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A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990

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Final Act," Fry reflects that it "recognizes that true security depends on balanced progress in security, human rights and economic cooperation." Although not its main focus, this work does make a contribution to rethinking security. In addition to pointing out the broad concept of security the Helsinki process elaborated, the book identifies unexpected players in the national security game: Helsinki monitoring groups and citizens holding their governments accountable. Ideally, in the future the world's citizens will continue to be mobilized by similarly noble causes, not the nationalist and zero-sum motives we fear so much at present.

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Kagan, Robert. *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*. New York: Basic Books, 1996. 903pp. \$37.50

During the 1980s Nicaragua became a major ideological battleground in the East-West conflict. In 1979, Sandinista revolutionaries toppled the government of Anastasio Somoza and immediately embarked on a radical transformation of the country's social, political, and economic structures, dramatically extending government controls and threatening those who challenged their consolidation of power. Most significantly, from an American strategic perspective, the Sandinista regime became a vehicle for supporting insurgency in El Salvador.

In this important historical study of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations, Robert Kagan

tells of the political forces and institutional dynamics that influenced the development and execution of American foreign policy toward this small land. Kagan's massive treatise can be viewed as three distinct stories. The first is that of the domestic politics of U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua. By explaining the ongoing political conflicts between President Ronald Reagan and Congress, and between congressional Republicans and Democrats, the author shows how difficult foreign policy making can be in a democratic society, especially when the conflicts involve core interests and fundamental moral values. Indeed, Kagan argues that the intensity of the policy debates had less to do with Nicaragua than with how "to define America at home and abroad."

The second story is that of the domestic politics of Nicaragua, illuminating the institutional forces that contributed to the fall of Somoza and the rise, evolution, and eventual demise of the Sandinistas. Kagan challenges conventional wisdom which assumes that the United States was partly responsible for the Sandinistas' radicalization. He shows that it was "the Sandinistas [who] earnestly sought alliance with the Soviet Union" as a way of extending their own national and regional influence.

Third, Kagan provides a historical account of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Nicaragua. While the study begins with the American occupation of Nicaragua in the early part of this century, Kagan's major focus is on the years of intense regional conflict from the late 1970s, when Somoza was forced to resign, to the unanticipated 1990 election of Violeta Chamorro, which ended the Sandinista

eleven-year Marxist dictatorship. Kagan's richly textured account is not about the "inevitable" fall of the Sandinistas but rather of the multiple, unpredictable, and frequently conflicting forces that influenced U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. Contrary to the received wisdom, which regards the rise of the Somoza dynasty as the direct by-product of American occupation early in the century, Kagan argues that the United States did not put, or keep, Somoza in power but rather contributed to the evolution of Nicaraguan politics through its vacillating, inconsistent policy of endless cycles of intervention and withdrawal. Kagan writes, "Indifference and noninterference had been all Somoza required in 1936; it was enough for the next 40 years."

While President Reagan came to office deeply committed to halting the advance of communism in Central America, he wanted to challenge Marxism in the least violent manner. The least controversial way of doing so was to support covertly the Contras, in what was known as the "lowball option." According to the author, this decision was made not so much to foster pluralism in Nicaragua as to challenge the Sandinistas' support of El Salvador's insurgency.

Kagan argues that the regional peace process, which culminated in the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, was not governed by any single development or policy initiative but was the by-product of many different circumstances and policies. Nevertheless, Kagan shows, convincingly, I believe, that the principal force that moderated the Sandinistas' behavior was the Contras, for they alone could provide a "threat capable of forcing moderation on the Sandinistas."

This is a significant book that provides an impressively detailed account of U.S.-Nicaraguan politics during the last decade of the Cold War. Although Kagan served as a Department of State official during the mid-1980s, this work is not an insider's account of American diplomacy but a scholarly, dispassionate study based on documented sources. With more than 731 pages of narrative and 162 pages of notes, this book is not for the fainthearted. However, anyone concerned with American foreign policy making, Cold War geopolitics, or the evolution of American-Nicaraguan relations will find this well written study an invaluable resource.

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Gates, Robert M. *From the Shadows*.
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
604pp. \$30

The dust jacket of Bob Gates's book describes him as the "ultimate insider." While this description contains a touch of hyperbole designed to sell books, it is not far from the mark. Gates came to the Central Intelligence Agency in the late 1960s as an analyst. He served under six presidents and worked in the White House for four of them. His intervening years in the Agency included duties as the Executive Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), as Deputy Director for Intelligence (head of analysis), and Deputy DCI; he ended his career with tours as the Deputy National Security Advisor and then as DCI. Gates observes that no one other than Franklin Roosevelt spent more years in the White House. Whether or not this makes him