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Roundtable Review 16-32

Eline van Ommen, *Nicaragua Must Survive: Sandinista Revolutionary Diplomacy in the Global Cold War* (University of California Press, 2024).

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Introduction by Molly Avery, University of Sheffield

Almost five years ago, Eline van Ommen, then a PhD candidate in the final stages of writing her dissertation, co-organized a conference at the LSE to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Nicaraguan Revolution. The one-day workshop drew together seventeen papers, all of which sought to respond to the organizers' declaration that "we still know surprisingly little about the global, international, and transnational dimensions of the Nicaraguan Revolution."[1] At this point, I was in the second year of my PhD program and seized the opportunity to present my own fledgling research at the workshop. In the years since, it has been a privilege to witness Van Ommen's progression as a scholar, and it is a pleasure to have been asked to introduce this roundtable, which is full of praise for her first book, *Nicaragua Must Survive: Sandinista Revolutionary Diplomacy in the Global Cold War*.

In the relatively short period that has elapsed since that conference at the LSE, we have come to know much more of the global, international, and transnational dimensions of the Nicaraguan Revolution. As Michelle Chase, Tom Long and Sarah Osten note, in recent years scholars have been blessed, to borrow Chase's words, with "an emerging body of new studies of the Nicaraguan Revolution that take the revolution on its own terms, not merely as a victim of President Ronald Reagan's anti-Communist crusade in Central America."[2] While *Nicaragua Must Survive* is rightly recognized by Osten as a "groundbreaking" contribution to this body of work, it is also important to recognize Van Ommen's vital role in its development more broadly, chiefly through the fostering of collaboration among historians who are working on transnational and international histories of the revolution, with two journal special issues growing out of that initial 2019 conference.[3]

Nicaragua Must Survive fuses transnational and international history to tell the story of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and its relations with Western European governments, politicians, and solidarity activists between 1977 and 1990. The three reviewers here are unanimous in their praise for the book, describing it variously as a "fascinating study" (Long), a "mandatory point of reference" (Osten), and a "powerful, persuasive, and engaging new account" (Chase). All three recognize the depth and

[1] "International, Transnational, and Global Histories of the Nicaraguan Revolution, 1977-1990," LSE, 15 May 2019, organised by Eline van Ommen and Tanya Harmer, https://www.lse.ac.uk/International-History/Events/2019/International-Transnational-and-Global-Histories/International-Transnational-and-Global-Histories-of-the-Nicaraguan-Revolution.

[2] As Chase also notes, Mateo Jarquín, Emily Snyder, and Gerardo Sánchez Nateras are central among the scholars who are producing exciting and original work on the history of the revolution. See Mateo Jarquín, *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2024); Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, *La última revolución. La insurrección sandinista y la Guerra Fría interamericana* (SRE, 2022); and Emily Snyder, C*aribbean Internationalisms: Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, Nicaragua, and the United States* (forthcoming).

[3] Van Ommen and Tanya Harmer eds., "Internationalizing Revolution," *The Americas* 78:4 (2021): 541-51; another special issue, co-edited with W. Michael Schmidli, is forthcoming in *Cold War History*.

breadth of the archival research that underpins Van Ommen's work, praising her mastery of multiple European languages and her detailed knowledge of Western European and Nicaraguan politics.

This rich and varied source base allows Van Ommen to explore the history of Western European solidarity with Nicaragua both from the top down and the bottom up, revealing the complex and, at times, strained relationship between the FSLN and its Western European supporters. While, as Long recognizes, other scholars have touched on these dynamics in article-length contributions, as the first book-length study on Western European solidarity with Central America, *Nicaragua Must Survive* breaks new ground in terms of the "pluralistic range" of actors under discussion.

For the reviewers, one of the major historiographical interventions of the book is its expansion of the scope of international histories of the Nicaraguan Revolution beyond the Americas. As Long puts it, Van Ommen's book "changes the geography of how the revolution and FSLN government engaged the world." Rather than the oft-cited US "backyard" historians now the recognize importance of the Nicaraguan Revolution—and the civil wars in neighboring El Salvador and nearby Guatemala—for people all over the globe and from across the political spectrum.[4] Van Ommen shows that not only did the Nicaragua Revolution capture the imaginations of many Western Europeans at a popular level, but it also elicited nuanced diplomatic responses from the region's governments. Western European diplomacy, in turn, influenced the international environment in which the FSLN operated, acting as an "indispensable counterweight to the United States on the global stage" (Osten). While Chase rightly recognizes the difficulties in determining the precise extent to which the solidarity activists at the heart of Van Ommen's book directly influenced Western European governments' decisions in relation to Nicaragua, there is no doubt, as Van Ommen notes in her response, that these activists helped determine the broader political environment in which Western European policymakers operated and, of course, vice versa.

Although *Nicaragua Must Survive* explicitly seeks to decenter the United States within international histories of the Nicaraguan Revolution, all three reviewers note that this book nonetheless offers much to readers who are interested in questions related to US power. Van Ommen leaves little doubt that US hostility played a fundamental role in determining the options available to the FSLN in pursuing revolution both at home and abroad. Yet rather than depicting the United States as a hegemonic and all-conquering force, Van Ommen's study of the Western European dimensions of FSLN revolutionary diplomacy allows readers to grasp the myriad ways in which popular revolutionary movements sought to counter US power, with varying degrees of success. In this respect, *Nicaragua Must Survive* is a welcome sign that the historiography of Latin America's Cold War has truly shifted away from narratives that narrowly focus on

[4] For a sense of the Nicaraguan Revolution's global dimensions, see Jarquín, *The Sandinista Revolution*, chapters four and five. My own research and that of Argentine scholars such as Julieta Rostica has explored the importance of events in Central America for far-Rightists in the Southern Cone in this period: Rostica, "La política exterior de la dictadura cívico-militar argentina hacia Guatemala (1976-1983)" *Estudios* 36 (2016): 95-119. On ties between Nicaragua and Eastern Europe see, for example, Mónika Szente-Varga, "Constructing the future: solidarity action in Nicaragua" *Third World Quarterly* 44:12 (2023): 2423-2440.

US interventionism in the hemisphere. Latin Americans and extra-hemispheric actors from across the entire political spectrum contested US policy throughout the Cold War period, often forcing policymakers in Washington to adjust and adapt in response.[5] Van Ommen's account of FSLN efforts to influence US policy via Western Europe is one such example of how decentering the United States can, in fact, allow historians to learn more about the international environment in which US policy was formulated.

That said, and as H-Diplo's reviewers note, in the case of the Nicaraguan Revolution there is little doubt that the US position did, in fact, win out in the end. Crucially, however, the FSLN's eventual defeat came through elections in 1990, more than a decade after the revolution's initial triumph, thereby significantly outlasting contemporary and historically analogous cases, as Chase discusses in her review. And indeed, Van Ommen makes a compelling case that the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy helps to account for the longevity of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Yet as the reviewers note, it is her exploration of how and why the revolution ended when it did that forms another of the book's vital contributions, and this lies in what the story told in *Nicaragua Must Survive* teaches us about the enormous changes wrought on international politics between 1977 and 1990, among them the ongoing rise of the international human rights movement, the third wave of democratization, and, of course, the end of the Cold War itself.

In her review Chase tackles this question of change over time head on, arguing that "sensitivity to periodization is one of the book's great strengths." Between 1979 and 1983, the FSLN enjoyed relative success resisting US hostility and harnessing Western European support. Yet from 1983 onwards, as the third wave of democratization reached Latin American shores, they were forced to "make ever greater concessions" on elections, dialogue with the opposition, and guaranteeing certain rights, all while subject to far higher levels of scrutiny than that which was applied to the governments overseeing the concurrent transitions from authoritarian to nominally democratic rule taking place in both Guatemala and El Salvador.

As the decade progressed, the rules of the international game changed once more. In her analysis of the late 1980s, Van Ommen reveals how the success of FSLN revolutionary diplomacy was itself contingent on the ongoing Cold War. As both Chase and Long note, for the FSLN's Western European interlocutors, the rapid alleviation of Cold War tensions in this period paradoxically served to lower the stakes in Central America, thereby weakening the FSLN's international position at a critical point. From this perspective, Van Ommen shows how the FSLN's shock electoral defeat in 1990 must be understood as much as a product of the dramatic closing stages of the Cold War as the outcome of a decade-long war of attrition against US hostility and US-backed opponents within Nicaragua. In this respect, *Nicaragua Must Survive* provides vital insight into how the rapidly changing international environment of the 1980s directly affected room for maneuver for the FSLN and the wider revolutionary Left.

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[5] See, for example, Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (University of California Press, 2021); Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

By way of conclusion, this book matters for a broad audience and the multiple fields for which it holds deep relevance. The reviewers, all of whom are Latin Americanists by background, agree that the book makes a vital contribution to the history of Latin America's Cold War. This is also very much a book about Western Europe, however. As Van Ommen makes clear in her response, *Nicaragua Must Survive* "has much to offer to scholars of European integration, foreign policy, and social movements, particularly regarding the question of how Europeans related to the Global South in a postcolonial world." More broadly, this book is also essential reading for anyone interested in the history of the global Cold War and particularly its transformative closing decade and the debates over both democracy and human rights that helped define it.

Contributors:

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Molly Avery is Lecturer in the History of the Americas at the University of Sheffield. Her research to date has focused on Latin America's Cold War, anticommunist internationalism and the history of democracy, dictatorship and repression in both the Southern Cone and Central America. She has published articles in the *Journal of Latin American Studies* and *The Americas* and is currently working on her first book, *Building an Anticommunist International: Networks of Terror in Cold War Latin America*.

Michelle Chase is an Associate Professor of History at Pace University. She is the author of *Revolution within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952–1962* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Tom Long is Professor of International Relations at the University of Warwick and Profesor Afiliado in the División de Estudios Internacionales at CIDE, Mexico City. His research sits at the intersection of International Relations and History, exploring topics related to US-Latin American relations, Latin America in the world, and small states in international politics. Tom is author of two books: *Latin America Confronts the United States: Asymmetry and Influence* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), and *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2022). His research has been published in journals in political science, history, and international relations, including the *American Political Science Review*, *Past & Present*, *International Organization*, *World Politics*, and *International Security*.

Sarah Osten is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Vermont, and a historian of twentieth century Mexico. She is currently writing a book on Mexican solidarity with Central American revolutions in the 1970s and 1980s.

Review by Michelle Chase, Pace University

How could a radical revolution in a small, impoverished country in the United States's proverbial backyard survive for more than a decade? What tools or room for maneuver did revolutionaries of the Global South have during the Cold War? Eline van Ommen's *Nicaragua Must Survive: Sandinista Revolutionary Diplomacy in the Global Cold War* uses these central questions to provide a powerful, persuasive, and engaging new account of the Sandinista Revolution by focusing on Nicaraguan foreign policy, especially in Western Europe, which the Sandinistas hoped might serve to counter US aggression. In broad strokes, Van Ommen argues that the Sandinistas were not always successful, but their international outreach nevertheless mattered, "shaping everyday life, international politics, and the revolution's own trajectory" (221).

Van Ommen's book joins an emerging body of new studies of the Nicaraguan revolution that take the revolution on its own terms, not merely as the victim of President Ronald Reagan's anti-Communist crusade in Central America. These studies have led to many new insights, such as offering deeper and more nuanced understandings of the Sandinista project, rethinking domestic opposition as reflecting authentic internal differences rather than US manipulation, uncovering Latin American responses to the revolution, and revisiting the influence Cuba had on the Nicaraguan leadership.[1] Van Ommen adds significantly to this new body of work by focusing on the Sandinistas' relations with Western Europe, both via conventional forms of state-to-state diplomacy undertaken by the Sandinista leadership and the grassroots transnational solidarity networks forged with New Left, Catholic, feminist, and human rights activists.[2]

Van Ommen's deep archival research and formidable understanding of Western European politics lead to fascinating explorations of the Sandinista attempts to win hearts and minds. She chronicles the emergence of the solidarity network in Western Europe and its major accomplishments, especially in generating excitement and extensive fundraising for early initiatives such as the literacy campaign of 1980. Van Ommen's nuanced analysis allows her to draw out regional differences in how the solidarity network evolved. For example, it overlapped more clearly with the left in the polarized UK than in Germany or the Netherlands (37-38). Some of the most fascinating material involves her discussion of tensions between Western European solidarity activists and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN), which often

[1] See especially Mateo Jarquín, *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2024); Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, *La última revolución. La insurrección sandinista y la Guerra Fría interamericana* (SRE, 2022); and Emily Snyder, C*aribbean Internationalisms: Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, Nicaragua, and the United States* (forthcoming). For a good selection of this new work, see Van Ommen and Tanya Harmer eds., "Internationalizing Revolution," *The Americas* 78: 4 (Special Issue; October 2021): 541-551.

[2] Van Ommen thus also contributes to scholarship on the creative cultural diplomacy of revolutionary states in the Global South, sharing some methodological approaches to works such as Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Cornell University Press, 1999), Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Judy T. Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Cornell University Press, 2013), and Thy Phu, *Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam* (Duke University Press, 2022).

had different visions of what solidarity activism should entail. For example, while the FSLN prioritized concrete results like fundraising or meetings with political leaders, grassroots activists wanted activities that would make them feel included, such as small meetings, intimate explanations of FSLN decision making, and later on, trips to Nicaragua (70-72). Van Ommen impressively details the growth of a large network of activists in this period, but sometimes I found it hard to connect the role of these grassroots activists to the decisions made by their heads of state. The FSLN's fortunes in Western Europe often seem to have been determined more by the parties in power (with significantly more support from social democratic than conservative or Christian Democratic governments) than solidarity activists' strength. Still, by recovering the importance of European support for the Sandinistas, Van Ommen reminds us that the global Cold War was truly multipolar.

Overall, how successful was Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy? To her credit, Van Ommen eschews easy answers to this question. On the one hand, she views it as helping keep the revolution alive, noting its relatively long duration (1979-1990) compared to revolutions in Guatemala (1950-54), Chile (1970-73), or Grenada (1979-1983), all of which collapsed much more quickly under the onslaught of US government destabilization efforts or outright military intervention, as well as various forms of internal opposition.[3] And unlike the Cuban revolution, which survived by becoming a Soviet protectorate, Nicaragua managed to chart a relatively independent course, achieving some level of economic redistribution while retaining a mixed economy, elections, a free press, and other civil liberties.[4] In this view, Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy helped defend the revolution against all odds.

On the other hand, it is possible to read this story as confirmation of the ultimate impossibility of forging a radical revolution in the United States' "backyard" and the relative weakness of transnational alliances in the face of US aggression. Ground down by the US embargo and the military drain of the Contra War, hypocritically held to higher standards regarding human rights and democracy than their neighbors, and besieged and harassed at every turn by the Reagan administration, the Sandinistas found themselves increasingly unable to deliver the social justice initiatives they had promised, gradually lost popular

[3] For different interpretations of the US role in containing Latin American revolutions and leftist movements during the Cold War, see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), Steven G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2012), and Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

[4] The historiography on the Cuban Revolution is too vast to cite here, but classic explorations of the evolution of Cuban-Soviet relations include Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (Norton, 1997) and James G. Blight and Phillip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers After the Missile Crisis* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007). Recent historiography on the Cuban Revolution has attempted to move beyond what Lillian Guerra describes as "mak[ing] Cuba's national history an extension of empire, whether U.S. or Soviet." Exemplary texts in this vein include Guerra, *Visions of Power: Revolution, Redemption and Resistance, 1959-1971* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and Michael J. Bustamante and Jennifer Lambe, *The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959-1980* (Duke University Press, 2019). Quote from Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 4.

support, and were finally ousted in elections in 1990. In this view, Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy perhaps merely delayed the inevitable.

Then again, the answer to this question also changed over time, and this sensitivity to periodization is one of the book's great strengths. From 1979-1983, especially, the FSLN used the transnational solidarity movement to help legitimize its rule, frame its revolution as a national liberation movement rather than a Marxist state like Cuba, generate sympathy for the David-and-Goliath-like contest between Nicaragua and the United States, and depict Reagan rather than the insurrectionary left as the region's greatest threat to peace. But after the US intervention in Grenada in 1983, and then as late Cold War forces developed—including the weakening of the USSR and its consequent withdrawal from the Global South—Nicaragua was forced to make ever greater concessions, agreeing to elections in 1984 and 1990, dialogue with the domestic opposition, and guarantees of press freedom and other rights demanded by Western European observers. Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy still had some successes—such as encouraging the support of Western European states for the 1987 Esquipulas II peace accords—which laid the groundwork for ending conflicts in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America—but in general the FSLN found less and less room for maneuver as the decade wore on.

Van Ommen's insights will be of interest to scholars whose work ranges far beyond Nicaragua. I see the book speaking to several bodies of historiography. First, Van Ommen contributes to other recent studies that reevaluate the global role and impact of Latin America in the twentieth century. Recent publications by historians like Christy Thornton, Margarita Fajardo, Katherine Marino, and Amy Offner emphasize the way Latin America has long shaped ideas and practices in the Global North, not merely vice versa.[5] In this vein, Van Ommen shows how revolutionary Nicaragua pioneered diplomatic strategies, scripted global solidarity activists' messaging, and in general disseminated its own understandings of democracy, national liberation, and development in the era's global war of ideas. Most broadly, she argues that the Sandinistas' focus on generating Western European support and solidarity prodded the region's leaders into devising a coherent foreign policy for the region and, indeed, even into viewing themselves as comprising a coherent global actor capable of a shared foreign policy distinct from that of the United States. This is perhaps Van Ommen's boldest argument: that Nicaraguan revolutionary diplomacy helped Europe reimagine itself.

Nicaragua Must Survive is also one of the most interesting explorations to date of the late Cold War in Latin America,[6] and Van Ommen offers many fruitful and provocative analyses of the Cold War's periodization

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[5] Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (University of California Press, 2021); Margarita Fajardo. *The World That Latin America Created. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era* (Harvard University Press, 2022); Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an international Human Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Development States in the Americas* (Princeton University Press, 2019).
[6] Some of the most exciting recent historiography on the late Cold War has emerged from studies of the Southern Cone, including works that explore the multiplicity of political and cultural changes prompted by the end of military dictatorships in the region. See for example, Jennifer Adair, *In Search of the Lost Decade: Everyday Rights in Post-*

and dynamics. For example, she rightly argues that the Central American wars are too often treated as an addendum to a neat narrative that sees the revolutionary moment of the 1960s followed by the repression and reaction of the 1970s. Yet that trajectory largely describes the Southern Cone. By centering Nicaragua, Van Ommen argues that the Central American conflicts were in fact representative of a broader global wave of Marxist insurgencies and revolutionary states across the Global South—such as in Angola, Afghanistan, and Grenada—in the same period. And although other historians have described the mid or late 1970s as marking the decline of the Third World and non-aligned project,[7] Van Ommen recovers the countervailing trend of hope found in the same period (56). Thus, she asks us to rethink the received temporalities of the Cold War in Latin America and the Global South.

In addition, her detailed analysis of the dynamics of the late 1980s offers fascinating insights into the end of the Cold War, and how differently this might have been experienced in the Global South versus the Global North. For example, although the Cold War's East-West contest is what helped turn Nicaragua into a hot spot in the first place, the decline of superpower tensions by the late 1980s did not result in greater Western acceptance of revolutionary Nicaragua. On the contrary, Van Ommen shows how superpower negotiations and the diffusion of tensions between the US and USSR in fact functioned to further isolated Nicaragua. This was because, on the one hand, Reagan benefitted from his new image as a peacemaker, rather than the belligerent hawk that was an easy shared foil for Nicaraguans and Western Europeans. And while Western European leaders may have disagreed with US tactics in Nicaragua, they shared its goal of keeping Nicaragua out of the socialist camp. The weakening of the USSR and its willingness to abandon its Third World allies for an accommodation with the US removed this threat and thus paradoxically diminished Western European interest in and aid to Nicaragua.

Finally, the broad cultural and political changes of the late Cold War—including the hegemony of human rights discourse, the rise of more individualized understandings of solidarity activism, the Latin American debt crisis, and popular uprisings against Communism in Eastern Europe—all conspired to paint the Sandinista revolution as anachronistic and repressive, a utopian project that was out of touch with contemporary sensibilities. Here Van Ommen's book provides a welcome addition (although the book is not directly framed this way) to the explosion of scholarship on human rights discourse in Latin America, which has analyzed its taming of the revolutionary left, its eventual cooptation by Reagan and the right, and its trend toward valorizing individual rights at the expense of social and economic rights.[8] Van Ommen

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Dictatorship Argentina (University of California Press, 2019) and Natalia Milanesio, *Destape: Sex, Democracy, and Freedom in Postdictatorial Argentina* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

[7] See for example Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (The New Press, 2007) and Mark Atwood Lawrence, "The Rise and Fall of Nonalignment," in Robert McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

[8] There are too many publications to cite here, but important accounts in this vein include Vania Markarian, *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Network, 1967–1984* (Routledge, 2005); Patrick Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge University Press,

builds on those observations by showing what that meant in practice for leftist regimes in power in countries like Cuba and Nicaragua, which were increasingly forced into defensive positions on their own human rights records, and for the Nicaraguan solidarity movement, which struggled to maintain the Sandinistas' romantic image.

In sum, *Nicaragua Must Survive* is a hugely welcome addition to the historiography on Latin American revolutions, transnational solidarity, and the Cold War in the Global South.[9] Van Ommen's robust archival research, nuanced analysis, and original arguments help us consider the limits of US power and the true multipolarity of the Cold War.

2018); and William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and US Interventionism in the Late Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

[9] Other excellent recent titles with which Van Ommen's work can be read in dialogue include Jonathan Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (Harvard University Press, 2017); Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, eds., *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Tanya Harmer, *Beatriz Allende: A Revolutionary Life in Cold War Latin America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez (eds), *Toward a Global History of Latin America's Revolutionary Left* (University of Florida Press, 2021); Jessica Stites Mor, *South-South Solidarity and the Latin American Left* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2022); R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence (eds), *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); and Eric Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (Duke University Press, 2020).

Review by Tom Long, University of Warwick

What automobile should an advocacy organization offer when it hosts the envoy of a revolutionary government? A simple, personal vehicle could suggest camaraderie among old friends, something in keeping with the pro-poor rhetoric and transnational solidarity of the left. On the other hand, pulling up in the black Mercedes, which was then in fashion amongst diplomatic corps, signals that the revolution demands equality in the international pecking order.

In her book, *Nicaragua Must Survive*, Eline van Ommen briefly recounts this episode. Shortly after the victory of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) over the long-ruling Somoza dynasty, junta member Sergio Ramírez traveled to the Netherlands. For years, a Dutch solidarity group had supported the FSLN's attempts to overthrow the dictatorship; now that the Sandinistas were in power, the activists hoped to maintain a fraternal spirit. But the FSLN sought to govern, and that meant prioritizing relations with other governments, including by adopting diplomatic trappings. An activist's red Peugeot 304 wouldn't cut it.

On the surface, this small disagreement was about a car. But it suggested something more: how former guerrilla fighters now sought international acceptance while still trying to deploy "revolutionary diplomacy" to build bridges with civil society, parties, and governments. The disagreement about the car, then, marked a status shift. It was about trying to square a host of often misplaced expectations. Ultimately, the hosts and the Sandinistas compromised on a black Ford Taurus.

In this fascinating study, Van Ommen illustrates how the FSLN often turned to Europe, hoping to find support, leverage, or an alternative to the dilemmas the revolutionaries faced in inter-American relations. Before it came to power, the FSLN largely looked to solidarity networks in Europe for fundraising and publicity. After Somoza's downfall, the FSLN's representatives tried to turn those networks of political connections to their state's advantage while putting ties with political parties and governments on a higher plane. As the anecdote about the car suggests, this transition from insurgent party to government generated tensions with erstwhile allies. The FSLN insisted on its own right to determine Nicaragua's course, but European groups which were in a position to offer support and funds had their own expectations about the country's path.

Drawing on an impressive range of multinational and multilingual research, *Nicaragua Must Survive* tells the story of the FSLN's "revolutionary diplomacy" in Western Europe. The book traces connections among Nicaraguans and their counterparts from the consolidation of the Nicaraguan anti-Somoza movement in 1977, through the revolution's victory, until the FSLN lost power in elections in 1989. The book illustrates these efforts with convincing attention to individual connections that span the realms of traditional diplomacy to the innovative public diplomacy of inviting European brigades and cultivating local ties across the Atlantic.

The primary contribution of Van Ommen's book is to redirect historians' attention, both in terms of geographies and the nature of actors who engaged with the revolution. At least in their international dimensions, the Nicaraguan Revolution and ensuing decade of FSLN rule largely have been understood through the prism of U.S.-Central American relations. Understandably, these accounts, like William LeoGrande's classic *Our Own Backyard*, are largely about the making of US policy, Central American responses, and the devastating consequences.[1] Certainly, some studies of the Contadora and Esquipulas peace initiatives approach the processes from a more Latin American perspective;[2] in general, though, studies of the dynamics of the underlying conflict in Nicaragua tend to foreground the United States as the main external player.[3]

Without denying the importance of the United States, Van Ommen changes the geography of how the revolution and FSLN government engaged the world. Western Europe occupied a central place in the FSLN's attempts to loosen the strictures of a bipolar ordering of the world. By the close of the Carter administration, and definitively with the election of Ronald Reagan, there was little hope that US policy could be changed directly. Instead, the FSLN attempted to move Western European governments towards more accommodating positions. Particularly in countries that were governed by the left, European diplomats provided one of the few backdoors to Washington. Just how receptive these governments were varied a great deal. At one extreme, the FSLN faced sharp, Thatcherite opposition in the United Kingdom; at the other, it found more consistent support from French and Spanish social democratic governments.

In general, Sandinista diplomats hoped that the political support of these NATO allies might act as a check on US hostility, raising the costs of a feared US invasion enough to deter it. Fears of US military action were

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[1] William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Other prominent accounts of the Central American conflicts that foreground the US role include, Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (Norton, 1983); Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability* (University of Georgia Press, 1991); Cynthia Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America, 1976–1993* (Penn State Press, 1993); Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Russell Crandall, *The Salvador Option* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[2] E.g., Mary Kathryn Meyer, "Latin American Diplomacy and the Central American Peace Process: The Contadora and Esquipulas II Cases", PhD diss, University of Massachusetts, 1992; Mario Ojeda, *Retrospección de Contadora: Los Esfuerzos de México Para La Paz En Centroamérica (1983–1985)* (El Colegio de Mexico AC, 2007); Carlos Federico Ávila Domínguez, "Oponiéndose al intervencionismo: Brasil y los procesos negociadores de Contadora y de Esquipulas (1983–1996)," *Diálogos: Revista Electrónica de Historia* 9 (2008): 1601-1613; Mateo Jarquín, "The Nicaraguan Question: Contadora and the Latin American Response to US Intervention Against the Sandinistas, 1982–86," *The Americas* 78:4 (2021): 581-608, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2021.6.

[3] Thomas W. Walker, *Reagan versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua* (Westview Press, 1987); Kenneth Roberts, "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America," *International Security* 15:2 (1990): 67-102; Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Westview Press, 2002); Morris H. Morley, *Washington, Somoza and the Sandinistas: Stage and Regime in US Policy Toward Nicaragua 1969–1981* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

always present, but they intensified after U.S. forces toppled the left-wing government of Grenada in 1983. With the evident exception of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, most Europeans held a dim view of militaristic US policies and rhetoric; they read them through their own relations with the Soviet Union and skepticism about proposed US defense deployments. For those reasons, European politicians were usually willing to hear the FSLN's case. The region also offered the FSLN an opportunity for economic aid with less backlash from the United States (or Nicaraguan moderates) than turning to the Soviet Union.

Of course, the United States is not absent from Van Ommen's account. But rather than putting US officials in the driver's seat, her book triangulates relations among the Sandinistas, the Europeans, and their US counterparts. Perhaps as a trade-off of moving the focus away from the United States, the account of US actions remains much more state-centric than those of Nicaragua or Western Europe. Similarly, although perhaps more for reasons of archival constraints, the accounts of Cuban, Soviet, and other Central American countries are mostly limited to official, state positions.

Returning to Europe, a key objective of the FSLN's "revolutionary diplomacy," Van Ommen convincingly shows, was to raise the costs of US unilateralism by showing that other groups and countries cared about Nicaragua's fate. Crucial to this effort was the stoking of popular support for the Sandinista project in Europe, and in turn raising the stakes for European politicians. However, Sandinista diplomats ran into something of a Catch-22. Their efforts to engage Western Europeans were most successful when Cold War dynamics were most intense, and Europeans hoped that their money and influence might keep Nicaragua from moving into the Soviet ranks. When bipolar tensions eased, Western Europeans found Nicaragua to be a less pressing issue. To counteract this and respond to European government pressures, the FSLN offered concessions regarding elections and civil liberties; in doing so, though, it faced much greater expectations than many of its transparently authoritarian neighbors. This was, Van Ommen suggests, the flip side of the FSLN's success in raising Nicaragua's profile as an international cause celebre.

In its second broad contribution, *Nicaragua Must Survive* takes the analysis beyond the state. It is not the first account of Central American-focused transnational solidarity,[4] of course, but the book is important for how it presents a pluralistic range of revolutionaries, diplomats, politicians, and activists and illustrates connections among them. As an insurgent movement, the FSLN looked to solidarity activists in Europe for sympathy and material support for their quest to topple Somoza. In a sense, those goals remained once the FSLN took power. However, many other aspects of their relationships with European civil society actors changed. As a broad, anti-Somoza front, the FSLN was able to engage with a diffuse coalition of left, pro-democracy, and peace movements. As the party consolidated its rule and home and faced growing US aggression, its range of European supporters tended to narrow. Many of these backers were highly

[4] For example, Rober Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Kim Christiaens, "Between Diplomacy and Solidarity: Western European Support Networks for Sandinista Nicaragua," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 21:4 (2014): 617-34; Sarah Osten, '"To Defend the Nicaraguan Revolution Is to Defend Mexico": Mexican Solidarity with the Sandinista Revolution, 1974–82', *Cold War History*, 2023, 1-19, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2023.2282006.

committed, traveling to Nicaragua to aid the coffee harvest and participate in diverse brigades; this sort of living-the-revolution was more attractive to overseas supporters than the dreary (but perhaps more effective) task of raising funds back in Europe for objectives identified by the FSLN itself.[5]

Even sympathetic and well-informed Europeans often saw what they hoped to see in the Sandinistas. Such views were shaped by a shared, critical view of the United States' return to hard-line, militaristic Cold War policies, as well as sympathy for the FSLN's domestic projects. Mismatched expectations were a recurring theme for solidarity activists, visitors, political parties, and governments. The FSLN sought to encourage views of its moderation, non-alignment, and social democratic predisposition. Sympathetic audiences often exaggerated the FSLN's compromising and democratic tendencies, even as the party sidelined its former centrist coalition partners. Such a reading of Nicaraguan politics was self-serving, as European governments and social democrats hoped that their influence and aid would tip the scales to fashion a non-aligned state, removing the revolution from the vicissitudes of the Cold War and US interventionism.

Whenever a historical account tries to shift the focus from the clearly central actor and relations, it will face the question of whether the new object of attention really mattered. If the central axis was between the United States and Nicaragua, what is to be gained by turning to Europe? Without overstating the case, Van Ommen's argument on the value of this effort at de-centering is convincing. By turning across the Atlantic, *Nicaragua Must Survive* adds a great deal to our understanding of the Nicaraguan revolution—even though the major drivers of the Sandinistas' rise and fall were closer to home. By moving the reader's attention away from US-Nicaraguan relations, Van Ommen casts new light on how the Sandinistas sought to position their country in international affairs. She also shows the obstacles they faced in trying to flip the script. These included mismatched aims and expectations in their dealings with European civil society supporters and ultimately their relative strategic marginality to Western European governments in the rapidly changing contest of the late 1980s.

[5] On solidarity movements and Nicaragua, generally, see Christian Helm, "Booming Solidarity: Sandinista Nicaragua and the West German Solidarity Movement in the 1980s," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 21:4 (2014): 597-615; Héctor Perla Jr, "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the US-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 36:6 (2009): 80-100; Felix A. Jiménez Botta, "Popular Culture and Celebrity Activism in the British Solidarity Campaign with Sandinista Nicaragua, 1979–1990," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 21:1 (2023): 30-53.

Review by Sarah Osten, University of Vermont

In *Nicaragua Must Survive: Sandinista Diplomacy in the Global Colds War*, Eline Van Ommen takes us deep inside Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution and its globally consequential aftermath, while also skillfully demonstrating the multiple modes of engagement by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) with western Europe, and the world, from the 1970s through 1990. In doing so, she teaches us a lot about Nicaragua and the FSLN, but also about the nature of the Cold War in its final phase, at a global scale. She demonstrates that Nicaragua in those years was one of the most important sites of geopolitical tensions, conflict, and negotiation, but not as an idiosyncratic side effect of global politics of that era that sometimes put small, peripheral states at center stage. Rather, she shows that throughout the world, the Sandinistas' conflict with a US-supported dictatorship (and later, a US-funded counterrevolution), and the FSLN's own public presentation of its political project as a modern, pragmatic leftist struggle for national liberation that transcended Cold War politics, was profoundly inspirational for some, and a menacing threat for others. Throughout, Van Ommen gives us a fresh and very clear account of why it was that President Ronald Reagan's national security advisor Jeane Kirkpatrick declared Central America to be "the most important place in the world" in the 1980s (87). She also outlines the reasons why that was true for western European countries in those years too, even without the kinds of long-term political and economic relationships that the United States had with Central America 143). Van Ommen writes that one of her goals is to suggest new avenues beyond timeworn Cold War historiographical paradigms, and she leads by example with this book.

This is a groundbreaking book in several respects. First, Van Ommen gives us a fresh interpretation of the significance of the Sandinista revolution on the global stage, suggesting its critical importance to the course of the Cold War in its final phase, as well as persuasively arguing for its utility as a case study of the global dynamics of diplomacy, economic aid, and social movements in the 1980s.[1] Relatedly, second, she very successfully and compellingly weaves together the history of diplomacy and politics with the history of social movements, demonstrating in the process that these were, in fact, deeply interrelated. Indeed, she shows that European Community nations in this period crafted Central America policies in part in response to public opinion, and that this was because of the successful efforts of Sandinista solidarity activists to raise awareness and public sympathy for the Nicaraguan revolution. Third, she demonstrates that this was the outcome of a strategy by the FSLN to win support from both states and grassroots activists, and argues that, contrary to more dismissive interpretations of the Sandinistas' relatively short time in power, what the FSLN was able to achieve in these regards was substantially impressive, in spite of daunting challenges and threats to the Sandinista government, and some notable political miscalculations by FSLN leadership.

[1] This book is a valuable addition to a growing body of recent work that reconsiders the historical significance of the Sandinista revolution, from multiple perspectives. See also, in particular: Mateo Jarquín, *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2024).

Van Ommen encourages readers to think of Nicaragua's revolution as neither an anomalous last gasp of Cold War leftist insurgency, nor as a briefly fashionable but later discarded pet project of leftist idealists throughout the world, although she is clear that its history contains elements of both. Rather, she argues that the Sandinistas' foreign relations constitute a critically important case study of the interrelated politics and grassroots social movements of the Cold War's last phase, and what's more, of the complexity of politics and diplomacy of that era that are too often reduced to overly facile and simple parables of a global tug of war between the US and the USSR, with few if any other relevant players or inputs. She insists that the Sandinistas be recognized for their remarkable successes, which are too often overshadowed by their electoral defeat in 1990 by a coalition of US-backed dissident factions, and argues that on the contrary, the accomplishments of the FSLN on the international stage are impressive, particularly considering the daunting challenges they faced, most of all, the relentless determination of Ronald Reagan to see the Sandinistas overthrown. One of her central arguments is that the fact that western European countries got involved in supporting Nicaragua at all is testimony to the impressive successes of its project of revolutionary diplomacy (221).

Embedded in the history of Sandinismo, Van Ommen highlights an important current: the efforts of the FSLN to transcend the Cold War (particularly, in a way that Cuba had not). And yet the logics of global engagement with revolutionary Nicaragua were inevitably Cold War ones, even while anti-imperialism and national sovereignty were at the heart of the Sandinistas' revolution, as they always insisted; nor were their persistent claims to be independent of those logics always borne out in practice, as Van Ommen shows. Nor were they always sincere, and she rightly emphasizes FSLN commander Sergio Ramírez's later admission that the Sandinista revolution was always Marxist-Leninist, even if he and other FSLN leaders wouldn't acknowledge it at the time. In short, she shows how and why the FSLN tried to be many things to many people (and many countries), and that it succeeded in some ways, but simultaneously set itself up for failure in others, particularly in the medium-longer term. For one thing, she underscores that Europe was by no means politically homogenous, meaning that in just one diplomatic theater of many, the Sandinistas had a broadly varied collection of allies to appease, who supported the revolution to varying degrees. By the mid-1980s, this was "a necessary inconvenience" for the FSLN that forced it to make concessions it might otherwise not have made (146). At the same time, no matter what they said or did, Van Ommen shows that the Sandinistas were never really able to escape the zero-sum bipolar Cold War ideological paradigm in terms of how the rest of the world strategically engaged with them. As Van Ommen astutely puts it: "the Cold War remained the dominant frame through which Western officials understood the Nicaraguan revolution" (66). For its part, Van Ommen argues that even as it sought to escape the zero-sum politics of the Cold War, the FSLN understood western Europe to collectively be an indispensable counterweight to the United States on the global stage, especially once Ronald Reagan took power in January of 1981.

Even while Europe is her focus, Van Ommen has even bigger ambitions than elucidating how Western European countries perceived and engaged with revolutionary, and then postrevolutionary, Nicaragua. One of the greatest achievements of this book is that it provides a clear sense of the truly global dynamics that were at play in the Sandinistas' engagements with the world. In perhaps the clearest and most impactful example of this, she shows the decisive impact of Mexico's withdrawal of oil assistance to Nicaragua in the

mid-1980s during the dire Mexican debt crisis and neoliberal turn, which pushed the FSLN towards the USSR for the first time, for urgently needed oil assistance, with devastating diplomatic consequences for Nicaragua's foreign relations with both European Community (EC) countries and the United States. In another example, she demonstrates the various impacts of the US invasion of Grenada in 1983 (another frequently overlooked Cold War battleground) on US-Nicaraguan relations, as well as larger, global reverberations in the months and years that followed. This book is therefore a highly useful window into larger global political history of the late twentieth century, which contributes a great deal to a fresh understanding of how and why Central America, and especially Nicaragua, came to be a centrally important theater of the final battles of the Cold War.

Another of the most valuable contributions of this book is to complicate and thereby also to enrich our understandings of the nature and significance of the global solidarity with Nicaragua movement from the late 1970s to 1990.[2] Activists and idealists in many places latched on to the Sandinista revolution as a breath of hope in a faltering struggle in Latin America against violent, US-supported right-wing authoritarianism. As Van Ommen emphasizes, widespread disillusionment on the left in those years led everyday people in many countries to project their own political aspirations and ideals onto Nicaragua, particularly from the late 1970s onward. In the FSLN, many people all over the world found an inspiring, youthful struggle against a manifestly terrible dictatorship, and what's more, one that explicitly rejected ideological purity and embraced pragmatism and pluralism. While those on the right worried that Nicaragua would be "the next Cuba" with the triumph of the FSLN in 1979, on the more moderate left there was much hope that the Sandinistas would not repeat many of Cuba's mistakes, particularly when it came to human rights and extreme diplomatic isolation. At the same time, the FSLN gave a breath of hope to segments of the radical left across the world that guerrilla warfare was still a viable strategy to win political liberation (39). It was thus a revolution that inspired an especially broad and diverse spectrum of activists and politicians. But she also shows that activists' enthusiasm for participating in a revolution did not always translate well or easily to defending the FSLN's fragile postrevolutionary state, or participating in its many, often much more prosaic projects, following its successful, landmark overthrow of the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Generating and sustaining solidarity activism abroad was a critical piece of the FSLN's strategy for ensuring its own survival. Van Ommen shows that in Europe, Sandinista efforts to win the support of both states and non-state actors were not two separate initiatives, but rather, twin elements of the same project to protect the revolution and its fragile state-building project, post-1979, particularly from the Reagan administration's determined efforts to destroy it, from 1981 onward. As she writes, the result was an

[2] Previous scholarship on solidarity with the FSLN has largely focused on activism in the United States. See for example: Héctor Perla, "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 36: 6 (2009): 80-100; Perla, "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.: Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Research Review* 43:2 (2008): 136-158; Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (University of California Press, 2016); William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and US Interventionism in the late Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

idiosyncratic combination of "state level diplomacy with a unique mix of culture, propaganda, and personal relationships" (3). Crucially, she shows that the effects of this dual effort were mutually influencing. Van Ommen demonstrates that policymakers were meaningfully constrained in their engagements with Nicaragua in those years because of widespread popular support and more general sympathy for the Sandinistas in much of western Europe (as in Latin America and the US in those same years). As she puts it, adequately considering the "human dimension" of the FSLN's global efforts allows us "to understand the intimate connections between the local, the transnational, and the global during the Cold War era" (12). Van Ommen's tandem study of diplomacy and grassroots activism is an important methodological innovation and interpretative contribution that has significant potential to advance future studies on related topics.

Grassroots solidarity was critical to the Sandinistas, but Van Ommen demonstrates that it is also a critically important element of the history of this phase of the Cold War. It was also limited in its impact in some important ways, related to both the social and the political contexts of the time. Van Ommen also shows that once the FSLN took power in 1979, international solidarity had marked limitations in its ability to assist the Sandinista government to achieve its own priorities. International activists who longed to experience a real revolution firsthand, or at least to actively abet one, were not similarly inspired to do the fundraising work that the FSLN urgently requested as Nicaragua was hit with US economic sanctions and blockades, and then as it was forced to defend itself from the US-funded Contra insurgency. Nor did activists all feel adequately appreciated by the FSLN after the Sandinista triumph in 1979, as the FSLN's state rebuilding priorities often diverged from solidarity activists' revolutionary hopes and dreams for Nicaragua, and their own participation in its struggle for national liberation.

What was arguably once an alluring experience of revolutionary voyeurism became for many a much more tedious one of supporting a faltering political party that made missteps and sometimes what they saw as distasteful choices in order to govern a war-torn and starving country. Van Ommen provides numerous examples to show that the steps the FSLN took to survive both politically and economically were sometimes disappointing or disillusioning to solidarity activists, and the Sandinista state inevitably failed to live up to all idealistic expectations of both Nicaraguans and foreigners who were drawn to support the revolution. Indeed, the Cuban example continued to loom large on all sides: the right inevitably saw its worst fears about a second Cuba in Central America confirmed, while the left also began to worry that Nicaragua was going too far down the Cuban post-revolutionary path. Thus, as she emphasizes, once the FSLN took power, its programs and projects were most successful in winning the support of solidarity activists when they were open to interpretation, allowing solidarity groups to read their own goals and aspirations onto the revolution they were working to support (77).

The gradual disillusionment many activists experienced with the FSLN over the course of the 1980s applied to states, as well. Van Ommen shows that when aid to Nicaragua decreased from places like western Europe and Mexico, the FSLN was pushed towards the USSR and Cuba out of necessity, which was the precise turn of events many of their European and Latin American allies had initially hoped to forestall. Worse, once this happened, many of their former allies were significantly less willing to support them, and finally, once

the USSR withdrew from its engagement with Central America, one of the central rationales for European countries sending aid to Nicaragua was gone (211). In part, Van Ommen shows, the times had changed. In the span of just a few short years, as the Cold War finally waned, the kind of revolution the Sandinistas had waged no longer seemed like an inspiring vision of the future. This was true for activists, but also governments, particularly those that welcomed the end of the Cold War and no longer wanted to support a state like Nicaragua, that was not exactly Communist, but was nevertheless already seen as a vestige of an earlier era (184). The FSLN labored to transcend Cold War dichotomies, but, as Van Ommen convincingly argues, it was also ultimately undone by the Cold War's denouement (190).

This book also brings fresh perspectives on the Cold War goals, strategies and positions taken by countries that wished to remain at least somewhat independent in their diplomacy from both the US and the USSR. Van Ommen focuses on the EC countries throughout, but also has quite a lot to say about other countries elsewhere, including in Latin America. Even as European politicians and diplomats shared some of the concerns of the US when it came to the Sandinistas' politics, methods, and alliances, Van Ommen shows that the Reagan administration's unrelenting aggression towards Nicaragua also gave them pause. Indeed, one of the core strategies of EC countries was to embrace the FSLN precisely in order to prevent is turn towards the USSR and to keep it off the path that Cuba had paved. (It is worth noting that Mexico pursued a similar project in its engagement with the FSLN in the early 1980s, following similar logic).[3] She also shows that to some degree, in its early years in power, the FSLN showed its allies what it believed they wanted to see, but that even as it emphasized its ideological pluralism, the Sandinistas never intended to build a Western-style electoral democracy (53). In this sense, the FSLN's strategy to win a notably broad base of allies was successful in the short term but inevitably ran into trouble when Sandinista political practice failed to live up to the expectations their diverse collection of allies projected onto post-revolutionary Nicaragua.

Boldly confident in its argumentation, this book is a compelling read from which readers will gain any number of valuable insights about this period in global history, and a welcome and much-needed reassessment of the often-underappreciated significance of the Sandinistas revolution. Its arguments and methodologies are also suggestive of many fruitful avenues of future research for historians of this era working on other countries and regions, and particularly transnational histories. Perhaps one of its greatest contributions is as a case study of why "high politics" and social movements should not be studied in

[3] On Mexican popular solidarity with the Sandinistas, see: Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, "'¡Nicas y mexicanos solidarios como hermanos!': el movimiento mexicano de solidaridad con Nicaragua (1974-1979)," *Secuencia* 108, e1840(2020); 1-33; Sarah Osten, "'To Defend the Nicaraguan Revolution is to Defend Mexico': Mexican Solidarity with the Sandinista Revolution, 1974-82," *Cold War History* (2023): 1-19. On Mexican state support for the FSLN, see in particular: Fabián Herrera León, "El apoyo de México al triunfo de la revolución sandinista: su interés y uso políticos," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 38:1 (2011), 219-240*: Tema libre* (2011); Mónica Toussaint, "¿Activismo o intervencionismo? México frente a Nicaragua, 1978-1982," in Mario Vázquez Olivera and Fabián Campos Hernández, eds., *México ante el conflicto centroamericano: testimonio de una época*, ed. (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Centro de Investigaciones sobre América Latina y el Caribe, 2016): 49-78.

isolation, or as separate areas of inquiry. Van Ommen also deserves praise for the clarity and accessibility of her writing; even as she skillfully advances various ongoing conversations between scholars on a number of related topics, this book is also eminently readable by students and other non-experts, making it of particular utility for both undergraduate and graduate teaching purposes. This is therefore a book that will become a mandatory point of reference for a broad spectrum of scholars writing on Latin America, Europe, and global politics and diplomacy of the late Cold War period, but also one that will enrich pedagogy and syllabi for those fields.

Response by Eline van Ommen, University of Leeds

When writing *Nicaragua Must Survive*, I hoped it would one day be the subject of an H-Diplo Roundtable. I am therefore very grateful to Elisabeth Leake for organizing this forum, to Molly Avery for writing the introduction, and to the reviewers Michelle Chase, Tom Long, and Sarah Osten for taking the time to carefully read and engage with the book. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the reviewers for taking the book's ideas and contributions seriously, as well as for their generosity and praise. It is an honor to have scholars whose work I admire describe the book as groundbreaking, fascinating, impressive, persuasive, compelling, and powerful. It was my intention that *Nicaragua Must Survive* would appeal not only to scholars of the Sandinista Revolution, but also to historians of Latin America, Europe, transnational activism, and the global politics of the Cold War. The reviewers make insightful observations about the book's strengths and contributions to these and other fields, and I will use the remainder of this response to think through some of their comments and remarks.

I began researching this book more than a decade ago in the archives of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. There, I found out something I had not fully realized to that point, namely that Western European people and governments in the late 1970s and 1980s cared deeply about the Sandinista Revolution, and particularly about the conflict between the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and the United States. Until then, I believed that the Sandinista Revolution's international dimensions were confined to its tense relationship with the United States and, perhaps, Nicaragua's relations with its anti-Communist Central American neighbors. Clearly, this was not the case, as the documents revealed the FSLN's close engagement with the world beyond the Americas, including solidarity activists, state leaders, European Community institutions, and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Sandinista Revolution had, as Sarah Osten puts it, a "globally consequential aftermath," and I am pleased that reviewers recognize *Nicaragua Must Survive* as a significant contribution to our understanding of the revolution's global entanglements and impact.

In the archives, I also began to suspect that Nicaragua's global significance in this period was tied to the Sandinistas' unique and ambitious foreign policy, or their revolutionary diplomacy, as I call it in the book. The FSLN's international outreach was never limited to state actors, as it sought to build bridges with solidarity activists, feminists, political parties, and human rights groups. To trace this multi-layered history, the book had to be methodologically innovative, blending diplomatic history approaches with histories of social movements and grassroots activism. As both Osten and Long point out, others have written important works about transnational solidarity activism and the Sandinista project, but *Nicaragua Must Survive* is innovative in that it brings this "pluralistic range" of state and non-state actors together in a coherent account of the Sandinistas' international diplomacy and its impact on local, regional, and global levels.[1]

[1] See, for exampe, José Manuel Agreda Portero, *Internacionalistas, Activistas y Brigadistas. La red*

Michelle Chase, too, expresses appreciation for the book's close attention to the role of solidarity activists in the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy, but she wonders about the actual influence of Western European activists on the "decisions made by their heads of state." This is an important point, which is related to some of the challenges that come with the book's methodology. How can we trace the impact of grassroots activism on state policy? Archival records indicate that solidarity activists were rarely able to directly influence their governments' decisions, but policymakers were certainly concerned about public opinion when developing their approach to Central America, and particularly when it came to expressing—or not—support for US foreign policy towards the region. In that sense, solidarity activists' influence on public opinion, most notably by spreading the Sandinista message, was clearly connected to decisions made at the state level. Chase is right, though, to note that the political parties in power had more impact on foreign policy decisions than solidarity activists. Indeed, this observation might explain why UK-based solidarity activists spent more time and effort on fundraising for the FSLN, instead of lobbying the rightwing Thatcher government to change its policies, in comparison to those in the Netherlands and West Germany, where politicians in power were more open to directly supporting the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, as well as to challenging Reagan's foreign policy.

All the reviewers note the book's contribution to scholarship on the Cold War, its multipolarity, and its inescapable influence on the Sandinistas' global entanglements. I was encouraged to read that Osten and Chase found the book to be a compelling exploration of the 1980s and the end of the Cold War in the Global South. It is my hope that *Nicaragua Must Survive* will encourage future scholarship on this period, and particularly on what the decline of Cold War tensions meant for revolutionary movements and activists in the Global South. The case of the FSLN suggests that, paradoxically, the Cold War's denouement meant that the Sandinistas were increasingly isolated on the international stage. As Long notes, the Sandinistas ran "into something of a Catch-22" as they tried to navigate the fast-changing Cold War landscape. It is my sense that the same could be true for other national liberation and socialist movements, but further research is needed to get a better historical understanding of this transformative period in Latin America and beyond.

In *Nicaragua Must Survive*, I aimed to demonstrate that actors beyond the United States and the Soviet Union mattered on the global stage, and that their ideas and foreign policies, although shaped by Cold War constraints, were indeed influential. This required multilingual and multinational research, while at the

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transnacional de solidaridad con Nicaragua desde el Estado español, 1978–1991(PhD diss., Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2021); Friederike Apelt, "Between Solidarity and Emancipation? Female Solidarity and Nicaraguan Revolutionary Feminism," in Jan Hansen, Christian Helm, and Frank Reichherzer, eds., *Making Sense of the Americas: How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Kim Christiaens, "Between Diplomacy and Solidarity: Western European Support Networks for Sandinista Nicaragua," *European Review of History* 21:4 (2014): 617-34; Christian Helm, *Botschafter der Revolution: Das transnationale Kommunikationsnetzwerk zwischen der Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional und der bundesdeutschen Nicaragua-Solidarität 1977–1990* (De Gruyter, 2018); Sarah Osten, "To Defend the Nicaraguan Revolution is to Defend Mexico': Mexican Solidarity with the Sandinista Revolution, 1974-82," *Cold War History* (2023): 1-19; https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2023.2282006.

same time taking the policies and grassroots campaigns of often-overlooked actors seriously. Inspired by earlier works that convincingly demonstrated the agency, impact, and global role of Latin America, I was determined to treat the Sandinista revolutionaries as important international actors in their own right.[2] Even though it was always my intention to trace the Sandinistas' global influence, I was still surprised to note the extent to which Western European governments became involved in Central American affairs as a result, at least in part, of the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy, as well as the importance the Sandinistas attached to European involvement in their region. This was directly related to the Sandinistas' strategic calculation that US foreign policy could not be influenced directly but could be shaped—and tempered—by its European allies. The FSLN, in Osten's words, "understood Western Europe to collectively be an indispensable counterweight to the United States on the global stage."

This brings me to a brief point I wanted to make regarding the book's intended audiences. As the title suggests, it was primarily written for historians of Latin America, the Cold War, solidarity activism, and international relations, and I am grateful that it has, so far, received a warm welcome in these fields. Yet, it is my hope that historians of twentieth-century Europe will also find their way to *Nicaragua Must Survive*. I think the book has much to offer to scholars of European integration, foreign policy, and social movements, particularly regarding the question of how Europeans related to the Global South in a postcolonial world. I would, for example, be interested to find out how Europeanists respond to what Chase describes as perhaps the book's "boldest argument: that Nicaraguan revolutionary diplomacy helped Europe reimagine itself." This exchange of perspectives could further enrich our understanding of the interplay between Europe and revolutionary movements during the late twentieth century, as well as the foreign policies of smaller powers in the late Cold War.

To conclude, I wish to reiterate my thanks to the reviewers for their insightful responses to the book. It is inspiring to see that a global, international, and transnational history of the Sandinista Revolution can spark such an interesting conversation among scholars with various expertise, and I look forward to the field developing further. That reviewers find the book clearly written and accessible for non-experts and undergraduates is also a great compliment, and I hope *Nicaragua Must Survive* will encourage students and colleagues to write many more essays, articles, and monographs on related topics.

[2] Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Thomas C. Field, Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, eds. *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press Press, 2020); Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (University of California Press, 2021); Margarita Fajardo. *The World That Latin America Created: The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era* (Harvard University Press, 2022); Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an international Human Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).