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Deborah Tyroler

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Political Violence In Nicaragua: Chronology Of Events, Nov. 7 - 14

by Deborah Tyroler

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Nov. 7: At a press conference in Managua, Daniel Ortega, former president and general secretary of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), announced that he would forfeit his right to parliamentary immunity in order to face charges by leaders of the National Opposition Union (UNO) party coalition. Under Nicaraguan law, as an unsuccessful presidential candidate, Ortega automatically has the right to a seat in the National Assembly, as well as the parliamentary immunity that goes along with it. [On Oct. 29, UNO leaders commenced proceedings to have the National Assembly strip Ortega of his immunity in order to bring charges against him in civil court. The threat of legal proceedings followed Ortega's warning that if municipal government leaders implement a plan to create their own security forces parallel to the National Police, then the FSLN would consider rearming its own civilian militias. Managua mayor Arnoldo Aleman asserted that Ortega's statement was tantamount to inciting armed insurrection.] Reading from the letter which he submitted to the Assembly requesting suspension of immunity, Ortega said, "The specter of Somocismo, which we thought had been eradicated from our country, has risen again with all of its assassins, corruption, evils and dangers." Ortega noted that the charges which Aleman's Constituentalist Liberal Party (PLC) say they will press against him including terrorism, sedition, and conspiracy to commit a crime "resemble those leveled by Somoza against Pedro Joaquin Chamorro," director of newspaper La Prensa, assassinated in January 1978. Chamorro, an outspoken critic of the Somoza dictatorship, was the husband of current Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro. In comments broadcast on radio news program El Vespertino, National Assembly president Alfredo Cesar asserted that Ortega's letter "contains a call to confrontation." He said that by inciting a confrontation between Somocismo and Sandinismo, Ortega was undermining national stability. Mayor Aleman told reporters that training of the new Managua municipal police force will commence Nov. 11. The force, he said, is to begin operations in January 1992. After claiming that Nicaragua is engulfed in a "state of anarchy," Aleman said Ortega had displayed his true colors with the call to arms. Nov. 8: During a rally held to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the death of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca, Daniel Ortega accused Vice President Virgilio Godoy, Cesar and Aleman of fomenting political instability. The rally took place in Managua's Plaza de la Republica. In a communique, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) warned that the nation's "nascent democracy" was in danger due to the FSLN's destabilization plans. COSEP called on the government to "take immediate legal action to punish the terrorism orchestrated by Ortega." The group condemned closed-door talks between the government and Sandinista leaders. [On Nov. 1, an all-day meeting was held in Managua. Participants included Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo and six other cabinet members, the nine members of the FMLN national directorate, army chief Gen. Humberto Ortega, and National Police chief Rene Vivas.] Unidentified assailants toppled a statue of musician Luis A. Delgadillo, author of the Nicaraguan national anthem. The statue was commissioned by Managua mayor Aleman. Nov. 9: A local radio station reported that an explosion had partially destroyed the tomb of Carlos Fonseca. According to the report, the bomb was concealed in a bouquet of flowers placed next to the tomb. Within hours of the pre-dawn
explosion, hundreds of demonstrators had gathered in the park and plaza to protest desecration of the monument. Dozens of unidentified persons set fire to the Managua mayor's offices, and burned three municipal vehicles. Looters carried away desks and other office equipment, while firefighters were kept away at gunpoint. About 25 Sandinista supporters engaged in a 10-minute shootout with former contras at the Managua office of the Nicaraguan Resistance Civil Association (ACRN). Six vehicles belonging to the International Verification and Support Commission (CIAV, sponsored by the Organization of American States) parked near the office were damaged. In Matagalpa, FSLN supporters commenced a vigil outside the house where Fonseca was born and raised. UN leaders residing in Matagalpa were reported to have left town, fearing attacks on their homes. Fifty soldiers were dispatched to the downtown Managua area. Managua radio stations Corporacion, Minuto and Mundial, and Radio Dario in Leon were forced off the air following attacks by armed assailants on respective studios. The Managua headquarters of Cesar's Social Democratic Party (PSD) was partially destroyed. At a Managua monument commemorating persons who played an instrumental role in the February 1990 elections, demonstrators tore down plaques honoring Jimmy Carter, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Joao Baena Soares, Oscar Arias, Vinicio Cerezo, Sonia Picado, Allen Weinstien, Elliot Richardson, Miguel Obando y Bravo, and Carlos Andres Perez. In the afternoon, Daniel Ortega addressed a crowd of an estimated 10,000 Sandinista supporters in the Plaza de la Republica. Ortega called for a halt to violence, and "permanent struggle" against extremist politicians identified with the Somoza regime. Ortega accused Godoy, Cesar and Aleman of "sowing the seeds of hatred," and of spearheading a movement committed to overthrowing the government in order to launch an all-out offensive against the FSLN. He said, "They want to get rid of this government in order to make our [the Sandinistas'] heads roll. Let them understand that if this government falls, their heads will be the first to roll." The Chamorro government released a communique condemning "acts of vandalism," and calling for the restoration of calm and order. The statement promised that investigations into recent violent incidents will be carried out. In a nationwide television and radio broadcast, Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado said police protection for political leaders and National Assembly representatives would be reinforced. He added that military patrols in the nation's cities will be increased. In comments aired on a local radio station, Vice President Godoy asserted that the bomb explosion at Fonseca's tomb had been orchestrated by the FSLN. "The Sandinistas have the money and the bombs to do it," he said. Nov. 10: In a pre-dawn incident, unidentified persons attacked a home owned by mayor Aleman in El Crucero, 20 km. south of the capital. Material damage was reported, but no casualties. Aleman was in Guatemala at the time of the attack. In Esteli, unidentified persons tossed a grenade at a vehicle belonging to the UN Central America Observer Force (ONUCA). The blast caused damage to the vehicle, as well as to several homes in the vicinity. During a speech in Chinandega, Ortega attributed responsibility for the attack on Fonseca's tomb to Managua mayor Aleman. In Ocotal, unidentified persons tossed a grenade at an ONUCA vehicle parked outside the UN mission's local office. Nov. 11: After denying involvement in bombing Fonseca's tomb, Aleman asserted that the FSLN had orchestrated the bombing in order to "create chaos and destabilization." Aleman criticized the police for complicity in recent violent incidents. Damage to the mayor's offices resulting from the Nov. 9 looting was estimated at over US $5 million. Godoy expressed support for Cesar's suggestion that the government declare a state of emergency. The vice president also asserted that national police and army commanders should be replaced due to their apparent negligence in responding to violence incidents during the weekend. In statements to daily newspaper La Prensa, Cesar urged President Chamorro to adopt a harsher stance against the FSLN in order to avoid further "chaos and anarchy." He also criticized the police for negligence, and called for application of sanctions against officers who fail to obey orders.
Nicaraguan Bishops Conference released a statement condemning the violence and calling on the government to "exercise its authority and stop hiding behind mere words." Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo told reporters that during an eight-hour meeting with UNO representatives, an agreement was reached to convene a "national dialogue" of government, UNO and Sandinista representatives aimed at searching for common ground necessary to achieve political stability. Next, Lacayo rejected calls for replacement of Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) and police commanders, and for abolishing the EPS. Instead, Lacayo urged Nicaraguans to respect all duly-constituted civil and military authorities. Nov. 13: Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado said he had ordered a formal investigation in connection with the response of police officers to the events of Nov. 9-10. According to Hurtado, a special ministry commission headed by deputy minister Jose Pallais will address charges that some police officers refused to carry out orders aimed at stopping the violence, while others participated in same. Hurtado also confirmed that two people had been killed in Managua during the weekend. [Basic data from Barricada (Nicaragua), 11/08/91; Associated Press, 11/09/91; Notimex, 11/11/91; Agence France-Presse, ACAN-EFE, 11/07-13/91]