

United States Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Hearing on Nicaragua's Political Crisis: Ortega's Assault on Democracy
Chairman John Curtis (R-UT) Questioning
September 30, 2026

Senator Curtis: Mr. Guerra, let me start with you. How would you define the Administration's current strategy in regard to Nicaragua?

Gil Guerra, Fellow, Hudson Institute: I think that the current strategy is somewhat premised off of the actions that we took in January toward the Venezuelan regime. There seems to be this sense that Nicaragua is after Cuba. So, we took care of Venezuela first, next we'll have Cuba, and then perhaps after that we will reach Nicaragua.

There have been some actions that were taken. There were some gold firms, for example, that were designated earlier in the spring as well. But what I would like to see is perhaps having Nicaragua take more of a priority, even at least equal to Cuba. So far, we haven't had any new designations, for example, since the last ones that were announced in April. I believe that we are long overdue for additional designations on Nicaraguan figures.

Senator Curtis: Thank you. Mr. Acevedo, transnational repression is a threat to democracy everywhere. It's a tool of dictatorships. We see it in China, Russia, and Iran. Can you speak to the tactics of transnational repression specifically employed by this regime and those that are unique to this regime?

Eddy Acevedo, Vice President for Policy & Government Relations, National Endowment for Democracy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In terms of the tactics, what it comes down to is there's a lot of surveillance that is happening. Ortega and his regime send the thugs to the other neighboring countries. So, we're seeing that a lot in Costa Rica, in Honduras—just threats, surveillance, and then someone, obviously at the highest level, makes a call to be able to assassinate or try to assassinate folks.

But one of the issues that we have is, in Costa Rica and Honduras, those governments are not taking this as a priority. In Honduras, there are very few investigations. The same in Costa Rica. So much so that President Fernández was quoted—they asked her about Nicaragua, and she said, "That is the government that they have chosen to have." She walked back those comments. The foreign minister walked back those comments, and then the foreign minister, for an unrelated matter, was fired last week.

The Costa Ricans tell the Nicaraguans to keep a low profile or leave the country. That is not the signal that we want to be sending.

However, I do want to stress, Mr. Chairman, I recognize that Ortega has a gun to their heads because he leverages the border and threatens to close the border. That keeps the Costa Ricans sort of at bay. The same with Honduras.

So, I think we also need to send a clear message to Ortega not to close the border to cause immigration, pipeline, and trade problems in the region.

Senator Curtis: You're ahead of me, but my next question is: What do we do? In addition to that, what are your suggestions for how the U.S. can engage on this?

Mr. Acevedo: One of the things that we are doing—at the NED, for example—we are supporting NGOs who are documenting the transnational repression that's going on throughout the region. I think that is very important.

Secondly, I think we can ask for INL and DRL. They also have prioritized transnational repression within Latin America, and I think they can provide technical support and law enforcement support to these countries to build their capacity to deal with this issue.

Senator Curtis: Treasury sanctioned, in April of this year—some of the sanctions included two of Ortega's sons who serve as government officials. And it feels like we're watching Nicaragua evolve from a dictatorship into a family dynasty.

If nothing changes in Nicaragua democratically and Murillo succeeds her husband, what is the suspected trajectory in the next five, 10, 15 years?

Mr. Acevedo: So, we are already seeing that transition happen before our very eyes. One of the things that Murillo is seeking is a little bit of legitimacy, but obviously that's not going to happen as they continue to sharpen their elbows in terms of the abuses.

And one of the things that she has done is—Ortega, for a very long time, has had a really close inner circle. She has replaced many of the people in his inner circle. They are now in jail or they are in house arrest. Why? Because she recognizes that the senior leadership of the FSLN, and even the military, do not support her.

So, she is moving these people out, putting her people in place so that when the transition happens, sort of 100 percent, then she has her people in the positions to be able to maintain power.