THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES IN NICARAGUA FROM 1912-1933

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Recent United States involvement in the Central American and Caribbean region has focused national attention on the issue of U.S. invervention in foreign countries. In this article Frank C. Pandolfe traces U.S. activities in Nicaragua from 1912-1933. He argues that it is only through an analysis of past United States relations with Nicaragua that we can fully understand present problems between the two countries. Examining both the type and extent of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua in the years between 1912 and 1933, he points out that the internal political situation of both countries affected the U.S. decision to intervene with economic and military aid. Mr. Pandolfe then discusses the impact of United States troops and funds on Nicaraguan political and economic stability, asserting that many of the problems associated with the U.S. presence were the results of conflicting expectations within the United States and Nicaragua. Ultimately, U.S. intentions in Nicaragua were good, the author concludes, but political stability must be the product of Nicaragua, not of foreign intervention.

"Triumph of the Sandinistas" ballyhooed *Time* magazine's lead story of September 4, 1978, describing a highly daring and successful guerilla raid on Nicaragua's National Palace in the capital city of Managua. *Time* wrote:

> The seizure of the palace was only the latest and most dramatic episode in a relentless civil war waged between the oppressive Somoza government — which has usurped the country's riches, denied it political freedom, and brooked few critics — and a mostly unarmed population weary of Somoza family rule.[1]

The new U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua was instructed by the Carter Administration not to present his credentials to President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, but to urge his resignation instead. At least one Amer-

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1. "Triumph of the Sandinistas," *Time*, September 4, 1978, p. 23.

ican Senator openly referred to Somoza as, "the Idi Amin of Latin America."[2] Less than one year after these events, General Somoza and the top military leadership of the National Guard took flight to Miami, abandoning Nicaragua to their ideological opposites, the Sandinistas, and effectively ending nearly seven decades of direct American influence in that nation.

This article will examine the history of United States-Nicaraguan relations between 1912 and 1933 in an effort to understand the seeds of the 1979 revolution. It will attempt to answer three vital questions concerning these two nations: why did the U.S. intervene in Nicaraguan affairs in 1912 and 1927; what was the extent of the U.S. involvement; and, what legacy did the U.S. leave behind in Nicaragua?

It will be seen that U.S. policy towards Nicaragua was but a small part of a greater design aimed at enhancing Western Hemispheric security and social justice by grafting complementary southern counterparts to the North American democratic system onto the nations of Latin America. By pursuing this goal in Nicaragua, the United States accelerated change in an already changing society, and precipitated events unforeseen then and misunderstood today.

I. Background to Intervention

In 1912, Nicaragua was an agrarian society whose political structures were as temporary as its familial and religious institutions were durable. The majority of the population lived on the western seaboard and its adjacent plain, including the twin cities of Granada and León. The eastern coast was but a marshy climb out of the Caribbean Sea while a formidable backbone of mountains separated the eastern and western plains, dividing the nation in two.

Nicaragua was a homogeneous society composed of European and Indian descendants called "mestizajes," thoroughly hispanicized in culture. With a population of 638,000 people occupying 51,000 square miles of land, Nicaragua was the largest and most sparsely populated country in Central America. The western provinces contained seven-eighths of the nation's population and probably an equal share of the national wealth.[3]

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2. "Why the U.S. Switch on Nicaragua?" *U.S. News and World Report*, July 2, 1979, p. 3. and "For U.S., No-Win Situation in Nicaragua?" *U.S. News and World Report*, September 9, 1979, p. 25.
3. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of the Relations from 1909-1932," in *Latin American Series No. 6*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 2.

It was a country whose economic life was based on the land. Its principle exports were lumber, bananas, sugar, and tobacco, which Nicaragua traded for imported wheat and manufactured products. The United States was by far the dominant trading partner, buying 53 percent of all Nicaraguan exports while providing 63 percent of all imports. U.S. investment in Nicaragua was rather limited, however, amounting to less than $15 million worth of wharves and railroads located on the eastern coast. This was the smallest amount of American investment in any of the Central American nations.[4]

Following independence from Spain in 1821, the briefly united Central American Union disintegrated into the separate states of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, with each nation pursuing its own view of the future. The political life of Nicaragua followed the Latin tradition: regional loyalty (localismo) and personal charisma (personalismo) were the prime movers of political fortune. A politically polarized axis ran diagonally from the northwestern Liberal city of León, home of educated and cultured Creoles, approximately seventy miles southeast to highly Conservative Granada, seat of landed aristocrats and cattle ranchers. While ideological differences between these regional parties were few (as both represented but different factions of the same small aristocracy), the political rivalry between these two cities was so intense that a third, neutral site — Managua — was chosen half-way between them to serve as the national capital.

The first thirty-five years of Nicaraguan history consisted of incessant interparty warfare as the Liberals and Conservatives vied for power. Not until the American adventurer William Walker threatened to seize power in 1855 did the two factions unite in a constructive coalition which eventually resulted in thirty-five years of peaceful Conservative rule.

II. The First Intervention: 1909-1925

This situation changed suddenly in 1893 when an internal split in the Conservative party provided its opponents with a chance for a quick, successful revolt, which raised Liberal José Santos Zelaya to the Presidency. Zelaya was liberal in name only, however, and his regime was marked with cruelty, repression, exploitation, and fiscal waste. His desire to unite the nations of Central America under his leadership led him to attempt to undermine neighboring countries, angering both North and South America. By 1909, the Conservative party was in revolt against Zelaya under the leadership of Generals Juan Estrada, Emiliano Chamorro, and Luis Mena.

4. Ibid., p. 4.

The Conservative troops quickly rallied popular support, posing a serious threat to President Zelaya's government. This prompted governmental military action which included the execution of two American soldiers-of-fortune, Lee Roy Cannon and Leonard Groce; deaths which served as the pretext desired by Washington to sever diplomatic relations with the troublesome Zelaya.[5] On December 1, 1909, the Nicaraguan Chargé d'Affairs in Washington was presented with a note that read in part:

> President Zelaya has almost continually kept Central America in tension . . . republican institutions have ceased . . . and public opinion and the press has been throttled. . . . The Government of the United States is convinced that the revolution represents the ideals and the will of a majority of the Nicaraguan people more faithfully than does the Government of President Zelaya. . . . The Government of Nicaragua . . . is hereby notified, as will the leaders of the revolution, that the Government of the United States will hold strictly accountable for the protection of American life and property the factions *de facto* in control of the eastern and western portions of the Republic of Nicaragua.[6]

Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, Liberal troops were prevented from attacking the Conservative army at Bluefields, a city in eastern Nicaragua, by the direct intervention of U.S. naval forces. Bowing to the inevitable, President Zelaya sailed to Mexican exile and on August 21, 1910 General Estrada assumed control of a nation plagued by instability and economic debts.

The government of President Estrada was fully cognizant of the role played by the United States in helping it achieve power, and repeatedly looked to the U.S. for help in dealing with internal affairs. As President Estrada pointed out to the *New York Times* in September 1912: "Without the active help of the United States Government Nicaragua will never thrive . . . . We want the United States Government . . . to keep an eye on us, supervise our elections and, in a word, to become the arbitrator of our destinies."[7]

Estrada ruled a restive Conservative coalition consisting of himself as President, General Chamorro as leader of the Constitutive Assembly, and

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5. Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean 1900-1921*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 176.
6. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of Relations from 1909-1932," p. 8.
7. "Moral Mandate of the United States," *The Outlook*, September 28, 1912, p. 151.

General Mena as Secretary of War. Chamorro was the favorite of the Granadian landed aristocracy, while Mena enjoyed broad public support due to his military victories in the recent Conservative revolution. Sensing the instability of this new government, the State Department dispatched U.S. Minister to Panama Thomas C. Dawson to Nicaragua with instructions to help the Conservatives re-establish constitutional government and rehabilitate Nicaragua's finances. On Oct. 27, 1910, Estrada, Mena, Chamorro, and Diaz signed what have become known as the Dawson Agreements which read, in part, that Nicaragua would hold free elections in 1912 (after President Estrada and Vice-President Diaz had ruled for a two year provisional period), that the U.S. and Nicaragua would form a mixed claims commission to deal with the financial debts owed by Nicaragua to both American and European creditors, and that the U.S. government would float loans to the Nicaraguan government until it regained its financial health.[8]

To follow through with this last provision, U.S. Secretary of State Philander C. Knox signed an agreement with Nicaraguan Minister to the United States Salvador Castrillo, promising the much needed loan, to be secured with Nicaraguan customs collections receipts. Unforeseen at the time was the fact that after lengthy deliberations and three separate votes, the U.S. Senate would refuse to ratify the Knox-Castrillo treaty. The loan would never be completed.

Pressed for immediate funds, however, the Nicaraguan government approved a separate Treasury Bills Agreement with the New York banks Brown Brothers & Company and J. and W. Seligman & Company for the immediate transfer of $1.5 million in capital to Nicaragua in return for two major concessions. First, the bankers in New York would nominate an American to serve as Nicaraguan customs collector, subject to approval of the U.S. Secretary of State and appointed by the President of Nicaragua; and second, a national bank for Nicaragua (Banco Nacional de Nicaragua) would be incorporated in the United States with a 51 percent controlling majority of shares being placed into the hands of the New York bankers themselves.[9] By 1913, the New York financiers would extend their holdings to include the Nicaraguan Pacific Railroad, as well. In this manner fiscal control of the Nicaraguan government shifted into private American hands with the encouragement of the U.S. Department of State, but against the wishes of the U.S. Senate.

8. Isaac Joslin Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States 1909-1927* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1928), pp. 712-713.
9. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of the Relations from 1909-1932," p. 14.

During 1911, Nicaraguan governmental scheming continued its byzantine progression, signaling a breakdown of the political harmony the Dawson agreements had been designed to secure. In April, the National Assembly, led by Emiliano Chamorro and his allies, drafted a new constitution which severely limited presidential power. This prompted President Estrada to dissolve the assembly, apparently with U.S. Minister to Nicaragua Elliot Northcott's support, forcing Chamorro to flee the country temporarily. President Estrada gained little from his maneuvering, however, for General Mena quickly packed the newly elected assembly with his supporters. On May 9, Estrada tried to have General Mena jailed on charges of "contemplating treason," only to be forced to back down and resign when faced with the wrath of both the Nicaraguan army and Minister Northcott. Vice-President Adolfo Díaz was then elevated to the presidency, while General Mena reassumed duties as Minister of War and leader of the National Assembly. General Mena gave Northcott his assurances of support for President Díaz in return for promises of Díaz' support for a Mena candidacy in the next elections.[10]

Mena's power continued to grow by virtue of his controlling the army. He became restless and had his supporters elect him President on October 7, 1911 by the National Assembly, fully 15 months before his term was to start. As leader of the National Assembly, his refusal to support the popular election guarantees of Dawson Agreements (which he had signed) ran counter to the desires of the recently returned Emiliano Chamorro. It soon became apparent that the Assembly was not big enough for two men of such ambition as Chamorro and Mena. Therefore, rallying the army and his Liberal followers to action under his personal standard, General Mena revolted against the Conservative government on July 29, 1912.[11]

Upon the outbreak of the Mena Revolution, the United States Government sent a message to President Díaz demanding that the safety of American lives and property be ensured. The Nicaraguan President responded that such a guarantee was impossible given the limited manpower of his army compared with Mena's, but at the same time inviting the United States to land troops to undertake such a mission themselves.[12]

On August 4, 1912, six days after General Mena revolted, the vanguard of 2,500 U.S. marines and sailors landed in the western coastal city of Corinto, from which they proceeded to secure the Pacific Railway and pressed on to Managua. From the moment they landed, the U.S.

10. Ibid., p. 19.
11. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1912* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 1027.
12. Ibid., p. 1032.

forces actively supported the government of President Díaz under the immediate direction of U.S. Minister to Nicaragua George T. Weitzel, whose bitter dislike of Mena's rebels led him to propose that their leaders be tried and hanged by U.S. forces.[13] The marine's actions included a dramatic attack on Masaya Hill, a fortified height heavily defended by rebel troops. The assault was enthusiastically reported by many U.S. newspapers including the *New York World*, which wrote that the assault was of the tradition shown when, "Mad Anthony Wayne stormed Stony Point and Hooker stormed Lookout Mountain."[14] Leon, the last stronghold of the Liberal rebels, surrendered on October 6 and by October 10, 1912 the revolt was over, having been broken at the price of seven American and "uncounted Nicaraguan" dead.[15]

The American involvement in the revolution of 1912 touched off strong emotions in the United States, ranging from self-congratulatory paternalism to skeptical questioning of U.S. intentions. On August 21, 1912, an angry Senator Bacon of Georgia sponsored Resolution 385 which questioned the legality of putting American troops ashore into a foreign wartime situation without Congressional approval. Especially vexing to Congress was the fact that the marines were in Nicaragua in support of U.S. economic interests — including the protection of a customs collector — in seeming direct disregard of Congressional opposition to the Knox-Castrillo Treaty. He spoke on the floor of the Senate:

> There are today in the interior of Nicaragua 450 of the armed forces of the United States . . . taking part in a battle between the contending armies in that country, going far beyond any possible suggestion that they are there simply upon the proper mission of protecting a consulate or the lives and property of American citizens . . . . This, sir, is war; and, however just a cause, it is for Congress, and for Congress alone, to determine when a cause, whether good or bad, shall determine the United States to go to war on account of it.[16]

Referring to the unratified Knox-Castrillo Treaty he said:

> As this treaty could not be secured through ratification by the Senate, it would appear that the effort is made to accom-

13. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy*, p. 209.
14. "American Blood Spilt in Nicaragua," *The Literary Digest*, October 19, 1912, p. 657.
15. Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States 1909-1927*, p. 718.
16. U.S. Congress, Senate, Senator Bacon speaking for passage of Resolution 385, 62nd Cong., 2nd sess., 21 August 1912, *Congressional Record* 48:11430-11432.

> plish the same thing without any law to authorize it, and that in some way this so-called American collector of Nicaraguan customs has been appointed and is now on duty in Managua and that the armed forces of the United States are there now to support the party in power, which recognizes his authority, and to make war, if necessary, to accomplish it. . . . I should like very much for some Senator to point out conditions in Nicaragua which justify an invasion by some 2,500 or 3,000 of the armed forces of the United States to take part in battles in that country.[17]

So poorly informed was the U.S. Senate on events in Nicaragua that Senator Bacon openly acknowledged that his information was wholly derived from newspapers.[18]

Newspapers and magazines were also divided on the issue. *The Outlook*, a popular magazine of the era, blamed the U.S. Senate for causing the revolution in Nicaragua by not having ratified the Knox-Castrillo Conventions. It wrote,

> the removal of the collecting function from local control would inevitably have also removed a chief incentive to revolution; the cupidity of malcontents is always excited by the material profit to be had by even a very brief control of the customhouses.[19]

The more moderate *Literary Digest* cited the legal precedent of having been invited into the country by President Díaz as sufficient grounds for active U.S. involvement.[20] The *New York Tribune* expressed doubts about U.S. policy, arguing that the U.S. would either have to continually reintervene or,

> . . . having restored peace and order, the United States would have to maintain [troops] there by permanent occupation . . . . If we did this it should soon incur bitter hatred of people who would regard us as oppressors and despots.[21]

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* outdid the other papers with its paternalistic, self-righteous support for the intervention:

17. Ibid., p. 11431.
18. Ibid., p. 11518.
19. "Nicaragua," *The Outlook*, August 17, 1912, p. 845.
20. "Keeping the Peace in Nicaragua," *The Literary Digest*, August 24, 1912, p. 286.
21. Ibid., p. 286.

> It is the way of the world. The United States merely does as other big nations do. . . . Nicaragua is, of course, a chronic trouble maker. It is impossible to impress on the minds of the Nicaraguans the advisability of being peaceful and orderly . . . . No Latin-American country more severely tries the patience of the big Anglo-Saxon guardian. No one of the baby republics so richly merits a spanking on general principles.[22]

The *New York Evening Post* even gave expression to a logic that would later be known as the domino theory by writing, "If the Liberals had won in Nicaragua the revolution would have spread to Honduras, Guatemala, and possibly Salvador. . . ."[23]

The differing domestic opinions apparent in these magazines and newspapers, when viewed together with the Senatorial attacks on the landing of the marines, shows that President Taft and Secretary of State Knox committed U.S. forces to Nicaragua in 1912 in the absence of a national consensus. Commitment of troops was decided, rather, in response to an invitation issued by President Díaz in the interest of protecting American lives and property, preserving Nicaraguan internal peace, and preventing the Liberals from regaining power.

It is interesting to note that reformist ideology was surprisingly absent from the unsuccessful Mena Revolution of 1912. It was not a popular revolt unleashed by many generations of peasant-borne injustices, but an individual power-play relying on the "personalismo" surrounding a popular military hero. Given this narrow base of legitimacy, it is not surprising that the United States was able to crush the uprising with relatively minor military action.

One of the consistent tragedies of Nicaraguan political history is that the people were continually offered unattractive choices between two candidates representing very narrow interests. Only later would the Sandinistas emerge, a group whose allegiance belonged to neither Granada nor León, but purportedly lay in the countryside. Interestingly, Sandino's movement would be born in opposition to the United States' presence in Nicaragua, a presence intended to provide a calming influence for that nation given Nicaragua's inherent political instability.

1912 was to be an election year according to the Dawson agreements. Díaz won the conservative nomination for president after Minister Weitzel persuaded the controversial Emiliano Chamorro not to run. The Liberals, bitter after the defeat of their uprising, decided not to participate at all, and Díaz was popularly reelected by a landslide vote. U.S. forces were

22. Ibid.

23. "American Blood Spilt in Nicaragua," *The Literary Digest*, October 19, 1912, p. 658.

then quietly withdrawn, except for 130 marines who remained stationed in Managua as a Legation Guard — a standing reminder of American interest in Nicaragua.

Unfortunately, the financial situation of Nicaragua continued to deteriorate, and in the years following the U.S. intervention a series of loans were negotiated between Managua and New York which increased Nicaraguan indebtedness and American investment. By 1913, these Nicaraguan debts included $6,200,000 owed to European creditors (known as the Ethelburga bonds), $750,000 owed to Brown Brothers of New York, $1,500,000 to miscellaneous creditors, and approximately $3,000,000 to Nicaraguan nationals filing war claims against the government.[24]

In October 1913, a further $1,000,000 flowed south from New York, but this, too, provided only temporary relief. In February 1914, hoping to offer Nicaragua long term financial stability, newly elected President Woodrow Wilson empowered Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to negotiate a new agreement. The resulting Bryan-Chamorro Treaty stipulated that the United States would receive the right to build a trans-isthmian canal across Nicaragua, which would be guaranteed in perpetuity, as well as a ninety-nine year renewable option to fortify the Corn Islands on the Caribbean coast and permission to build a naval base at Fonseca Bay on the Pacific Ocean. In return, the Nicaraguan government would receive $3,000,000 with which to pay off its most pressing debts.

The treaty eventually submitted to the U.S. Senate also included a sweeping "protection plan" for Nicaragua containing provisions similar to the Platt Amendment governing U.S.-Cuban relations. It stated that Nicaragua could neither declare war without U.S. permission, nor enter into any agreements which would effect its independence or territorial integrity.[25]

The United States Senate approved the entire treaty except for the "protection plan." On August 5, 1914 the treaty was signed by the American Secretary of State and the Nicaraguan Minister to Washington, the seemingly omnipresent Emiliano Chamorro. The money provided to Nicaragua from the treaty saved it from financial collapse and chaos.[26]

As a result of the election of 1916, Chamorro became President of Nicaragua. Originally there had been three candidates for the presidency, General Chamorro and Dr. Carlos Cuadra Pasos both Conservatives, against Dr. Julián Irías, a Liberal. The Liberals might have won the

24. Cox, p. 723.
25. Ibid., p. 724.
26. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy*, p. 400.

election of 1916 but for two events. First, the Conservative Party eventually healed its split resulting in the withdrawal of Dr. Pasos from the race. Second, the Liberals aroused deep suspicions in Washington by nominating Dr. Irías, a close advisor of the still remembered and disfavored former President Zelaya, as their candidate.

It was at the request of the Liberal Party, nonetheless, that the U.S. government offered to supervise the elections; an offer declined by President Díaz. Díaz had also initially opposed Chamorro as a candidate for president, but finally agreed to support his campaign after the U.S. threatened to withdraw the Legation Guard and shut off canal payments promised in the Bryan-Chamorro treaty.[27] The resulting election was a sham as Dr. Irías was not allowed into Nicaragua to campaign. He withdrew his candidacy two weeks before the elections and Emiliano Chamorro, the only candidate left running, was elected President.[28]

Presidents Chamorro and Woodrow Wilson continued the close relationship begun during Chamorro's years in Washington, as both leaders sought peace and solvency for Nicaragua. A far reaching fiscal plan was jointly designed in 1917, detailing a definite Nicaraguan budget which for the first time specified steady payments on all debts. This U.S. supervised reform, coupled with the tremendous upsurge in Nicaraguan raw material sales during the First World War, served to improve the Nicaraguan economy dramatically. By June 30, 1920, Nicaragua paid off the last of the deferred service charges on the bonds of 1909 and the Treasury Bills of 1913.[29] In October 1920, Nicaragua repurchased its Pacific Railroad Company from the New York bankers and contemplated forming a new Atlantic coast railroad.

1920 was once again a Nicarguan election year. Emiliano Chamorro was forbidden by law from succeeding himself, and when he hinted that he might run, the U.S. State Department told him that any deviation from the constitution would be seriously frowned upon. The Conservatives therefore nominated his uncle, Diego Manuel Chamorro. As the Conservatives had now held power since 1912, they had a secure grasp of the national election machinery and felt sure of victory.

The Liberals, however, produced a popular candidate in wealthy coffee planter José Esteban Gonzlez. Pre-election activities grew violent as the race appeared close. The U.S., which was determined that the election of 1920 would be more fairly run than those of 1916, sent Major Jessie I. Miller to Nicaragua to supervise the elections and to enforce the official

27. Ibid., p. 412.
28. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of the Relations from 1909-1932," p. 33.
29. Ibid., p. 38.

American position of non-partisanship. On July 1, 1920 the American Minister to Nicaragua issued a statement declaring, in part,

> The Government of the United States has expressed no opinion with reference to the persons who have been mentioned as candidates for the presidency. Its sole interest is that the forthcoming election be characterized by the utmost fairness and freedom; that an accurate count of the votes cast be made, and that the candidate receiving the largest number of popular votes be declared the president of Nicaragua.[30]

The resulting election confirmed victory for the Conservatives but engendered widespread misgivings about alleged vote manipulation and voter registration fraud. Major Miller discovered considerable fraud and recommended to Washington that reforms be made in Nicaragua's election laws. As a result, in June 1920 an American electoral expert, Dr. Harold Dodds, was dispatched to Managua. By the end of the summer, Dr. Dodds had thoroughly studied the situation and prescribed an improved electoral system which was adopted by the Nicaraguan government on March 16, 1923.[31]

The administration of Diego Chamorro proved uneventful as the Nicaraguan government remained essentially unchanged. The fiscal picture continued to improve, and in 1924 the government repurchased controlling shares in its National Bank.[32] On October 12, 1923, President Chamorro died suddenly while still in office, and the presidency was assumed by Vice-President Bartolomé Martínez, a Conservative though not a member of the Chamorro family.

The election of 1924 proved pivotal as it was the first time since 1916 that the familial power of the Chamorro clan had been challenged. The Conservative Party was split into two camps. Since Martínez could not legally succeed himself, his supporters endorsed a candidate named Carlos Solórzano, while the remaining Conservatives supported Emiliano Chamorro.

The Liberals were also divided. The new Liberal Nationalist Party supported Dr. Juan B. Sacasa while the Liberal Republicans nominated a relatively unknown leader named Luis Corea. Eventually, an alliance between the Martínez Conservatives and the Liberal Nationalists reduced the field by producing a mixed Conservative/Liberal ticket with Solórzano for President and Sacasa for Vice-President.

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30. Ibid., p. 40.
31. Ibid., p. 43.
32. Ibid., p. 46.

The 1924 election was the first election to be held under the newly adopted Dodd election laws, and the United States strongly desired a fair election which would demonstrate Nicaraguan political maturity and stability. Such an election would allow the State Department to withdraw the remaining marines from Nicaragua by the summer of 1925, as planned. Also, a legally elected regime would allow the United States to recognize the incoming administration in accordance with the Washington Treaty of 1923, under which the nations of Central America had pledged not to recognize any government coming to power by unlawful means.

On June 13, 1924, in response to a message from President Martínez requesting an American blessing for the coalition ticket, the United States Charge d'Affairs answered,

> In reply I am instructed by my Government to state that it has no preferences whatever regarding candidates for the high office of President of Nicaragua. My government supports no candidate and is hostile to no candidate; it desires only that free and fair elections may be held in order that the will of the people may be expressed without hindrance at the polls.[33]

The U.S. did have three observers at the election of 1924; Dr. Dodd and two civilian officials were present to report on the effectiveness of the election reforms of 1923. One week before the elections, President Martínez requested that Washington deploy marines throughout Nicaragua in order to police the voting, but the State Department ruled that this request was both impossible and undesirable at that late date. The election of 1924 was to be a strictly Nicaraguan affair.[34]

The voting proceeded smoothly, and when the ballots were tallied the coalition candidate had won. On January 1, 1925, President Solórzano and Vice-President Sacasa were sworn into office. On August 4, 1925 the U.S. marines were withdrawn from Nicaragua ending thirteen years of American military presence. Three months later, General Emiliano Chamorro, who had been rejected at the polls, was waging an open revolt.

III. The Second Intervention: 1927-1933

At first, the coalition ticket of President Solórzano seemed an ideal way in which to heal wounds long present in Nicaraguan politics. Cha-

33. Ibid., p. 51.
34. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy*, p. 177.

morro grew restive, however, and his adherents openly began to disrupt the Congress and the Cabinet. On October 25, 1925 the Conservatives staged a revolt, capturing the fortress of La Loma overlooking Managua and wresting power from President Solórzano. Chamorro promulgated a series of measures he wanted to see enacted, including provisions that only Conservatives be members of the Cabinet, that he be named as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and that the Government pay him $10,000 for personal expenses incurred during the uprising.[35] Chamorro then had the Congress purged of all Liberals. On January 13, 1926, by congressional vote, Chamorro was elected president.

The United States, in accordance with the Washington Treaty of 1923, refused to recognize the Chamorro government. Vice-President Sacasa, meanwhile, took refuge in Mexico in hopes of gathering support for a return to power. In August 1926, with Mexican logistical and moral support, Liberal forces started fighting on the eastern coast, birthplace of Nicaraguan revolutions. Led by the skillful General José María Moncada, the Liberals enjoyed military successes throughout Nicaragua causing great damage to both Nicaraguan and foreign private property.

At this time, however, the United States viewed Mexico with suspicion because of its intensely nationalistic oil and land legislation, as well as feared Bolshevik ties with Soviet Russia. Largely due to this American fear of the Mexican Bolshevik threat, the U.S. position began to shift from neutrality towards helping retain the Conservative government in power.[36]

On October 16, American officials succeeded in talking both Liberals and Conservatives into a conference on board the cruiser *U.S.S. Denver*, then anchored in Corinto harbor. Though no decision was reached as to who would become President, Conservative leaders did decide that the ousted Liberals would be reseated in Congress and that Congress would then elect a new president. This was done because the Conservative leaders correctly believed that the replacement of Chamorro as president would increase their chances of securing active American military support against the rebels. Conservative Adolfo Díaz thus reassumed the duties of President of Nicaragua with Congressional blessing, which led to U.S. recognition of the Nicaraguan government on November 17, 1926. Emiliano Chamorro was then relieved as Commander-in-Chief of the army and left Nicaragua on December 20, 1926 to take up the duties of Minister to Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, and the Vatican.

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35. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of Relations 1909-1932," p. 56.
36. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy*, p. 205.

On December 15, 1926, faced with an expanding revolution, President Díaz asked for U.S. military help in quelling the uprising, raising the spectre of a possible governmental collapse unless it was forthcoming.[37] The U.S. government responded and by March 5, 1927 over 2,000 U.S. marines and sailors were once again patrolling the cities of Nicaragua. Though they officially took no sides, their very presence shored up the government of President Díaz.

President Coolidge watched the disintegration of Nicaragua with uneasiness, pondering the same issues of hemispheric security and peace which tempted his predecessors to intervene in 1912. In order to gain a clearer picture of events in Nicaragua, he dispatched fellow Republican and former Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to Managua. His orders were to investigate and report and, should he find a chance to settle the matter, to do so.[38]

Upon arrival in Nicaragua on April 17, 1927, Stimson found a ravaged country in a state of war. Fields were unsowed, cities had been burned, and the populace was armed.[39] He immediately conferred with Admiral Latimer, commander of the American naval forces off Nicaragua, as well as with United States Minister to Nicaragua Charles Ederhardt. He then met with Conservative and Liberal leaders and found that both welcomed American help in attempting to end the bloody stalemate then existing.[40]

On April 22, President Díaz proposed a peace plan (which he and Mr. Stimson had devised) to the Liberals. It provided for:

> 1) An immediate general peace and delivery of arms simultaneously by both parties into American custody;
>
> 2) General amnesty and the return of exiles and the return of confiscated property;
>
> 3) Participation in the Díaz cabinet by representative Liberals;
>
> 4) The organization of a Nicaraguan constabulary on a non-partisan basis, to be commanded by American officers;
>
> 5) Supervision of 1928 and subsequent elections by Americans who would have ample police power to make effective such supervision; and

37. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1926*, p. 811.
38. Henry L. Stimson, *American Policy in Nicaragua* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 62.
39. Ibid., p. 46.
40. Dana G. Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republics 1921-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 224.

6) A temporary continuance of a sufficient force of American marines to secure the enforcement of the peace terms.[41]

Stimson acted as an intermediary between the Conservatives of President Díaz and the Liberal General Moncada, who represented Sacasa, by carrying the peace proposal to the Liberal's camp for discussion, and back to Managua for review. Meeting with Moncada on May 4 and 11, 1927, Stimson was able to convince the General that the Americans would carefully supervise the upcoming elections, thereby allowing the Liberals a chance at regaining power legally.

The proposal was accepted and on May 12, 1927 disarmament began throughout Nicaragua with the government paying individuals $10 for each weapon turned in. In total, 11,600 rifles, 303 machine guns, and 5.5 million rounds of ammunition were turned in to the American forces.[42]

Just over one year later, the election of 1928 proved to be the fairest election yet held in Nicaragua. Coordinated by a new National Board of Elections composed of two Nicaraguans and one American and supervised by the United States Marine Corps., the voting proceeded quietly and orderly.

The Liberal Party ran General Moncada as its candidate, capitalizing on his extensive wartime fame. The Conservatives nominated Adolfo Bernard, a Chamorro partisan. The final count showed that Moncada had won by a 20,000 vote margin. The Liberals celebrated their return to power by appointing Dr. Sacasa to the highly prized post of Minister to Washington as a show of gratitude to the man who had led the Liberal revolution, and as a reaffirmation of the Liberals' intentions to preserve Nicaraguan ties to the United States.[43]

One faction of Moncada's Liberal army had refused to lay down its arms, however. General Augusto César Sandino refused to sign the document of peace and vowed to continue the Liberals' battle against the Conservative regime even if that regime had seduced General Moncada into a coalition.

Sandino had been born in coffee-growing hills south of Managua in 1895.[44] It was a middle class area only a few miles from the house where Anastasio Somoza was born that very same year. He had traveled as a youth in Mexico, where he witnessed the unrest of revolution and felt

41. Stimson, p. 63.
42. Ibid., p. 84.
43. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of the Relations from 1909-1932," pp. 90-92.
44. Bernard Diederich, *Somoza — And the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America* (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1981), p. 15.

the stirrings of nationalism. Emerging a complex, strong willed man, Sandino combined talents for leadership with an unmatched ability to wage guerrilla warfare; pillage and nationalism seemed to coexist in one soul.

Sandino had fought well as Moncada's lieutenant, but he viewed the Stimson peace initiatives as the codification of an American presence in Nicaragua, and refused to accept those terms. With a band of two hundred men, he headed north into the inaccessible hills of the northern Nicaraguan province of Nueva Segovia, where he gained dozens of local followers. In June 1927, he kidnapped the European managers of several commercial firms and held them for ransom. Following that small success, he decided on greater undertakings.

On July 16, 1927 Sandino threw his small army against the U.S. Marine detachment guarding the town of Ocotal. In a battle which raged from 1:15 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., he suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the seasoned American professionals. Sandino again retreated into the mountains to begin a long, bloody guerrilla war.

Upon hearing of the battle, Stimson wrote:

> On July 16 Sandino's force, augmented by other lawless individuals who had drifted in the interval to him, attacked a much smaller group of marines and constabulary at Ocotal, . . . and were repulsed with severe losses. Later cable dispatches from our minister indicate that Sandino's following has now practically dispersed.[45]

Sandino was far from through, though, regardless of what Stimson may have thought.

Once again fading back to the densely-overgrown hills, Sandino shifted to the now familiar hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare which would make him the nemesis of American pacification efforts and create a Latin American legend. Combining cruelty with insight, Sandino ruthlessly carved out an area of northern Nicaragua in which only his supporters survived. His continual raids — darting out of the north just long enough to inflict damage before slipping away — subjected the administration in Managua to unceasing psychological stress.

President Coolidge grew so frustrated over these attacks that he ordered 6,000 Marines into Nicaragua with orders to "get Sandino dead or alive."[46] The patrols the marines endured during the next six years while searching for Sandino are still recounted in yellowing letters in Marine

45. Stimson, p. 85-86.
46. Diederich, p. 16.

archives. They tell of months of rain, cold, fatigue, and disease. The Marines chased Sandino across the most remote parts of northern Nicaragua, but never caught him. In early 1928, Sandino's men raided Matagalpa province, killing and looting with abandon. The depression of 1929 helped him further as it heightened labor unrest in Nicaragua and swelled his ranks, spurring spring raids on the east coast city of Cabo Gracias a Dios and the western city of Chinandega.[47] He was nearly killed when U.S. planes spotted his fortified hilltop hideout called El Chipote. As U.S. forces advanced to attack, however, they were ambushed and suffered five dead and twenty-three wounded. They pressed on with the assault and captured the summit only to find that Sandino and his men had slipped away once more.

It appears that despite his fame, Sandino often relied on fear to ensure a following. His bloody methods of securing areas were highlighted by painful, drawn-out tortues of suspected government sympathizers. So sadistic were his cruelties that as late as the 1960's, when the vanguard of the left-wing movement which bore Sandino's name first appeared in the countryside of Nicaragua, peasants still recoiled in horror from the stories that were associated with the long dead Sandino. In contrast, the populace generally seemed to like the American marines, whose conduct was closely watched by their superior officers concerned with ensuring public support and goodwill. Often, the locals would ask the Americans to mediate in their personal disputes, a small-scale reflection of the Nicaraguan tendency to turn to foreign mediation in internal differences.[48]

In the United States, however, public opinion was turning against the U.S. presence in Nicaragua. In the years that elapsed between the initial U.S. involvement in Nicaragua in 1912 and the final pullout in 1933, vast social changes had taken place throughout the world as socialism had swept across the ranks of the international intelligentsia, and communism had triumphed in Russia. The U.S. had been stung by the failure of Pershing's expedition into Mexico, and still remembered the unexpected bravery of the Filipino named Aguinaldo. Most importantly, the slaughter of World War I had stripped martial exploits of their former glory. Old international lions had been transformed into lambs.

These attitudes were reflected in American writings toward involvement in Nicaragua. Gone was the arrogant tone of the 1912 popular press, replaced with more cautious words born of painful experience

47. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and Nicaragua — A Survey of the Relations from 1909-1932," p. 104.

48. William Kamman, *A Search for Stability: United States Diplomacy Towards Nicaragua 1925-1933* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 139.

accumulated in Latin America and elsewhere. On July 16, 1926 *The Nation* wrote,

> What are we up to in Nicaragua now? . . . When we are not interfering for the selfish advantage of big business, we seem destined to be meddling for what defenders of such a policy would doubtless call 'Nicaragua's own good.' We are playing either the big bully or the big brother. And a policy which allows us to play the big brother allows us also to play the big bully.[49]

More and more frequently in the years 1912-1933, American newspaper and magazine editorials ended with question marks.

The return of the U.S. Marines to Nicaragua after a respite of fourteen months left the people of United States confused over the government's long range plans for that distant land. The *Baltimore Sun* described the Chamorro government which emerged from the coup of 1926 as "thoroughly illegal and without foreign recognition." The *Pittsburgh Sun*, on the other hand, wrote that the U.S. should be involved in Nicaragua due to the fact that the government had "purchased the right to build an interoceanic canal across that country."[50] The *Des Moines Register* wrote simply, "A plague on the whole matter and especially on our interference in South American troubles."[51]

As the Conservative-Liberal civil war of 1927 heated up and more U.S. Marines were deployed, popular concern grew. On March 18, 1927 *Outlook* magazine wrote that the United States was honor bound to help out its sister republic to the south, but that such help should be done with as little interference as possible. *Outlook* wrote,

> We should discharge our obligation to Nicaragua by giving her an assured control of her own affairs so long as international interests are not endangered. That will be the measure now, not only of our realization of our responsibilities, but also of our sense of their serious bearing on our relations with all South America.[52]

The government of Nicaragua wanted U.S. help, however. Very little of the popular view portraying Uncle Sam as intruding into Nicaraguan affairs without invitation was to be found in Managua. General Moncada,

49. "Big Brother or Big Bully," *The Outlook*, July 14, 1926, p. 25.
50. "Marines Return to Nicaragua," *The Literary Digest*, September 18, 1926, p. 13.
51. Ibid., p. 14.
52. "Uncle Sam in Central America," *The Outlook*, May 18, 1927, p. 76.

visiting the United States after his military and diplomatic victories of 1927 said,

> We Liberals want the United States marines in Nicaragua. We believe that the marine officers such as now command our constabulary can best supervise free elections necessary to put a representative government in office. Further, we believe that the United States owes it to Nicaragua to keep her marines there until such elections have taken place. It is her duty and obligation.

He continued,

> Opinion, I am told, is divided in the United States as to the policy that has been followed by the Department of State. We Nicaraguans think that we have acquired an explicit right, and that the United States has bound itself to an explicit duty [to remain in Nicaragua.][53]

Still, public opinion wavered as the war against Sandino caused increasing American casualties. The press alternately described Sandino as bandit and patriot. In one popular story, the evil Moncada attempted to bribe Sandino from his cause by offering the rebel a frightened, young virgin for his pleasure. Replied Sandino, "This girl is the embodiment of Nicaragua. She shall not be yours, or any man's, to violate or give away." He then "put the girl on his horse and rode off into the darkness," eventually depositing her in a nunnery where she took the name Sister Maria Augusta.[54]

Other reports described an elusive young bandit who had "earned the wholesome respect of the men who were trying to capture him." He had, they wrote, "unusual powers over the illiterate Nicaraguans."[55] Sandino supposedly ran an extensive intelligence network in which everybody was his friend, and any movement of the enemy was immediately reported to him.[56]

As the Great Depression swelled the socialist, communist, and labor movements of North America, the international language of economic determinism crept into the popular press. *The Nation* wrote,

> Colonel Stimson's 'peace plan,' forced on Nicaragua last spring was one of the most sordid maneuvers in the history of im-

53. "Nicaragua and American Intervention," *The Outlook*, December 14, 1927, p. 460.
54. "Sandino of Nicaragua," *The Literary Digest*, February 4, 1928, p. 42.
55. Ibid., p. 43.
56. Ibid., p. 48.

> perialism. Stimson went to the opposition leaders, and told them that if they continued to fight the whole force of the United States would be employed against them, but that, if they would surrender their arms, they would be paid in gold dollars for their guns and ammunition. Craven Moncada, the Liberal leader who is now defending American policy, accepted the bribe. The 'bandit' Sandino patriotically refused it, and faced death to defy the dollars and bullets of the Yankee colossus.[57]

The glorification of Sandino grew as he continued to frustrate the marines sent against him. The press' reaction to his keeping his word by reaching a peace settlement with the Nicaraguan President after the withdrawal of the U.S. marines in 1933, was positively euphoric. "Viva Sandino, patriot and victor!," trumpeted the *Louisville Times* while the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that Sandino sent his condolences to the families of all those marines who had lost their lives fighting his forces.[58]

An article appearing in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1933 observed that Sandino must have been surprised by the encouragement given him by the press. It seemed that everyone from Latin American anti-U.S. propagandists to American anti-imperialists had taken the Nicaraguan rebel to heart.[59] Only the *Boston Evening Transcript* muttered a discordant note when it reported, "We would give all due credit to Sandino for his patriotic gesture [in fighting], but we would not forget that except for his operations, the Marines would have been withdrawn from Nicaragua some years before they were."[60]

In response to the protracted war which existed in Nicaragua from 1927-1933 against Sandino, the governments of the United States and Nicaragua proceeded to implement the forth point of the Stimson peace of 1927, which provided for the organization and training of a nonpolitical constabulary officered by United States Marines. The *Guardia Nacional* was envisioned as a vital element in a two-tiered American plan to stabilize Nicaragua which provided for fiscal reform leading to economic prosperity, and non-partisan municipal law leading to internal peace.

The establishment of the Guard was first attempted in 1925 when President Solórzano invited U.S. Major Calvin Brook (C.B.) Carter to

57. "What They Die For," *Nation*, January 25, 1928, p. 86.
58. "Sandino Calls Off His Gadfly War," *The Literary Digest*, February 18, 1933, p. 8.
59. Dana G. Munro, "The Establishment of Peace in Nicaragua," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1933, p. 699.
60. "Sandino Calls Off His Gadfly War," p. 8.

Nicaragua to train and lead a force of four hundred Nicaraguan guardsmen. Training had progressed fairly well, though by 1927, the Guard had been decimated by the fighting of 1926 and 1927. Following the Conservative victory of 1927, this Guard was officially disbanded as part of the formation of the new national guard, one which would be officered by Americans.

Shortly after the Díaz government was reinstated in 1927, the U.S. and Nicaraguan governments signed an agreement establishing a new *Guardia Nacional* as the "sole military and police force of the republic, clothed with full power to preserve domestic peace and the security of individual rights."[61] It was to consist of 93 officers and 1136 enlisted men with an annual budget of $689,132.[62]

The State Department had been careful to ensure that effective control of the Guard would be in American hands as long as the U.S. remained in Nicaragua. Though the President of Nicaragua was the Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard, all other functions remained in American hands. These included recruitment, training, promotions, examinations, disbursing, provisioning, operations, and discipline.[63] All court martials were to be conducted by American officers, and no government official (except the president) had authority over the Guard.

Given the short duration of the American experiment in creating this armed force, from 1927-1933, it was, in many ways, a crash course. The first officers training school was not even opened until 1930, and by 1933 there were barely enough newly commissioned second lieutenants to staff the Guard.[64] The officers were considered reliable by their American supervisors; they had been thoroughly trained by U.S. professionals and drilled in the philosophy, "Friendliness and justice promote security, friendship and favoritism promote insecurity."[65] Above all, they had been instructed to remain above the political fray.

The Guard quickly expanded beyond its original size as the Sandino campaigns grew larger. By October 1, 1930 they reached a high-water mark of 2,250 men, an increase of 85 percent over the basic force of 1927. The depression forced a cutback of five-hundred men, however, which Washington approved as long as the full seventy-two officers and one-thousand enlisted men assigned to the troubled Neuva Segovia province remained untouched.[66]

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61. Marvin Goldwert, *The Constabulary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962), p. 32-33.
62. Ibid., p. 33.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 38.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 35.

The Guard certainly didn't lack recruits. Paid twelve dollars a month, the average guardsman earned one-third more than the common Nicaraguan laborer. He also received medical benefits, housing, a balanced diet, and a rudimentary education. It was a hard life, but Nicaragua was a hard country. Many volunteered.

As U.S. public opinion turned against active American involvement in the fighting taking place in northern Nicaragua, the marines began to turn over their leadership positions to Nicaraguans. In November 1928 there had been 5,480 marines in Nicaragua, by January 1930 that number was down to 1,844, and by January 1933 only 797 remained to ship out.[67]

Leadership of the Guard had been entrusted to General Anastasio Somoza. Born of humble parents, he had nonetheless married into the prominent Debayle family of Managua. He was politically experienced, having served as President Moncada's personal aide, as well as Henry Stimson's translator, and he enjoyed great popularity with the Americans because of his excellent command of English and his administrative control over deciding which of the U.S. officers posted in Nicaragua would receive the impressive gold and silver medals that the Nicaraguan government gave its friends.[68]

The presidential elections of 1932 had gone well, with the Liberal Dr. Juan B. Sacasa finally attaining the coveted office which he had sought for so long. On January 1, 1933 Sacasa was sworn into office as the Guard kept a watchful eye over the nation, Sandino prepared to agree to a peace, and the last American marines sailed from Nicaragua.

Ideally, the story of American involvement in Nicaragua would end here, with a functioning democracy promoting a bright future for that troubled state, as well as a solid foreign policy success for the United States after having invested so many lives and dollars. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

After almost a year of negotiations with Sacasa, Sandino entered into a peace agreement with the government of Nicaragua — only to be murdered by Somoza's men that very night. Three years later on May 31, 1936, Somoza seized power ushering in the most stable, and most repressive, regime in Nicaraguan history and setting the stage for present day Nicaraguan unrest.

IV. Interconnection Between Past and Present

As Nicaragua enters into a new epoch in its national development, it is time to reflect upon the lessons which can be learned by studying the

67. Ibid., p. 39.
68. Diederich, p. 13.

extent and effects of American involvement in that nation. The years of anarchy which lay between independence from Spain in 1821 and the ascension of Somoza to power in 1936 were times of active American interference in Nicaraguan affairs. American involvement during the era of stability and increasing repression under the Somoza family dynasty, however, was limited to passive American support (exemplified by military training and economic aid), and a absence of serious American pressure towards political reform. Today, faced with Marxist-Leninist Sandinistas in Managua, the U.S. has adopted a strategy of proxy interventionism, more subtle than the marching marines of 1912 and 1927, yet definitely aimed at challenging the regime in power.

The reasons for continued American interference in Nicaragua are not easily categorized. Neither the altruistic idealism put forth by the U.S. government, nor the writing of those who blame American intervention on sinister imperialism are totally true. In fact, it is fundamentally misleading to personify nations as entities possessing absolute coordination, consensus, or morals when actually dealing with the effects of decisions made by individual decision makers.

In the year 1912, these decision-makers, both American and Nicaraguan, were products of an imperialistic age. National leaders throughout Europe and North America assumed it was not only a right, but a duty, to guide "less civilized" states towards pluralistic democracy and industrial modernization. International law reflected this attitude as a valid interpretation of reality. While never expressly approving the use of force by larger powers to acquire political control of smaller countries, neither did it prohibit such actions. As of 1912, intervention was a widely accepted mode of international behavior so common that it remained largely unquestioned both morally and legally.[69]

Indeed, as we have seen, the only legal questions raised concerning the involvement of the United States in Nicaraguan affairs was a senatorial investigation carried out within the framework of U.S. domestic law. In that age of social darwinism it was assumed that American intentions, rather than Nicaraguan rights, were the issues to be questioned.

The fact that neither international condemnation nor international law stood in the way of American involvement in internal Nicaraguan affairs still does not explain why the U.S. chose to intervene. It is unlikely that U.S. military intervention was aimed at protecting American investments in Nicaragua, for as late as 1928 the U.S. had less than $17,000,000 invested in Nicaragua, less than any country in Latin America with the

69. L. Oppenheim. *International Law: A Treatise*, ed. by H. Lauterpacht (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 178.

possible exception of Paraguay.[70] Nor is it likely that special interest groups representing that $17,000,000 had such leverage as to force full military intervention. Political scientists John Spanier, Eric Uslaner, and Lester Milbrath have all investigated domestic inputs into U.S. foreign policy, and concluded that special interest groups have surprisingly little effect in presidential decision making.[71] Special interest groups, furthermore, tend to lobby Congress for enactment of their desired policies: judging from the statements of Senator Bacon of Georgia in regard to his reliance on newspapers for information, it may be safely concluded that Congress was not a key player in the formulation of American policy towards Nicaragua.

The threat of imminent European interference did not prompt American intervention either. Though it is true that Nicaragua owed a considerable sum of money to the European Ethelburga Syndicate due to bonds sold in 1909, and that the Royal Navy cruiser *Columbo* was dispatched to Nicaraguan waters for several days in February 1927 in response to civil unrest, it cannot be seriously argued that the U.S. acted as it did in Nicaragua under the threat of probable European intervention.[72]

The protection of American lives and property, including the right to build a trans-isthmian canal as guaranteed in the Bryan-Chamorro treaty of 1916, is another reason frequently cited for U.S. actions. There is some validity to this argument. Speaking before Congress on January 12, 1927, Secretary of State Kellog justified U.S. intervention by citing the protection of American rights to build the canal, which he believed would be constructed in just a few years.[73] In fact, the Army Corps of Engineers recommended against such construction several years later. Reduced traffic through the Panama Canal due to the Great Depression, and the security problems inherent in defending a second canal, made such a project unjustifiable.[74]

The key to American behavior in Nicaragua can be better seen by examining issues of larger focus. In a world of secure, prosperous nations pleased with the status quo and underdeveloped nations restive in their poverty, friction was inevitable. By 1912, The United States found itself squarely on the side of the status quo nations. As Secretary of State Knox said in 1911, "We are in the eyes of the world, and because of the

70. Kamman, p. 224.
71. Lester W. Milbrath, "Interest Groups and Foreign Policy," in *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 250.
72. Kamman, p. 93.
73. Ibid., p. 79.
74. Ibid., p. 228.

Monroe Doctrine, held responsible for the order of Central America."[75] Although U.S. leaders truly desired social progress for Nicaragua, they were convinced that such progress was impossible as long as warfare raged unchecked. Peace and stability became the highest priorities of the U.S. foreign policy for Latin America.

Violence in Nicaragua disturbed American leaders profoundly, for such violence once unleashed could destroy the fragile peace which covered the latent heat of Latin America politics, crippling the social and economic progress which the United States hoped to foster via the export of the North American democratic process and economic investments. The Mexican Revolution had already sent shudders of anarchy (and possible Bolshevik activity) northward from Central America towards Washington D.C., and the U.S. government was deeply concerned about this possible threat to its security. Stability, therefore, had become an end in itself — though largely unrecognized as such — and herein lies the key to understanding U.S. actions in Nicaragua in both 1912 and 1927.

An examination of the extent of American intervention into Nicaraguan political affairs reveals that U.S. efforts to promote reform were largely confined to the upper levels of the government. Unlike modern revolutionary doctrine, the United States did not attempt to reorganize an entire society, affecting education, religion, and the economy. U.S. pressures were largely directed at a few prominent individuals: Díaz, Chamorro, Mena, Estrada, Somoza, Sandino. It was, in fact, an attempt at national change from the "top down" as opposed to a sweeping program of social reform. American leaders were convinced that if they could export the same democratic process which allowed dozens of competing groups to coexist in the United States in peace and prosperity, then the changes needed in Nicaraguan society could be worked out over time by the national government without American interference.

U.S. involvement in military affairs was far greater, however. Starting with the American prevention of the Liberal attack on Bluefields in 1910, U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan military matters was all pervasive. It continued with the symbolic presence of the Legation Guard and was strongly reasserted in the intervention of 1927, highlighted by the national disarmament which followed Stimson's peace initiatives. The United States also insisted on the creation of a single armed force to replace all police and army units, a force which eventually became the vehicle of repression.

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75. Quoted in Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1983), p. 48.

American involvement on Nicaraguan finances was also extensive. Commencing with the Treasury Bills Agreement of 1912, and progressing through the purchase of the National Bank and railroad, private bankers in the U.S. played a great part in early Nicaraguan economic development. Later, the U.S. government took over this role as a provider of economic assistance and training. The extent of success achieved in the economic development of Nicaragua was exemplified by the fact that by the mid-1970's, Nicaragua was enjoying a growth rate of 5 percent per year, and being promoted as an example of economic growth for the Third World.[76]

The legacy of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua is harder to ascertain. The United States attempted to promote political change which would lead to social and economic development, democracy, and non-partisan law enforcement. Unfortunately, it also fostered a political dependency which lasted long after 1933. Years after the last U.S. marines left Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan president was known to look to the American Minister in Managua for a blessing of action.[77] Furthermore, by setting itself up as an arbitrator of peace between warring factions the United States may have forestalled the very social changes it hoped to see accomplished. In many societies (including the U.S.), violence has been a vehicle of change, as groups with conflicting ideals have fought for supremacy. A rigid insistence on Nicaraguan political stability, therefore, may have frozen apart two warring factions to neither's satisfaction, simply forestalling violence until a later date.

Finally, the United States tragically misunderstood the nature of the problem it was attempting to solve. U.S. officials failed to see that the violence resulting from the Conservative/Liberal rivalry was not a conflict of opposing political ideologies but of opportunism, and as such it could not be eradicated simply by disarming the populace and depositing all weapons in the hands of a constabulary. For if the Nicaraguan view of popular participation in government was opportunistic, then the creation of such a force simply provided a different context in which that opportunism would flourish under the control of new leaders.[78] Unfortunately, it was only seen later that to the average Nicaraguan the prestige of the U.S. was so intertwined with the Nicaraguan National Guard that whoever controlled it would appear to be draped in a mantle of American approval.

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76. Belden Bell, *Nicaragua — An Ally Under Siege* (Washington D.C.: Council on American Affairs, 1978), p. 112.
77. Goldwert, p. 44-46.
78. Ibid., p. 67.

The United States did not place Somoza in power, however. When U.S. forces shipped out of Nicaragua in January 1933, they left behind a popularly elected Liberal government entrusted to support the democratic process. General Somoza seized power several years later in an internal Nicaraguan coup in which the United States' only role was that of deferring yet another invitation by Nicaraguan governmental leaders to intervene as a guardian of the peace.

The United States failed in many ways. Its leaders underestimated the complexity and difficulty inherent in attempting to promote fundamental change in another country. They also relied too heavily on military force when faced with largely political problems. And given the vast reservoir of U.S. money, population, and influence never utilized, it is apparent that the American effort in Nicaragua was a minor, passing matter even then eclipsed by greater events on the world stage.

Nicaragua failed in greater ways, however, for ultimately American intentions in that nation were honorable, and the Nicaraguan elite failed to take advantage of them. Nicaragua's leaders failed to create a peaceful society between 1821 and 1912. Instead they warred not only between themselves, but also upon other nations in Central America, and in doing so they threatened United States interest in Central American peace. They also failed to embrace the democratic ideals the U.S. attempted to instill into the Nicaraguan political system. Not once did a statesman of such stature appear who could command both Conservative and Liberal respect while furthering the democratic process. Instead, short-sighted political partisans squandered their nation's future in pursuit of personal gain. Even the fruits of the impressive economic growth under Somoza were restricted to the few wealthy families which had for so long dictated the destiny of Nicaragua.

Should the U.S. have "left Nicaragua alone?" Robert White, former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador observed recently that national power is not like a "light switch that you can turn on or off at will."[79] Rather, large nations like the U.S. will affect smaller nations like Nicaragua both by action and inaction. Often, purely internal American decisions will have serious repercussions in foreign lands. It was, and is, simply impossible for the United States to have no effect whatsoever on Central American nations. Therefore, the final question remains: How will the past affect future Nicaraguan-American relations?

Today, Nicaragua is a troubled Marxist-Leninist state reliant on Cuban teachers and Soviet weapons. If the Nicaraguan revolution proceeds along

79. Lecture by Former Ambassador Robert White at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, October 1984.

the same course followed by other nations after communist triumph, several results are probable. First, the poor of Nicaragua can expect to share in the national wealth for the first time. Illiteracy will be largely eradicated, and health care will improve (at least for the very poor). The price of these gains will be complete government control over public speech and press, and a totalitarian control over individual liberties. The national population can also look forward to sharing in an economic system so inefficient as to guarantee everyone an equal share in poverty. Human rights will not improve.

A scapegoat will be needed by the government to explain these societal ills, and the ghost of U.S. involvement in Nicaraguan affairs will prove well suited for that task. For in the popular press of Sandinista creation, America stands guilty of economic exploitation and imperialism so grave as to have caused all of Nicaragua's historical and present problems. This, they say, will not be forgotten.[80]

The truth is far more complex, and far less satisfying for the current government of Nicaragua. The United States government acted as it did in Nicaragua between the years 1912 and 1933 largely in response to the threat posed by Nicaraguan violence to regional stability. It should be seen, therefore, that the ultimate cause of Nicaragua's historical problems — and the future of Nicaragua as a nation — lies within Nicaragua itself. Not until the leaders of Nicaragua admit this to themselves and to their countrymen will peace come to that war-weary nation.

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80. Tomas Borge, Carlos Fonseca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock, *Sandinistas Speak* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982), p. 26-29.