

THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

- ~~1. WHATEVER GOES UPON TWO LEGS IS AN ENEMY.~~
- ~~2. WHATEVER GOES UPON FOUR LEGS, OR HAS WINGS, IS A FRIEND.~~
- ~~3. NO ANIMAL SHALL WEAR CLOTHES.~~
- ~~4. NO ANIMAL SHALL SLEEP IN A BED.~~
- ~~5. NO ANIMAL SHALL DRINK ALCOHOL.~~
- ~~6. NO ANIMAL SHALL KILL ANY OTHER ANIMAL.~~
- ~~7. ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL.~~



ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE



MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

The title of this article is derived from the final "commandment" mandated by the self-appointed leaders of a group of revolutionist animals depicted in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, published in 1945. The allegory is a morality tale in which Orwell warns against recurring patterns of emerging self-appointed elites leading revolutionary movements in the rise and evolution of early twentieth-century authoritarian regimes. In it, Orwell describes a mythical revolution on an English farm that begins with the farm animals driving their human overlords out and establishing an egalitarian animal-centric society. The ensuing social order is collectively devised to ensure all animals benefit equally from their shared labor on the farm. It degenerates, however, when pigs assume leadership roles and gradually evolve into human-like beings that betray the revolution by assuming the exploitative role formerly filled by human overseers. The tale concludes with the eradication of the former seven commandments originally established by the collective that were supposed to guide animal life under the revolution, and their replacement with the one self-serving commandment mandated by the former pigs who form the new elite.

All Socialists Are Equal, but Some Are More Equal Than Others

Edward A. Lynch, PhD

What makes a revolutionary? It is standard theory among political scientists that revolutions occur when conditions in a society have become intolerable, and the people living in that society see no peaceful path to improvement through normal political channels. In addition, those who would support a revolution must feel that they are not only deprived but also deprived unjustly. Put differently, they must feel not only desperate but also wronged.

While these preconditions are necessary for revolutionary change to begin (to say nothing of having a chance of succeeding), they are not sufficient causes. A revolution must have leadership to distinguish itself from similar spasms of political violence. Mark Hagopian distinguishes revolution from revolt, coup d'état, and secession.¹ The distinguishing feature of revolution is a focused, self-conscious leadership made up of men and women with a clear vision of the sort of society that they would like to see rise from the ashes of existing society.²

Crane Brinton describes the characteristics of these revolutionary leaders in some detail. For the most part, revolutionary visionaries perceive a world that can be made perfect. (Not simply better than the existing world in which they live, but perfect.) For the revolutionaries of France in 1789 and Russia in 1917, human beings themselves can be made perfect. Brinton compares this belief to the way “men have been observed to behave before when under the influence of active religious faith.” He goes on, “[Revolutionaries] all sought to make all human activity here on earth conform to an **ideal pattern** [emphasis added].”³

But this perfection can only be achieved in a collective way, under the influence of ideal social, economic, and political circumstances. Modern revolutionaries differ from traditional Christian believers, who perceive an ideal afterlife and usually limit the achievement of perfection to that afterlife.

Perfection, for traditional religious believers, is not possible here on Earth. For modern revolutionaries, however, earthly perfection is the goal and the embrace of that goal, without hesitation or uncertainty, is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a true revolutionary, according to Brinton. He refers to this unshakeable faith in societal perfection as the “apocalyptic vision.” In the case of revolutionaries like Maximilien Robespierre and Karl Marx, postrevolutionary society will be one in which not some but all societal ills are cured. Some revolutionary theorists contend that once the revolution takes place, however, its details

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(Composite graphic by Arin Burgess, *Military Review*; graphic elements courtesy of [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com))

are defined, personal vices will disappear, including greed, not because the revolutionary regime outlaws such things but because the people living after the revolution will no longer desire vice in any form.

Even for revolutionaries who do not believe in such an apocalyptic vision, it is necessary to appear to believe in a future made perfect to justify the sacrifices and bloodshed that must necessarily accompany wholesale societal transformation. Even desperate people will be hesitant to embrace revolutionary violence for only marginal changes for the better. Men and women in seemingly hopeless situations are more likely to grasp at any improvement, no matter how small, that can offer hope. Reformers, for this reason, have always been the enemies that revolutionaries fear far more than the oppressors of the old regime.⁴

For those possessed of this revolutionary apocalyptic vision, therefore, the path to earthly perfection is marked not only by the willingness to embrace violence but also by an almost monkish personal asceticism. In revolutionary England, for example, card playing, dancing, theatre performances, and most other forms of entertainment were banned. In Russia, the only forms of entertainment permissible to the Bolsheviks were those created by the Russian Revolution to the service of the revolution. Englishmen and Russians were assured that such restrictive laws were only necessary to prevent a small (but threatening) number of counterrevolutionaries from tainting the perfect society that was under construction. For true revolutionaries, avoiding card playing should be no more difficult than avoiding taking poison.

In this regard, revolutionary leaders often preach the importance of sacrifice with zeal and often a penchant for coercion unmatched by traditional religious and moral authorities. The man in the street must be convinced that he only embraced his former vices because of societal pressure and bad examples. At the same time, people must be convinced of the nobility, as well as the necessity, of personal sacrifice on behalf of the perfect society that revolution promises. Thought of as part of the path to earthly nirvana, what appear to be acts of sacrifice are anything but deprivations. Eliminating personal vices will not result in the sense of loss but rather in a thrilling sense of fulfillment.

Che Guevara, the Argentinean Marxist who would play such a vital role in the Cuban Revolution, expressed the ideal of revolutionary asceticism in very clear terms: “The guerrilla fighters should be required to go to bed and

get up at fixed hours. Games that have no social function and that hurt the morale of troops and the consumption of alcoholic drinks should both be prohibited.”⁵ He added, in a different context, “The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.”⁶

Che’s Cuban colleague, Fidel Castro, decades into his revolution, told his fellow Cubans of the link between personal morality and revolutionary fidelity: “[Revolution] is defending the values one believes in at the cost of any sacrifice; it is modesty, selflessness, altruism, solidarity and heroism; it is fighting with audacity, intelligence and realism; it is never telling a lie or violating ethical principles.”⁷

Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh was just as clear in his demand for moral as well as political devotion to the revolution. In a 1952 essay titled “To Practice Thrift and Oppose Embezzlement,” Ho wrote, “We want to build a new society, a free society where all men are equal, a society where industry, thrift, integrity, and uprightness prevail.” He continued, “The duty of the cadres is to love and take care of every fighter and to value and save every cent (sic), every bowl of rice, every work hour of their compatriots.”⁸

But Ho, in the same essay, also foreshadowed what Marxist revolutionaries would find to be an unpleasant and inconvenient reality—not everyone desires the level of self-sacrifice demanded by revolutionary fervor. He said,

To have a good crop we must weed the field, otherwise the rice will grow badly in spite of careful plowing and abundant manuring. To be successful in increasing production and practicing thrift, we must also weed the field, that is, root out embezzlement, waste, and bureaucracy. Otherwise, they will harm our work.⁹

A Less-Than-Perfect Reality

Just as desperate social, economic, and political conditions are not enough to bring about revolution, so too a revolutionary leadership, no matter how dedicated and how thoroughly infused with revolutionary zeal, is also not sufficient to bring about a successful revolution. At least one additional element is necessary. This element is the employment of men and women who are skilled in, and accustomed to, violence. Brinton notes, correctly, that a decadent, divided, and self-doubting old regime ruling elite is vital to the chances for success of any revolution. Put differently,

revolutions cannot succeed in a society in which the ruling elite is ready, willing, and able to use uninhibited violence to repress revolutionary actions.

Thus, when thousands of Tunisians marched against long-time dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, and the military leadership made it clear that they would not open fire on unarmed demonstrators, the Jasmine Revolution succeeded. On the other hand, when thousands of Syrians marched against long-time dictator Bashir al-Assad, they found that the Syrian military was perfectly willing to open fire. Barring massive outside assistance, the Syrian revolution will fail.

All but the most decadent and sclerotic old regime leadership are likely to put up some kind of a fight when the leadership class perceives a genuine threat from a revolutionary movement. The old regime may respond with arrests of revolutionary leaders, with more general reprisals against all of its citizens or perhaps against some segment of society perceived to be supporting the revolutionaries, or even with massive violence designed to intimidate the people of an entire nation.

Whatever level of violence the old regime elites employ, revolutionaries must counter with their own brand of violence or face irrelevance (or even extinction). Scholarly and idealistic visionaries of revolution, however, are often ill-equipped, ill-prepared, and ill-suited to perform the necessary violence themselves. Thus, leaders with revolutionary vision must necessarily make common cause with people who know how to perpetrate violence if revolution is going to succeed.

The obvious problem is that the people of violence are unlikely to fade into the background once the old regime has been ousted. Experience has shown that their

continued presence in the revolutionary movement is an ongoing challenge to the direction of that movement, since chances are good that the experts in violence never shared the ideals of the visionaries, and at best, have no interest in the remaking of society after the revolution succeeds. This dilemma leaves visionary leadership with two choices. First, the people of violence can be purged using other experts in violence. The best example may be Adolf Hitler's "Night

of the Long Knives" when the paramilitary *Sturmabteilung* (SA) was destroyed by the more committed *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Elsewhere, Francisco Franco, during the Spanish Civil War, made sure that the most ardent members of the Falange (the Spanish fascist party) were sent to the front lines of battle.

The second choice is to appease and co-opt the violent partners, keeping them inside the revolutionary movement against the time when violence may be needed again. In the meantime, they will have to be satisfied with more earthly rewards. And this opens the door to corruption. Lucrative government jobs, access to government contracts, and positions in government that provide opportunities for extortion are all rewards likely to be expected from those who believe, often correctly, that absent their violent contributions, the revolutionary

government would never have had the chance to govern.

Thus, the pure asceticism of early revolutionary fervor is unlikely to last long after revolutionaries seize power. Vladimir Lenin was still very much alive when the Soviet government imposed rationing on most Soviet citizens but opened special stores for party members only. Those exclusive retail outlets, filled with products that most citizens could not acquire, lasted throughout the existence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.



Portrait of Maximilien de Robespierre (1790), oil on fabric, anonymous artist, Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Robespierre was one of the leaders of the French Revolution that brought about the fall of the French monarchy in August 1792. A zealous advocate for establishing a French republic and perfecting society, he became notorious for his obsessive determination to achieve his objectives with seeming indifference to the human cost; this was manifested by his instigation of numerous executions of his political opponents. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)



Revolutionary leaders Ernesto “Che” Guevara (*left*) and Fidel Castro salute admirers in 1961 after having successfully overthrown the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Comrades in arms, both Castro and Guevara promoted public personas calculated to project ascetic self-deprivation and self-sacrifice in solidarity with the oppressed peoples for whom they reputedly fought both in Cuba and elsewhere. However, their private lifestyles diverged diametrically from their public images. After the death of Guevara in Bolivia, Castro went on to lead a secretive, but opulent, lifestyle that he took great pains to hide from the Cuban public and the world. (Photo by Alberto Korda/Museo Che Guevara via Wikimedia Commons)

Revolutionaries in Power: Living the High Life

Castro, especially in the early years of his regime, liked to portray himself as an austere exemplar of the kind of self-sacrifice he and other revolutionaries demanded from the people they ruled. Castro seldom allowed

himself to be photographed unless he was wearing his signature fatigues. An unkempt beard added to the impression of a hunted fugitive and ascetic warrior monk who cared little for creature comforts but devoted himself wholly to avoiding assassination attempts and working for the benefit of the Cuban people. However, his actual lifestyle was starkly different.

In 2006, after almost fifty years of leading the Cuban people, Castro’s personal fortune was estimated at over \$900 million by *Forbes* magazine. Like the missionaries in James Michener’s novel *Hawaii*, “They came to the islands to do good, and they did right well.”¹⁰ Among other expenditures, Castro used government money to rebuild his childhood home, which had burned down in 1954. While it is not unusual for leaders to wish to have an iconic birthplace, Castro’s childhood home was rebuilt as a luxurious multi-room structure at the center of a five hundred-acre sugar plantation. The reconstructed building was turned into a Castro museum.¹¹

Purportedly because of the many attempts on his life, Castro maintained several homes around Cuba during the forty-nine years he personally ruled the island. In 2005, he retired from active government and ceded power to his brother Raúl Castro. Fidel then

relocated to Punto Cero, a seventy-five-acre estate that at one time was an exclusive Havana golf club. While he described Punto Cero as a “fisherman’s cottage,” a former Castro bodyguard said the estate, walled and gated like a military installation, contained abundant fruit trees, grazing cows, and greenhouses.



Joseph Stalin

A mugshot and information card on Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin circa 1911 from the files of the Tsarist secret police in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Stalin was a loyal and fanatical supporter of Vladimir I. Lenin's Bolshevik faction of the Communist Party that prevailed in the 1917 Russian Revolution. A skilled and violent criminal by nature, he became Lenin's trusted agent for organizing bank robberies, kidnappings, protection rackets, and other illegal activities to fund prerevolutionary Bolshevik operations. However, after the revolution, his penchant for violence and threatening demeanor toward party rivals led Lenin to distrust him, going so far as to warn other party leaders about the lengths to which he thought Stalin might go to achieve his personal political ambitions. However, despite Lenin's efforts to quietly undermine the growing power of Stalin, upon Lenin's death, Stalin went on to eliminate his rivals and become the new leader of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, he was responsible for repression on a heretofore unparalleled scale, including hundreds of thousands of executions, ethnic cleansing through extermination and mass deportations, and artificially causing famines that killed millions of ethnic Russians as well as other citizens living under rule of the Soviet empire. (Photo courtesy of a Tsarist police document via Wikimedia Commons)

But this huge estate, so reminiscent of the homes of the previous Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista and other prerevolutionary elitists, whom Castro had overthrown, was not Castro's only island residence. He also owned a large home in Cayo Piedra (very close to the Bay of Pigs) and a third home at Coleta del Rosario that included a private marina. La Deseada, another luxurious house in Pinar del

Río, was used primarily for one of Castro's favorite pastimes: duck hunting.

Juan Reinaldo Sánchez was Castro's personal bodyguard for seventeen years and saw the dictator's real lifestyle more closely than anyone in the world. Sánchez authored an exposé titled *The Double Life of Fidel Castro: My 17 Years as Personal Bodyguard to El Lider Maxim* in which he revealed, among other things, the exact locations of

Castro's multiple properties around the island. According to Sánchez's account, the dictator owned twenty homes in addition to the Cayo Piedra private island, where he kept his private yacht, the *Aquarama II*.¹² The yacht was powered by four motors, gifts from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.¹³ Sánchez asserts that few people were allowed to visit Castro at Cayo Piedra except for his immediate family, friendly communist dictators, and friendly American journalists such as Barbara Walters and Ted Turner (neither of whom revealed to the world the luxurious lifestyle of the Marxist dictator).¹⁴

Access to the total revenue of a medium-sized nation, even one as strapped as Cuba, might seem like a sufficient income for even a corrupt leader, but Castro felt the need to supplement his salary further with a hefty second income from running drugs into the United States.¹⁵ Sánchez detailed a conversation between Castro and Gen. José Abrantes, Cuba's minister of the interior, which Sánchez heard on the recording device Castro kept in his private office. The conversation involved methods of increasing the flow of drugs into the United States and increasing the flow of profits to Castro. The revelation shocked the still-idealistic Sánchez. "In a few seconds," he wrote, "my whole world and all my ideals came crashing down." The hero of the Cuban revolution was organizing cocaine trafficking, "directing operations like a real godfather."¹⁶

The fall of the Soviet Union, and the consequent end to the generous subsidies that Cuba had been receiving, forced Castro to seek at least apparent rapprochement with the West. But the culture of corruption continued. Foreign investors who opened hotels were required to pay the salaries of the workers directly to the state. Government officials took the lion's share of the money, giving the chambermaids, waiters, clerks, and managers a fraction of their salaries, which was paid in worthless pesos.¹⁷

Sánchez's credibility can be established in two ways. First, his coauthor for *The Double Life* was French journalist Axel Gylden, an experienced reporter with the left-leaning news magazine *L'Express*. Gylden acknowledges the possibility of strong bias but insists that he checked Sánchez's claims and found that they held up to scrutiny. He told *The Guardian*, "This is the first time someone from Castro's intimate circle ... has spoken. It changes the image we have

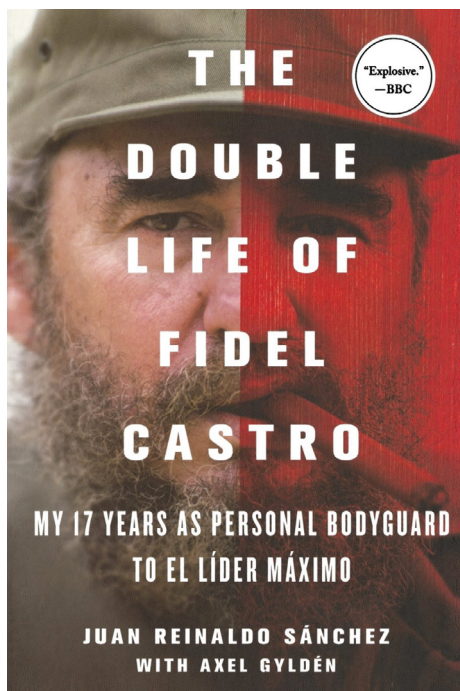
of Fidel Castro and not just how his lifestyle contradicts his words, but of Castro's psychology and motivations."¹⁸ Even more persuasive evidence of Sánchez's reliability exists in his treatment by Castro. When Sánchez asked to be released from his job as bodyguard, Castro had him thrown into prison for two years. Sánchez sums up his indictment of the Cuban leader: "Fidel Castro let it be known and suggested that the revolution gave him no rest, no time for pleasure and that he ignored, indeed despised, the bourgeois concept of holidays. He lies."¹⁹

Counterrevolution in

Nicaragua. President Daniel Ortega is best known for his leadership of the Sandinista regime in the 1980s, when Nicaragua was undergoing a bitter civil war while at the center of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Sandinista mismanagement

of the economy and a highly unpopular draft resulted in a devastating electoral defeat for Ortega in Nicaragua's first free elections in February 1990. Undeterred by an election in which he lost every precinct in the country, Ortega shed the army fatigues of the 1980s, substituted a white shirt and jacket, and ran for president in 1996 and 2001, both times unsuccessfully. In 2001, his candidacy was devastated by charges brought by his stepdaughter that he had sexually abused her starting when she was eleven years old.²⁰ Ortega angrily denied the charges but also refused to give up his legal immunity as a former president to answer the charges in court.

After his loss in 2001, Ortega conspired with President Arnaldo Alemán to alter the constitution so



The Double Life of Fidel Castro: My 17 Years as Personal Bodyguard to El Líder Máximo, published in 2014 by authors Juan Reinaldo Sánchez and Axel Gylden; translated by Catherine Spencer.



Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro (*left*) talks with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (*center*) and Fidel's brother, Cuban President Raul Castro, 24 February 2010 at Punto Cero near Havana. Punto Cero is a prerevolution golf course property that had been seized by Fidel Castro in the 1970s and converted into his personal residence. In time, Castro also appropriated a number of other equally extravagant residences in prime locations in Cuba using as justification that constant assassination attempts made it necessary for him to move around frequently to various locations. Subsequently, Lula was convicted of extensive corruption in Brazil and is currently imprisoned. (Photo by Ricardo Stuckert-PR/Handout/Reuters)

that a presidential candidate who won 35 percent of the popular vote would not have to stand in a run-off election.²¹ In 2006, with only 38 percent of the vote, Ortega returned to the presidency. He had added an outward commitment of Christianity to his political persona but remained committed to socialism. However, it would quickly become apparent (at least to most observers) that he was even more committed to building his personal wealth.²²

Much of the money that does come to the government of Nicaragua escapes any kind of scrutiny or accountability. For example, Albanisa, the state-owned oil company, has received between \$4 billion and \$6 billion in illicit funding in the past ten years. Most of these funds have come from Venezuela, governed by fellow socialists Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, but tracking the dollars after they get to Managua is nearly impossible. It is clear that they have not been plowed back into the

Nicaraguan economy, which is the poorest nation in the hemisphere after Haiti.²³ An investigation by an independent Nicaraguan newspaper showed that Albanisa “has devised a sophisticated scheme of transferring funds and indirect subsidies to other related businesses.”²⁴

The relationship, both political and financial, between Nicaragua and Venezuela strengthened when Chávez announced the formation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas to counter the influence and power of the United States. Ortega brought Nicaragua into the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas bloc almost immediately and began receiving subsidies in the neighborhood of half a billion dollars annually. Critics describe the annual gift as a “personal slush fund” for Ortega.²⁵ The Venezuelan contributions do not appear in the national budget.²⁶

An even more mysterious source of funds came to light in 2013, when Ortega stood side-by-side with

shadowy Chinese billionaire Wang Jing and announced a \$50 billion deal for the construction of a new canal to rival the Panama Canal. Six years later, with not a single spadeful of earth dug, the Cocibolca Group, a union of civic organizations, issued a statement saying that the project had been “plagued by illegalities, irregularities, signs of government corruption, and illicit enrichment of some people linked to the government.” The group alleged that the well-connected were buying up property along the canal route with the intention of reselling it to the government at inflated prices.²⁷

The well-connected speculators probably lost money, since the Chinese company supposedly leading the project closed its Hong Kong office in 2018 and had not updated its website since 2017. However, the money that changed hands when the deal was signed is still unaccounted for, and the fact that Ortega took such a

promotes through the media as an austere, dedicated socialist. For one thing, even after losing the election in 1990, Ortega never vacated the mansion he took over as the president’s residence in 1979. He has lived there ever since.²⁹ His wife is rarely seen in public without a ring on each finger and multiple necklaces.³⁰ As hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans lived on \$2 per day, she used public funds for an art project called the Trees of Life in Managua.³¹ These are huge, stylized trees made of metal, painted bright yellow, and decorated with thousands of light bulbs. They are estimated to cost \$25,000 each.³² Her often mystical and New Age pronouncements, and her seemingly dominant influence over her husband, have prompted Nicaraguans to nickname her *La Chamuca* (the demon or witch).³³

Ortega has moved expertly to prevent any serious accountability. Even a report from the International



Nicaraguan Vice President Rosario Murillo, along with her husband President Daniel Ortega (*not shown*), greet supporters 13 October 2018 at a march called “We walk for peace, with faith and hope” in Managua, Nicaragua. Murillo is widely referred to by the Nicaraguan people as “La Chamuca,” meaning the demon or witch. Although the sobriquet is popularly used as a derogatory metaphor, in fact, she has organized conferences on witchcraft, parapsychology, and folk medicine, and made spirited defenses of both witchcraft and the practice of magic in public life. Apart from promoting her personal interests, she has worked with her husband to amass a fortune in real estate, banking interests, and monopolistic control of Nicaraguan mass communications that is estimated at approximately \$1 billion. This has been done by exploiting their Nicaraguan government offices for kickbacks, bribes, insider contracting, and other unethical and illegal business activities. The fortune has been accumulated in a nation that is regularly singled out by the United Nations and other international organizations as among the poorest in the world. (Photo by Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters)

large personal role in the negotiations leaves little doubt in the minds of Nicaraguans about the destination of those funds. Suspicion about Ortega’s role was even raised by Sergio Ramírez, who had served as Ortega’s vice president during the Sandinista era.²⁸

As with Castro, the lifestyle of Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo seems at odds with the image he

Monetary Fund (IMF) could only categorize blocs of income that came from Venezuela, with over \$35 million simply marked, “Other Projects.”³⁴ As part of his deal with Alemán, Ortega got the right to name judges. He proceeded to pack the country’s supreme court and had it declare that the constitutional provision against a third term as president was a violation of Ortega’s human



rights, paving the way for the former Sandinista to remain president for life. The effort brought Nicaraguans into the streets (where some pulled down the Trees of Life) amid shouts of “¡Ortega vendepatria!” (“seller of the fatherland,” a traditional insult in Latin America for corrupt leaders).³⁵ One observer summed up Ortega’s attitude toward private businesses: “His logic is, ‘If I can have a bank, why should you have it?’”³⁶ Resentment toward Ortega is particularly strong among those who still believe in the socialist promises of Sandinismo. One former colleague told *The Irish Times*, “Ortega has betrayed the revolution. He is no longer a socialist but a capitalist.”³⁷

Ortega and his wife’s holdings have become quite impressive. They own or control several television stations and an advertising agency, and they have a controlling interest in the country’s oil industry. In some cases, one or more of their seven children nominally control the businesses. One son, Laureano, works for PRONicaragua, a supposedly private agency that promotes foreign investment. He was deeply involved in the negotiations for the proposed canal. He also used his wealth to stage a lavish production of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Rigoletto*, contracting with his sister to provide the costumes.³⁸

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (center) gestures to supporters while flanked by his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo (left), and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro 10 January 2017 during his swearing-in ceremony at Revolution Square in Managua, Nicaragua. Maduro was instrumental in enabling the Ortegas to consolidate dictatorial control over the Nicaraguan economy and security forces using Venezuelan oil money as leverage. (Photo by Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters)

In what may be thought of as the ultimate abandonment of his socialist past, Ortega also owns a luxury hotel in Managua and a private security firm that protects the homes of the wealthy.³⁹ While some of Ortega’s businesses are nominally independent, the founder of the Banco Central de Nicaragua (Central Bank of Nicaragua) avers that the network “blurs the lines between his Sandinista Party, the state, and the private sector.”⁴⁰ According to documents published on WikiLeaks, the U.S. government said Ortega received “suitcases full of cash” from Venezuelan officials.⁴¹

In addition to subverting the courts, Ortega and his wife also control government advertising dollars, which they can use to reward or punish newspapers and radio stations for their loyalty or lack of loyalty. Licenses to buy

newsprint also go through them.⁴² Control of the courts permits the harassment of political opponents and also allowed Ortega to escape trial for his alleged serial rape of his stepdaughter when he got a friendly judge to declare that the statute of limitations had run out.⁴³

Perhaps because of the time and effort necessary to look after these varied (and profitable) business interests,

percent. Nine of ten Venezuelans live in poverty. Over one million have left the country to take their chances in the impoverished border areas of Colombia and Brazil.

Chávez won the support of the people of Venezuela in the 1998 election by promising to use the country's vast oil wealth to benefit the poor and to put an end to the corruption that infected both major parties in

“The situation has gotten so obvious to most Venezuelans that they have invented a new word, “enchufado” (well-connected) to refer to those who benefit personally from access to government money.”

Ortega was caught by surprise by a huge budget deficit in the spring of 2018. To bring some balance to the national budget, he announced deep cuts in the country's social security program. The announcement led to huge protests, bringing thousands of people into the street. Ortega at first seemed genuinely stunned by the uprising and hastily backed off the pledge to cut benefits.⁴⁴

However, it soon became plain that the social security cuts were only a small part of the problem, according to the demonstrators. Many cited the pervasive corruption of the regime, starting with Ortega and his wife.⁴⁵ The demonstrations continued and Ortega, some say at the bidding of his wife, responded with deadly force. More than three hundred Nicaraguans were killed, two thousand more were injured, sixty thousand more were forced into exile, and seven hundred were arrested.⁴⁶

Former Sandinista Vice President Sergio Ramírez summed up his view of his former governing partner: “He came back [in 2006] intending never to leave, [bolstered by] a lack of scruples and a ton of money from Venezuela.”⁴⁷ Sofia Montenegro, a Sandinista feminist leader, added, “The Sandinistas [under Ortega] are closer to Don Corleone's Mafia than a political party.”⁴⁸

Ruining Venezuela. Presidents Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and Nicolás Maduro (2013–present) inherited a country with one-fourth of Earth's oil reserves, three growing seasons a year, a prime location for trade with both North and South America, an infrastructure second to none in South America, a thriving tourist trade, and a functioning civil service. Now, twenty years since Chávez came to power in a disputed election, Venezuela is an economic failure. Inflation is running close to 1,000,000

Venezuela and brought the nation's politics to a chaotic standstill. And like Castro and Ortega, Chávez portrayed a public disdain for wealth and personal luxury and gave the impression he would eschew the comforts that come with the presidency.

The reality, once again, was different. By the time of Chávez's death in 2013, he had amassed a personal fortune between \$1 and \$2 billion, according to a study by the Criminal Justice International Associates. Shedding his stated commitment to austere, revolutionary living, he used government money to buy himself a \$65 million personal airplane after he visited Qatar on a plane used by the royal family and decided he wanted one just like it.⁴⁹ (As a candidate, Chávez had promised to get rid of all government airplanes.) He had also created a circle of friends, relatives, and associates who were welcome to share in the bounty that illicit oil money provided. Consistent with his impatience with oversight, he named his minister of energy the president of the state-run oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA). In effect, the PDVSA president is overseeing himself.⁵⁰ The situation has gotten so obvious to most Venezuelans that they have invented a new word, “enchufado” (well-connected) to refer to those who benefit personally from access to government money.⁵¹

Like his friend Ortega, Chávez moved immediately after becoming president to weaken the structures of accountability in what had been a thriving democracy with a robust system of checks and balances.⁵² Chávez proposed the election of a special constituent assembly, ostensibly for the purpose of writing a new constitution. Using various methods of fraud and



Top: While Venezuelans are starving, President Nicolás Maduro enjoys a lavish meal and smokes a cigar at Nusr-Et, the restaurant of Turkish celebrity chef Nusret Gökçe, commonly known as “Salt Bae,” 18 September 2018 in Istanbul. (Screenshots courtesy of @nusr_et, Instagram)

Bottom: A man eats the food he scavenged from inside trash bags 27 February 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. (Photo by Carlos Jasso, Reuters)

intimidation, he packed the assembly with his own supporters (and family members), ultimately controlling 121 of its 131 seats.⁵³ Chávez then decreed that the constituent assembly would replace the elected National Assembly of Venezuela.

Also like Ortega, Chávez received some of the harshest criticism from former political allies who became disenchanted with his self-enrichment. As stated by José Rojas, Chávez’s former minister of finance, “The loss of autonomy of the Venezuelan Central Bank

and the disorder in the management of the financial resources on the part of the government will lead to a significant national crisis.”⁵⁴ Christopher Figuera, Chávez’s former intelligence chief, told the *Washington Post* that Chávez’s successor, Nicolás Maduro, and members of Maduro’s family are involved in money laundering and corruption, even taking money to allow Hezbollah cells to operate in Venezuela.⁵⁵

Besides insisting on controlling the levers of government, Chávez also insisted on total control of the country’s only important export: oil. With Chávez’s friends and supporters running the state oil company, PDVSA, oil production dropped by 25 percent between Chávez’s inauguration and his death, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.⁵⁶ With global oil prices dropping at the same time, the entire Venezuelan economy went into a tailspin. The Chávez government made things worse and opened up fabulous avenues of corruption for the enfuchado by controlling the exchange rate for U.S. dollars. In brief, government officials decided who had to buy dollars at the real exchange rate (over one thousand bolívars to the dollar in 2013) and who could buy them at the “official” rate of ten to the dollar.⁵⁷ Venezuelan journalist Carlos Ball estimated that the enfuchado may have profited \$600 million from this scheme.⁵⁸

The situation has gotten worse under Maduro, who became president when Chávez died in office. In 2018, Transparency International rated Venezuela as the twelfth most corrupt country in the world.⁵⁹ The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project named Maduro its “2016 Man of the Year.”⁶⁰ As early as 2012, the country’s total reliance on oil has forced it to import two-thirds of its food, even though thousands of acres of arable land remain untilled.⁶¹ The World Justice Project ranked Venezuela in last place among Latin American countries based on respect for the rule of law.⁶² Consistent with the need for a corrupt dictator to share the wealth with those who might oppose him, Maduro has given prominent military commanders control over the distribution of food and key raw materials. A general in the Venezuelan National Guard has taken over PDVSA.⁶³

The results in Venezuela are stark. The IMF reported in 2016 that the country had the world’s worst economic growth, worst inflation (the currency lost 99 percent of its value from 2012 to 2016), and

ninth-worst unemployment rate. It also has the world’s second-worst murder rate and an infant mortality rate that has gotten one hundred times worse since 2012.⁶⁴ At the same time, Venezuela has dropped to dead last in the Economic Freedom of the World Index.⁶⁵ Millions of Venezuelans have been reduced to begging, prostitution, and even grave robbing.⁶⁶

A corrupt comeback in Argentina? Castro and Chávez, as venal as they were, are no longer a threat to the freedom or well-being of their people. Such is not the case with former Argentinian President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who recently had a court appearance for corruption the same week she announced her candidacy for the country’s vice presidency.

Fernández de Kirchner was elected president in 2007 after serving as first lady during her husband Néstor Kirchner’s four-year presidency. The two are from the Justicialist Party, successors to the Peronist party of the mid-twentieth century. They both were swept into office on a wave of discontent and fear brought about by the country’s 2001 debt default and economic and social crisis. They blamed the crisis on corruption and promised to remove both corrupt officials and the temptations of corruption.

For all of the despair and trepidation brought on by the 2001 crisis, the underlying Argentinian economy was undergoing an agricultural export boom by the time Fernández de Kirchner became president.⁶⁷ Policies aimed at reducing the government’s role in the economy would have resulted in both greater foreign direct investment and fewer temptations for corruption. In addition, the Kirchners benefitted from widespread goodwill in the United States, which resulted in efforts by the George W. Bush administration to assist efforts to repair the Argentinian economy.⁶⁸

Neither Fernández de Kirchner nor her husband, however, made any effort to limit the intervention of Buenos Aires in economic decisions. They attacked international trade as a malevolent force and economic data collection as a right-wing conspiracy. Imitating the failed policies of Argentinian Gen. Juan Perón, they used the profits from a commodities boom to expand payments to politically favored Argentinian citizens through programs that became unsustainable once the boom ended.⁶⁹

Instead, more social programs meant a greater need for tax money, which led to stronger incentives to avoid paying taxes, which led to more opportunities for



business people and government officials to collude. For example, Fernández imposed a 35 percent tax on soybean exports, supposedly to keep the staple food from leaving the country. Farmers, however, saw it differently. “We had a saying,” one farmer told the *New York Times*, “For every three trucks that went to the port, one was for Cristina Kirchner.”⁷⁰ By 2015, when Fernández de Kirchner left office at the end of her second term, Argentina was, again, in an economic tailspin, and legends about official corruption were once again a major topic of conversation.

As always, the root of corruption in Argentina was a government monopoly. Dozens of business people ran afoul of the law for paying large bribes to Fernández de Kirchner and her government officials in return for exclusive bidding rights on expensive public works projects. In August 2018, after Fernández de Kirchner left office, Argentines awoke to the news that twenty-six formerly untouchable business people had been arrested and that the multiple homes of their former president had been raided by investigators.⁷¹

An accidental discovery had led to the wave of arrests. A judge learned of the existence of notebooks kept by Oscar Centeno, a driver for a ranking official in the Ministry of Federal Planning, which contained details

Argentinian Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, former president of Argentina, speaks 30 May 2018 during a senate session on the proposed increases of natural gas tariffs in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Photo by Charly Diaz Azcue, Argentinian senate communication)

of the driver’s pickups and deliveries of bags of cash around Buenos Aires. The “Notebook Scandal” became known to Argentines when the judge ordered a public report that exposed a “criminal organization made up of public officials.”⁷² The organization, the report documented, “between the years of 2008 and 2015 [the years the Kirchners were in office] sought the payment of illegitimate sums of money from numerous private citizens, many of them public works contractors.”⁷³ Centeno’s meticulous records indicate that he delivered about \$160 million from 2005 to 2015.⁷⁴

With a new law allowing reduced sentences in return for information, revelations about corruption reached higher and higher. In one instance, the owner of an industrial conglomerate confessed to paying a bribe of \$600,000 in return for permission, delivered in a decree from Fernández de Kirchner herself, to control the operation (and fees) of a major commercial waterway.⁷⁵

Another major corruption story emerged in 2016 when José López, a former secretary of public works under Fernández de Kirchner, entered a convent just outside Buenos Aires carrying Rolex and Omega watches, plus an automatic weapon.⁷⁶ He was arrested some hours later while trying to stuff nearly \$9 million in cash (plus €150,000) into bags.

her personal fortune is estimated at \$660 million.⁸² She was also found to be in possession of priceless historical documents, such as letters from Latin America's independence leaders. She claimed the artifacts were gifts from Russian President Vladimir Putin.⁸³

Argentinian constitutional law prevents Fernández de Kirchner from being seriously inconvenienced by even

“Dozens of business people ran afoul of the law for paying large bribes to Fernández de Kirchner and her government officials in return for exclusive bidding rights on expensive public works projects.”

At the start of 2015, an even more serious allegation was leveled at Fernández de Kirchner when Alberto Nisman, a criminal prosecutor, charged that she had conspired with the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran to derail an investigation into the 1994 bombing of a Jewish organization in Buenos Aires.⁷⁷ (The attack remains the deadliest terrorist attack on Argentinian soil, with eighty-five killed and over three hundred wounded.)⁷⁸ According to Nisman, in spite of strong anti-Iran rhetoric from Fernández de Kirchner at the United Nations and elsewhere, she had agreed to bury the investigation in return for favorable terms on Iranian oil and promises from Iran to buy Argentinian goods at inflated prices. However, the night before Nisman was due to present his evidence to the congressional committee, he was found dead of a gunshot wound in his apartment.

In another far-fetched scenario, in May 2019, Fernández de Kirchner made a surprise announcement that she would seek the vice presidency (most observers expected her to go for the presidency) in the same week that she appeared in court for the first of eleven trials on charges of official corruption. This particular trial was to hear allegations of Fernández de Kirchner creating an illegal association for the purpose of channeling fifty-one public works projects to Lazaro Baez, a businessman and friend.⁷⁹ The official charge read, “[Fernández de Kirchner] damaged the interests entrusted to her by violating her duty to administer and faithfully take care of the assets of the state that were under her responsibility.”⁸⁰ The total value of the contracts is estimated at nearly \$1 billion.⁸¹

It is not clear just how much this corruption affected the personal lifestyle of Fernández de Kirchner. However,

the most serious charges. As a former president, she is a senator for life. As such, she enjoys near-total immunity from incarceration. It would take a two-thirds vote from the senate to remove her from office and imprison her. If she is elected vice president, the chances of her paying any price for her corruption will drop even further.⁸⁴

In spite of all the credible stories about corruption under Fernández de Kirchner and about her personal profit from some of those ventures, her party won the October 2019 elections and she will return to public office.⁸⁵ While the wave of arrests in August 2015 outraged Argentinians to a degree not seen in decades, the anger has long since subsided.⁸⁶ Supporters of her successor, President Mauricio Macri, feel let down by the incumbent, less well off than they were four years ago, and not nearly as fearful of a return to “Kirchnerismo.”⁸⁷

Corruption and Oppression

Dictatorship and corruption almost naturally go together. It is the nature of a dictator, or an aspiring dictator, to weaken or destroy the instruments of accountability, since such instruments are, by their nature, limitations on the power of the man or woman at the top. Just as dictators prefer to have no checks on their power to rule over others, they also prefer to have no checks on their ability to enrich themselves. As we have seen, the corrupt rulers worked sedulously to free themselves from any effective oversight.

Before the late twentieth century, however, even though corruption and dictatorship went together just as frequently, the results of corruption tended

to be less dire than in our own time. Venezuela, for example, had endured dictatorships for much of the first century and a half of its independent existence, but the level of suffering did not approach what its citizens are living through today. Venezuelan dictators like Juan Vicente Gomez and Marcos Perez Jimenez enriched themselves (and their friends) while in office, but they did not impoverish the entire country in the process.⁸⁸ Nicaraguan doctor Anastasio Somoza Debayle was both corrupt and brutal, but even his enemies acknowledged that apolitical Nicaraguans could survive, and even thrive, under his dictatorship. The same could be said for Francisco Franco in Spain, another heavy-handed dictator but whose worst personal vices seemed to be watching too much television and betting in football pools.

It is important to keep in mind that some of the worst dictators in history, like Lenin and Hitler, did not live a lavish, ostentatious lifestyle. Dictators of the totalitarian stripe sometimes have little or no time for creature comforts, given their revolutionary zeal to overhaul society to achieve their apocalyptic visions. Traditionally, therefore, social scientists could offer some consolation to those living under corrupt dictators. Personal corruption, first of all, requires a reasonably productive private sector so that there would be wealth for the dictator to steal. Second, a focus on personal gain tended to weaken the dictator's focus on violent societal transformation.

In the twenty-first century, however, this consolation is no longer available. While Castro did combine personal vice with a murderous apocalyptic vision, there is no evidence that Ortega, Chávez, Maduro, or Fernandez are single-mindedly interested in overhauling their respective societies. Yet the people in those societies, especially in Nicaragua and Venezuela, are suffering horribly in large part because of the corruption of their leaders.

There are reasons for this relatively new linkage between personal corruption at the top and terrible hardship at the bottom. First, the level of personal corruption is far higher than it was a century ago. Today's dictators are not satisfied with fortunes in the millions; only billions of dollars will do. (As early as 1997, it was estimated that over \$100 billion of Venezuela's oil income had disappeared.)⁸⁹ As we have seen, greed at this level outstrips the productive capacity of a country as naturally wealthy as Venezuela. Second, corruption at the very top of the governing pyramid invariably results in mid- to lower-level officials also seeking illicit wealth. When the scale of corruption rises at the top, it also rises at the subordinate levels, furthering the unsustainable drain on the national economy.⁹⁰ Third, one hundred years ago, there were no institutions like the IMF and the World Bank to provide billions of dollars in debt relief and other forms of aid, which resulted in inadequate oversight and an almost nonexistent ability to punish leaders who misdirected loans from international institutions to their own accounts.

Fourth, and finally, dictators in our own time come to power with a vision, perhaps an apocalyptic vision, of how to remake society. Even if they lack such a vision, today's dictators must appear to have a vision of a perfect or near-perfect world to attain power. If an aspiring revolutionary does have an apocalyptic vision, he or she will soon be disappointed in the possibility of actually creating the new world he or she envisions. Thus, unable to safely relinquish their power, they settle for personal enrichment. For those without a vision, the temptation to enrich themselves comes much sooner and is much harder to resist.

Thus, the link between dictatorship and corruption will continue as will the hypocrisy of those professing concern for the downtrodden masses in their society while amassing personal fortunes. Understanding this link is the first step to combatting it. ■

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90. To give one example, a former minor Venezuelan government official, using insider contracts to acquire oil money, became wealthy enough to spend \$1.6 million on two pistols once owned by Simón Bolívar. See Coronel, "The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela."