



AMERICANS FOR LIMITED GOVERNMENT

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January 3rd, 2011

Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen:

Little more than a year has passed since the U.S. Senate confirmed Arturo Valenzuela to the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. At the time, Americans for Limited Government objected to the appointment because of Valenzuela's incredibly weak record defending liberty in the region.

Valenzuela has argued for "dialogue and an opening towards Cuba," defended Venezuela's cracking down on press freedom while serving at Freedom House, and sat on the advisory board of Americas Watch with George Soros, a group that supported reinstating Manuel Zelaya to power in Honduras. We argued that Valenzuela's background indicated a very weak policy by the U.S. to defending free nations in Latin America from the Marxist regimes that seek to overthrow them.

Since that time, freedom is once again being threatened in the region, a cause for serious concern. Particularly, the freedom of Nicaragua and the territorial integrity of its neighbor, Costa Rica, are in danger. Assistant Secretary Valenzuela does not appear to be equipped with either the capability or the will to do anything about it.

In October, as you are well aware, Nicaragua invaded and to date occupies Calero Island in the San Juan River belonging to U.S. ally, Costa Rica. The communist dictatorship absurdly claimed that Google Maps showed the territory belonged to them, and seized the island. Since then, the Sandinistas have claimed that an 1858 treaty and an International Court of Justice ruling justifies their presence. They have also claimed they are dredging the river and needed to put their equipment on the island, and that they are simultaneously fighting drug trafficking. None of these claims put the island in Nicaraguan territory.

In fact, according to the official maps of both countries, the land has always been Costa Rican. It is in fact an illegal invasion by Nicaragua of Costa Rica, an historically peaceful country which has no standing military.

Since then, as noted by a December 26th, 2010, editorial by the Washington Post, "Soft on Nicaragua," the U.S. has failed to respond and "has not condemned the Nicaraguan land grab. In fact, the State Department has yet to say anything about the matter". Instead, U.S. Amabassador to Nicaragua Robert Callahan announced that the communist state was now a candidate for U.S. foreign aid via the Millenium Challenge Corporation.

Also of note, Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega has stacked that country's Supreme Court simply so it could rule he is eligible to run for reelection — even though he is term-limited by the constitution. Clearly, Ortega has taken a page from Manuel Zelaya, who attempted a similar coup in Honduras to stay in power for life. Moreover, the Sandinistas have seen fit to "reprint" the Nicaraguan constitution to allow term-limited officials, including Supreme Court justices and election magistrates, to stay in power indefinitely, undoubtedly to solidify Ortega's hold on power. This is the same regime responsible for the murder of thousands of Nicaraguans in the 1980's as it waged its revolution.

Weakness invites aggression, and it is clear that the ineptitude of the Obama Administration has not gone unheeded in the region. In the last week of the year, Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez expelled U.S. envoy Larry Palmer for being “disrespectful,” according to Chavez. In reality, Palmer was voicing U.S. concerns that Columbian drug cartels are being financed by Venezuela. Columbia, like Costa Rica, is in danger from these insurgent forces seeking to topple freedom in the region.

Venezuela has unsurprisingly refused to condemn the Nicaraguan invasion of Costa Rica in the Organization of American States, and itself has a horrendous record of suppressing opposition in its country. Chavez has made himself dictator-for-life and has eliminated privately-run press organizations. The Obama Administration’s response of simply denying the visa of the Venezuelan diplomat to the U.S. is woefully inadequate to deal with these larger dangers posed to the region.

Arturo Valenzuela has done nothing since being appointed to his post to suggest that the weak U.S. posture in the region will be changing any time soon, and certainly not in time to save nations like Nicaragua from once again falling into the grips of an authoritarian regime.

Freedom will not long endure in the Americas without U.S. leadership, and under the Obama Administration, Central and South America are becoming less free.

We urge you, on behalf of our members, and on behalf of the free peoples of Costa Rica, Columbia, and Honduras, and those who yearn to be free in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Equador, and elsewhere to immediately conduct an in-depth hearing so that Valenzuela can explain in detail the weak appeasement policies of the Obama Administration in Central and South America.

Sincerely,



William Wilson
President
Americans for Limited Government