General Assembly 1

Research Report

The Question of:

The situation in Nicaragua

Introduction

After several attempts, Daniel Ortega finally was elected as president. The legislative and presidential elections were held on the 5th of November 2006. At this point he started his three-term long reign over the Republic of Nicaragua. In 2011, Ortega was re-elected with an overwhelming majority of 62.46% of all votes cast. In addition to his landslide win, the National Assembly also approved changes to the constitution, which allowed Ortega to run for a third successive term.[1] After being elected in 2016 for the third time, he faced some opposition regarding the validity of his win, since international monitoring was prohibited. Nicaraguan election officials reported Ortega to have received 72% of the votes. However, Broad Front for Democracy (FAD) claimed 70% of the voters abstained, while officials claimed 65.8% participation.[2]

According to Francisco Toro and James Bosworth from the Washington Post in their article 'The unlikely origins of Nicaragua's epic wave of protest', the alleged rigged elections are not the only wrongdoing of president Ortega.

"Ortega has spent more than a decade dismantling Nicaragua's democracy. His Sandinista Party has stolen elections for the Nicaraguan congress and stacked the judiciary with cronies, and controls nearly every mayoral seat. The president reformed the constitution to grant massive concessions to a Chinese developer for a canal that will never be built plus projects that benefit Ortega's party, allies and family. He has tried to silence dissent by buying off many of the major media outlets. The Sandinista-controlled courts allowed Ortega to run for a third term in 2016, which he won under blatantly unfair conditions."[3]

The alleged illegitimate and questionable election of Ortega caused anti-governmental sentiments to rise up among many citizens. The iron grip he has on his reign over the country has spiked up anger towards him and the government. Since his second re-election, the situation has escalated severely. The built-up frustration and anger reached a boiling point when Ortega announced unfavourable changes to the pension system. Protesters took to the street to make them be heard. Ortega retaliated inadequately with excessive use of violence. Since the outbreak of the protests in April of 2018, there have been fatalities on both sides of the conflict, both on the side of the oppressing government and the rebelling protesters. The conflict has the potential to further escalate and endanger international security.[4]

The primary goal of this research report is to give a current overview of the situation in Nicaragua, to offer insight in what may be possible solutions and to lay down a basis so the delegates have something to get a hold on when debating.

[1] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2014-01-30/nicaragua-s-revolution-heads-toward-dictatorship-
[2] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37892477
[3] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/04/27/the-unlikely-origins-of-nicaraguas-epic-wave-of-protest/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6f946ea7bd8a
[4] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44398673

The Committee

The general assembly first committee, also referred to as GA1, is a committee concerning disarmament and international security. The UN general assembly first committee deals with issues and international challenges that threaten peace and can disrupt the global community. The UN committee therefore tends to work closely with the disarmament committee in evaluating all methods to bring peace to pressing issues. The committee was the first to create a resolution of the general assemblies concerning: "Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy" passed in 1946 in order to maintain the usage of Atomic Energy, that had recently been discovered and monitor any problems that could be created through it. They continuously work on resolving issues to work towards the greater goal of establishing peace.

The General Assembly committees will join for a plenary session in order to discuss three resolutions, one from each of the General Assembly committees that has passed in their own committee. The plenary session will take place on the third day of the conference and will conclude this session of LEMUN for the general assembly committees.

General Overview

Though there have been underlying tensions for years, especially from 2013 onwards when the protests began, the inducement of the protests were the reforms made to the social security package, and then specifically to the pension system. On April 18 2018 these reforms were announced and protests erupted once again around the country. Protests over pension reforms; at first it could be seen as an overreaction from the population. Now, following the aforementioned article from the Washington Post, the uprisings are not as surprising as they may seem:

"Maybe it's not as surprising as it seems. Most of Ortega's previous abuses were abstract — fiddling with underlying rules of the game, stacking the deck in his favour, stealing from small numbers of citizens who could not effectively oppose him. But pension reform is one of those issues that affect everyone intimately. The elderly who receive only a few hundred dollars per month from the system need that money to eat and buy medicine. All employees and employers contribute to the system."[5]

The protests were, however, swiftly and harshly countered by the so-called 'Grupos de Choque'. These pro-government groups were used in the past to repress protests and also discourage others from taking the streets. However, this time footage of the excessive repressing spread all across the country and elicited nationwide protests.

One police officer and two protesters were killed on 19 April during attempts of the security forces to suppress the demonstrations. After four days of protests, Ortega cancelled the social security package and said he was willing to dialogue. However little progress was made and there have been many incidents and protests to follow with people getting injured almost daily. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) said 264 people had been killed between the start of the protests and 11 July.
Human rights groups inside Nicaragua say the death toll is now up to more than 300.

Protesters blame the security forces and paramilitary groups loyal to the government, the so-called "Grupos de Choque", for the violence while the authorities have labelled the protesters as "terrorists".

[5] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/04/27/the-unlikely-origins-of-nicaraguas-epic-wave-of-protest/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6f946ea7bd8a

Protesters also allege that the security forces use excessive force, using live bullets and sharpshooters against demonstrators. Many human rights groups have supported the allegation against the government. A statement made by Amnesty International in May was "state repression has reached deplorable levels" in Nicaragua. This statement echoes a warning given by the United Nations Office for Human Rights: "the dangerous spiral of violence and impunity" Nicaragua is sliding into.[6]

On the other hand, the Nicaraguan government justifies the amount of force used. They deny the violence is one-sided and points to the use of homemade mortars by the protesters as evidence that the security forces come under attack. Also, they have labelled the protesters and demonstrators as terrorists, which makes them an enemy of the government and threats to national security. Which, in the opinion of President Ortega and his government, authorises the force and violence used in oppressing the uprisings.

"The Secretary-General welcomes the start of a national dialogue led by the Catholic Church in Nicaragua," said UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq, in a statement issued on Friday 18 May. "At the same time, the Secretary-General remains concerned about recent violence and calls on all Nicaraguans to abide by the rule of law, respect for human rights and the peaceful resolution of differences." The bishop mediating the negotiations suggested a mixed commission of six people: three from the government and one representative each from the universities, civil society and the business sector.[7] Sadly, the peace talks did not have their wished effect and ended in acrimony. The protesters want Ortega and his wife to step down, but the president has made clear that will not happen. The Church called off peace talks with Ortega's government last week after a march led by victims' mothers was met with gunfire, killing at least 16 people.

On Sunday June 3, Pope Francis called for peace talks to be reinstated after another shocking conflict leaving 7 protesters dead.

For months on end the church has been leading the negotiations, but there has been hardly any to no progress made at all. The White House has issued a statement on July 30, stating: "The United States stands with the people of Nicaragua, including members of the Sandinista party, who are calling for democratic reforms and an end to the violence. Free, fair, and transparent elections are the only avenue toward restoring democracy in Nicaragua. We support the Catholic Church-led National Dialogue process for good faith negotiations". Mike Pence, the Vice President of the United States, continued to add: "President Ortega and Vice President Murillo are ultimately responsible for the pro-government para-police that have brutalized their own people." Lastly, the U.S. also announced an additional 1.5 million in financial aid to "continue support for freedom and democracy in Nicaragua. The funds will support civil society, human rights organizations, and Nicaragua's independent media, which have been under threat after years of fraudulent elections and the regime's manipulation of Nicaraguan law."[8]

The situation in Nicaragua escalated to such an extent that United Nations Security Council decided to have a meeting to discuss appropriate measures and actions that could be taken to restore peace and security in Nicaragua, on 5 September. Its members were divided. The representative of the US, Nikki Haley, compared the situation at hand to those in Venezuela and Syria. She stated that there are strong parallels with the refugee crises and exodus in both countries and the situation in Nicaragua. A Nicaraguan exodus would overwhelm its neighbours and create a surge of migrants and asylum-seekers in Central America.

[6] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44398673
[7] https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/9138/church-mediated-dialogue-in-nicaragua-breaks-down
[8] https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/white-house-condemns-violence-in-nicaragua-supports-catholic-led-negotiations-50973

The opposition, however, leads with the argument that the conflicts were not a threat to international security, and that therefore it was not within the mandate of the Security Council to interfere. Nicaraguan's Foreign Ministered corroborated with the opposition and added that there was a "consensus" that their country was not a threat to international security. He even went as far as describing the debate as "a clear interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua, and a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and International Law."[9]

Major Parties Involved

Protesters

The opposition of the government consists of a variety of citizens from all different ethnic groups, ages and religions. The inducement of the protests was the change in the pension system. Such a change affects all citizens intimately and has elicited feelings of resentment all over the country. Between April and July, when the report of the IACHR came out, it is said that over 300 citizens have died, thousands have been injured and over 500 had their freedom taken away. The protesters demand president Daniel Ortega and his wife step down, so Nicaragua can return to peace once again.

The State of Nicaragua

Ever since Ortega came to power in 2006, there have been made allegations that the government became increasingly corrupt. The government, however, refutes these allegations. They do keep on repressing demonstrations and protests. Government officials claim there is no threat to international security and therefore interference is a violation of their sovereignty. The government also blames the protesters, which they labelled "terrorists", for all the violence and bloodshed.

Grupos de Choque

'The mobs' or 'las turbas' are the pro-government groups who carry out most of the oppression of protesters on behalf of President Ortega and his government. Although exclamations such as "Long live the Sandinista Front!" are often used and the claims of helping the state fight the anti-government demonstrations, President Ortega denies any involvement. During so-called "clean-up operations" in July, police and pro-government gunmen were accused of raiding pro-opposition neighbourhoods.[10]

Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR)

The Organization of American States (OAS) was founded on April 30 1948 and now has its headquarters in Washington D.C. It was created for the purposes of regional solidarity and cooperation among its member states. The organization consists of 35 member states.

The IACHR is an autonomous commission of the OAS. Its primary goal is to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere. For the situation in Nicaragua the commission has released reports on the severe human rights crisis, which is going on in the country. The IACHR also concludes that the government of Nicaragua has violated, personal integrity, personal liberty, assembly, health, freedom of expression, access to justice and the rights to life.[11]

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has played a key role as mediator in the negotiations between the protesters and the government. The church has offered common ground in one of the oldest seminaries of Nicaragua. Negotiations have been halted and then continued again on several occasions when the violence was at its high.

[9] https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1018442
[10] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/las-turbas-nicaragua-pro-government-armed-groups-180726080427772.html
[11] http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2018/134.asp

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
5 November 2006	Daniel Ortega is elected for the first time as president of Nicaragua
2011	Ortega is re-elected
2016	Ortega is re-elected for the second time
18 April 2018	Reforms to the pension system announced causing uproar and protests
16 May 2018	The opening of the dialogue between the two parties
22 May 2018	The Church issues a statement in which they reveal some bishops have had death threats
11 July 2018	A report of the IACHR states that there have been at least 264 deaths
5 September 2018	The UN SC meets to debate on the raging conflicts in Nicaragua

Previous attempts to solve the issue

After a working visit from May 17 to 21, the IACHR adopted precautionary measures aimed at protecting members of the student movement and their families after testimonies indicated the majority of them had suffered acts of violence and death threats for their participation.

There has not been any international military interference, since that would violate Nicaragua's sovereignty. The most notable attempts at solving the issue are the peace talks and negotiations led by the Catholic Church.

The Future

There has been a widespread international condemnation of the Nicaraguan government and calls for the security forces to be reined in but so far to little effect.

People pray in front of police that block the entrance of Divine Mercy Catholic Church in Managua, Nicaragua July 14, 2018. With the death toll in the hundreds and little dialogue there is little hope for a quick solution. Businesses have been suffering, especially those in the tourism sector, and with protesters threatening to call further strikes an estimated 85,000 jobs could be lost this year. A "national dialogue" in which protesters sat down with members of the government with the mediation of the Catholic Church has so far achieved very little and stalled repeatedly. With talks stalled, President Ortega ruling out early elections and protesters saying that there is no going back, the crisis seems likely to further escalate.

Important Decisions a Resolution Must Take

While writing clauses one must keep in mind some aspects to ensure their writings are comprehensive and complete.

The major problem in Nicaragua is the drastic changes the country went through; they went from relatively free and democratic to strictly controlled and dictatorial leadership. So one of the main aiming points of a resolution must be to somehow encourage electoral and perhaps legislature changes that result in a fairer act of governing.

Another issue is the human rights crisis that is going on in Nicaragua. Innocent citizens are killed, injured, arrested and imprisoned. This crisis has two sides: the government acts against its own citizens, but also pro-government groups are violating human rights. Both parties must adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The government justifies their acts by labelling the protesters terrorists and distances themselves from the act of the pro-government groups. A resolution must go into how the excessive use of force and violation of human rights can be combatted, keeping in mind that Nicaragua still is a sovereign state and does not consider themselves to be a threat to international security.

The committee must keep in mind that a GA committee is strictly advisory and no actions will be forced upon any member state. Only the Security Council can obligate a member state to act.

Bibliography

- Gibney, James. "Nicaragua's Revolution Heads Toward Dictatorship." Bloomberg.com, Bloomberg, 30 Jan. 2014, 17:28, www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2014-01-30/nicaragua-s-revolution-heads-toward-dictatorship-

- "Downward Spiral: Nicaragua's Worsening Crisis." BBC News, BBC, 16 July 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44398673.

- "Nicaragua Leader Daniel Ortega Wins Third Consecutive Term." BBC News, BBC, 7 Nov. 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37892477.

- Toro, Francisco, and James Bosworth. "The Unlikely Origins of Nicaragua's Epic Wave of Protest." The Washington Post, WP Company, 27 Apr. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/04/27/the-unlikely-origins-of-nicaraguas-epic-wave-of-protest/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6f946ea7bd8a.

- enquiries@thetablet.co.uk, The Tablet - w: "Church-Mediated Dialogue in Nicaragua Breaks Down." *The Tablet*, 24 May 2018, www.thetablet.co.uk/news/9138/church-mediated-dialogue-in-nicaragua-breaks-down.

- CNA. "White House Condemns Violence in Nicaragua, Supports Catholic-led Negotiations." *Catholic News Agency*, Catholic News Agency, 1 Aug. 2018, www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/white-house-condemns-violence-in-nicaragua-supports-catholic-led-negotiations-50973.

- "Security Council Takes up Nicaragua Crisis, with Some Reservations | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, 5 Sept. 2018, news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1018442.

- Witschge, Loes. "Las Turbas: Who Are Nicaragua's pro-Government Armed Groups?" *Latin America | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 13 Aug. 2018, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/las-turbas-Nicaragua-pro-government-armed-groups-180726080427772.html.

- OAS. "IACHR Issues Report on Nicaragua's Serious Human Rights Situation." *OAS - Organization of American States: Democracy for Peace, Security, and Development*, 1 Aug. 2009, www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2018/134.asp.