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APPENDIX 1 International Court of Justice Case Summaries: CASE CONCERNING THE
MILITARY AND PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES IN AND AGAINST NICARAGUA
(NICARAGUA v. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

The International Court of Justice ruled in 1984 in favour of the state of Nicaragua. The ruling proved United States as guilty of unnecessary use of violence against Nicaragua\(^1\). This took place in the aftermath of the US-backed Somoza rule in a bipolar world known as the *cold war* era.

I have become interested in the puzzle of how the second largest democracy in the world could proceed so far in their activities in Nicaragua, ending up charged and convicted of state terrorism without a general public saying; “We do not approve of this”. My primary interest focuses on the central role of the mass media in the shaping of public opinion and the mass media's important role in determining which topics are to be at the centre of public attention. The road leading up to the criminal actions performed by USA, according to the International Court of Justice, has captured my interest insofar that I wonder how this could have taken place. How did the media in USA portray the American activity in Nicaragua to their audience? How much, and what was told about the American foreign policy in the daily newspapers? Foremost, if I had been there at the time, reading the newspapers, what would have been my, as an individual, understanding of the situation?

I believe it is extremely important to think about the information that is offered to the public under a state jurisdiction on the subject of the own state’s activities on the international political arena. Research shows that media, through mass communication, not only has the power over *which* issues the public are paying attention to and regard as important but also *how* the addressees develop an understanding for the issue in question, (McCombs, 2004:xii). In a democracy, the public should be offered independent intelligence in order to be able to understand the world around them, but what happens if someone else, intentionally or not, attempts to create a pseudo-world in their mind?

\(^{1}\) appendix 1
My intention and ambition with this essay is to improve my understanding about how the media exposure on Nicaragua worked during the period of 1979-1990, based on one of the largest newspapers in USA, *The New York Times* (NYT). I will sort out these articles in comparison with reports from the *Central Intelligence Agency* (CIA) and their contemporary actions along with the former Nicaraguan National Guard. Furthermore, I am also highly curious about whether the style and agenda of *New York Times* changed in any way when mentioning Nicaragua, after the guilty verdict of the USA.

Different angels of various current events covered by media has caught my awareness regarding this specific case rathermuch, because of the catastrophic outcome that the (presumed\(^1\)) lack of American civil opposition against the interventions in Nicaragua came to lead to. The United States was ruled against in the case, “CASE CONCERNING MILITARY AND PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES IN AND AGAINST NICARAGUA" (International Court of Justice, 1984) due to repeated mining, bombing and sabotage of the Nicaraguan harbor during the early eighties, a crime known as state terrorism. What did the American public know about these attacks against Nicaragua?

Personally, I regard this old state of affairs’ way of setting the agenda just as topical and current today as back then, because of the ongoing importance of media in our everyday life.

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\(^1\) personal reflection
1.2 Purpose and Research Problems

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose with this essay is to investigate what the *New York Times* portrayal of Nicaragua looked like during the period of 1979-1990. I shall try to terminate if the *New York Times* agenda could have facilitated the American actions in Nicaragua by inhibiting potential hostile opposition from the American civil society.

My intention is to look into how the media portrayal of Nicaragua was displayed and if this portrayal could possibly have had an impact on the American public agenda. Thus, I will conclude if there is a possible causal relationship linking media agenda setting to the public opinion by a general discussion on how media uses the concept of framing?

1.2.2 Research Problems

What assumed effect might the news coverage of the *New York Times*, during the years of 1979-1990, have had on the American public opinion concerning the American military actions in Nicaragua, according to the agenda-setting theory?

My questions are:

- How did the *New York Times* portray Nicaragua during the period of 1979-1990?

- What aspects of the *New York Times* portrayal of Nicaragua might have had a compelling effect on the American publics’ view of Nicaragua?
1.3. Method, Literature and Evaluation of Sources

1.3.1 Method

This essay is comparative and qualitative, the majority of my gathered primary information consists of literature studies on the theoretical approach and the CIA as well as a voluminous examination of several thousands of news articles published in the *New York Times* during 1979-1990. I will perform a methodological study analysing indirect sources and direct sources and further on discuss these in relation to the theoretical approach. My anticipation is to be able to analyse this period with help from the agenda-setting theory\(^1\) using attribute agenda setting and framing\(^2\) (McCombs 2004: passim), which I will explain more thorough in the upcoming theory section.

An obstacle such as the already passed period describing the core of my examination has restrained my possibilities to carry out actual interviews with the American public during the years of 1979-1990. I have therefore chosen to analyse the headlines and articles in reference to presumptive effects on the American community, as for example passivity. My intention is to steer a discussion involving selected articles from the *New York Times* and thereby be able to suggest various effects and responses that might have come to mind within the public stemming from the accessible information. This is a path previously taken by several scientists using the agenda-setting theory. Assuming that the contemporary dynamics of public opinion described by agenda-setting theory can be extrapolated to the past, scholars have used content analyses of newspapers and magazines to write the history pf past public opinion (McCombs, 2004:34). I have carefully examined thousands of articles on the subject of Nicaragua and I consider those articles that I refer to in this study to be representative thus insuring this study’s validity.

In the theory section, I present the ontology, the history, growth, and different ways of using the theoretical approach the agenda-setting theory, focused on the concept of attribute agenda-

\(^1\) a theory of media mass communication
\(^2\) placing attributes framing objects in purpose of giving them special recognizable characters
setting and framing. Because of my intention to let attribute agenda-setting and framing play a bigger part in my discussion, a longer presentation will take place on the subject.

The literature studies contain selected representative articles and headlines from the *New York Times* during a period of eleven years (1979-1990). The study also contains the CIA activities in Nicaragua during the same eleven years rendered by William C. Blum, scientist and former employee at the American Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The analysis will therefore partly be a comparative study of the *New York Times* articles in comparison and relation with the reports from Blum, partly a general discussion of media's significant role in determining which topics are at the centre of public attention and action.

Next I will present the core literature used in this study, *Setting the Agenda – the Mass Media and Public Opinion* and its author Maxwell McCombs.

1.3.2 Maxwell McCombs

I have gathered the primary information of the theory section from the book: *Setting the Agenda – the Mass Media and Public Opinion*, written in 2004 by Maxwell McCombs, professor at the University of Texas and one of the worlds leading media scientists. At some parts in this study I will also refer to the Swedish copy, *Makten över dagordningen – Om medierna, politiken och opinionsbildningen*, translated into Swedish in 2006.

McCombs himself is one of the names behind the agenda-setting theory in cooperation with his colleagues Don Shaw and David Weaver, both American scientists and academics. In short, this book constitutes an abstract of the research of media and mass communication going forty years back, once initialized by these scientist in a small study known as the Chapel Hill-study. McCombs’, Shaw’s and Weaver’s central hypothesis in the Chapel Hill study was that the mass media set the agenda of issues for a political campaign by influencing the salience of issues among voters (McCombs, 2004:4).

In this research paper, I have also gone through thousands of articles from the American daily newspaper *The New York Times*, which I will present more thorough next.
1.3.3 The New York Times

The New York Times\(^1\) is an American newspaper founded in New York 1851, well known as one of the world’s most prestigious and leading newspapers (Nationalencyklopedin, 2006). Under the leadership of Adolph Simon Ochs, editor-in-chief 1896–1935, the paper became acknowledged for being well-informed especially in the field of foreign countries. A huge amount of money was spent on the exclusive rights for the events of great international importance, e.g. the discoveries of the Arctic/Antarctic Circles as well as Charles Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic. Still today, the New York Times maintains one of the most extensive networks of correspondence among the grand newspapers around the globe, recognized for their reporting on the Vietnam War, the Mid-East Conflict and the Gulf War.

As the majority of the larger news corporations, even the New York Times is at subject for criticism due to lack of objectivity when reporting news. A logical explanation for this is the reality of journalists working for a specific agenda also being individuals with their own ideologies and ways of looking at the world that might interrupt the neutrality of their articles. In the specific case of Nicaragua the lack of objectivity, or more correctly the presence of subjectivity might just work in favour for my study and my upcoming results, as the presence of partiality is in fact an important aspect of the power of setting the agenda and framing.

William C. Blum and his book Killing Hope: U. S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II act in this study as a counterbalance to the New York Times headlines, giving another perspective of what was going on at that specific time in history. Following below is the presentation of Blum and his book.

1.3.4 William C. Blum

CIA & USA: s verkliga utrikespolitik, originally titled Killing Hope: U. S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II is written by William C Blum, scientist and researcher of the

\(^{1}\) Home page: http://www.nytimes.com/
CIA since thirty years. The book was published in 1995 and translated into Swedish in 1998 and I am in this study using the Swedish copy.

The book is a chronological report on CIA and the interventions in Nicaragua carried out by the American military during the Cold war, focusing on the human consequences resulting from the American power politics. The author William Blum left the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1967, abandoning his aspiration of becoming a Foreign Service Officer because of his opposition to what the United States was doing in Vietnam. He previously worked with Philip Agee, another critic of the CIA and former CIA officer. Blum was also one of the founders and editors of the Washington Free Press, the first "alternative" newspaper in the capital and he has worked as a freelance journalist in the United States, Europe and South America, (The History Guy, 2006). Although the author is to some extent partial due to his resentment of imperialism, one finds that the majority of his observations in his work indisputably refer to the official intelligence of the American State Department as well as other authorized official documents relevant for his research.

1.4 Structure

Chapter 1: This is the introduction to the essay, which includes preface, list of contents, purpose and research problems, method, literature and evaluation of sources. This is where I present the main authors and sources referred to in this essay. In this chapter, I also present restrictions to this study.

Chapter 2: The theory-chapter. Here I present the agenda-setting theory and its origins. I focus on attribute agenda-setting and framing and I also introduce the Antonio Gramsci idea of ‘consent as powerful as force’.

Chapter 3: This is the chapter where an analysis is executed out of the New York Times articles, paying attention to attribute agenda-setting as well as looking at the events presented in media in comparison with the actions performed by the CIA

\[^{1}\text{as in leftist}\]
Chapter 4: Here I discuss the results from the analysis of the New York Times and the CIA activities.

Chapter 5: This is where I give my conclusions of this study.

Chapter 6: Here I present the books, articles and internet sources that I make use of in my study.

1.5 Restrictions

This study is comparative as far as an evaluation is made between a large amount of articles published in the New York Times 1979-1990, the William Blum reports on CIA containing the activities of the American military in Nicaragua the same period and the Maxwell Combs agenda-setting theory. Hundreds and hundreds more articles were published in various newspapers and magazines on the matter of Nicaragua during the 1980’s, because of the unstable and troublesome political situation in the country at the time, but I focus exclusively on the reporting from the New York Times. I trust that my decision to do my research based on the New York Times will prove productive since I believe the paper to be representative for the common American news coverage of Nicaragua during the cold war.

Since my indirect source on the CIA activities is a self-claimed socialist it might seem as there is a lack of other objective sources in this essay. However, due to several recent confirmed reports on secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe and revelations on illegal transportations of convicts on Swedish soil, the statements by Blum on American military activities in Nicaragua during the cold war seems not too farfetched. Apart from this, I will not examine the possible various factors that shape the agenda presented by the mass media or the origins of the media agenda.

For those versed in the situation of Nicaragua, I want to clarify my intentional leave out of the actual Iran/Contras-affair since I believe this to be a matter big enough for an evaluation of its own.
2. THEORY

2.1 The Agenda-Setting Theory

2.1.1 The Dialogue between Socrates and Glavkon

In the introduction to the Swedish edition of Setting the agenda– The mass media and public opinion, readers get introduced to the allegory created by Plato referred to as the “cave allegory” (Strömbäck, 2006:5). This chapter will start of with the telling of this allegory:

Glavkon is asked to imagine a situation where people since they were born are held chained in an underground cave. The people are not able to either move their bodies or turn their heads, the only thing they can do is to stare in front of them. Outside, above and behind these people there is a fire burning in the distance, and between the fire and the captured people there is a road where a wall is raised. Outside the cave people are walking along the road and back carrying various tools, sometimes walking during silence, sometimes engaged in conversations with one another. Of this, the chained people in the cave do not see anything but the shadows of these people walking behind them, formed by the fire in the distance, dancing on the back wall of the cave. They see the shadows and they hear the voices but nothing else. With this background, Glavkon is asked whether he thinks that the people in the cave comprehend these shadows as real objects or not. Glavkon’s answer is “yes”.

Jesper Strömbäck, the Swedish translator of Setting the agenda– The mass media and public opinion, tells of us humans only being able to relate to what we know by the help of our senses. If our senses in one way or another are not reliable then we will make false postulations about the reality around us. In addition, we are often fast to generalise out of isolated observations (Strömbäck, 2006:5). So what does this all mean and what does it have to do with New York Times, Nicaragua and the agenda-setting theory? Well, as humans we are not able to be physically everywhere at the same time and mostly we make our

\footnote{see Plato, The State}
assumptions about the world around us from what we hear on the news or read in the papers. This is the initial hypothesis behind my interest for the relationship between the *New York Times* -reports and the lack of civil resistance to the escalating warfare in Nicaragua 1979-90. Not to mention, we also often draw hasty conclusions out of pictures we see in papers or on news bills even without reading the following text. “I read it in the newspaper” is a common answer to the question: “How do you know that?” To help me interpret the *New York Times* articles in a correct manner I turn to the Maxwell McCombs *Agenda-Setting Theory*.

### 2.1.2 General Content of the Maxwell McCombs Agenda-Setting Theory

“Setting the agenda” is a phrase used in discussions about politics and the general opinion according to McCombs and the phrase itself summarize the ever so ongoing debate in every community, from neighbour talks to the international arena, about what should be in the centre of the society’s attention, (McCombs, 2004:x). The agenda-setting theory has evolved from the narrow “Chapel Hill-study”, once paving the way for further research on mass communication and power of mass medial agenda-setting, to a contemporary theory now containing different aspects of the process of setting the agenda. Besides investigating the influences, and the extent of these influences, on how the media agenda-setting affects the general public agenda, the current agenda-setting theory is also divided in two levels of analysis. The first level of the agenda-setting theory, the traditional agenda-setting theory, has to do with the priority and frequency of different matters -objects- on the media agenda. The second level concerns the priority of the different attributes framing these objects (McCombs, 2004:70). Summing up, in the first level the media put forward what the public should think about through amount of coverage, and in the second level the media suggest how the people should think about the issue.

Both the first and second level agenda are of great interest for my research since focus is not only on the frequency of reported items but also on in what context *New York Times* presented the news. In *Setting the Agenda*, McCombs elucidates the phenomenon he refers to as the *function of the news media agenda* as a huge and all-embracing ethical question for the
journalists concerning which agenda they do portray through media. “What the citizen need to know” is a reoccurring phrase within the rhetorical repertoire of the professional journalism, (McCombs, 2004:xiv). It is also a point of view potentially involving enormous consequences on the society as a whole. In this case, the victims of the New York Times -agenda were the Nicaraguans and the stability of their society. Whether the New York Times agenda mattered much or not, there is a task of providing, fair and balanced news and I hope that the combination of the first and second level of the agenda-setting theory will work out the kinks of my research problems. In the next segment I discuss closely the first level of analysis, namely how frequency acts as an influence on the public.

Fig.1 (McCombs, 2004:5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE MEDIA AGENDA</th>
<th>THE PUBLIC AGENDA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of news coverage</td>
<td>Concerns of the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOST PROMINENT PUBLIC ISSUES</td>
<td>MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC ISSUES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transfer of issue salience

2.1.3 Influencing the Public

Relating to the previous section, according to the agenda-setting theory, it is possible to say that almost every discussed topic on the general public agenda is a second-hand reality, a reality produced, structured and delivered by the journalists who provide us with reports on events taking place around us. Through daily selection and presentation of particular news, editors and head of news all over the world steer our attention to, and influence our view of, which current events are important and in what way the events should be interpreted. A
constantly reoccurring issue day after day is the strongest message of exactly how important
the event actually is. Will Nicaragua show to be a hot subject or not on the New York Times
agenda? If so, in what sense? After a while, this procedure of repeating news shows that the
event given a lot of attention in the press is also an event considered to be very important
according to the public. This is, according to Combs and the agenda-setting theory, a first step
in building a public opinion. As Bernard Cohen puts it: “the news media may not be
successful in telling people what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling their
audiences what to think about” (McCombs, 2004:3)

The agenda-setting theory does not look upon the public as robots ready to be programmed
with information. Instead, the central part in the agenda-setting theory headlights the mass
media's significant and sometimes controversial role in determining which topics are at the
centre of the public agenda, meaning that the pictures delivered by the media very much
effect the images that the public create of the reality (McCombs, 2004:3).

A very interesting way of influencing the public is to intimidate the public into having strong
opinions. I expect to run into this way of influencing the public when examining the New York
Times -reports, since they cover an intense time in history. The reason why the media-agenda
uses this alarmed discovery, intentionally or not, might vary. Maybe there is an urge to sell
higher volumes of individual copies or maybe it is just a journalist’s belief, presented in
media and causing other media to tag along. It has been done before and McCombs shows
below his readers a sarcastic example of this journalistic power.

In the United States summer 2001, shark attacks were the biggest worries on every other
citizen’s mind (McCombs, 2004:28). Why? The American magazine Time had a terrifying
cover this summer of a man-eating, bloodthirsty shark and other press also reported instantly
about shark-attacks on humans, reinforcing the notion of how dangerous it would be to take a
swim. Marine biologists were however quick to announce that there were definitely not any
strange numbers of shark attacks this summer, the only odd or scary thing about the shark-
attacks, according to the marine biologists, were the unexpected coordinated reports from
every other newspaper about specifically shark-attacks. In fact, 28 children had died in
America from televisions falling down during the period 1990-1997, a number four times as
high as the lethal rendezvous that any human had with the great white during the entire 1900.
Consequently, as McCombs cleverly establish, the alarmed discoveries should better have been about warnings against watching *The shark* on TV (McCombs, 2004:28).

For people in general the cold-war era was a frightening time involving the presence of atomic bombs. As a result of using the agenda-setting theory and *framing*, possibly I will find that the *New York Times* reports was influenced by the ongoing cold war framing the object of Nicaragua by using memorable attributes. Meaning, placing Nicaragua in a memorable context giving Nicaragua a certain shape of character.

### 2.1.4 Attribute Agenda-Setting and Framing

Largely discussed in the second level of the *agenda-setting* theory is the method of connecting certain attributes with issues discussed in media. What does this mean and why is this important for my study? Framing objects by using attributes is a way of defining and emphasising a piece of news that media wants the public to grasp in a certain way. It means that it is not enough to tell a story in a mechanical way since it would leave the public the opportunity to draw own conclusions. Instead, the issue is placed in a framework in hope of making the audience support a certain resolution. McCombs illustrate an example for us originating from the reports on the Bush administration’s energy politics.

George W. Bush’s definition of the energy question stresses the development of new fossil fuel sources and the enlargement of new power plants and power cables. Meanwhile the dangerous environmental effects evolving from these energy politics have for the most part been ignored, and the energy saving which is an important part of the energy politics, has been successfully toned down. The outcome of this kind of reporting is an audience steered in a direction of thought outlined by the media. Naturally, presented like this, the question about generating energy becomes more acute than worries about the environment since the environment has not entered the discussion (McCombs, 2004:82).

To clarify, you can report on Sweden presenting it like a former socialist state or as a country known for sexual freedom. Either way, your chosen opening will form the public’s view of Sweden for the rest of the feature. If you just say “Sweden”, you leave it all up to your
audience to make their own images of the country. With this in mind I look forward to see how media portrayed the events in Nicaragua according to this study.

Fig.2. (McCombs, 2004:71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First- and second-level agenda setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDIA AGENDA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer of salience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>First-level effects: traditional agenda-setting</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Second-level effects: attribute agenda-setting</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are inherent differences between attributes, according to McCombs. Some attributes are often brought up on a regular basis in the messages from media; others are more likely to make a quick and more long-lasting impression. When one interprets a message, some attributes are given more relevance than others are. The audience notice some characteristics for an object in a way that makes them particularly compelling arguments, i.e. frames, certain ways of organizing and structuring the picture of an object that enjoy high success among the public (McCombs, 2004:92).

When the media agenda give priority to a certain attribute framing an object, it can result in a direct influence on the public priority of this object. Some ways of describing an item can be more convincing than other ways and it makes the public giving priority to a certain object. It is also known as shaping. In my study, I am anxious to find out if the New York Times-articles pointed out any compelling arguments that might have enjoyed high success among the American public on the matter of Nicaragua during the eighties.
2.2 Consent, as Powerful as Force

My research problems focus on the American publics’ lack of action against the military interventions in Nicaragua, and I look at this passivity with help from the agenda-setting theory. In addition to the agenda theory, I will connect the Gramsci-theory of intellectual hegemony.

According to Antonio Gramsci, we should demonstrate our viewpoints through action, a philosophy of praxis, which is a belief I find very interesting when considering the New York Times articles and the presumed passivity from the American people during the interventions in Nicaragua. If the civil society actually did demonstrate their beliefs by indorsing the actions carried out from the American military, is it possible that their beliefs originated from media reports (Balaam/Veseth, 2005:85)?

Gramsci declares that one way for a dominant class in society to remain in their position is by what he calls consent, which could be even more powerful than coercion since ideas allow
rule of the masses by their own consent and thereby power over thoughts (Balaam/Veseth, 2005:85). Intellectual hegemony is then a state of produced ideologies supporting a single group of people holding the distributing power of views through media and thereby legitimatizes its interests. In every day life, the major part of the public is not aware of themselves being indoctrinated with ideas springing from media, mass communication and every day conversations (Balaam/Veseth, 2005:86). Instead, it is considered as individual beliefs and honourable beliefs since they fall into the average opinion when looking at the news bulletins. If one chooses a challenging path, disagree with, and oppose the general ideas flowing from media and other social constructions of mass communication one comes across as an obstacle in the democratic arena. This means that trying to give your endorsement to other ideas than the media/public-agenda demands in most cases the unfortunate use of violence. If not taken as far as to violence, the society will most certainly see you as a menace to the society.

The cold war era was probably a difficult time not to be a patriot and my suggestion is that even if you are not a believer of the portrayal of Nicaragua you might still hesitate to express your views in a certain environment. I expect to be able to draw conclusions also out of the Gramsci view of media since Gramsci´s theory of intellectual hegemony suggest that structural tensions are built into our daily lives through the forces that terminate what we think and don’t think, e.g. media influences (Balaam/Veseth, 2005:86). Gramsci also suggests forces behind the media agenda, but these will not be of any concern to my work since my focus is on the public reactions instead of who might intentionally have caused these reactions.
3. The Contents of the *New York Times* Articles / Headlines on Nicaragua 1979-90 and the Actions Carried out by the CIA

3.1. The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads

3.1.1 Background

When the American armed forces left Nicaragua in 1933, conservative Antastasio Somoza was in command of the National Guard, which left the Americans assured about the future of Nicaragua. Three years passed, before Somoza took the presidential seat but then he stayed in place for 43 years. Somoza created a dynasty around his persona with the aid from the National Guard and subsequently began the rule of the country as if it was private property. The Somoza dynasty confiscated the lion’s share of Nicaragua’s land, trade and industry while the National Guard, totally supported by the United States, spent time murdering opponents and massacring farmers. In 1979, in the midst of the cold war, the leftist Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza government and while fleeing abroad Somoza left behind a shattered nation with two thirds of the population making less than 300 dollars per year, (Blum, 1998:381).

The following analysis is in each chapter divided into two parts. First, there is a part describing the actual *New York Times* agenda at the time, displaying headlines and reflections on these headlines. Second, the *New York Times*-section is directly followed by CIA-information on the actual events behind “the scene”, with reflections on the (possible) *New York Times* concordance with the CIA/American government activities.
3.1.2 Carter's Latin Policy

In this first section, I focus solely on the year 1979. In this year there was not just the Somoza rule going for its end but also the American Carter administration was on its way to break down. Interesting is, when looking at the New York Times-articles this specific year, the fabricated “dialogue” taking place in media between likely Reagan supporters and the Carter administration as well as the statements made about Cuba and communism as a threat and the Cuban answers to these accusations.

In the CIA-section, directly following “The Decline of Carter and Somoza” some revelations will occur on the matter of the goodwill of the Carter administration and it will be clear how media conveys a strong message to the audience about what are the most important topics of the moment and how to receive them.

The Decline of Carter and Somoza

One of the first New York Times -headlines regarding Nicaragua in 1979 is the very headline above, “CARTER’S LATIN POLICY”. It appears on page A17 and contains considerations on the Carter way of the United States’ relations with Latin America (NYT, February 12, 1979). In the article one can read, ‘the Carter Administration has altered the direction of American policy from conservative, semi-interventionist to one that supports progressive and even leftist governments.’ There is no evidence in his sentence of the New York Times acting as a imposer of values but it’s clear that even if the audience is not told what to think it is most surely given a topic to think about. The key word and the obvious attribute framing President Carter’s actions in this time of the cold war, is the intonation of the word “leftist.” Reading this one gets the feeling that President Carter acts a little bit too soft considering the contemporary hunt for communist movements and the present threat of Russia.

To enhance the danger of the emerging revolution in Nicaragua the American public was on June 13, 1979 a little bit more educated on what kind of people bring concerned in Nicaragua. The headline read, “FOE OF U.S IN 20’S INSPIRES NICARAGUAN REBELS”, obviously referring to Augusto Cesar Sandino from whom the revolutionaries of the eighties had taken their name as well as inspiration. Poetic yes, but still, a foe is an enemy, enemies have nothing
good about them, and the headline clearly frames the rebellion movement in Nicaragua as troublemakers by mentioning them in the same context as an old foe.

At this point, the Sandinista revolution was on its way to peak and a couple of days later the *New York Times* reported on a proposal offered by the United States with purpose of easing the tensions in Nicaragua. According to the front page of *New York Times*, the United States asked the *Organization of American States* (OAS) for an urgent consideration of an inter-American peace force to restore order and democracy there (June 22, 1979). The headline also cried for a replacement of the Somoza government after 43 years and by suggesting a peace force, it reassured the American public about who the good people were. Even though it put the United States in a benefactor framework, this proposal was not well received at all by the OAS, and intense headlines followed the week ahead. Even if the proposal was not well received from the OAS, there had still been a headline on the front page of the *New York Times* speaking about the United States aside with prints like “peace force” and “democracy”.

In *New York Times*, one could read, “CUBA IMPUGNS U.S MOTIVES”, where the Cuban leader Fidel Castro charged that the United States wanted to establish a military presence in Nicaragua and said such a move could create ‘a Vietnam in the very heart of Latin America.’, (June 21, 1979). “Cuba” as a subject itself was frequently brought up in *New York Times*, as malicious attribute framing Nicaragua with the Sandinists. Even in situations like this when the United States was supposed to look like the bad guy. The result of this kind of reporting is that even when the United States stood accused of bad activities, the word “Cuba” helped to justify these activities. “Cuba” and “Soviet” were attributes heavily associated with Nicaragua during this year through frequent media coverage.

Following day’s front page declared a quick and powerful answer, “U.S ASSERTS CUBANS ARE SUPPLYING AND TRAINING REBELS IN NICARAGUA”. The Carter Administration officials said that Cuba was heavily engaged in supplying arms and training instructors to guerrilla forces in the civil war in Nicaragua, (June 23, 1979). The Nicaraguan rebels denied any Cuban involvement the day after, but they did not get the front-page though, (June 24, 1979). This way of agenda-setting directs the publics attention to the early formative stages of public opinion when issues emerge, as in this case of Nicaragua, and engage public attention. This is where journalists have to select carefully the issues on their agenda, and of course, where to place them. The importance of an issue is understood when placed on the
first page. Already in the late seventies, Nicaragua was heavily involved with the nemesis socialist bloc according to the New York Times -description of the situation, and in the meantime, the paper portrayed the United States as the defender of good American values.

Soon, the Carter administration realised that Nicaragua went for a political left turn and that there was nothing to do about it at this point. In New York Times, comforting phrases appeared reassuring that Nicaragua was not a new Cuba, meaning not hostile or dangerous, (August 7, 1979,), and as a proof of good will, Carter donated huge amounts of money to the Nicaraguan people. Of course, New York Times reported on this generous move, “US INCREASING AID TO NICARAGUA”, framing the United States as a benefactor for all (August 7, 1979).

In a last move from Somoza addressing Carter, he openly accused Carter for his, Somozas’, political fall and expressed at the same time a serious warning towards the American people. Somoza held that communist domination in Latin America ‘will soon extend right up to the border of the United States,’ (August 23, 1979, page 11). In an American era of concerns for Soviet and its myrmidons, this statement from Somoza could scare the morning coffee out of the toughest individual. Socialist and communists were strong and terrifying expressions and absolutely nothing the average American should make light of in any sense. This was probably an effective way of selling copies most certainly by means of alarmed discovery as a way of intimidating the public into having opinions.

**Preventing Socialist Influences**

In his book on CIA activities worldwide, William Blum confirms the intentions of the United States’ willingness of placing a peace force in Nicaragua while replacing Somoza, but the intentions according to Blum differed widely between the New York Times -headline and the actual underlying causes. The Carter administration had in reality not yet given up on Nicaragua and the possibilities of replacing the Somoza administration with another conservative alternative with assistance from an OAS peace force. The real task of the peace force was actually to be an obstacle to the military progress of the Sandinista revolutionaries, preventing them from taking over power, (Blum, 1998:382).
Regarding the headlines concerning the huge amounts of aid sent to the Nicaraguan people, Blum offers another story about the purpose of this aid. Even though Reagan later on addresses the nation stating that there could be no uncertainty about the decency of the American people referring to this aid, Blum says there were some things Reagan forgot to tell.

1) Almost all help went to non-governmental organisations (NGO’s) and the private sector, including the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFDL), also known as a former CIA-façade. 2) The main motive with this aid was to strengthen the moderate opposition and to prevent socialist influences on Nicaragua. 3) All military aid was hindered, which left the still remaining National Guard to operate freely under a new name, the contras.

What shall be very clear further on is the enormous resistance by means of direct terror the contras acted out against the Sandinista government.

### 3.1.3 A New Government in Nicaragua

*It is the early eighties and it has become clear that the Sandinist rebellion succeeded in creating a Nicaraguan political turnover. The socialist movement in Nicaragua has proved stronger than the fallen Somoza rule and when in ruling position the American media attacks against the Sandinists grow stronger. Lots of effort is put on framing Nicaragua as allies with the socialist bloc and the New York Times create an understanding of how big of a threat this new Nicaraguan government actually is to the American society.*

*Meanwhile, it stands clear that the new socialist rule in Nicaragua is an obstacle for the keeping of the cold war balance and with aid from CIA the freedom fighters makes their entrance, also known as the contras.*

### A Growing Socialism

The early eighties came to notify the American public about the errors committed during the Carter administration by acting gentle towards a dawning socialism in Latin America. Alarming headlines spurted out like cannonballs from the *New York Times* in a never-ending manner throughout the beginning of 1980. Some examples of what the public had to know (and worry about) back then,
- “REVOLUTIONARY WARS PUT U.S IN THE MIDDLE”, an article accusing the United States Carter administration of intervening too late in order to prevent the victory of Sandinist guerrillas in Nicaragua (February 10, 1980),

- “IF YOU ARE CAUGHT IN A COUP… ACTIONS TRAVELLERS CAN TAKE IF THEY ARE CAUGHT IN A COUP”, basically a survivors guide for American citizens if they should find themselves in a coup d’etat or another anti-American surrounding (February 24, 1980), another example of alarmed discovery

- “NICARAGUA LEADERS SIGNS PACTS WITH SOVIET UNION”, (March 23, 1980), the ultimate standpoint in the bipolar world of that time and also a clear framing of Nicaragua as part of the axes of evil

This is only three New York Times articles out of a thousand covering 1981, but in large the content is pretty much the same no matter which article one reads. The public was told about Cuba’s expanding ties with its Latin neighbours to offset United States influence and to strengthen Latin American solidarity, again “Cuba” as a frequent attribute. The American public was also informed on how the leftist movement was the main danger and not to mention how the shock waves from the Nicaraguan revolution were echoing through Central America, bringing new violence and instability to the region through communism (April 13, June 10, July 9). The leftist movement, a frightening attribute frequently used when mentioning Nicaragua, and as it was put in New York Times; along with it came violence and instability in the shape of communism.

During the months, leading up to the presidential election in the United States (which eventually was won by the former actor Ronald Reagan) the New York Times articles becomes harsher and more and more nerve-racking. The public reads about how Soviet exports terror according to CIA (November 2, 1980) and how Nicaragua's politics have become rougher and nastier, illustrated by the violent death of an important free-market spokesperson (November 21, 1980). Soviet and terror along with murdering of representatives of the core of American politics, the free market, is not a pleasant portrayal of a dawning government. The American public could not but see clearly the Nicaragua/communist connection, meaning a connection to the other bloc during the cold war. Most disturbing and frequent, was the news regarding
Nicaraguan aid to Salvadorian rebels who were expanding the red revolution in the area. Along with it became the framing of Nicaragua as not only a turbulent leftist state itself, but also as a benefactor of other dangerous leftist movements in the region. According to *New York Times*, the United States suspended payments to Nicaragua from a $75 million economic support fund because of evidence that the left wing guerrilla in El Salvador was supplied with arms from Nicaragua.

The *New York Times* aimed much attention at the conducts in El Salvador and the headlines told of the dangers involved. On the 19th and 20th February 1979, the headlines read, “ESCAPED SOVIET SPY IS REPORTED SMUGGLING ARMS TO EL SALVADOR”, and “U.S. SAYS SALVADOR IS 'TEXTBOOK CASE' OF COMMUNIST PLOT”. Now, who can forget that just a couple of weeks earlier Nicaragua was described as a contributor to this particular communist plot? The move to hold the payments to Nicaragua encouraged right-wing Nicaraguan exiles along with the contras to step up attacks from bases inside Honduras and to start planning a full-scale invasion. Verbal warfare between Sandinists and the Roman Catholic hierarchy, business leaders and opposition politicians added to the tension in accordance with *New York Times* (April 5, 1981).

**The Freedom Fighters Manual**

Up till the middle of the eighties the United States main official explanation of the American military aggression against the Sandinist government answered to the considerable amount of military supplies addressed to the Salvadorian leftist rebels from the Sandinists. The predicament with this rhetoric was the announcement of Salvadorian ministers in January 1981, saying Nicaragua did not allow any transportation carrying weapons through their country whatsoever (Blum, 1998:386). In fact, Washington had very little evidence to support their allegations. A couple of weeks after the Salvadorian officials’ statement, requests were made to the Salvadorian guerrillas from the Sandinists in hope of a peaceful political solution to the Salvadorian internal turbulence. Similar requests were repeated throughout the following years in an effort from the Sandinists to convince Washington not to hold the economic aid meant for and much so needed by the Nicaraguan people.

And so, at a meeting held at the CIA-headquarter in March 1981 between William Casey head of CIA, and others, it was decided to prevent any transportation of necessities to Nicaragua.
At the very same meeting it became clear to David MacMichael, former CIA-agent that the possible transportations of weapons to the Salvadorian rebels never really were a concern at all. MacMichael had had access to secret material concerning transportation of weapons from Nicaragua to El Salvador 1981-83, and he drew thereby the conclusions that CIA systematically and intentionally distorted reports on the transports. Why? The answer is simple, to justify the CIA efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government (Blum, 1998:386).

Speaking of ‘textbook case’ as referred to on the previous page. CIA’s Freedom fighters manual, a handy little book containing everything a wannabe saboteur needs to know, was distributed among the contras along with another manual, Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare. These two manuals included everything the contras needed to know in their goal along with the United States to recoup the nation. In Freedom fighters manual, guidelines were given on useful sabotages such as cutting trees and leave them on the road, stealing from the state, leaving the water running and spreading rumors about the governmental officials. Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare however had a crueler approach aimed for the bravest. In this particular manual strategies were given on how to take a town and establish a peoples court in purpose of humiliating the Sandinists, how to commit political murders, blackmail and blow ups of public buildings (Blum, 1998:387). If the American public had been informed about these manuals they might have looked at turbulence in Nicaragua in a totally different way. At least if the Americans were to know that other forces were behind the constant instability in Nicaragua, the Sandinists would not have made such an unreliable impression.

The contras became notorious because of their extensive brutality against civilians, involving cutting of throats and pulling their victim’s tongue through the open wound, cutting of women’s breasts and stabbing out eyes. When questioned, the contras were advised by CIA to justify their actions in accordance with the necessary battle against the Russian imperialists, never mentioning nationalists of Nicaragua. Rapists, torturers and murderers, drilled by the CIA and named the contras; these are the rebels Reagan (and New York Times) chose to call freedom fighters and morally equal to the founders of the American nation, “PRESIDENT CALLS NICARAGUA REBELS FREEDOM FIGHTERS” (NYT, May 5, 1983.). If anything, displayed on the front page like it was, for the contras to be known to the American public as freedom fighters, would be a particularly compelling argument on their behalf. The rebels in
El Salvador on the other hand were murderers and terrorists, according to the Reagan administration (Blum, 1998:385).

### 3.1.5 The Continuing Threat of the Red-Bloc

Still in the early eighties slowly approaching the mid eighties, this section will bring a closer look at the Soviet and Cuban connection to Nicaragua and the Sandinists as team players rather than agitators. The headlines were now shifting in so far that Nicaragua came to be displayed as a threat itself, even without aid from the other countries in the socialist bloc. In the New York Times the Americans could read statements from the American State Department itself on how dangerous the Sandinists actually were.

What were not yet publicly displayed though were the CIA-activities which included smearing media campaigns against the Sandinists. Stories about drug exports and mass murders flourished in media, but not much was said about the truth of these rumors. Not even when the lies were publicly disclosed. The effects of longtime framing and emphasizing of some attributes in media might have diminished the newsworthiness of the disclosure of fabricated stories.

**Nicaragua as a Threat**

The news regarding Nicaragua in the beginning of and midst of the eighties followed very much a similar pattern. If it did not frame the Sandinistas in the red bloc-framework, the news mainly covered the internal turmoil in the Latin nation. There were continuing reports on heavy battles between government forces and the pro-Somoza forces, the contras. Some examples of the alarmed reports, “AROUND THE WORLD; NICARAGUA SAYS IT KILLED 14 PRO-SOMOZA REBELS”, as in freedom fighters, (October 11, 1981), "BOMBS KILLS 3 IN NICARAGUA" (February 24, 1982) and ”75 CHILDREN KILLED IN NICARAGUA “ (December 10, 1982).

As a reader of *New York Times* it was hard not to notice the communist connection to Nicaragua during the eighties. American intelligence sources continued to report on the
arrivals of major Soviet military equipment to Nicaragua including heavy tanks. The State Department reported on Soviet T-55 tanks being shipped from Cuba to Nicaragua. Even though the State Department clarified that these were unverified reports lacking hard evidence the threat still seemed to be something to be taken seriously. These “vague but serious reports” were delivered to the American public via headlines like “SOVIET SAID TO SHIP MANAGUA ARMS” (June 2, 1981) and “SOVIET SAID TO SHIP TANKS TO NICARAGUA” (June 3, 1981,). Consequently, if you missed the not-confirmed news on Tuesday there was another chance provided on Wednesday and even if it wasn’t true there was still no chance to miss the intimate connection between Nicaragua, Soviet and tanks. Two months later, American Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. confirmed that the Soviet arms-shipment to Cuba had increased sharply and that there was evidence supporting reshipping to Central America (July 31, 1981). Other headlines covering the communist threat, “CUBAN COMMANDER IN NICARAGUA POST”, a Cuban in Nicaragua was obviously considered a serious threat since it was displayed on the front page (June 19, 1983), “SOVIET BUILDING FISHERY PORT ON NICARAGUA'S PACIFIC COAST”, a fishery port might seem like a harmless attribute, but a soviet-build fishery port is not (May 15, 1983), “BEHIND NICARAGUAN BUILDUP: SOVIET-BLOC AID CITED” (April 27, 1983).

A report by the American State Department published in *New York Times* March 21, 1982,” TEXT OF A U.S. REPORT ON CUBAN AND NICARAGUAN ROLE IN SALVADOR REBELLION” clarifies the Cuban and Nicaraguan role in the Salvador rebellion and the alliance of El Salvador's aggressive left. This headline means that Nicaragua has gone from a state supported by Cuba to a potent state now in cahoots with Cuba aiding the leftist rebels in El Salvador. Nicaragua, along with Cubans and Salvadorian rebels were definitely spelled out in *New York Times* as a possible match made in hell. In the report the readers get informed of the Cubans serving as a link between the Sandinists, the Salvadorian extremists and the communists outside Central America. According to this report the military connection and mutual training had escalated insofar that for additional specialized training, a daily operating Managua-Havana air shuttle was linking the nations. The magnitude of these operations was confirmed through a required ticketing system, according to the American State Department.

In the report one was also offered proof of a large shipment of arms which the Salvadoran guerrilla group picked up on the Usulutan coast after the shipment arrived by sea from
Nicaragua and just a couple of weeks before, the *New York Times* reported on aerial reconnaissance photographs made public by the Reagan administration. According to these photos, there were proofs of Nicaragua, with Cuban and Soviet assistance, assembling the largest military force in Central America. Front-page; “U.S. OFFERS PHOTOS OF BASES TO PROVE NICARAGUA THREAT” (March 10, 1982). Proofs like these are hard to ignore and Nicaragua did not any longer need threatening attributes since Nicaragua itself was a threat to count on.

A new angle of the Nicaragua reporting emerged in the midst eighties, showing the possible export of the Nicaraguan bad seeds, “U.S. ACCUSES MANAGUA OF ROLE IN COCAINE TRAFFIC” (July 19, 1984). They are the "Communist dictators," the platform says. "Cuba, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria - and now the Sandinistas in Nicaragua - are international 'pushers,' selling slow death “. From now on the American public should fear also the deadly influences on their children since the Sandinists were accused of direct involvement in cocaine trafficking between South American countries and the United States. Moreover, the attributes are self-glowing: Cuba, Soviet, Eastern Europe, cocaine and communism. These are the cold war- allies of Nicaragua, according to the *New York Times*.

**Another Washington Justification**

‘Henry A. Kissinger has already indicated he believes a firm American response is needed in that region to maintain the credibility of the United States in other parts of the world’ “KISSINGER ON CENTRAL AMERICA: A CALL FOR U.S. FIRMNESS” (NYT, July 19, 1983).

President Reagan compared Nicaragua to a ‘totalitarian dungeon’ (awful context to be in) and insisted that people in Nicaragua were being more suppressed than the blacks in South Africa were. Members of the Kissinger Central America-commission implied that the Sandinist Nicaragua was as bad as or even worse than the Somoza era and Henry Kissinger himself thought Nicaragua to be as bad as Nazi-Germany ( really awful context to be in). Reagan agreed with Kissinger linking the duty of the contras as similar to the British mission against Germany during the World War II (a saviour-like simile) (Blum, 1998:392).
The eagerness of the American State Department to describe the Sandinists as international pariahs resulted in all kinds of accusations against the country, none of them backed up by any evidences whatsoever. The world was told about the Nicaraguan government exporting drugs, being anti-Semite and acting as a mentor of Brazilian guerillas. When pressured about the alleged Sandinist drug connection, CIA denied the State Department statement. Instead, to show proof of the mass murder-like crimes committed by the Sandinists, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. laid forward photographs of decomposing corps representing Mosquito Indians killed by the Nicaraguan government. Later on it was publicly exposed that the photograph was taken 1978, during the Somoza era… (Blum, 1998:392).

Make believes like these sprung from the Office of Public Diplomacy (OPD), formally created under the jurisdiction of the American State Department in purpose of influencing the public, i.e. the American public. Colonel Daniel Jacobowitz, assistant chief of OPD described in 1995 the media campaign in a ‘confidential and secret’ strategy report; “The general theme is that the Nicaraguan freedom fighters struggle for freedom according to American values while the Sandinists are shady” (my translation, Blum, 1998:392). Debate articles and “news” created by OPD-employees was said to be written by members of the contras or independent researchers and thus published in all the major newspapers as independent statements from the White House.

Washington declared their politics towards Nicaragua as fair considering the revelations of major Nicaraguan military power. The general assumption pictured Nicaragua as a military threat against other nations in Central America, not just towards the American military bases on Honduran soil, but also against Honduras itself and other nearby countries as well. In reality, the Nicaraguan government did practically not possess an air force at all, and moreover they had no reasonable cause to invade any of their neighbors since their primary duties regarded building up their nation after the Somoza era. But still, the threats from the Sandinists according to the media did not seem to end anytime soon.
3.1.6 Breaking a Rogue State

To understand the impact of the mass media influences on the American public during this era I must linger a little more in the early eighties. The headlines never ended and there was more going on than simply the demonstration of Nicaragua as a threat against the American society, there was also continuing military attacks performed against the Sandinist government and Nicaragua civilians. To clarify, the New York Times reported repeatedly on possible threats stemming from Nicaragua simultaneously as they reported on American support for actual military actions against Nicaragua. Even when Nicaragua was under attack they still came through as the bad guys.

U. S. Backs Central America 'Good Guys'

A couple of times in the end of 1982 and beginning of 1983, Nicaragua charged the Reagan Administration with sponsoring a campaign of terror against Nicaragua. The headlines read “SANDINISTS ACCUSE U.S. OF TERRORISM” (January 13, 1983,) and “NICARAGUA, REPORTING DEATH OF 5 REBELS, ACCUSES CIA” (December 27, 1982). The Nicaraguan government accused among other things the CIA of supplying the contras with explosives. A quick response to these allegations could be read in New York Times January 20, 1983, where the American government’s chief human rights spokesman explained the American foreign policy as being based on the beliefs of the world as an exceptionally dangerous place and that the American government was looking after the freedom of its citizens. Putting it like this the Nicaraguan accusations seemed dishonest since the United States acted out of genuine concern for the American people. Freedom is a powerful word and as an attribute connected to the United States actions it can be of crucial importance.

In the New York Times a few days later it said that the Sandinist government was making up false charges in an attempt to seek sympathetic actions in their favor from the rest of the world. The headlined showed no mercy, “U.S. CALLS NICARAGUAN CHARGE OF IMMINENT INVASION A MYTH”, (March 24, 1983, A12). The chief United States delegate to the United Nations, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, urged Americans to take the Soviet threat in the region seriously. ‘We are backing the democracies’ in Central America, she said. ‘Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, all of Nicaragua's neighbors are democracies. We're supporting
the good guys in every sense of the word.’ (April 25, 1983). She also added that Moscow had established a major force in the Western Hemisphere in Cuba and had recently threatened to deploy nuclear missiles in the area. In New York Times one could read that it was the “good guys” against the authoritative powers of Cuba, Soviet and Nicaragua, not to mention the threat of nuclear weapons.

To reinforce the perception of the United States dealing with dangerous forces the American people was also warned about the fanatic Nicaraguan youth who were reading “all about how to use grenades” obviously in attempts to do harm (March 31, 1983). With this in mind maybe the headlines on the Israeli arm shipment to the contras was a welcomed feature for the worried Americans. In another context the by American authorities requested shipment of weapons captured from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) might seem odd and disturbing, but with the American people’s wisdom of hindsight it probably made sense. (July 21, 1983). Since media is for the most part a persons only contact with the world outside and acts like a bridge to the pictures in our head one must understand that the reaction from the American public at this time was a response to this pseudo environment. The media picture of Nicaragua was the only known image for the majority of the American public. This also supports the Gramsci-idea of the public not being aware of themselves being indoctrinated with ideas springing from media, mass communication and every day conversations.

In New York Times readers were now brought to attention on an intense period of attacks against the Nicaraguan government. In September the paper told on how anti-Sandinista exiles bombed Managua's main air base and international airport along with a second aircraft which attacked a residential area of the capital (September 10, 1983). Two reporters at the New York Times bellowed the next day that the air raid “hit Nicaragua where it hurt” (September 11, 1983).

The intensification of the Nicaragua situation becomes clear looking at the four following articles, which gives an impression of a clash of the headlines in just one newspaper. I have chosen these articles to represent an almost yearlong period of enormous damage done against the Nicaraguan government and the Nicaraguan people. “ARMS AID TO NICARAGUA STILL RISING, U.S. SAYS”, an enormously frequent topic referring to either Cuban or Russian involvement (October 5, 1983). “NICARAGUAN GUERRILLAS REPORT LAYING MINES AT KEY PORT”, several statements were actually made from the anti-Sandinista rebels themselves on the subject of planting mines in the waters around the port.
where Nicaragua received its oil and other necessities (October 8, 1983). Headlines like the previous one was almost always followed by a headline like “A COMMUNIST INSISTENCE ON SPREADING VIOLENCE” (November 2, 1983), probably attempting to justify the several accusations that actually occurred on the subject of mining by referring to the potential terrors of communism. And again, a response; “MOSCOW HOLDS U.S. RESPONSIBLE FOR MINES OFF NICARAGUA'S PORTS” (March 22, 1984).

**And What Say the Good Guys?**

This is where an evaluation should take place looking at the *New York Times* headlines and the actual actions performed or insinuated by the CIA, but my reason for not evaluating further at this point is partly the evidential support earlier revealed in this study. The contra-support has already been expressed at a public level through the American State Department itself and CIA-revelations on the subject have been made clear in previous sections. If there is still confusion, this topic will be brought up again in the upcoming discussion.

### 3.1.7 Vetoes and Voids

*This is 1984, the year when the ICJ ruled that The United States of America should immediately cease and refrain from any action restricting access to or from Nicaraguan ports, and, in particular, the laying of mines. This also the year when Nicaragua held its first election since the political turnover. So far we have not seen any signs of objections from the American public, thus providing what Gramsci should call a “silent consent”. This silent consent might have promoted the self-confidence initiated from the Reagan administration on the matter of the rule of ICJ.*

*There will also be shown a form of ambivalence originating from the New York Times, since the media agenda might had come to work as a self-fulfilling prophesy.*
A New, Bolder Media Approach by the Reagan Administration

We are closing up on the inspiration for this essay, the mining, bombings and sabotages of the Nicaraguan harbor. Nicaragua brought claims to the United Nation’s Security Council for "the escalation of acts of military aggression “performed by the united states against them in April 1984. The American government response to the allegations was clearly spelled out in NYT on April 5th 1984, “U.S. VETOES U.N. BID TO CONDEMN MINING OF NICARAGUAN PORT”! The proposed resolution would have condemned the mining of the Nicaraguan ports but the American government’s reply was no secret to the American people at all.

Next step, just four days later read like this, “U.S. VOIDS ROLE OF WORLD COURT ON LATIN POLICY”, meaning simply that the Reagan administration would not accept World Court jurisdiction in arguments concerning Central America. This void would be valid for at least the upcoming two years and the president made no secret about the reasons behind this decisions. A senior State Department official said the move had been made because of “information that Nicaragua was about to bring charges against the United States” (April 9, 1984). The front-page the day after was no surprise, “NICARAGUA TAKES CASE AGAINST U.S. TO WORLD COURT”.

According to the new, bolder media approach by the Reagan administration maybe the following initiative spelled out in the New York Times did not come as a shocker. The director of CIA made a statement implying as well as suggesting the American public not to take any bigger notion about the mining of the Nicaraguan harbor since there existed bigger problems to worry about. The headline read, “CIA. CHIEF SEES MIGRATION, NOT MINING, AS PUBLIC WORRY” and the director of Central Intelligence William J. Casey, says (April 16, 1984, A8);

he believes the American public is more concerned about the wave of immigration that would follow new Soviet and Cuban gains in Central America than about reports that his agency has supervised the mining of Nicaraguan harbors,
In this light, maybe it laid closer to hand for the average American to think about its country’s future instead of another country’s present. After all, it was a communist country allied with Soviet and Cuba.

Even though *New York Times* did announce the verdict from the International Court of Justice which ruled that the United States should immediately stop any attempts to sabotage the Nicaraguan harbor by blockade or mines, there was never really any big excitement about it in media. The *New York Times* headline on the matter read “U.S. LOSES RULING IN NICARAGUA CASE”, and that was really it (May 11, 1984). Maybe the United States void of the court itself made the verdict lose its appeal to the public. Instead, focus turned to the upcoming election in Nicaragua.

By using terms as “moral responsibility”, a fantastic attribute to associate with the American way, Reagan declared the importance of aiding the contras as long as Managua promoted “communist interference” in the region and the front page of *New York Times* July 20th 1984 told about the Reagan prediction of the upcoming vote in Nicaragua as a self-evident sham. A “communist interference” used in the very same article as “moral responsibility” made the picture of Nicaragua so much clearer as antonym against everything good and decent. The Regan assertion of the Nicaraguan vote as being a sham might have affected the *New York Times* decision to not place the news about the Sandinist victory on the front page (November 15, 1984). And it might also explain why it took 11 days before the result was published at all. This would mean that the media agenda had affected the public insofar that it bounced back to affect the media agenda yet again.

**The New York Times Ambivalence**

The Reagan assertion of the Nicaraguan vote as a sham was hard for the American government to prove. In comparison with western election norms there was not much critique to talk about at all. Compared to the rest of the Latin America the Nicaraguan election was nothing but an example of democracy. The election was open for everybody according to the 400 international observers present and a broad spectrum of political opinions was allowed to participate, many of those extremely critical against the Sandinists (Blum, 1998:390). The Sandinist victory was unquestionable.
The Reagan administration officially criticized the election on the 4th November while secretly arguing whether their choice of oppositional candidate Arturo José Cruz should participate for his participation to help legitimizing the election. The ultimate solution for the CIA was to let Cruz withdraw his candidacy in the last minute claiming impossible conditions. Even New York Times reported on these Reagan administration’s filthy scams (Blum, 1998:391). But, after the New York Times exposure of the shady administrational scheme, the paper suddenly made a u-turn and unexplainably said in a debate article “only the most naive ones could possibly believe that last Sunday’s Nicaraguan election was a democratic and legitimating proof of the Sandinists’ popularity” (my translation, Blum, 1998:391). Why this sudden change of heart, it is hard to explain, all I know is that last impressions usually last. As a reader I might have considered the vote to be a sham, who wants to be pictured as naive?

3.1.8 Stopping World Terror

As the early eighties installed the Sandinists along with the Reagan administration, the late eighties came to another political turnover. The goal for the Reagan administration to overthrow the Sandinists finally succeeded but the political career for Ronald Reagan himself was over. A new media approach on Nicaragua was revealed, the Bush administration made its presence and the Nicaraguan socialist era became history.

The end of Reagan, the end of the Sandinist

While dismissing verdicts and elections an even tougher Reagan approach stood clear in the late eighties, according to New York Times. Just a couple of months after the successful democratic Sandinist victory in the Nicaraguan election, the front-page of New York Times shouted out, “PRESIDENT ACCUSES 5 'OUTLAW STATES' OF WORLD TERROR” (July 9, 1985). It was there on the front page for everybody to fear, the new international version of ‘Murder Inc.’ Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua were all said to be terrorist states acting out crimes of war against the United States. Presented like this, the Nicaraguan circle did not look good at all. In the wake of this recent Reagan initiative, the House of Representatives passed a $12.6 billion foreign aid bill just three days later with intention to
confront communists and aid rebels fighting the Marxist Governments. These were news fitted for the front page of New York Times (July 12, 1985).

The headlines were all very similar to one another up until the beginning of 1987. Up until then the American public was able to learn about the President’s move towards a decision to formally end United States’ recognition of the World Court’s authority in political cases (October 7, 1985), the moral obligation by the United states to aid the contras (March 11, 1986) and how the Mexicans consider the United states to be ‘a friend’ (November 17, 1986). All these front pages were heavily promoting the Reagan administration at the same time as they spelled very clearly out the blamelessness of the Reagan-policy.

However, there is a sudden shift in the manner of presenting Nicaragua in New York Times 1987. Nothing really happened with the media attitude on Nicaragua after the rule of the International Court, which was my expectation; instead, the contras became the centre of media attention. A period of name-calling and search for the scapegoat of the turmoil in Nicaragua followed now. Reagan was portrayed in a not so pleasant way while the Sandinists and the Nicaraguan people were gaining more and more sympathy. The Iran-Contras affair seemed to be the final turnover for the Reagan administration and it brought out a sharper tone in media on the matter of the contras actions. The headlines leading up to the presidential election 1988 where George Bush Sr. won the American people’s support, presented a new approach on Nicaragua. “CONTRAS ARE FOCUS IN 7 INVESTIGATIONS”, “ORTEGA PROPOSES TALK WITH REAGAN AND THE CONTRAS” (November 11, 1987), “HOUSE, BY 8 VOTES, DEFEATS REBEL AID; A LOSS FOR REAGAN” (February 4, 1988,) and “BROKEN CHILDREN, A TRUTH OF NICARAGUA’S WAR”, a headline not so supportive of a violent hunt for communists. In campaigning to succeed Reagan, Bush suggested that he might do some things differently, invoking a vision of a "kinder, gentler nation” (November 9, 1988). Suddenly, when mentioning Nicaragua on the front pages the context appears so much more humane.

Despite the gentler American approach the Sandinist saw them being replaced two years later by a new government, the Chamorro government. According to the New York Times the effect on American foreign policy was immediate, “TURNOVER IN NICARAGUA; WASHINGTON SET TO END EMBARGO AND AID CHAMORRO GOVERNMENT”
(February 27, 1990). And also in Nicaragua the tables were turned, “CEASE-FIRE BEGINS IN NICARAGUA AS THE CONTRAS AGREE TO DISARM”, (April 20, 1990).

The Victory of Democracy

When the war in Nicaragua slowly went for its final cease-fire in the late eighties the disclosure of the Iran-Contras affair drove the Reagan administration off the cliff. Guns and aid to the contras had been supplied by foreign terrorists vouched-for by the American government, secret propaganda wars against internal political foes, perjury and obstruction of justice – all done in support of rapists, torturers and murderers (Blum, 1998:395).

Mission accomplished! The Sandinists were overthrown and Bush called it a victory of democracy. A former employee of the State Department predicted the contras to bee regarded as heroes in the future. And Senator Robert Dole summarized the turnover as a justification for the Reagan policy in Latin America (Blum, 1998:395). Another explanation might have been the Nicaraguans’ vote for peace after a decade of terrorism, war and the American embargo starving the population. Obviously the terror from outside would not end as long as the Sandinists led the country and when the choice stood between socialism and putting food in the babies’ stomachs maybe ideologies just had to wait. In the eyes of the American public and in the headlines of the New York Times the Nicaraguan threat of communism was eliminated.
4. DISCUSSION


Well, who’s cheering for the freedom fighters morally equal to the founders of the American nation? And who’s routing for the murderers and terrorists? My personal first impression tells me that the readers of New York Times never really had any other option than to see Nicaragua as a potentially dangerous and hostile nation. The presentation of Nicaragua was clearly carried out under the influence of the contemporary so-called cold war and the most evidential attributes mentioned along with Nicaragua were; Cuba, Soviet, socialism and communism. All these words strongly related to hostile environments.

These attributes had obviously a significant impact on the American public’s opinion since the expressions clearly referred to the dangers involved with the bipolar world and the nuclear power combined with the socialist bloc. According to the agenda-setting theory, this was a brilliant method of forming a public opinion about Nicaragua. Relating to the dialogue between Plato and Glavkon\(^1\) the general American public opinion was possible to create by means of the Americans’ New York Times -based awareness about the events in Nicaragua without seeing it for themselves. The one thing the readers of New York Times saw was the headlines. Did they perceive them as portraying real actions? Almost certainly. They see the shadows and they hear the voices but nothing else. With this background, Glavkon is asked whether he thinks that the people in the cave comprehend these shadows as real objects or not. His answer is “yes”.

The framing of Nicaragua into a communistic outline is conspicuously presented in a frequent manner during the entire eighties. It starts already in the late seventies during the Sandinista-rebellions against the Somoza government, as an alarming prediction of the coming future threat of Nicaragua. When the New York Times expresses its concerns for the soft Carter approach on the Sandinists, it transports these concerns to its readers in a subtle way, intentionally or not. For Carter this approach backfired and it most likely led to his loss in the next presidential elections, possibly much because of the fire starter in New York Times .It

\(^1\) see page 10, chapter of theory
came to lead to mass communication among the public resulting in a unified American disapproval of a sympathetic tactic against communists.

From the first level of analysis in the agenda-setting theory, we have learned the importance of frequency when creating an awareness of an event along with the media agenda. Since the central theme is constantly reoccurring topics, as a message of how important an event actually is, my examination of the *New York Times* -articles 1979-1990 came to prove an enormous significance of Nicaragua as a media cash-cow. There were approximately a thousand articles each year, all discussing Nicaragua in one way or another. Mostly in one way though, the intimidating way.

Not only was the frequency of Nicaragua itself on the media agenda observable. In addition, frequent appearances were the prioritized attributes framing Nicaragua. As the headlines have shown, Nicaragua was usually mentioned in a framework involving Cuba or the socialist bloc in general. Cuba, I must say appeared to be the most frequent attribute connected to Nicaragua, maybe because of its well-known communist rule. Since Nicaragua so often were mentioned in the same context as Cuba the first impression of Nicaragua proclaimed a country in conspiracy with the long-time antagonist of the United States, Cuba. Soviet too had a major role as an attribute connected to Nicaragua as it appeared when investigating the *New York Times* -articles. In addition, along with Soviet the subject of arms came up on a regular basis, most probably as a compelling argument on how to respond to the socialist bloc.

McCombs tells about alarmed discovery as a way of intimidating the public into having opinions on certain issues and I recited the story of sharks and televisions earlier in this study. What if, by comparison with this story, the mining and bombing of the Nicaraguan harbor could be seen as a cold war-metaphor for the televisions falling down without anyone taking any notice despite the death of many people, while communism was the bloodthirsty shark who got all the attention in media even though no actual Nicaraguan threats was uttered towards the United States? An accurate simile or not, nonetheless the threat of Nicaragua as an ally with the socialist bloc made several more headlines during the eighties than the reality of the many casualties of innocent Nicaraguan civilians ever did. As it came to show, the function of the news media agenda as an ethical question for the journalists and the phrase “What the citizen needs to know” did involve immense consequences on the Nicaraguan
society as a whole. It took excessively long time for the media to put the outcomes of the American military interventions in Nicaragua in centre of attention.

Meanwhile *New York Times* positioned Nicaragua in a communist context; it did simultaneously characterize the United States in a perspective of defending the freedom of the Americans. When the United States government was brought up in *New York Times* the general attributes connected to the American military actions were expressions like “moral obligations”, “American values”, “democracy” and “freedom”. If these were not enough to give confidence to the American public on the benevolence of the American standpoint, there were still convincing arguments to add. In hope of making the audience support the American interventions in Nicaragua the chief United States delegate to the United Nations recommended Americans to take the Soviet threat in the region seriously, saying “We are backing the democracies¹” along with “We're supporting the good guys in every sense of the word².” As an American at that time you would doubtlessly prefer to back the good guys too, and if you for one reason or another did not agree on who the actual good guys were, you would probably not object particularly loud anyway. After all, if the United States did not even listen to the International Court of Justice, who would listen?

Gramsci would most certainly point at the signs of *New York Times* - produced ideologies supporting a single group of people, in this case the United States government and the semi-secret CIA-activities. Since there never really were any actual aggressive threats stemming from the Sandinists against the United States, the American public was entirely indoctrinated with ideas originating from media. Even if I am not in this essay searching for the roots to this intellectual hegemony there are still clear evidences pointing at a certain steering of the news and a flow of general ideas coming from media. We do know now what actually happened and whether there were huge disinformation or misinterpretations taking place at the *New York Times* agency is not for me to say even though some explanations in this study point at a CIA involvement in creating certain news.

Since the principal part of the *New York Times* headlines, regarding Nicaragua included words and phrases like “foe of U.S.”, “pacts with Soviet”, “Cuba”, “communism”, “socialism” and “arms”, then the answer to how the portrayal of Nicaragua looked like would be that

¹ see page 30
² Ibid
Nicaragua was in fact portrayed by *New York Times* in a fear-provoking manner during the eighties. Nicaragua was mentioned as an “outlaw of terror” organized in a “murder Inc” meanwhile Mexico publicly showed its support for the United States government, which made the conception of U.S as a right-doer even more apparent.

The American public was just not able to connect these certain attributes in a context with Nicaragua, there were also without further ado statements from President Ronald Reagan in *NYT*, comparing Nicaragua with Nazi Germany at the same time as he referred to the contras as freedom fighters defending American values. I can imagine how hard it would be for the average American citizen not to perceive Nicaragua as a potential threat to their society and thus simultaneously give their silent consent to further actions against the Sandinists. Along with this grave media-war of aggression against the Nicaraguan Sandinist government I probably wouldn’t do anything either to hinder the contra-rebels fighting for my freedom, given these circumstances. Not to mention, the move from *NYT* to publish a survivor’s guide for Americans to use whenever caught in a coup or other anti-American environments which certainly added to the tension in the American homes as well. If there is a need for a survivor’s guide there is probably also a reason to worry about something bad coming up. Better keep that guide, just in case.

As I clarified earlier in this essay, there was never this vast turnover in the media-agenda after the ICJ rule against the United States, which was somewhat part of my anticipation. Instead focus turned to the upcoming election in Nicaragua and the cocaine transports, still no sympathy or softer approach towards the Sandinists. But then, in the late eighties it happens and the media attitude towards Nicaragua take the most dramatic turn. The tables had turned on Reagan along with the exposal of the Iran-contra affair and an obvious change of heart occurred in the course of the *NYT*-articles. Again, I am not looking for any forces behind the media-agenda but I can not help but to suggest reasons for this turnover such as a wish from somebody to make President Reagan take a bow followed by an establishment of the Bush administration.

However, the significant importance of the use of framing becomes tremendously clear when looking at the headlines published in the end of the eighties. Now the Sandinists are exposed as negotiators willing to talk, no aggression flaunted whatsoever and the attributes along with Nicaragua are starving and tormented children. No one can’t help but to feel for starving and
tormented children. After portraying Nicaragua as a country populated by children instead of fanatic communists an ease of military attacks was to expect. And finally, when the NYT headlines could present a new anti-leftist government the threat against the American society was successfully removed and the long wait for exhale was over.

**Personal Reflections on how Media Uses the Concept of Framing**

Throughout this study, I have found myself in several “aha”-moments. When reading thousands of articles in a chronological manner as I have done, a story is built in front of ones eyes, a story including intrigues and arguments. In the beginning of this study, starting with the examination of all the *New York Times*-articles my expectation was to learn about media and the method of framing. Besides being educated on the agenda-setting theory another revelation was made before me during this study. Suddenly I found myself thinking about recent headlines 2006-2007 and automatically I started to see the resemblance between the news of the eighties and the news of today. I have heard it all before! I just did not know there was a name for it.

My first spontaneous reaction to the *New York Times* headlines was a feeling of déjà vu and my belief is that anybody who goes through these articles will have the same reaction. “Freedom fighters”, “terror states”, “defending democracy” and choosing the “good guys” side, it is all in the news today in 2006 and it has been there for many years. Back then, it was the media’s communist-hunt, spreading and enlarging the fear of the red danger. Today it is the exact same rhetoric; the only thing changed is the source of terror, which today is the hunt for Muslim fundamentalists, the green danger. They too are terror-states, according to media and the American forces are still freedom fighters defending democracy all over the world. It got me thinking on a deeper level about what I read and it clearly opens up for further research of other newspapers as well.
5. CONCLUSIONS

In the Nicaragua case, it has become obvious to me that *New York Times* really succeeded in what the *attribute agenda-setting* and *framing* is all about. It made the American public focus their attention to the Sandinists and their activities and the *New York Times* got over the message of Nicaragua as a hostile nation. By frequent news reports on Nicaragua involving cold war-related, intimidating words like “communism”, “Cuba” and “Soviet”, the reports helped play a significant role in establishing the American public agenda. That is *framing*, to focus the attention of people to a certain situation and making the public perceive the situation in a certain way.

The *New York Times* served as the back wall of the Plato simile putting pictures of threatening communist and ill doer’s into the average American citizens’ head. As a result, there was never really a need for the American military along with CIA to end their aggressions against Nicaragua since the American people in a silent manner had given their consent to these actions. Who would not support the contra-rebels fighting for my freedom, given these circumstances? Together with Gramsci’s theory of *consent*, framing as a part of the agenda-setting theory have proved more than enough useful to answer my research problems.

The method of connecting certain attributes to news and items in media has come to appear as highly significant in influencing readers or people on every day sites through mass communication. It is like that game when you are given a word and your task is to as quickly as possible say the first word that comes to your mind related to the given first word. I have seen many examples of this game throughout this study; “Nicaragua”-“Sandinists”, “Sandinists”-“Communists”, “Communists”-“Soviet” and “Soviet”-“the antagonist of the United States during the cold war”. What would you do as an American citizen? Since Nicaragua was portrayed in context with the cold war, there was definitely not any other option for the American public than to perceive Nicaragua as a potential threat and as a result, the *New York Times* made the Americans put their faith into the hands of their country’s leaders and its military capacity.

Finally, if we think that we are not affected by *framing* when communicating, reading the papers or watching the news we should turn to the word-game and think about the next word
or image on our mind when we hear; “terrorist”, “hamburger” or an old framing example: “don’t think of an elephant”.

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