

10-25-1991

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Nicaragua: Controversy Over Proposal To Create Municipal Police Force." (1991).
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Nicaragua: Controversy Over Proposal To Create Municipal Police Force

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, October 25, 1991

Oct. 17: At a political rally, former president Daniel Ortega denounced the government's plans to create a municipal police force. Ortega asserted that if the plan is carried out, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) would feel justified in organizing popular Sandinista militias. [In 1980, the former government created the Sandinista People's Militia (MPS). Civilians throughout the country joined the militia, which took orders from the Sandinista People's Army (EPS). The government dismantled the militia in 1990.] Oct. 19: At a press conference, Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado said Ortega's call for a revival of the militias was "irresponsible and unfortunate." According to Hurtado, Ortega's statements "contradict all of the peace efforts made by the government and the Sandinista Front." After stating that he would meet with Ortega, Hurtado said, "I hope this is not his position, but mere posturing." Hurtado said the government was "within its rights to create [whatever] police forces" deemed necessary. In earlier statements, the minister said municipal police forces would be established in towns throughout the country, and comprised of individuals selected by mayors. The ruling Nicaraguan Opposition Union (UNO) coalition controls about 75% of all municipal governments, including Managua. Oct. 23: Arnoldo Aleman, Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) president and mayor of Managua, said PLC deputies would submit a bill to the National Assembly that would strip former president Ortega of parliamentary immunity. [Under Nicaraguan law, unsuccessful presidential candidates automatically have the right to a seat in the legislature, and thus qualify for immunity from prosecution.] Aleman said that once Ortega loses immunity, he will face seven charges in connection with the call to revive the popular militias. The charges would include terrorism, inciting a crime, criminal association, conspiracy, rebellion and sedition. Next, Aleman said Ortega's prison sentence on conviction of only one of the charges sedition would be from six months to two years. The politician asserted that Ortega's comments demonstrated that he does not support civilian disarmament. In a joint communique released in Managua, former militia members said they were prepared to join a new popular militia. The statement said the formation of a municipal police force in Managua represents a threat to FSLN party members. (Basic data from AFP, ACAN-EFE, 10/19/91, 10/23/91)

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