NICARAGUA: POLITICAL PROCESSES AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION – POSSIBLE LESSONS FOR CUBA'S FUTURE

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Executive Summary

This essay explains Nicaragua's transition to democracy from a Leninist-oriented system and tells how political parties and elections have been key variables in this transition. There are many additional, diverse interconnected factors (economic, administrative, and others of significance) that must be taken into consideration. However, such an extensive study exceeds the scope of this essay. It is doubtful that a country can make an effective transition to democracy without political parties or elections. Experiences such as China's in the 1980s with Den Xiaoping and again with Jiang Zemin indicate that controlled and effective economic-administrative reforms can coexist with a Communist Party dictatorship. In Cuba, where a closed party system persists, even economic ruin is not a sufficient cause for a change off course toward democracy.

This study of the Nicaraguan transition and the structural transformations that have occurred there invites readers to draw conclusions on topics that implicitly include lessons for the future transition in Cuba, which will affect the United states and other countries, while offering explicit comparisons of the similarities and differences between the cases of Nicaragua and Cuba. This essay begins with a contextual historical summary, focusing on the analysis of the period between 1989 and 1990 in Nicaragua and on the processes and results from which conclusions can be drawn for the future of Cuba.

Introduction: Political Parties, Elections, and Systems

This study assumes that political parties and elections have been factors that were inextricably tied to and decisive in Nicaragua's transition from a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship to a democracy, which was fundamentally consolidated by 2002 and is still in the process of adjustment and refinement. In Nicaragua, making political parties and elections central players has required much basic, grassroots work to empower the actors and institute democratic processes, as well to put the results of these changes into perspective. Democracy is only possible if citizens participate freely in the political process, articulate their demands, and organize into interest groups and political parties that become intrinsic parts of society. These are the most important means to incorporate the interests of citizens into a democratic political process (Almond, Powell, Storm, and Dalton 2000, 85-96). Free, open competition between two or among several parties is essential for an institutional setting to guarantee citizens equality under the law.

An age-old but clear typology (Duverger 1980, 85-89) generally divides political parties into "traditional elitist parties." and "mass political parties." The first tend to be structured around well-known, influential individuals, due to their professional or moral prestige or because of their wealth. Traditional elitist parties were organized into autonomous committees, although the opposite can occur, as happened in Great Britain after the nineteenth century. This type of partisan organization also existed in Nicaragua.

The "mass political parties" subsequently emerged. Some maintain that in Latin America, the mass political parties were initiated by the liberal parties. In Europe, the socialists established these organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although they had their own distinct characteristics and were subject to vertical control, the communist and fascist parties could also be classified as mass political parties, particularly due to their focus on mobilization. Political parties of the extreme right, which came from the now extinct dictatorships of the Latin American military right, can be added to the list.

Political parties in the modern sense of the term surfaced in the United states. Political groups that could be categorized as "elitist parties" emerged early in the life of the young union. Following an era of decline

of the first organizations (from 1817 to 1825), the Democratic Party held its first convention in 1832 and began to mature as a partisan entity. After the Civil War, the two dominant parties in U.S. politics had established many of their principal characteristics (O'Connor and Sabato 2000, 416-21). From that moment on, both parties could be classified as mass political parties.

Unlike the strong ideological tendency common to political parties in Latin America and Europe, North American parties were characterized by pragmatism. They had effectively mobilized the citizens; engaged in democratic fights for power as a means of adding issues, unity, and the interconnection of the components of a complex and much decentralized political system; and stressed the responsibility of political officials (Lawson 1999, 181-93). There are criticisms of the bipartisan system of the United States (G. Black and B. Black 1995, 201), which suffers from low voter participation, but the system functions and will surely continue to do so in the foreseeable future (Texeira 1999, 149-55).

Together with Duverger's analysis of parties, it is important to point out that, generally throughout the Western world, where elitist parties predominated, they coincided with political battles between the aristocracy or the oligarchy and the middle class. In contrast, where parties of the masses predominated, save for the communist and fascist parties, they coincided with the expansion of democracy. In sharp contrast to democratically oriented parties of the masses, communist parties have always considered a party to be a political formation with a program and a structure for continuing activities, exclusively serving the interests of *a class, a group, or a social strata.*

The aforementioned observation is a simple, exclusionary concept about social structure (in reality, heterogeneous) for every political party, although each one articulates and adds preferentially but not exclusively to the interests of the group or class. In addition, Leninist political party practice, from its origin until its setback in the nineties, has revolved around principles such as "democratic" centralism, proletariat internationalism, and the superiority of the Marxist-Leninist "scientific doctrine" (Lenin 1921, 658, 661; Lenin 1925, 29; Mascitelli 1977, 292).

Nicaragua is rich in partisan experiences, as it has had elitist parties, mass political parties, and nearly eleven years under Marxist-Leninist control by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (the Sandinista

National Liberation Front Party – FSLN). The current party in power, the Partido Liberal Constitucional (Constitutional Liberal Party) – PLC), also has a nonideological and pragmatic focus, which is well-known in the partisan discussion, in government programs, and in the cabinet structure, composed basically of entrepreneurs and technocrats.

Free elections are institutionalized processes linked to the activities of political parties in democratic systems. Elections take place through free and general voting, which is one method of accounting for the population's preferences for a particular party and what it stands for.

Some of the functions of elections can change from one system to another and even from time to time within the same political system, but normally in a democracy the following functions exist: legitimization of the system, directing political participation, institutionalizing political demands, institutionalizing change, determination of the relative power of the political parties, the creation of public careers for members of elite parties, and the establishment of political responsibilities of that elite. The electoral process includes issues such as requirements for suffrage, the standardization of voting procedures, the protection of free elections, division of territories, the stages of the electoral process, and procedures for counting votes, as well as the selection of the electoral quotient and other much more technical issues that are part of "electoral engineering."

Dictatorial systems can allow elections, using the entire technical voting mechanism, without true elections ever taking place or a true multiparty competition existing (Mackenzie 1974, 160-164). This is the case in systems dominated by communist parties (White, Gardner, and Schopflin 1982, 121, 168), very few of which still survive, yet among them, the Cuban regime. In centralized and vertical systems, voting does not elect the authorities. The viable candidates (sometimes one per key position) are selected by the party, which determines the structure of the state's operation. Therefore, in Leninist systems, elections actually serve to mobilize the masses, develop the organization of the party and of the state, and legitimize the system (even if partially through indoctrination and mobilization).

In Latin America, right-wing military dictatorships have existed that also celebrated voting but not elections. Nicaragua and Cuba are two countries in the Western Hemisphere that have had authoritarian right-wing and Leninist totalitarian regimes. In 1990, Nicaragua undertook an

institutional transition toward democracy. This is the pending challenge for Cuba.

Additionally, references to the concept of "system" are appropriate in this introductory section, as the parties are elements of the political system. A system is a mechanical, ecological, cultural, political, or any other type of entity that is confined by limits, composed of mobile and interdependent components, and subject to internal as well as external pressures (Almond and Powell, et al. 2000, 13, 14, 85-96). For many years, this concept has been utilized frequently for political analysis (Easton 1975, 46-75). By this definition, the broadest and most omni-comprehensive system is that of society. It encompasses a series of subsystems, including the political system, dynamically interconnected and simply called "systems" due to established usage.

A political system possesses many institutions, such as the legislative, executive, and judicial branches and the state bureaucracy; it includes the process of making public and required decisions, as well as nonstate organisms, such as parties and political movements, union organizations, churches, and so on. The concept of system can help us visualize the impact of parties and elections on the Sandinista political system and other related topics.

Political Culture and Historical Background: The Evolution of Parties and Elections in Nicaragua – Some Parallels with Cuba

The political culture of a collective group is formed by various elements, such as its historical experiences, its political participation, and their natures (Axford and Rosamond 1997, 109-110). The way in which the Nicaraguan people have resolved political issues in the recent past and today can be better understood (given that nothing happens *ex nihilo* in the society) if a general historical perspective is provided, with emphasis on the role of parties and elections.

The history of Nicaragua is marked by the volatility of its political systems. It is worth mentioning that Nicaragua has been through not one but several political systems and a number of diverse situations: anarchy during the years immediately following independence; periods of stability under oligarchic control; prolonged right-wing dictatorships, and then,

the other extreme – a Marxist-Leninist regime. Following that, the country weathered a bloody civil war with extensive international participation, to become a democracy in 1990, which now has become reasonably consolidated.

To summarize the historical facts in just a few lines, it would be enough to point out that from the time of its independence in 1821 until the year 2002, Nicaragua had 14 political constitutions and 91 presidents, including various government juntas and heads of state (Orúe, 2000). The first Constitution of Nicaragua was approved in 1824 and the last in 1987. This last one has been revised twice, once in 1995 and again in 2000.

Following a period of anarchy that afflicted the country from the time of independence (1821) until 1858, Nicaragua went through a slow process of institutionalization. At this time, the country was dominated by a well-structured provincial oligarchy, which initiated the construction of the Nicaraguan state. It was an era dominated by the Partido Conservador (the Conservative Party), then an "elitist party," according to Duverger's typology. During this era, known as "the period of 30 years," political participation and demands for electoral resources fundamentally served the dominant strata of society. Nevertheless, the transfer of public duties was institutionalized, political careers of the leaders were forged, and Nicaraguan society was considerably stabilized. Over time, that political order became rigid and was unresponsive to the people; it was overthrown by the liberal revolution of 1893, which became the foundation of the Primera República Liberal, the First Liberal Republic. The revolution's leader, José Santos Zelaya, would soon become the dictator who would modernize the country's legal and economic systems, but his policies distorted the function of the parties and elections.

The Partido Liberal advanced as the party of the masses under antidemocratic control and pursued a form of empty legitimacy, through "elections" controlled by the National Congress. The system, in spite of its liberal rhetoric, established an authoritarian tradition and continued clientelism and other inherited corrupt practices, such as particularism and appointment.

The values and practices of the Liberal Party were (and are) factors that contributed to Nicaragua's underdevelopment, cited for decades by analysts of Weber's tradition (Lipset 1986, 42-49; Silvert 1986, 40-46). However, their analyses were often somewhat distorted and simplistic

when they dealt with such complex topics as political and economic underdevelopment.

The Segunda República Conservadora -- the Second Conservative Republic (1911-1936) -- succeeded Zelayismo and represents a case study of how a political system, in itself weak and anarchical, can be pressured by external factors that it encouraged itself; in this case, the main factor was the United states. The Partido Conservador even lost its role of recruiting the political elite, which was at least partially self-assigned to the U.S. State Department in view of the chaotic Nicaraguan situation. (A case in point is Adolfo Díaz, who was president at three different periods during that era: 1911-1913, 1913-1917, and 1926-1928).

Liberalism returned to power in 1929, and after an apparently promising democratic period of two administrations (1929-1936), the Somocista era was initiated (1936-1979), following a coup d'état by Anastasio Somoza García. Somocismo was an entirely different regime from its predecessors in several respects and shared some similar characteristics with those of certain dictatorships of the Southern Cone, classified by Guillermo O'Donnell as corporate-military regimes.

Somocismo, like Zelayismo, acquired a formal legitimacy, but Somocismo was more complex. Somocismo was a dynasty starting with a father, Anastasio Somoza García (1937-1956), and his two sons, Luis Somoza (1956-1963), and Anastasio Somoza Debayle (1967-1972 and 1974-1979). The Somoza regime celebrated numerous (unfortunately, fixed) popular elections and established political alliances with diverse forces, including leadership circles of the Partido Conservador and the Partido Socialista de Nicaragua (Socialist Party of Nicaragua – PSN), which adhered to the Moscow line.

Even though Somocismo was a dictatorial regime, it also had a noteworthy capacity for inclusion of the economic and social areas. During the Somocista era, national and international factors converged to produce the longest period of economic growth and modernization in the history of the country. The growth of the economy as a consequence of good international prices in the exportation of crops (primarily cotton); the expansion of the state and its institutions (ministries, the army, autonomous entities); and a relatively efficient administration facilitated the ascent of groups proceeding from diverse social sectors.

The period when the army was controlled by the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan National Guard – GN) is illustrative. Somoza transformed the military institution into a praetorian body through various mechanisms. One mechanism was the cultivation of personal loyalty to the dictator, partly based on the fact that a high percentage of the members of the GN came from the lower classes and found in the armed forces, whether through licit or illicit means, a source of power and social mobility. Fixed elections were an important means used by Somocismo to include numerous opponents in its system. Through its resources, many politicians, critical of the government, agreed to limited participation in an asymmetrical interdependent relationship, which strengthened the system.

In that era, the government party, the Partido Liberal Nacionalista (Liberal Nationalist Party – PLN) was a party of the masses in many aspects, with disciplined structure and a strong presence in cantonal, municipal, departmental (provincial), and national settings. Some state resources were at the party's disposal, mostly for electoral campaigns. Although the PLN added to its platform provisions and assigned individuals to take care of the interests of considerable sectors of the population, the PLN fundamentally served the orders and interests of the Somozas and their followers. This regime was supported by the armed forces almost unanimously, by the business sector to a large extent, by the Catholic Church's friendship, and by a succession of administrations of the United states during the Cold War era.

With time, the system aged and became more corrupt. Clashes of interests with the private sector suddenly occurred. The Catholic Church, revived by Vatican II, became critical of the regime. Neither parties nor elections fulfilled their usual functions, and the system entered into an era of irreversible delegitimization, accelerated by an adverse international climate, which derived partly from North American Human Rights policies. Several Latin American governments also distanced themselves from the Nicaraguan regime. Besieged on national and international levels and with the country fighting a bloody civil war, Nicaragua's multiparty and multiclass regime collapsed on July 19, 1979.

The results of this struggle were skillfully monopolized by a radical organization, that until that time had been small and clandestine, El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (the Sandanista National

Liberation Front – FSLN). There is little doubt that the radical tendencies of Sandinismo, its use of violence to reach power and to exercise it, and its attitude toward law were all influenced by an inherited political culture; although not very edifying, this culture had been a tradition for more than a century and a half.

Cuba shows similarities with Nicaragua in its political culture, particularly relative to the role of elections, the transfer of power, pluralism, inclusion, and generally with regard to democratic experiences. Cuba has suffered fluctuations between democracy and dictatorship, the absence of a solid governmental institution, and a regime that has prolonged itself for more than 43 years, combining typical Leninist regime structures with a chief who has brought about cohesion and legitimized the system.

Gerardo Machado's electoral victory in 1924 could, in theory, have initiated a democratic period for Cuba, in which elections would have played their classic role through its late independence. In the early 1920s, the memory of North American intervention, which undoubtedly helped organize Cuba for the better until 1902, was beginning to fade. Nevertheless, President Machado disrupted constitutional order in 1928. His regime started the cycle of dictatorship and revolution, causing the transference of institutional power to be ineffectual.

The unfortunate presidency of Carlos M. Céspedes, the prominence of lower class members in the armed forces, the circumstances of Sergeant (later General) Fulgencio Batista, the irregular and unusual situation of the pentarchy, and the downfall of Ramón Grau's reformist government in 1933 – all portrayed a society with a seriously immature political system, in spite of its attempts at modernization in several areas. Additionally, Cuba was dealt several blows by its vulnerable economic system, due to its dependence on the monocultural sugar industry.

The magnitude of the gap between the formal structure of governance and the true power structure, which tends to be larger when a political system is less institutionalized, was apparent in Cuba with the hegemonic role that Colonel Batista played out behind the scenes. Batista would finally become president from 1940 to 1944; then he voluntarily and temporarily absented himself (like a tropical Ulysses who retires to his tent) as Grau assumed the presidency. Batista would return to power in a coup d'état in 1952. Once again, another attempt at democracy was cut short, following the constitutional periods of 1944-1948 and 1948-1952,

presided over by Presidents Grau and Carlos Prío, respectively.

In this short period, democracy was delegitimized by corruption and disorder. Seven years later, an ideological movement, which was confusing at first, with tendencies toward accelerated radicalism and caciquism, overthrew Batista and took power. Cuba's political culture, the manner of exercising power, the forms of participation, the social environment, and external factors, such as relations with the United states, would be factors in the formation of the new political system that would effectively eliminate (until this day) any vestiges of "bourgeois" democracy.

Party of the Masses and Vertical Control. The FSLN. The Party Structure. Rise and Fall. Cuba: Caciquism or Institutionalization

Nineteen sixty-nine marked the beginning of a new era for Nicaragua, under the hegemony of a new party, the FSLN, which, from its foundation as a small clandestine group in 1962, was guided by the classic organizational principles of Leninism. The FSLN aspired to install a radical revolutionary regime, through a transitory stage of alliances with democratic forces in the country. Sandinismo belonged to what some called the "second wave" of the radical armed movements of the Latin American subcontinent (Castañeda 1994, 90-128). The first generation of Marxist-Leninist organizations was made up by the traditional communist parties that dated back to the second decade of the twentieth century. These were parties loyal to Moscow and to orthodox Marxism; party members were taught that socialism was achieved through evolution, following the development of capitalism.

The second Latin American Marxist generation had a different vision. They believed that they could accelerate the arrival of socialism with armed struggles from the very bosom of "pre-capitalist" societies. This generation was inspired by Fidel Castro's revolution of 1959, but their attempts to foment revolutions summarily failed through a series of defeats in countries such as Argentina, Venezuela, and Bolivia in the 1960s and 1970s.

The "second wave" of this generation was formed by guerrillas, who learned bitter lessons through the years and who formed tactical alliances with democratic sectors that were opposed to the dictatorships in coun-

tries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The FSLN was the only insurgent organization that was successful. It was actually the only armed Leninist movement to come to power in continental South America and the second in the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, the FSLN was the last of all the "vanguard parties" to assault the heights of command. Ten years later, the Socialist Bloc would collapse.

When the FSLN reached power, it rapidly transformed into a party of the masses that aggressively propelled its "strategic program" under the control of a hegemonic party. For tactical reasons, the FSLN leadership delayed making premature official pronouncements about the goals of the revolutionary process (Dirección Nacional, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1981; Arce Castaño 1980). Within this process, they controlled the existence of political parties, elections, and the promulgation of a new constitution for the tactical purpose of disguising the Sandinistas' intentions. However, unlike the Cuban process, Sandinismo was not able to annihilate the other political parties totally, in spite of having reduced the power of minor allies or of minimized rivals. This failure was vital to the democratic transition and will be discussed in the following sections.

The Sandinistas created a vertical command structure that diminished judicial structures and the state in general to administrative instruments of the party's will. The Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army); the Sandinista Police; the Sandinista State Security; the legal system (unpredictable and unsafe, politicized, and removed from the general principles of "bourgeoisie" law); the Sandinista Defense Committees, organized by street; and the Marxist Christian groups centered around languishing liberation theology -- all of these institutions and systems were at the service of "democracy" and the revolution (Ortega Saavedra 1980; Cardenal and Borge 1981). Within this context, violations of human rights were generalized (U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 1983).

The two organizational charts presented at the end of this essay (Figures 1 and 2) provide a synthesis of the structure of the Sandinista Party and of the intimate state-party interconnection during the years the FSLN was in power. Both will help to explain later how that dominant structure faded in the transition process to democracy. It is worthwhile to indicate that the FSLN was the only Leninist party in the world that maintained one collective leadership (the National Leadership comprised nine

members) from the time it reached power in 1979 until it lost it in 1990.

Reviewing Figure 2, one can easily see that the Sandinista Party (populist, mobilizing, creator of a new distributive politic, supposedly on the way to egalitarianism) played a much broader and more active role than any other party in the history of Nicaragua in the political, legal, economic, and social systems in general. This role was similar in all "vanguard parties" (in its modernized Leninist meaning). Unfortunately, the human, social, and economic results of the Sandanista regime were disastrous. The accrued inflation rate reached 24.81 percent during the first year of government (1979-1980) and subsequently jumped to almost incomprehensible levels (33.602 percent in 1988, two years before the end of the regime) (INIES, *Boletín Socioeconómico* No. 15, 1989, 6-12).

Under the Sandinista regime, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita fell from 7,519.2 córdobas in 1979 (the steady rate of 1980) to 5,360.7 córdobas in 1988. Exports decreased from US$412.4 million in 1979 (an abnormally low year due to the civil war and the change in government) to $235.7 million in 1988 (Instituto Nicaragüense de Estadística y Censos, INEC, *Nicaragua en Cifras*, 1989, 19,26). The economic debacle was one of the factors that contributed to the Sandinistas' defeat.

Another defining characteristic of Sandinismo was proletariat internationalism, that led to interventionism and to support of radical movements of the period, such as the FMLN in El Salvador. This launched Nicaragua into the Cold War and eventually produced a U.S. response: the strategy of "low intensity conflicts." As a result, the anti-Sandinista civil war acquired an international dimension, with dire results for the country: 53,252 casualties (*El Revés de la Contrarrevolución*, 1987, 17), and military costs reached 50 percent (or more) of the national budget. At the political level, the rejection of military recruitment by the FSLN was one of the elements of its electoral defeat in 1990. The Sandinistas' proletariat internationalism is a case of a political system that attempted to transcend its borders (functional and territorial) and provoked external pressure that contributed to its downfall and to the beginning of democratic institutionalization.

The Cuban case, when compared to that of Nicaragua, presents significant differences. To begin with, the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26-J) and, in essence, the revolutionary process, fundamentally revolved around Castro's charismatic leadership. At first there was a somewhat

amorphous struggle within the M-26-J between the moderates and the radicals (like the Castros and the Guevaras), who categorically prevailed. Besides M-26-J, there were also developing opposition groups, like the Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary Movement of the People) and the Movimiento de Rescate de la Revolución (Movement to Rescue the Revolution), integrated with heterogeneous elements (Castro's nationalist and anticommunist comrades who were alarmed by the course of the revolution). They were all nullified by Castroism, by his enormous power of calling together the people by popular edicts, and by the rapid refinement of the repressive mechanisms of the new regime.

Castro's centralization was such that it was not until 1965 that the party structures were institutionalized with the foundation of the Partido Comunista (the Communist Party), although its establishment was relative, given the weight of the will of the Commander in Chief. The Communist Party of Cuba was born, therefore, tied to Castroism, a reality for those who joined the process, as well as for those who accepted it passively. Among them were diverse members of the former, unpopular Stalinist Partido Socialista Popular (Popular Socialist Party – PSP), which opportunistically and skillfully disappeared in 1961.

The case of the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (Revolutionary Integrated Organizations – ORI) and Aníbal Escalante in 1962 and the Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista (United Party of the Socialist Revolution – PURS) and Marcos Rodríguez in 1964 were lessons for those who had not understood that this was not an orthodox Marxist revolution, but rather, a Castro phenomenon. To a certain degree it was a true involution (from a Weberian perspective) with its tendency to institutionalize, that is, to make routine and predictable and stable systems. In such an environment, the efforts of expression and organization of the center and the political right were summarily repressed. From that time on, there was no possibility for any partisan system of competition and free elections. Even geographic realities, such as Cuba's insularity, would aid in closing the system.

One of the most striking characteristics of the Cuban regime is its durability, intimately linked to the longevity of its cohesive and legitimizing element par excellence, Fidel Castro. Naturally, although Castro is a central element, his regime is the expression of an extremely complex situation.

At the beginning of the revolution, Castroism was a movement of the masses, not fully articulated around ideologies or structures. It found in the Stalinist PSP a valuable subordinate element that offered a basic ideological, organizational, and structural framework, as well as ties with Moscow. At an international level, Castro had the good fortune to take power during the middle of the large bipolar and global confrontation of the era between 1945 and 1991. This setting catapulted him and Cuba to a prominence that clearly exceeded the true proportions of the leader and of his revolution. The international structure of that period allowed Castro to intercede in the global landscape (the Missle Crisis in October 1962). Castro participated directly and openly in Africa and intervened in Latin American countries, generally very cautiously, for which the powerful Departamento de América (Department of America) was key.

From 1965, as already mentioned, the formal structures of the revolutionary government were further defined by the foundation of the Communist Party and the publication of the Constitution in 1976. The master structures of the revolutionary state were formally established. These included the National Assembly of Popular Power; the State Council, similar to the Supreme Soviet of the defunct USSR and the true executive committee of the symbolic Assembly; the Council of Ministers, the highest administrative and executive organ; and the Judicial Power, made up of diverse levels of "Peoples' Courts," in charge of political justice under the authority of the Council of Ministers. This structure involved organisms and specialized institutes, such as the Central Planning Board, the National Institute of Saving and Housing, the National Institute of Tourism, and others. Vital within the system were the entities charged with disseminating the regime's ideology and blocking the dissemination of contrary ideas (national TV, radio broadcasts, newspapers, La Casa de las Américas, The Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematography, and others).

The Cuban Communist Party (Partido Comunista de Cuba – PCC) was inextricably connected to the state and determined its politics and its functions. Although formally its maximum authority was the Congress, which meets once every year, the center of power was rooted (as has occurred with all Leninist parties when they took control) in the Politburo, the party elite. Next, there is the Comité Central (Central Committee – CC). This has served to integrate representatives from a

variety of existing sectors and interests to a high level within the party and the society, as the PCC, controlled by Castro, acts as the valid and most effective element to articulate social and political interests.

The Central Committee has been increasing its membership: from 100, to 112, to 148, and so on. The CC elects the leadership of the party and is divided into departments, such as Economic, Revolutionary Orientation, Department of America, and so on. Around the central structures of the PCC revolve the renown "organizations of the masses:" Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution – CDR); Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women); Federación de Trabajadores Cubanos (Federation of Cuban Workers); Asociación Nacional de Pequeños Agricultores (National Association of Farmers); and others.

In spite of this entire network of complicated institutions, there exists the anachronism of Castro's much cited hegemony, which determines how decisions are made when a situation requires it. Different observers point out that in the middle of this generalized illusion of definite institutional maturity, the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces have advanced the most in development. The process of institutional consolidation of the armed forces was accelerated in the 1970s. This occurred in such a manner that the responsibilities differ from those of the civil, the economic, or more correctly, the profitable sector of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, there exists a strong presence of top military as well as partisan hierarchies in the armed forces. In effect, the leadership of the Armed Forces has elevated participation in the government and in the Central Committee of the PCC and has occupied up to 58 percent of the highest positions of the party.

A quick review of the manner in which the top military and party authorities overlap is revealed by the following: Fidel Castro is First Secretary of the Central Committee, President of the Council of Ministers, President of the Council of the State, member of the Politburo, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Raúl Castro is Second Secretary of the Communist Party, First Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, member of the Politburo, and Minister of the Armed Forces. Abelardo Colomé Ibarra is Vice-President of the Council of the State, Minister of the Interior, member of the Council of Ministers, member of the Politburo, and General of the Army. Julio Casa Regueiro is a Minister,

member of the Council of the State, member of the Politburo, and General of the Army. Alvaro López Miera is Vice Minister, member of the Central Committee, member of the National Assembly, and General of the Army. Leopoldo Cintra is a member of the Politburo, member of the Central Committee, member of the National Assembly, and General and Commander of the Western Army. Joaquín Quintas is a member of the Central Committee, member of the National Assembly, and General and Commander of the Central Army. Ramón Espinoza Martín is a member of the Politburo, member of the Central Committee, member of the National Assembly, and General and Commander of the Eastern Army. Ulises Rosales del Toro is Minister of the Sugar Industry, member of the Central Committee, member of the Politburo, and General of the Division (División General).

In spite of the degree of institutionalization achieved by the armed forces, the role of said forces in the post-Castro period will depend on other factors and not specifically on the degree of autonomy achieved, according to the prevailing opinion among observers of the Cuban situation. We will return to this point at the end of the next section.

In comparing the Cuban regime with the Sandinista regime, the formal and functional similarities of various of their elements are evident, as Sandinismo was inspired by various aspects of the Cuban experience. However, Castro as well as the Sandinistas took many fundamental elements from the communist parties then in power in Eastern Europe: "standard" elements of Leninist parties in general. Nevertheless, the element of caciquism, or having only one chief, did not happen in the Sandinista system. Caciquism, which has given the Castro revolution its profile and the continuity of its existence, is the one element that could also bury it when that leadership disappears, which, by its very nature is temporary.

The Transition Process Toward Democracy. Political Parties and Elections: Their Role in the Change of Structures. Reflections on the Cuban Situation

The fall of the Sandinista state and the transition to democracy in Nicaragua was the result of a complex series of factors. Some were global — Gorbachev's reforms, the end of the Socialist Bloc, and the re-launching of North American power after the Reagan era. Other factors were regional, including the position of countries like Honduras in the anti-Sandinista fight and Central American diplomacy. This was backed by the Plan de Esquipulas (August 7, 1987), the declaration of San José, and the Tela and Playa del Sol accords, following the lack of success of the Wright-Reagan plan and the failure of the Grupo de Contadora prior to that. Other factors were of national or domestic character, which have already been mentioned.

This section focuses on the systemic changes unleashed by the role that political parties and elections played in the transition to democracy at the end of the Sandinista era in 1990. The elections that year were decisive, as they achieved the basic disassembly of the dominant power structure. Along with the factors mentioned in the previous paragraph, the elections and the parties, sectors at the national level were fundamentally in the hands of national political groups and forces. Therefore, the domestic actors had more control of those variables. That provided a lesson of greater prescriptive and comparative value for the actual or eventual transition to democracy of other countries.

It is important to remember that the Sandinista Revolution reduced the other parties to subordinated allies or limited and repressed these groups but did not achieve their total extinction. Many factors impeded the FSLN from reaching its goal of being the only party.

To begin with, Sandinismo (a clear example of the previously mentioned "second generation" of armed Marxist organizations) only came to power as a result of a great national alliance. The war against Somoza, much bloodier and destructive than the liberation of Cuba by Castro against Batista, was won with the collaboration of national and international democratic forces. For that reason, Sandinismo began its limited era based on "tactical compromises" with non-Marxist forces, from which it would gradually distance itself and reduce their participation.

Following the civil war of 1978-1979, the economy required foreign assistance, although it had remained basically healthy. It was also evident that such help would initially come from the United states and from other countries in the region that were not much inclined to assist a radical regime. This was another factor that limited the FSLN's ability to eliminate other parties and the private sector.

Although Sandinismo immediately consolidated, it held power due to its control of the armed and security forces. Due to its Cuban and Euro-Oriental council structure and the rapid expansion of the "organizations of masses," its interference was soon challenged by the United States. The FSLN attempted to hide its true nature and present a young, democratic revolutionary face that was multipartisan and interested only in national independence and compassion for the poor around the globe. These sins "provoked the wrath of the merciless Reagan imperialism."

With respect to the parties, there existed in Nicaragua the Frente Patriótico para la Revolución (Patriotic Front for the Revolution – FPR) from the beginning of the Sandinista regime in 1979 until 1984. The FPR was composed of the left and center-left-oriented parties, including the Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Socialist Party – PSN); the Partido Popular Social Cristiano (Popular Social Christian Party – PPSC); the Partido Liberal Independiente (Independent Liberal Party – PLI); and the Partido Conservador Demócrata (Conservative Democratic Party – PDC), which was a conservative branch that collaborated with the FSLN. All these parties had partisan houses and maintained limited responsibilities but were infiltrated and watched by the State Security and were continuously forced to deal with obstructions to their activities.

All parties were expected to dedicate themselves to strengthening the revolution, within the framework indicated by the National leadership of the FSLN. Besides the FDP, there were other parties that were subjected to much stronger repression, such as the Movimiento Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutional Party – PLC); the noncollaborative branches of the Conservative Party; the Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement – MDN), whose leadership went into exile; and trade union organizations, like the Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada (Superior Council of Private Enterprise – COSEP), that actively participated in politics in order to defend themselves against the hostile environment.

In 1984, the FPR disintegrated due to the hegemony of the FSLN and was denounced by the leaders of the Socialist Party, the Partido Popular Social-Cristiano, and others. There were also cases like the PLI, which was fragmented as a result of infiltrations by state security and the FSLN.

That same year, 1984, the FSLN convened general elections. The purposes (stated repeatedly by the Sandinista leadership to the partisan organizations) were to win spaces in the diplomatic arena, to isolate North American foreign politics toward Central America, and to achieve disarmament of the dangerous, growing anti-Sandinista resistance forces. Once that was achieved, they planned to accelerate the revolutionary process.

The Nicaraguan state was then formally ruled by a governmental Junta, a state Council, and partisan judicial power, which was infested with "popular courts" and other anomalies that emerged in the heat of the triumph of 1979. There was no political constitution, but instead, two documents worked out during the final phase of the civil war against Somoza: The Estatuto Fundamental del Gobierno de Reconstrucción (Fundamental Government Statute for Reconstruction) and the Estatuto de Derechos y Garantías de los Nicaragüenses (Statute of Rights and Guarantees of the Nicaraguan People). Both would be replaced by the Constitution of 1987, due to political necessity and FSLN propaganda. That Constitution is in force to this day, although extensively modified (Egueva Gómez 2000, 1136-1190). It was basically a partisan Constitution, with limited technical-legal value and partly inspired by the current Cuban Constitution.

In the 1984 elections, the FSLN utilized all of its advantages of having control over state funds, together with repressive mechanisms, so that its only credible rival, the Coordinadora Democrática (Democratic Coordinator – CD), withdrew from the electoral process due to a lack of transparency and lack of security to protect its followers. The CD was made up of the Central de Unidad Sindical (Confederation of Labor Unification – CUS); the Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Workers' Union – CTN); the Social Democratic Party; the Social Christian Party; Nicaragua Conservatives; Liberal Constitutionalists; and the COSEP. Without any real opponents, the FSLN triumphed, with 63 percent of the votes for Daniel Ortega, its candidate for President of the Republic, and 64 percent for the Sandinista

candidates to the Assembly (winning 61 seats of the total 96). To this must be added 27 seats in Congress secured by FSLN allies and other leftist groups. Although the elections were basically nullified from the immediate democratic perspective, they served to train non-Sandinista partisan organizations, which would become important a few years later.

By 1988, the situation that had existed a short time earlier had fundamentally changed for the FSLN. International conditions, similar to those inside Nicaragua (armed resistance; abandonment of the collective agrarian strategic project, due to increased participation in the anti-Sandinista war, which was fundamentally farm-worker based; economic setbacks; and growing popular discontent), all indicated to the Sandinista leadership that the revolutionary project was irreparably dying. The higher strata of the Sandinista movement understood that they had to prepare for a new post-revolutionary order, in which, if they were to retain power, they would have to make deep concessions to the economic market and the basic principles of the "democratic bourgeoisie." If, on the other hand, they lost control, they wanted to be assured that the gains of the revolution would be respected and be recognized as contributing to the new prosperous economic status of the leadership in general.

The decision to accept the situation was inevitable, and the move from a post-socialist order would be achieved through long and intense internal and international negotiations. Within this new frame of reference, adverse to the FSLN, the 1990 elections were held.

The negotiations prior to the elections included, separately, the anti-Sandinista resistance forces and the purely civic political opposition forces. Through these negotiations, the FSLN reached agreements that included petitions from the civic opposition forces to various states to isolate and disperse the armed resistance. Meanwhile, in the Nicaraguan case, the presence of the armed opposition decisively forced the FSLN, which in previous years had rejected at least 15 attempts at negotiation, to sit down to negotiate seriously.

On August 5, 1989, the FSLN signed an agreement with 21 national political parties and organizations (note the fragmentation of the opposition at the time), through which Sandinismo pledged to liberalize the dominant political conditions. Control of the mass media and the broad terrorizing faculty of the Sandinista Police would be reviewed, elections would be called, and recruitment for the Sandinista Army would be sus-

pended for six month prior to the elections. The elections took place on February 25, 1990, but occurred only after an ordeal with the opposing forces: numerous advantages for the FSLN, aggression against the opposition, and threats to suspend the electoral process alternated with promises that the election would be held on time and correctly. In spite of all this, the opposition continued to work with its sights set on the electoral battle.

Obviously, the elections of February 1990 were possible because other parties and political organizations had remained in existence during the Sandinista era, for reasons already explained. Such political organizations and unions were the channels (limited, but in any case alternatives to the complex Sandinista apparatus) for the articulation and addition of issues and demands of important sectors of the population. For example, the PLI responded to the interests and sympathies of a middle class group from 1970 to 1990. The conservative non-collaborationist factions served as avenues of communication for some sectors of the upper class, a fraction of the middle class, and small sectors of farmers from diverse regions of the country. The COSEP centralized the most relevant groups from what was left of the private economic initiative.

As the aforementioned indicates, unlike other Leninist states, Nicaraguan civil society had not been completely absorbed by the dual vanguard-state party. The brave active and passive resistance achieved the downfall, for example, of the famous Comités de Defensa Sandinista (Sandinista Defense Committees – CDS), modeled on the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution – CDR) of Cuba, which continue to be active. In the long run, the situation in Nicaragua facilitated an electoral alternative when the opportunity arose.

The only serious rival to Sandinismo in the 1990 elections was the Union Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union – UNO). The alliance, after innumerable internal struggles, in addition to the struggle against the imposing closed political system, was formed by the following political parties: Acción Nacional Conservadora (National Conservative Action -- ANC); Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement – MDN); Partido Social Demócrata Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Social Democratic Party – PSDN); Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Socialist Party – PSN); Partido

Neo-Liberal (Neo-Liberal Party – PNL); Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party – PAN); Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutional Party – PLN); Partido Conservador de Nicaragua (Conservative Party of Nicaragua – PCN); Partido Popular Social Cristiano (Popular Social Christian Party – PPSC); Partido Alianza Nacional Conservadora (Conservative National Alliance Party – PANC); Partido Comunista de Nicaragua (Communist Party of Nicaragua – PC de N); Partido Liberal Independiente (Independent Liberal Party – PLI); and Partido de Confianza Nacional (National Confidence Party – PCN). The UNO also had the support of non-Sandinista union organizations, like the Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Workers' Central – CTN); the Central de Unidad Sindical (Confederation for Trade Union Unity – CUS); and the majority of the private firms organized in COSEP. The ex-member of the defunct Patriotic Front for the Revolution (FPR) participated in this alliance.

The only way to bring down the FSLN, which profited from all of the advantages of authoritative power, would be through an alliance such as the United Nations, not very finely structured, but possessing a large scope of coverage, that inevitably required the heterogeneity of its components. For this very reason it was imperative that the alliance be forged around a few general goals and principles, such as democratizing Nicaragua and improving the level of the dominating poverty. This last demanded, among other things, the reduction of the enormous military and repressive Sandinista apparatus. Notwithstanding the lack of modesty of the program, the United Nations was proposing a true revolution, as a reorganizer of the real and formal structures of power. (As discussed later in this paper, Nicaragua's experience with the United Nations has aspects that could be useful for Cuba's transition).

When institutionalized dictatorships see themselves forced to concede to free elections, the organized and democratic addition of political preferences bring about a revolutionary transformation of the political system and of the state. Under such dictatorships, the state and the government (in the hands of ideologized parties) are inextricably integrated. In such a way, the state is subordinated to the party, and a change in the governing party implies a profound reorganization and reorientation of the state. This is not the case in democracies designed for periodic changes in government, which tolerate modifications that can be pro-

found without leading to the rupture of the political system or the state mechanism. The FSLN risked a process of revolutionary change whose general course, following the victory of the United Nations, will be summarized below.

In the 1990 elections, no less than 86.23 percent of those registered voted (1,510,838 votes). Of those, 54.73 percent were for UNO (the United Nations), and 40.80 percent were for the FSLN (Consejo Supremo Electoral 1990). This almost immediately caused the following structural changes in the political system: La Dirección Nacional (National Leadership – DN) of the FSLN, the maximum political authority of the party and of the state, was displaced at the state level by the Presidency of the Republic. This was a swift initial and basic move for the separation of the party and the state. The transformation of the true structures of power immediately began to conform with or approximate the formal structures, defined by the Constitution and the laws. In this manner, a profound displacement of the partisan commissions of the FSLN also occurred (see Figure 2).This democratic transformation immediately displaced the powers of the DN, which had exercised power superior to that of the presidency of the republic and of its ministers.

The Executive Commission and the State Commission of the FSLN were totally eclipsed in their controlling role over the state. On the other hand, in this situation of vertiginous political flow, the Defense and Safety Commission of the FSLN truly underwent a profound change. The FSLN disappeared as a partisan structure and as the superior hierarchical axis of state organizations like the Ministries of Defense and of the Interior, but in place of these emerged a mechanism of pressure (with true "veto power") within the new political system on the road to democracy. This mechanism was fundamentally made up of the State Security and the Ejército Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army – EPS).

The function of this new mechanism would be to defend, at least during the initial transition phase, "those conquered by the revolution," the economic power of the Sandinista elite, and what could be salvaged its former political power. The General Leadership of the State Security (well-known for its crimes) had been, until that time, part of the three General Leaderships (the other two were the Sandinista Police and the Judicial Processes) subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, under Commander Tomás Borge.

The EPS and its peripheral organizations were commanded by General Humberto Ortega. The political dynamics at the state and the intra-party level dictated the dissolution of the Ministry of the Interior and with it the final fall of Borge's political luck. Meanwhile, Ortega established himself as a key man in the initial negotiations for the course of transition. In addition, the State Security, although its functions, budget, and power were greatly cut, would never be under the EPS. State Security would remain integrated into the Military Intelligence Leadership.

The above-stated organizational arrangement was the result of somewhat obscure negotiations: there was an initial secret agreement, prior to the inauguration of the UNO government, between the president-elect's intimate circle (led by his son-in-law) and the highest leadership of the FSLN (led by the Chief of the Army Humberto Ortega). This so-called "transition protocol" guaranteed the Sandinistas (among other crucial points) the continuation of their control of the security and armed forces.

In any case, from the beginning of the UNO government, the discourse of the EPS changed from partisan revolutionary rhetoric to "professionalizing the armed forces." It was a clear concession to national and international realities and necessary for survival. As some analysts indicate, the decline of the international proletariat and, even more so, the end of the Socialist Bloc, left the EPS without a "rear guard," a source for equipment, replacements, and training (Guzmán 1992, 51-52). The future of the armed forces lay in its institutional redefinition and approximation to the West, specifically to the United States. (In 1992, in an act that created bitter discord, the EPS awarded its highest honor to Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis Quinn, military attaché to the United States Embassy in Managua).

Although the EPS maintained its presence within the FSLN (no less than 22 of the 105 seats in the partisan assembly), the tendency toward separation was evident. The army was soon involved in carrying out governmental orders, such as the displacement of farmers said to be Sandinistas from their land. At the same time, the EPS remained the most structured power of Nicaraguan society and, with that, retained great importance in the political system, refusing to give in completely to civil power. The EPS used its old partisan connections in the National Assembly to secure its part of the budget and to avoid laws that damaged

its autonomy. The EPS reached such extremes as secret handling of its budget and its own businesses on the margins of the fiscal control system.

The EPS's pervasive power created conflicts of interest with civil powers that continue to this day. Initially, there were no term limits for the tenure of the leadership of the army, and the entire system of promotions and other regulations were generated through the army itself. All in accordance to Legal-Decree 2-91, passed on the initiative of the EPS. Nevertheless, with the reforms to the Constitution of 1987 and with the new military regulations, the EPS was gradually being transformed; it changed its name to the National Army. According to the reforms to the Constitution, Ortega handed over command in accordance with military regulations in 1995 to General Joaquín Cuadra, who, in 2000 (when his term ended), turned it over to General Javier Carrión.

Seen in perspective, the "transition protocol" with regard to the army correctly interpreted what would be its gradual and still incomplete transformation. Aside from whether Nicaragua does or does not need armed forces, all indications are that they are re-orienting toward anti-terrorism, fighting drug trafficking, and carrying out civil actions and civil defense work.

It would appear today that the presence of the army in Nicaragua and its gradual evolution as an institution inserted into a democratic society can benefit national and even regional stability, which affects the interests of countries such as the United States in several areas, including the ever more serious migration problem. Nevertheless, the continuation of other entities with strictly political-repressive histories, such as the State Security of the FSLN, differ from the case with the army.

Unlike the possible advantages of the preservation and complete institutionalization of the army, the survival of the State Security created negative situations in Nicaragua, such as: 1) continued crimes against select leaders of the former anti-Sandinista resistance (hundreds of them were murdered, and no one was punished). Several civil leaders were also murdered with impunity. 2) The continuation of political espionage (declining but real). 3) The support (according to general opinion) of work stoppages, strikes, and violent demonstrations that so severely shook both Violeta Chamorro's and Arnoldo Alemán's administrations. Such events forced concessions that were damaging to security, the economy, and the speed of democratic institutionalization. Greater firmness in

the transition negotiations or greater international pressure could have impeded the survival of that repressive entity.

In any case, the reorganization of State Security forced several strictly partisan branches, such as scores of troublemaking groups (known as the "turbas") and the CDS, into a period of orphanhood and decline, without access to the benefits of the state budget. Concomitantly, partisan organisms, like the auxiliary departments that had authority over state ministries or that usurped the functions of some of these, lost their roles as the new regime ascended. Examples of this (see Figure 1) were the Department of International Relations and the Department of Political Education, which had enormous influence over the decisions of foreign ministries and public education. With the triumph of UNO, the benefits of the state budget that the professional Sandinista activists had received until that time ceased from the level of leaders of the Base Committee.

The democratic government's acquisition of power evidently affected other state organisms. The National Assembly, previously dominated by the FSLN, went on to exercise a legislative role more in tune with the realities of a liberal democracy. Nevertheless, it was still considerably tarnished by corruption, influence peddling, and compromises with the FSLN on such points as state property and confiscated property. Part of the situation arose from President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's handling of the government, which was undermined by nepotism.

The judicial power, which already had a bad reputation and a worse history, stayed mainly in the hands of Sandinista officials, although this began to change with the different political framework and the more serious legal atmosphere, the results of the disappearance of the omnipotent and vertical control of the party. In this manner, the judicial power began to orient itself toward the slow restoration of the general principles of law and the fundamental guarantees of democracy.

In retrospect, it is notable that the dissolution of the despotic structures of power resulted from the democratic-electoral play of a regime that, in some respects, had achieved a fair degree of institutionalization, at least with respect to the existence of a resistant and lasting collective leadership, certainly less elementary than a charismatic and singular leadership. The leadership of the FSLN took the example of Augusto César Sandino seriously on at least one point: His death ended his project in the 1930s. (General Sandino led the Defending Army of National

Sovereignty in a guerrilla war. Anastasio Somoza García ordered Sandino's murder in 1934.) Collective leadership was the remedy to such an eventuality. The disappearance of one or two members of the DN would not have significantly affected the general course of the revolution. It is true that the arbitrariness of the National Leadership influenced the development of admirable institutional maturity during the Sandinista era. However, the revolutionary project was never centered around one man whose eventual disappearance would subject the project to unsuspected tensions and pressures, as in Cuba.

Chamorro's government was followed by that of Dr. Arnoldo Alemán (1997-2002), the candidate of the Alianza Liberal (Liberal Alliance), centered around the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutional Party – PLC) and the winner over Daniel Ortega, the FSLN candidate who suffered his second defeat. Of the total 93 seats of the National Assembly, the Alianza Liberal won 42, the FSLN 36, and the rest were distributed among five minor parties. In spite of the transparency of the elections and their endorsement by cautious international observers (*La Prensa*, Managua 12/11/ 996, 1A) the FSLN still initiated a number of violent protests and threats, but the results were finally accepted 32 days later (*La Tribuna*, Managua, 23/11/1996, 1A-2A).

Democracy was secured with those elections that promised essential democratic functions, such as the capacity to rotate power. However, the imperfections and the corruption inherent in clientelism caused great damage during the Alemán era, including a pact with the Sandinistas that distributed large public resources and important duties in the Supreme Court, in other courts, in the General Comptrollership of the Republic, and in the Supreme Court Electorate between the PLC and the FSLN (with bi-partisan criteria and state looting).

In spite of everything, the Alemán government ended normally. In the November 2001 elections, Enrique Bolaños, the PLC candidate, was the winner who took over the Presidency of the Republic. He triumphed over Daniel Ortega, the FSLN candidate, who was defeated for the third consecutive time. Once more, public participation was extraordinary, an excellent indication of the legitimacy of the democratic system. The PLC received 56.31 percent of the votes, the FSLN 42.28 percent, and the Partido Conservador (Conservative Party) 1.41 percent. The PLC won 52 seats and the FSLN 38. In this instance, the top Sandinista leadership and

Ortega personally acknowledged the results of the popular vote quickly. Once again, the elections fulfilled all the functions expected in a democracy, as explained at the beginning of this paper.

While Bolaños' government has failed in its campaign against corruption and to demonstrate the consequences of the Alemán-Ortega pact, it can be said that the transition to democracy has been fundamentally completed. There is certainly territory left to cover in many areas, including the complete subordination of the army to civil authority, especially in budget-related issues.

It is necessary to add that the FSLN lacks internal democratization at the partisan level. This is demonstrated in the permanence of the "historical" leadership and the manipulation of events such as primary elections (*La Prensa*, Managua, 2/23/2001, 1A; 3A; 6A; 7A; *La Prensa*, Manauga, 2/24/2001, 6A; 7A; *El Nuevo Diario*, Managua, 2/23/2001, 1). The intra-party changes were limited, even in the last FSLN Congress of March 17, 2002. Some dissidents complained that the statutory budget changes (including a council of 30 people) will concentrate power in the hands of a few (*La Prensa*, Managua, 3/18/2002, 1A; 4A-5A). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the party is no longer and never will be a "vanguard party," nor does the political party of the 1980s exist any longer, based on the quasi-identity between a Leninist party and the state.

Turning our attention back to Cuba, all indications are that the transformation or the substitution of the current system will come from a different base than was the case in Nicaragua, where the struggle for democracy originated from the supposition that the military and political battle would overthrow or transform the Sandinista state. In Cuba, which is clear at this point, such a change will only be initiated by Castro's departure or incapacity due to his age.

In contrast with the Sandinista system, which faced a long and bloody civil war, Castroism has suffered less destructive pressures. Its moments of acute political-military danger were the brief threat during the Bay of Pigs invasion and the short and dramatic crisis of October 1962 that ended with a guarantee to Castro, conceded by the United States to the Soviet Union. Castroism has survived innumerable problems, including the debacle of its economic model, without the shock of strong internal resistance.

The Cuban economy, having been dependent on Soviet and Eastern

European aid, collapsed when the subsidies ended after December 1991, which was announced by André Kozirev, then Russia's Minister of the Exterior. Cuba's purchasing power decreased from over US$8 billion in 1989 to less than $2.2 billion in 1992 (Carlos Lage, "Conferencia," *The Miami Herald*, 11/16/1992, 1A-13A). The dramatic character of these figures alone summarizes a situation that would probably have destabilized another system. But with Castroism, a number of diverse factors prevented this.

One of those was the escape valve migration to the United States. Understandable from the human perspective, objectively, it has also contributed to reducing pressure on Castro. Ironically, a segment of the exile community who generously help their relatives on the island has been a great source of foreign currency for the Cuban state. Other stabilizing factors for the regime are the control of mass communication and the effective repression of the scarce and weak opposition. There is also Castro's cohesive function and the effects of a motivating populism, in which an important sector of the population feels "acknowledged," although they have no decision-making ability.

Interestingly, the ruling control in Cuba could facilitate a rapid change in the system in the future. Fidel Castro's hegemony, his accumulation of power and duties, introduces a serious fragility for the post-Castro system. Power, like gasses, expands and occupies any empty space. For that reason, Castro's absence will leave enormous holes in leadership and power, over and above the functions formally attributed to each position dealing with succession.

Although claims about said future setting are hypothetically and tentatively *a fortiori*, it is reasonable to assume, based on real facts and tendencies, that neither Raúl Castro nor any other person in the current leadership, will be able to replace the cohesiveness and legitimacy of the maximum leader. Fidel Castro's absence will produce conflict within the Communist Party, the armed forces, and the state, but the phenomenon will be further complicated by readjustment among different units of the political system, the process of inter-institutional redefinition of influence, whose current referee is the celebrated Chief of State, Chief of the Government, President of the State Council, Commander and Chief of the Armed Forces, eminent member of the Politburo, and Secretary of the Communist Party.

In spite of all this, there are experts on Cuba, such as Jaime Suchlicki, who maintain the opposite thesis. They believe that Cuba will not have a transition, but rather, a succession from Fidel Castro to Raúl Castro, which may only be avoided through the coordination of forces that oppose the regime and with strong international pressure. In any case, if the setting for a transition arises, this would open a gamut of options relative to the transformation of each sector of the political system and of the social system as a whole: multi-partisanship, reforms to the legal system, reforms in the armed forces and security, economic openness, privatization, benefits, housing, education, and health, as well as others.

With reference to partisan roles and elections in the future transformation of the Cuban system, it should be noted that opposition in Cuba is weak and disjointed, due to repression and lack of mass responsiveness, which will make the path difficult. Nevertheless, some of today's repressive structures, so rooted in Cuban society, such as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, could divide, and their fragments could mutate, once their true North and guiding light is lost. For that reason, from those very territorial limitations, alternate and democratic organizations can emerge that will be vital to the partisan and electoral struggle. In Nicaragua, with Sandinismo already in crisis, the democratic activists from the neighborhoods were and frequently are former members of the Sandanista Defense Committees (CDS), who were inserted by pressure. At the opportune moment, their experiences of "surrenderers" served them well for the new tasks of freedom -- to organize and proselytize.

One great lesson that can be learned from the United Nations in Nicaragua in 1990 is the importance of the heterogeneity of its components and the generality of its program. In Cuba, the absence of opposition parties may also require the articulation of a large initial opposition movement, focused around themes as general as human rights, political guarantees, separation of the state and the party, and economic openness. It should not be lost that the ones that have maintained a breath of opposition inside Cuba have been the pro-human rights activists. Presumably, this reality will be considered by the numerous Cuban organizations in exile when they collaborate with the Cubans inside the country. In that manner, they may form an alliance capable of bringing down, in a legal, civic manner, the powerful Communist Party, one of the three great institutional players in Cuba. (The other two are the armed forces and the

Ministry of the Interior, with its security forces.)

There is no doubt that parties and elections were decisive in the last instance (and economic in material and human terms) for the transformation of Nicaragua and for a number of ex-communist European countries. For that reason, it is morally and politically imperative to explore such civic resources for the future of Cuba. But aside from parties and elections, there are numerous factors that cannot be fully discussed in this short essay. All that being said, it is worth at least mentioning one key element of the Cuban system: the military sector.

A brief mention of said sector should indicate that the preservation and transformation of the armed forces would serve multiple purposes. On the one hand, it would probably play a role similar to what the military institution played in Nicaragua, to defend some of the so-called "accomplishments of the revolution," (a coined phrase). This security network, which is realistically necessary, would facilitate the opening of other and numerous areas of the system. In addition, the armed forces in Cuba form the most mature institutional entity of the island and, for that reason in the case of system changes, is the most appropriate organization to preserve order, including control to avoid a migration flood, which would affect the United States.

It must be realistically admitted that in any evolutionary process, the armed forces in Cuba will have to compete with decades of political control from its very foundation, constructed around: a) personal loyalty to Castro and the revolutionary principles, b) the organization of the Communist Party within the armed forces, c) institutional professionalization and modernization, and d) the use of the armed institution in support of economic and political ends (P.G. Walker 1995, 526). However, neither that political control nor its elements are unchangeable. Castro's eventual disappearance will erode some of the elements of control, while the loss of credibility of the Marxist paradigms will eventually create distance between partisan loyalties and the tendency toward professionalization and modernization.

The United States can position itself to attract the Cuban military estate and influence its modernization within the democratic framework. In actuality, the Cuban military has, for more than a decade, lacked the support of a strategic partner to train its personnel and modernize not only equipment, but the institution as a whole, so that it can face the future in

this new century.

A report prepared some time ago (May 6, 1998) by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency established that the threat of the Cuban military apparatus for the United States has diminished, although dangers must still be taken into account, such as a) the use of Cuba for anti-U.S. intelligence tasks; b) the potential danger of nonconventional weapons (biological and chemical); and c) the U.S. role during possible instability when the regime changes and the U.S. faces the possibility of mass emigration.

These potential dangers could be removed and transformed into collaboration (on anti-drug trafficking, anti-terrorism, anti-human trafficking, and environmental conservation) if the armed forces of post-Castro Cuba were to establish ties with the United States, based partly on the factors pointed out in the text above. On the other hand, it is hopeful that the United States has made it abundantly clear that, following the Russian retreat from the military base at Lourdes, the United States will not allow the presence of any other power (including China) from the island to threaten its national security. In any case, it is necessary to admit that the development of new relations will be complicated by the presence of military hierarchies that are also party hierarchies. In Nicaragua, this was achieved with relative speed, as no active military person was allowed to have an active role in the FSLN or any other partisan group. It would be necessary to press for something similar in post-Fidel Cuba.

The communist State Security organization is different from the armed forces. As seen in Nicaragua, this institution (attached to the army since 1990) is destructive. The partisan State Security has little to offer society and the neighboring countries. Fortunately, outside of the dictatorial matrix, a partisan State Security is politically vulnerable in light of its history and role. For this reason, in the Cuban setting, there must be intense internal and international political pressure for a complete replacement of the State Security apparatus. This mission, will, however, run into serious obstacles. For example, the Ministry of the Interior is commanded by high officials in the army, in this case, General Colomé.

Without ignoring the hurdles for the future Cuban transition, the global experience in the last years of the twentieth century is promising. Regimes as diverse, strong, and with as many resources as Russia and South Africa have irreversibly transformed their governments without

violence. Undoubtedly, along with the process of globalization (economic and cultural, both good and bad features, and the unstoppable tide of technology and information), democracy will expand around the globe (A. Giddens 2000. 85-100).

The Cuban transition would also benefit from a study of the Nicaraguan experience in the social sector, as in higher public education, where errors and serious offenses were committed, and in the economic system sectors, such as transportation and processes for compensation and privatization. There also exists, in the area of privatization, abundant knowledge from experiences in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia. They have used three basic methods of privatization: sale to foreign investors, purchase by management and workers, and privatization through "vouchers" (Gray 1996, 183-195). Nicaragua has instituted the first two methods. However, without mechanisms that insure the publicity and transparency of the transactions, privatization tends to become a feast for corrupt individuals and groups, as has happened in countries as dissimilar as Russia and Nicaragua. In some cases, the results have been lower production and the perpetuation or increase of poverty, as has occurred in Russia.

Cuba will confront the complex transition process to democracy with the advantage of having several models, such as Nicaragua's, which provide examples of successes and failures. The fact that Cuba has had to wait so long for its transition gives it the advantage of perspective that other nations have not had when they began to initiate change. Through the transformation of the political system -- hopefully, through civic means, which has occurred in closed systems, like the Soviet Union's – it will be possible to promote change in other systems within Cuban society.

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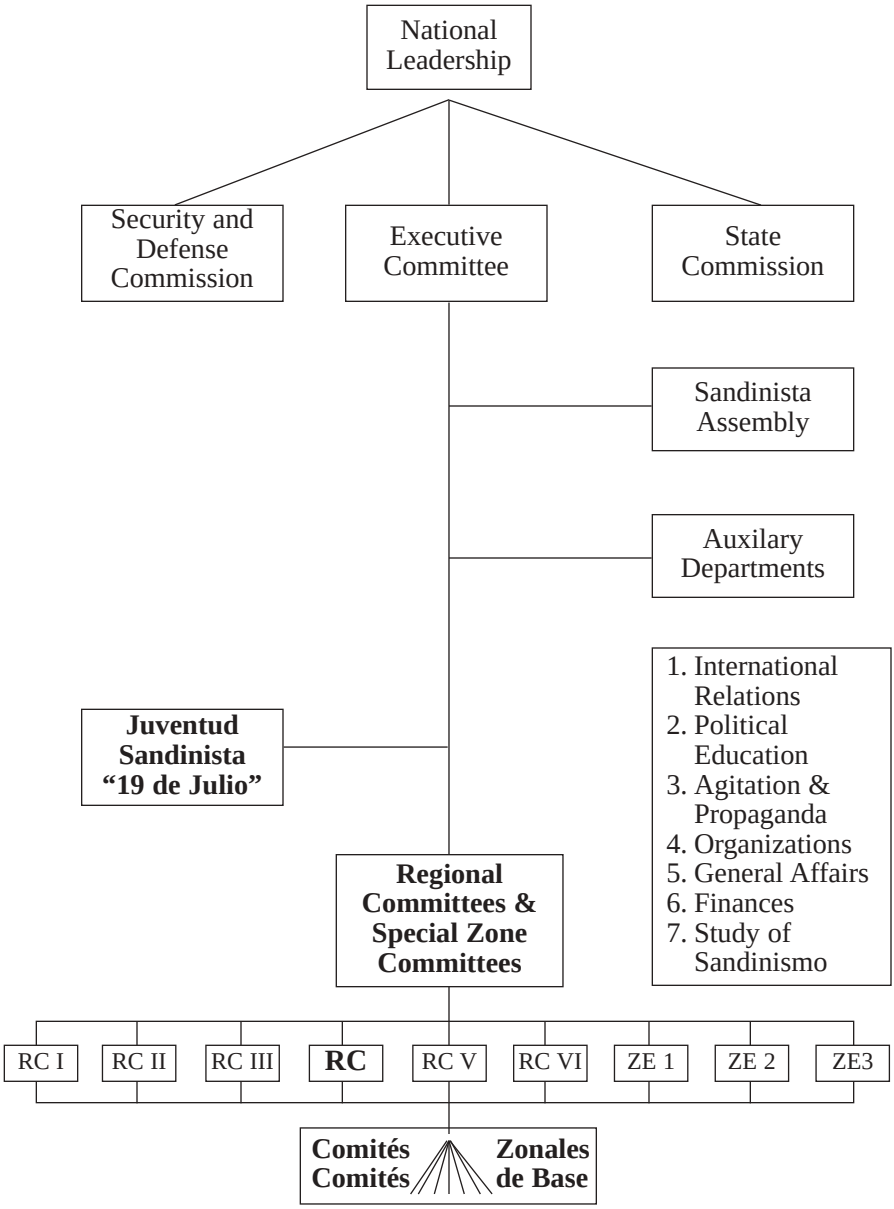
Figure 1
Organizational Chart of the Sandinista Party[1]



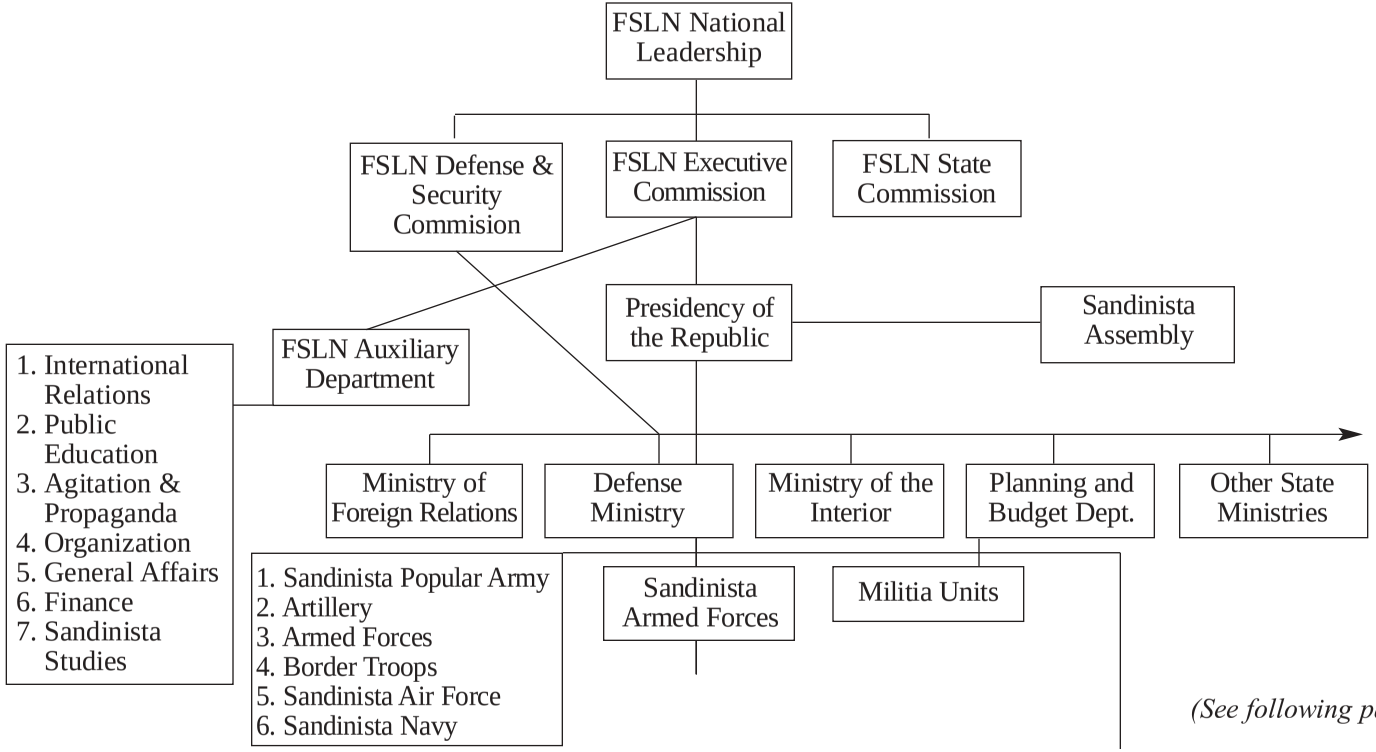
[1] Until the First Party Congress (July 19, 1991).

Source: *El FSLN: Antecedentes y Estructura Orgánica* (Managua: Editorial Vanguardia, 13.)

Figure 2

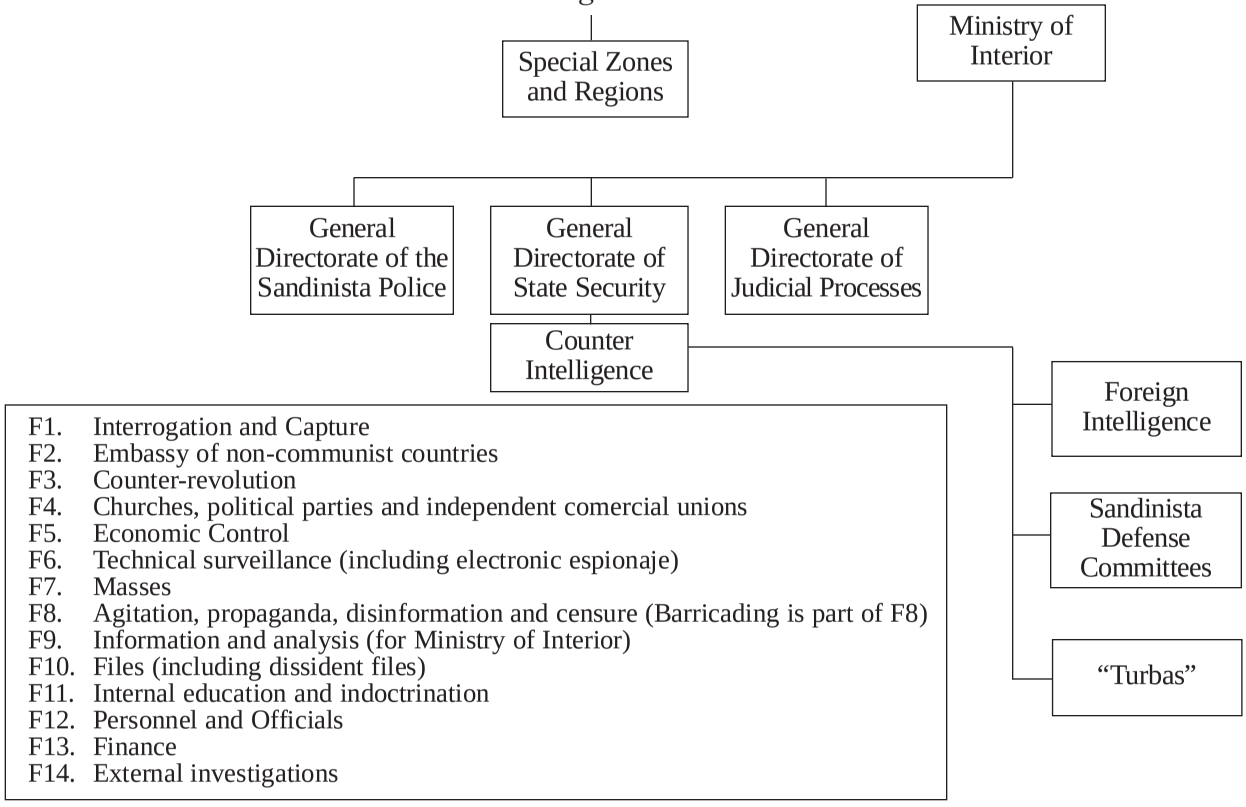
Structure of Power of the Sandinista Front: State and Party

(Through February 25, 1990)



(See following page)

Figure 2. Cont.



Source: *El Crepúsculo de la Vanguardia*. Alvaro Taboada Terán. Fondo Editorial, Banco Central de Nicaragua, 1994.

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