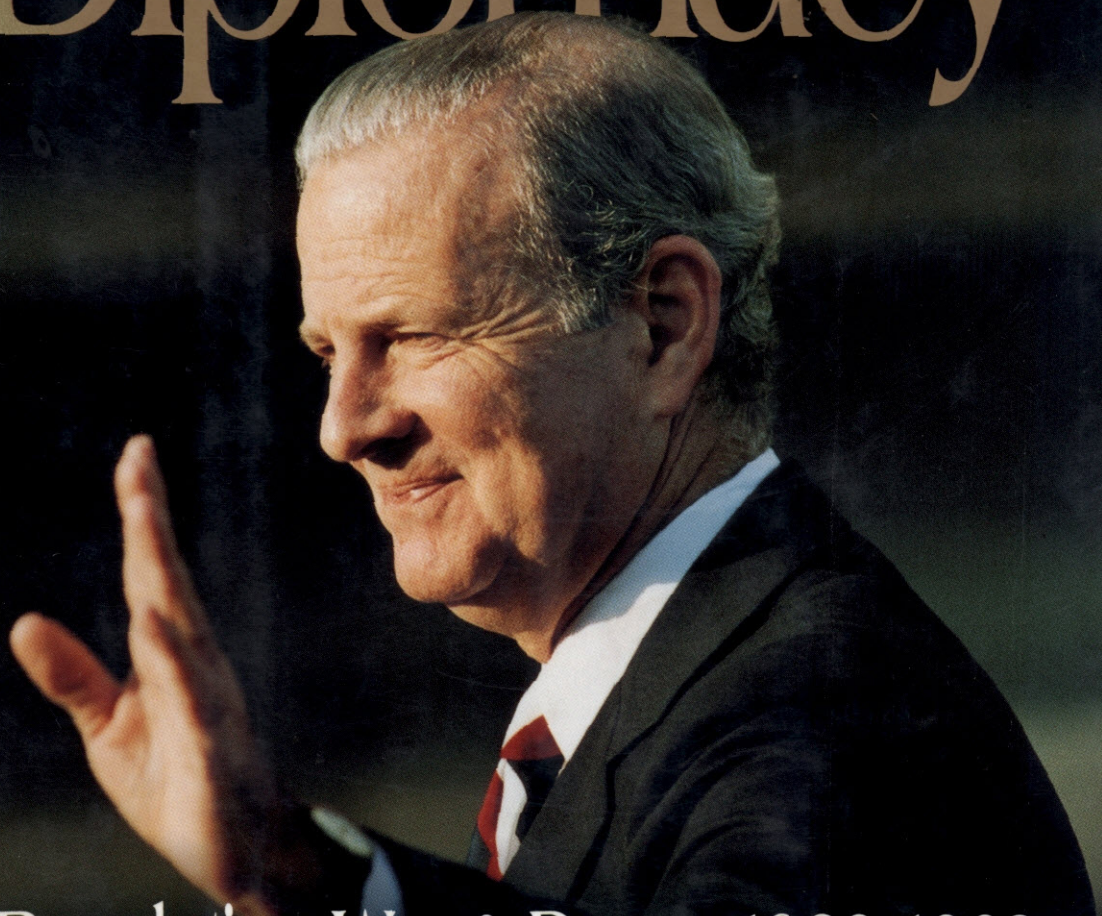


The Politics of Diplomacy



Revolution, War & Peace, 1989-1992

James A. Baker, III
with Thomas M. DeFrank

Giving Diplomacy a Chance Finally Bears Fruit

Our bipartisan agreement gave the President and me a powerful piece of leverage with which to challenge the Soviets to apply Gorbachev's new thinking to continued Nicaraguan aid. Two months after we announced the accord, I was in Moscow, able to tell Shevardnadze that the President and Congress were united in the view that warmer relations were impossible until the Soviets stopped their mischief in our hemisphere, but that if the Soviet Union would support free and fair elections in Nicaragua, we would honor the results.

We were now offering the Soviet Union something it had sought but never achieved in its history: the acceptance by the United States of a legitimate role in diplomacy in our hemisphere. But we did so on our terms: challenging the Soviet Union to endorse and support the Esquipulas Treaty as the United States had done, and to press its allies in the region, Nicaragua and Cuba, to do the same.

The timing could not have been better. Coincidentally, the press had made much of our review of U.S.-Soviet relations, suggesting that the new President was taking a hard look at the entire relationship. Thus, our challenge to the Soviet Union to cooperate on Central America appeared to them to be an important test of their relationship with the newly elected President. Moreover, it offered them a face-saving means of reducing their \$1 billion-a-year subsidy of the Sandinistas while gaining the prestige of partnership with the United States in Latin America.

I had honed these points in my March meeting with Shevardnadze. As soon as he was confirmed, Bernie Aronson had traveled to Moscow to meet with his Soviet counterpart. He was the first, and no doubt will be the last, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to travel to Moscow on his first official trip—a symbol of the unique transition period in which the Bush administration conducted its diplomacy.

The Soviets agreed to stop delivery of major military supplies to Nicaragua, to try to keep the Cubans from doing the same, and to press the Sandinistas to accept the electoral outcome. Despite some problems, for the most part they kept their commitments.

We also had to box the Sandinistas in on the ground.

We persuaded the fractured opposition to unite behind a single opposition candidate. We pressed the OAS, the United Nations, the Carter Center, the European Union, and many others to flood Nicaragua with election observers. And we convinced the Congress to provide voter registration and other support through the National Endowment for Democracy to attempt

to level out the enormous advantages the Sandinistas enjoyed through their control of government resources and personnel.

We reached out to former President Jimmy Carter, in particular, who played a crucial role as head of the Carter Center, reinforcing in the clearest terms our commitment to a bipartisan policy. Carter helped convince Daniel Ortega to accept his electoral defeat, and telephoned me with that good news at 4:15 A.M. on the morning of February 26, 1990.

The defeat of Daniel Ortega by Violeta Chamorro's UNO coalition was a sweet vindication of the Bipartisan Accord on Central America. But it was something more. It represented a stunning ideological defeat for communism and the left. Once the ordinary people of Nicaragua had a chance to speak their mind in the security of the polling place, they sent the Sandinistas packing with a smaller percentage of the vote than even General Pinochet in Chile had received a year before. So much for the Sandinista apologists who had argued for so many years that the regime had the support of "the people." The triumph of democracy in Nicaragua and peaceful demobilization of the contra army—as well as our successful cooperation with Latin American nations and the Soviet Union—also laid the groundwork for our subsequent diplomacy to end the war in El Salvador and to secure an end to Soviet aid to Cuba.

Working together with Congress, we had shown that for all the bitterness and vituperation of the last decade over Central America, Arthur Vandenberg's testament to bipartisanship not only remained sound advice—it still worked.