



The truth about Felix Maradiaga - NSCAG Briefing, November 2018

Felix Maradiaga, a prominent opponent of Nicaragua's Sandinista government, will be speaking at a public meeting in London in December. The meeting is hosted by SOSNicaragua-UK, a group which supports Nicaragua's right wing led opposition and advocates regime change; they describe Maradiaga as a 'renowned scholar and political strategist'.

But who is Maradiaga and who does he represent? Who funds his regular trips between the US and Latin America and to Europe? Research reveals a man with many identities: an elusive right wing libertarian closely associated with the Trump administration; a civil society activist who has created at least five Nicaraguan NGOs funded by the US; and a man subject to an arrest warrant in Nicaragua on charges of training people who then committed criminal acts during the attempted coup.

Maradiaga's obscure politics

On a recent BBC 'Hardtalk' programme, Felix Maradiaga [denied](#) being a politician, claiming to be an academic and an 'average citizen'. This is untrue. After growing up partly in the US and studying at Harvard and Yale, Maradiaga returned to Nicaragua to become Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence in the right-wing government of Enrique Bolaños. He developed strong links with the MRS (Sandinista Renovation Movement), the party which split from the Sandinistas in the 1990s and later formed an alliance with the right-wing PLI. Yet Maradiaga [has also criticised](#) MRS leaders Mónica Baltodano and Dora María Téllez as 'opportunists who have little credibility as alternatives to the Sandinistas'. In the Hardtalk interview he also distanced himself from the Civic Alliance, which comprises the civic society groups on the opposition side in the national dialogue set up in May.

Maradiaga often hides his political views despite numerous connections with right-wing US politicians and organisations. He met with republican senators [Marco Rubio](#) and [Ileana Ros-Lehtinen](#) in May and June this year. He is a [supporter of US economic sanctions](#) championed by Ros-Lehtinen and right-wing senator Bob Menéndez that would cause enormous damage to Nicaragua's economy.

In June, he led a delegation to Washington to denounce the Nicaraguan government before the General Assembly of the Organisation for American States. Then in September, he was [a guest speaker](#) invited by US ambassador Nikki Haley at the UN Security Council, where he also denounced Nicaragua.

Maradiaga's right-wing credentials were recognised in 2015 when he won [Chicago's Gus Hart visiting fellowship](#). Other winners have been Venezuelan right-wing politician Henrique Capriles Radonski and Cuban dissident Yoani Sánchez. In one of his few political writings, Maradiaga compared the politics of both Hugo Chavez and Daniel Ortega with [fascism](#). In 2011, he told a visiting US delegation that 'If Ortega is re-elected, we will not recognise him'.

Maradiaga has been [canvassed as a presidential candidate](#) for the opposition in social networks.

Maradiaga's NGOs

A large number of Nicaraguan NGOs receive US government funding, especially via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), established in 1983 by Ronald Reagan to 'promote democratic ideals in developing countries'. In May this year a NED-funded publication, *Global Americans*, said that NED was [laying the groundwork for insurrection](#) in Nicaragua via the \$4.1 million it has spent on Nicaraguan NGOs. Other funding sources include USAID and the National Democratic Institute.

Maradiaga has created or is prominent in at least five NGOs, often using US funding:

- **Movement for Nicaragua.** In 2016 he was Secretary General of the NGO [Movimiento por Nicaragua](#) (MpN, also known as Fundación Iberoamericana de las Culturas). Over the period 2014-17 it received [six grants](#) totalling \$395,423 from NED to 'promote democracy' and has also received money from USAID. MpN openly supports the violent demonstrations which began in April, even though Maradiaga claims [to come from the non-violent movement](#).
- **IEEPP.** Maradiaga is director of the Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas (IEEPP) which he set up in 2004. IEEPP has received [four grants](#) totalling \$224,161 from NED to 'raise awareness on citizen security'. IEEPP is accused of criminal links (see below).
- **Eduquemos.** Along with other prominent members of the opposition, Maradiaga is a board member of educational NGO [Eduquemos](#). Its director, Ernesto Medina, an opposition supporter, [recently said that](#) being young in Nicaragua is 'a crime'. Eduquemos has USAID funding and works with the neoliberal think tank Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas, which promotes [free-market educational policies](#) in Latin America.
- **Civil Society Leadership Institute.** Maradiaga set this up in 2007; it 'identifies, recruits and trains grassroots democracy activists in Nicaragua' and featured in the 'Viper' trial (see below). It has links to another NGO, FIBRAS, supported by NED and other US sources.
- **Liberation Foundation.** Founded by Maradiaga in 2012, [The Liberty Foundation](#) is part of the [Atlas Network](#) of free market think-tanks in Latin America, sponsored by the Koch brothers.

Criminal links

Maradiaga is subject to an [arrest warrant](#) issued by a Nicaraguan judge on September 24, accusing him of using IEEPP to train people who then committed criminal acts during the attempted coup that began in mid-April.

During the trial in Managua of a criminal known as 'Viper' (Cristian Joshua Mendoza) and others, evidence revealed [collaboration](#) between Maradiaga and Colombian drug trafficker Julio Cesar Paz Varela. This was alleged to have begun in 2011 with [an agreement to set up a drugs network](#) in Managua night clubs and use the income to fund training of young people in preparation for overthrowing the Sandinista government. The NGO 'Fundación Soy Humano' was Paz Varela's cover for money laundering. Paz Varela was assassinated in Colombia in 2014.

Viper [named Maradiaga directly](#) as a supplier of money, arms and ammunition to the opposition. IEEPP was alleged to be the key channel for funds with help from another NGO, Hagamos Democracia, which has received over \$500,000 from NED. Maradiaga [was filmed with](#) armed protesters at the UPOLI (private university), which in April became a centre for armed attacks, robbery and torture. Maradiaga [rejects](#) the accusations.

Maradiaga [describes](#) as 'political prisoners' Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena, who have been charged with murder and other crimes. The charges have been substantiated by numerous witnesses including a police officer kidnapped and tortured in the town of Morito, after four of his colleagues were killed by protesters. In his [Hardtalk interview](#) Maradiaga called the killings 'shameful' and claimed he would not try to defend those involved.

Contact: NSCAG, 86 Durham Road, London N7 7DT
Tel: 020 7561 4836
www.nscag.org