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'Your Government Has Lied'

On Dec. 7, 1982, Edgar Chamorro, then a director of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (better known as the contras) and five other exiled Nicaraguans, met in a Miami hotel to prepare for a press conference the next day. Joining them were two CIA agents. One of the Nicaraguans asked the CIA what to say about their contacts with U.S. officials. They were told to lie.

Two years later, Chamorro was awakened at 2 a.m. in a CIA-provided house in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. A CIA agent named George handed him a press release written in Spanish. It said that the contras had mined several Nicaraguan harbors. George urged Chamorro to rush to the contras' clandestine radio station and break the news before the Sandinista government did. Chamorro did what he was told, even though the mining was news to him. It was the CIA, working through its so-called "Latino assets," that had done it.

Chamorro's story, published in the current issue of The New Republic, contains other examples of U.S. government duplicity, not the least of them being the fiction that the contras want only democracy in Nicaragua and not—perish the thought—power for themselves. But overall, the former contra director provides details to a story whose outlines are already known and which is of interest primarily because it provides firsthand evidence that your government has lied. Whether it is still lying remains to be seen.

That question is important because at the same time that Chamorro's story was published, the Reagan administration accused the Sandinistas of planning terrorist attacks against Americans in Honduras. The same diplomatic note also linked Managua to

the killing of four U.S. Marines last month in El Salvador and said—although it goes without saying—that we are not going to put up with this sort of thing. The terms "react accordingly" and "serious consequences" were bandished. Nicaragua, as usual, responded by saying, "Who me?" and for the umpteenth time accused the United States of seeking a pretext for an invasion.

Maybe the first thing to be said is that both sides are giving hypocrisy a bad name. The Sandinista government excuses its every excess, from

tightening its rule to the expropriation of property to a U.S. invasion that never comes. But Nicaragua is a small country. It can hardly match the flow of cant and mock innocence that comes from Washington. Here, the Reagan administration pretends that for all the world it cannot understand why the Sandinistas would even

dream of knocking off Americans.

But if "linkage" is enough for the United States to connect the killing of the Marines with Managua, then let us look at our own linkage. We are, in spades, linked to the contras who are linked to the deaths of thousands of Nicaraguans—as many as 12,000, according to the Sandinistas. The United States is linked to the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and other acts of sabotage, and in El Salvador, it is linked to a government that is fighting a civil war. If linkage is good enough for us, then why is it not good enough for both the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran left? Are not the Marines who were killed linked to the government troops they have trained, and don't those troops kill leftist guerrillas?

Enough! Our phony innocence is suffocating. The truth is that the United States is engaged in a war of sorts—a war in which it seems to expect the other side not to fight back. In reality, of course, it expects no such thing. Instead, it uses retaliation as a pretext to turn up the level of violence. It hits and then cries foul when someone hits back. Like the boy who cried wolf, it is fast losing its credibility.

There are those of us who would love the United States to punish the Sandinistas with cold indifference—to lay down certain rules (no Soviet missiles, for instance) and then go on to other, more important, hemispheric matters. But regardless of the policy pursued, it and its consequences ought to be frankly acknowledged. It should not be possible for someone like Chamorro to write that the U.S. government lied—not to its enemy, but to its own people. His article is additional evidence that the United States is at war. As usual, truth is the first casualty.