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The middle men : the American Foreign Service and the dictators of Central America, 1930-1952

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The middle men

The Middle Men
The American Foreign Service and the dictators of Central America, 1930-1952

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Jorrit van den Berk
Leiden, May 2, 2012

Introduction

Superpower, hegemon, hyperpower, empire. Some of the labels used in the last years to describe the U.S. position and its behavior in the world. Whether it describes the political authority, military preponderance, economic prevalence, or cultural dominance of the United States, it is clear that it touches many aspects of peoples' lives around the world—for better or for worse. But long before it was a world power, the United States had a sphere of influence, a backyard, or a regional empire in and around the Caribbean. The region to the south of the United States was long thought of as a proper place for American expansion and, at times, annexation was even considered. But these largely remained empty ambitions until the United States could claim a position of almost exclusive hegemony after the defeat of Spain and the demise of the Spanish empire in 1898—a position that was strengthened when Europe all but committed collective suicide in 1914.

Born of revolution itself, the United States became a status-quo power within the confines of its Caribbean sphere of influence. It opposed extra-continental threats on the basis of the Monroe doctrine of 1823, which has been characterized as America's oldest foreign policy—even though it was not really effective until the end of the 19th century. The United States also opposed threats to the status quo emanating from the region itself: conflicts between the various states, civil wars, political and social revolutions, general misgovernment or financial irresponsibility. All these occurrences could jeopardize the lives and investments of American citizens in the region, the safety of the Panama Canal, or the prestige of the United States as a regional leader.

In a word, from the 19th century onward, the United States desired and attempted to establish *stability* in its Caribbean sphere of influence—much like it would on a global scale after its rise to hegemonic status. Even while the United States could withdraw its influence from European affairs in the 1930s, no American leader challenged the basic need for peace and calm in the Caribbean. How that goal should be accomplished, however, has often been a question for debate.

The question of how to achieve stability is intricately tied to the question of the political organization of the countries in America's backyard. Except for the case of Puerto Rico, the United States has always declined to take direct control over the

nations of the Caribbean and Central America and to rule them as formal colonies—although in practice, the sovereignty of these nations was often violated by the northern neighbor. Different forms of intervention were practiced by the United States throughout the twentieth century to end unrest, war, or revolution. During the early part of the century it was the Navy's gunboats and Marines that did the job. And while this strategy was not entirely abandoned in the second half of the century, the CIA was often employed in that period on the presumption that it could handle matters more discreetly. But direct intervention was never the preferred approach, as it was a costly endeavor and rarely popular with domestic and foreign audiences. Besides, neither the Marines nor the CIA were equipped for long-term police duties: long-term stability could only be achieved if the American republics were properly governed.

Therefore, American intervention was often aimed at or followed by what has become known as "regime change". President Wilson's insistence, for example, that Central Americans should "learn to elect good men" led to numerous Marine supervised elections in the region. In 1961 the CIA helped Dominican resistance groups assassinate President Rafael Trujillo—the "dictatingest dictator who ever dictated"—in favor of more liberal groups. And in the late 1970s, President Carter practiced a sort of reversed intervention by cutting all American assistance to the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who was subsequently overthrown. Based on these three examples, American policy in the Caribbean could be said to be pro-democratic or at least anti-dictatorial. Seemingly, Washington believed that popular governance was the best route to long-term stability.

One would be hard-pressed, however, to find any serious historian who argues that the United States has consistently labored in favor of democracy in its own sphere of influence. In fact, Washington has often been accused, as will be discussed at greater detail below, of "propping up" and supporting dictatorships in the region. The period of Wilsonian interventions was followed by an age of tyranny that featured some of the most notorious dictators of the Western Hemisphere. Washington's support for Trujillo's enemies is suspect, since it had earlier armed the Dominican regime with American weapons. The same goes for Anastasio Somoza, whose downfall was regretted by Carter's successors in the Reagan administration. And in fact, it is Reagan's support for old Somoza-men and various right-wing dictators in Central America and the Caribbean that is often taken to be representative of U.S. policy. Although the accusation that the United States consistently supports dictatorial proxies to maintain stability by force in its sphere of influence used to be associated with New Left historians, it had recently become a mainstream—together with the growing popularity of "Empire" to describe America's role in the world

This subject, the "use" of allied dictators to establish stability in the Caribbean sphere of influence, is the subject of this text. It is a subject that has been the source of animated and at times even emotional debate among politicians, policy makers, journalists and other commentators, but also among historians and political scientists. It is a question which, in a sense, cuts to the heart of America's role in the world.

Framing the question: The Friendly Tyrants Dilemma

In the late eighties the "Foreign Policy Research Institute", an independent research institute based in Philadelphia, sponsored a three year research project designed to identify patterns in United States dealings with dictatorial allies. An impressive group of scholars, members of policy think tanks, and (former) government officials contributed case studies to this project. The result was a collection of papers that explores previous and contemporary cases of American policy toward friendly dictators and offers "policy primers" for future foreign policymakers. Dubbed *Friendly Tyrants: An American dilemma*, this publication probably represents the last such research project to be instigated while the Cold War was still in progress. It is also the first attempt ever made to describe the American experience with friendly dictatorships as a discrete research topic. While the questions and methods used in this collection are dated, it is still a good starting point for an exploration of the subject.

The book focuses on dictatorial allies of the United States, or "Friendly Tyrants" as the editors have chosen to call them. As the subtitle announces, the existence of authoritarian allies poses a *dilemma* (i.e. insolvable problem) to the *American* government. That is to say, the nature of American political culture furnishes the prerequisites for the creation of a dilemma that may not exist when, say, the French or the British government is faced with a similar situation. In extremis, the dilemma exists of an impossible choice between a Realist and an Idealist approach to Friendly Tyrants. According to the editors, the Realist approach stipulates that policymakers should not be concerned about the internal policies of other states (in this case, the existence of a dictatorial government) unless such policies themselves present a threat to American interests. Assuming that the existence of a dictatorial government does not *in itself* pose a threat to the United States, it would be natural for Washington to recruit these governments as allies against states that *do* threaten American interests. The Idealist approach assumes that the United States—"a special nation, the paragon of democracy"—should not associate with dictators because they violate its standards of political behavior. Such statesmen should be punished for their abuses, not coddled or rewarded.[1]

Any great power which finds itself in a dangerous world (as the United States did during the Cold War) would recognize that dictatorial governments are simply too numerous to be written off as potential allies, or at least, not if it "expect[s] to remain a great power for very long". However, "[f]or Americans (and perhaps for Americans alone), pure realism is not realistic".[2] By this the editors refer to "the singular nature of American politics and nationalism":

> From its creation to the present day, no other great power in modern history has had as large a moral dimension to its foreign policy as has the United States, and none has contended with the collision of moral scruples and

[1] Howard J. Wiarda, "Friendly Tyrants and American Interests", in: Daniel Pipes and Adam Garfinkle eds., *Friendly Tyrants: An American Dilemma* (Hampshire and London 1991), 3-20, 3-5.
[2] Wiarda, "American Interests", 6.

> raison d'etat to the extent that the United States has in its (so far) brief tenure as a great power.[3]

These observations lead the editors to conclude that the so-called "rational actor model" does not apply to the study of United States foreign policy—at least not when Friendly Tyrants are involved. The "rational actor model" is a Realist hypothesis about the behavior of states in international politics. It postulates that a state, or government, may be regarded as a single unitary entity that will act "rationally" (i.e. it will not act against its "national interest" as defined in terms of strategy and geopolitics). The case studies in Pipes and Garfinkle's publication show that Americans do not merely define their national interest in geopolitical terms but also in ideological terms ("Does this or that policy violate our morals and values?"). Therefore, it is possible for the United States to act "irrationally" (that is, in conflict with its strategic interests) when it chooses to prioritize its ideological interests. Or when it cannot pursue any coherent policy at all because of the irreconcilable conflict between strategy and ideology.[4]

In short, the Friendly Tyrants dilemma raises the question of how the United States defines its interests and what these interests really are. Unfortunately, the book does not offer an answer; it simply raises the question. This is understandable, since the goal of this research project is to offer techniques to manage the Friendly Tyrants dilemma—not to solve it. Before and after the publication of *Friendly Tyrants*, however, many historians and political scientists have in some way dealt with this topic and they did come up with answers. Like Pipes and Garfinkle, they frame the problem in the Realism / Idealism debate. The following paragraphs evaluate their efforts.

Classical Realism and Cultural Relativism, 1940s-1970s

Historian Michael Joseph Smith characterizes the difference between European and American political thinking during the interbellum period as follows: "To move from [Max] Weber's world of inexpiable conflicts and tragic ethical dilemmas to the progressive universe of interwar Anglo-American idealists is like leaving an uninterrupted performance of Wagner's Ring Cycle for a civic meeting punctuated by communal singing of hymns by S.S. Wesley".[5] This situation would soon change, though. During the thirties American intellectuals became profoundly disillusioned with traditional philosophical and legalistic approaches to international politics that characterized Wilsonian policies. They feared that their country was naïve about the nature of international politics. Policymakers in the United States were blinded by normative assumptions about the world. They acted from the assumption that international politics should be like American politics (i.e. based on liberal democratic ideals) and ignored signs that suggested the opposite. In fact, the number of stable democracies in the world

[3] Adam Garfinkle, "Friendly Tyrants: Historical Reckoning", in: *Idem*, 221-251, 221.
[4] Such a policy paralysis occurred, for example, when the dictators of Cuba and Nicaragua, both longtime allies of Washington, were faced with Marxist uprisings in 1959 and 1979 respectively. Wiarda, "American Interests", 12-17.
[5] Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge and London 1986) 54.

had diminished dramatically since the First World War. It was feared that the dictatorships might hold the key to the future, because they had a more realistic understanding of politics. In any case, they were taking advantage of the naïve policies of Washington and their growing power was now a threat to the vital interests of the United States. If Washington was ever to gain the upper hand over the dictatorships, it had to come to terms with what international politics *were* like, not with what they *should* be like.[6]

In this context Hans Morgenthau published the first edition of *Politics among Nations*[7], a Realist account of foreign policy that would be acknowledged as the starting point of modern, "scientific" thinking on international politics in the United States.[8] In subsequent years, "political realism swept the field (…) discussions of foreign policy have been carried on, since 1945, in the language of political realism—that is, the language of power and interests rather than of ideals or norms".[9] The Realism and cultural relativism of the well-known diplomat/historian George Kennan were important factors influencing post-war historiography.[10] Kennan argued that a sober and detached analysis of the global balance of power, rather than moralistic concepts grounded in images of national greatness, should guide foreign policy decision-making. His argument about power politics was intractably tied up with his conviction that people could not really understand other cultures anyway. Morality was grounded in the national experience and if one tried to translate it to foreign policy it would only lead to misunderstandings and even conflicts with other nations. The universal language of power and national interest was the only solid base for foreign policy. Being realistic about international politics meant, according to Kennan, "that we will have the modesty to admit that our own national interest is all that we are really capable of knowing and understanding—and [we need to have] the courage to recognize that if our own purposes and undertakings here at home are decent ones, unsullied by arrogance or hostility toward other people or delusions of superiority, then the pursuit of our national interest can never fail to be conductive to a better world".[11]

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[6] On American disillusion with normative frameworks and the fear that authoritarianism might be the wave of the future, see the still relevant study of Purcell: Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory. Scientific Naturalism and the problem of Value* (Lexington 1973) especially Part III: 115-232.

[7] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for power and Peace* (New York 1948).

[8] For assessments of Morgenthau's position as the "founding father" of modern political thought, see for example: Stanley Hoffmann, "An American Social Science: International Relations", *Daedalus. Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 106, No. 3 (Summer 1977) 41-61, there 44; Robert O. Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics", in: *Idem* ed., *Neorealism and its critics* (New York 1986) 1-26, there 10-12; Jan Willem Honig, "Totalitarianism and Realism, Hans Morgenthau's German Years", in: Benjamin Frankel ed., *Roots of Realism* (London and Portland, OR 1996) 283-313, there 283.

[9] Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics", 9.

[10] Many historians have commented on the significance of Kennan's writings. Consult, for example: Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. foreign policy* (New Haven and London 1987) 199-200.

[11] George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago 1951) 103.

Kennan believed that "It seems to me unlikely that there could be any other region of the earth in which nature and human behavior could have combined to produce a more unhappy and hopeless background for the conduct of human life than in Latin America". Therefore no state should be discriminated against because of its undemocratic practices: "our own political institutions [are] the product of a peculiar national experience, irrelevant to the development of other peoples". From a realistic standpoint, Kennan argues, there is no reason for the United States to show greater regard for democratic governments in Latin America, since that would imply a certain amount of American responsibility for the continued good behavior of that state, which can only amount to a growing gap between our commitments and our capabilities". On the other hand, the "international" posture of the Latin American states, particularly in regard to the Communist threat, did concern the strategic interests of the United States. And since Communism was an European ideology that was alien to Latin America, much like American democracy, Kennan felt that the United States could reasonably support states that were anti-Communist in their domestic and international policies, but regardless of their democratic or authoritarian nature. In fact, Kennan argues that:

> We cannot be too dogmatic about the methods by which local communists can be dealt with [by the Latin American governments themselves] (…) Where the concepts and traditions of popular government are too weak to absorb successfully the intensity of the communist attack, then we must concede that harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer; that these measures may have to proceed from regimes whose origins and methods would not stand the test American concepts of democratic procedure; and that such regimes and such methods may be preferable alternatives, and indeed the only alternatives, to further communist successes.[12]

American historians in post-war decades generally accepted Kennan's recommendations. They describe the United States as a "status-quo Power" and agree that its foreign policy should be guided by "the national interest". Deviations from this rule, such as a foreign policy aimed at democratization, were considered dangerous, because they overstretched American responsibilities and alienated potential allies. The idea that the United States was a special nation—the guardian of democratic principles—and should disassociate itself from states that violated its political values, lived on among politicians, journalists, and other commentators, but would henceforth be mostly excluded from academic writings. Diplomatic historians regarded their Realist notions as part of their professional mystique: the one thing that set them apart from untrained observers. Indeed, the folly of American Idealism during the interwar years and the eventual triumph of Realism in postwar years became something of a founding myth for (the study of) modern U.S. diplomacy.[13]

[12] "Memorandum by the counselor of the Department (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, Washington, March 29, 1950", *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere* (1950) 598-623, there 600, 607, and 613-618.
[13] Hoffmann, "An American Social Science", 41-61.

Like so many other things, the Realist consensus began to be questioned during the Vietnam era. William Appleman Williams introduced the thesis that American foreign policy was based on the economic interests of domestic elites, rather than objective realities. While this new element in the discussion did not directly affect the academic discussion about friendly authoritarians, some historians did feel the need to explain the traditional position. In a 1972 book, historians G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson announce that, *for the first time*, they have examined the relationship between the United States and the Dominican regime of *Generalissimo* Rafael Trujillo "from the specific viewpoint of his having been a dictator".[14] It is not hard to see why this should be the first time that such a viewpoint has been adopted in an American study of diplomatic history: if "power"—and not "ideology"—is the principle that guides diplomacy, it would be nonsense to classify U.S. policy toward dictatorships as a discrete phenomenon worthy of academic attention.

So why was this a good time to study U.S. policy toward dictatorship? Atkins and Wilson note the "severe and extensive criticism" of "the official United States attitude toward dictatorship and militarism in other American Republics". Atkins and Wilson reveal that "we as authors could better satisfy our personal value preferences if we concluded that the United States has had a major role to play in furthering democracy in Latin America". However, the authors argue that the logic of international relations conspired against the worthy intentions of ideologically inspired statesmen, and they also agree that U.S. foreign policy would be improved if it accepted such logic. [15]

Atkins and Wilson argue that the United States—a "major status-quo power"—has traditionally been concerned with political stability and the prevention of interference by extra-continental powers in Latin American affairs. At the start of the 20th century, the preferred means of promoting stability and of averting foreign interference in the Caribbean was direct military intervention and the subsequent supervision of local elections. At the time, American diplomats believed that the democratic procedures would bring stability to the Dominican Republic. Nonetheless, due to Latin American resentment of "Yankee imperialism", the United States had to renounce its "right" to intervene during the 1920s. Therefore, Washington could no longer direct the internal developments in the Dominican Republic and could not be held responsible for the rise to power of Trujillo in 1931. However, American policymakers did accommodate to the regime because it was "conductive at least to temporary stability".

The latter policy was more realistic, because it accepted the fact that the local power balance favored Trujillo and his National Guard. Unfortunately, say the authors, democracy requires careful cultivation and can only be nurtured by internal leadership rather than external control. Moreover, the pro-democratic policies of the United States were focused on the *procedures* (such as supervised elections) and not on the *substance* of democratic processes. In the final analysis, the authors claim that

[14] G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The United States and the Trujillo Regime* (New Brunswick, NJ 1972) viii.
[15] Atkins and Wilson, *The Trujillo Regime*, vii-viii.

American democratic policy was “pursued in ethnocentric ideological terms”, while they state—in words echoing Kennan’s cultural relativism—that “democracy” and “constitutionalism” were “not relevant to the Dominican national experience”. Political developments in the Dominican Republic were, therefore, largely beyond the control of the United States. As the case of Trujillo demonstrates, it may not be possible to combine stability and the promotion of democratic principles: “It is difficult to prevent dictatorial or military regimes or even to bring about social and political change. By recognizing that there is no way out of this dilemma and that no solution exists in this regard, the Latin American policy of the United States would be more realistic and thereby improved”. The United States may have to tolerate the existence of dictatorships in its sphere of influence and may have to work with them as they are.[16]

Anger and Revisionism, 1970s-1980s

Atkins and Wilson were satisfied to dissociate their “personal value preferences” from a discussion on America’s relationship with Caribbean dictators. Whether accurate or not, they cultivated an image of professional distance. For many historians, particularly pupils and followers of Appleman’s thinking, such an attitude became untenable by the end of the 1970s. Historian James Dunkerley introduced his book on the “long war” in El Salvador on the note that ”it is the product not only of study and political conviction but also outrage”.[17] He was certainly not the only one to feel this way, although he was one of the few serious academic researchers to be honest about it. American authors from the late 1970s onward found it increasingly difficult to hide a sense of indignation when they discussed their own country’s relationship with the Central American isthmus.

Where did these feelings of anger, outrage, and indignation come from? The answer would easily cover an entire book, but it goes something like this: Beginning in the late 1970s, the governments and reigning economic and military elites of Central America faced serious challenges from leftist opposition groups. For the next ten years or so, much of the region was torn by brutal civil wars costing the lives of tens of thousands of people. Even today, many Central American country’s have yet to recover fully from that dark decade, which has become known, simply but suitably, as “the crisis”.

The United States was deeply involved in “the crisis”. The Reagan administration acted on the assumption the leftist rebels and regimes in Central America were proxies of Cuba and the Soviet Union. Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan’s ambassador to the United Nations and one of the administration’s theorists, argued at the time that “to [the normal] patterns of political interaction [in Central America] there has been added in recent years the unfamiliar guerilla violence of revolutionaries linked to Cuba by ideology, training, and the need for support, and through Cuba to the Soviet Union.” This was considered a

[16] *Idem*, 160-162.
[17] James Dunkerley, *The Long War. Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador* (London 1982) 1.

direct threat to the security of the United States.[18] Hence, Washington supported the forces of reaction in Central America on every level: politically, financially, militarily, etc.

Reagan's policies were doubtlessly popular with those Americans who felt that Jimmy Carter's posture in world affairs was one of, again in Kirkpatrick's words, "continuous self-abasement and apology".[19] However, there were also many Americans who regretted the fact that their country was connected, though indirectly, with right-wing dictators and their death squads in Central America. Others feared that the United States were getting involved in complicated local wars from which it might be difficult to withdraw ("El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam" was a popular slogan for buttons and bumper stickers in those days). Although the Reagan administration was unapologetic about its rhetorical support for right-wing groups in Central America, the extent to which it was involved in local struggles was long obscured from the scrutiny of Congress and the press, a situation that eventually led to the Iran-Contra scandal.

While Americans of different political leanings found different reasons to support or oppose Reagan's policies in Central America, many liberal intellectuals were outraged: first by the fact that human rights were being violated on unprecedented scale on America's doorstep and second by Washington's secret involvement in those events. Thus, Dunkerley remembers that on a sunny day in August, 1981, he picked up the afternoon newspaper, only to be confronted by a report on how "the armed forces of El Salvador were using guillotines to execute their prisoners". He was struck by the fact that such procedures could not be the sole responsibility of the Salvadoran military, which had previously limited itself to random shootings of local peasants, but was "equally the product if the desk-ridden managers of 'counter-insurgency' employed in Washington (…) No doubt the compilers of those neat manuals on anti-guerilla warfare would be better pleased with operations that are undertaken under conditions of maximum hygiene in an abattoir than in the customary style of peasant violence".[20]

Much like in the case of Dunkerley, "the crisis" inspired a whole generation of researchers to uncover the causes of the barbarity that characterized the Central American scene for so many years. While American studies on Central America had been exceedingly scarce before, they mushroomed throughout the 1980s. Louis Goodman states that before the 1970s, "Central America was the subject of little concern for scholars, policymakers, or the general public in the United States. Few citizens could name any of the seven countries of the region; for policymakers major issues included keeping the Panama Canal free of silt and the price of bananas low; few scholars had researched the politics or societies of the region". After the Sandinista revolt, however "a huge reassessment began. Central America became news. U.S. citizens started to read about the region on the front pages of their newspapers; policymakers evaluated the meaning of these changes for global political strategy; scholars began to build an

[18] Jeane Kirkpatrick, "U.S. Security and Latin America", *Commentary* 71:1 (January 1981) 29-40, there 34.
[19] Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictators and double standards", *Commentary* 68:5 (November 1979) 34-45, there 45.
[20] Dunkerley, *Long War*, 1-2.

inventory of research focusing on the region".[21] In fact, research on Central America branched out across the academic disciplines, but it also captured the interest of political scientists and diplomatic historians who set out to uncover the American role in the Central American tragedy. Some went all the way back to the 18th century, but for many others, the history of the 1930s seemed to hold the key to explaining contemporary events. This is not surprising, because in some ways, the violence of the 1980s appeared to be a reenactment of events in the 1930s. The Sandinista rebels who toppled Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua, for example, got their name from the 1930s rebel leader Augusto César Sandino, who was himself assassinated by Anastasio Somoza García, godfather of the Somoza dynasty. Likewise, the Salvadoran *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* was named after the 1930s Communist leader Farabundo Martí. The latter was executed by the military regime of Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, who had the dubious honor of having a right-wing death squad named after him in the 1980s.

Throughout the 1980s, the Revisionists, as critics of the classical realist school have come to be known, loosely refer to Marxist theory in arguing that foreign policy is basically the assertion of domestic economic interests abroad. When they discuss American policy toward the Third World, Revisionist historians are often inspired by *dependency theory*: a thesis that was originally developed by Latin American scholars and posits that the major powers in the international system have used their economic strength to make Third World development dependent on—and subordinate to—the interests of those leading powers. What emerges from these new theories is an image of the United States as an imperialist nation which employs its power to enforce stability and order on the Third World to make it more susceptible to its unbridled economic expansion.

Walter LaFeber, one of Appleman's pupils, has applied the insights briefly described above to construct a new interpretive framework for the study of United States policy toward Central America. In his study *Inevitable Revolutions*, LaFeber attempts to prove that the American relation to its Central American neighbors was marked by a condition he calls "neodependency". By the start of the twentieth century the United States had become the richest country in the region and benefited most from the existing economic system, so it had a vested interest in maintaining it. The poor masses of Central America—those who were exploited by the economic system—could only change their lot by revolting against it and thus against U.S. dominance. LaFeber assumes that, being faced with Central American revolts against economic injustice, Washington would always opt for the short-term solution of forcefully reasserting its dominance (which did not solve the deeper causes of revolution and therefore set the stage for future revolutions, hence the *Inevitable Revolutions* of the title), rather than taking its chances with radical changes that could produce long-term stability. This is

[21] Louis W. Goodman et al., *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America* (Boulder et al. 1990) 3.

where LaFeber's model of "neodependency" fits in. The economic power of Washington was not adequate to put an end to revolutionary activity in Central America (rather, economic dominance caused this activity). Therefore, *dependency theory*, which focuses exclusively on economic power, is not adequate to explain the history of U.S.-Central American relations. Hence, LaFeber introduces "neodependency", which posits that the United States did not want to govern the tumultuous Central American republics directly, but sought to control the region informally with the help of a system of economic dominance coupled to the occasional application of military and political power to end revolutions. By inserting military and political power into the interpretive framework, LaFeber believes that his theory is more adequate to explain the relationship between economic dependence and the periodical recurrence of revolution.[22]

So were does dictatorship fit in? LaFeber argues that the American system of "neodependency" was in trouble during the late twenties. The military interventions ended because of congressional concerns about high costs and bad Public Relations, while economic dominance was weakened due to the Great Depression. In response to these problems, Washington instructed its Marine Corps to train National Guards in the Central American Republics which would maintain local order on the cheap and discharge the United States from having to intervene directly to suppress rebellions. These National Guards were initially expected to be nonpolitical institutions, but when the commanders of the Guards seized power through military coups, Washington readily accepted the dictatorial regimes they installed. In fact, these new military leaders, Carías in Honduras, Martínez in El Salvador, Somoza in Nicaragua, and Ubico in Guatemala, became an integral part of the "neodependency" system during Franklin Roosevelt's administration. LaFeber maintains that "deals were easily struck" between Washington and the dictators because the former needed proxies to maintain the status quo while the latter needed U.S. recognition and access to the New York money market. Thus, the "United States (…) accepted, and soon welcomed, dictatorships in Central America because it turned out that such rulers could most cheaply uphold order. Dictators were not a paradox but a necessity for the system, including the Good Neighbor policy".[23] Aside from occasional "tinkering", this system was supposedly maintained until the time LaFeber wrote his book.

From Post-Revisionism to Triumphalism, 1980s-1990s

While Revisionism remains a strong current in the historiography, it had its origins and heyday during the years of soul-searching that followed the Vietnam War. During the 1980s, though, Realism would reemerge to explore all that was strong and positive in American foreign policy. Some American historians grew tired with the repentant tone of Revisionism and the time had come, or so one historian put it, to do some "moral house-

[22] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable revolutions. The United States in Central America* (New York and London 1983) 5-18.
[23] LaFeber, *Inevitable revolutions*, 19-83, particularly 64-69 and 81.

cleaning".[24] Jeane Kirkpatrick stated in a 1979 article entitled "Dictators and double standards" that "no problem of American foreign policy is more urgent than that of formulating a morally and strategically acceptable, and politically realistic, program for dealing with non-democratic governments who are threatened by Soviet-sponsored subversion".[25] Kirkpatrick's remarkable argument represents the first thorough attempt at a Realist appraisal of America's policy toward dictatorship, although many of her arguments had in some way been anticipated by earlier authors.

Professor Kirkpatrick wrote her article to discredit the policy of the Carter Administration (1977-1981). President Carter believed that the rising tide of anti-Americanism in the Third World was due to America's flawed human rights policy. One of the remedies his administration offered was to denounce the traditional right-wing dictatorships that ruled much of the Third World and to seek common ground with the anti-dictatorial struggle of leftist revolutionary movements. Kirkpatrick believes that such a policy "ends up by aligning us tacitly with Soviet clients"[26] and goes on to argue that a more realistic approach to traditional versus revolutionary regimes should guide United States policy. She states that traditional authoritarian governments leave intact existing allocations of wealth, power, and status and their repressive control over society is highly limited. Therefore, these regimes are "bearable to ordinary people". Moreover, traditional dictators are known to permit limited contestation and participation and Washington could "effectively encourage this process of liberalization and democratization" provided that the internal political situation is stable and the change is gradual rather than revolutionary. In contrast, revolutionary movements, if victorious, are known to install modern totalitarian regimes and "they claim jurisdiction over the whole life of society and make demands for change that so violate internalized values and habits that inhabitants flee by the tens of thousands". Therefore, Kirkpatrick believes that Carter employs "double standards" by opposing relatively benign and generally pro-American traditional autocrats and befriending Marxist revolutionaries who are likely to install brutal and pro-Soviet tyrannies. A sound foreign policy should accept the "unpleasant fact" that it is morally and strategically acceptable to support traditional dictators in the face of a global totalitarian threat.[27]

The significance of Kirkpatrick's argument should not be underestimated. Her argument in particular and the Realist argument in general are still a widely accepted interpretation for U.S. policy toward dictatorship. A good explanation for the popularity of the Realist interpretation must surely be its elegance. Consider the next example, which

[24] Mark Falcoff, "Somoza, Sandino, and the United States", in: Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal eds., *The continuing crises: U.S. policy in Central America and the Caribbean: Thirty essays by statesmen, scholars, religious leaders, and journalists* (Washington 1987) 297-320, 299-301.
[25] Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships", 34. For the sake of clarity, all references to Kirkpatrick are to the 1979 article "Double Standards". In a 1981 article, however, Kirkpatrick presents a variation on her original argument which is slightly more relevant to this text, since it specifically refers to U.S. policy in Latin America: Jeane Kirkpatrick, "U.S. security and Latin America", *Commentary* 71:1 (January 1981) 29-40.
[26] Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships", 41.
[27] *Idem*, 44-45.

is the most concise and elegant explanation for the American policy towards dictatorship ever put forward by a historian: In his 1997 book *We now know*, John Lewis Gaddis states that:

> [A] distinction Americans tended to make—perhaps they were more subtle than one might think—[was that] between what we might call benign and malignant authoritarianism. Regimes like those of Somoza [and] Trujillo might be unsavory, but they fell into the benign category because they posed no serious threat to U.S. interests and in some cases even promoted them. Regimes like those of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan, because of their military might, were quite another matter. Stalin's authoritarianism had appeared malignant when linked to that of Hitler, as it was between 1939 and 1941; but when directed against Hitler, it could come to appear quite benign.[28]

The end of the Cold War had a profound impact on American thinking about foreign policy. Some of the most dramatic examples of this impact can be observed in the writings of Realist thinkers. Henry Kissinger, a Realist theorist and practitioner who was especially prone to mock Idealist visions during the Cold War, admitted in his 1994 book *Diplomacy* that Realism no longer sufficed as a framework for American foreign policy. In the absence of acute external threat, what was needed was an animating "vision" of America's mission that lent coherence to the endeavor of foreign policy and gave the public a sense of "hope and possibility". In effect, Kissinger was arguing for a more important role for Idealism in foreign policy.[29] At that time it was not uncommon for Americans to be talking about "visions", "ideas", "ideals", and "Idealism". Most commentators agreed, however, that the United States had had an ideal, mission or vision all along. In fact, they believe that the American liberal democratic ideal was the winning weapon in the Cold War. Even if propositions on how, why, and to what extent this was so differed widely, the sense that American Idealism had triumphed over Soviet Realism was widespread. The influence of this "Triumphalism" was notable throughout the 1990s.[30]

During previous decades, many scholars had assumed that the United States was less well-suited to "fight" the Cold War than the Soviet Union was, because its liberal democratic institutions did not allow secrecy, quick decision-making, the financing of a large standing army, or other measures that would presumably be necessary to win this conflict. When the United States did "win" the Cold War many scholars proposed that

[28] John L. Gaddis, *We now know. Rethinking Cold War History* (New York 1997) 35. Brackets and italics are mine.
[29] Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York 1994) 835. The analysis is from John Gerard Ruggie, "The past as prologue?: Interests, Identity, and American Foreign Policy", *International Security* 21:4 (Spring 1997) 89-125, 92.
[30] Without attempting to feign exhaustiveness, the following list presents a sample of Triumphalist writings from a historian, a political scientist, a philosopher, and a foreign policy specialist: Gaddis, *We now know*; Tony Smith, *America's mission. The United States and the worldwide struggle for democracy in the twentieth century* (Princeton, NJ 1994); Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man* (New York 1992); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence. American Foreign Policy and how it changed the world* (London 2001).

this was due to America's liberal democratic system, not in spite of it. Political scientist Tony Smith, for example, argues that the United States defeated its ideological antagonists of the twentieth century—Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union—because its democratic system allowed it to accommodate class, gender, and ethnic diversity at home while it remained flexible enough to cooperate with other states. In his book *America's Mission*, which has been quoted as a foremost example of the Triumphalist current in post-Cold War literature, Smith argues that Americans have always been aware of the importance of democracy to the international position of their country. At least, the "American idea of a world order opposed to imperialism and composed of independent, self-determining, preferably democratic states bound together through international organizations dedicated to the peaceful handling of conflicts, free trade, and mutual defense (a package of proposals that may be called 'liberal democratic internationalism') has been with us in mature form since the early 1940s".[31]

From the Constructivist challenge to Empire, 1990s-2000s

In reaction to the Realist/Post-Revisionist portrayal of American diplomacy in terms of the "extended struggle between clear-eyed realists on the one side and fuzzy-minded moralists (…) on the other", historian Michael Hunt argued in a 1987 book that such an approach is at least "incomplete" since it neglects the "deep and pervasive impact of an ideology with its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries".[32] In this case, "ideology" does not refer to the traditional Wilsonianism, but to the intellectual traditions, ideas, ideals, and worldviews of American diplomats. These topics became the objects of study for many diplomatic historians from the late 1980s forward and have been applied on several occasions to the study of American relations with dictators in its sphere of influence.

Although the empirical study of American "Idealism" in diplomatic history shows the clear stamp of the methodology and themes of more traditional intellectual history, some influence from post-colonial studies, and particularly Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and "othering", are also in evidence. More generally, however, the interest of diplomatic historians in the topics advanced by Michael Hunt mirrored the rise of "Constructivism" in the political sciences. Constructivism is generally understood to be a "theory in which identities and interests are the dependent variable" and proposes that "people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meaning that the objects have for them".[33] This theory is not inconsistent with either Realism or Idealism. Clearly, like Idealism, Constructivism accepts the influence of "soft" (i.e. non-material) factors on international politics, even if it does not necessarily accept Idealism as an interpretive framework. How Constructivism relates to Realism can be illustrated with an argument by historian Lars Schoultz. Schoultz argues that the Realist concept of power

[31] Smith, *America's mission*, 3-33, esp. 7.
[32] Hunt, *Ideology*, 125 and 171.
[33] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics", *International Organization* 46:2 (Spring 1992) 391-425, there 394 & 396.

politics goes far in explaining the nature of the relationship between the United States and the Latin American nations (it being a relationship between a great power and several very weak powers). But the fundamental difference between the arrogant policy toward, say, Peru and the respectful policy toward, for example, Denmark is a particular American "mindset" about Latin Americans. According to Schoultz, Washington's inter-American policy is (and always was) founded on "a pervasive belief that Latin Americans constitute an inferior branch of the human species". Concerning U.S. "friendliness" toward Latin dictatorships, Schoultz notes that it "flowed naturally" from the belief that "Latin Americans were already undemocratic". [34] Regardless of whether this last observation can stand the test of empirical research[35], this example shows that, within the framework of Realism, the Constructivist attempted to improve our understanding of foreign policy, so that it becomes more than the interaction between featureless states, who's only differentiating factor is, in Gaddis' words, their "military might".

Historian David F. Schmitz accomplished the most complete restatement of the Friendly Tyrants Dilemma in constructivist terms. He criticized Smith for his one-sided treatment of American foreign policy. Using a Realist framework that recognizes the importance of rational calculation and strategic interests, Schmitz argues that: "[p]romoting human rights and democracy demands a toleration of instability and change in regions considered crucial to American business or defense, often leaving no clear choice between conscience and self-interest and making strong, stable right-wing dictators attractive to policymakers".[36] At the same time, however, he also rejects the notion that U.S. policy toward friendly dictatorships was "simply a matter of cynical realism or cold disregard for the peoples of other countries".[37]

Somewhat like Hunt, Schmitz wants to go beyond the "cynical realists" / "starry-eyed idealists" dichotomy and uncover intellectual traditions, perceptions, and rationalizations in American foreign policy. According to Schmitz, the logic, rationale, and ideological justifications for American support of dictatorships were developed in the 1920s. In that decade, American officials became concerned with the spread of (primarily) Bolshevik revolutions which occurred in the wake of the First World War and caused a full-fledged "Red-scare" in the United States itself. This "irrational fear" for Bolshevik revolutionary activities was coupled to a racist (or at least ethnocentric) believe that many peoples around the world were not yet ready to build stable

[34] Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States. A history of U.S. policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge and London 1998) iv, 315, and 346.
[35] Another historian, Frederick Pike, offers a different view when he notes that American diplomats in the 1930s were fascinated by social reformers in Central America. Arguing that the diplomats of the Good Neighbor era were influenced by a "counter-culture" of "cultural pluralism", which momentarily allayed the influence of older stereotypes about "primitive peoples", Pike notices a degree of sympathy among State Department officials for social and political experimentation in South America. See: Frederick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America. Myths and stereotypes of civilization and nature* (Austin 1992) 277-281 and 304.
[36] David Schmitz, *'Thank God they're on our side.' The United States and right-wing dictatorships, 1921-1965* (Chapel Hill and London 1999) 3.
[37] *Idem*, 5.

democracies. Schmitz account is very close to Hunt's on this count. Washington officials developed the view that democratic institutions in "politically immature" nations were too weak to withstand the onslaught of economic depressions and the global spread of revolutionary activity. Such a worldview led American policymakers to regard the rise of fascism in Europe with mild approval. Even if the Fascist ideology was antithetical the American values, at least it appeared to fit the German an Italian political traditions and it was strongly anti-Bolshevik. Furthermore, Washington officials were inspired by an idea which might best be described as "modernization theory *avant-la-lettre*". This idea prescribed that authoritarian governments might be a necessary transition stage for backward nations that were developing into politically mature nations. Such a conception allowed Americans to believe that the support for dictatorial regimes did not conflict with liberal interest in the long run.

In Latin America, American fears of revolution and conceptions of local political backwardness initially gave rise to "Wilsonian" interventions which were intended to install stable, economically responsible democracies backed up by American resolution. In the 1930s, however, such intervention became too costly and appeared to stimulate anti-American sentiments. Echoing the analysis of several other authors reviewed above Schmitz notes that the Roosevelt Administration started to rely on authoritarian governments—most notably in Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador—because they preserved order, controlled radical reform movements, and protected American investments "while obviating the need for American intervention".[38] The immediate desire to install democracies was replaced with the long-term hope that local strongmen would serve as "modernizing" agents and would eventually clear the road to democratic development.

The American rationalization for the support of dictatorship—which combined the fear of revolution with a racial / ethnocentric distrust of foreign democracies—had been institutionalized before the start of the Second World War, Schmitz argues. The "policy pendulum" did swing to support of democracy during this war, because dictatorship was increasingly associated with international aggression while American faith in liberal values was strengthened. However, with the start of the Cold War, old fears and trusted solutions reemerged. The Eisenhower administration was especially apt to work with authoritarian regimes and the local military in countries such as Greece, Spain, Iran, and Guatemala. But to the old fear of revolution and distrust of democratic experiments, a new variable was added: post-War American officials increasingly referred to dictatorial allies as members of the "free world". This rhetorical devise created a blind spot for the internal policies of the "friendly tyrants". Also, the new concept of "nation building", which was grounded in scientific notions of "development", encouraged the idea that the United States could direct authoritarian states to greater liberty while maintaining cordial relations with them.

While American policy would "swing" around to support for democracy one more time—after Cuban dictator Batista had been ousted by Castro, the very type of

[38] *Idem*, 84.

revolutionary leader he was supposed to prevent from gaining power—American support for authoritarianism continued beyond the 1960s and the justifications for such a policy remained remarkably similar.[39] In his concluding remarks Schmitz addresses the Triumphalists when he states that "American support for right-wing dictators demonstrates that the promotion of democracy was not a consistent, central goal of American policy throughout the century". In fact, the support for dictatorship was often a central feature of American policy. And since American leaders often used moral appeals to gain public support for their policies, Schmitz finds reason to question the morality of U.S. conduct when it served the interests of despots. On the pragmatic side, Schmitz believes that support for authoritarianism did not serve the national interest because "[r]ight-wing dictators more often than not created political polarization in their nations that led to long-term instability and an anti-American sentiment that fostered radical nationalist movements and brought to power, in Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Iran, among other nations, the exact forms of government the United States originally sought to prevent".[40]

Although it is impossible to predict in which direction the historiography will develop, or even in which direction it *is* developing, a full discussion on the subject cannot ignore the recent influence of post-colonial studies that is noticeable even in a traditional field like diplomatic history. That influence has manifested itself most clearly recently in the definition of the United States as an "Empire". Naturally, the use of "Empire" as a model to explain America's position in the contemporary world is not new: Revisionist historians used the term often in this context.[41] However, Revisionists understood the term in a Marxist sense, while "empire" in post-colonial studies is understood as a cultural/linguistic concept. In very broad terms, it can be said that the modern definition of Empire originated from Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. Like Said, who studied the subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture (which was deemed both "other" and thus "inferior"), American historians of U.S. diplomacy are increasingly interested in the American perceptions of other cultures and the ways in which these perceptions influenced international relations. The representation of the "Other" as backward and inferior justified subordination of foreign countries and their economies to the American system as long as it was also included a parallel drive to "civilize" and "educate" them.

The post colonial framework was applied to the study of U.S. Latin American studies in the collection *Close encounters of empire.* It is exceedingly difficult to (briefly) summarize how this particular collection of articles instructs our understanding of U.S.-Latin American relations, since its editors purposely and justifiably allowed the

[39] David F. Schmitz, *The United States and right-wing dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge et al. 2006).
[40] *Idem*, 308-309.
[41] Most explicitly in Williams' *Empire as a way of life: an essay on the causes and character of America's present predicament, along with a few thoughts about an alternative* (Oxford 1980), which combines many of the themes of his earlier work as well as the work by other revisionists.

contributors some leeway in their approach to the subject. However, it can be said that the general purpose of *Close Encounters* is to explore the "contact zones" of "empire" which are not necessarily geographical locations but may "represent attempts at hegemony, but are simultaneously sites of multivocality; of negotiation, borrowing, and exchange; and of redeployment and reversal". The collection goes on to explore several case studies were the United States and Latin America "encountered" each other, necessarily in a "power laden" context where "people, ideas, commodities, and institutions" were "received, contested, and appropriated". For example, Lauren Derby contributed an article on chickens from high-yield poultry factories in the Dominican Republic. Local attitudes to the so-called *gringo* chicken, "which is of North American origin, is white, and eats imported feed, but lives in the Caribbean and is grown by Dominican producers", could tell us something about how Dominicans construct their own national identity in a country dominated economically by the United States. Revealingly, gringo chickens had been held responsible for "causing AIDS, infertility in women, and impotency and homosexuality in men".[42]

However that may be, one study that is relevant to the current text that is linked to the *Close Encounter* project is Eric Paul Roorda's *The dictator next door*.[43] Roorda contributed an article to *Close Encounters of Empire* on the joint obsession of American and Dominican military men with the airplane. Almost simultaneously, he published his award-winning *The dictator next door*, which presents a very innovative approach to American diplomatic history.[44] The book is a case study of Good Neighbor diplomacy. It analyses the relationship between Washington and the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1945. It underscores that American diplomats were sincere well-wishers to democratic development in Central America but did not have the influence needed to actually direct political events in this region (this was especially so after the adoption of the Good Neighbor policy which explicitly renounced the American "right" to intervene in the affairs of the sister republics). From this situation sprang a policy dilemma which Roorda wishes to explore: "The formation of the Trujillo regime showed that a foreign policy based on the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination, the *Geist* of the Good Neighbor policy, meant having to accept as

[42] Gilbert M Joseph, "Close encounters. Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations", in: Joseph et al., Close Encounters of Empire, Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations (Durham and London 1998) 3-46 and Lauren Derby, "Gringo Chickens with Worms. Food and Nationalism in the Dominican Republic", in: *Idem*, 451-493.

[43] Eric Paul Roorda, *The dictator next door. The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* (Durham and London 1998). A complete review of recent works on this subject should also include Schmitz, *'Thank God they're on our side'.* For the sake of conciseness, though, a review of this book has been omitted here.

[44] Roorda, *The dictator next door.* Two earlier articles published by Roorda anticipate certain themes and subjects in this book: Roorda, "The Cult of the Airplane among U.S. Military Men and Dominicans during the U.S. Occupation and the Trujillo Regime, in: Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC 1998) 269-310; Roorda, "Genocide Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy, the Trujillo Regime, and the Haitian Massacre of 1937", *Diplomatic History* 20 (Summer 1996) 301-319.

gracefully as possible the nearby existence of regimes antithetical to the principles of peace and democracy".[45] Throughout the 1930s, most American officials accepted Trujillo's dictatorial rule or at least rejected the idea of direct intervention to promote a more liberal regime (which, according to Roorda, was a proposition supported by influential diplomats such as Sumner Welles).[46] This situation would change at the end of the Second World War when Idealism was strong in the State Department.

The innovative nature of Roorda's analysis is to found in his insistence that individuals matter in foreign policy. The historical actors that Roorda analyzes include dictators, diplomats, military officers, lobbyists, journalists, and bankers and the author emphasizes that the cultural background of these individuals determined their outlook on the relationship between the United States and the Dominican Republic. This implies the existence of foreign poli*cies*, rather than the one coherent policy which is often presented in books that are inspired by the "rational actor model" or other Realist schemes. For example, the State Department was often at odds with the American military: the former promoting a cool and sometimes openly hostile stance toward the dictator, the latter assuming a cordial and congratulatory posture:

> For a naval officer, the quality of port facilities is a paramount consideration in judging the merits of a civilization; and for a Marine the cleanliness and orderliness of a place are similarly central in his evaluation. For such men, the physical achievements of the Trujillo regime outweighed any other consideration. The resident diplomats, on the other hand, counted the cost of the regime's oppression and the dictator's self-obsession against the value of the order and development he had fostered.[47]

This difference in outlook meant that American diplomats were generally more concerned about the dictatorial aspects of Trujillo's reign than their military colleagues who were generally approving of the *Generalissimo*'s policies. According to Roorda, this difference can be explained by the cultural background of the historical actors: the elitism of American diplomats was at odds with Trujillo's populism while the dictator's military training by American officers during the marine occupation of the Dominican Republic enabled him to correspond to American military representatives. During the 30s and early 40s, State Department criticism of Trujillo was curtailed due to the non-intervention policy and the over-arching foreign policy objective of hemispheric solidarity. At the end of World War II, however, anti-dictatorial sentiments ran high in the State Department and American officials became more overtly critical of Trujillo and other *caudillos* in Latin America. However, the effects of this new attitude were limited due to the relatively minor influence the United States could bring to bear on Trujillo. Moreover, American concern for democracy in Latin America was soon overshadowed by the Cold War.

[45] Roorda, *The dictator next door*, 1.
[46] *Idem*, chapter 3.
[47] *Idem*, 173.

The next step

The topic of American encounters with Central American dictatorships originally caught my attention because of the dramatic moral dilemma's inherent in it: The public image that the United States cultivates—that of the immaculate city on the hill, the champion of democracy—presents a clear and immediate contrast to the stereotypical *generalissimo*—a common gangster clad in impeccable white uniform excessively adorned with medals and epaulettes who leeches on his poor and beaten people. Yet, it is well-known that Washington supported such leaders (some of whom fit the stereotype remarkably well) in various ways over the decades. The issue reveals that there are cracks in the white armor of the "paladin of democracy" and seems to suggest that by studying the problem, one could reveal something of the dark, true nature of forces that make up American foreign policy.

In this sense, the literature on the subject does not disappoint. From the Realist's rejection of "ethnocentric" influences in foreign policy via the Revisionist's revelation of America's cynical drive to empire to the post-colonialist's dark ruminations about Washington's dehumanizing of the Other, the topic of American encounters with dictatorship has provided many schools of thought with a convenient "empirical" case that could establish the supposed truth on the nature of U.S. foreign policies.

In fact, the subject lends itself so easily to the Big Questions and the moral reflections on the nature of American actions that it is hard to reduce it to a human scale. One is tempted to typecast Americans who encountered foreign dictatorships in the role of a Machiavellian tactician or of an agent of empire. Not only does this approach obscure the role of individuals involved, it also decontextualizes it. In other words, the historical setting of the encounter is delegated to the background and the episode turns into a mere manifestation of colliding interests or imperial machinations. Many historians will instinctively sympathize with Robert Freeman Smith when he complained about the "high degree of order, coherence, and single-minded planning to U.S. actions regarding Latin America". This leads to historical studies, Smith argues, that hardly refer to "what actually happened". In one example, he cites a scholarly paper in which the American ambassador to Bolivia is represented as "the conscious agent of an imperial power implementing the master plan of domination". Smith pleads for a revision of such accounts, which should reveal the totality of events, including the "emotions, ideas, and motives" of American diplomats. Smith believes that "the burden" of historical developments in Latin America, coupled with the "hopes, fears, ambitions, and frustrations" of American statesmen determines the nature of U.S. policy toward the sister republics: "[Those are] the characteristic[s] of actual people struggling in a real world. After all, that is the true nature of history".[48]

Although Smith's complaints are aimed at the Revisionist school—of which he was himself an exponent—it is a good description of my own attitude toward much of what

[48] Robert Freeman Smith ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence. Volume 2—Era of Good Neighbors, Cold Warriors, and Hairshirts, 1930-1982* (Malabar, Florida 1983) viii-ix.

has been written about American encounters with "friendly tyrants". While it is in itself a convenient description of the terms in which the matter has been *discussed*, Pipes and Garfinkle's concept of the "Friendly Tyrants dilemma" is fraught with assumptions and prescriptions about the "exceptional" nature of America that make it too cumbersome for empirical research. Naturally, the United States is hardly the only country which subscribes to an animating vision or political ideal: such concepts have played a significant role in the foreign policies of all nations. Therefore, it would not do to state that "[f]or Americans (and perhaps for Americans alone), pure realism is not realistic". To be sure, the flaw is not with Americans themselves, but with insistence that abstract concepts such as Realism and Idealism determined their behavior.

Classical Realism, while purportedly an "objective" and "scientific" approach to foreign relations, suffers from its own inclination to pass judgment on "starry-eyed" Idealists. Kennan rebelled against the "vision of national greatness" which he thought had guided U.S. foreign policy up to his own time; Atkins and Wilson argued that foreign policy was sometimes pursued in "ethnocentric ideological terms"; and Kirkpatrick chastised the Carter Administration for its "pious" worldview. When they imply that Realism is the superior theory, all these men and women are to some degree arguing what foreign policy *should be like*—not so much what the sources showed it was like. It should be obvious, therefore, that the classic school of Realism at least is no less normative than Ideology: it prescribes what foreign politics should be like, not what it always is or has been like.

John Lewis Gaddis, who was informed more by modern "Neorealism", reduces the entire subject to a single determinant: "military might". However, such blatant reductionism turns foreign policy into something static (i.e. basically similar across the ages) and has little to offer to historians. Gaddis is rather superfluous in stating that "subtle" American statesmen distinguished between benign and malignant *authoritarianism*. For if "military might" is the only distinguishing factor between one authoritarian and another, he might just have stated that Americans made distinctions between benign and malignant *states*. After all, if the subject is put in these terms, why should a really powerful republic be any less malignant than a really powerful dictatorship? While a political scientist might be entirely satisfied with such a model based mainly on "power"—and may even deduct many interesting and relevant conclusions from it—a historian may well ask the question: "Is this all we want to know?"

In the sense that Revisionism was inspired by anger, by the sense that there was a deep divide between the supposedly democratic nature of the United States and its terrorist tactics in the Third World, it can be interpreted as a Idealistic reaction to the Realists' description of the world. And while it is good medicine against Classical Realism's fetish for the status quo, it too suffers from a judgmental approach to the study of U.S. foreign policy. While LaFeber, for example, presents his concept of "neodependency" as something completely new, there is in fact little to set it apart from Realism. Like Realists, LaFeber assumes that American statesmen were motivated by a disinterested analysis of the national interest, even if he describes this national interest

as something fundamentally economic rather than political. His contention that political and military power are essential parts of the economically oriented dependency theory, produces a theory of "neodependency" which is almost indistinguishable from a Realist view which assumes that a state will mobilize all its sources of power to serve the national interest. What does set his interpretation of American foreign policy apart from classical Realists is not a rejection of the *existence* of power politics, but a rejection of the notion that power politics are a *desirable* trait of foreign policy. Rather than a policy of enlightened self-interest which promotes international understanding and stability, Realism becomes a policy of cynical selfishness which promotes economic empire-building. He recognizes a cynical drive to empire which motivated American statesmen almost from the inception of the republic. According to LaFeber, this unity of purpose is the real source of American foreign policy; the Ideological rhetoric is merely a cover-up.

The tone that was set in the 1980s still influences the terms in which America's relations to Central American and Caribbean dictators are discussed. Considering that a large body of literature on the subject was produced in that decade—including many books that are now recognized pioneering works and classics in their field—this should come as no surprise. Thus, during the last decade or so, the assumption that Washington "propped up" dictators in Central America can still be found in many monographs. In some cases, the argument is rather stale—as in the case of Chomsky, who has not revised his view that Washington "always" backed military dictators in Central America since he picked up the subject in the early 1980s.[49] But more frequently, the argument is mentioned almost in a nonchalant tone, a matter of common knowledge. Accordingly, Max Paul Friedman, in an impeccably researched and innovative study on the 1940s, carelessly notes that "throughout Central America and the Caribbean", during the 1930s, "U.S.-backed dictatorships [were] fully able to maintain order on their own".[50] Most recently perhaps, Brian Loveman repeated the same line in his grand history of U.S. Latin American affairs:

> Some U.S. objectives could be achieved (…) by installing "elected" dictatorship, buttressed by the constabularies created during the American occupation regimes. Such governments could be substituted for direct U.S. administration. So eventually Rafael Trujillo came to power in the Dominican Republic, as did the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua, among other American-supported tyrants.[51]

More recent works such as those of Schmitz and Roorda that employ what I will call, for convenience's sake, a constructivist approach point the way forward. While Schmitz acknowledges the importance of Washington's geopolitical concerns, his argument that American policymaker's views of les developed nations determined *the method* whereby American interests would be protected in the Third World (that is, by

[49] Any book by Chomsky that deals with U.S. foreign policy in some way will do, but consult chapter 3.
[50] Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors. The United States campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge 2003) 74.
[51] Brian Loveman, *No higher law. American foreign policy and the western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill 2010) 242.

supporting right wing dictatorships) improves our historical understanding of American actions in that region. However, Schmitz' work should also be seen in its proper context. Writing in the late 1990s, Schmitz explicit objective was to counter the rosy picture of U.S. foreign policy put forward by post-Cold War Triumphalism. *Thank God they're on our side* is practically the mirror image of Tony Smith's *America's Mission*: While Smith intends to uncover a pro-democratic tradition in American foreign policy, Schmitz counters by showing that that policy often depended on the collaboration of right-wing dictators.

The fact that Roorda identifies—at minimum—some measure of discomfort with dictatorial allies among American diplomats is rather exceptional. As shown above, many Revisionist historians found Americans only too willing to work with the Latin dictators. Roorda convincingly substantiates his findings by grounding them in a sophisticated analysis of the cultural background of American diplomats (although this theme should not be overstressed: Roorda does not focus exclusively on the State Department. This theme has been singled out in this review because it fits in well with the rest of this text). However, Roorda's conclusions should also be put into perspective. One gets the impression that Roorda studied diplomats who fitted his ideal type more closely than those who did not. Avra Warren, United States representative to the Dominican Republic from 1942 to 1944, cultivated a cordial relationship with Trujillo, but does not receive as much attention in Roorda's book as those who were considerably less friendly to the dictator (Ellis O. Briggs and Spruille Braden, for example). Warren was not the only American diplomat to be captivated by the charms of a Latin American *caudillo*. James B. Stewart, American representative to Nicaragua from 1942 to 1945, was reportedly on such good terms with president Somoza that the dictator scathingly referred to him as "my steward".[52] Ambassadors such as Warren and Stewart must have been largely ignored when Roorda wrote that in 1945-1946 "Spruille Braden and Ellis O. Briggs tapped fifteen years of ethical discomfort [among State Department officials] as they denounced the wartime alliance with Latin America's strongmen".[53] Since Roorda's case study ends in 1945, he can present the short-lived post-war American attacks on Caribbean dictators as the climax of fifteen years of discomfort. This picture might have been different if his case study ended in 1950.

The works of Schmitz and Roorda are the immediate predecessors of this study, even if it is less ambitious in its scope. The deconstruction of foreign policy as practiced by a unitary, rational state into foreign policies, as achieved by Roorda, inspired the domain of the current study. I have chosen to study American ambassadors and ministers who actually met and interacted with foreign dictators. Current research on the topic of American policy towards dictatorship mainly focuses on political crises and abstract rationalizations of policy-makers in Washington. I propose that this focus can lead to a distorted view of the overall diplomatic contact between the United States and its

[52] Clark, *Diplomatic relations*.
[53] Roorda, *The dictator next door*, 230.

authoritarian antagonists. By focusing on the situation "on the ground", I hope to reconstruct the day-to-day interaction with foreign dictators that set the tone for potential crises or alliances and to analyze the information American ministers sent to Washington and which influenced the views of the policy-makers. I propose that this approach will establish more securely the complex, nuanced, and historically contextualized interaction between the American Foreign Service establishment and dictatorships in Central America.

While it is by no means unusual to identify and study specific actors in the conduct of American foreign affairs, such works as there are tend to take a biographical approach, or to study the inherent logic and dynamics of an institute or group as a whole. Cultural or post-colonial studies such as *Close encounters of Empire* have generally left the fields of politics and foreign policy for what they are to focus instead on arts, advertising, and animal husbandry. Only Roorda has applied the approach to actors in what is traditionally known as the field of international relations. The current study will focus on a relatively large group of American chiefs of mission—the personal representatives of the American president in foreign countries. In all, some 26 individuals spread over three countries and a period of twenty years will form the nucleus and centerpiece of this study. Most of them were not famous diplomats. Most have only been mentioned in passing, if at all, in any work of history. Yet, they represent the rank-and-file of the American Foreign Service: not the flashy ambassadors who served on London or Paris and have received acknowledgement for their work, but the men who worked in dangerous, unhealthful, and thoroughly unglamorous cities. As far as I know, the current text is the most extensive study of the background, worldview, and work of American Foreign Service officers serving abroad. Whether their behavior can indeed be classified as "imperial", as the title of *Close encounters of empire* would suggest, is a question which will, for now, be left for the concluding chapter.

While the next chapter will expand on the protagonists of this study, a problem of definitions does present itself with the definition of the antagonists: What, exactly, constitutes a "dictatorship". It is a question that few historians who have tackled the problem of U.S. relations with such "friendly tyrants" have asked themselves. Naturally, there are formal definitions. Any dictionary will provide a concise list of characteristics. Organizations such as Freedom House employ quantifiable checklists to be able to distinguish between "free" and "unfree" states. But, as always, these definitions have but limited use to the historian because they are determined by contemporary understandings of what constitutes a dictatorship. What we now consider to be dictatorships might not have been experienced as such some decades ago. This problem is only compounded if we assume that different cultures have different conceptions of dictatorship and democracy. Furthermore, one could distinguish between relatively benign dictatorships and truly evil ones.

One could devote a book length philosophical, anthropological, or linguistic analysis on this problem of what defines a dictatorship and still not come up with a satisfactory answer. Besides, such exercises are entirely beyond the scope of this text.

The solution to this problem of definition employed here is a simple one. Since this is a work of history that presumes to engage and improve upon other works of history, it will simply assume—at least for the moment—that those leaders who have been identified as dictators by historians are valid subjects for this book.

This does not mean that the question of whether historical actors experienced a government as dictatorial or not is irrelevant. Indeed, it is perhaps the single most important question to be answered. While the formulation of the question of how U.S. diplomats dealt with "dictatorships" in the American backyard allows me to engage other historians who have written on the subject in these terms, I will leave it up to the historical actors themselves to "tell" us how they defined the governments in question and what this meant for their relation to them. A close reading of the political correspondence from American embassies will help establish not only whether American diplomats felt that they were dealing with a dictatorship, but also whether they believed that such a form of government was somehow desirable or appropriate at that specific time and in that specific place. This is one point where the decision to study the "men-on-the-spot" will yield immediate results.

I scaled down the domain of this research project to American ambassadors and ministers in the "dictatorial" nations of Central America during the years 1933-1952. While it is possible to treat the choice for this particular region as if it stands apart from the choice for this particular timeframe, these two matters are in fact inseparable. For now, it will, I hope, suffice to point out that American thinking on democracy and dictatorship during the Cold War (which is the focus of the best part of research on this topic) took shape during the thirties and forties: years which, under the influence of events such as the Great Depression and the rise and fall of right-wing dictatorship in Europe, saw a "crisis in democratic theory" in the United States. During this period, Latin America was the only region with which the U.S. had extensive *diplomatic* contact. In this context, it is of great importance to this research project to observe that most Central American nations went through a period known as the "era of tyranny". While so-called "caudillos" (political bosses) reigned during most of these years, the first signs of democratic and socialist opposition were also visible. These subjects, and especially the question of how they were experienced by American diplomats, will be elaborated upon in chapters to come.

Its has not been easy to find the proper balance between the largest, and presumably most representative, group of diplomats on the one hand and the manageability of the research project on the other. The sheer size of the archives of American Foreign Service, not to mention personal papers, published interviews, and (unpublished) memoirs, made a careful selection of embassies to be studied very important. Eventually, that selection was brought back to the embassies in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The fact that U.S. relations with these specific countries are a relatively neglected subject was only of secondary importance to the making of this selection. The most northern and most southern republics of what is sometimes understood to be Central America—Mexico and Panama respectively—are actually part

of what geographers call North and South America. More importantly, however, Mexico is such a large and important country and so close the United States that, in terms of U.S. foreign policy, it is in a class by itself. Indeed, Mexican affairs were handled by a specific group of experts and officers in the American State Department. Panama was in a similar position as regards U.S. policy. Not because of its size or influence, but because of the all-important Canal. This leaves, from north to south, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the countries that make up Central America proper. From this group, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were selected for study, because they share long land borders as well as political institutions and economies. Historically, these three countries reverted to "dictatorship" almost simultaneously around 1930, thus presenting similar problems to a discreet group of American diplomats. Nicaragua and Costa Rica, which for reasons of history and geography stand somewhat apart from the northern countries, will nonetheless figure quiet prominently in some parts of the next chapters—Nicaragua in particular.

While the analysis of the 26 ambassadors mentioned will roughly follow a chronological pattern, Chapter 1 will set the stage with an analysis of the ministers and ambassadors who served in Central America over the course of 20 years. The chapter will take the form of a qualitative analysis of the Foreign Service officer in Central America. There is, of course a real danger that this section will overlap with the chronological chapters that follow. However, there are some broad questions that can be answered in this chapter which do not concern the policy toward Central American dictators and military leaders directly, but do present a context which will be important to be able to understand to chronological chapters. Some these questions are: How did these men define their jobs? What did they think they were doing in Central America? How did these they define Central American politics and society? Who did these men associate with locally? Where did they get their information about Central America?

The chronological narrative starts with chapter 2, which goes back to the late 1920s and early 1930s. The choice for this starting point was an easy one: during the timeframe mentioned, new "dictators" came to power in all of the Central American countries except Costa Rica. They were Jorge Ubico in Guatemala, Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez in El Salvador, Tiburcio Carías in Honduras, and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. All these leaders shared a progress-oriented ideology; a cynical dedication to democratic form unparalleled in any other dictatorship in the world; an opportunistically pro-American foreign policy; and very long breath. This generation of leaders figures prominently in the historiography of U.S.-Central American relations, because they were the "first" friendly tyrants in Pipes and Garfinkles' conception and the archetypical proxies of American imperialism in the Revisionist narrative. While the historiography has already been discussed in general terms, chapter 2 will explore specifically, the question as to whether the United States installed dictatorships in its backyard.

Chapter 1

THE ENVOYS
American diplomats in Central America, 1930-1952

A diplomat is a good diplomat if he serves his country well. He serves his country well if he plays a part, however humble in carrying out his country's policies. His country's policies (…) should be directed towards serving his country's best interests. His country's best interests should include not only its own freedom, liberty, peace[,] well-being, power, strength, and prosperity, spiritual and material, but also the freedom, liberty, peace, well-being, power, strength and prosperity, spiritual and material, of the world at large.

~ *Jefferson Caffery, n.d.* [1]

The word "diplomat" probably carries different connotations for different people. Some may believe that the diplomatic corps is an elitist club made up of the scions of old-line American families who – adorned in their striped pants and silk hats – mingle with the refined and governing classes of distant lands to engage in endless intrigues. Others may think that the ambassador is just another dreary bureaucrat who spends his days with the painstaking editing of political and economic reports—his only distraction being the malaria mosquitoes that infest his tropical post. As far as the American diplomatic corps in Central America was concerned, both images have some truth to them. At these subtropical posts we do find the flashy striped-pants-diplomat, the dull administrator, and any manner of person in between.

The next eight chapters will feature some twenty American ministers and ambassadors who worked in Central America between 1930 and 1950. Despite the many individual differences between these men, there are some important similarities in the backgrounds and worldviews of the Foreign Service officers who worked in Central American at a given time. It is therefore possible to distinguish three "generations", if you will, of envoys in the twenty odd years discussed here. While not every one of these

[1] Jefferson Caffery, "Adventures in Diplomacy" (unpublished), University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Edith Garland Dupré Library Special Collections and Archives, Collection 45: Jefferson Caffery Papers, 1902-1974, Box 69: Unpublished Memoirs.

twenty diplomatists fits into this generational mold comfortably, there are enough broad similarities within each generation to justify this attempt at generalization. Furthermore, subtle changes in the make-up of the Foreign Service in Central America, from one "generation" to the next, offer important clues as to how the character of American policy toward the region changed over time and why this was so.

1. THE GENTLEMAN DIPLOMATS, 1930-1935

The first generation of diplomats to be discussed here, managed the difficult transition, around 1930, from an interventionist American policy to a noninterventionist policy. Throughout the early twentieth century, Central American treaties which were backed up by U.S. support provided grounds for interference if not outright intervention in isthmian affairs. In 1923, the State Department brokered the so-called Treaty of Peace and Amity between the Central American states. The Treaty itself was supposed to be an improvement on a similar Treaty that dated to 1907 and had also received enthusiastic support from Washington. One of the most important objectives of the Treaty was to prevent coups and revolutions by denying would-be rebels the fruits of their victory: Article 2 of the Treaty stipulated that any government that came to power through unconstitutional means would be denied diplomatic recognition by the signatories of the Treaty. The threat of non-recognition alone was intended to deter any coup attempt from getting started. Even though Washington declined to be a signatory to the Treaty, the State Department did make it the backbone of its policy on the grounds that it was in concert with the region's own desire for peace and stability. Commenting on the perceived importance of the Treaty, Secretary of State Stimson noted in 1932 that:

> There can be no doubt in the minds of any impartial observer[s] that the treaties of 1907 and 1923 have been beneficial to the people of Central America. In the years prior to the adoption of these treaties revolution within and triumphantly from without were almost the yearly portion of the countries of Central America. The great danger always was that revolution in one country would lead to armed intervention in support of one side or the other on the part of the neighboring countries and that as so frequently occurred, general war would ensue. As a result of the 1907 and 1923 Treaties revolutions have decreased and not a single case of a general Central American war has occurred since 1907. The positive gain for Central America in the way of progress toward stability and orderly Government has thus been indisputable.[2]

Throughout the 1920s, however, Washington also started to distance itself from its old interventionist policy and to treat its Southern neighbors with more respect. Already in 1928, then president-elect Herbert Hoover promised to halt the deployment of U.S. troops to Latin America. It was not until 1936, however, that Secretary of State Cordell Hull made a definite promise to end all forms of intervention and interference, even if the lives of U.S. citizens were endangered.[3] Between 1928 and 1936, the evolution of an

[2] Henry Stimson (U.S. Secretary of State) to Sheldon Whitehouse (U.S. Minister to Guatemala), November 23, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.
[3] See chapter 4, pages 127-129

unconditional non-intervention policy made slow and sometimes halting progress. State Department instructions on the non-intervention issue to its diplomatic representatives in Central America were not always clear and could even be contradictory (especially when one considers that U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua throughout the 1920s and early 1930s).

While the Hoover administration moved away from intervention in Latin America, the State Department's fanatic support for the 1923 Treaty and Stimson's insistence that the Treaty should be used as a deterrent to—rather than a punishment for—any unconstitutional seizure of power provided a justification for unlimited interference in the internal affairs of Central America. Much like the U.S. Marines, who had served as the guarantors of free and fair elections in Nicaragua in 1932, the Treaty of 1923 made the U.S. legations in the northern Central American republics the guarantors of free elections and the protectors of constitutional governments, even if they were expected to accomplish their tasks without the benefits of armed assistance.[4]

Between 1929 and 1935 the American legations in the northern republics of Central America were led by Sheldon Whitehouse in Guatemala, Warren Delano Robbins in El Salvador, and Julius Garache Lay in Honduras. Lay served throughout the period, but in El Salvador, Robbins was replaced in 1931 by Charles Boyd Curtis who was himself effectively replaced by Jefferson Caffery in that same year. Matthew Hanna took over from Whitehouse in 1933 and remained in Guatemala until 1936. While this generation formed a link between the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations, it was in the first place a product of many years of Republican rule in the United States. Named the "generation of gentlemen" by reason of their aristocratic or upper middle class backgrounds, these men shared a unapologetic believe in the superiority of Anglo Saxon elites and in the benign effects of American rule over lesser peoples.

All of these men were born in the 19th century, with Lay being the oldest (1872) and Caffery the youngest (1886). Though not exactly amateur diplomats—since they all made a career in foreign affairs—they had all joined the service before it became a professional civil service in 1924. Concurrently, they all shared some of the characteristics of that "old school" generation. As far as their life stories can be reconstructed, it is clear that Whitehouse, Robbins, and Caffery were all scions of aristocratic families while Lay, Curtis, and Hanna came from somewhat more modest, upper-middle class families. Like many diplomats from their generation, Robbins and Curtis were schooled at Groton and Harvard. Whitehouse went to the no less prestigious Eton—where, it was said later, he acquired his distinctive accent and urbane manners—and later attended Yale. Caffery, Lay, and Hanna had to make do without Ivy League educations. Caffery, whose family came from Lafayette, attended Tulane University.

[4] On 1923 Treaties: Leonard, *Central America*, 80-83. Leonard characterizes the Treaties as the "high water-mark of constitutionalism". According to Leonard, the Department's conviction that the earlier and similar 1907 Treaties had provided stability was naïf. Such calm as existed was rather caused by a convergence of interests between the Department, U.S. businesses in the region, and local elites. See also: Findling, *Close neighbors*, chapter 4.

Lay's father was an army officer who was transferred regularly and thus provided his son with private tutors. Hanna was a military man himself and had graduated with honors from West Point in 1897.[5]

Caffery seems to have been the only one who entered the Foreign Service *after* examination. Whitehouse, Lay, Robbins, and Curtis started their careers in diplomacy as the private secretaries of established diplomats. Lay got a position at the consulate in Ottawa in 1889 through his father, who had been appointed consul-general there thanks to the intervention of Republican vice-president Levi Morton.[6] Whitehouse, Curtis and Robbins became private secretaries of the ambassadors in London, St. Petersburg, and Lisbon respectively. All their mentors were political appointees of the Roosevelt and Taft administrations. Whitehouse doubtlessly obtained the most desirable position as the protégé of one-time Republican vice-presidential candidate Whitelaw Reid at the Court of St. James, the most prestigious of all American embassies. It was not unusual at the time that young men from wealthy families chose to join the diplomatic service. The excitement of travel and the idea of serving the country appeared more attractive than tending the family fortune. Family networks could be applied to obtain a secretarial position at some prestigious foreign post, so that their social lives need not suffer. For many, this would just be a temporary adventure, a great opportunity mingle with foreign dignitaries for a year or so. As Caffery later remembered, he joined the service "for the lard".[7]

As for Hanna, he joined the Service after a 26 year military career. After his graduation, Hanna was assigned to Cuba, where he served as an aide to American military governor Leonard Wood, who is probably best known for co-founding the 1st Volunteer Cavalry regiment, popularly known as the "Rough Riders". Among other things, Hanna had the important task of reforming Cuba's educational system in his function of Commissioner of Public Schools of Cuba from 1900 to 1902. After Cuba, Hanna continued to serve General Wood—who may have considered him a protégé—in several other capacities, but in February 1917 he made a career change: becoming an assistant at the American embassy in Mexico City. From that time on, Hanna's career was on the fast track: He became minister in Managua after just 12 years in the Foreign Service (the average "career official" served at least 15 years before he was first considered for such a post).

[5] On Whitehouse, see: *Register* (1933) 278; "Sheldon Whitehouse dies at 82; Career diplomat for 26 years", *NYT* (August 7, 1965) 21. On Curtis, see *Register* (1933) 151. On Robbins, see: *Register* (1935) 284; "Warren D. Robbins dies of pneumonia", *NYT* (April 8, 1935) 19; "Robbins dead; N.Y. rites set for U.S. envoy", *TWP* (April 8, 1935) 1. On Lay, see: *Register* (1934) 204; "Ex-Envoy J.G. Lay, Long in Service", *NYT* (August 29, 1939) 20; "Julius G. Lay Dies at 67 in Massachusetts", *TWP* (August 29, 1939) 21. On Caffery, see: *Register* (1950) 74; "Jefferson Caffery, Dean of Diplomatic Service, dies", NYT (April 14, 1974) 48; "Envoy Jefferson Caffery dies", TWP (April 17, 1974) D8.

[6] Henry E. Mattox, *The Twilight of Amateur diplomacy: The American Foreign Service and its Senior Officers in the 1890s* (Kent et al. 1989) 29-31.

[7] Robert D. Schultzinger, *The making of Diplomatic Mind: the training, outlook, and style of United States Foreign Service officers, 1908-1931* (Middletown 1975); Caffery, "Adventures", Caffery Papers, Box 69.

Why Hanna joined the Foreign Service and climbed the ranks so fast cannot be ascertained. His international experience in the army probably prepared him for such work (he appears to have been "glib" in Spanish and he had practiced his administrative skills as Commissioner of Public Schools in Cuba). But the clue to his successes in the service was, according to a State Department memorandum, "his intimacy with Henry Fletcher". Henry Prather Fletcher was a prominent Republican (he would be Chairman of the Republican National Commission from 1934 to 1936). It is definitely plausible that he had a hand in Hanna's promotions and he may even have been the one who invited Hanna to join the service. Hanna's first assignment to Mexico coincides with Fletcher's appointment as ambassador to that country. Also, Fletcher was under-secretary of state (the second-ranking official at the Department) when Hanna was called to Washington to serve as Chief of Mexican Affairs. Hanna's only appointment to Europe in 1924 occurred while Fletcher was serving his country as ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, and Italy respectively. Hanna's "personal intimacy" with Fletcher is probably due to his former acquaintance with General Wood. Wood himself had become a notable Republican – he was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1920, but lost out to Warren G. Harding. Wood's friendship to Fletcher probably dates back further, however: they were both former "rough riders".[8]

Some evidence has survived of the fascinating lives these six men lived in the early twentieth century Foreign Service. Caffery, for example, wrote a lively, unpublished memoir of his diplomatic career that reveals little about American foreign policy, but does describe the "season" at the Swedish royal court; hunting expeditions with the Persian Shah; and the fine horses of a French prince, which he would take out for rides through the *Bois de Bologne*, together with Sheldon Whitehouse. The latter's early experience in the Foreign Service is recounted in *The New York Times*: the social pages. He traveled Europe and indulged in New York's social life; spending many a summer in Newport, attending society events, and joining elite Gentlemen's clubs such as the Racquet and Tennis Club, the Huguenot Society, and the Sons of the Revolution. Matthew Hanna, probably from a less aristocratic family than Whitehouse, was introduced to European high society through the Foreign Service and eventually married a German baroness.[9]

The fascination of American diplomats with European culture and high society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is well documented.[10] American

[8] Register (1935) 182-183; "Seven career men named as envoys", *NYT* (December 6, 1929) 15; "Matthew E. Hanna, diplomat, is dead", NYT (February 20, 1936) 20; "The Hoover week", *TM* (Monday, December 16, 1929); Unmarked files (Long to Hull, February, 1933), New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Collection 1972-003: Elisha V. and Boaz W. Long Papers, Box 44, folder 109: Analysis of incumbents in Diplomatic Service, 1933.

[9] Caffery, "Adventures", Caffery Papers, Box 69; "Matthew E. Hanna marries a Baroness", *NYT* (April 29, 1925) 21. For a small sample of Whitehouse's appearances on the social pages, see page 29, footnote 18, below.

[10] Wiel, *A Pretty Good Club*, especially 24-45; Schultzinger, *The Diplomatic Mind*, especially 3-11; Kenneth Paul Jones ed., *U.S. Diplomats in Europe, 1919-1941* (Oxford and Santa Barbara 1981) passim.

diplomatic customs, protocol, and dress were modeled on those of Europe and American diplomats were fascinated by the social prestige and cosmopolitan elegance of their European colleagues.[11] European courts and European high society were the favorite playing grounds of young diplomats like Whitehouse, Caffery, or Hanna. And while the American corps was acutely aware of the ideological distance between themselves and the European aristocracy—convinced as they were that the policies they represented were inspired by a democratic spirit[12]—in social terms the European elite was its point of reference. Historian Martin Wiel, for example, recounts the fascinating experience of one Arthur Bliss Lane who was a Foreign Service officer at the Polish court in the 1920s. Lane's experiences are especially interesting because he shared his background and worldview with the six men discussed here; joined the service around the same time and for similar reasons; and was appointed to Central America, Nicaragua in his case, in the early thirties. American Foreign Service officers of the time, Wiel writes:

> …by choice and by temperament became honorary members of the Polish aristocracy. Lane, in particular, judged Warsaw as he judged [his native] New York—by the elegance and lavishness of the entertainments enjoyed by the idle rich.[13]

The firm class distinctions of Europe appeared entirely natural to these men—just as it was natural that they should be part of its upper crust.

All this is not to say that these young diplomatists did not have to work. They worked very hard and social functions were part of their job—sometimes a rather demanding part. It so happened, however, that the six men discussed here liked the service, whether it was despite or due to all the social obligations, and dedicated their lives to it. As these things go, they all slowly climbed the ranks during the early part of the 20th century, each of them serving as consul or secretary in several European and Latin American posts before they were given command of one of their own. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, all six were apparently considered experienced enough to be promoted to the rank of minister. Interestingly, all six of them served their first tour as chief of mission in Central America and the Caribbean: For Caffery it was Salvador in 1926; for Curtis the Dominican Republic in 1930; for Lay Honduras in 1930; for Robbins El Salvador in 1929; for Hanna it was Nicaragua in 1929; and for Whitehouse Guatemala in 1930.

It is tempting, therefore, to conclude that the State Department wanted to test its young ministers in these backwater posts before sending them to more important posts. In fact, during the late 1920s many Foreign Service officers still looked upon Latin American tours as a demotion or as punishment duty. Hoover's Under-Secretary for Latin American Affairs Francis White (born in Baltimore; patrician family; Yale graduate) was determined to change this mentality. In the context of a broader push to improve

[11] David Paull Nickles, "US Diplomatic Etiquette during the Nineteenth Century", in: Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte eds., *The Diplomats' World. A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914* (Oxford et al. 2008) there 287-316.
[12] Nickles, "Diplomatic etiquette" and Schultzinger *The Diplomatic Mind*, especially 6-7.
[13] Wiel, *A pretty good club*, 24-26.

U.S.-Latin American relations, White made sure that experienced career men were appointed to the Latin posts. Publicly at least, both Lay and Curtis were presented as the "bright young men" of the State Department when they were sent to Latin America.[14] For the new chiefs themselves, while their new posts represented a promotion, life there was not always easy and it is safe to assume that most of them did their best to prove themselves and be transferred to more desirable posts. This sentiment is implicit, at least, in a letter from Matthew Hanna, then U.S. minister to Nicaragua, to Whitehouse: wishing Whitehouse a good vacation, Hanna noted that: "if something better comes your way and you do not return, I will rejoice with you".[15]

These men had led active social lives at the major metropolises of Europe, South America, and the United States so their transfer to cities like Tegucigalpa presented a significant change of pace. In a letter to Whitehouse, Lay complained that "as you can imagine there is no life in this place [Tegucigalpa], no congenial people…". He asked Whitehouse if any of the European or Mexican diplomatic representatives in Guatemala would visit the inauguration of the new Honduran president so he could throw them a "stag diner" and have some "congenial people" to talk to.[16] As for Whitehouse himself, *Time magazine* aptly described his promotion from counselor of embassy in Madrid to minister in Guatemala City as "a step up professionally, down socially".[17] The only comfort was that Guatemala City was relatively close to Whitehouse's native Newport, NY, where the Minister owned a mansion "with castle like turrets and surrounded by a high wall" where he would entertain up to 50 diner guests at a time during the summers of his three year tenure in Guatemala.[18] Likewise, Robbins was named the "social mentor" (later Chief of Protocol) of the Hoover administration during his tour to Salvador. He regularly left the legation in the care of his chargé for extended periods, while he returned to Washington "for the season".[19]

An appreciation of the social backgrounds and diplomatic style of this generation of gentleman diplomats is vital for a thorough understanding of their encounter with Central America. These factors naturally influenced their views on the local social structure and how they thought they fit into it or at least how they positioned themselves in relation to it.

It is extremely difficult to reconstruct a complete picture of the ministers' social and professional network in Central America, since they did not leave any personal papers

[14] Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor diplomacy: United States policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore and London 1979) 3-4; "The Presidency: The Hoover Week", TM (December 16, 1929).
[15] Matthew Hanna (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua) to Whitehouse, June 1, 1932, PR Guatemala, Vol. 286, cl. 800: Nicaragua.
[16] Julius G. Lay (U.S. Minister to Honduras) to Whitehouse, January 13, 1933, PR Guatemala, Vol. 295, cl. 800: Honduras.
[17] "The Presidency: Practical idea", *TM* (November 18, 1929).
[18] "Sheldon Whitehouse dies at 82; Career Diplomat for 26 years", *NYT* (August 7, 1965) 21; "Dudley P. Gilberts are Newport Hosts", *NYT* (August 25, 1931) 18; "Notes of Social Activities in New York and Elsewhere", *NYT* (July 25, 1932) 12; "Republican Chiefs Feted in Newport", NYT (September 11, 1932) 29; "Newport Greets President's Wife", *NYT* (September 2, 1933) 15.
[19] "Robbins dead; N.Y. rites set for U.S. envoy", *TWP* (April 8, 1935) 1.

and diplomatic correspondence regularly omits the names of contacts and informants (probably for reasons of discretion and security, since the political reports were sent to Washington by airmail in plain text). Such information as there is does suggest, however, that as far as their political reporting was concerned, the U.S. ministers relied on a fairly small circle of acquaintances and contacts.[20] First of all, legation reports regularly mention conversations with "prominent American businessmen" as a source of information. And whenever the ministers discussed political matters with Central Americans, those tended to be their social or professional equals. The members of the government and military elite largely originated from the small local aristocracy and these were the people that U.S. diplomats met on an almost daily basis. The minister regularly mentioned the "better elements" or the local "society" in their reports and invariably sympathized with them.

When it comes to the diplomatic style of this generation of ministers, the outside world, at least, regarded them as the "striped pants" variant of diplomatist. The six discussed here certainly belonged to that group. These were distinguished gentlemen of the old school. Coming mostly from socially high-standing families and having mostly attended prestigious private schools and universities, these were men who were very much aware of their social eminence. They were accustomed to seek out their social peers and deal with diplomatic problems "forcefully" and "effectively": by direct negotiations with the people who *mattered*. As a legation secretary of Caffery later recalled:

> He [Caffery] realized that in any given community, (…) in any government, there are only a relatively small number of really powerful people; people who really call the signals and call the tunes. He always managed to establish a very, very close working relationship with such centers of power. That was his style. And when he wanted something done, when he wanted to persuade the government to go this way or that way, he would go quietly and talk it over with these people, whose respect he had already gained, and then he would persuade them. And more often than not, that government acted in a way that we considered constructive and responsible.[21]

During the early 1930s many American officers combined a low opinion of the majority of Central Americans with a patronizing attitude toward what was believed to be an "intelligent" minority. Among the "drunks", "hot-heads", "criminals", "riff-raff", "cut-throats", communists, volatile banana-field laborers, and grafting politicians there were also those vaguely referred to as "the people", "the intelligent voter", or "the better element". According to the American legations, this "better element" desired peace in the country's national and international affairs, appreciated the importance of foreign capital and foreign political guidance, and abhorred radicalism. References to this vaguely

[20] For example: Personal Memorandum for the Minister, November 19, 1928, PR El Salvador, Vol. 106, cl. 844. A list of informers deemed reliable by the legation. Mainly businessmen, landowners, and foreigners.

[21] "Interview with Robert Corrigan January 21, 1988", Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, CD-Rom: Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands (henceforth: ADST). Also see: Gellman, *Good Neighbor diplomacy*, 16.

progressive, though unidentified, constituency in Honduras, for example, were often used in the political reports: The legation believed, for example, that "the better people of both [political] parties" in Honduras wanted to live at peace with their neighbor Guatemala. Contrasting several radical, anti-American candidates for the congressional elections of 1930 to two more conservative and capable men, Lay insisted that "[b]oth these [latter] candidates have the respect of the intelligent voters of the capital and the general feeling here is that, if there is really a free election, they will be elected". Lay also believed that "the people realize that if it were not for American capital to develop the banana industry, Honduras would become a wilderness". On the subject of foreign intervention, the Minister noted that "Hondurans on the North coast have the most pleasant and friendly recollections of the visits of our Marines to this country, especially in 1924".[22]

The relationship with the Central American elite was not unambiguous however. In many ways, the elitist outlook of American diplomats and of the Central American aristocracy seemed perfectly compatible: both admired the ways of European high society and were keen on imitating its outer forms and both were comfortable with the idea of elite rule. The Salvadoran and Guatemalan coffee barons and the Honduran rangers and plantation owners who constituted the local social and economic elites frequented golf clubs and joined European style gentlemen's clubs; they followed Old World fashion and lived in French or Italian style mansions; they sent their children to European and American schools; a light skin and Spanish aristocratic heritage were highly prized. American diplomats socialized with the native elite at local country clubs like they would in any European capital. They also agreed with the aristocracy that it was entirely appropriate that they should have the land that the Indian masses were too indulgent to cultivate.[23] Yet, an undertone of patronizing contemptuousness marked the American attitude toward the Central American ruling elite.

Hidden away somewhat in the State Department "Lot Files" is a concise report on Salvadoran society and politics by Cornelius van H. Engert, who was a first secretary of legation in that country from 1925 to 1926.[24] Somewhat of a rarity among the diplomatic

[22] Lawrence Higgins (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Honduras) to Whitehouse, June 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 102, November 2, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol. 170, cl. 800: Political Conditions; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 399, February 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 187, cl. 800: Communism; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 597, August 17, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to Thomas C. Wasson (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes, Honduras), March 11, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[23] For good discussions of the worldview of Central American elites, consult: Samuel Z. Stone, *The Heritage of the Conquistadors. Ruling Classes in Central America from the Conquest to the Sandinistas* (Lincoln and London 1990); David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* (Stanford, CA, 1994); Cerdas Cruz, "Colonial Heritage", in: Goodman et al., *Political Parties*; Jeffrey M. Paige, *Coffee and Power. Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge, Mass., and London 1997) 120-126; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 8-16.

[24] Cornelius H. van Engert, El Salvador, National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD, Record Group 59: Department of State Lot Files, Studies on Latin America, Box 12, Folder marked Salvador by Cornelius van H. Engert.

archives of the time, it offers a complete and integral study of Central American society by a U.S. diplomat and provides the clue to understanding the American position toward the local ruling classes. Engert rightly observes that the ideology of the local elite was strongly based on the concept of racial superiority over the Indian. While the secretary did not have a problem with that ideology as such, he did dispute that the Salvadoran elite's claim to whiteness and European heritage put it on the same level as the American elite: No matter how "white" the local aristocrat might be he was not an Anglo-Saxon. While the Spanish colonist, much like the American frontiersman, prided himself on his toughness and independence and considered it entirely natural that he should claim the land that the native Indian had never bothered to develop, the North American would not recognize this accomplishments. Rather than a southern version of the North American "self-made man", Engert asserts that the "presence of [a] large Indian population" had the effect of lowering the standards of the ruling classes "by enabling them to live upon the toil of inferiors without doing any work themselves". Combined with the racial intermingling with Indians, this lack of honest physical labor over time led to a degeneration of the upper classes, which "lost much of their energy and resourcefulness".

It is striking that while Engert's analysis of the Mestizo and Indian classes is largely an abstract treatise, couched in what was at the time regarded as scientific language[25], his reflections on the upper class seem very personal and are particularly venomous. Being the only class with which the secretary had any personal contact, he was clearly unable to dress a profound culture shock in neat, academic generalities. And so, Engert devotes six of fourteen pages of the introduction of his report on a diatribe against the Salvadoran aristocracy, which is laced with unfavorable comparisons to alleged Anglo-Saxon traits and customs:

> From their Spanish ancestors, the upper classes have inherited vivacity of intellect, courage, and courtesy. Unfortunately, however, their intellect is apt to take the form of superficial cleverness rather than wisdom, common sense, or foresight; their courage becomes visionary audacity which causes them to attempt much more than they can accomplish and to start things they cannot possibly finish; while their courtesy loses itself in a maze of polite but artificial formalities and ceremonies, and they are often ignorant of the simplest rules of good breeding (…)
>
> The Spaniards were too impulsive, emotional, and excitable to hold deep convictions or to be sincerely attached to a cause or an ideal. Hence the lack of definiteness of aim, an absence of a sense of responsibility, and a

[25] Such is evident, for example, in Engert's attention for history and geography, which betray some erudition on these subjects. More striking to the modern reader would be his references to physical anthropology or so-called craniometry. He observed, for instance that the eyes of the Indian had a "Mongoloid tilt" and that the shape of their heads was "brachycephalic" (i.e. round and flat, as opposed to the allegedly long and thin skulls of the Caucasian races). Engert associated such features with impaired mental faculties. In all fairness, however, it must be noted that such observations were balanced with more realistic—though no less paternalistic—reflections on the social-economic circumstances of the Indians: "no sincere effort was ever made to raise them economically or educationally and to offer them opportunities for improvement".

> disposition to shirk drudgery. A momentary enthusiasm is easily aroused but is as quickly followed by disillusionment at the sight of the first obstacles.
>
> This naïve impressionability is probably also responsible for their love of sonorous phrases. Eloquence comes so easy to them as to be almost a nuisance. Impassionate oratory and theatrical pathos seem to take the place of sound reasoning and calm reflection. And as one listens to their speeches—full of classical quotations, circumlocutions, and repetitions—one cannot help but feel that they talk faster than they think (…)
>
> Another characteristic is love of display. Their extravagance at feasts and festivals contrasts oddly with the parsimony of their daily life. Showiness, rather than thoroughness, seems to be the aim (…) The same is true of their somewhat overrated hospitality. The joys of simple and unostentatious entertaining are unknown to them. Every party must be either a *fiesta* or a *banquete*.

Engert reserved similar contempt for the upper middle cases of politicians, military officers, and administrators, which were even less Anglo-Saxon then the landowners. This class, which tended to the practical affairs that the aristocracy could not be bothered with, was mainly Mestizo or Ladino, a “mongrel” race of Spanish and Indian ancestry. In fact, Engert seems to have preferred the Indian of “pure blood” whose biggest fault was the lack of thrift, but, being a “natural” race, had no serious defects. The Ladinos, by contrast, were “more cowardly, less honest, lazier, and more sensuous than the pure Indian” and were prone to heavy drinking and gambling. However, since the locals shared a “curious” tolerance of interbreeding, Engert observed that the Mestizo would eventually dominate Central America and comforted himself with the thought that, although they “lose some mental and moral qualities of the superior race”, they are at least “a step ahead of the Indian”. The improvement that Engert recognized was not so much in what he might have called the “moral” realm, as he rather appreciated the alleged docility of the Indian, but rather in the Mestizo’s inheritance of some of the white man’s ambition and foresight. Thus, “the Mestizo realizes that he can rise from the masses by his own efforts and thus makes him more purposeful and intent on accomplishment”. These inbred characteristics had created a middle class of Mestizo clerks, teachers, professionals, politicians, and soldiers: Professions that were frowned upon by the white upper classes but were mentally excessively demanding for the Indians. That such an overlap of racial and social hierarchy should be desirable, can be concluded from Engert’s assertion that the Mestizos “form a useful link between the ‘aristocrats’ and the peons, who therefore understand each other much better than the same elements in neighboring countries were the middle class is not so large”.

The sentiments expressed by Engert explain the American diplomatic corps’ attitude toward the “White” coffee barons and “Ladino” political rulers: the American minister mingled with them at social occasions and accepted as natural their rule of the Indian masses, but at the same time, he was superior to them. The minister took his place among the ruling classes of Central American as he would in any European capital, but he did not consider himself *part* of that group. Thus, men like Whitehouse and Lay adopted a patronizing attitude towards the affairs of Central America such as they would

not adopt towards the affairs of Europe. They easily assumed that they had to lead the local leadership.

Taking some steps down on the social ladder, American ministers understood the local Indian populations to be essentially peaceful, if not passive, people. They lacked the mental capacities to comprehend political ideas or ideologies and concurrently, were not dissatisfied with their lack of political influence. If only enough land or food was available for the masses to survive, they would endure the basically feudal system under which they had toiled for many generations. Thus, according to Whitehouse, Guatemalans were a "very submissive people who are not easily incited to revolt". Apparently lacking its own political agency, the people would need "strong men" to lead an uprising and, happily, such men did not currently exist in Guatemala. In El Salvador, legation officials agreed that the so-called *mozo* (Indian peasant) did not desire change. While a measure of social unrest was always evident, it was not serious. The legation considered that work was always obtainable in industrious, intensely cultivated Salvador. And even those who could not find work should be able to live off the land. Minister Robbins reported in 1931 that:

> Unemployment has this characteristic in Salvador, namely, that nobody need go hungry for it is easily possible to live on the country without money. Furthermore, there is no excuse for much unemployment here. One of the leading coffee-growers, Mr. James Hill, has informed me that he now requires 200 additional hands on his properties and is unable to obtain them.

Thus, unemployment, hunger, and poverty were caused, according to Robbins and others, by "a want of desire to work", and not by any social inequalities or economic problems.[26]

Only Lay and the Honduran legation were somewhat more pessimistic about the essentially peaceful nature of the local masses of peasants. In fact, Hondurans, who were poorer, less obviously Hispanic, and more obviously Indian than people in the neighboring republics, were considered especially backward, hot-headed, prone to heavy drinking, and intellectually impaired: "[T]hey are naturally very credulous, having little critical faculty in their mental composition. When something is told them, they do not stop to ask themselves if it is plausible, reasonable or consistent with facts known to them, but as a rule accept the story in its entirety until denied or refuted". Hondurans were therefore easily excited, not because there was any reason to be, but because they lacked the ability for sober reflection. For example, first secretary Higgins more than once complained that Hondurans were led into a patriotic frenzy against Guatemala, because of wild and unfounded rumors about president's Ubico's designs for Central American domination: "These allegations, fomented by the press and falling on the fertile

[26] William McCafferty (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 218, November 13, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, #1020); W.W. Scott (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 236, March 22, 1930, PR El Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: Bolshevism; Harold D. Finley (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 490, May 2, 1931, PR El Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Guatemala; Warren D. Robbins (U.S. Minister to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 468, March 21, 1931, PR El Salvador, Vol. 112, cl. 800.B: Bolshevism.

soil of the medieval mind of the Hondurans, so prone to distrust and hatred of the foreigner, particularly when he is a neighbor and hereditary enemy, are on everyone's tongue and sincerely believed by many".[27]

Lay himself believed that the Honduran Indian was a "very low type of Indian" and the attribute that was invariably ascribed to them was vindictiveness. When this trait was combined with easily available liquor, a dangerous situation developed: "The average Honduran", noted vice-consul Stewart, "is fairly good-natured until he gets drunk and then he sometimes runs wild and resents any real or fancied insult with revolver or machete". Whenever the American fruit companies had to lay off large groups of workers, they preferred to fire the Jamaican Negro laborers, because they were supposedly more peaceful and less prone to drinking than their Honduran counterparts. The legation agreed that this was a good way to prevent disturbances.[28]

During the early Depression years, however, it was inevitable that the Indian masses would be touched by the economic letdown and this worried the American legations. Whitehouse feared that hunger and unemployment would cause Guatemalans to "join *any* movement which may promise to improve their condition". In fact, it seems likely that Whitehouse did not just have "any" movement in mind, but the recently founded *Partido Cooperatista*. This party, Whitehouse claimed, was mainly made up of the "younger elements" of existing parties who objected to the current government's inefficiency. While the Party's appeals to the laboring and agrarian classes were voiced in "high sounding phrases", the Minister seemed to agree with "many people" who believed that its proclamations were "nothing more than an effort to encourage radicalism and communism".[29]

It is this last issue that Whitehouse mentioned that worried him and his colleagues: not that the Indian masses would become a political force in themselves—as they were peaceful and did not desire change anyway—but that devious elements among the Mestizos or Creoles would take advantage of the Indians' unemployment and general credulity. Due to the Depression many Honduran peasants and plantation workers, for example, faced the prospect of losing their land or their jobs. The American legation feared that large groups of Hondurans who had nothing to loose were prone to pillaging and burning, especially when opportunistic politicians or other "professional troublemakers" incited them. Such was the pretext for many "revolutions" in Honduras,

[27] Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 504, June 10, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 535, June 28, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 192, cl. 891: Public Press.

[28] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 731, March 3, 1933, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 218; Higgins to the Department of State, Despatch 332, November 11, 1931, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 216; Lay to the Department of State, Despatch 704, January 27, 1933, PR Honduras, Vol. 195, cl. 715: Honduras-Guatemala; Warren C. Stewart (U.S. Vice Consul to Ceiba, Honduras) to Higgins, November 26, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol 172, cl. 850.4: Labor Strikes; Thomas C. Wasson (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes, Honduras) to Lay, November 17, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol 172, cl. 850.4: Labor Strikes; T. Monroe Fisher (U.S. Vice Consul to Tela, Honduras) to Lay, November 20, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol 172, cl. 850.4: Labor Strikes; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 141, November 21, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol 172, cl. 850.4: Labor Strikes.

[29] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, November 13, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, #1020).

the Americans believed. In a typical example, Lay warned the North Coast consulates in the autumn of 1930 that "this Legation is informed that unemployment on the North Coast during the past few months has greatly increased and that many desperate men out of work have recently been responsible for murders and outrages".[30]

In El Salvador, the *mozos'* natural incapacity to grasp political concepts or even to form any kind of public opinion, the lack of unemployment and absence of any "need" to go hungry, implied that Salvador's backward society was naturally insulated against modern political radicalism. While the existence of communism in El Salvador was acknowledged and taken seriously by the legation, there is no evidence that it was considered a force capable of effecting any social or political change as it had been in Mexico some years previous. Instead, it was communism's potential for disorder, murder, rape, pillage, and destruction that was feared. However, communism was containable as it could only flourish when artificially implanted and cultivated by foreign agitators. As long as responsible army and police officers were willing to take "prompt and decisive action" against foreign elements, communism would not spread since the *mozos* were "not of the character to embrace Communism whole-heartedly".[31]

The fear for "Communism", or any other kind of "radicalism", at the American legations at this particular time should not be confused, therefore, with that which developed during the Cold War. communism was not defined, for example, as a global conspiracy directed by Moscow. Terms like "fifth column movement", "totalitarian threat", or "monolithic organization" had not entered the vocabulary yet. communist agitators were mainly described as opportunists whose only incentive was to still their thirst for blood. Hence, isolated "communistic" uprisings were not understood to be a direct political threat in the sense that their objectives were to overthrow the government and install a Bolshevik dictatorship. The objective was to "pillage and burn". However, the unrest and financial drain accompanying a communist uprising could pose a significant threat to political stability.[32]

Since any unrest among the *campasinos* was thought to have been caused by a discreet and limited group of (foreign) agitators, it could be controlled fairly easily.

[30] Lay to the U.S. Consulates on the Honduran North Coast, November 13, 1930, PR Honduras, PR Honduras, Vol 172, cl. 850.4: Labor Strikes; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 286, September 10, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol 179, cl. 800: Honduras (Continued); Stewart to Lay, October 20, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol. 170, cl. 800: Political Conditions; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 125, December 19, 1930, PR Honduras, Vol. 170, cl. 800: Political Conditions; Stewart to Lay, April 8, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800:Honduras (Telegrams); Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 63, April 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras (Telegrams).

[31] Scott to the Secretary of State, Despatch 236, March 22, 1930, PR El Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: Bolshevism; Scott to the Secretary of State, Despatch 319, August 1, 1930, PR El Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: Bolshevism.

[32] Local elites seem to have had a very similar understanding of what communism was: Héctor Lindo Fuentes et al., *Remembering a massacre in El Salvador: The insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the politics of historical memory* (Albuquerque 2007) 46, argues that Salvadoran elites in the 1930s did not have a well-developed idea of what communism was and used the term "communist" according "to the parlance of the day, when the word meant someone who was violent, immoral, against the law, contrary to the nation state, or lacking in Christianity".

Government repression of strikes or other stirrings was deemed appropriate by the American legations. What was needed was "firm" or "purposeful" action by the government, untainted by "opportunistic" attempts to woo the labor vote. An interesting sidelight on this notion is that American officers often conceptualized a "firm" stand on labor in gender terms. Thus, former president Paz Barahona of Honduras, despite his democratic credentials, was considered an "old woman" in this regard. A local *comandante* on the North Coast of that same country who had wavered in his response to labor unrest was said to be lacking "manly" qualities. Americans defined leadership over the masses in *macho* terms. While there is no indication that they were looking for anything like a dictator, they never considered that the line between manliness and despotism might be very thin indeed.[33]

2. THE ROOSEVELT APPOINTEES, 1935-1945

One might argue that inter-American policy was the least of Roosevelt's worries. His administration is best known for its handling of the Great Depression and its confrontation with fascism in Europe. Yet, inter-American policy played an important role in both these endeavors and Roosevelt is also remembered for his Good Neighbor policy, which has been classified an enormous success by many (but by no means all) American historians.[34]

The Good Neighbor policy was a multifaceted attempt to win the trust and respect of America's Latin American neighbors. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, American policy towards the south was characterized by unilateral military intervention and unbridled economic expansion, thus fostering the growth of anti-American sentiment in the so-called "sister republics". By the time Franklin Roosevelt entered the White House, the state of U.S. Latin American relations was thought to be at an all-time low. The new administration made valiant attempts to change this situation: It used a new official discourse that stressed mutual respect and inter-American solidarity and moved on to proclaim officially that the United States would never again violate the sovereignty of the Latin American republics. The marine contingents that occupied Nicaragua were withdrawn; the infamous Platt amendment of the Cuban constitution was abrogated; and the Central American Treaty of Peace and Amity, which had often been used as a justification for U.S. interference, was quietly shelved. As a reward, and as a measure of the success of the Good Neighbor policy, nearly all nations of the Western Hemisphere warmly supported the United States during the Second World War.[35]

The Roosevelt administration felt that the appointment of envoys to the sister republics required extra care in the context of its Good Neighbor policy. It was not

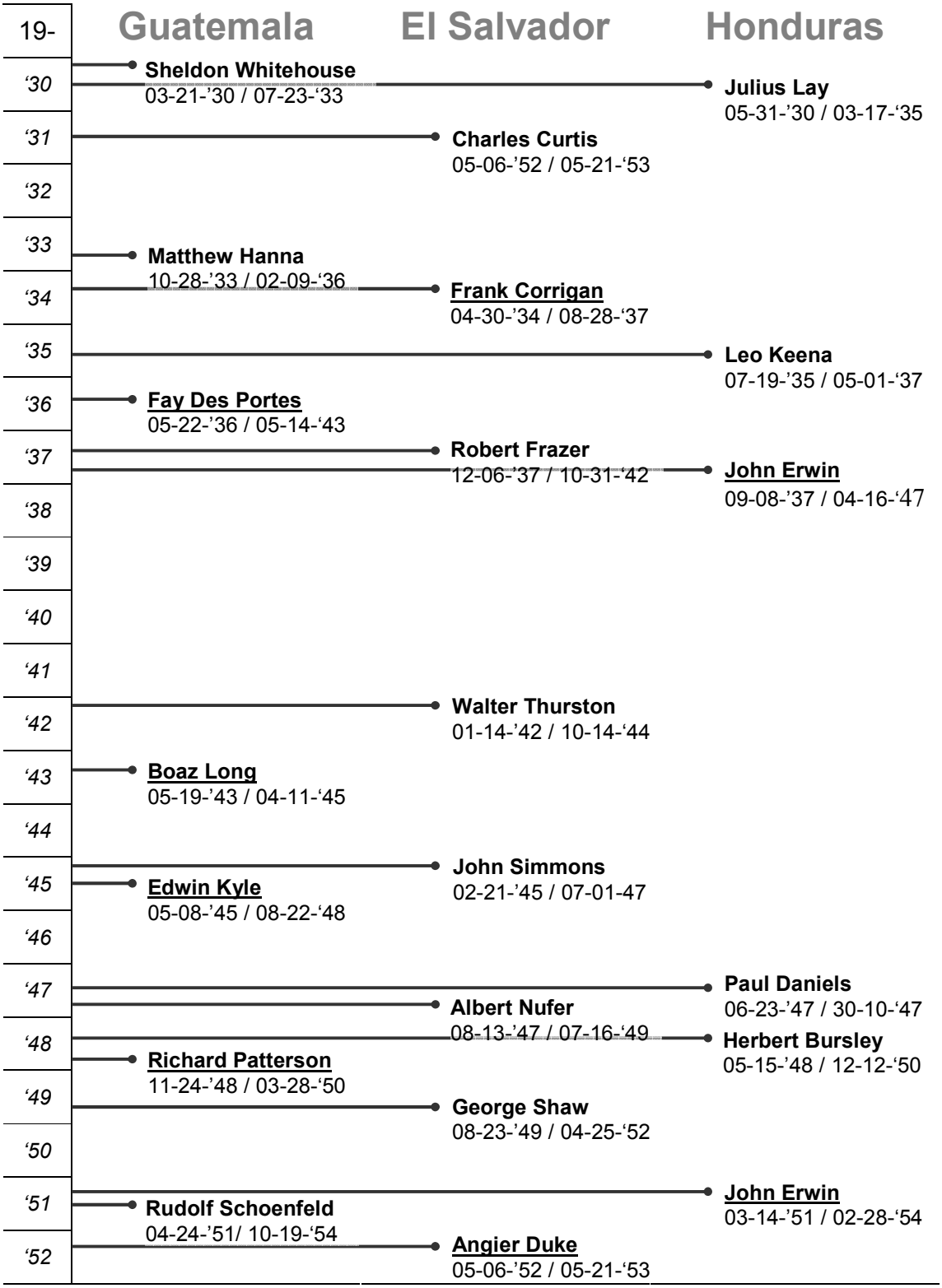
[33] Higgins, Notes on the Political Campaign in Honduras in 1923, n.d., PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Henry S. Haines (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Castilla, Honduras) to Lay, August 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol 179, cl. 800: Honduras (Continued).
[34] See chapter 5, footnotes 6 and 7.
[35] The classic account of the Good Neighbor policy is: Wood, *The Making*. Many other works cited throughout the current text will provide insights into the specifics of the Good Neighbor policy.

altogether satisfied with the state of the diplomatic corps when it took office. It proved to be difficult to find Foreign Service officers of the senior ranks who had not been tinged by the Republican patronage machine. At least with regard to Central America, Whitehouse, Curtis, Lay, and Hanna were all thought to be partisans of the Republican Party to some degree. Only Jefferson Caffery and Warren Delano Robbins—a first cousin of the new president as his middle name indicates—were not associated with the Republicans. The former had many years of active service ahead of him, serving, among other posts, in Cuba. The latter was promoted to Canada, but died unexpectedly of pneumonia in 1935. Whitehouse took charge in Columbia in 1933, but soon left the service for "family reasons". Curtis had already been retired involuntarily. Lay left Honduras in 1935. He was considered "dead wood" by the incoming administration, but was eventually transferred to Uruguay, where he could serve out two more years in order to obtain full retirement benefits.[36]

Whether it was due to the large amount of Republican protégés in the Service; the landslide election victory of 1936; the insistent plea for diplomatic perks from Roosevelt supporters; or even an attempt to give a personal touch to the Good Neighbor policy, the fact remains that from 1936 onward Democratic political appointees took over the Central American posts. Francis Patrick Corrigan, a Democrat from New York, was appointed to El Salvador in 1934; Fay Allen Des Portes of North Carolina was appointed to Guatemala in 1936; John Draper Erwin of Tennessee was appointed to Honduras in 1937. Des Portes was replaced in 1943 by Boaz W. Long of New Mexico who was himself replaced by Edwin J. Kyle of Texas in 1945. The only career men to serve in Central America (including Nicaragua and Costa Rica) before the outbreak of the War were Leo Keena (Honduras, 1935-1937) and Robert Frazer (El Salvador, 1937-1942). From 1941 onwards, the Central American posts were slowly recovered for the professional service.[37]

[36] William C. Bullit to R. Walton Moore, December 8, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Office Files. Part III Departmental Correspondence. Microfilm: Roosevelt Study Center (henceforth: ROF), Reel 24, Frames 727-730; Franklin Roosevelt to the Acting Secretary of State, December 28, 1936, ROF, Reel 24, Frame 731; Franklin Roosevelt to the Acting Secretary of State, December 19, 1936, Reel 24, Frame 735; Memorandum for Judge Moore, December 19, 1936, ROF, Reel 24, Frames 736-737 ; Unmarked files (ca. 1933), Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers, Official File 20: State Department, February to June, 1933; Unmarked files (Long to Hull, February, 1933), Elisha V. and Boaz W. Long Papers, Box 44, folder 109: Analysis of incumbents in Diplomatic Service, 1933; Interview with James Cowles Hart Bonright (February 26, 1986) ADST; Whitehouse to Franklin Roosevelt, November 19, 1934, FDR Library, OF729: Sheldon Whitehouse, 1933-1938. On Curtis' final weeks in the service, see chapter 3, pages 102-109. He seems to have retreated from public life after his retirement and does not turn up in the newspapers anymore.

[37] *Register* (1941) 107; *Register* (1942) 147, 179-180, and 192; *Register* (1946) 218; *Register* (1948) 291; *Register* (1950) 110. Incidentally, the diary of Leo Keena's wife, Mrs. Joan S. Keena, was published in 1985. Regretfully, the diary is rather bland and deals mostly with the management of a legation household (although it is not particularly insightful or interesting on that count either). The addendum by Keena's daughter, Ms. Manuela Keena, presents a far more interesting read, but does not deal with Foreign Service life. Joan S. Keena, *On the Foreign Service merry-go-round* (Elms Court et al. 1985).


19-
Guatemala
El Salvador
Honduras
'30
Sheldon Whitehouse
03-21-'30 / 07-23-'33
Julius Lay
05-31-'30 / 03-17-'35
'31
Charles Curtis
05-06-'52 / 05-21-'53
'32
'33
Matthew Hanna
10-28-'33 / 02-09-'36
'34
Frank Corrigan
04-30-'34 / 08-28-'37
'35
Leo Keena
07-19-'35 / 05-01-'37
'36
Fay Des Portes
05-22-'36 / 05-14-'43
'37
Robert Frazer
12-06-'37 / 10-31-'42
John Erwin
09-08-'37 / 04-16-'47
'38
'39
'40
'41
'42
Walter Thurston
01-14-'42 / 10-14-'44
'43
Boaz Long
05-19-'43 / 04-11-'45
'44
'45
John Simmons
02-21-'45 / 07-01-47
Edwin Kyle
05-08-'45 / 08-22-'48
'46
'47
Paul Daniels
06-23-'47 / 30-10-'47
Albert Nufer
08-13-'47 / 07-16-'49
'48
Herbert Bursley
05-15-'48 / 12-12-'50
Richard Patterson
11-24-'48 / 03-28-'50
'49
George Shaw
08-23-'49 / 04-25-'52
'50
'51
John Erwin
03-14-'51 / 02-28-'54
Rudolf Schoenfeld
04-24-'51/ 10-19-'54
'52
Angier Duke
05-06-'52 / 05-21-'53

Aside from a difference in geographical origins—with greater emphasis on the South and the West rather than the North and East—the new Roosevelt appointees differed considerably from their predecessors at the Central American posts. Generally, the appointees were not from old, upper-class families; they had not enjoyed Ivy League or even university educations; and they lacked experience in professional diplomacy. Before they became diplomats, these men had had careers in business or the professions: Corrigan was a surgeon, Des Porters a politician, businessman, and farmer, Long a businessman, Erwin a journalist, and Kyle a scholar. What united them, of course, was their connection with the Democratic Party. None of the new ministers to Central America played a particularly important role in the Democratic Party, nor were they particularly close to members of the Roosevelt administration. Their political connections and their records as life-long supporters of the Democratic Party did, however, lead to their appointment to the Foreign Service.

One interesting sidelight to these appointments should be mentioned: Des Portes, Erwin, and Kyle were from the traditional South. Long was from New Mexico. Corrigan, Keena, and Frazer were from the Northern states, but, as their names indicate, they were all of Irish stock. While it is unknown whether this played any part in their appointments to Central America specifically, the idea that Irishmen and Southerners would get along better with Latins appears to have been a common stereotype. The former were considered friendlier and less ostentatious than the formal and reserved Anglo Saxon type and thus better able to deal with the extravagant Latins. According to the Division of Latin American Affairs, the field posts needed men who took an interest in Latin culture and spoke Spanish; men who were progressive and forward-looking and sympathized with the region's social and economic problems; men of independence and tact who had the courage needed to withstand the many pressures that might draw the United States into local politics. Lastly, Latin American duty demanded the "ability to get along with peoples whose customs, mentality and background often differ quite radically from our own". According to the Division, men "with some Irish blood often meet this requirement as do Southerners who have no color prejudices".[38]

As to the professional backgrounds of the Roosevelt appointees, one can debate at length the merits of appointing politicians to the highest diplomatic posts abroad. The fact remains, as will become clear in the following chapters, that years of experience in foreign relations do not necessarily result in sound diplomacy. And from the standpoint of the Roosevelt administration, there were some advantages to the appointment of non-career men. The very lack of experience of these men in American foreign relations was an asset in so far as they were untainted by Republican policies. It seems probable that

[38] Trueblood, Memorandum on Qualifications of Officers specializing in Latin American Service, December 15, 1937, Lot Files, General Memoranda, Box 2, Folder marked General, Oct-Dec, 1937. Incidentally, secretary Drew commented on Keena that: "He is a very nice person—quiet, unruffable, sense of humor. Being of Irish extraction he would be". And on Corrigan he noted: "Am I prejudiced or back-patting or is there something about the Irish? They always seem to be smarter than other people and to have 'a way with them'. You either hate them or love them". Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919-1970, ADST.

many of these men were unfamiliar with the 1923 Treaty or the promotion of constitutionalism and they never mentioned gunboats or marines. Also unfamiliar with protocol and diplomatic etiquettes, their approach to legation affairs appears to have been relatively informal and they were more willing to engage the local press—an attitude conformant with the spirit of the Good Neighbor.

Under normal circumstances, most chiefs of mission served at a single post for around three years. The ministers who were appointed to Central America around 1936, however, served an average of just over five years at their isthmian posts. Those appointed to Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (i.e. Des Portes, Frazer, and Erwin) served an average of over seven years at these posts. Why this was so has apparently not been documented, although it is reasonable to assume that toward 1939 it was deemed desirable to have envoys in Central America who had already established a satisfactory working relationship with the local governments and who could be trusted to gain Central American cooperation for the U.S. policy of neutrality and, two years later, for the American war effort. However this may be, it can safely be said that due to their long tenures, the Roosevelt appointees played an important role in the development of U.S.-Central American relations. While some of their life-histories will necessarily be discussed in the context of chapters to come, an illustrative discussion of the first three appointees to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras follows below.

Francis Patrick Corrigan was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1881. At the age of 25, he graduated from the local Western Reserve University with a medical degree. After that he went into surgery, which would be his vocation for the next twenty-eight years. He was a successful surgeon too: Some career highlights include his participation in the first successful blood transfusion in the United States; graduate work in Europe; and several official missions to Latin America intended to improve health care there. During the 1920's Corrigan served as director of surgery at several hospitals, but toward the end of the decade, he felt that it was time for a career change. By his own account, Corrigan had always wanted to join the diplomatic service and since, again by his own account, he was a life-long Democrat, he felt that Roosevelt's election presented the right opportunity for him to enter that line of work.[39]

There was no obvious reason for the new administration to be interested in Corrigan—at least there is no known record of important political work or campaign contributions from his side. It appears that he won his appointment to the legation of El Salvador in 1935 by single-minded determination. Corrigan's personal papers at the Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, NY, document his personal campaign for a diplomatic post. The genial Irishman seems to have been acquainted with many people and he was definitely not shy about contacting them and recruiting them for his cause.

[39] "Dr. Frank Corrigan Dies at 86; Retired Surgeon and Diplomat", *NYT* (January 23, 1968) 39; Corrigan to Senator Robert J. Bulkley, January 17, 1933, Folder: Bulkley, sen. Robert J., General Correspondence, Box 2, Papers of Frank P. Corrigan, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York

Characteristically, he introduced himself to Robert Bulkley, Senator for Ohio at the time, by stating outright that "I am submitting my name [for appointment to a diplomatic post] only because I feel that by temperament, training and type of mind I might be of considerable and valuable use to President Roosevelt's administration".[40]

Corrigan managed to convince many people in his personal network to back his campaign, but the administration's initial answer was "no chance". Corrigan kept at it, however, and, with Senator Bulkley and a small army of reputable Americans firmly by his side, his efforts were rewarded with the appointment to El Salvador. The only problem was that Corrigan had been aiming at least for Ecuador or one of the larger Latin American countries. Thus, a campaign for promotion was almost immediately initialized, with new letters of introduction and self-promotion going out to everyone who could help him. While he seems to have been aiming for a position as assistant secretary in the Department of State, Corrigan's connections were not that good.[41] However, he did have a fairly successful career in diplomacy, which eventually included several ambassadorships and which extended into the postwar era.

Though given to flattery somewhat, one cannot help but respect Corrigan for his strong and unapologetic sense of self-worth. It seems that he did not entirely overestimate his own abilities either: He quickly earned the respect of his secretaries at the Salvadoran legation—and it was never easy for a political appointee to win the favor of the younger career men—and Franklin Roosevelt reportedly considered him the best man to come into the service from the outside.[42]

Fay Allen Des Portes, born on June 16, 1890, in Winnsboro, SC, was probably the son of an independent farmer or small plantation owner. He was educated at Clemson College and North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College, classified at the time as a school for the "industrial classes". After graduation, Fay went into business in Winnsboro, trying his luck at merchandising, chemical production, and banking. He also owned a farm in his native Fairfield, which employed up to 400 black workers. From 1926 to 1928, he served the Democratic Party in the South Carolina House of Representatives and subsequently in the South Carolina Senate from 1928 to 1933 (both houses had been dominated by Democrats since the end of Reconstruction). On a national level, Fay Des Portes drew some minor attention because of his stance against

[40] Corrigan to Bulkley, January 17, 1933, Folder: Bulkley, Sen. Robert J., General Correspondence, Box 2, Corrigan Papers.
[41] Patrick J. Cooney to James A. Farley, October 5, 1933, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 4, Folder: Farley, James A.; Farley to Cooney, October 18, 1933, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 4, Folder: Farley, James A.; R. Walton Moore to Corrigan, December 19, 1936, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 7, Folder: Moore, R. Walton; Corrigan to Hull, March 20, 1937, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 4, Folder: Hull, Cordell; Sumner Welles to Corrigan, June 4, 1937, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 10, Folder: Welles, Sumner.
[42] Bulkley to Corrigan, June 3, 1937, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 2, Folder: Bulkley, Sen. Robert J..

prohibition and because he was a delegate to the 1932 Democratic National Convention, which nominated Franklin Roosevelt as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.[43]

The Great Depression hit the Des Portes family hard, however. Life on the family's farm was almost unbearable as Fay explained in a 1931 letter to his favorite cousin:

> "[t]he horrible part of the whole situation is these poor starving people here in our midst. The Banks can't let the poor Negroes on the farm have anything to eat. I don't know what is going to happen. I have about four hundred Negroes that are absolutely dependent on me as my two little boys but I can't help them any more and God only knows what is going to happen to them. And what is happening to me is happening with every other farmer and landowner in the state".[44]

Fay's health apparently broke under the strain of these economic difficulties, and he was committed to a sanitarium in the fall of 1932.

It so happened, though, that the cousin Fay wrote to was the highly successful New York financier Bernard Baruch, who had close ties to the incoming Roosevelt administration. In 1933, Baruch, "in one of the rare instances he ever exerted influence in personal patronage", wrote a letter to James Farley, Roosevelt's former campaign leader who was virtually in control of the Democratic Party's patronage machine, to advertise the abilities of his cousin Fay. FDR himself seems to have taken an interest in the case and was "delighted" to help out "Barney's" cousin. Bernard Baruch's biographer opines that "[w]hat happened was like the ending of a Fairy Tale. For Fay Allen Des Portes, a South Carolinian with something of the charm of his more famous kinsman, was whisked away from a dying cotton plantation to the genial climate and cultured official society of the Republic of Bolivia", where he became the American chargé d'affaires.[45] Some years later he was transferred to Guatemala to head his own mission.

John Draper Erwin was born in Meador, Kentucky, on November 14, 1883. Next to nothing is known about his family, except that it had moved from Meador to Chattanooga, Tennessee—a major railway hub with some industries—when Erwin was still a little boy. One can speculate that his father was somehow involved in the railway industry, where John Erwin would also find his first employ. Young Erwin attended the local McCallie Prep School for some time and then switched to Baylor, also a pre-university school, where he graduated in 1908. In 1909, he joined the staff of the *Chattanooga News* as a reporter, which turned out to be his true calling in life.[46]

Erwin was a lifelong Democrat and in 1913 he temporarily left journalism and moved to Washington D.C. to work for the Democratic Tennessee Senatorial delegation. He started out as a staff member of Senator John K. Shields but soon switched to the staff of Senator Luke Lea. Lea was a staunch supporter of President Wilson's Progressive policies and, during the years that Erwin was in his service, he devoted

[43] *Register* (1941) 107; "Fay A. Des Portes; U.S. Ambassador", *NYT* (September 18, 1944) 19.
[44] Margaret L. Coit, *Mr. Baruch* (Reprint: Washington D.C. 2000) 400.
[45] *Idem*.
[46] *Register* (1946) 218; "J.D. Erwin Dies; Aided 'Dome' Probe", *The Hartford Courant* (March 3, 1983) C12.

most of his energies to launching a federal investigation of the railroads and of political corruption in Tennessee.[47]

Erwin's decision to move to Washington, his home for the next 25 years, proved to be of major importance for his further career. After some five years on Senator Lea's staff, he went back into journalism, as a Washington reporter for *The Nashville Tennessean* (which, as it happened, had been founded by Lea). During the next twenty years, he would also be connected with the Pulitzer brothers' *New York World* and the Memphis based *Commercial Appeal*. Perhaps as a result of his work for Lea, Erwin's major interest as a correspondent was political corruption. During the 1920s, he acquired some modest fame for his reporting on the Teapot Dome Scandal—arguably the United States' biggest political scandal until Watergate. Together with a young attorney called Harry Slatterly, Erwin provided the Senate committee that studied the fraud case with leads that would eventually result in the arrest and imprisonment of Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall.[48]

Despite his successful muckraking, Erwin was not exactly a national figure, but he was quite well-known in his own state as a member of the Tennessean press corps and as a former assistant to Tennessean Senators. It was particularly fortunate, in his case, that Roosevelt's secretary of state, Cordell Hull, was also a Tennessean and something of an acquaintance of him. In 1937, with the support of the Tennessee delegation and at the insistence of Hull, Erwin was appointed minister to Honduras, his home for the next ten years.[49]

The political appointees took widely different experiences, talents, and ideas ("idiosyncrasies" is a better term in some cases) to their new jobs as diplomats. Every one of them seems to have been keen to use some of that special talent to distinguish themselves from their peers in the professional service. Corrigan was always happy to apply his medical training. His initiatives along these lines ranged from personally pulling the bad teeth of his young secretaries to elaborating plans to improve the health of Foreign Service officers or sanitary conditions in the countries where he was posted.[50] Erwin, the muckraking journalist, was very sensitive to signs of official corruption and he was initially quite overwhelmed by what he perceived to be the abundant fraud and nepotism in Honduras.[51] Des Portes was eager to sniff out Nazi sympathizers—though

[47] "Senator Kenneth McKellar to President Truman, February 11, 1949" (Truman Papers – OF 1002); "J.D. Erwin", *THC*; "John Erwin, Ex-Envoy from U.S. to Honduras", *NYT* (March 3, 1983) D19.
[48] "J.D. Erwin", *THC*; "John Erwin", *NYT*; "J. Erwin, 99; helped break Teapot Dome", *Chicago Tribune* (March 2, 1983) A6.
[49] "J.D. Erwin", *THC*; "Interview with Randolph Clough", *ADST*; "McIntyre to Roosevelt, n.d." (FDR Papers – OF 193b).
[50] Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919-1970, ADST; Corrigan to Moore, October 30, 1936, Corrigan Papers, Box 7, Folder: Moore, R. Walton.
[51] See Chapter 5, pages 168-170.

he was not entirely out of step with his contemporaries in this regard.[52] The fact that his mother's family was Jewish (hence the Baruch connection) *might* have something to do with this. Kyle, the educator and agriculturalist, was "anxious to cooperate with the Government and the people of Guatemala in the development of their natural resources which are largely agricultural and in aiding in building a strong educational program". [53]

Long, the diplomat and businessman, was always working out some scheme to develop the economies of Central America—be it by tapping sulfur from Nicaragua's volcanoes or by introducing soy beans as a food staple in Guatemala. As a young man, Long joined the diplomatic service because he wanted to "do something" for the peoples in the south: "Our Government has a sacred duty towards them and should lead them towards a higher form of civilization by precept and example". In one of his more prosaic descriptions of the white man's duty, Long described how the Spaniards had broken the spirits of the Maya Indians and they now needed outside help to get back on their feet again. Referring to an old Maya legend, Long wrote that the "ship of dreams will come again to the stricken Indian nation, and salvation will be brought by the white-faced gods in the end". His use of analogies when he talked about Central America are a gender historian's dream: He once wrote friends that Nicaragua was "virgin country" that was "ripe" for development. Long had a very strong interest in the material improvement of the southern republics, which, he believed, required active American involvement because Latin peoples were too passive to do it themselves.[54] By the time he took over the Guatemalan post, Long was singularly devoted to road building. As one of his secretaries wrote to his wife:

> Boaz is a character. Doesn't know my first name yet. The most un-personal (or impersonal) man I have known. No interest whatsoever in people. Things and ideas yes. Over 60 but indifferent to discomfort. Completely egotistical but not offensive. Simply negative (…) I believe he neither likes nor dislikes anyone in the world, unless one should interfere with his consuming passion, which is road-building just now. Also mildly interested in soy beans.

According to this same secretary, Long's passion for roads even got in the way of his diplomatic duties: "He has stacks of mail. Does he look at it? Not even a peep. Roads, roads, nothing but 'em (…) Are you beginning to get the picture?"[55]

The one thing that united these men was their very personal dedication to the Good Neighbor policy and its main champion, Franklin Roosevelt. Corrigan, for example,

[52] Fay Allen Des Portes (U.S. Minister to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1256, May 15, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 711: War. Peace. Friendship. Alliance.
[53] Kyle to Arnold Nicholson, Memorandum on Dean Kyle's background, educational training, travels and practical experience to equip him for the ambassadorship in Guatemala, n.d. (ca. 1943), Cornell University, Carl A. Kroch Library Rare & Manuscript Collections, Archives 1686: Edwin Jackson Kyle papers, 1934-1955;.
[54] Long to Judge Vincentt, October 4, 1916, Long Papers, Box 48, Folder 136: Letters Sent; Long, undated pamphlet (ca. 1917), Long Papers, Box 53, Folder 224: Special Report: Conditions in Germany after the Stillhalte Agreement, 1931; Long to Dempsey, April 13, 1936, Long Papers, Box 48, Folder 140: Letters sent and letters received; Long to Chavez, August 22, 1936, Long Papers, Box 48, Folder 140: Letters sent and letters received.
[55] Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919-1970, ADST.

confided in a letter to his president that he regarded the latter as a "social and economic savior".[56] Before the liberal Salvadoran press, Corrigan painted a picture of Roosevelt as "the highest summit of humanity of the present time, since he is nothing less than the 'Apostle of Democracy'".[57] Likewise, Des Portes propagated to the Guatemalan press the "true feelings" of Good Neighborliness entertained by the American government and was always sure to link those directly to President Roosevelt.[58] Except for "impersonal" Long perhaps, the politicos attempted to embody the policy of their chief with a more informal, friendly, and welcoming attitude than their predecessors.[59] Central Americans seem to have loved it. That, at least, is the impression conveyed by local newspapers, which, intriguingly, often mentioned the fact that Roosevelt's appointees were not of Anglo-Saxon heritage: The Salvadoran periodical *Diario de Hoy* remarked on Corrigan that he "has never appeared to us of Saxon temperament. We find him a fluent talker, enthusiastic, witty, ironic".[60]

While their friendly, informal approach to diplomacy and their impulse to help the Latin neighbors were doubtlessly sincere, there was also a darker side to the attitude of the Roosevelt appointees. These diplomats hardly believed that the Central Americans were their equals. A patronizing attitude toward the southern neighbors seemed inherent in North American culture and did not leave the Good Neighbors untouched. The manifestation of these feelings did change over time, however. It was no longer acceptable during the Good Neighbor era, for example, to refer to the Latins in racist terms in diplomatic correspondence.[61] Other terms were found, though, to express the American sense of superiority. Words were borrowed from anthropology, science, and even medicine that lent an air of objectivity to derogatory comments. Corrigan, the medical doctor, opined that Central Americans "are politically embryonic and still need obstetrical care lest they be born badly and grow up idiots".[62] When describing the difficulties of government in Honduras, Erwin liked to point out that some 75 percent of Hondurans were illiterate, while 55 percent were born out of wedlock—statistics that were doubtlessly intended as an illustration of low intellect and high irresponsibility

[56] Corrigan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 24, 1934, Corrigan Papers, Box 9, Folder: Roosevelt, F.D. & Eleanor.
[57] Corrigan does note that the Salvadoran journalists who interviewed him eventually published an "impression" of his words, not a direct quotation. Francis P. Corrigan (U.S. Minister to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 936, February 1, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 7, Vol. II, cl. 123: Corrigan.
[58] For example: Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 893, June 9, 1939, PR Guatemala, Box 23, cl. 800: Misc.
[59] Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919-1970, ADST, gives a good impression of the American Legation in Salvador under Corrigan.
[60] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 936, February 1, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 7, Vol. II, cl. 123: Corrigan.
[61] Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 296.
[62] Corrigan to Willard Beaulac, April 15, 1936, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, Box 1, Folder: Beaulac, Willard.

among the locals.[63] Based on the well-established historical and anthropological views of the time, a report signed by Des Portes stated that:

> The Guatemalan Indian has preserved his customs, habits, dress, and manner of thinking from the time of the Spanish conquest to the present. He is, generally speaking, a product of the serfdom imposed upon him by the Spanish colonist and subsequent masters who have found it to their interest to keep him in that state. He is the dumb, half-slave, half-drudge of the large estate holders and can best be likened to the Chinese coolie whom he resembles in many outward ways notwithstanding their completely different cultures.[64]

There is no evidence suggesting that the Roosevelt appointees expanded the legation's circle of contacts or network of informants. In fact, in the context of Central American politics, Good Neighborliness led to restrictions in the ministers' circle of acquaintances. With regard to the Central American side of the story, it should be remembered that by about 1935, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were ruled by dictatorships. While civil liberties had never been very secure in the region, the regimes of the 1930s were better equipped than most previous regimes to positively repress the free press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, etc. Many active opponents of the regimes were exiled or kept under surveillance. Newspapers and other periodicals that did not conform to political realities were soon closed down.[65]

Since the American legations depended on personal contacts and newspaper publications for information, restrictions on civil liberties severely limited the diversity of sources on political life in the isthmian republics. Foreign Service inspection reports bear witness to this development: Already in 1935, Minister Hanna complained to the Foreign Service inspector that:

> …keeping informed concerning the internal political situation is a specially difficult problem because of the dictatorial nature of the existing Government. The surface indications are misleading. The press is submissive if not completely controlled. The sources of information customarily present in other capitals are lacking here. The conditions being as just stated, close and continual contact with a large number of people is absolutely essential if the Minister is to keep even fairly well informed (…) It is not practicable for him to do this effectively with the existing staff organization.

Under these circumstances, Hanna claimed, the president of the republic "may be regarded as the principal if not the only source of authentic information". Despite these assertions, the inspector chided the legation in Guatemala for depending too heavily on

[63] It is not known where Erwin picked up this piece of "information", but it was much used. For example: John D. Erwin (U.S. Ambassador to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1322, August 21, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras, August to December; Lt. Col. Nathan A. Brown, jr. (U.S. Acting Military Attaché to Honduras) to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 839, April 14, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 22, Vol. 13, cl. 850.4: Labor; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1549, December 22, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 22, Vol. 13, cl. 850.4: Labor.

[64] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2067, August 22, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 41, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.

[65] On the establishment of dictatorships, see chapter 4.

the press, while the Minister himself admitted that “sources of information provided by an opposition press do not exist” and “such items of information as appear in the local press (…) generally reflect the official point of view”.[66]

The same situation was described in several other inspection reports throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. “As the press in Honduras is under a strict Governmental control at present information for political reports of value must be sought industriously through personal contacts. The political situation, as at present, lends itself to much speculation and widely varying rumors most of which have little definite basis other than aspirations and fears…”, according to Keena, 1935.[67] Some six years later, Erwin reported that: “The only difficulty experienced by this office in obtaining political information is a certain mistrust on the part of Hondurans opposed to the present Government in maintaining current contact with the members of the [Legation’s] staff”. And while contacts with people who were opposed or indifferent to the regime were “discreetly maintained”, the legation still depended most heavily on “sources of political information [from] within the Government”.[68] Describing the one-sidedness of available sources, the legation in El Salvador noted in 1943 that:

> President Martínez is a de facto dictator and there is only one legal political party (the “Pro Patria”) permitted. Moreover, the mail, press and radio are strictly censored. The National Legislative Assembly is merely a rubber stamp, which automatically enacts all laws presented by the Government. Consequently there are no open opposition and criticism of the Government.[69]

Although this subject will be further developed elsewhere, it should be noted that Good Neighbor diplomacy itself only made it more difficult for American diplomats to obtain information from alternative sources. The problem, as the State Department described it in 1944, was that of defining "the line where friendliness toward the government of an allied sister republic ends and friendliness toward a particular political regime begins".[70] That wisdom, however, was the product of some ten years of experience in Good Neighbor diplomacy. The distinction between a particular regime and a government or a people more generally was not so clear during the earlier years of the Good Neighbor. In the Central American context—that is, under a dictatorship—the conceptual differentiation between government and regime was particularly problematic, because regimes never changed and everyone who was opposed to the regime was necessarily an enemy of the state. In this polarized political environment, the American legations could not very well maintain public contact with the opposition and

[66] Nathaniel P. Davis (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to the Secretary of State, January 7, 1936, Lot Files: Inspection Reports, Box 66, Vol. 1935.
[67] Davis to the Secretary of State, December 13, 1935, Lot Files: Inspection Reports, Box 160, Vol. 1935.
[68] Charles B. Hosmer (Foreign Service inspector) to Erwin, March 24, 1942, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 1, cl. 124.6: Inspection Report.
[69] H. Merle Cochran (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to Walter Thurston (U.S. Minister to El Salvador), January 25, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 77, Vol. IV, cl. 124.6: Routine Reports.
[70] E.R. Stettinius, Jr. to the U.S. Embassies in Latin America, February 2, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala.

be on friendly terms with the government at the same time. And since the practical goal of the Good Neighbor was to obtain trade agreements and to build an alliance against extra-continental aggression, good relations with the powers that be were imperative. Hence the need for "discretion", in Erwin's words, whenever the legation dealt with persons that were not part of the political establishment.

An additional problem was that the local regimes did everything they could to convey the impression that American friendliness and support was aimed at them specifically. While this subject will be further discussed in chapter four, the following incident is illustrative: On March 13, 1937, U.S. minister to Guatemala Fay Des Portes sent a brief telegram to the State Department: "Shall Legation fly flag Monday fifteenth in honor [unconstitutional reelection] President Ubico in office QUESTION MARK".[71] For the legation, this was indeed a major question mark. Its staff had witnessed how seemingly minor matters of diplomatic protocol were claimed by different groups in Guatemalan society, taken out of context, and redefined as tokens of American support for- or opposition against Ubico's continuance in office. In 1936 for example, the State Department's bureau of protocol had, on President Roosevelt's behalf, drafted a politely worded reply to a personal letter from Ubico to the American chief, informing the latter of his reelection. The brief reply was pushed for all it was worth in Guatemala's government-controlled press, which presented it as proof for a personal bond of friendship between FDR and Ubico.[72] In February 1937, however, the legation in Guatemala neglected to send Ubico a note of congratulations on his six year anniversary in office. Representatives of many American companies in Guatemala were also absent from the celebrations for various reasons, thereby feeding rumors that the United States did not sympathize with Ubico's reign.[73]

The peculiar Guatemalan art of claiming and representing symbols of U.S. affection, or lack thereof, was lost on Washington, however. Secretary Hull answered the legation's request with an evasive telegram: "You should use your own judgment about flying the flag although if flags are being flown no reason is perceived why you should not act similarly PERIOD".[74] This answer represents the Department's determination not to stand out in the Guatemalan political landscape—the United States would not interfere in local matters, period. Shortly thereafter, the legation informed the Guatemalan minister of Foreign Affairs that the Stars and Stripes would be flown in honor of Ubico's second term.[75]

This brief exchange of telegrams between the legation and the Department also illustrates U.S.-Guatemalan diplomatic relations over the following years: The State

[71] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Telegram 6, March 13, 1937, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[72] See also chapter 5, pages 176-182.
[73] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 190, February 17, 1937, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[74] Cordell Hull (U.S. Secretary of State) to Des Portes, Telegram 3, March 15, 1937, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[75] Des Portes to Carlos Salazar (Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Affairs), March 15, 1937, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.

Department was preoccupied with European affairs and content to leave purely Central American matters to the stewardship of the ministers who were expected to maintain the Good Neighbor Policy there. Under these circumstances, the day-to-day diplomatic relations between the United States and the isthmian republics were virtually reduced to the personal bonds between legation staff and local government officials.

3. THE POSTWAR PROFESSIONALS, 1945-1952

Taking the Central American region as a whole, the pattern of appointments during the war and the postwar years to the American diplomatic posts there seems to favor career men. Only in Honduras and Guatemala were political appointees kept on during the war years. The post-war years were almost entirely dominated by career men, although the politicos did make a comeback toward the end of Truman's second term (a pattern which was also noticeable during the Roosevelt period) with four "deserving" Democrats appointed to Central America between 1948 and 1953. As was to be expected, only one of the latter men was carried over to the Eisenhower Foreign Service.

The career officers who served in El Salvador during the War and after were Walter Clarence Thurston (1942-1944), John Farr Simmons (1944-1947), Albert Frank Nufer (1947-1949), and George Price Shaw (1949-1952). Toward the end of Truman's second term, political appointee Angier Biddle Duke, the scion of a wealthy New York family, also served in Salvador, but was retired by the Eisenhower administration. In Guatemala, Edwin Kyle served until 1948, when he was replaced by Richard Cunningham Patterson, another appointee. When Patterson was declared *persona non grata* by the Guatemala authorities in 1950, he was eventually replaced with career diplomatist Rudolf Emil Schoenfeld (1951-1954). John Erwin ended his ten year tour in Honduras, involuntarily, in 1947 and was replaced by Paul Clement Daniels (1947). In that same year, Daniels was promoted to the Department and replaced by careerist Herbert Bursley (1947-1951). In 1951, Erwin made a comeback and was assigned to Honduras for another 3 years, until he was again forced into retirement by the Eisenhower administration.

Aside from a dry account of the many posts they served in, little can be said about these career men. This is not because they are inherently less interesting than, say, Lay, or Hanna, or Corrigan, or Long. Doubtlessly, their extended travels around the world as young diplomatists made for very interesting lives. However, their names did not pop up in the social sections of major newspapers, as was the case with Foreign Service officers of old and wealthy families. Nor did they leave memoirs or personal papers, something many political appointees did because they had had long and colorful careers before they went into diplomacy and—or so it seems in many cases—because they generally had an inflated sense of self-importance than the careerists did. Also, they left less of a personal stamp on the reports produced at their posts.

As a group and individually, the seven career officers who were appointed to Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras between roughly 1943 and 1952 seem rather unremarkable. They did not own "castle-like" mansions in Newport, like more aristocratic

diplomats did, nor had they engaged in interesting careers or made high-placed friends, like the political appointees. And while most of these careerists have not made it to the history books, these well-trained, dedicated professionals represent the rank-and-file of the postwar American Foreign Service. Except for Daniels (b. 1903), all were born in the closing years of the 19th century. Most of them originated from the northeast coast, although Thurston and Shaw were from Colorado and Kansas respectively. Business and Law were popular educations among these seven, but only Simmons and Daniels attended Ivy League schools. Generally speaking, they had finished their educations around 1910 and joined the Foreign Service thereafter—putting in many years of hard work at small posts before they reached the highest ranks of the Service.

Daniels was the last to join the Service in 1927, the other six joined between 1910 and 1920, while in their teens or early twenties. Unlike men like Whitehouse, they did not have the privilege of starting out as private secretaries. Instead, they all started out as clerks or consular assistants and slowly climbed the ranks within a service that was quickly professionalizing between roughly 1915 and 1925. They saw all the levels of the diplomatic establishment, serving in both the consular and diplomatic branches, but also at the Department in Washington. Around 1945, after having served in almost every rank in the diplomatic and consular branch of the Foreign Service and having seen many different countries in Europe and Latin America, these seven men came under consideration for promotions to the ambassadorial level. All were, to a greater or lesser extend, specialized in the Latin American region and, without exception, their first assignment as chief of mission was to a Central American post (except for Schoenfeld, who had earlier served in Rumania as chief of mission). This again suggests that these embassies were considered by the Department to be training grounds for new chiefs. Actually, if one includes the political appointees, all but three chiefs who served in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras during the decade following the War were freshly appointed to the ambassadorial level.

All seven career men had served a number of years in Latin America, notably at the executive levels of their post (consul, secretary, or counselor) during the Good Neighbor years. Thurston, Simmons, and Daniels had been assistant chiefs of the Latin American Division of the Department, with the first also serving as that division's chief from 1930 to 1931. Although they remained in the Foreign Service, the War did not go by unnoticed for these men, all of them offering a humble contribution to the fight against fascism in some diplomatic or administrative capacity. Thurston served in Spain and the Soviet Union during the late 1930s and early 40s and had to evacuate his posts several times due to the advance of Axis armies.[76] Schoenfeld was the American chargé d'affaires to the exiled governments in London throughout the War. Simmons claimed that he had witnessed the rise of Nazism while he was stationed at the consulate in

[76] See chapter 7, page 227.

Cologne during the early 30s.[77] Shaw, Daniels, and Bursley were involved in the coordination of American war measures in the Western Hemisphere, serving, respectively, as the Department's assistant chief of Foreign Activities Correlation, chair of the American Coffee Board, and assistant chief of the Division of American Republic Affairs.[78]

Whether the relative abundance of career appointments to Central America (as compared to the prewar period) was a matter of policy or coincidence is not clear. Several probable explanations come to mind, though these are merely educated guesses. First of all, the Truman administration may have found it prudent initially to hold back on the appointment of politicos, since a wholesale replacement of career men with Truman supporters would have provoked negative comments from the press and perhaps even accusations of nepotism from political opponents. Only when its mandate was confirmed in 1947 did the administration appoint more Democrats to diplomatic posts. Another reason to hold back on political appointments to Central America could have been the lack of interest in the region during the postwar years. While the isthmian countries were looked upon as a "front" for Good Neighbor diplomacy before the War, the region's solid support for the American war effort seemed to imply that it was secure and pro-American. U.S. interest focused on Europe and Asia and the Truman administration would have had a hard time convincing its political appointees that a post in Central America was in any way desirable or interesting. It is also possible, however, to think of affirmative reasons to appoint career men to Central America during and after the War. Most importantly, the work of an ambassador had become considerably more complex since the prewar years. Embassies had been greatly expanded and needed to stay in touch with the new American agencies that were introduced to the region during the War and that remained there to execute the Point IV programs later. Furthermore, many new treaties and other international commitments were arranged during and after the War. Due to the many technicalities surrounding the negotiations for such commitments, Washington may have preferred to use the professionals at its disposal, although a politico would, of course, be able to lean on an expanded embassy staff.

The period leading up to and including the first years of the Second World War brought some major practical changes in U.S. policy toward Latin America due to U.S. attempts to lead the Western Hemisphere through neutrality and war—objectives that came to overshadow all other concerns. For the Foreign Service, this meant a major change of pace, functions, and objectives in the daily management of legations (officially embassies from 1943 onward) in the other American republics. At the time, the State Department and its Foreign Service were actually among the smallest departments (in terms of personnel) in the executive branch of the American government. While the

[77] Memorandum enclosed in Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2249, December 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador.

[78] Unless indicated otherwise, all the information on the professional lives of these men is from: *Register* (1950) 71, 377-378, 458, 463, and 504.

Second World War would accelerate the drive toward specialization within the Foreign Service, the allegedly positive effects of this development would not be felt at the posts for some time. During the War, U.S. posts were enlarged and reinforced with the arrival of cultural attachés, agricultural attachés, intelligence attachés, etc. Up to the first years of the War, however, the smaller posts in Central America still had to get by with two to four officers and a hand full of clerks. While the workload exploded from 1939 onward, additional staff was not forthcoming, because the State Department badly needed additional staff in Washington and in other countries that were more directly affected by the War. While a temporary "Auxiliary Service" was founded to help out with foreign affairs work, many experienced officers also volunteered for military services or were drafted into the army (the rules for exemption from service were very strictly applied and only the most experienced officers, or those with established families, were permanently excluded from the draft).

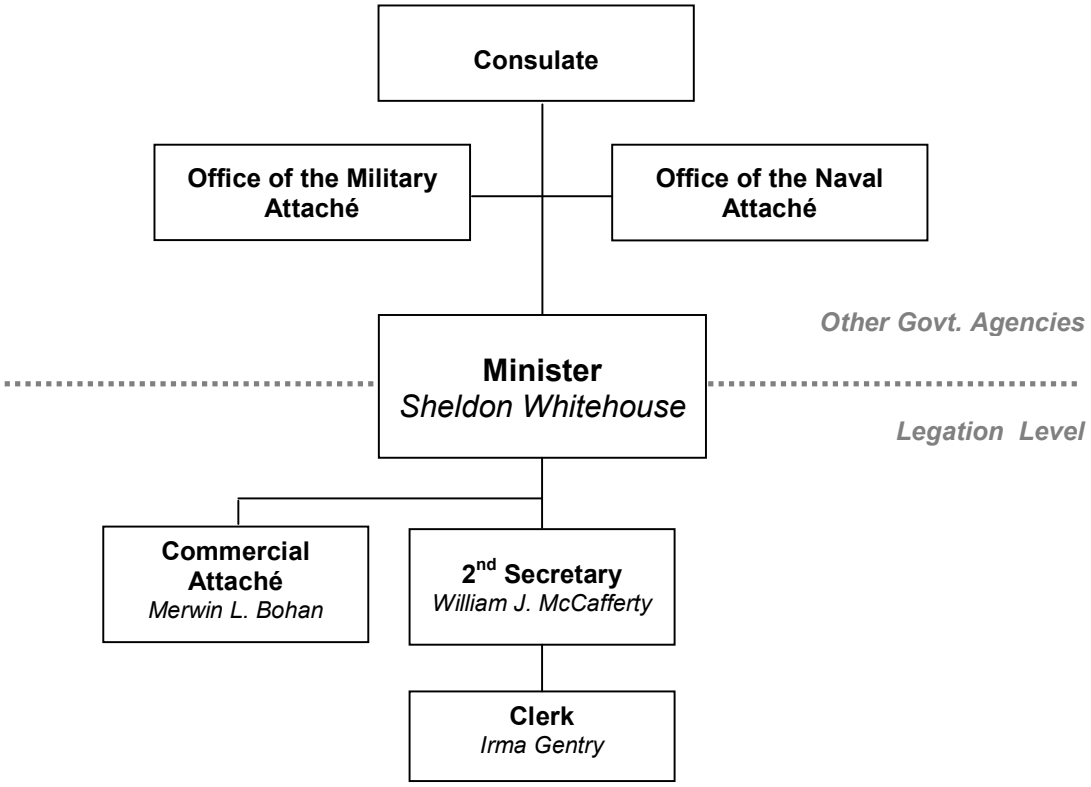


Figure 1: The U.S. Legation in Guatemala, ca. 1930
The above diagram shows the structure of a typical U.S. Legation in Central America. This structure hardly changed throughout the 1930s, although the number of secretaries and clerks might vary at times.

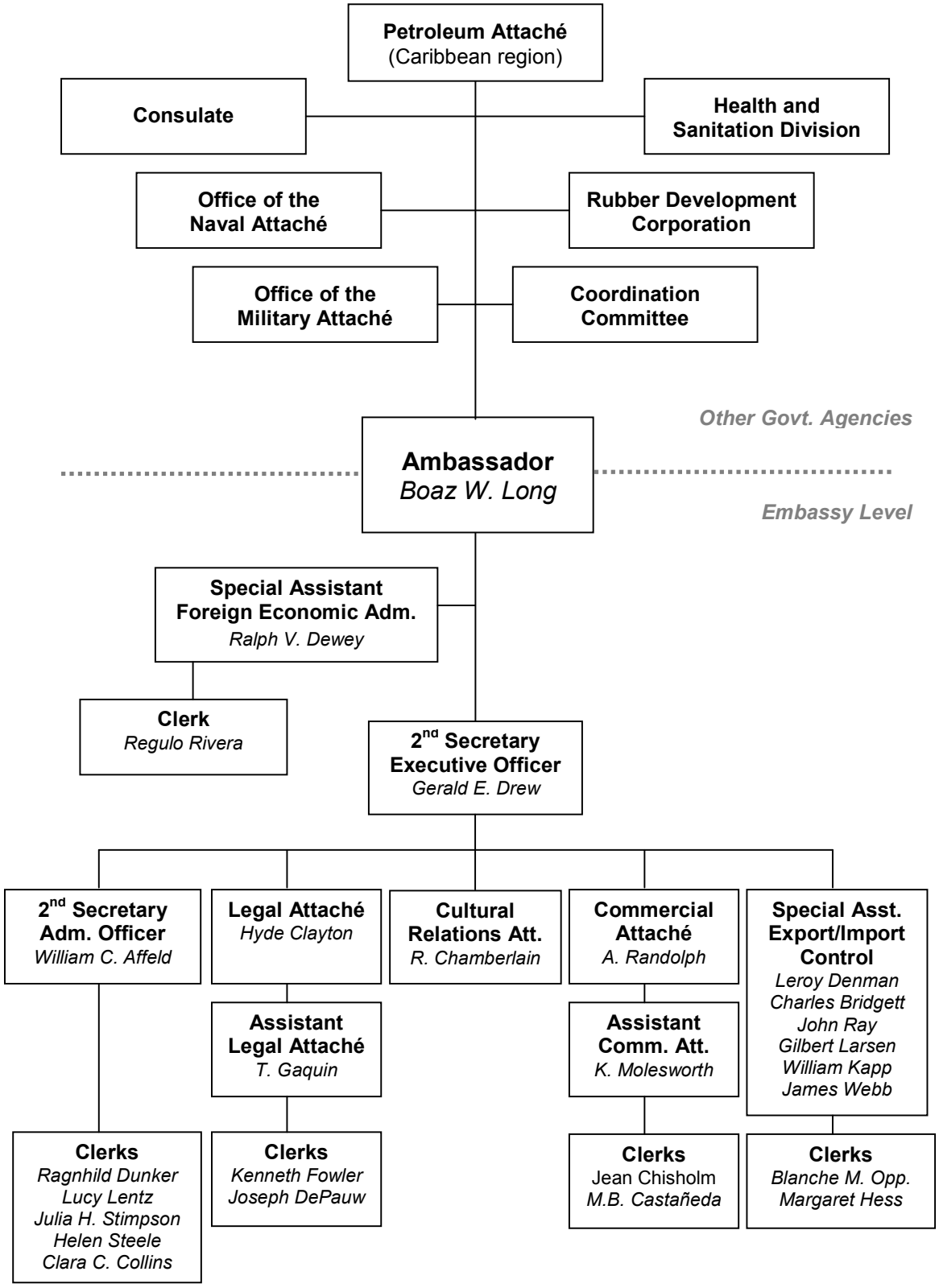


Figure 2: The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, ca. 1944
The above diagram indicates the expansion of the duties and the personnel of a U.S. Embassy during World War II

Also conspicuous during this period was a trend toward the professionalization of the Foreign Service and of the expansion and specialization of its tasks. While this development was barely noticeable before the War, it went into overdrive from 1939 onward. The acute need for military cooperation, the expansion of economic warfare capabilities, the development of war-related resources, the coordination of the Nazi hunt, the intensification of cultural relations, the strengthening of local economies, etc, etc, brought to the Central American legations a broad array of experts in these fields. Military attachés, economic experts, legal attachés, and cultural liaison officers—almost all of whom needed their own clerks, typists, and messengers—swelled the ranks of the legation staffs. * And this was only in addition to the many new, war-related agencies that were continually popping up and, formally at least, fell under the jurisdiction of the American ministers.[79]

The expansion of the staff of the American legation in Honduras is a fine illustration of this development. Around the beginning of the 1930s, the legation was staffed by the minister, one Foreign Service officer, and one to three clerks. Toward the end of the War, the staff had expanded to include two additional Foreign Service officers, two additional economic experts, and between seven and ten additional clerks. The size of the staff of the American embassy now exceeded, in fact, that of the staff of the Honduran ministry of Foreign Affairs! At the same time, the staff of the embassy in Guatemala, which performed several functions for the entire Central American region, had grown from roughly five employees in 1930 to well over twenty in 1944, because it also included legal, cultural, and commercial attachés and several special assistants. These numbers do not take into account the consular officers and military attachés and instructors, or employees of the Coordination Committee, Health and Sanitation Division, and Rubber Development Corporation, all of whom worked under the general direction of the American embassy in Guatemala during the War (see figures 1 and 2).

The implication of this development was, of course, that, by the end of the War, there was not a single sector of Central American government, economy, and society that was not somehow connected with and influenced by the American embassies. Aside from the regular contacts between the embassies and important politicians and government officers, which is the traditional function of the American Foreign Service, the work of the embassies' commercial and consular sections also affected the economy through export and import controls over products needed for the war effort; "blacklisting" of enemy enterprises and businesses; the building of public works such as the Inter-American highway and the hospitals, sewers, and water purification plants of the Health

* This does not include the offices of the Consulates. Some of these specialists did not belong to the Foreign Service but to other Departments. The Department of Commerce had its commercial attachés. The Department of Justice its legal attachés (in Latin America, the legal attaché was often a F.B.I. agent who did intelligence work). The Departments of Army, Navy, and Air (later the Department of War and still later Defense) had their military and navy attachés. In Central America, one military attaché was usually accredited to all the Central American republics together and would be stationed permanently in Guatemala. During the War, however, every legation or embassy had its own military and/or navy attaché.

[79] See figures on pages 57-58.

and Sanitation Division; the diversification of agriculture through the Rubber Development Corporation and the Fruit companies; and the general management of the economy through the local Coordination Committees, which included local businessmen, bankers, and representatives of the Chambers of Commerce. The Central American security apparatuses (military, constabulary, police, and secret service) received training from- and exchanged information with the military attachés and the legal attachés—mostly FBI agents. Cultural attachés managed exchange programs between Central American and American universities and research institutions, supported the work of local libraries and other cultural institutions, and provided "information" to local newspapers. Politicians, businessmen, police officers, soldiers, journalists and editors, university students and professors, agriculturalists, medical doctors, etc, etc. They all felt the American presence in some way or another. [80]

The expansion of the Foreign Service and its posts abroad was a product of the pressure and stress of war. While it may not have lived up to it in every sense, the makeup of the prewar Foreign Service was guided by the ideal that a democratic, anti-colonial, and peaceful country like the United States did not need a large diplomatic corps. The latter was associated with secret deals, espionage, intrigue, and other such assorted skullduggery, which had plunged Europe into the First World War. The European powers used their expansive diplomatic establishments, it was believed, to facilitate international arms trafficking, colonial administration, and dissemination of propaganda. The United States, in contrast, could get by with a small corps of professionals and the occasional citizen diplomat (political appointee) to maintain peaceful relations and expand commercial connections with other nations.

It is obvious, then, that it is not only the individual officers or the "type" of officers assigned to Central America that changed between 1930 and 1950, but that the Foreign Service itself went through some considerable changes during the period. While the expansion of the American Foreign Service is generally associated with the postwar period (which is true for Europe), American ambassadors in Central America had been struggling with a deluge of new tasks and specialists for some years. The experience was not always a happy one and did not always lead to a more efficient Service (although the measure of efficiency that one would ascribe to the embassies is, of course, dependent on the objectives that one would like them to achieve. In terms of paper output, for example, the efficiency of the Service was certainly enhanced after 1939). Only toward the end of the period under discussion here did embassy employees

[80] Cabot to the Secretary of State, Orginizational Report Guatemala, July 9, 1940, State Department Central File, Box 669; Drew to the Department of State, Orginizational Report Guatemala, State Department Central File, Box 669; Cousins to the Secretary of State, Orginizational Report Honduras, January 1, 1940, State Department Central File, Box 669; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Orginizational Report Honduras, June 26, 1944, State Department Central File, Box 669; Gade to the Secretary of State, Orginizational Report El Salvador, November 8, 1940, State Department Central File, Box 670; Gade to the Secretary of State, Orginizational Report El Salvador, June 22, 1944, State Department Central File, Box 670. These numbers also exclude employees without diplomatic functions such as guards, messengers, gardeners, cleaners, etc.

of all Departments come together under the coordination of the ambassador to produce joint reports (the so-called "Joint Weeka"). Before that time, conflict and confusion characterized the work of the enlarged embassies at least as much as coordinated efforts.[81]

In conclusion, it should be noted that a healthy variety of Foreign Service officers served in Central America throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The region was not the exclusive reserve of clueless political appointees—though there were some of those—nor of particularly outstanding professionals—though there were some of those too. It is remarkable that many chiefs of mission in Central America were freshly appointed to that rank and that the administrations in Washington tended dump a relatively large number of appointees there after reelection. However, this is not *necessarily* a recipe for bad diplomacy. Inexperienced officers could offer fresh insights while the old hands, despite their experience, were sometimes woefully unable to deal with the peculiar circumstances they encountered at their isthmian posts. It is undeniable, for example, that careerist Matthew Hanna's experience in the Dominican Republic led him to pursue a disastrous policy in El Salvador. It is also remarkable how insightful some of politico Frank Corrigan's reports were when compared to the bland writings of professionals in neighboring republics.[82]

Generalizations such as those presented in the current chapter can only go so far, of course. The following chapters will demonstrate that individual officers—because of there individual prejudices and experiences—had a profound impact both on the course of American policy and on the histories of the Central American republics. What if Sheldon Whitehouse had been assigned to El Salvador instead of Guatemala in 1929? Would General Martínez' career have been cut short in 1932? And what if a professional diplomat had been assigned to Guatemala in 1945? Would the Guatemalan revolution have been better understood in Washington?

It should also be stressed that the American posts in Central (and South) America seemed to be regarded as testing grounds not only for new chiefs of mission, but also for new policy and new forms of Foreign Service organization. Concerning policy, the nonintervention principle and the policy regarding disreputable governments should be mentioned.[83] Regarding organization, it can be said that while the stereotype of the lonely officer plodding along at his mosquito infested post holds true for the 1920s, the American posts had become major organizations by the early 1950s (especially when

[81] See chapters 6 and 7.
[82] Using a statistical analysis, one Phillip L. Kelly has attempted to prove that Latin America received ambassadors of poor caliber in the postwar decades. It is, of course, undeniable that the most talented officers went to London, Paris, or Berlin (or Brazil and Venezuela, as Kelly's analysis also shows) but it remains impossible (for a historian) to scientifically measure the effectiveness of the training of these officers, let alone measure the "success" of their tenures in Latin America. Besides, what would the measure of that success be? Phillip L. Kelly, "The characteristics of United States ambassadors to Latin America", *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 30 (Autumn 1976) 49-80.
[83] See chapters 2 and 7.

compared to the diminutive size of some of the Central American government agencies). These developments, combined with the eccentricities of individual diplomats and the amazing twist and turns in Central American history, account for the high degree of complexity and richness of this topic that will (hopefully) be evident in the historical narrative that follows.

Chapter 2

PROPPING UP DICTATORS?
Caudillos come to power in Central America, 1930-1931

HONDURAS TORN BY REVOLT;
REBELS MARCH ON CAPITAL;
FEAR AMERICANS IN PERIL

This headline, or a similar one, undoubtedly is familiar to most newspaper readers in the United States. And it has been for decades. You may substitute the name of some other Central American republic for that of Honduras, and the headline is just as familiar. Sometimes "bandits" replaces "rebels" – usually the difference is slight.

~ *Major General Smedley D. Butler, 1931*

A revolt in Honduras in 1931 provoked General Smedley Darlington Butler to write a short article on his own experiences as a Marine involved in the U.S. intervention in another Honduran revolt in 1903.[1] Called "Opera Bouffe Revolts" the article was intended to amuse rather than to inform fellow Americans. If Butler is to be believed, revolutions in Honduras were a fairly easy-going affair, "friendly" even, and consisted mainly of local soldiers changing the color of their hat ribbons—a blue ribbon signifying support for the government and a red ribbon signifying support for the rebels. In fact, the General wrote, these ribbons were often two-sided, blue on one side and red on the other, to allow a quick and bloodless change of sides if the situation so demanded. In case of the 1903 revolution, Butler and his Marines only went ashore once: To pick up the U.S. consul in Trujillo—who was found cowering between the beams of the floor of his house, naked but for the American flag in which he had wrapped himself[2]—and to escort him to their ship "in a manner due his rank and station". Shortly after this uneventful rescue operation, "this business of turning hat-bands inside out had become epidemic, with the result that the revolt was over".

[1] Smedley D. Butler, "Opera-Bouffe Revolts: What usually happens when the Marines have landed", PR Honduras, Volume 181, cl. 891: Public Press. The article originally appeared in the magazine *Liberty* on October 10, 1931.
[2] Butler makes sure to point out that the American consul in this case was actually a native of Honduras.

Butler's little chit on Honduran revolutions is part of a long American tradition of making fun of the southern neighbors and their unabashed tendency toward rebellion.[3] Having read the occasional O. Henry story or Time Magazine article on the "Banana Republics", nothing in Butler's writing must have struck the American reader as particularly incorrect. His explanation for the causes of Central American revolutions could have appeared to his readers as very nearly accurate:

> An ambitious local leader simply decided that the then president had had enough of public office and what goes with it and it was high time he be sent scampering away – with the ambitious local leader as the new president. That's the reason for virtually all revolts in the Caribbean area. The names mean nothing. There have been too many presidents, too many *insurrectos*, and too many rebellions in that land for anyone to try to remember them.

Indeed, American leaders had been calling upon the sister republics to stop their "chronic wrongdoing" and learn to "elect good men" at least since the start of the 20th century. More often than not, Marines were dispatched to add substance to these wise words and to enforce a measure of democratic development in the region.[4] To the contemporary who believed in the essential correctness of the didactic policies of the U.S. navy in the region, it must have been exasperating, as Butler wrote, to open the Sunday newspaper and read about another of the countless revolutions in the "American Balkans". But things were about to change.

Over the course of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the United States abandoned its practice of intervening militarily in Central America and the Caribbean. Almost simultaneously, brutal dictators came to power in that region and put an end to the seemingly insistent revolutions. The coincidence of these events inspired a common historical interpretation: That Washington used the new generation of Central American dictators as a cheap replacement for its Marines. In this chapter, it will be argued that this interpretation is a gross oversimplification of what actually happened. It will seek to demonstrate the confusion that accompanied America's move away from armed intervention; will analyze how seemingly clear-cut policy objectives in Washington were often diffused by local diplomats; and will argue that even though American involvement in the events of the 1930s was considerable, the *outcomes* of such involvement cannot be directly linked to U.S. *intentions* for Central America.

The focus of this and following chapters will be on the American diplomatic envoys in Central America who, in the absence of clear policy guidelines from Washington, had to fall back on their beliefs about the nature of the Latin Other and their personal relation to them. As it turned out, unlike historians who have the benefit of hindsight, these men had no idea that their actions would contribute to the establishment of at least 15 years of uninterrupted dictatorial rule in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Instead, the men who came to power in this period appeared to the Americans to be honest and

[3] For a short description of American representations of Honduras which are either satirical or idealized, see: Alison Acker, *Honduras: The making of a banana republic* (Boston 1988) 16-25.
[4] On U.S intervention and policy of coercive democratization during the early 20th century: Paul W. Drake, "From Good Men to Good Neighbors: 1912-1932", in: Abraham F. Lowenthal ed., *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore and London 1991) 3-40.

progressive presidents who had come to power through free and fair elections: They represented, in short, a big step forward in Central American development.

1. THE SOMOZA SOLUTION?

Towards the end of the 1920s, there were several incentives for U.S. policymakers to discontinue the sending of Marines to Central America, as had happened so often in the past. Firstly, these interventions did not lead to any recognizable improvement in the stability of local governments. Secondly, such intervention, which sometimes required extensive periods of occupation and police duty, was costly and became especially unpopular with the budget-minded Congress of the Depression era. Thirdly, American public opinion turned against the interventions as part of the larger movement against war and imperialism during the isolationist years.[5] Finally, the arrogance with which the United States policed the sovereign sister republics of Central America and the Caribbean met with increasing diplomatic resistance from other Latin American states. Latin Americans understood U.S. actions in that region to be a litmus test for its attitude toward the rest of the hemisphere. Thus, interventions in that region fed Southern suspicions about U.S. imperial designs, making it increasingly difficult for U.S. diplomats and businessmen to win the trust and cooperation of the Latins. High officials in the State Department began to wonder whether it was worthwhile to maintain a costly and ineffective interventionist policy in Central America that had the potential to endanger U.S. relations with the entire hemisphere. Accordingly, the Hoover and FDR administrations developed a new Latin American policy with non-interventionism as its backbone: The now famous Good Neighbor Policy.[6]

During the same period, factional strife began to make way for strong, centralized states in Central America. For years, the isthmian republics had been largely dependent on the export of such items as bananas and coffee. Naturally, when international markets crashed after 1929, the export such luxury items was the first to suffer from the letdown of consumption in the industrialized nations. The slackening of exports was enough to push many rural communities into dismal poverty. While consequences differed in the various Central American countries, some social frictions developed everywhere. Though never serious enough to be a threat to the social order (except, perhaps, in El Salvador) the stirrings of the *campesinos* did scare the ruling economic elites enough to drive them into the arms of strongmen with military backgrounds. Thus, Jorge Ubico (1930-1944) was the first to establish a strong military regime in Guatemala and was followed in quick succession by Tiburcio Carías (1931-1948) in Honduras,

[5] Incidentally, one of the more famous anti-war and anti-imperialist books to come out of this movement was entitled “War is a racket” and was written by none other than General, now retired, Smedley Butler

[6] Bryce Wood, *The making of the Good Neighbor policy* (New York 1961) 3-155; Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The search for stability* (Athens and London 1991) 90-91; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 71-108; Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States. A history of U.S. policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge and London 1998) 290-315; Loveman, *No Higher Law*, 238-252.

Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez (1931-1944) in El Salvador, and Anastasio Somoza (1936-1956) in Nicaragua. In El Salvador, tensions between the landless and the landowners led to violent state repression. Yet violence was not the norm. The new governments in all countries combined authoritarian tactics with some form of nationalism, populism, social justice, and economic programs aimed at the masses. These tactics were evidently successful, since—like in the rest of Latin America and in Europe—populist authoritarians ruled until at least the end of the Second World War.[7]

The fact that dictatorships were established in Central America after American Marines left the region raises an important question for historians: Is there a connection between these developments? More specifically: Did "these corrupt, repressive regimes (…) [come] into existence because of inadvertence or conscious design on the part of the United States?"[8] Some historians have opted for the first interpretation: That there is a connection between the two developments but that it was inadvertent. During the post-war decades, when Classic Realism held sway among American historians, the received wisdom was that starry-eyed American diplomats, imbued with Wilsonian idealism, had intended the U.S. Marines to export democracy to the Caribbean during the 1920s. When these democratic experiments failed and the Marines withdrew, local strongmen used the resulting power vacuum to install their own governments. In describing the rise to power of General Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, for example, historians Atkins and Wilson argue that this could not be otherwise.[9]

A more popular interpretation, however, is that U.S. policy-makers in the early 1930s were not ready to let the chips fall where they may after the departure of the Marines. To a more or less active degree, depending on the book one reads about this matter, U.S. policy makers identified and then supported local dictators who had the will

[7] Dodd and Grieb tend to stress the modernizing aspects of the new regimes: Dodd, *Carías*; Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*. In his preface, Grieb even notes that one purpose of his book is to nuance the overwhelmingly negative literature on Ubico. A very expansive German book on the Ubico regime discusses the accomplishments of the caudillo in minute detail: Stefan Karlen, *"Paz, progreso, justicia y honradez": Das Ubico-Regime in Guatemala, 1931-1944* (Stuttgart 1991). A Guatemalan chronicle of presidents contains photographs of Ubico's public works in the capital: Héctor Gaitián A., *Los Presidentes de Guatemala. Historia y Anécdotas* (Guatemala C.A. 2009) 91-99. Many authors tend to weigh the negative aspects of increased repression against the positive aspects of economic development: Gilderhus, *The second century*, 73-78; Parkman, *Nonviolent insurrection*, 20; Morris, *Caudillos Politics*, 8-12; Weaver, *Inside the Volcano*, chapter 4; Lewis, *Authoritarian Regimes*, 71. Some historians are largely negative in their judgment about the caudillos: Edelberto Torres Rivas, "Central America since 1930: An overview", in: Leslie Bethell ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America. Volume VII: Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean* (Cambridge at al. 1990); Dunkerly, *Long War*, 31-34; Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 90-97; "De la Esperanza Democrática de Posguerra a la Crisis (1920-1929)", in: Víctor Hugo Acuña Ortega, *Historia General de Centroamérica. Tomo IV: Las Repúblicas Agroexportatoras* (Madrid 1993) 225-249 ; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, "La Crisis de la economía de agroexportación (1930-1945), in: *Idem*, 325-363 ; Argueta, *Carías*, passim, but especially 371-378.

[8] Mark T. Gilderhus, *The second century. U.S.-Latin American relations since 1889* (Wilmington, DE 2000) 79.

[9] Atkins and Wilson, *The United States and Trujillo*, 151-164.

and the means to do the Marine's job: Keep Central America stable and firmly within the U.S. sphere of influence. The English historian Jenny Pierce has fittingly described this supposed event as the "Somoza solution", named after the most notorious dictator who came to power in this period. [10] While some realists have subscribed to this interpretation[11], it is most often adopted by those who whish the expose the dark nature of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean—that is, by Revisionist historians.

There are many variants of the "Somoza solution" hypothesis—and by no means have all of these deal with Anastasio Somoza—some decidedly more sophisticated than others. The general argument is that when the United States was forced to withdraw its Marines from the Caribbean in the early 1930s, Washington officials devised an inexpensive plan to keep order in America's backyard without involving U.S. troops. Before they withdrew, the Marines trained and armed national constabularies that would keep the peace in the Caribbean republics. Washington readily tolerated that the chiefs of these national armies took command over their governments after the Marines had left and throughout the 30s and 40s it would depend on these dictatorial proxies to do the job the United States Marine Corps used to do.[12]

Similarly—but from a constructivist angle—David Schmitz argues that U.S. policymakers from the 1920s onward believed that "Non-Western European people were (…) incapable of handling the difficult demands of democratic rule". Thus, it was easy and quite natural for Washington to accept and support the rise of dictatorial rule in Central America. "American officials resolved the contradiction between nonintervention and allowing self-determination and the desire for stability by supporting Somoza". [13] Perhaps most recently, Brian Loveman argued in his concise monograph on U.S.-Latin American relations that, during the 1930s, "some U.S. objectives could be achieved (…) by installing "elected" dictatorship, buttressed by the constabularies created during the American occupation regimes. Such governments could be substituted for direct U.S. administration. So eventually Rafael Trujillo came to power in the Dominican Republic, as did the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua, among other American-supported tyrants".[14]

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[10] Jenny Pearce, *Under the eagle: U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean* (1982) 20-25. It is by no means a generally accepted term, but will be used here as a convenient shorthand.

[11] Gaddis, *We now know*, 35.

[12] Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, *The politics of antipolitics: The military in Latin America* (Lincoln 1978) 7-8; Karl Bernmann, *Under the Big Stick. Nicaragua and the United States since 1848* (Boston 1986); Michael L. Krenn, *U.S. policy toward economic nationalism in Latin America, 1917-1929* (Wilmington 1990) 64-65 and 148-149; Blachman and Sharpe, "The transitions", in: Lious W. Goodman et al. eds., *Political parties and democracy in Central America* (Boulder, Colo, 1992); Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the eagle. Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American relations* (New York and Oxford 1996) especially chapters 2 and 3; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 271; Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States campaign against Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge 2003) 75-78.

[13] David F. Schmitz, "*Thank God they're on our side". The United States and right-wing dictatorships, 1921-1965* (Chapel Hill and London 1998).

[14] Brian Loveman, *No higher law. American foreign policy and the western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill, NC 2010) 242.

Some proponents of the Somoza solution theory have taken their claims to the extreme of arguing that Washington actively and consciously identified the men who should lead Central America after the departure of the Marines and then helped them to acquire and hold dictatorial powers for decades to come.[15] Such an argument both underestimates Central Americans' capacity for self-determination and overestimates Washington's capacity to dictate events in other countries. Frederick Weaver convincingly argues, for example, that "it is historically inaccurate, analytically misleading and patronizing to attribute too much influence to external forces" and concludes that "the very real importance of foreign influences has to be understood in the context of Central American nations' internal dynamics". Moreover, the Central American rise of dictatorship was part of a world-wide, post-war and post-depression development that brought to power militaristic and authoritarian governments across the globe, including countries where the United States had no influence over internal events at all.[16] Many specialists in Central American history and politics (as opposed to diplomatic history) have described the rise of Central American dictatorship as a factor of largely local developments in the political, social, and economic life of the region.[17] Even if a measure of U.S. influence in all these developments cannot be denied, the rise of the caudillos was a much more complicated process than a case of basically "propping up" dictators.

Hence, the most sophisticated elaborations of the Somoza solution hypothesis suggest that there was a convergence of interests between U.S. policy makers and Central American dictators around 1930. Walter LaFeber, for example, argues that the United States maintained a system of economic dependency backed up by politico/military might in Central America since the beginning of the 20th century. Rather than consciously install dictatorships in the early 1930s, Washington easily accepted the rise of the caudillos and started to support them, because they fitted the pre-existing system so easily and would eventually become integral parts of it. "Deals were easily struck" between Washington and the dictators because the former needed proxies to maintain the status quo while the latter needed U.S. recognition and access to the New York money market. Thus, the "United States (…) accepted, and soon welcomed, dictatorships in Central America because it turned out that such rulers could most

[15] Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 271-272.

[16] Frederick S. Weaver, *Inside the volcano: The history and political economy of Central America* (Boulder, Colo., 1994) 1. Chapter 4 explains how the rise of dictatorship was a due to a combination of internal factors and developments in the world economy.

[17] Patricia Parkman, *Nonviolent insurrection in El Salvador: The fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* (Tucson 1988) 27; Hugh M. Hamill, *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America* (Norman and London 1992) passim; D.J. McGreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* (Stanford 1994) 316; Jeffrey Paige, *Coffee and power: Revolution and the rise of democracy in Central America* (Cambridge 1997) 27-28; Wade Booth and Thomas Walker eds., *Understanding Central America* (4th edition: 2006) chapters 6-8.

Very few historians of U.S. foreign policy claim that Washington never got along with the dictators: John E. Findling, *Close neighbors distant friends: United States-Central American relations* (New York et al. 1987) chapter 5; Leonard, *Central America*, 99-101 and chapter 6.

cheaply uphold order. Dictators were not a paradox but a necessity for the system, including the Good Neighbor policy".[18]

Despite the elegance with which this interpretation synthesizes a wide array of sources on American foreign policy over a period of many decades, there are several problems. The Somoza solution hypothesis presupposes a determination and single-mindedness in U.S. policy that is difficult—if not impossible—to find at the micro-level. The U.S. legations' handling of the elections that brought two caudillos to power do not in any way conform to the "Somoza solution" hypothesis. It is important to bear in mind that—in contrast to later historians—none of the American ministers in Central America had any way of knowing that the men who were elected to office in the early 1930s would build up dictatorships that were unprecedented, in terms of the reach of their power and the length of their rule, in Central American history. Neither did any of the legations show an interest in establishing local dictatorships. Indeed, around 1930 all the legations in Central America were determined to have free and fair elections. Rather than propping up dictatorships, the organization of local elections under the tutelage of the American legations was considered the most effective way to assure stability in the region.

2. THE ELECTIONS OF THE EARLY 1930S

Between 1930 and 1932, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were al set to have presidential elections. The elections in Guatemala and Honduras produced two presidents—General Jorge Ubico and General Tubircio Carías—who have been identified by historians as the sort of authoritarian leaders who were part of the "Somoza solution" for Central America. Salvadorans elected one Arturo Araujo to power. This leader has been largely ignored by historians because he was removed from power by a military coup after a couple of months in office. The circumstances surrounding Araujo's election, however, are perfectly in line with events in Guatemala and Honduras.

2.1 Ubico wins in Guatemala

When minister Sheldon Whitehouse arrived in Guatemala, the country was ruled by General Lázaro Chacón of the Liberal Party. Chacón had been president since 1926, when he was elected by a margin of 250,000 votes over his opponent from the Progressive Party: Jorge Ubico. As the Depression set in, however, things went downhill for Chacón. His administration was unable to deal with the economic difficulties and it suspended constitutional guarantees several times to deal with disturbances and plots. Whitehouse himself was convinced that Chacón would not last if his administration was unable to deal with the economic difficulties of the country. In his reports to Washington, Whitehouse expressed his "devout" hope that American bankers could float a loan to

[18] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable revolutions: The United States in Central America* (2nd revised and expanded edition: New York et al. 1993) 19-83, particularly 64-69 and 81.

help the Guatemalan government to stabilize the internal situation.[19] The minister also had high hopes for United Fruit Company (UFCO) plans to built a modern port on Guatemala's Pacific coast.[20] He was quickly disappointed.

On July 9, Whitehouse ruefully admitted that "Chacón has none of the qualities of a president". In fact, the president lacked "firmness" and "his intelligence is so limited that he is unable to understand anything of the problems of government". Whitehouse reported to Washington that Chacón's cabinet ministers were plotting against their chief and against each other while the opposition in the National Assembly was exploiting the confused situation to defeat any proposal that had the potential to strengthen the government. Among such proposals were a foreign loan and the UFCO contract to build a Pacific port, exactly those projects that Whitehouse believed to be essential. The minister denounced the "ludicrous" criticism leveled at the proposals in the assembly and blamed "political passions" from obscuring the merits of both plans. Unless the president would show "unexpected firmness" in the near future, Whitehouse was pessimistic that he would be able to "finish his (…) term in peace".[21]

Despite Whitehouse's pessimism about the future of the Chacón regime, its end came unexpectedly. In fact, Guatemala's government fell apart in December 1930—while minister Whitehouse was vacationing in Florida. Admittedly, the event that pushed Guatemala over the edge could not have been foreseen. President Chacón reportedly suffered from a stroke on December 13 and presidential power was temporarily invested in a presidential designate, as prescribed by the Guatemalan constitution.

The political situation took another turn three days later. In the afternoon of December 16, the chargé d'affaires of the American legation, William McCafferty, was startled by gunfire in the streets. He quickly sent a telegram to Washington: "A revolution apparently started at 4 p.m. today (…) I believe it is a revolt of the Army against the Government". As it turned out, several army leaders had been planning a revolt against Chacón—who they believed was to blame for their declining influence in politics—for some time and they now used the president's incapacitation as a pretext to declare that the caretaker government was unconstitutional. After some confused days of fighting and negotiating, one General Manuel Orellana, the leader of the revolt, had himself elected provisional president by the National Assembly.[22]

"We are not amused", yelled a *Time Magazine* header when it reported on the Orellana coup.[23] Indeed, the legation and the State Department agreed at an early date

[19] Sheldon Whitehouse (U.S. Minister to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, June 18, 1930 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs, 1012).
[20] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, July 9, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1013).
[21] Idem.
[22] William McCafferty (Chargé d'Affairs ad interim, Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, December 13, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1022); McCafferty to the Secretary of State, December 13, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1023); McCafferty to the Secretary of State, December 15, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1024); McCafferty to the Secretary of State, December 16, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1025).
[23] "Guatemala: We are not amused", *TM* (January 12, 1931).

that Orellana's reign was unacceptable in the light of the 1923 Treaty.[24] In Guatemala, the job at hand was to put the government back on a constitutional basis while avoiding the appearance of direct intervention. This job fell to Sheldon Whitehouse who hastily returned from his vacation.

The first thing Whitehouse did when he came back was to devise a plan to put the Guatemalan government back on a constitutional basis. The eventual arrangement was to have Chacón resign his presidency. Orellana would then have to resign his "provisional" presidency as well, as he was technically only Chacón's replacement. Upon Orellana's elimination, the National Assembly would elect new designates to the presidency (since the former designates were either dead or had resigned). The First Designate to the Presidency would automatically become provisional president and call for new presidential elections. As Whitehouse admitted, there were some constitutional roadblocks in his complicated scheme, but "no one would make any difficulty about it".[25]

Naturally, Orellana and his companions did create difficulties and the second task was to get the General to work along. On December 24, Whitehouse decided to have a chat with him. Happily, the minister's experience in France and Spain made him "rather good" at "personal encounters with Latins".[26] Whitehouse quite bluntly told Orellana that Washington's decision not to recognize him was "final" and that further discussions were "futile". He then outlined the plan he had construed to put Guatemalan government on a "sound" constitutional basis. Some days later, Orellana came around to the fact that the Americans would not accept him and decided to play along. On December 29 Chacón resigned the presidency under the watchful eye of Whitehouse, who was present at the official ceremony, while negotiations on the election of a provisional president were under way.[27]

Throughout the whole encounter with Orellana, the American minister attempted to maximize the power of his office by requesting special assistance from Washington. Quite unexpectedly, as it would appear, he was told by his superiors that the non-intervention policy posed new limits on his actions. Citing the possibility that Orellana may cause trouble for a future provisional president, Whitehouse requested that an American war vessel be sent to the Guatemalan coast. He even suggested that the captain of the ship come ashore with a few officers and pay his respects to the eventual provisional president to strengthen the latter's position.[28] One day later, the minister was kindly informed by his superiors that such action would not be contemplated unless it

[24] "The Chargé in Guatemala (McCafferty) to the Secretary of State, Guatemala, December 17, 1930", FRUS 1930, vol. II, 178-180; "The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Guatemala (McCafferty), Washington, December 20, 1930", FRUS 1930, vol. II, 182-183.
[25] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 23, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1028).
[26] "Guatemala: We are not amused", *TM* (January 12, 1931).
[27] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 27, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1033); Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 28, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1035); Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 29, 1930 (M1280, Roll1, Political Affairs 1036).
[28] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 29, 1930 (M1280, Roll1, Political Affairs 1036).

was to protect American lives and property. In fact, the initial draft of the answer to Whitehouse was a very terse cable stating "I [Stimson] am not convinced that a warship is necessary under present conditions. Please continue to report". [29] Somewhat defensively, Whitehouse answered that he did not "mean to imply that it would be necessary to send any forces to the Capital, but merely that the presence of a warship in port would have a quieting effect".[30]

Nearly everyone at this time was somewhat confused over what non-intervention should mean. Orellana was no exception. Even though he decided to play along with the schemes of the American minister, he was definitely not convinced that all the talk about legality and elections was sincere. When Whitehouse had the General over at the legation to discuss the future of Guatemala, the latter was surprised to hear that none of the revolutionaries should join the future provisional government and that the new provisional president should not meddle in the planned elections. Orellana chose to ignore the first statement, but could not hide his surprise over the second one. Did the minister really want *free* elections, he asked. Whitehouse wrote the Department that he "naturally replied in the affirmative". For the General, who had been pushed around by the Americans for several days, it was probably hard to believe that they would now hand over all power to the people.[31]

But Whitehouse *was* sincere in his insistence that all constitutional and democratic procedures should be followed during the elections. It is true that the American minister hardly respected Guatemalan politics. He believed that the Guatemalan people were basically passive while their "representatives" in the National Assembly were all too easily swayed by political passions. He also scoffed at the prevailing influence of corrupt opportunists, military men, and "political crooks" in Guatemala.[32] He nonetheless thought that the American policy of discouraging revolutions and promoting constitutional procedures had a "moral benefit to Central America". Such benevolent effects would be lost, however, "if we content ourselves with a sham".[33]

As one Guatemala expert has argued, the field of potential candidates for the presidency that Whitehouse's scheme allowed for was extremely limited. In the eyes of many Guatemalans, former collaborators of Chacón were discredited by the inefficiency and corruption of that regime. Members of the revolutionary forces under Orellana were

[29] Stimson to Whitehouse, December 30, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1036).
[30] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, Despatch 256, January 8, 1931 (M1280, Roll 3: Revolution 73).
[31] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 28, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1035).
[32] Interestingly, the quoted reference to "political crooks" has been deleted in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the primary source publications of the Office of the Historian at the State Department. Many other derogatory references to Guatemalan politicians have also been edited out of FRUS.
[33] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, December 28, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1035).

told by Whitehouse that they were barred from the elections. The only realistic candidate that stood a chance to be elected was General Jorge Ubico.[34]

Whitehouse and his colleagues at the legation certainly did not regret the strong position of the General. In fact, the legation had considered Ubico a likely and desirable future president even before minister Whitehouse arrived in Guatemala.[35] Whitehouse himself was no less impressed by the merits of the General. Some of the characteristics that stand out in the way the legation described Ubico were his honesty, his efficiency, his pro-American standpoints, and his strength of character. No less important was the legation's belief that Ubico had a very large popular following. There is no denying that the American legation had substantial reasons to trust and like Ubico. His honesty and efficiency were evident from his governorship over the Guatemalan department of Retalhuleu. The General's popularity was evident from several public demonstrations in his favor during the turbulent month of December 1930. Lastly, Ubico himself sought to actively ingratiate himself with the Americans by visiting the legation to give witness to his distaste for rebellions and his active support for the U.S. position.[36]

When Whitehouse argued on December 28 that the U.S. could not afford to content itself with "a sham" in the upcoming Guatemalan elections, he was not yet certain that Ubico would actually be elected. There is no evidence to suggest that the American legation gave any inappropriate support to Ubico's campaign. Neither would that have been necessary, as it was soon clear that he was the only candidate. The political vacuum that allowed Ubico's ascendancy to the presidential palace was clearly caused by Whitehouse's scheming, but there is no reason to assume that the minister realized the implications of his actions as far as Ubico's rise to power was concerned. So while it is clear that Whitehouse was not "propping up" a dictatorship, it is interesting to see how the he reconciled the fact that Ubico was the sole candidate to the presidency, with his earlier insistence on free elections.

Throughout the months of January and February, Whitehouse argued to his superiors in Washington that Ubico would have been the winner in a hypothetical contested campaign for the presidency: "In spite of the fact that he is the only candidate, there is very little doubt but that General Ubico is the choice of the large majority of the people of Guatemala". [37] Such widespread enthusiasm for Ubico, according to Whitehouse, was a reaction to "utter incapacity and widespread dishonesty of the Chacón administration". In contrast to earlier presidents, Ubico was regarded as a man of "absolute honesty, of intelligence and ability" and as the only man capable of "bringing

[34] Grieb, "American involvement in the rise of Jorge Ubico", Caribbean Studies 10:1 (April, 1970) 5-21.
[35] See for example: Stanley Hawks (Chargé d'Affairs ad interim, Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, April 2, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1010).
[36] In addition to despatches mentioned below, consult: Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, Despatch 101, July 9, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1013); McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 218, November 13, 1930 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1020); Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, Despatch 246G, December 31, 1930 (M1280, Roll 2: General Conditions 37).
[37] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, January 29, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1054).

order out of chaos".[38] It is striking that the minister described Ubico as the exact opposite of Chacón, who was portrayed by the legation as inefficient, incapable, corrupt, and ignorant. Conversely, Ubico was described as capable, strong, and intelligent. One of his more outstanding qualities, one that Whitehouse stressed on almost every occasion, was his honesty. The minister approvingly reported that one of Ubico's campaign promises was to disclose all his possessions at the beginning of his term (something that the General actually did), so that a comparison could be made when he left office.[39] If there was anyone who was not looking forward to Ubico's presidency with "any too great joy", Whitehouse opined, that would be because he was "crooked".[40] Another major point to Ubico's credit was his pro-Americanism (which was probably also regarded as evidence for his intelligence). Ubico told Whitehouse that "it was impossible to ignore the fact that Guatemala needs the cooperation of North Americans to solve satisfactorily the many problems which are essential for the progress of the country".[41]

By the end of January 1931, Whitehouse looked forward to Ubico's presidency with careful optimism. His only major concern was that the old political crooks would try something to "remove General Ubico to a better world". This, he expected, would lead to "utter chaos". If Ubico would be able to "fill out his term", the minister believed that he would "leave Guatemala a prosperous little country".[42] This statement suggests that Whitehouse expected Ubico to fill out his term and then leave the presidency. Such expectations were justified by Ubico's own promise that he would change Guatemala's electoral law to prevent "old abuses" that enabled the government to remain in power "against the popular will". This, according to Whitehouse, would remove "one of the principle causes of revolution", making Guatemala a more stable country.[43]

After Ubico was, inevitably, elected, Whitehouse rejoiced that the General would be an excellent, and therefore atypical, Guatemalan president. Despite the special conditions under which the General would be elected, Whitehouse did not doubt that Ubico was the choice of the people. Neither did the minister believe that the General would abuse his power to enrich himself or to stay in power. At least as far as Whitehouse was concerned, Jorge Ubico was the honestly elected head of state of Guatemala. He did not use the word "dictatorship" for months to come.

Toward the end of 1932, after Ubico had been in power for some months, the U.S. Army Attaché in Guatemala, one captain Harris, reported that the Ubico administration represented a "truly (…) radical innovation for Guatemala". The captain mainly quoted Ubico's honesty and efficiency in support of this claim.[44] There is every indication to

[38] *Idem*.
[39] *Idem*.
[40] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, January 28, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1053).
[41] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, January 29, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1054).
[42] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, January 28, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1053).
[43] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, January 29, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1054).
[44] A.R. Harris (Military Attaché, Central America) to the Secretary of War, n.d. (December 1932) (M1280, Roll 3, Revolutions 75).

believe that the legation agreed with the attaché on the revolutionary (in the sense of progressive or innovative) nature of the Ubico administration.

In part, the American perception of the revolutionary quality of Ubico's administration was due to his official policy of government honesty. minister Whitehouse was very prejudiced about the sobriety and honesty of Guatemalan politicians. He and his colleagues at the legation appreciated that, much like them, Ubico was "disgusted" with the corruption of his predecessors.[45] When Ubico was sworn into the presidency, he had an American accountant's firm make an inventory of his possessions. In that way, his wealth at the end of his term could be compared with that at the beginning of his term. The president expected his subordinates to do the same and in April 1931 he introduced the Law of Honesty (*Ley de Probidad*) to fight corruption in government circles.[46] While these measures undoubtedly caused some resentment in a country where "gratuities" were considered an acceptable addition to the low wage of many civil servants, the legation may have been too quick in identifying opponents of Ubico as disgruntled grafters. For example, in August 1931, Whitehouse admitted that two men who had recently been accused of graft were political enemies of Ubico and hence, many people felt that the official stress on honesty was "nothing more than an attempt to discredit and eliminate political opponents". However, said the minister, "[o]fficial dishonesty and theft were so widespread and had so many ramifications during the preceding administration that it will be virtually impossible to punish all alike. The action of the government will certainly engender a spirit of resentment and revenge among politicians who feel themselves discriminated against and this may cause them to engage in subversive activities".[47]

A second point that characterized the Ubico administration, according to the legation, was his "strength", "effectiveness", "firmness", "energy", etc. One cannot escape the impression that these terms, which are commonly used to describe Ubico in many reports, sometimes act as euphemisms for the more authoritarian aspects of his rule. While the American legation under Whitehouse rarely (if at all) went so far as to suggest that Ubico's "firmness" bordered on the authoritarian, the army attaché in the same period did admit that Ubico was also "violent", "ruthless", "harsh", and even "autocratic".[48] However, neither the legation nor the military attachés regarded this aspect of Ubico's rule, whether it is described as "strong" or "autocratic", as a weakness.

[45] Lieut. Col. Fred T. Cruz (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to Military Intelligence Division, Report 1117, March 10, 1931 (M1280, Roll4, Palma, Baudilio 11).
[46] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, April 7, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1062. In a 1939 article, Russell Fitzgibbon lauded the Guatemalan law as "one of the most interesting and perhaps significant legislative experiments undertaken by a Latin American government during the entire period of independence". Russell H. Fitzgibbon, "Guatemala's Ley de Probidad", Pacific Historical Review 8:1 (March, 1939) 75-80, there 75.
[47] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, August 4, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1075.
[48] Fred T. Cruse (Army Attaché, Central America) to the Secretary of War, January 14, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1052; Unknown author (Office of the Naval Attaché, Central America) to the Secretary of War, n.d. (October, 1931) (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1081; Harris to the Secretary of War, n.d. (February 1933) (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1102.

In fact, when compared to Whitehouse's evaluation of Chacón, the minister appreciated the fact that Ubico got things done. For example, Whitehouse felt that it was a good thing that Ubico "dominated" the Legislative Assembly, since it enabled the General to enact "good legislation". Among such legislation were measures to balance the budget, fight corruption, or to sign a contract with UFCO, so that the modern port that Whitehouse had been lobbying for since the Chacón days could finally be built.[49]

Whitehouse believed that Guatemala needed a "strong" leader and that Ubico "undoubtedly has the interests of the country at heart". The minister ignored the possibility that the centralization of power that was taking place under Ubico could lead to undesired outcomes. Six months after Ubico was elected to office, Whitehouse for the first time (and apparently the last) admitted that "because of [Ubico's] strong and dominating character and his violent temper (…) the fear is expressed that in time he will become a dictator". However, the minister wrote, Ubico was handicapped by the economic depression and financial difficulties and if he were just given some more time, "a decided improvement in the Government will be brought about".[50]

A last point which was greatly appreciated in Ubico's mode of administration was his progressivism. The greatest innovation in this field was that Ubico did not only develop the capital—as his predecessors had done—but also the backward and neglected countryside. The president's public works projects reached the countryside and he took a personal interest in the well-being of the Indian communities. Early on, the General made it his habit to visit the provinces on annual inspection trips. During those trips, Ubico inspected roads and other projects, dispensed personal justice during mass audiences with the locals; and checked the books of his *jefes politicos* (the military governors of the provinces). Trough these visits, the General obtained "first hand information concerning the problems, difficulties and abuses in the outlying sections" and this made "an excellent impression on the people of the provinces" who in the past had been prone to "support revolutionary movements against the Government in the more favored capital city".[51]

2.2 Araujo wins in El Salvador

The smallest of all the Central American republics, El Salvador was also one of the richest and most developed countries in the region, thanks to its prosperous coffee plantations. The republic was often said to be ruled by only "14 families" representing the most powerful coffee barons. These "14 families" were in reality an invention of the U.S. press, although there were some 60 families that could be said to dominate the country's economic life. The reins of government were in the hands of a single family, known as the Quiñónez-Menendez dynasty. While the politicians from this dynasty were looked down upon as parvenus by Salvador's aristocratic coffee planters, the family did make sure to favor the coffee interests and was therefore benignly tolerated by the capitalist

[49] Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, August 4, 1931 (M1280, Roll 1, Political Affairs 1075).
[50] *Idem*.
[51] *Idem*.

sections. By the late 1920s, however, the family was under some pressure to open up the political leadership to contenders from other families. Then president Alfonso Quiñónez Molina, who was pressured by the U.S. legation to quit his plans for continuance in office in light of the 1923 Treaty, decided in 1927 to hand over the presidency to one Pío Romero Bosque. The latter was a protégé of president Quiñónez and was expected to merely serve as a front for the continued political dominance of Quiñónez-Menendez family. However, in an amazing *volte-face*, Romero Bosque turned against his former protectors almost as soon as he was installed in the presidential palace. But instead of setting up a ruling dynasty of his own, he announced his absolute determination to have free and fair elections when his term ended in 1931.[52]

Initially, the American legation did not sympathize with President Romero's plan for free elections. Throughout the early part of 1930, chargé William W. Schott was skeptical about the whole affair:

> The longer one observes the progress of the present experiment in "free suffrage" the more apparent become the difficulties which it must encounter in this country of an extremely high percentage of illiteracy and an utter lack of public opinion and political capacity. Republicanism fits the situation rather than democracy and the direction of the administration must be held in the hands of a few. Unfortunately, the few have been politicians, with little interest taken by the land-owners and capitalists.[53]

Hence, Schott preferred to see a bigger role for the "cultured gentlemen" of the aristocracy who controlled the economic life of the country and were talking constantly about necessary reforms and progress. Schott regretted to report however that these men were not united or organized and that "thus far, they have displayed little courage or initiative or public spirit, to crystallize their thoughts into actions". There was *one* wealthy coffee grower, Arturo Araujo, whose "dream" it was to be swept into office by a wave of popular enthusiasm, but that dream was easily crushed by Schott: "…the masses are not sufficiently politically minded to create a general popular opinion—it does not exist".[54]

As the campaign for the presidency progressed throughout 1930, a confusing array of candidates popped up: Old-school caudillos, landowners, diplomats, and army Generals. Many of them were experienced Salvadoran politicians who were not accustomed to, and did not recognize the necessity for, rallying the voters. Instead, by

[52] Weaver, *Inside the volcano*, chapter 3; Paige, *Coffee and power*, 18-20; Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, *To rise in darkness: Revolution, repression, and memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham and London 2008) 34-41; James Dunkerly, *The long war. Dictatorship and revolution in El Salvador* (London 1982) 7-14; Phillip Williams and Knut Walker, *Militarization and demilitarization in El Salvador's transition to democracy* (Pittsburgh 1997)15-17.

[53] W.W. Schott (chargé in San Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 275, May 28, 1930; National Archives of the United States at College Park, MD; Record Group 84: Foreign Service Post Records, Legation in San Salvador, 1930; Volume 104, class 800: El Salvador. See also: Scott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 212, February 13, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador; Scott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 200, January 16, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800. Hereinafter items from the Post Records are cited as PR San Salvador.

[54] Scott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 212, February 13, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.

complicated maneuvers that had been perfected over decades of political infighting, they attempted to get enough support from influential interest groups to force the president to pick one of them as the next official candidate for executive office.[55] It is this side of the political picture that Schott reported to Washington, but he did regret that the campaign resolved solely around personalities and not around any sort of momentous cause.[56] The chargé resolutely refused to report seriously on the popular campaign of Araujo, who "has persisted in an absurd and dangerous campaign to draw the masses. He spreads the doctrine of division of property, and he is reported to have offered cabinet positions to laborers [!]".[57]

In September of that year, chargé Schott was relieved by minister Robbins, who returned to Salvador after an extended absence.[58] With this change of personnel, the line of reporting of the legation immediately softened. For one, Robbins considered it possible that Salvador might have a "semblance" of free elections if the president refrained from forcing through his own candidate in the last minute.[59] Furthermore, the minister started reporting the chances of some of the candidates, if *free* elections were held.

Initially, Robbins was not favorably impressed with the field of candidates that had formed during the previous months. Both military candidates, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and General Antonio Claramount Lucero, enjoyed some respect and support outside of the army, but they were not leadership material according to the U.S. minister. Of the four civilian candidates, only Araujo and Alberto Gomez Zarate seemed to take their campaigns seriously, but the former had squandered his support from the property owners by his stand on labor matters while the latter did not strike Robbins as a particularly strong man. In all, "there is not much to choose from, and each [candidate] is, I think, the equal in ability to the present incumbent [i.e. rather bad]". Solely for this reason, Robbins suggested that he would follow a policy of not "showing favoritism for any candidate", and to limit himself to advising president Romero Bosque on steps to be taken to assure orderly and fair elections for all candidates.[60] The State Department, which favored non-intervention for the sake of broader policy considerations,

[55] For example: Scott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 212, February 13, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[56] Schott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 291, June 17, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[57] Schott to Secretary of State, Despatch No. 348, September 5, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[58] Warren D. Robbins (United States Minister in San Salvador) to Francis White (Assistant Secretary of State), Telegram No. 36, September 26, 1930; PR San Salvador, Volume 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[59] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 387, November 4, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El salvador.
[60] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 365, September 26, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol 104, cl. 800: El salvador.

naturally informed its minister that such a policy would be acceptable, although it did not educate Robbins on its changing policy guidelines.[61]

In the months following, Robbins kept to his pronounced policy, even if his reports started to show a slight bias towards Araujo. Robbins acknowledged that the latter was very popular with the poor and had the best chances of winning a fair election.[62] Despite Araujo's wooing of the labor vote, the minister may have been comforted by Araujo's announcement that his government would be one for the people (not by the people) and that it would favor equal distribution of work (not of property).[63] In the end, Robbins deemed any kind of social overturn or radical revolution unlikely anyway. Perhaps indirectly referring to Araujo's background, the minister noted that: "I cannot help but believe that in this very thickly populated country where practically every acre of land is owned by rich and poor, there is not much chance of a revolution for the reason that there are too many property owners who have much to loose".[64] Ignoring the chances of social unrest, Robbin's policy of ensuring relatively free and fair elections focused on two stumbling blocs: The intentions of the military and those of President Romero Bosque.

Robbins regarded the threat of a military coup as greater than that of a social revolution.[65] The capital's chief of police also seems to have been alive to such possibility. Interestingly, the chief believed that the United States would help El Salvador protect itself against its own armed forces and asked Robbins whether he could arrange to have a U.S. cruiser and bombing planes from Nicaragua stand by in case of trouble. While Robbins considered this "rather a large order", he did request the authority from the State Department to call upon such forces in case of an army rebellion in El Salvador.[66] The Department was, of course, quick and thorough in disabusing its minister of the notion that he had the authority to summon these forces: Under no circumstance would bombing planes be sent to Salvador and a war vessel could only be

[61] Henry L. Stimson (Secretary of State) to Robbins, Telegram No. 22, October 1, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[62] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 387, November 4, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador and Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 399, December 2, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[63] Robins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 365, September 26, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 388, November 6, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800.B: Bolshevism. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To rise in darkness*, 59, argues that local supporters of Araujo demanded land reform, but that "Whatever Araujismo meant at the local level, in San Salvador Araujo made it clear that he did not favor land reform, and he reduced his claims to one thing: work for all". A more elaborate description of Araujo's ideas is in Dunkerly, *The long war*, 19-21, who argues that the popularity of these ideas was "strictly limited to a closed group of professionals and maverick landlords".
[64] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 408, December 18, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[65] *Idem*.
[66] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch No. 393, November 18, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.

dispatched on orders from Washington if American lives and property were in direct danger.[67]

Whether Robbins understood how unusual his request was in the context of broader policy is not clear (his initial request was rather nonchalant in tone). Anyway, it did not temper his resolution to discourage any ill-considered military move, although he did change tactics, now opting for diplomacy over gunboats. Following the Orellana military coup in Guatemala, Robbins counseled the Department to withhold recognition from the Orellana regime so that events in Guatemala would not have a negative effect in Salvador.[68] Some days later, the minister even requested permission to publicly declare that the United States would abide by the Treaty of 1923.[69] This alone, the embassy hoped, would discourage any plotters from moving against the government. In January, Robbins noted that the example of American policy toward Guatemala was of great help, since the Salvadoran military clique would doubtlessly have committed a coup if Orellana had been recognized.[70]

Up to the start of the elections, Robbins distrusted Romero Bosque and became very concerned that the president would reverse course and "railroad through" his own candidate at the last moment.[71] One week before the elections, Robbins got personally involved and went to have a talk with the president "and in very strong terms urged him to do his utmost to have constitutional elections". Combining strong terms with flattery, the minister "went so far as to say that [this] would make Salvador famous".[72] Even on the eve of the elections, Robbins was "very much in doubt" that president Romero would allow the chips to fall where they may. He was still convinced that Araujo made a good chance to win the elections—his chances had even improved somewhat since one of the military candidates, Hernández Martínez, had joined his ticket as the vice-presidential candidate.[73] However, Salvadoran law determined that if a presidential candidate did not get more than 50% of the vote, the National Assembly would determine the winner.[74] So even if Araujo did receive a plurality of votes, the game was not over yet.

[67] Stimson to Robbins, Telegram 27, November 20, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[68] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 51, December 18, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[69] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 411, December 30, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[70] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 412, January 2, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador..
[71] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 387, November 4, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 399, December 2, 1930; PR San Salvador, Vol. 104, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[72] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 412, January 2, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[73] Gould, *To rise in darkness*, 60, argues that Romero Bosque himself brokered a deal between Araujo and Martínez
[74] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 5, January 10, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

On January 12, three anxious days of voting started. The sale of liquor was prohibited[75] during the voting days and soldiers armed with machine guns patrolled the streets of the capital.[76] President Romero, instead of meddling in the elections, attended a high mass to pray for peaceful elections.[77] On the second day of voting, there was a minor crisis when the populist General Claramount called on his colleagues in the army to reject the elections and call for a constitutional convention. The chief of police immediately informed the American legation about this development and Robbins again requested that the Department send a war vessel to Salvador.[78] Even though Robbins made no mention of American lives being in danger, the Department this time decided to send a cruiser to Corinto, which is in Nicaraguan waters but close enough to Salvador to employ swiftly in case of trouble.[79] As it turned out, the ship arrived when the crisis was already over. Fortunately, Salvador's many Generals did not have the stomach for a revolution at that time and Claramount eventually decided, in a somewhat melodramatic move, to offer his sword to the president in submission.[80]

In the end, Araujo did get most votes, but not a majority. This meant that the National Assembly would choose a winner from the top three candidates. Happily, Araujo and his allies also secured 39 out of 42 seats in Salvador's Assembly (the elections for national deputies had occurred at the same time as the presidential elections). The number two candidate, Gomez Zarate who had the support of the wealthiest families in Salvador, was not ready to roll over and surrender, however. He and his financial backers gathered an army more fearsome than Claramount's 30 odd General friends: A team of lawyers who would dispute the procedures of the election.[81]

Faced with this challenge to his imminent victory, Araujo anxiously told minister Robbins that he could not stand for the behavior of his supporters if the outcome of the elections was contested.[82] Even though Robbins was not charmed by Araujo's implied threats, he was anxious that Salvador's first truly popular elections—which, incidentally, he believed would reflect favorably on his own track record in Salvador—would end in civil strive. Thus the minister stepped in:

[75] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 6, January 12, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[76] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 9, January 14, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[77] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 6, January 12, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[78] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 8, January 13, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[79] Stimson to Robbins, Telegram 5, January 14, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[80] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 9, January 14, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 423, January 16, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[81] Robbins to White, Despatch 424, January 16, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[82] *Idem*.

> On [Araujo] leaving me at three, I sent for a representative of Gomez Zarate and merely said to him, without mentioning that Araujo had been to see me, that I thought it would be a disaster to the country, after reports of free and square elections had been broadcast over the world that these reports should be disproved by a demand for recount or an accusation of fraudulent elections. I further suggested that I thought it would be far better to try and get together with Araujo. He replied that the Zaratistas were willing to do this to which I merely replied that I was very glad.

Both factions took due notice: The next day, Robbins' mere suggestions had been followed up and correctly executed.[83] On February 10, the National Assembly unanimously elected Araujo president without intervention from his opponents.[84]

Despite his earlier pessimism, Robbins was now quite pleased about the elections—and about himself. After congratulating the president, the chief of police, and the Salvadoran people in a newspaper article[85], the minister turned his attention to the State Department, which, in his opinion, had not shown adequate appreciation for the historic events in El Salvador. Somewhat to the minister's distress, the world at large remained oblivious to events in Salvador. Therefore, he wrote personal letters to his contacts in the Department that reveal a lot more about his interpretation of the elections than his carefully worded political reports do. To Michael McDermott, the Chief of the Division of Current Information, Robbins wrote that not one word about the "historic" elections in Salvador had appeared in the American press, and that the only explanation could be that the "young man" at the Salvador desk had "obviously" been "asleep at the switch". The minister hoped that Mac would be a good friend and play this up for all it was worth. In a "Dear Francis" letter to the assistant secretary of state, Robbins noted that free and untrammeled elections had "literally (…) not happened before in the history of Central America" and that he took "a little pride" in making it happen. If the elections were given some publicity, it would show the people of the United States that Salvador was "progressing" while it would give Salvadorans some "confidence in themselves".[86]

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[83] *Idem*.

[84] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 15, February 12, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: El Salvador. For background information on the procedure of the elections, see: Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 12, January 20, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 429, January 21, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[85] Robbins to White, Despatch 424, January 16, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 445, February 4, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[86] Robbins to Michael J. McDermott (Chief, Division of Current Information), January 30, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 114, cl. 891: Public Press; Robbins to White, January 30, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 114, cl. 891: Public Press. On Robbins' pride in seeing the elections successfully executed, see also: Robbins to White, February 17, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador. Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 110-113, agrees that Araujo's election was the first democratic opening in Salvadoran history. Ching, "Patronage and Politics", in: Aldo A. Laura-Santiago & Leigh Binford, *Landscapes of struggle: politics, society, and community in El Salvador* (Pittsburgh 2004) 54-56, is more careful when stating that elections during the Romero Bosque/Araujo governments were more nearly democratic than at anytime before or after.

Aside from a "particular pride in seeing these elections going so smoothly", Robbins also felt "a considerable satisfaction in seeing Araujo elected".[87] Despite his earlier admonition that the legation would not show favor to any candidate, Robbins revealed after the elections that Araujo had always been a "friendly and frequent guest" of his post.[88] While the minister may have had his own reasons for portraying the future head of state as a good friend of the legation, Araujo's recourse to the legation during his run-in with the Zarate faction seems to confirm that he was not shy about visiting the Americans.

Robbins was quite optimistic about the future of Salvador after its "historic" election. Araujo seemed to him "frank" and "honest" and had made a point of advertising his friendship to the United States before the minister on several occasions.[89] The new president also vehemently denied that he was a communist, as was rumored during the campaigns.[90] Robbins himself explained that Araujo's supporters on the countryside may have made promises to the peasants that Araujo never authorized. Many peasants expected the coming of the millennium after Araujo's election and may have been led to believe that the lands of their masters would be divided among the workers by the new administration. Robbins notes that although Araujo anxiously sought the rural votes, it is unlikely that he ever promised land reform, since he was a rich landowner himself and would be financially devastated by such a move.[91]

Robbins' enthusiasm about Araujo's election in El Salvador was premature, however. The new president proved unable to deal with the economic and social dislocation that characterized the global Depression.[92] Not one year passed before he was toppled by a "revolutionary directorate" of young army officers. The directorate soon put General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in power. While the General was initially considered a puppet of the directorate, he quickly and remorselessly built his own power base and stayed in power until 1944.

Parkman*, Nonviolent insurrection*, 16, permits that Araujo was the first member of the Salvadoran elite who demonstrated the power of popular politics.

[87] Robbins to White, February 17, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[88] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 431, January 23, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[89] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 457, March 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 431, January 23, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Robbins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 15, February 12, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[90] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 436, January 29, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[91] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 471, March 27, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[92] In Araujo's defense, Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To rise in darkness*, 92, argues that "he [Araujo] faced an elite that would not pay taxes; a middle class that would not allow more foreign loans; foreign banks that would not loan money easily; a U.S. customs receivership; and an ineffective public service infrastructure with a long tradition of graft and corruption. A mobilized *campesinado* expected and demanded agrarian reform, but only a small amount of land was available for redistribution without confronting the oligarchy". Williams and Walter, *Militarization*, 17-19, present a similar argument.

2.3 Carías wins in Honduras

"Honduran political history through the late 19th and early 20th centuries is such a welter of confusion that it is tempting to avoid analysis and present, instead, a satiric panorama of tinpot Generals playing musical chairs." This, at least, is the opinion of Honduras' most sympathetic American chronicler.[93] Indeed, by the early 1930s the situation in Honduras was very unsettled. Divisions in the ruling Liberal Party; the worldwide Depression; the growing power and economic dominance of the American fruit companies; and numerous revolts by local political bosses all conspired to upset the political and economic life of the republic. To the officers at the American legation, these conditions seemed inherent to the land and its people, rather than determined by any external factors. "When rumors of an impending revolutions (…) do not circulate", commented the legation's first secretary, Laurence Higgins, "there is cause for wonderment. They are indeed an almost chronic and constant feature of the political life in Honduras".[94]

From 1930 onward, the contending parties of Liberals and Nationals (also known by their party colors: The Reds and the Blues) were sizing each other up for the presidential elections in 1932. Between 1930 and 1932, there were two important stepping stones on the way to the presidential palace: The elections for the National Assembly in 1930 and the municipal elections in 1931. Somewhat to the surprise of the American legation, the Liberal president of Honduras, Vicente Mejía Colindres, allowed both elections to be free and fair and the National Party won both of them.

It is not entirely clear why president Mejía Colindres allowed the elections to be free. Granted, he himself, as well as his predecessor, had won the presidency after somewhat free elections, but due to Honduras' "*doble vida*" of a nominally democratic system combined with a party system based on patronage, both those elections had been violently contested by those who couldn't obtain lucrative government positions. So in the Honduran context, what was necessary to win an election *and* to actually win the presidency was not just a majority of votes, but also a power base anchored in solid patronage network (there was some overlap in these two factors, but the strength of one's patronage network was not necessarily determined by numerical strength). Mejía Colindres himself seemed to have lost his own power base by 1930. Both the Nationals and a rival group in his own Liberal Party were now pressuring him to allow free elections.[95]

[93] Acker, *Honduras*, 69.

[94] Laurance Higgins (Chargé d'Affaires a.i.) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 365, December 9, 1931, PR Honduras (Strictly Confidential files), Vol. 216.

[95] Morris, *Caudillo politics*, 1-11; Marvin Barahona, *La influencia de los Estados Unidos en Honduras (1900-1954). Del Tratado de 1907 a la Bananera de 1954* (PhD thesis: Nijmegen 1999) 109-113. In the past, another source of American support had been the banana companies which dominated Honduras' economy. During election times, competing banana companies would often financially support their own favorites, which is why their backing was so important to the presidential hopefuls. By 1932, however, the United Fruit Company had pushed out the rival banana companies in Honduras, thereby obviating the need to "buy" one of the political parties during election time. Whoever now won the elections would have to deal with UFCO anyway.

Lay's loose definition and benign vision of intervention, coupled with his patronizing attitude toward Hondurans, seem to have had the effect of emboldening him to assume an active role in the 1932 elections. He was determined to make sure that whoever won the elections did so by means of "votes rather than bullets". [96] As far as shorthands go, this was a fair representation of the State Department's policy of abiding by the 1923 Treaty. However, Lay's conception of the American role in bringing about a peaceful and fair election was an activist's one.

During the 1932 presidential elections, there were two candidates from whom the legation might have chosen a favorite: The National Party's candidate was Tubircio Carías. The Liberal Party was represented by the leader of its "radical" wing: Ángel Zúñiga Huete. It should be noted that neither of them was an Arturo Araujo. Both of these men were traditional rulers of the caudillo type and both had in the past used violence when they believed it suited their interests.[97] In terms of politics, it is undeniable that the State Department preferred the conservative and pro-American National Party. The Liberal Party, especially its radical wing under Zúñiga Huete, was considered too pro-labor, anti-United Fruit, and even anti-American. Moreover, the Department appreciated Carías' cooperation in the U.S. led negotiations during the presidential elections of 1924 and the dignified acceptance of his loss of the 1928 elections.[98] Zúñiga Huete, on the other hand, was considered an opportunistic labor agitator and was vaguely remembered for his alleged role in the "machine gunning" of Carías voters in 1924.[99]

For the man on the spot, however, the lines between good and bad were not so clearly drawn. Julius Lay did not acknowledge any serious ideological difference between the Liberal and National Parties and considered the presidential election to be a simple contest between the "ins" and the "outs" (though both presidential candidates could be considered "outs" at this particular time). The minister naturally judged the contenders by the supposed merits of their personal characteristics instead of their ideological backgrounds. To Lay and his secretaries, Carías seemed to represent all that was backward in Honduras: The General always seemed uncomfortable at official occasions, he was a bad public speaker, and during his campaign he did not stir from his plantation in rural Zambrano. Being unfamiliar with the situation outside the capital, the legation had no way of knowing that Carías was building an impressive patronage network since at least 1924 and Zambrano was a perfect location from where to manage it. To the Americans, his campaigning techniques seemed rudimentary when compared to those of his competitor. Moreover, Carías was somewhat of an outlandish appearance: He was a very large man—said to be able to break a rifle in two with his bare hands—

[96] Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 135, June 30, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.
[97] On Carías before 1931: Dodd, *Carías*, 15-47 and Argueta, *Carías*, 21-77. On Zúñiga Huete: Argueta, *Carías*, 295-299.
[98] On 1924 elections: Leonard, *Central America*, 83-84.
[99] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 474, May 7, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

sporting a haystack mustache and having dark, brooding eyes. Carías' rustic appearance led Lay to believe that "his blood is probably mostly Indian and he evinces a good proportion of the characteristics of the Honduran Indian, who is a very low type of Indian". Concurrently, the minister deducted that Carías was not a very intelligent man.[100]

Zúñiga Huete's campaign, on the other hand, consisted of a rather busy schedule of speeches and other public appearances in Honduras' major towns and commercial centers. He even used airplanes and movies to reach as many people as possible. The Americans considered his campaign quite "modern" and assumed that it would win him many votes. Moreover, Zúñiga Huete thought he had a realistic chance to win the elections "the hard way": By a plurality of votes. Being so close to the presidency, he was not prepared to risk loosing it to meddling *yanquis*. So, as the presidential campaigns progressed, Zúñiga Huete toned down his pro-labor and anti-UFCO rhetoric, thereby disappointing many laborers but gaining some of the company's trust in return. He also made a point of visiting the American legation to advertise his peaceful intentions. These efforts bore fruit: In a candid letter to Whitehouse, Lay admitted that "there are many here who fear [Zúñiga Huete's] radical and dictatorial methods if he should become president, but he is an intelligent and forceful character and has learned much in the last few years and I am not so sure that he would not be an excellent president for Honduras and treat American interests with consideration."[101]

It is remarkable that Lay never confessed his reappraisal of Zúñiga Huete to the State Department. Perhaps he was not sure that his superiors would accept his analysis, since the Liberal leader was generally known in Washington as a trouble maker. It seems fair to conclude, however, that minister Lay had no real favorite in the presidential elections of 1932. His behavior during the elections, as it has been recorded in the legation's archives, also appears free of any intentional partiality. But despite being a fairly neutral player in the events of 1932, Lay was anything but a passive bystander. He was very much interested in ensuring free and fair elections in Honduras.

Judging that president Mejía did not have the strength of character, or even the intelligence, to control all the facets of government policy, the U.S. legation under Lay claimed a central role in the conduct of state. Assuming that the Honduran state needed secure borders, friendly neighbors, and internal peace to even have a shot at free elections, the legation played a part in the obtainment of these objectives that went far

[100] Dodd, *Carías*, 15-16 and 46; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 622, September 23, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 731, March 3, 1933, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 218; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 559, July 15, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[101] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 622, September 23, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 613, September 4, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 504, June 10, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 443, April 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 483, May 20, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to Whitehouse, April 28, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

beyond a mere mediatory role. From 1930 to 1932, it pushed the Honduran government to negotiate border agreements with Guatemala and Nicaragua; had its own personnel inspect the borders with Nicaragua to insure that it was adequately guarded from incursions by Sandinista troops; and took on a coordinating role during two armed rebellions, one led by the Indian leader Gregorio Ferrara and the other by the disgruntled National Party caudillo Díaz Zalaye, giving orders to local Honduran commanders through its network of consulates.[102]

The official campaign for the Honduran presidential elections in October, 1932, began in earnest in March of that year. President Mejía Colindres proved himself to be an honest proponent of free and fair elections throughout the whole ordeal, but despite his efforts, the months leading up to the election proved tense. One source of worry was a minor uprising on Honduras' North Coast, but an even more serious problem was the distrust between the contending parties. The Liberal Party controlled the executive arm of the government, which included the regional offices of the *jefes politicos* who were in charge of keeping order during the elections. While president Mejía was adamant that elections should be free and fair, not all Liberals agreed with him and there was some suspicion that the local governors would coerce voters into support for Zúñiga Huete. On the other hand, the National Party controlled the municipal authorities, which organized the actual voting, giving the Liberals their own reasons to suspect fraud during the upcoming elections. While both parties were fully convinced that they enjoyed majority support among the populace, both also expected that the other would cheat them out of

[102] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 598, August 18, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 613, September 4, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Major P.C. Geyer, Jr., (U.S. Naval Attaché) to Lay, January 26, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 179, cl. 800: Nicaragua; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 180, January 26, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 179, cl. 800: Nicaragua; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 107, May 21, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Stimson to Lay, Telegram 45, May 24, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 100, May 17, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 76, April 27, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 63, April 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to Whitehouse, April 8, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras; Lay to Robbins, April 8, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras; Lay to President Mejía Colindres, April 14, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 58, April 18, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 59, April 18, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Stimson to Lay, Telegram 23, April 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 61, April 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 64, February 21, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to Whitehouse, April 11, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Whitehouse to Lay, April 13, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to Thomas C. Wasson (vice consul, Puerto Cortes), April 23, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the North Coast consulates, September 19, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 156, September 13, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Lay to Whitehouse, June 10, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.; Whitehouse to Lay, June 11, 1931, PR Honduras, Vol. 178, cl. 800: Honduras. Telegrams.

a fair election victory. Therefore, they were at the same time running an election campaign and arming their followers in case the opposing party committed fraud. A particularly ominous sign, in the Honduran context, was that Zúñiga Huete ordered large quantities of red lint for the production of hatbands.[103]

Julius Lay, in the meantime, was royally fed up with the "bitter mudslinging" and "partisan attacks" that characterized the campaigns. The uprising in the North was beyond his capability to understand, as he could not grasp how its leader could be so "unpatriotic" as to start trouble during the election season. He also regretted that the contending parties focused on mutual suspicions rather than the "real issues" and found that their reciprocal accusations were "petty" and "childish". While the minister respected Mejía Colindres' effort to have free elections and was also convinced of the latter's sincerity, he believed that the president lacked "severity". As Lay saw it, the "childish" presidential hopefuls needed a firm, fatherly hand to ensure that they would be on their best behavior during the elections. He also believed that the lofty end of free elections justified the means by which that goal was accomplished. But president Mejía was a much too mild-mannered man to provide such guidance. "It is unfortunate that the Government has not proven itself strong enough", Lay reported to the State Department, "to accomplish many of the aims for which the Legation has striven".[104]

This last remark hints at the depth of the involvement of Lay's legation in the elections. Having found Mejía Colindres willing but, in Lay's opinion, unable to control the strong forces unleashed by the election campaigns, the minister decided that the American legation should be the enforcer of order and the guarantor of untrammeled elections. And so, throughout 1932, Lay and the legation's secretary, Laurence Higgins, appeared regularly at the president's desk with friendly, if somewhat insistent, advice. In turn, both Zúñiga Huete and Carías were regular guests of the legation, doubtlessly in an effort to manipulate the favor of those meddling *yanquis*, but in no position to ignore Lay's counsel unless they were willing to risk American displeasure.[105]

[103] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 636, October 14, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 589, August 4, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 559, July 15, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 646, October 27, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with Doctors Salvador Aguirre and Antonio Rivera, July 27, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[104] Lay to Wasson, February 12, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 589, August 4, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 596, August 15, 1932 PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 602, August 26, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 646, October 27, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[105] Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 515, June 20, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Antonio Rivera, June 22, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 483, May 20, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 596, August 15, 1932 PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with President Mejía, July 13, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras,

Lay's actions in favor of the elections ranged from his insistence that the candidates publish a statement on their peaceful intentions to his coordinating role in the containment of the North Coast uprising. Much was also accomplished by legation secretary Higgins who, in his own words, played an "instrumental" role in preventing the establishment of general martial law, which Mejía Colindres thought necessary to fight the North Coast uprising—and which would have made fair elections an unlikely event. Also, the secretary cajoled the president into decreeing a general disarmament of the population, which was in conflict with Honduran law and was unlikely to be enforced by the country's badly armed police force anyway, but which, again in Higgins' terms, would have a benign effect on the country's stability. As the campaigning season neared its climax and both parties seemed ready for a fight, Lay managed on October 28—one day before the voting started—to convince both Carías and Zúñiga Huete to instruct the Nationalist municipalities and the Liberal governors to ensure free election. To Lay's regret, however, neither candidate instructed his followers to accept the *outcome* of the election.[106]

On October 29, three anxious days of voting started. Expecting trouble, many of the well-to-do of Tegucigalpa left the country like rats would a sinking ship. Having picked up rumors that the National Party was not at all sure of victory at the voting boots anymore and was preparing to fight, Lay had requested two weeks before that a "planeload of Marines" be sent to Tegucigalpa to protect the legation. Having consulted the legation's archives, the minister was under the impression that this was normal procedure, but Stimson telegraphed him that the Department was "highly reluctant" to honor his request unless American lives were in actual danger. Until such time, the best

January to June; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 569, July 22, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 634, October 13, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with Doctors Salvador Aguirre and Antonio Rivera, July 27, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[106] Lay to Wasson, February 12, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 499, June 3, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 569, July 22, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 648, October 28, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 483, May 20, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 486, May 21, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with the President, May 25, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to Whitehouse, June 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to Wasson, June 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins, Memorandum of Conversation with the Foreign Minister with regard to the Politico-Military Situation, June 6, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Telegram 48, June 7, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to Wasson, June 6, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 499, June 10, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

that resident Americans could do was to go the way many of their rich Honduran neighbors had gone, viz. out of harm's way.[107]

In the end, the elections went along smoothly, except for the "more or less usual choppings and killings due to excessive drink among the lower classes". To Lay's considerable astonishment, Carías won the elections by a large margin. Since the attendant elections for Congress also brought in a large National majority, there was no (legal) way that the Liberals could prevent the inauguration of the new president. Faced with utter defeat in a fair contest, Zúñiga Huete had no choice but to be a good sport and accept the outcome. To Lay's relief, he told his followers to do likewise.[108]

Some days after the elections, Lay sent in a report with his analysis of the elections. Of the factors that Lay identified as having promoted free elections (which he characterized as a "most extraordinary turn of events") the majority was the work of the legation: The pre-election statements of good-will by the candidates; stricter adherence to the gun laws; and an unusually firm attitude on the side of Mejía Colindres. Correspondingly, reported Lay, many people felt that "somehow" the legation was responsible for the peaceful elections. Not surprisingly, then, the minister felt that fear for non-recognition or American intervention in case of a revolution were the most important enablers of this recent exercise in democracy. Though no intervention had been contemplated by the Department, Lay recounts that the showing of a film portraying American naval maneuvers in a Tegucigalpan theatre days before the elections had started the rumor that an American aircraft carrier was actually in Honduran waters and ready to intervene. While Lay admitted that such an event "at first blush must appear trivial", yet "in a country as small and primitive as this and with a population so impressionable and credulous [it] may have been of real importance". Anyway, the mere specter of American intervention "had an undeniably salutary effect" on local passions.[109]

When the elections turned out to be a resounding success, minister Lay, much like his colleagues in Guatemala and Salvador, made sure his seniors in Washington understood the central role he played in this local victory for democracy. As a reflection of the importance that local actors ascribed to the legation's responsibility for the elections, President-elect Carías visited Lay to thank him for his good works. Only after Carías made this official call on the legation did he visit the presidential palace to confer with President Mejía Colindres. Lay forwarded articles from the Liberal Press lauding his

[107] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 636, October 14, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Higgins, Notes on the Presidential Campaign of 1928 taken from the Legation Records, n.d. (November/December, 1932), PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Stimson to Lay, Telegram 47, October 28, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[108] Lay to Edwin C. Wilson (Chief, Division of Latin American Affairs), November 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Kenneth S. Schraud (vice consul, Tela) to Lay, Despatch 89, January 31, 1933; PR Honduras, Vo. 196, cl. 800: Honduras; Lay to the Central American legations, October 31, 1932; PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 649, October 31, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June.

[109] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 651, November 4, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December.

actions in favor of Honduran democracy and some effusive congratulations from the consulates. “It is pleasing for me to hear”, Lay wrote the Department in a faux-humble tone, “that my efforts to secure peaceful elections are considered fruitful”.[110] The minister optimistically reported that the latest elections represented “an extension of democracy in Honduras”. He praised Zúñiga Huete for his graceful acceptance of the results, opining that this would improve the latter’s chances for the 1936 elections. All-in-all, the successful experience in electoral politics would bring “another four years of peace” to Honduras.[111]

Unfortunately for Lay, the rosy picture he painted was not entirely accurate. In fact, it was not accurate at all. Two weeks after the elections, the government barracks in San Pedro Sula, a Liberal stronghold, were attacked and taken by surprise. This turned out to be the opening shot in a country-wide uprising by Liberal military leaders who could not accept the recent victory of the National Party. In line with the fine Honduran tradition of providing dramatic sounding names even to the most insignificant skirmish, the fighting that took place in late 1932 was later dubbed the “Revolution of the Treacheries” because, as the American Naval Attaché reported, Hondurans felt that there was no legitimate reason to revolt.[112]

However this may be, minister Lay surely felt betrayed and he was not willing to have the Liberals snatch defeat from the jaws of his recent democratic victory. Things did not look particularly bright, though. Honduras did not have an army in the usual sense of the word: Rather, both political parties had their own militias. Since it was the Liberal militias that revolted, President Mejía Colindres had no troops to put down the revolt. Thus, the legation immediately instructed the President to work with the National militias and may have been instrumental in brokering a deal between Carías and Mejía Colindres to fight the rebels. Also, and despite having suffered a rebuff of a similar request during the elections, Lay pressed the Department to send weapons to Honduras to protect the constitutional government, arguing that “timely foreign aid (such as supplying arms to the Government) in suppressing the rebellion would be greatly preferable to letting things drift until the presence of foreign armed forces on Honduran soil might become necessary”. At first, the Department was non-committal, claiming that it did not even have the antiquated ammo and weapons requested by the Honduran government. Eventually, however, Francis White decided to send some much-delayed

[110] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 653, November 8, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December.

[111] Lay to Edwin C. Wilson (Chief, Division of Latin American Affairs), November 4, 1931; PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras, November to December; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 649, October 31, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 697, January 13, 1933, PR Honduras, Vol. 196, cl. 800: Honduras; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 653, November 8, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December.

[112] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 682, December 6, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 91, November 12, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Geyer, Memorandum on Honduran Revolution of Treacheries, n.d. (December, 1932), PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December.

policy instructions the Honduran legation: “I think the situation in Honduras is different now from what it was in 1928 when we did supply the Honduran government with certain military supplies. I think it much sounder on the whole that we should keep out of such transactions and that is our policy at present”.[113]

Aside from an insistent lobby for arms, which was eventually unsuccessful, legation reports give the impression that Lay was deeply involved in the coordination of resistance against the rebels. Apparently without the Department’s knowledge or concurrence, he urged his colleagues in Guatemala City and Managua to negotiate a deal whereby the Honduran government would intern political exiles from Guatemala and Nicaragua if the governments in those countries would control the movements of Honduran revolutionaries within their borders in return (Honduran insurgent troops made free use of the uncontrolled borderlands between Honduras and its neighbors). Acting in line with general U.S. policy, Lay also asked Whitehouse to make sure that Ubico did not provide his Liberal brothers in Honduras with arms. And while Lay never admitted that he was in any way involved in the defense of the constituted authorities in Honduras, his reports during the revolt do suggest that the leaders of the National army, Carías and his running-mate Abraham Williams, regularly visited the legation and received advise from the minister. In the end, Lay’s efforts were fruitful: After a month and a half of fighting, the National militias defeated the Liberal insurgents. Although President Mejía Colindres was completely dependent on Carías’ troops throughout the ordeal, he was kept in power until February 1, 1933, when he duly handed over the presidential sash to Carías.[114]

In the end, the legation in Honduras was not as enthusiastic about Carías as Whitehouse was about Ubico. In 1932, when the legation was still basking in the success of the election that it helped bring about, Lay reported that “[t]his Legation should be able to get anything it asks for from the new Administration, Congress and Supreme Court except money”.[115] Such a favorable analysis, however, was not due to Carías’ helpfulness. Unlike Ubico, Carías had a more easily recognizable Indian appearance (at least in the eyes of the legation). As Lay himself opined: “his [Carías’] blood is probably mostly Indian and he evinces a good proportion of the characteristics of the Honduran Indian, who is a very low type of Indian”. In a fuller explanation of this

[113] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 675, December 2, 1932, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 217; Lay to the Secretary of State, Telegram 97, November 18, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 671, November 25, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Geyer, Memorandum on Coup d’Etat attempted by Insurgent Rebels, n.d. (November, 1932), PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Lay to Hanna, December 20, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December; Stimson to Lay, Telegram 58, November 19, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras November to December.

[114] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 173, February 3, 1933, PR Honduras, Vol, 196, cl. 800: Honduras.

[115] Lay to Edwin C. Wilson (Chief, Division of Latin American Affairs), November 4, 1931; PR Honduras, Vol. 189, cl. 800: Honduras, November to December.

statement that contains all the classic stereotypes of the Indian, Lay explained that Carías:

> …is stubborn and unforgiving, easily aroused to anger or resentment, has little education, and has never been outside of Central America. On the other hand he is a natural gentleman, generous, kindly, courteous, and hospitable, a good husband and parent, a patriotic citizen (…) Carías is, I believe, not intelligent, and he is powerfully influenced by the ignorant prejudices of his race, nationality and class, viz. Honduran Indian *campesino* [peasant]. But he is an honest man, an upright man, loyal to his friends, principles and party, and devoted to his relatives (too much so for some of them are thoroughly bad characters.

Furthermore, Carías was not a good "socializer" or "mixer" and did not seem comfortable at society events.[116] He had little in common with Lay who liked dinners and cocktail parties as much as the next diplomat, had traveled extensively, and felt himself to be a cosmopolitan member of the highest rungs of society. Unlike Whitehouse and Ubico, who were both "cultured gentlemen" and seemed to get along very well on a personal level, Carías and Lay never became close.

Carías himself was seen as a "figurehead", a fatherly figure whom the Indian masses could relate to:

> He is a great popular figure, trusted and venerated by hundreds of thousands of peons who have never seen him, a Hindenburg to the ignorant soldiers who fought under him in the revolutionary war of 1924 (…) His principal role in the present government is to command popular respect and support. One man no matter how much of a figurehead can accomplish this in a country where politics is a matter of personalities rather than programs or principles.

The substance of government, meanwhile, would be left to the Cabinet, which was "conspicuously superior" to that of Mejía Colindres and formed a "more progressive and enterprising government than the last". The legation centered its attention on Finance Minister Julio Lozano Díaz, whose job it was to recover the finances of the government—which was almost bankrupted during the heydays of the Depression.[117]

It is not strange, therefore, that the legation's hopes never focused on Carías, but rather on the more cosmopolitan and highly educated gentlemen in his government. These, the legation believed, would provide Honduras with an efficient and honest government and four years of much needed peace and stability. A government, in short, that could stand a careful comparison with Ubico's government. If such a government would turn out to be stern, Lay believed that it would "not be a despotism of one man, for reasons above stated, but an autocratic government directed by the group in President Carías' entourage; and what Hondurans will lose in their personal liberties (liberties that degenerated into license under Mejía Colindres) they will gain in greater protection to life and property, more efficiency and honesty in the public services".[118]

[116] Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 731, March 3, 1933; PR Honduras (Strictly Confidential files) Vol. 218.
[117] *Idem*.
[118] *Idem*.

3. THE UBICO SOLUTION

If a name were to characterize American policy in Central America during the period around 1930—when the U.S. engaged a measured withdrawal from military intervention while its representatives continued to manage elections in Central America—it should be the "Ubico solution".

Ubico and Carías established strong, dynamic, and repressive dictatorships in the five to six years following their elections. This process was completed around the middle of the decade, when they both suspended the constitutional prohibition against reelection in their respective countries. Ubico would rule Guatemala until 1944 and Carías presided over Honduras until 1948. In the historiography, both leaders are represented as part of a group of dictators who came to power around this time. In 1932, General Martínez came to power as the result of a military coup against Araujo and Anastasio Somoza established his rule in Nicaragua in 1936.[119] The only place in Central America where constitutional and fairly representative government survived was traditionally liberal Costa Rica. Together, Ubico, Carías, Martínez, and, of course, Somoza are considered by many historians to be the beneficiaries of Washington's "Somoza solution" policy. But this interpretation of events in Central America and Washington's role therein is anachronistic and simplistic.

The Somoza solution hypothesis is anachronistic because Ubico and Carías were not considered dictators at the time. Neither were they deemed to be of the same class as Martínez and Somoza. First of all, Martínez was regarded as an outcast by American diplomats when he came to power in 1932. Somoza had to wait another four years before he could realize his ultimate ambition to become president of his country. From a 1931 perspective, therefore, the governments of Guatemala and Honduras were not part of a dictatorial bloc. Taking into account developments on the entire isthmus, the elections of Ubico and Carías were seen in conjuncture with the elections of Arturo Araujo in El Salvador and Juan Sacasa in Nicaragua. All of these elections were thought to be remarkably fair and free, thus representing a victory for American policy and a big step forward in the political development of Central America.

All the American legations in Central America in the early 1930s reported that free and fair elections had been held there and that the region was now undergoing, in the words of Military Attaché Harris, a "radical innovation" in honest and efficient government. In this context, it is of particular interest to quote here at some length a State Department study on Latin America, which offered to its readers Washington's interpretation of its legation's reports.

Compiled by the Division of American Republic Affairs for the use of the American delegates to the International Conference of American States at Montevideo in 1933, the study in question reached the highest echelons of the State Department, including the new Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, who led the mission.[120] The section on Nicaragua is

[119] See chapters 3 and 4 of this text.

[120] Division of American Republic Affairs, "Latin America: Politics and Government. Political Résumé for the Use of Delegates to the 7th International Conference of American States,

particularly informative. While Nicaragua presented a special case because it had undergone U.S. military occupation from 1909 to 1933 (with an interlude of 3 years beginning in 1925), it also represented to the Department the highest hopes of what could be achieved under American tutelage.

Just before the report was finished, U.S. Marines were withdrawn from Nicaragua by preannounced plan and as part of a larger drive to remove the vestiges of intervention from Central America and the Caribbean. However, Marines supervised the Nicaraguan presidential elections as recently as 1932—a victory for Juan Bautista Sacasa—leading to a felicitous outcome: "For the first time in the memory of Nicaraguans, the government in power, both president and Congress, is known to represent the freely manifested will of the Nicaraguan people". Following the elections and the withdrawal of the Marines, the report announced in a victorious tone: "The present generation of Nicaraguans are initiating what is to them a new experiment in self-government".

The importance attached by the Department to the holding of free and fair elections is evident from its argument that "one of the principal reasons, or pretexts, for revolt in Nicaragua, that is, the desire to overthrow a government illegally or illegitimately exercising power, has disappeared". And although old rivalries in Nicaragua still presented an obstacle to the "valiant and sincere attempt [of Nicaraguans] to govern themselves", at least they had the benefit of the "impartial and restraining assistance of the American Legation".

The factors present in the Department's evaluation of Nicaraguan politics in 1933—that is, an unprecedented experiment in self-government; stability through periodic elections; and the importance of American "assistance" short of military intervention—also dominated its view of Guatemalan and Honduran politics. In Honduras, the fact that Carías' election to office was free and fair, was considered "a tribute to the political progress which Honduras had made in the past decade". And even though the administration of the country depended mainly on the "better element" in the government—primarily the "especially competent" minister of Finance—Carías himself was thought to have a quieting effect on Honduras because he was "respected for his courage, equanimity and political honesty". Thus, the Department ventured to predict that:

> If General Carías is able to complete his administration peaceably, and there are no present indications that he will not, and particularly if he is able to guarantee fair elections at the end of his term in office, Honduras will have made more progress during the present and the preceding two administrations than it has made during any equal period in its political history, and a long step will have been taken toward the development of true institutions and the elimination of the influence of the chronic revolutionary type.

Montevideo, 1933", Lot Files, Studies on Latin America, Box 20, folder marked Montevideo Conference, 1933.

Since Sacasa was thought to be somewhat on the soft side and Cariista Honduras was still considered the most backward country in the region, the government of Jorge Ubico in Guatemala was held in the highest regard by the State Department. In 1933, when there was no reason to assume that Ubico would continue in power past his legal term, the State Department stressed the semi-democratic circumstances under which the General had come to power: "Despite the circumstance that he was not opposed by any other candidate, usually an ominous sign in Central America, there appears to be no doubt that General Ubico was the choice of a large majority of the articulate people of Guatemala". Citing Ubico's honesty, energy, intelligence, and ability, the Department's report rejoiced that "President Ubico has fulfilled his promise to give Guatemala an improved administration" by balancing the budget and enforcing government honesty. Thus, in 1933, the Department regarded Ubico as "the outstanding leader of Central America".

A remarkable aspect of the American interpretation of the new regimes in Central America is perhaps that the local U.S. ministers easily combined their demand for electoral politics with respect for what would now be regarded as authoritarian policies. So while Whitehouse argued that Ubico was the choice of the "great majority" of Guatemalans, he also respected the General's "forcefulness" and complete command over the country's legislative and judiciary. Lay was satisfied that he had set Honduras on the road to democratic progress, but also observed that the Carías regime would have authoritarian qualities. Robbins believed that the election of Araujo in El Salvador was a historic event, but he was also relieved to report the new president could "break some heads" if the need arose. The American ministers perceived a need for "forceful" and "effective" government because they felt that Central Americans needed a stern hand to guide them toward progress. Chacón, Romero Bosque, and Mejia Colindres were considered too weak to deal with the economic and social problems of the Great Depression. In the Lay's words, the advantage of a strong-armed government at that point was that "what Hondurans will lose in their personal liberties (liberties that degenerated into license under Mejía Colindres) they will gain in greater protection to life and property, more efficiency and honesty in the public services".[121]

American diplomats were not naïve: They knew that the newly elected presidents of Central America were tough *hombres*. It may seem odd that they were confident that Ubico and Carías would submit to honest elections toward the end of their legal tenures. Others seem to have been less optimistic, as Whitehouse admitted when he reported that "the fear is expressed that in time he [Ubico] will become a dictator". The important thing here is to realize that the ministers did not know that non-intervention—non-interference even—would be the backbone of U.S. policy by 1936. Although they never admitted so much, it is reasonable to assume that they expected the next elections in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to be supervised by a strong U.S. minister, as they had led the early 1930s elections. The multiple requests for armed intervention that have been noted in previous paragraphs demonstrate that the diplomats under

[121] *Idem*.

discussion here had no idea which way the wind was blowing. They could not have known that the Department's tolerance for interference would be drastically reduced by 1936. Nor could they have, for this development required a change of administrations and a thorough reevaluation of policy in Washington. As far as Whitehouse, Robbins, and Lay could see, a paternalistic legation was a fixed element in Central American politics and would ensure that these "tempestuous little countries" remained committed to constitutional government.

Chapter 3

DEFEAT IN EL SALVADOR
One caudillo defies the American legation, 1931-1934

One of a group of Central American dictators supported by the United States, Martínez had won notoriety by presiding over the 1932 Matanza ("massacre"), a slaughter of some 10-30,000 peasants while US and Canadian naval vessels stood offshore and US Marines were alerted in Nicaragua. "It was found unnecessary for the United States forces and British forces to land", US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral William V. Pratt testified before Congress, "as the Salvadoran Government had the situation in hand." Martínez was granted informal recognition at once on the grounds of his success in "having put down the recent disorders" (State Department), with full recognition following in 1934 in defiance of an agreement with the Central American states that military dictators were not to be recognized without free elections…

~Noam Chomsky, 1987 [1]

During the 1980s, El Salvador was the scene of one of the most horrid civil wars the region had ever witnessed. Over a period of 12 years, the U.S.-backed military government battled leftist guerillas of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN), resulting in an estimated death toll of 75,000 people. The semi-official death squads, the members of which were often recruited from American-trained army and security divisions, were particularly notorious. One such group called itself the *Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez Brigade*, which was responsible for the assassination of Marxist as well as moderate Christian Democratic politicians. The Reagan administration supported the military regime of El Salvador with money and weapons throughout its tenure, due to the alleged connections between the FMLN and the Marxist regimes of Nicaragua and Cuba.

[1] Noam Chomsky, *Turning the tide. U.S. intervention in Central America and the struggle for peace* (2nd ed.: Boston 1987) 43-44.

Throughout the 1980s the situation in the rest of Central America was not much different from that in El Salvador: Revolutions, civil wars, death squads, and mass killings characterized this period, which became known simply as the "Central American Crisis". Due to the very controversial involvement of the United States with extreme rightist regimes and groups during the Crisis, historical inquiries into the nature of U.S. involvement in Central America—which had been exceedingly rare before—mushroomed during the '80s. Not surprisingly, many historians who dealt with U.S.-Salvadoran relations turned their attention to the early 1930s: That is, the time of Farabundo Martí and Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez, the people after which the later Marxist coalition and right-wing death squad were named.[2]

Hernandez Martínez became president of El Salvador in 1931, after a military coup had ousted Araujo. Some six weeks after this event, a large peasant uprising broke out in western El Salvador under the nominal leadership of Farabundo Martí, the founder of the Salvadoran Communist Party. Martí was quickly arrested and executed and the uprising was crushed within a matter of days. But that was not the end of it: For weeks after the end of the revolt, Salvadoran army units scoured the countryside, killing anyone who was suspected of being involved in the uprising. Estimates of the numbers killed range from 10,000 to 40,000. [3]

Thus, the rise to power of Martínez takes a special and particularly damning place in the narrative of the "Somoza solution" interpretation of U.S.-Central American relations. The current chapter will nuance that interpretation of the events of 1932, arguing that during the two year period in which the Martínez regime went unrecognized, no special concern was voiced either by the legation or the Department over the communist menace in El Salvador. Instead, the Americans fretted over Martínez' open defiance of American power by clinging to office rather than going the way Orellana had gone some years earlier. In the end, the decision to recognize the General was a negative one: It demonstrated that even though the United States was infinitely more powerful than El Salvador on a global scale, Martínez was the master of his own little piece of the globe where the Americans could not touch him. Especially since the United States labored under the self-imposed restrictions of the Good Neighbor.

[2] See introduction, pages 8-11.

[3] The classic account on the slaughter is: Thomas P. Anderson, Matanza. The 1932 "slaughter" that traumatized a nation, shaping US-Salvadoran policy to this day (2nd edition: Willimantic, CT, 1992). Anderson notes that official documents on the event were all destroyed by the Martínez regime, but, having consulted local sources, believes that 8,000 to 10,000 victims should be a reasonably accurate number (174-176 and 186). Researchers still disagree about the death toll, however: Booth et al., *Understanding Central America*, 47 & 96, etimates 30.000 deaths. Lindo Fuentes, *Remembering*, 40, states that estimates range from 10.000 to 30.000 but that there are no records to establish the exact number. Using numbers from the British legation and other local observers at the time, Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To rise in darkness*, 233-234, states that 10.000 deaths seems a reasonable estimate. Dunkerly, *The long war*, 29, notes that a minimum of 10,000 and a maximum of 40,000 people were killed, but that 30,000 is the number most cited.

1. WHILE THE NAVY WATCHED

The "*Matanza*", as the slaughter of 1932 came to be known, was largely a Salvadoran affair, but it is undeniable that the United States shares some of the responsibility for the severity of Martínez' reaction to the uprising. Looking back at the event through the lens of the 1980s, many historians are particularly harsh in their judgment of U.S. actions in the 1930s. Noam Chomsky is a case in point and offers a representative account of the *Matanza* and of American involvement in it. Describing Martínez as "one of a group of Central American dictators supported by the United States", Chomsky implies that Washington sent its naval vessels to Salvadoran waters to help the regime repress the supposedly communist uprising. That American intervention was ultimately unnecessary is beside the point, because the intention to intervene in itself serves to underscore the fact that Washington supported brutal anticommunist dictators whenever it could. Besides, Chomsky continues, Martínez was rewarded for putting down the revolt. Before the *Matanza*, the United States had refused to recognize Martínez, much like it had refused to recognize the Guatemalan regime of General Orellana, because his rise to power was the result of a military coup, thus violating the 1923 Treaty of Peace and Amity. After the *Matanza*, however, Washington extended "informal recognition" to Martínez, followed by outright recognition two years later—an act that, in practice, destroyed the "agreement with the Central American states that military dictators were not to be recognized without free elections".

There are alternatives to the interpretation that Chomsky advanced in 1987, but many textbooks on U.S.-Central American relations adopt, in a "matter of fact" tone, the view that the United States supported Martínez during and after the 1932 uprising.[4] Many serious monographs also touch on the subject. Somewhat cryptically, Historian Ralph Woodward claims that American ships were dispatched to Salvadoran waters during the *Matanza* to "assist in averting any Communist revolution".[5] James Dunkerley, a British specialist in Salvadoran history, writes with more confidence that the "Salvadoran armed forces master-minded and effected the counter-revolution [*Matanza*] by themselves although they had confident expectations of outside [U.S.] support should things go wrong".[6] Walter LaFeber notes that "the bloodbath (…) changed the mind of Washington officials about the general [Martínez]. Before the slaughter, the State Department had been adamant about non-recognition [but] in a 1932 announcement the U.S. granted Martínez informal recognition".[7] Professor Phillip Dur argued in 1998 that although the United States had "acted on principle" by not recognizing Martínez in 1931, "the eruption of a communist-tainted rural rebellion in January 1932 changed the whole aspect of things". And although Washington had to wait two years before it could shelve the 1923 Treaty and recognize Martínez, the ultimate legacy of the episode was that "for

[4] Black, *The Good Neighbor*, 84-85; Pierce, *Under the Eagle's Wing*, 20-25. Barry and Preusch, *Central America Factbook*, 200.
[5] Woodward, Nation Divided, 97.
[6] Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 30.
[7] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 75.

several decades [thereafter] realism took priority over idealism in US foreign policy and acceptance became the habitual response to non-communist dictatorships in Latin America".[8]

Most recently David F. Schmitz, in his study on U.S. policy toward right-wing dictatorship, elaborated on the thesis that Martínez' brutal repression of a rural uprising led to immediate U.S. recognition:

> Responding to what the State Department viewed as a communist revolt in January 1932, the United States would informally recognize the government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez because he was seen as necessary to stability and anticommunism in the region.[9]

However, there is no known document that directly links the recognition of Martínez with a concern for communism—not on the Department level, not on the legation level. The conclusion that such a link must exist only makes sense as part of a larger argument that the United States supported right-wing dictatorships in Central America as a matter of policy. That conclusion has been debunked in the previous chapter. Hence, it makes sense to revisit the sources and to reinterpret them from a perspective that ignores, as much as possible, our knowledge of the events of the 1980s and focuses on the (limited) knowledge and intentions of historical actors. The picture that emerges from this reinterpretation may be counter-intuitive as far as the relations of power between El Salvador and the United States were concerned: While the weak did what they could, the strong suffered what they must.

2. COUP

In November 1931, a new minister arrived in San Salvador: Charles Boyd Curtis. Curtis' last tour of duty was in the Dominican Republic where he found himself in the midst of a revolution that brought to power Rafael Trujillo—eventually one of the most hated tyrants of the hemisphere. Curtis was personally involved in the negotiations that led to the end of the revolution: He brokered a deal between the government and the rebel forces that included a new provisional government and future elections. While the State Department was satisfied with this outcome, cooperation between Washington and the legation during the revolt was not smooth. Despite standing instructions to the contrary, Curtis cajoled the warring factions into an understanding by threatening to call in the U.S. Marines. After a settlement was reached, Curtis did everything he could to prevent that General Trujillo got elected to the presidency. Trujillo, chief of the Dominican army, had switched allegiance to the rebels during the revolt—an unforgiveable act of treason in the eyes of Curtis. Washington explicitly opposed its minister's campaign against Trujillo, however. Quoting its nonintervention policy, the Department informed Curtis that it

[8] Phillip F. Dur, "American diplomacy and the rebellion of 1932 in El Salvador", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (February 1998) 95-119, there 119.
[9] Schmitz, *'Thank God'*, 57. Further elaborated on pages 117-118 below.

"desires you to know that it expects to recognize Trujillo or any other person coming into office as a result of the coming elections"—which is exactly what ultimately happened. [10]

Curtis' mission in the Dominican Republic was not a failure, however. Even thought his behind-the-scenes attempt to block Trujillo's rise to power failed, his public role in preventing a major battle between the government and the rebels was a personal victory. According to the American press, the minister had single-handedly prevented major bloodshed, loss of American lives and property, and American intervention in the island republic. *The New York Times* reported that the peaceful solution to the revolt was partly attributable to "the good offices of the American Minister, Charles B. Curtis, who brought the conflicting parties together. It is the first time in Dominican history that such a political dispute has been handled without bloodshed".[11] Around the same time, *The Washington Post* claimed that "the people [of the Dominican Republic] have the United States to thank" for continued peace and added that "Charles B. Curtis, American Minister, has been the dominant factor in straightening out the dispute without serious disturbances and loss of life".[12] From Secretary Stimson, Curtis received a letter of commendation for his services in the Dominican Republic. Other members of the Foreign Service sent personal letters of congratulation to the Minister as well. Nevertheless, Curtis' tenure in the Dominican Republic must have been a strenuous experience, especially because the revolt was quickly followed by a devastating tropical storm. When the diplomat was transferred to El Salvador, the *Washington Post* ventured to predict that it was "altogether probable" that "Mr. Curtis' new post will offer less excitement".[13] This was not to be.

Not one month after his arrival, while the Minister was still settling in, a revolution broke out in Salvador that caught the legation and the Department completely off guard. Although Araujo's popularity had been dwindling for some time, the direct cause of the revolution seems to have been that the government was unable or unwilling to keep payment of the salaries of its officers up to date. As far as the legation could ascertain after the events, it was the young officers of the Zapote fortress and the barracks of the capital that started a revolt in the evening of December 2. President Araujo, whose official residence was directly across the street from the revolting infantry barracks, left town "almost as soon as the first shot was fired". After some halfhearted attempts to raise troops and put up a fight, the President crossed the border to Guatemala on December 4. By that time, Vice-President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez had taken over the government.[14]

[10] Eric Paul Roorda, *The dictator next door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* (Durham 1998) 31-62.
[11] "Dominican Rebel becomes President", *NYT* (March 2, 1930) 9.
[12] "Two little Republics", *TWP* (March 2, 1930) S1.
[13] "New minister named to El Salvador; Oriental dispatches rumor transfer of Japanese ambassador to China", *TWP* (August 9, 1931) S1.
[14] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 21, December 5, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution. For historical descriptions of the coup, consult: Anderson, *Matanza*, 71-88; Dunkerley, *Long War*, 18-31; Williams and Walker, *Militarization*, 19-20.

In the meantime, Curtis dutifully implemented the strategy that had made him a hero in the Dominican Republic. He tried to prevent general bloodshed and attacks against American lives and interests by making sure that the revolution developed as smoothly as possible, regardless of who won. Shortly after the shooting started, the Minister occupied himself with visits to the different barracks and forts, trying to organize a cease fire. By the time Curtis got everyone to stop shooting and start talking, the President had long left town and the last resisters were about to surrender to the rebels.[15]

Curtis seems not to have cared which party turned out on top in the revolution, because he regarded both as equally bad. His first analysis of the Araujo administration concluded that it was "weak, inefficient and lacking in much ability to govern". Shortly after the revolution, Curtis repeated at greater length that:

> President Araujo unquestionably showed a high degree of incompetence. While he displayed no great sagacity in the matter of appointments, his handling of the Government finances exceeded all his other mistakes. (…) It seems certain that within a short time the Government would have been bankrupt even if it had stopped payments on its one large loan and all of its small ones.

Even before the revolution, the Minister had predicted that financial difficulties of the government "might easily provoke an entirely different [political] situation over night". Thus, Curtis believed that the government would have gone down even if the army had not acted. The personal flaws of the President sealed the fate of his administration once a revolution started: "In character he [Araujo] was both obstinate and vacillating (…) The revolution was successful primarily because of his obstinate refusal to believe that he had lost any of the great popularity which he enjoyed at the time of his election to the Presidency".[16]

In light of his evaluation of the Araujo administration, there is no reason to assume that Curtis felt any incentive to save the doomed government during the revolution. On the other hand, he had no reason to promote the cause of the rebels either. During and right after the revolution, Curtis concluded that the "[g]uiding lights in the revolution are officers who at the moment appear to be incapable and whose only idea is to destroy [the] Government of President Araujo".[17] At first, says the Minister, the revolution was directed by the younger officers: "youngsters for the most part of strongly Indian blood

[15] Charles B. Curtis (United States Minister in San Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Telegram 97, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 98, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 100, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 21, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

[16] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 21, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 11, November 19, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: General Conditions. Incidentally, this section was censured in *FRUS*.

[17] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 98, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

and with the appearance of being little more than half-witted". Only later was a revolutionary directorate formed with the participation of two senior officers who "appear to be men of some sense and capacity". But the majority of the Directorate was still made up of juniors of whom "the most that can be said is that they appear to be the least worthless of those lieutenants who were the known and apparently the actual organizers of the revolution". When the Directorate appointed Vice-President Martínez to succeed the President, Curtis still assumed that the latter would be a figurehead for the junior officers and that the General "has been allowed to take no action without its [the Directorate's] approval". "Of such a Government it seems impossible to expect much".[18]

Although Curtis' stated purpose was to prevent bloodshed and although he had no reason to prefer one faction over the other, he himself admits that his efforts to negotiate a truce during the revolution had the side effect of aiding the rebels. By the time that Curtis got involved in the revolution, the President had already fled the capital and the rebels controlled the city, "which history shows", the Minister commented, "probably means final success". From that moment on, the rebels only needed to dig in and thus had "more to gain by the delay" offered by Curtis' armistice than the President and his troops had. When the armistice expired, Araujo had already retreated far to the west of the country and was preparing to cross the border to Guatemala.[19]

In the meantime, Curtis' reports on the revolution had reached the highest echelons of the State Department and they were not well received. While Curtis' handling of the crisis was, strictly speaking, correct as far as United States policy and international law in the rest of the world were concerned, Central America presented a special case in light of the 1923 Treaty.

Curtis' reports from Salvador did not mention the Treaty at all. For the first time on December 4 (while Araujo was well underway to the Guatemalan border), Secretary Stimson telegraphed Curtis that the "Department assumes that you have made it amply clear to leaders of the revolution that the policy of this Government is to be guided by the provisions of the 1923 Treaty regarding the non recognition of governments coming into power through revolution". [20] Some hours later, Stimson reminded Curtis that the Department still considered Araujo the constitutional president of Salvador and acidly

[18] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 21, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution. Incidentally, this section was censured in *FRUS*. On Curtis' assumption that Martinez was *at most* a collaborator of the revolutionaries, and not a very enthusiastic one at that, also see: Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 100, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 105, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 108, December 6, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 109, December 6, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 26, December 15, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[19] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 97, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 100, December 3, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

[20] Stimson to Curtis, Telegram 56, December 4, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

added that "the Department is confident that you appreciate the importance of refraining from any action which might be misinterpreted as favoring the revolutionary party".[21] The next day, Stimson requested a report on Martínez' role in the revolt (participation would debar him from recognition) and again urged Curtis to explain the 1923 Treaty to the military faction.[22] Only after this third, rather anxious, plea from the Secretary did Curtis reveal that he regretted to "have to report that I did not bring [the Treaty] to the attention of the revolutionary leaders until the success of the revolution was already certain". In fact, evidence from the legation's files indicates that Curtis had not brought up this issue at all and would not do so in the future. His initial justification for this oversight was that:

> Anyone who saw the utterly irresponsible youths with whom I had to deal in the beginning, and whose opinions on all subjects except the resignation of President Araujo were as far apart as the two poles, and who saw the almost endless discussion whether an armistice should last for three hours or only two, would appreciate my reasons for forming the opinion that it was futile to mention this subject and that nothing should be mentioned which was not absolutely essential to the obtaining of an agreement on the subject of the armistice.[23]

After he made some more rambling reports, Curtis finally admitted that "[j]ust what exactly the Treaty of 1923 means is not clearly understood by me".[24]

Not only did Curtis bungle the handling of the revolution itself, he also strengthened Martínez' position because of his misinterpretation of Department instructions. Stimson's telegrams to Curtis stressed the importance of the Salvadoran constitution and the 1923 Treaty. What the Department wanted was to prevent anyone who was remotely suspect of participating in a revolution, as Martínez most certainly was, from attaining the presidency in Central America. Only in that way, the Department believed, could revolts and wars in Central America be prevented in the long term. Curtis, who lacked the long term and broad view of U.S. Central American policy, naturally took Department instructions literally. He concluded from his instructions that it was not Martínez who posed a problem; it was the military Directorate that had placed him in power and continued to exist as a rival to the authorities after Martínez took the presidency.[25] The Minister believed that what was necessary to make the government

[21] Stimson to Curtis, Telegram 57, December 4, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[22] Stimson to Curtis, Telegram 60, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Stimson to Curtis, Telegram 61, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[23] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 21, December 5, 1931; PR San Salvador, Vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[24] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Telegram 109, December 6, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[25] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 25, December 11, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 28, December 15, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution. Acting on the advice of Salvadoran government officials, Curtis reported that Martínez' assumption of power was entirely constitutional—since he had been elected to office and, as vice-president, had simply acquired the position that was abandoned by Araujo, It was also in concert with 1923 Treaty as the

constitutional and acceptable under the 1923 Treaty was to have the revolutionary military Directorate abolished. Curtis set out to accomplish this goal—with great success.

> On December 11, the Minister reported that he:
>
> had conversations almost daily with persons in a position to bring this matter to the attention of General Martinez; I availed myself of a call made upon me by (...) members of the Directorate (...) to make clear to them the desirability of the disappearance of their body; and I yesterday informed (...) [the Minister of War] of my opinion that every indication of even a possibility that the Directorate was influencing the actions of the Government of General Martinez ought to be avoided.

In addition, Curtis urged the Minister of War to transfer former members of the Directorate to distant posts after the dissolution of that body, so that there could be no suspicion that the dissolution was not genuine.[26] When the Directorate did dissolve the next day, Curtis started to refer to the Martínez regime as the "constitutional" government, in stead of "de facto" government, which would have been the more appropriate term from the standpoint of U.S. policy. The legation's traditional sources, the capital's upper classes, local media, government employees, and high-ranking military officers, all sang the gospel of the Martínez regime and bashed the former Araujo administration. As far as Curtis could see, Martínez was the choice of the "great majority" of Salvadorans and the army controlled the country in a peaceful manner. [27]

Curtis' actions would cost him his post and his career: Though just in his early fifties, Salvador was to be Curtis' last assignment. As it became clear to the Department that Curtis had lost control over the situation as far as U.S. policy was concerned, it moved quickly to replace the senior officers of the legation with more reliable men. On December 5, William J. McCafferty, an officer with six years of experience in Central America and Mexico, was designated second secretary of the legation. Ten days later, Jefferson Caffery, an expert in Central American relations, was assigned to Salvador as a "special adviser", but in practice quickly took over charge of the legation. While Curtis nominally remained chief of mission until 1932, he was placed on the sidelines as soon as Caffery arrived. Almost immediately, Caffery told Martínez and his Foreign Minister in no uncertain terms that they would never be recognized by the United States. It is

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Salvadoran government understood it—since the Salvadoran Congress had made some hazily-worded amendments to Article 2, which debarred revolutionary leaders from the presidency and since Martínez' actual participation in the revolution could not be established. Most in-depth accounts by historians tend to agree that Martínez did not take part in the revolution or at least permit that his participation cannot be definitely established. Anderson, *Matanza*, 188; Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 18; Williams and Walker, *Militarization*, 19-20.

[26] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 25, December 11, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

[27] Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 27, December 15, 1931, Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 25, December 11, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 28, December 15, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 26, December 15, 1931, Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 25, December 11, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

indicative of Curtis' handling of the crisis that both were genuinely surprised by the news.[28] Although Caffery rivaled Whitehouse, nemesis of the Orellana government, in vigorousness, his task was made practically impossible by Curtis' previous errors.

In the days after his arrival, Caffery reported that the Martínez regime was "daily growing stronger.[29] The "better elements" in Salvador had already thrown their support behind the Martínez regime (in following dispatches, Caffery confuses this support by the better elements with support by the entire people).[30] The National Assembly, which was still made up entirely of Araujo supporters, had lost much of its credibility when its leader fled the country.[31] There were still the former presidential candidates of the campaign of 1930-1931 who pushed the legation to replace the current government with one of them, but the military faction definitely opposed such a move and, more importantly, the Department and the legation were not willing to back a specific individual for the presidency: Policy had moved too far in the direction of non-intervention for the level of commitment such a move required. In other words, Caffery had no-one to turn to aside from officers of the army, who had firmly established its control over the country before Caffery arrived.[32]

Caffery was sent to Salvador as a trouble-shooter. His job was to save the 1923 Treaty and U.S. policy in the region by finding anyone who could reasonably be recognized according to the rules of the Treaty. His job was not to save the Salvadoran republic or civilian control over it. The Department considered the long-term objective of peace and stability—which the Treaty had provided so far—more important to Central American progress and development than the question of who ruled El Salvador. Therefore, Caffery had no qualms about turning to the military for help: In the short term, it was the only institution that could reasonably be expected to deliver a president.

It was not easy to find an alternative to Martínez in the army. The capable higher officers had joined Martínez' government and were therefore barred from recognition if they should become president. The only group inside the army that had any measure of organization and influence apart from the Generals was the revolutionary military Directorate. Caffery tried to rally this group behind his plan to form a recognizable government, but quickly found that it had been disbanded and its members dispersed

[28] Jefferson Caffery (Special Advisor to the Legation in San Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Telegram 123, December 22, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 37, December 26, 1931, Curtis to the Secretary of State, Despatch 25, December 11, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[29] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 124, December 23, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[30] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 122, December 19, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[31] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 123, December 22, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 128, December 30, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[32] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 123, December 22, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.

throughout the country by Martínez, who, Caffery reported while gracefully omitting Curtis' name, "had been made to believe that it would lead to prompt recognition".[33]

After some two weeks of tough words, negotiations, and public statements, Caffery finally convened a group of young officers whom he presumed were the leaders of the revolution.[34] These young men struck Caffery as friendly and conciliatory and they seemed ready to accept his solution; which was to have a new National Assembly (not dominated by Araujo supporters) elected and then have that assembly elect three new presidential designates who would not be debarred from recognition. The young officers would then have to force Martínez out so that one of the designates could assume the presidency.[35]

This plan, although the only one that had any chance of success, considering Martínez' strong position, was rife with complications from the start: Salvadorans in general felt that the United States was forcing its will on a small nation; the strongest groups in the capital supported Martínez; the latter had some reason to argue that his government was constitutional and that he had done everything Curtis had told him; the younger officers refused to commit to Caffery's plan in writing; and finally, this group itself admitted that it might not be strong enough to force Martínez out when the time came.[36] In this light, it is remarkable that Caffery trusted his new friends to execute "the plan". But Caffery seemed anxious to leave Salvador and told his superiors that the young officers had "a real understanding of what they should do". Despite pleas from the Department that he stay a little while longer, Caffery left in early January.[37] Curtis was told to leave some days later and the legation was left in the hands of second secretary William McCafferty. In this respect, Martínez' ability to hang on to power was perhaps due as much to Curtis' lack of experience in Central American policy as it was to Caffery's haste to negotiate a wobbly deal and leave.

3. SLAUGHTER

The Department was confident, throughout the first half of 1932, that it could dislodge Martínez from the presidency as it had dislodged presidents before. This task was left to McCafferty, but even before the chargé could go to work on the plan, Salvadoran history took a sharp turn for the worse.

Uprisings in the Salvadoran countryside had been endemic at least since the administration of Romero Bosque. There was a brief lull during the 1930 presidential

[33] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 124, December 23, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[34] Intent on describing the "adventurousness" of his diplomatic career, Caffery notes in his unpublished memoirs that "I had a lot of E. Philip Oppenheim's meetings with mysterious officers at aviation fields and so on". Caffery, "Advertures", Caffery Papers, Box 69-b.
[35] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 128, December 30, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution.
[36] Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 128, December 30, 1931, PR El Salvador, vol. 111, cl. 800: Salvadoran Revolution; Caffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 1, January 1, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[37] *Idem*.

elections as the country's poor peasants entertained some hope that Arturo Araujo would improve their lot. As it became clear, however, that Araujo was unable or unwilling to engage in substantial land reforms, new uprisings started in 1931. At the time, minister Robbins felt that Araujo should act energetically against the demands of the poor—for which he had no sympathy—and eventually expressed his satisfaction that the government had sent out the mounted *Guardia Nacional* to "break some heads". Araujo's increasingly repressive measures to deal with rural uprisings did not have the effect that Robbins apparently thought they would have. In fact, it led to a complete breakdown of trust in the government and the radicalization of the *campesinados*. This situation was further exacerbated when the military took over the government and on January 23, 1932, a major rural uprising started in western El Salvador.[38]

The course of the 1932 uprising, as well as the question of whether it was led by El Salvador's Communist Party, has been adequately analyzed elsewhere.[39] Suffice it to say that the revolting peasants, who were armed mainly with sticks and machetes, were quickly subdued by Salvador's well-organized army and rural police. The quelling of the uprising was just the beginning, however. Fearing that the uprising was a communist attempt to destroy the Salvadoran government as well as its capitalist classes, the Martínez regime reacted with utmost severity. In the weeks following the end of the uprising, machine gun squads scoured the countryside, randomly killing anyone of Indian appearance. The coffee planter class chipped in by forming its own *Guardias Civiles*, which ruthlessly pursued alleged participants of the revolt. Although there are no written sources that record the numbers killed during the uprising and ensuing slaughter, historians estimate that the peasant rebels killed some 50 to 100 people (including government soldiers) while the army killed some 10,000 to 30,000 civilians in response. Whatever the exact numbers may be, it is clear that the *Matanza*, as it came to be known, represented the "single worst episode of state suppression" in the history of Latin America up to that time.[40]

It is undeniable that the legation under chargé McCafferty shared a certain responsibility for the ferocious intensity of the *Matanza*. The chargé was shocked by the unexpected uprising. Throughout the weeks of negotiations with Martínez, the legation had practically ceased paying attention to events on the countryside, even as violence there was increasing throughout the month of December 1931. Also, McCafferty easily accepted the consensus among rich Salvadorans that the uprising was communist-inspired. The chargé did ask Washington to send American war vessels to Salvadoran waters and to maintain that presence for some time, because it would "have the effect of

[38] Robbins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 468, March 21, 1931, PR El Salvador, Vol. 112, cl. 800: Bolshevism.
[39] As noted before, the classic account is Anderson, *Matanza*. Valuable additions have been made in: Paige, *Coffee and power*, 105-122; Lindo Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, chapter 1; Gould & Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 209-238; Dunkerly, *The long war*, 24-31.
[40] Lindo Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, 61; Gould notes that the *Matanza* is recognized in Latin American historiography "as one of the most lethal acts of repression in the modern history of the region" (210).

allaying the present feeling of panic among the people but would also undoubtedly prevent the de facto authorities from relaxing their repressive measures".[41]

It would not be accurate, however, to argue or to imply that the sending of American warships was akin to American anticommunist interventions in Central America during the Cold War. Neither was it intended to save the Martínez regime. In order to properly understand the American reaction to the uprising in 1932, the context of the early 1930s (rather than the Cold War) is important. How did the American legation perceive the uprising and how was it portrayed to Washington? What would likely have happened had U.S. Marines been deployed in El Salvador?

Considering the first question, it is important to note that the legation's perception of the uprising and the subsequent slaughter was completely one-sided. McCafferty allowed himself to be misinformed about the true events that occurred on the Salvadoran countryside. There is no evidence at all that the chargé ever made a thorough inquiry about the uprising and the subsequent slaughter, let alone that he ever left the capital to see the results of the *Matanza* himself. Neither is there any evidence that McCafferty ever considered investigating the matter after the fact, nor did the Department ever ask him to. Instead, the legation's informers in this case came from the same limited pool of local notables that the legation always tapped for political or economic news.[42]

Blindly accepting the consensus among Salvadoran aristocrats, McCafferty felt that the massacres on the countryside were the work of communists rather than the government. As far as the isolated executions in the capital itself—which claimed the life of Farabundo Martí who was later dubbed a martyr and a folk hero—were concerned, McCafferty believed that the Martínez regime was reluctant to carry these out but had been forced to act by the capitalist classes. The highest death toll that McCafferty ever reported, and which he believed should be ascribed to the communists in any case, was a rumored 4,800 deaths. The chargé reported that this was probably a gross exaggeration.[43]

The description of the uprising as "communistic" should be understood within the context of early twentieth century El Salvador. The divide between the "white" coffee barons and the "Indian" peasants was particularly evident in El Salvador and the upper classes were mortally afraid of the "restlessness" of the masses. Ancient believes about the "savagery" of the Indians combined with vague notions that communist agitators

[41] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 53, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: Communism; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 9, January 20, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 25, January 31, 1932, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism.

[42] On legation sources specifically with regard to the slaughter, consult: McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 53, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: Communism and McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 9, January 20, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism.

[43] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 57G, February 5, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: General Conditions; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 419, March 7, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: El Salvador. Lay notes that reports about massacres are "communist" propaganda.

were continually trying to incite a class war—taken literally as a war—among the peasants. Salvadoran aristocrats did not conceive of a "communistic" uprising among the Indians in geopolitical terms (an attempt by Moscow to expand its sphere of influence) but in terms of plunder, rapine, and murder. Bloodthirsty Indians, incited by too much alcohol and foreign agitators, were thought to be intent on the slaughter of their social betters so that the latter's lands and properties could be taken. American diplomats, especially those who had spent many years among the Latin American upper classes, tended to subscribe to this particularly apocalyptic interpretation of "communistic" uprisings, routinely quoting the communists' thirst for plunder and murder, rather than the designs of Comintern.[44]

Against this background, it should be easier to understand the utter panic in San Salvador when the rural uprising was in full swing. During the climax of the uprising, wild rumors about savage hordes of Indians advancing on the capital circulated. The Salvadoran coffee barons, many of whom lived in San Salvador rather than on their estates, were in acute fear of their lives—imagining that everyone in the capital would be slaughtered if the insurgents were not pushed back.[45]

Panic among the locals inevitably touched the foreign colonies. In the characteristically understated tones of a diplomatic report, McCafferty later informed his superiors that "[d]ue to the extremely dangerous situation which existed at the time, many usually calm and sober minded persons became most excited regarding the rapid turn of events".[46] According to the American chargé, the Italian and the British ministers, the latter being a landowner himself, completely lost their heads, inevitably causing a panic among their compatriots as well. With evident pride, McCafferty reported that the "American colony in the capital behaved admirably throughout the difficulties and their conduct in the face of danger compared most favorably with that of certain natives and other foreigners".[47] Even though the chargé would not admit that he had ever been in real fear himself, it is clear from his reports that he shared the locals' nightmarish anticipation of what would happen in the capital if the insurgency was successful:

> The sanguinary intent of the Communists, which strangely enough did not seem as in the usual case to require the stimulus of alcohol, was shown in numerous gory and lustful attacks. Women were raped and then butchered, others had their breasts cut off, and men were so hacked by machetes that it was impossible to identify their corpses. Houses were ransacked and others completely destroyed. Shops were looted of all their stocks.[48]

[44] See chapter 1, pages 39-41.
[45] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 9, January 20, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 12, January 23, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800B: Communism; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 53, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: Communism.
[46] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 53, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: Communism.
[47] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 57G, February 5, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: General Conditions.
[48] Idem.

Against this backdrop, the British and the Italian envoys pleaded with McCafferty for American intervention and the chargé obviously agreed that such a move was necessary, since he relayed the request to Washington. The primary reason for McCafferty's request, therefore, was a very real and acute fear for the safety of local Americans and other foreigners. In this context, it would be hard to imagine that the American legation refused to make a request for armed assistance, or that the State Department would reject it. How would the American public and world opinion at large react if it became known that American, British, and Italian women had been "raped and butchered" and the men hacked to pieces in the streets of San Salvador while the U.S. Navy idled at nearby Panama? Thus, American ships were duly dispatched—accompanied by Canadian vessels. And while there are no sources to document the decision making process in Washington, there is no obvious reason to assume that Secretary Stimson—who carried ultimate responsibility for the sending and withdrawal of the ships—ever considered that the ships should be used for anything except the evacuation of foreigners. It is clear that Stimson was anxious to withdraw the ships as soon as any danger to foreign lives seemed past.[49]

The uprising in western El Salvador lasted a mere 48 hours and by the time American ships arrived in Salvadoran waters, the danger to foreign lives and property appeared to be past. No American marines set foot ashore, although British marines made a brief landing.[50] The question remains what would have happened had American intervention proceeded. Would American soldiers have fought "communist" rebels? Would they have saved the Martínez regime? One can only speculate, but it is informative that the Martínez regime actually felt *less* secure with the arrival of the American navy. Considering the fact that the Americans had opposed him almost from the start and the fact that Marine landings in previous decades had always been followed up by elections and a change of administrations, there is no reason to assume that Martínez would have considered American intervention during the uprising helpful or supportive. This does not mean that the United States does not bear some of the responsibility for the *Matanza*. As Lindo-Fuentes et al. have pointed out, Salvadoran authorities tried to prevent American intervention because they believed that it would be the end of their rule. This fear for American intervention was one ingredient in the mix—which included physical fear of the insurgents—which led the Martínez to lash out against the insurgents "like a wounded animal" and contributed to the apocalyptic nature of the event. [51]

[49] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 53, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: Communism; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 17, January 23, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism; Stimson to McCafferty, Telegram 17, January 29, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism; Stimson to McCafferty, Telegram 18, February 1, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800.B: Communism.

[50] A fascinating account on British/Canadian involvement in the affairs is: Leon Zamosc: "The Landing that Never Was: Canadian Marines and the Salvadoran Insurrection of 1932", Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies 11:21 (1986) 131-147

[51] "Wounded animal" quote in Lindo Fuentes, *Remembering*, 66. On the very weak position in which Martínez initially found himself, also consult: Ching, "Patronage and Politics", 50-55.

After initial panic died down, the Americans very quickly forgot about the uprising. Both the legation and the Department were evidently satisfied that the revolt had ended without loss of American life and property. Despite their physical nearness to the slaughter, American diplomats remained blissfully unaware of the fact that the *Matanza* was a singularly apocalyptic event that would haunt Salvadoran society for decades to come. Perhaps due to the very unprecedented scale of machine gun killings, they could not have known. Thus, McCafferty was satisfied to limit his reports on the massacre to the "gory and lustful" atrocities committed by the communists.[52]

While the local elites flocked to Martínez as their protector, McCafferty was not about to let his resolve sway. While the chargé respected Martínez' "cool and collected" attitude during the uprising, he also made sure that the President knew that American policy had not changed. As the machine guns were still bursting and American ships were still in Salvadoran waters, McCafferty spelled out again the pre-uprising policy of the United States to Martínez, even if it was in a little more respectful tone:

> I informed the de facto authorities that there is not the slightest animus against Martinez personally on the part of the United States Government but that as has been already made clear the decision regarding the non recognition of his regime is the only possible decision which can be reached in view of the provisions of the 1923 Treaty.[53]

The suppression of the 1932 uprising made McCafferty's job more difficult, however. General Martínez' internal political position was enormously strengthened. The Americans were well-aware of this fact, but the Department still had some hope that Martínez' hold on the reins of power would slacken over time and that there would be another chance to convince him to step down. This turned out to be a mistake. In the end, it *was* the United States that would have to give in.

4. DEFIANCE

After the initial alarm that accompanied the 1932 uprising, McCafferty quickly reasserted U.S. determination to face down Martínez. In the next five to six months, the chargé and the General engaged in a test of willpower, with McCafferty pressing for an immediate change of governments and Martínez skillfully delaying the matter. Granted, the United States did recognize that a solution to the constitutional problem in El Salvador had to include the army. But this was also the basis of Caffery's position, so McCafferty's negotiations with high military officers did not represent a change of policy due to the *Matanza*. Schemes suggested by Salvadoran authorities to get around the spirit of the 1923 Treaty were rejected out of hand. While Washington was willing to accept continued military dominance in El Salvador, it would not compromise the Treaty. Martínez had to leave the presidency.

[52] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 57G, February 5, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 116, cl. 800: General Conditions.
[53] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 24, January 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition.

This was unacceptable to Martínez. All his efforts in the months following the revolt were aimed at maintaining his position. The President's most-used argument to convince McCafferty that he was irreplaceable was to present himself as a bulwark against communism. But while the Salvadoran aristocracy readily accepted this logic, the U.S. legation and Department were not so easily duped. Although American diplomats acknowledged that they had underestimated the strength of communism, they considered that it was stamped out effectively by Martínez' repression. In other words, as far as the United States was concerned, Martínez' *very* thorough handling of the uprising had obsoleted him. So when Martínez first employed what would become his government's favorite *spiel*—arguing that he could not reorganize his government or step down due to the risk of another communist uprising—McCafferty countered that, if anything, the repression of the uprising had made the reorganization of the government easier:

> [General Martínez] spoke at length on the seriousness of the recent communistic movement and its effect on the neighboring countries and intimated that it would be disastrous at the present time to have a change of executive. I told him that all indications were that the communistic menace had been suppressed at least for the time being and that I did not believe a solution of the present political situation would be difficult if the provisions of the 1923 Treaty were followed in reorganizing the Government.[54]

McCafferty repeated this argument frequently and it must have become clear to Martínez at some point that his anti-communist credentials got him nowhere.[55]

Recent research has demonstrated, however, that anticommunist rhetoric and repression were only two facets of Martínez' campaign to solidify and legitimize his power. Others were his cooptation of the army into politics; the establishment and expansion of a new political party, *Partido Pro Patria*, which served as a patronage network to the new president; and a many-sided popular program to obtain the allegiance of the Indian masses. An indication of the effectiveness of Martínez' political maneuvers is the curious fact that the very Indian communities who suffered the full horror of the *Matanza* in 1932 were the last defenders of the regime against an urban middle-class uprising in 1944.[56]

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[54] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 28, February 3, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition . McCafferty adds that Martinez "is now beginning to realize that some steps must be taken to reorganize the Government on a basis which will permit of its recognition by other Central American States and the United States".

[55] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, telegram 70, March 22, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 86, June 1, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, dispatch 126G, July 9, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 800: General Conditions; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 118G, June 20, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 80: General Conditions; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 91G, April 21, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 800: General Conditions.

[56] Gould, *To rise in Darkness*, 238-243. A good description of Martínez' success in building a highly effective patronage network from scratch can also be found in: Erik K. Ching, "Patronage and politics under General Maximiliano Martínez, 1931-1939. The local roots of military

Martínez had ample time to strengthen his position, because he had duped McCafferty with a line of arguments that was much more subtle than his anti-communist rhetoric. To establish a stable follow-up government, the wily General argued, it was necessary to unite all the important players behind the *de facto* government. Only then could it guarantee a smooth transfer of power to a diplomatically recognizable government that would have the support of "the people". In other words, Martínez argued that he needed more power before he could safely rescind it. McCafferty was led on by this and other delaying tactics for several months. With regard to the General's growing domination over the army, for example, the chargé reported on April 16 that:

> Martinez has strengthened his position by his recent appointments of absolutely loyal officers as chief of Police and Chief of the Guardia. He apparently intends to secure complete control of the army by breaking the power of the young military officers who have been causing him much apprehension recently by their threatening attitude. If he succeeds in his plan it will be easier for him to reorganize the Government to admit of recognition. I believe he still intends to step aside but it has been difficult for him to do so because of the many dissensions in the army.[57]

Only by the end of April, 1932, did the legation and the Department realize that they were being played for time and credible excuses for further delays began to run out. When Martínez ingeniously argued that he could not resign in May, because "that was the Communist month", an exasperated Acting Secretary Castle wondered "what excuse General Martínez will find not to resign in June".[58]

Of course, once he was strong enough, Martínez did not step down. After five months of negotiations, Martínez decided that he would forego a compromise with the Yankees. In June, despite earlier promises to the contrary, the General announced that he would serve out Araujo's term without seeking recognition. Both the legation and the State Department had been anticipating this move for several days so it did not come as a complete shock. The realization that Martínez had simply been playing a cat and mouse game with them for months did, however, deeply annoy the American diplomats. Quite unaccustomed to successful resistance to American power, the legation and the Department had always assumed that Martínez was just a particularly pig-headed leader of the Orellana type who would have to capitulate to American wishes in the end.[59]

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authoritarianism in El Salvador", in Aldo Lauria-Santiago and Leigh Binford eds., Landscapes *of Struggle: Politics, Society, and Community in El Salvador* (Pittsburgh 200) 50-70, especially 60-69.

[57] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 78, April 16, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition .

[58] McCafferty to Charles C. Eberhardt (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica), May 15, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; William Castle (Acting Secretary of State) To McCafferty, Despatch 34, May 6, 1932, McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition .

[59] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 87, June 8, 1932, McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; Stimson to the U.S. Legations in Central America, June 2, 1932, McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the

Washington's reaction to Martínez' announcement that he would forego recognition led David Schmitz to conclude that the American government extended "informal recognition" to the Salvadoran General after June. This conclusion, which was also put forward (but not substantiated) by other researchers, requires exploration. There are two main arguments for the conclusion that Washington recognized Martínez "unofficially": Firstly, Washington was grateful for the General's repression of the communist uprising. Secondly, the State Department did not escalate its resistance against Martínez after the latter announced that he would remain in office in defiance of American wishes. In fact, the American legation in San Salvador remained open—be it in the hands of a chargé rather than a minister.[60]

With regard to the first argument, it is noteworthy, as Schmitz argues, that Stimson wrote in his diary on January 25, 1932 (two days after the start of the uprising), that the "communistic revolution in Salvador (…) produces a rather nasty (…) problem, because the man who is president and who is the only pillar against the success of what seems to be a rather nasty proletarian revolution is Martínez, whom we were unable to recognize under the 1923 rule". However, this statement in itself recognizes the continued primacy of the 1923 Treaty over any immediate concern for the communist danger. Furthermore, by June, 1932, any initial sympathy for Martínez had been eroded by his defiance to American wishes. In a report to McCafferty of June 14, Under-Secretary Francis White explained the feeling in the Department: "We had perhaps felt a little pity in the past that we could not recognize Martínez who had handled the outbreak so well, but that feeling had now vanished in view of the fact that apparently Martínez was a man whose word could not be relied upon. I was therefore inclined to take the position that it was a fortunate thing for us that we had not been able to recognize anyone who would appear to be so unworthy".[61]

Concerning the second argument, it is true that escalating the pressure on Martínez was hardly considered. This decision should be seen in the right context, however: Measures beyond mere non-recognition had never been necessary before and if applied now, would smack of intervention, thus endangering all the good will the Hoover administration had been able to build on its non-intervention policy in Latin America. Simply accepting defeat and extending outright recognition to the Salvadoran regime also seemed out of the question, because it would wreck U.S. policy in Central America, which had been based on the principle of non-recognition of revolutionary governments since 1907. Thus unable to seek Martínez' downfall due to the effect this would have on broader Latin American policy and unable to recognize him due to

Secretary of State, Despatch 116, June 10, 1932, McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 89, June 13, 1932, McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Telegram 84, May 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition; Francis White (Assistant Secretary of State) to McCafferty, Despatch 48, June 14, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition.

[60] Schmitz, *Thank God*, 57-72.

[61] White to McCafferty, Despatch 48, June 14, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition.

Central American policy, the State Department implicitly decided that the best Salvadoran policy was to have no policy at all. Perhaps there was some hope that Martínez' hold on the reins of power would lessen over time and that there would be a second chance to convince him to step down.

Lastly, it is entirely unclear what "informal" or "unofficial" recognition might mean in practice. By definition, extending diplomatic recognition is a public act—as is withholding recognition. It would take another 18 months (and a change of administrations) before Washington finally recognized Martínez. What could the Department hope to gain by recognizing Martínez informally but not officially? The continued reign of Martínez in defiance of Washington's official and well publicized policy of non-recognition could only hurt the prestige of the United States. If the object of alleged *de facto* recognition was to bolster an anti-communist regime, it is unclear why outright recognition was not considered. After all, if communism was so dangerous, then why let 2 years pass between the 1932 uprising and recognition? Even Joseph Stalin received official diplomatic recognition well before Martínez did.

In fact, the State Department made it clear to Martínez on several occasions throughout 1932 and 1933 that any type of informal relationship or cooperation was out of the question. And while McCafferty remained in Salvador during these long years to collect information and look after American economic and financial interest, he was careful not to associate himself with the regime. The poor chargé got stuck in El Salvador for two years: From Caffery's departure in January, 1932, to Washington's eventual recognition of the Martínez regime in January, 1934. His status was uncertain: He represented his country before a government that, officially, did not exist. He could not be promoted or transferred without raising the impression that U.S. policy toward Martínez had changed. The usual perks that made diplomatic life worth while – the banquets, the social prestige, the mingling with local dignitaries – were off limits for the young chargé. The locals, who had been driven into Martínez' arms after the 1932 uprising, considered McCafferty's presence as a symbol of unwanted U.S. interference in their politics. McCafferty could not join official festivities as his attendance would imply recognition of the local political situation (although his diplomatic colleagues from the other Central American states, which also refused to recognize Martínez, were less conscientious on this point). Even the usual visits to the local country- or golf clubs were out-of-the-question, since the chargé would inevitably be seen there rubbing shoulders with high government officials.[62]

The following eighteen months were hard on Martínez too. McCafferty reported on several occasions that Martínez felt very anxious about the continued state of non-recognition—especially when it became evident that the FDR administration was seeking

[62] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 244G, January 31, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 364G, October 20, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions; McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 366G, November 4, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions.

a rapprochement with Stalin, but continued to ignore him[63]—and went out of his way to please the *yanquis* on every occasion. American businesses received preferential treatment from the Martínez government. The latter also cleaned up its act by instituting financial conservatism, government honesty, minor social programs, and all the other policies that earned the Ubico government a good reputation with the Americans. In fact, McCafferty opined that "the principal reason for the present good administration in El Salvador is the non-recognition of the United States and (…) General Martinez and his collaborators hope that if they can demonstrate their ability to govern in an efficient manner, they will in time obtain recognition from the American Government".[64] While this was probably stretching the point, it is clear that Martínez' behavior was not that of a man who felt secure in the knowledge that the United States unofficially recognized his regime.

Only after the Roosevelt administration had been in office for some months did it become clear that the policy not to recognize undesirable regimes would have to be revised some time in the context of the non-intervention policy. The Central America situation itself also provided impetus for the Americans to come to terms with Martínez. Being signatories to the 1923 Treaty, the Central American neighbors of El Salvador were required to act as if the Martínez regime did not exist. Washington tried to make sure that they acted as such, but in a region were internal politics rarely stopped at the border, this proved to be impossible. First of all, the continued existence of the Martínez regime in defiance to U.S. policy was an inspiration to all ambitious politicians throughout Central America who could not gain the presidency by fair and democratic means. In Guatemala, Whitehouse reported that the Orellana faction now regretted that it had given in to American wishes so easily and appeared to be plotting a return to the presidential palace. In Honduras, Zúñiga Huete was said to have remarked that U.S. recognition was not a necessity any longer and this may well have influenced the decision of the Liberal Party to rebel after its defeat in the 1931 elections. In Nicaragua, President Juan Bautista Sacasa feared the ambitions of General Somoza, who's appetite for power was undoubtedly wetted by Martínez' seizure of power. In general, American diplomats feared that Martínez' example undermined the ability of elected governments to deter coups and thus threatened the entire region's stability.[65]

[63] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 304GC, June 1, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions and McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 314GC, July 1, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions.
[64] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 175, September 26, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[65] Both Whitehouse and Lay reported that the example of Martínez gave the Orellana and Zúñiga Huete factions the wrong idea: Whitehouse to Wilson, October 19, 1932, PR Guatemala, Vol. 286, cl. 800: Salvador; Lay to the Secretary of State, Despatch 471, May 5, 1932, PR Honduras, Vol. 188, cl. 800: Honduras, January to June. Additionally, the rise to power of a strong military leader in El Salvador disturbed the fragile balance of power in Central America. Fearing Martínez' ambitions, Ubico seems to have made plans to sent arms to Nicaragua and to seek a rapprochement to Mexico at the possible expense of U.S. influence in Guatemala: G.K. Donald

Then there was the division caused by the existence of the Martínez regime between the Central American states and even between those countries and the United States. President Ubico, who himself had come to power due to the opening that the 1923 Treaty had given him, pronounced himself to be a staunch supporter of the selfsame treaty almost immediately after the December 2 coup in Salvador. Also, the General clearly wanted to endear himself to Washington by presenting himself as a loyal supporter of its regional policy. But while American diplomats appreciated Ubico's support, his enthusiasm for the campaign against Martínez sometimes proved to be embarrassing. Ubico (rightly) opined that a passive policy of mere non-recognition would not bear fruit and pushed the Americans to employ an economic boycott or unspecified "harsher measures" against the Salvadoran General. Such proposals were rejected out-of-hand since, even if they were effective in Salvador, they would endanger U.S. policy in the rest of Latin America. American qualms about more rigorous actions against Salvador annoyed Ubico and hurt American prestige in Guatemala, where, Whitehouse reported, people felt that Martínez had "put something over on the United States".[66]

Carías' position was ambiguous. On the one hand, Honduras traditionally supported the 1923 Treaty because it seemed to be effective in quieting regional conflicts of which the Republic—its territory having served as the battlefield of Central America on many occasions—was often the only true looser. On the other hand, when Carías was fighting the War of Treacheries and was dreadfully low on ammo, Martínez was the only one who was willing to send him a couple of cases of lead.[67] Martínez, of course, was only too eager to make new friends, and although Carías paid for the Salvadoran ammo in cash and made it clear that an ammo-in-exchange-for-recognition deal was out of the question, the Honduran General henceforth seized on every opportunity to show his "unofficial" feelings of friendship for Martínez. In Nicaragua, internal intrigues forced Sacasa to abide by the 1923 Treaty, as mentioned before, but in Costa Rica public sentiment was entirely in sympathy with Martínez. Costa Rica and Salvador had long shared some mutual feelings of respect due to their relatively progressive governments and economies and the *Ticos* could not help but admire Salvador's lone defiance of the Colossus of the North. Besides, Costa Rica was a nation of independent farmers who were shocked by the 1932 "Communist" uprising.[68]

(U.S. Chargé d'Affairs a.i. to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 667, June 21, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: Guatemala; McCaffery to the Secretary of State, Telegram 97, June 30, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: Guatemala; Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, Despatch 797, October 7, 1932; PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: Guatemala; Whitehouse to the Secretary of State, Despatch 839, December 8, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 117, cl. 800: Guatemala.

[66] G.K. Donald (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, June 20, 1932, PR El Salvador, Vol. 118, cl. 801: Recognition.

[67] At the time, Washington was unwilling to "intervene" in Honduran affairs by the sending of ammo; the arsenals of Nicaragua were under the supervision of the U.S. Marines; and Ubico publicly supported the 1923 Treaty.

[68] McCafferty to the Secretary of State, Despatch 364G, October 20, 1933, PR EL Salvador, Vol. 122, cl. 800: General Conditions; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 831, July 6, 1933, PR El Salvador, Vol. 123, cl. 800: Honduras; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 833,

It should have been clear to the Roosevelt administration that it only stood to loose from a continuance of Hoover's policy toward Martínez. When Costa Rica and El Salvador jointly announced in 1933 that they would abrogate the 1923 Treaty to clear the way for a renewal of diplomatic relations, the State Department decided to cut its losses and salvage what it could. One thing that needed salvaging was the United States' tattered prestige. It could not capitulate to Martínez outright. And while the details of the diplomatic wrangling that preceded final recognition of the Salvadoran government are murky, it seems clear that the United States pushed Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica to jointly extend recognition to Martínez. After the Central American states had taken the initiative, Washington could claim that it would honor the wishes of its regional friends by making amends with Martínez: The whole procedure was thus presented as a mark of respect for the self-determination of the Central American republics and as a great victory for the Good Neighbor.

The State Department also wished to salvage what it could of the 1923 Treaty. Costa Rica and El Salvador had already made it clear that they wished to rid themselves of the Treaty, but it might still be upheld in the case of Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Discussions on the recognition of Martínez started at the middle level of the State Department in October, 1933, where it was recognized that the 1923 Treaty was already weakened, whether or not the Salvadoran government was recognized or not. The plan developed to have the three Central American countries that still upheld the 1923 Treaty, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, recognize the Martínez regime and at the same time announce that they would uphold the Treaty among the three of them. The United States would recognize Martínez some days later on the grounds that it supported the effort made by the Central American states themselves to further friendly relations. In fact, none of the Central American governments were consulted on this plan until January, 1934: The United States would lead the entire effort behind the scenes, but wished to uphold the impression that the initiative lay with the sister republics and merely had the "sympathetic interest" of the State Department.[69]

The plan was eventually supported by Sumner Welles—who had first hand experience with the ineffectiveness of non-recognition during his recent mission to Cuba—and the Undersecretary effortlessly got F.D.R. and Hull on board, both of whom seemed rather uninterested in the details of the issue. What followed was a brilliant episode of diplomatic doubletalk, in which the State Department told the Central Americans what to do while piously upholding the impression that it had no intention to intervene in their politics. Juan Bautista Sacasa of Nicaragua was chosen as the one

July 7, 1933, PR El Salvador, Vol. 123, cl. 800: Honduras; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 891, September 9, 1933, PR El Salvador, Vol. 123, cl. 800: Honduras; Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch, 842, PR El Salvador, Vol. 123, cl. 800.S.

[69] Leo Sack (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica) to the Secretary of State, January 1, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, January 31, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties; Willard Beaulac (Division of Latin American Affairs), "Procedure for arriving at the recognition of El Salvador by the United States", December 27, 1933, Lot Files, Individual Countries , Box 45, Folder: Salvador, 1930-1939.

who would "take the initiative" in suggesting the plan to his colleagues in Honduras and Guatemala. There is some reason to assume that Sacasa was chosen to make it clear to Somoza that the 1923 Treaty still applied to Nicaragua. In any event, Acting Secretary Phillips wrote Minister Lane that it had come to his attention that the Central American states themselves would "in fact be glad to extend recognition" to Martínez. In the light of this feeling among the Central American states, Phillips suggested that Sacasa, Ubico, and Carías "might desire to reach an agreement more or less in the (…) terms" that the Acting Secretary outlined to the Minister.[70]

It turned out that both Sacasa and Carías were indeed glad to follow up on the Department's suggestions, but Ubico was not. The latter considered El Salvador in General and Martínez in particular as rivals to a position of regional leadership that Ubico coveted for Guatemala in general and himself in particular. Furthermore, the General had faithfully supported the U.S. non-recognition policy toward Martínez and now felt embarrassed that his supposed friend changed course so unexpectedly. Last but not least, Ubico felt that the Department should have chosen him, not Sacasa, to take the initiative in this plan. Some pressure from the American legation was needed to convince Ubico that he was in fact glad to recognize Martínez on his own initiative. On January 25, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua jointly recognized the Martínez regime and at the same time announced that the 1923 Treaty would remain in effect between the three of them. The United States followed suit two days later, presenting the move not as the Martínez victory that it was, but as the sovereign wish of the people of Central America and "an important step in the establishment of normal, friendly relations among all the nations of America".[71]

[70] On Welles' mission to Cuba, see: Wood, *The Making*, 30-110; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 17-28 and 30-31; Howard Jablon, Crossroads *of a decision: The State Department and Foreign Policy, 1933-1937* (Lexington, 1983) 40-44. On the recognition of Martínez: Beaulac to Wilson, October 18, 1933, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1933-1940; Beaulac, Memorandum on Procedure for Arriving at the Recognition of El Salvador by the United State, December 27, 1933, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1933-1940; Welles to President Roosevelt, January 8, 1934, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1933-1940; State Department Press Release, January 26, 1934, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1933-1940;

[71] Lawton to the Secretary of State, January 15, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; William Phillips (Acting Secretary of State) to McCafferty, Despatch 1, January 17, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Lawton to the Secretary of State, January 17, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Lane to the Secretary of State, January 25, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Hull to McCafferty, Telegram 4, January 26, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Hull to McCafferty, Telegram 5, January 26, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government; Division of Current Information, Memorandum of Press Conference, Friday, January 26, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 801: Government.

5. LESSONS NOT YET LEARNED

In 1934, a Central American conference was held in Guatemala to discuss the future of the Treaty of Peace and Amity in the light of recognition of General Martínez.[72] While Matthew Hanna, the U.S. minister to Guatemala, devoted a respectable amount of political reports to the conference, the event has never been recorded in the history books. The reason for this "oversight" may well be that, in light of later events, the conference was a patently useless exercise in pious declarations on the side of Central American leaders. Hanna took it quite seriously, however. And if nothing else, his reports of the conference demonstrate what he and his colleagues had not yet learned from the defeat in El Salvador.

Ubico gave it all he got. Perhaps still smarting from fact that he was not chosen to lead the negotiations that resulted in the recognition of Martínez, he was determined to demonstrate his credentials for regional leadership during the conference. The delegates of the other Central American nations were welcomed with parades by Guatemala's finest military units; a twenty-one gun salute; prosaic speeches on Central American unity; and, for good measure, a 30,000 man march through the streets of Guatemala, courtesy of Ubico's Liberal-Progressive Party. "The size of the parade and its manifest devotion to President Ubico must have made a strong impression on the visiting delegates", according to Hanna's dry account.[73]

While the State Department had made clear its intention not to get involved in the conference[74], Hanna believed that it could well direct the future of the region. While the conference was in fact a product of the breakdown of the 1923 Treaty, Hanna somehow hoped that it could be the beginning of greater Central American unity, stability, and prosperity. The minister took it upon himself to coach the Nicaraguan delegation and, "without being too specific", lectured it on the possibility "that the Conference might see fit to set up machinery for assembling similar conferences at regular intervals or whenever circumstance appeared to make this desirable, and thus establish the Central American Conference as a recurring institution".[75]

After about a month of negotiations—enlivened by some more diners, concerts, and receptions that "added to the spirit of good fellowship"—the conference ended. The new "Treaty of Fraternity", as the decisions of the conference were officially known, established that the Treaty of 1923 would remain in effect between Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua and added new articles on the arbitration of international conflicts and extradition. Reflecting on the outcome of the conference, Hanna somewhat

[72] Lane to the Secretary of State, January 26, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties; Edward Lawton (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala) to the Department of State, January 27, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties.
[73] Matthew Hanna (U.S. Minister to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 89, March 16, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties.
[74] Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, January 31, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties.
[75] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 94, March 17, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties. In lieu of Department instructions on this subject, Hanna did add that "the idea was a purely personal one".

ironically noted that the fact that it had taken place without American guidance was a major step ahead: "[The delegates] manifestly feel that this conference marks the beginning of a new order of things in the political relations of the Central American states, and that they have established a foundation for greater stability in Central America on which future conferences may be build."[76]

While Hanna cautioned that the Conference did not "necessarily" mark "the beginning of a millennium for Central America", his reports on this event do indicate that he and his colleagues continued to labor under the assumption that international treaties combined with behind-the-scenes direction from the U.S. legations would determine the future of Central America. Ubico, Carías, and Somoza, meanwhile, recognized what the real "new order of things" would be. As Kenneth Grieb concludes in his classic account on Martínez' rise to power:

> …the successful defiance of the United States by Martínez ushered in a new era in Central American politics, making possible the rise of a new series of dictators. So long as the United States remained unwilling to resort to force, any strong-willed leader could seize office and retain it. Nearly all incumbent isthmian regimes immediately took advantage of the opportunity to perpetuate themselves in power.[77]

While Washington had some hope that it could keep the caudillos tied down by the 1923 Treaty, the latter recognized that, when stripped of American determination to back it up, the Treaty was just a scrap of paper. While the development towards a noninterference policy was completed in Washington, Ubico and Carías were building their armies, closing down newspapers, exiling opponents, and packing the National Legislations with supporters. They were ready to extend their terms in power.

[76] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 134, April 14, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 710 Political Relations. Treaties.
[77] Grieb, "The United States and the rise of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 3:2 (November 1971) 151-172, there 172.

Chapter 4

THE STUDENT AND THE MASTER
Strongmen become dictators, 1934-1936

¿Qué mi importa el buen vecino?

~ Juan Bautista Sacasa, 1936

Early in 1936, Arthur Bliss Lane, the U.S. Minister to Nicaragua, was set to be transferred to the Baltic States. One afternoon, he discussed his farewell speech with the President of the Republic, Juan Bautista Sacasa. The president asked Lane whether he could mention in his speech that the United States supported constitutional government in Nicaragua. Sensing a trap, Lane answered diplomatically that he could mention U.S. interest in peace in the region and the progress that had been made under Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy in recent years. At this point the Nicaraguan president got "very hot" and exclaimed: "What do I care about the Good Neighbor?".[1]

Much like Ubico and Carías, Sacasa was elected to office in 1932 in a contest that was deemed one of the fairest the country ever witnessed. The American role in this election was larger, and certainly more evident, than that in the Guatemalan and Honduran elections: U.S. Marines had occupied the Central American Republic since 1928 and had supervised the presidential elections there. An indication of the fairness of the elections, despite foreign meddling, was that the winner, Juan Sacasa, was a former rebel General who had spent years fighting the Marines. In Washington, U.S. policymakers congratulated each other for their open-mindedness in recognizing a rogue caudillo as the president in one of the sister republics. And as we have seen in Chapter 2, the State Department victoriously announced in 1933 that "[f]or the first time in the memory of Nicaraguans, the government in power, both president and Congress, is known to represent the freely manifested will of the Nicaraguan people".[2]

So why did Lane find it necessary, in 1936, to avoid mention of U.S. support for constitutional government? Why was Sacasa so disappointed in the Good Neighbor? The answer, as far as Nicaragua is concerned, is that Sacasa's election had depended on U.S. intervention on behalf of constitutional government in 1932. Since that time, however, the U.S. carefully moved away from intervention – a move which was completed under Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor. Although this was not evident at first, the Good Neighbor would eventually renounce interference as well as outright military intervention: meaning that American diplomats in Latin America would refrain

[1] Lane to Corrigan, July 22, 1936, Arthur Bliss Lane papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Yale University at New Haven, Connecticut (henceforth Lane Papers), Box 63, Folder 1126.
[2] See chapter 2, pages 94-96.

from any action that could be seen as an attempt to influence local politics, even if it was to support democracy. This is why Lane would only commit his government to a completely non-offensive policy of supporting peace.

The problem for Sacasa was that he had a mortal enemy in Nicaragua. Only a couple of years before, Nicaragua, much like Honduras, had no professional, centralized army organization. Instead, partisan militias battled each other for political influence. North American observers opined that this situation did not bode well for free elections. Therefore, U.S. Marines trained a *Guardia Nacional* which was to be a nonpartisan constabulary with a single mission: to protect Nicaragua's constitutional government. At the time of the founding of the Guardia, the then-government together with then-minister Matthew Hanna selected as the chief of the new organization one Anastasio Somoza–a charming fellow who spoke excellent English. Unfortunately, Somoza turned out to be something less than a non-partisan protector of the Nicaraguan constitution. After the Marines had left Nicaragua in early 1933, he remorselessly pursued the presidency together with his *Guardia*. By the time Lane was writing his farewell speech, both the presidential palace and the *Guardia* headquarters were heavily armed and fortified and ready for final battle.[3]

Because the Guardia inherited a virtual arms monopoly from the Marines, there was little that Sacasa could do, in a military sense, to save his presidency. His only hope was that the U.S. would *step in* to salvage his administration, but this was exactly what Good Neighbor Roosevelt had promised *not* to do. Minister Lane himself was certainly not immune to Sacasa's entreaties on behalf of democracy and against a military dictatorship that would certainly follow a Somoza coup. Opining that the Guardia was "pseudo-fascist" and "militaristic" and certainly inconsistent with American ideals, the Minister complained to a friend in the State Department that:

> [T]he people who created the G[uardia] N[acional] had no adequate understanding of the psychology of the people here. Otherwise they would not have bequeathed Nicaragua with an instrument to blast constitutional procedure off the map. Did it ever occur to the eminent statesmen who created the GN that personal ambition lurks in the human breast *even* in Nicaragua? In my opinion it has been one of the sorriest examples on our part of our inability to understand that we should not meddle in other people's affairs.[4]

In the end, Somoza proved himself an astute enough politician not to "blast" his way into the presidential palace. But, using the *Guardia* as his power base, he did become his nation's chief executive—just weeks after Lane left Nicaragua. His ascendancy confirmed an important lesson that local politicians had taught the Americans earlier: after many years of elections under U.S. tutelage, *power* was to be the new kingmaker of Central America. The students became the masters.

[3] This general overview is based on Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, Clark, *Diplomatic Relations*, Flacoff, "Somoza", and Walter, *The Regime*.
[4] Lane to Beaulac, July 27, 1925, Lane Papers, Box 61, Folder 1102.

The current chapter will discuss the era of "c*ontinuismo*"–a Spanish word which, in this context, refers to the illegal continuance of power of a government beyond its constitutional term. Somoza's rise to power in Nicaragua presented only the endpoint of a learning process for the American diplomatic establishment. Beginning with Ubico, all the Central American presidents had themselves "reelected" around 1935, despite constitutional limitations on presidential terms in all of these republics. This event challenged U.S. diplomats' perception of the local rulers as simply "strong" men who had come to power with the explicit or implicit consent of the people. After the successful continuismo campaigns in Central America, there was no question that these rulers were dictators. Much like Lane, U.S. diplomats in the region had some difficulty accepting this new fact. Most, if not all, of them assumed that *continuismo* would not meet with the approval of the State Department. However, the State Department valued its policy of non-intervention and the Good Neighbor much too highly to be willing to discard it in favor of supporting honest elections in Central America. This was not always easy to accept for the local diplomats who were as yet innocent of the rigidity of the Good Neighbor policy.

1. THE GOOD NEIGHBOR AND NONINTERVENTION

Throughout the years of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, the Good Neighbor policy came to have many meanings. It started with a fairly cryptic reference in Roosevelt's first inauguration address, where the new president announced that his foreign policy would be based on the principle of the good neighbor: "the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others". While no special mention was made of Latin America at first, the Good Neighbor policy eventually became synonymous with Washington's inter-American policy. Exactly what that policy was, changed over time. During Roosevelt's first term, foreign policy was mainly left to the devices of the State Department while the president focused on the causes and effects of the Great Depression at home. The Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, an ardent Believer in free trade, focused on improving economic relations with the rest hemisphere—which lead to the negotiation of several new trade treaties. After 1936 however, the president himself began to take the lead in Latin American policy: attempting to forge a hemisphere-wide political alliance against the threat of Fascism emanating from Europe.

But before any new economic or political relationship between North and South could be formed, old wounds needed attention. Many of the neighbors to the south of the United States felt that the "colossus of the north", as it was sometimes called, had been overbearing and arrogant in its dealings toward them over the past decades. A systematic campaign of public diplomacy and cultural outreach was one of the responses of the Roosevelt administration. Activities in this field ranged from high-worded speeches by equally high-placed American leaders, up to and including the President, during numerous inter-American conferences to Washington's successful attempts to enlist the cooperation of Hollywood companies in producing more favorable

stereotypes of Latin Americans. While effective in themselves, these "public relations" efforts could easily have come to naught if Washington's lofty words were not somehow backed up by deeds—or rather, the lack thereof.[5]

That is why, regardless of the great variety of initiatives that made up the Good Neighbor, the non-intervention principles was always considered as the backbone of Washington's policy, both in the United States and in Latin America. Some discussion will always be current among historians about who was responsible for the introduction of the important principle. It is obvious that the Hoover administration was well underway to establish non-intervention as a fixture of its Latin American policies. But there were inconsistencies in the Hoover policy, such as the continued occupation of Nicaragua, among other nations, and the employment of the American navy when American lives were thought to be in danger, such as during the *Matanza*. It is also plain that diplomats at Latin American posts, men such as Whitehouse or Lay, had not yet internalized the principle of nonintervention.[6]

So whatever grounds had been cleared during the Hoover years, it was up to the Roosevelt administration to finish the job and to make nonintervention a consistent and unbreakable standard. In terms of high diplomacy, that job was completed by 1936. Already at the inter-American Conference at Montevideo in 1933, Secretary Hull promised that the United States would abide by the nonintervention principle. However, the language of the that statement was somewhat vague on the issue of the protection of American lives and interests in the other American republics, creating a loophole that might leave the United States free to take action when its nationals were considered to be in danger. However, at the Pan-American Conference of 1936, Hull made a more definite statement which, theoretically at least, closed the door on U.S. intervention once and for all.[7]

There still remained an issue of day-to-day diplomacy, however. In principle, the concept of nonintervention had been something of a diplomatic dogma at least since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which established the modern concept of state sovereignty. The same principle had been recognized by the United States government shortly after its independence—a fact that is easily overlooked when studying the history of U.S.-Latin American relations. But regardless of any formal training that a U.S. diplomat might have received on this point, the reality was that intervention in the "backward" states of Latin America was considered quite appropriate, especially when it was dressed up in the language of a civilizing or democratizing mission. Especially during the first decades of the twentieth century, the U.S. navy had been so busy in the Caribbean that requests for Marines from the American Legations and Consulates in the region had become a

[5] Many books quoted in these references offer some insight on the Good Neighbor policy. For a general introduction, Wood, *The Making*, passim, Jablon, *Crossroads*, passim and Gilderhus, *Second Century*, Chapter 3, are recommended. Also see Chapters 5 and 6, both section 1, below.
[6] Wood, *The Making*, 123-135; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, Chapter 3, especially page 73; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 293-296; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 3-29.
[7] Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 78; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 304-305.

matter of course, not to be given much though to.[8] Thus, there was a very real risk that everything the State Department had tried to accomplish at inter-American conferences would be undone by careless officers in the field. For the Good Neighbor policy to be a success, Washington needed to educate its diplomats about the need to refrain from any sort of intervention or even interference. This job the State Department took upon itself only after considerable delay and confusion.

2. THE CONTINUISMO CAMPAIGNS

By the early 1930s, the Central American nations all had a long, if not entirely successful, history of republican government. Like so many other republics, those of the American isthmus regarded the development of a despotic government, either by a single person, a family dynasty, or an oligarchy, as their main existential threat. Hence, Central American constitutions allowed for short presidential terms, generally four years; listed strict limitations on appointment or election to office of two or more family members, even if it was to consecutive governments; and absolutely prohibited presidential reelection. Some constitutions included an additional obstacle to the ambitious caudillo, determining that any changes to the constitutional articles on reelection would not become effective until new general elections had taken place and a new government had been installed.

These constitutional obstacles were not always effective, but they had survived a century of political strive in Central America. Additionally, the 1923 Treaty boosted the prohibition against reelection by denying diplomatic recognition to unconstitutional governments. The latter did not only include regimes that came to power illegally, but also those that remained in office unconstitutionally. In this context, the United States had intervened several times during the 1920s to prevent Central American presidents from clinging to power, most notably in Nicaragua, but also in El Salvador where American actions led to Romero Bosque's election.

At the same time however, an epidemic was developing in the Caribbean and swept Cuba and the Dominican Republic, promising to infect Central America next. The name of the new disease was *continuismo*. Its symptoms have been catalogued by Russel Fitzgibbon:

> Continuismo (…) is the practice of continuing the administration in power in a Latin American country by the process of a constitutional amendment, or a provision in a new constitution, exempting the president in office, and perhaps other elective officials, from the historic and frequent prohibition

[8] Wood states that it "should not be surprising that a certain sense of the normality, and even propriety of calling on the Marines, should have persisted beyond 1920, independently of the nature of the formal justification for such action; it was a habitual, nearly automatic response to 'disturbed conditions' or 'utter chaos' in a Caribbean country". Wood, *The Making*, 5. Gorden Connell Smith argues that "the Marines had been used to frequently as to seem, to the United States, part of the natural order of things". Gordon Connell-Smith, *The United States and Latin America. A Historical Analysis of inter-American Relations* (London et al. 1974) 146-147.

> against two consecutive terms in office. The precise form of the constitutional change may vary—the general pattern is simple and uniform.[9]

Continuismo was employed by the Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado in 1928 and the Dominican regimes of Horacio Vásquez and Rafael Trujillo in 1928 and 1934. The spread of this practice had been watched closely from Central America, but, due to U.S. involvement in the elections of the early 1930s, had not looked especially promising. That is, until Martínez was recognized in 1934.

During the negotiations that surrounded El Salvador's return to the American fold, Washington made it clear that it supported the "initiative" taken by Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to maintain the 1923 Treaty among themselves. Officially, the treaty was maintained for another year or so, but those gifted with political acumen already considered it a dead letter. In January 1934, Ubico told the Legation that he did not "understand how President Sacasa and the Department can feel that the Treaty is not being violated [by recognizing Martínez]" and chargé Lawton opined that the "Guatemalan Government would not take a new or modified treaty very seriously".[10] It should not be surprising, then, that Guatemala would be the first of the Central American republics to be touched by the *continuismo* epidemic.

2.1 Continuismo in Guatemala

Charge of the legation in Guatemala was transferred from Whitehouse to Matthew Hanna in July 1933. Hanna plays an important role in the "Somoza solution" narrative, because he was the United States minister to Nicaragua from 1929 to 1933—that is, the period when Marines left the country and Anastasio Somoza became chief of the *Guardia Nacional*. It is undeniable that Hanna played an important role in Somoza's selection as Guardia chief in 1932: the two were good friends and the minister believed that Somoza was the most capable candidate for the job. Concurrently, Hanna signed the agreement which made Somoza the most powerful man—in military terms—of Nicaragua. Not surprisingly, then, Hanna has been reviled in the historiography as the man who cleared the ground for the Somoza dictatorship.

This is not a fair assessment of the minister. Somoza's appointment as Guardia chief was due as much to the political realities in Nicaragua as it was to Hanna's involvement. For example, the list of candidates for the top position in the Guardia was compiled by Juan Sacasa, president-elect at the time and also Somoza's uncle. The final decision on who would be selected from Sacasa's list fell to Hanna and to Nicaraguan President José Moncada, Somoza's cousin. The political leaders of Nicaragua, therefore, were as much in favor of Somoza's appointment as Hanna was. Moreover, the political situation in Nicaragua around Somoza's appointment was so complex, that it would have been impossible for Hanna to foresee that the former was to install a military dictatorship four years later. Arguing that he did would be the same as saying that Sacasa could

[9] Russel H. Fitzgibbon, "Continuismo: The search for political longevity", in: Hamill, *Caudillos*, 210-217, there 211.
[10] The Chargé in Guatemala (Lawton) to the Acting Secretary of State, January 19, 1934, *FRUS 1934, Vol. V: The American Republics*, 241-243.

have foreseen this event. Since Sacasa was the one who was ultimately disposed from the presidency by Somoza, this seems highly unlikely.

Rather than an agent of the Somoza solution, Hanna was one of the officers in the Foreign Service who was best acquainted with the Good Neighbor policy and its stress on nonintervention—thanks to his experiences in Nicaragua. He was still the U.S. minister to Nicaragua around the time of the 1933 Montevideo Conference, where Secretary Hull promised his Latin American colleagues that the United States would forego military intervention. From a public relations point of view, it was pertinent that U.S. policy in Nicaragua was entirely in agreement with the nonintervention principle around the time of the Montevideo Conference. American Marines left the isthmian republic only months before and unless American policy toward that country was beyond reproach, the Latin delegations in Montevideo would not take Hull's promises seriously. Therefore, Hanna was thoroughly briefed on the non-intervention principle and he would take these lessons with him to Guatemala.[11]

Around this time, Washington and the Legation still considered Ubico a legitimate ruler and assumed that he would transfer power to another elected president in 1936.[12] The prevailing image of the Guatemalan caudillo was represented in a State Department information bulletin, which, judging by its style and content, appears to be a summary of Foreign Service reports issued by Whitehouse and Hanna. The bulletin argues that the history of Guatemala was marked by "numerous coups d'état", "several wars", and "heavy-handed dictatorships". This situation, says the leaflet, changed when Guatemala subscribed to the Treaties of 1907 and 1923. The last Treaty in particular allowed American minister Whitehouse to elbow Orellana out of office, after which Ubico was elected. The General was the "obvious choice" for the "articulate people of Guatemala" (in contrast to the large Indian population, whose way of life had remained essentially the same as that of their "pre-Columbian ancestors") who flocked to Ubico because he was a man of "honesty, intelligence, and energy" while his predecessors were "corrupt" and "incapable". During his tenure in office, continues the leaflet, Ubico took effective measures to battle the Depression and he freed the Indian from the "system of debt servitude" which tied them to their landlords indefinitely. The General had plenty of enemies and sometimes employed high-handed disciplinary actions, but this was mainly due to his honesty and anti-corruption measures. While Ubico himself was "well off" and could "afford to be an honest man" he had to keep his less affluent subordinates in line with "rigid discipline". "The established of a strong and honest government, following a

[11] A good discussion on Hanna's portrayal in the historiography is in Andrew Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt. Good Neighbor diplomacy in Nicaragua, 1933-1945* (Oxford 2007) 19-22. Also see page 7-71 for a good analysis of American involvement in the rise to power of Somoza. Also see footnote 3 above and Chapter 8, section 1, and Chapter 9, section 2.1, below.

[12] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 402, October 30, 1934, (M1280, Roll 1) Political Affairs 1174; Hanna to Ubico, February 13, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 311, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 533, February 15, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 311, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.

weak and corrupt one, cannot be accomplished without arousing discontent on the part of self-seeking interests" and in this context an "undercurrent of opposition" did develop against Ubico. While some of Ubico's more heavy-handed measures against the press and the opposition were criticized by the Department, it still believed that it had put Guatemala on a sound footing with its support for the 1923 Treaty and was as yet unwilling to come to terms with the ominous events taking place in Guatemala. [13]

Shortly after Martínez received diplomatic recognition in 1934, Ubico began to solidify his position with a view on continuing in office after the end of the legal term in 1936. Hence, the circumstances in Guatemala at the time Hanna first encountered Ubico were very different from Whitehouse's initiation into Guatemalan politics. On September 12 of 1934, the government dramatically revealed an extensive plot aimed at assassinating Ubico with a bomb. The plot was genuine, but it also offered a unique chance for Ubico to rationalize the solidification of his control over the nation. In the aftermath of the discovery of the plot many prominent military and political leaders (some of whom came from Ubico's own party) were arrested, exiled, or even executed for their alleged involvement.[14]

Hanna sent a cable to the State Department on September 12, reporting that an official announcement had been made of a "communistic plot to overthrow the Government by assassination and establish a reign of terrorism".[15] The following days and weeks several arrests and executions took place while the government and the controlled press kept hammering on the theme of Communist terrorism and the "vigorous but just" government action that had prevented it.[16]

Hanna's reports in this period are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he seemed to have been willing to go along with the official story, since it conformed with earlier reports on anti-government plotting (reports that Ubico probably made sure the minister would receive) and with his own prejudices. On the communistic nature of the plot, Hanna declares that "there would seem to be some evidence that the leaders of the recent abortive plot (…) were playing on the [*sic.*] criminal instincts of the masses in holding out to the latter the promise that, if the plot should succeed, they could commit all kinds of outrageous acts". On the other hand, Hanna, who was after all a very experienced officer, remained skeptical about the official government position and seems to have been confused by the many contradictory rumors. He remembered that

[13] Department of State, Information Series 89, August 3, 1935, (M1280, Roll1), Political Affairs 1240.
[14] Grieb, *Guatemalan caudillo*, 117-118.
[15] Hanna to the Department of State, Telegram 56, September 12, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1148.
[16] Hanna to the Department of State, Despatch 402, October 30, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1174. Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 362, September 29, 1934, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00B/24; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 364G, September 29, 1934, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00 General Conditions/82; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 406G, October 31, 1934, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00 General Conditions/ 83; Hanna, Memorandum for Mr. O'Donoghue, September 25, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. Plot against President Ubico; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Telegram 7, September 27, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. Plot against President Ubico; Hanna, Memorandum, September 28, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. Plot against President Ubico.

the Guatemalan government was "extremely, if not almost fanatically, fearful of communistic influence", while "other well informed observers seemingly feel that there is little or no true communistic sentiment in the country".[17]

One of the effects of this episode was that Hanna became more sensitive to the dictatorial aspects of Ubico's reign. Several weeks after the bomb plot was revealed, Hanna admitted that the nation was "completely under the domination of the executive" and that the latter's reaction to the conspiracy was "ruthless" and "drastic". At this point, Hanna was not sure whether the fear that Ubico inspired in his opponents would work to his benefit, as "Guatemalan history furnishes abundant evidence that the force of a long harbored and carefully nurtured desire for revenge eventually becomes so impelling as to give little or no heed to the risks involved".[18] Also, and for the first time, Hanna made a report on the spectacular public celebrations surrounding Ubico's birthday on November 12. In hindsight, it is obvious that such celebrations were part of the developing "cult of personality" which surrounded the Guatemalan caudillo. Concerning Ubico's 53rd birthday celebration (which lasted for three days and involved the whole nation in public celebrations and parades), Hanna pronounced the suspicion that the government planted the many laudatory stories about Ubico in the local press. Ignoring the official stance that all celebrations were completely spontaneous and voluntary, the minister also stated that "[p]erhaps having in mind the recent attempt against [Ubico's] life, officials of the Government, private individuals and the press appeared to vie, each with the other, in offering homage to the President".[19]

In February 1935, Hanna learned from an informant that plans were underway to amend the constitution. One of the articles that was on the list to be updated was Article 66, which limited the presidential term to six years and prohibited the president from succeeding himself. However, even at this advanced state of planning for Ubico's continuance, Hanna still believed that the correct constitutional procedures would be followed and that, therefore, "Article 66 could not be amended (…) in time for President Ubico to succeed himself". Although Hanna seems to have thought that the planned amendments to the constitution were of minor significance, he did foresee that "public discussion of [the] project (…) will give rise to suspicions and possibly to charges of an ulterior motive". It seems probable, even though he did not state this explicitly, that Hanna did not believe that Ubico had "ulterior motives". If any movement was underway to continue the latter in office, Hanna believed that it would originate from the "many persons who form a part of this administration or who profit in other ways through their connections with it".[20]

Hanna's reluctance to come around to the fact that Ubico was preparing for a second term seems hard to explain. Rumors were rife inside Guatemala and the papers of the Legation show that Hanna could have been aware of discussions about Ubico's

[17] Hanna to the Department of State, Despatch 342, September 14, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1151.
[18] Hanna to the Department of State, Despatch 402, October 30, 1934, M1280, Roll1, 1174.
[19] Hanna to the Department of State, Despatch 418, November 12, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 306, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[20] Hanna to the Secretary of State, dispatch 551, February 28, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1185.

plans for “reelection” in the Guatemalan exile communities in Costa Rica and New York.[21] However, American Legation officials from minister down in both Guatemala and Costa Rica believed that the “emigrado politicians” should not be taken too seriously: they were a common appearance in Central America, where the “outs” were forever “disgruntled and bitter toward the ‘ins’”. Some of these exiles were even described as “pathetic”. Hanna himself was no more sympathetic to the exile community than his predecessor Whitehouse had been.[22]

While Hanna was not a naïve man, and may have had his doubts about Ubico’s intentions for the future, he and his colleagues had great difficulty re-creating their image of Ubico in the face of evidence which suggested that the General had no intention to leave the presidential palace. Ubico and his supporters were, of course, working towards his continuance in office. They had been for years. The plan was to organize a Constitutional Assembly to consider some minor changes to the constitution. When the Assembly convened, it would be flooded with “spontaneous” petitions from thousands of citizens all over the country calling for the continuance of Ubico. At the same time, the government-controlled press would start a propaganda campaign in favor of Ubico and his many accomplishments. In face of the widespread “popular” clamor, Ubico would “reluctantly” announce his willingness to forgo plans for a quiet retirement and to continue serving his country. However, he would do so only if a special plebiscite demonstrated that it was the unanimous will of the people that he remained as their president for another term of six years. Winning such an election would be no problem in a country where voters were required to sign their ballots with their names.[23]

From Ubico’s perspective, the internal situation seemed to be fairly well covered. The press was government-controlled; the army appeared to be loyal and appreciative of government support (especially because dissident officers were eliminated after the 1934 bomb plot); thousands of people in the capital—from the upper classes down to the lower classes—depended on government patronage and jobs; the business community, both foreign and local, was pleased with the peace and stability that the administration offered; the isolated Indian communities in the countryside could be cajoled or forced into submission; etc., etc. To deal with some of the more stubborn elements in the opposition, the Ubico administration still used the 1934 bomb plot and the specter of communist terrorism as a rationale to arrests hundreds as late as May 1935.[24]

[21] Leo Sack (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica) to Hanna, Despatch 1576, August 8, 1933, M1280, Roll1, 1122.
[22] Eberhardt to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1576, August 8, 1933, M1280, Roll 1, 1122; Edward P. Lawton (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 220, n.d. (March, 1933), M1280, Roll 1, 1134; Edward G. Trueblood (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Costa Rica), Despatch 220, April 26, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1139; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 193, May 17, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1141.
[23] Grieb, “The United States and General Jorge Ubico’s Retention of Power”, *Revista de Historia de América* 71 (January to June 1971) 119-135.
[24] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 666, May 31, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1222.

The international scene, however, was not so secure. The anxiousness of the Ubico administration over the potential international reaction to his intended continuance is demonstrated by his extreme sensitivity to reports about him in the international press. For one thing, Ubico expressed his great dissatisfaction with the reporting of U.S. newspapers. During late 1934, for example, *The New York Times* published several stories dealing with the alleged revolutionary upheavals in Guatemala. Although the reports had some nucleus of truth to them, since the situation in Guatemala had been tense after the revealing of the bomb plot in September, it exaggerated the extent of unrest in the country. [25] The Guatemalan Chief of Protocol protested the *Times*' publications, as did the Guatemalan envoy in Washington. The affair was eventually settled when *The New York Times* printed a correction.[26] Minister Hanna generally agreed that such "irresponsible" press accounts were damaging inter-American solidarity, but was otherwise somewhat surprised about Ubico's interest in what the foreign press had to say about him. He lectured the Foreign Minister, Dr. Skinner Klee, about the need to relax the strict censorship and to provide proper official information to the international press, so that the world would not remain ignorant of the "splendid administration of President Ubico".[27]

Despite Ubico's frequent run-ins with the American press over the years, his "special irritation" was reserved for the Costa Rican press.[28] Costa Rica was the most liberal Central American state at the time and it tolerated a considerable degree of press freedom. Many of Guatemala's political exiles settled in the country because of its liberal atmosphere and they used the local press to vent their anger for Ubico. To Ubico's mind, these "diatribes" in the Costa Rican press could only exist because the local government actively supported them in a conscious effort to insult the Guatemalan Head of State. As a result, relations between Costa Rica and Guatemala steadily soured. At one point, an official rupture in diplomatic relations seemed eminent.[29] Perhaps remembering Ubico's reaction to the bomb plot, Hanna warned the Department that the General's patience was stretched to a "breaking point" by the Costa Rican affair. And since he was a man of "great energy and decision", Hanna believed that Ubico may be expected to "act with vigor" if, in his "exasperation", he should be guided by "the more violent impulses of his character".[30]

[25] Hanna, untitled memorandum, September 29, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala; Wilson to Hanna, October 18, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. As it turned out, the source of the story may have been El Salvador, which at the time used any favorable opportunity to blacken Ubico.
[26] Hanna, Memorandum, September 27, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. Plot against President Ubico; Hanna, Memorandum, September 29, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala. Plot against President Ubico.
[27] Hanna, untitled memorandum, September 29, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[28] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 448, December 7, 1934, M1280, Roll 1, 1181.
[29] *Idem*.
[30] Hanna to the Secretary of Stare, Despatch 441, November 30, 1934, PR Guatemala, Vol. 305, cl. 800: Guatemala.

To prevent such an outburst the U.S. became involved in mediation attempts between Guatemala and Costa Rica. After weeks of frustrating negotiations, the American legations in Guatemala City and San José got the two contending governments to agree that they would exchange diplomatic envoys to bring about an improvement in their relations. Since both countries were unwilling to take the first step—and in that way imply guilt—a complicated scheme was eventually set up whereby the governments would exchange telegrams at exactly the same moment.[31] When, on March 7 of 1935, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister told Hanna that the plan for a simultaneous exchange of telegrams was also unacceptable and went on at great, great length about the insults that had appeared in the Costa Rican press, Minister Hanna—who had shown himself to be an extremely patient and tactful diplomat—finally exploded. Not yet aware of Ubico's delicate maneuvers toward continuismo, Hanna exclaimed that he found it "difficult to understand a mentality that attached so much importance to newspaper criticism". As an example, Hanna suggested that Hitler would have to break off relations with nearly every country in the world if he were to take foreign newspaper criticism so seriously. Perhaps to soften this comparison, Hanna subsequently suggested that Mexican newspapers also regularly criticized the U.S. government. Somewhat frustrated, Hanna told the Foreign Minister that he had worked hard to contradict the unjustified stories about Ubico among his colleagues from the U.S. and other countries, especially those stories dealing with Ubico's meddling in the affairs of his neighbors. If the Guatemalan government did not accept the current plan, Hanna threatened, "I very much [fear] that I would not be able in the future to express myself with the same clarity and conviction concerning the sincerity of this Government's desires and aims with respect to its Central American neighbors". After the interview with the Foreign Minister, Hanna went to the Legation's offices and dictated a very terse letter to Ubico to express his disappointment over the whole affair.[32]

The next day, Hanna was received by Ubico personally. As Hanna explained that the U.S. would not back any Guatemalan demand for Costa Rica to apologize for alleged injustices, the Caudillo interjected that "the relations of Guatemala with the United States throughout its entire history probably entitled it to greater consideration than would be shown to Costa Rica when measured by the same standard". Having re-found his former composure, Hanna tactfully ignored this remark and got Ubico to agree to the—somewhat silly—plan to exchange telegrams with Costa Rica on a fixed date, but at a time of his own choosing. While Ubico at first jokingly remarked that both Costa Rica

[31] Hanna, untitled memorandum, January 9, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna, untitled memorandum, February 8, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Sack to Hanna, February 22, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna to Sack, February 23, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Habba, untitled memorandum, February 25, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna to Sack, February 27, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Sack to Hanna, February 28, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna to Sack, February 28, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala.

[32] Hanna to Ubico, March 5, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna, untitled memorandum, March 7, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala.

and Guatemala would wait until midnight to send their telegrams, he must have eventually decided that he needed his friends: on March 20 at 11 o'clock in the morning, the Guatemalan government informed its Costa Rican counterpart that a new minister would be sent to the sister republic. One hour later, the Costa Ricans answered with their own telegram.[33]

While the hostility between Guatemala and Costa Rica cooled down (temporarily), the real shake-up in Central America was yet to come. In early April of 1935, Ubico's plans for continuance in office went into effect. On April 6, Hanna reported that the national Legislative Assembly had convened to consider several amendments to the constitution. While the article that touched upon the limits of Presidential terms (Article 66) was not on the agenda, several petitions calling for a second term for Ubico were circulating the country. When the petitions were finally handed to the Assembly, Hanna understood this to mean that Ubico would definitely "be continued in office for a second term".[34] Hanna quickly resigned himself to the fact that Ubico "has definitely decided to continue in the Presidency and [he will not] be restrained from doing so by either national or international influences".[35]

It should not be surprising that Hanna thought that he could not come between Ubico and his objectives. As minister to Nicaragua, he had been thoroughly briefed on the nonintervention principle and he had also witnessed Martinez' victory over U.S. resistance from close by. Furthermore, no-one inside Guatemala seemed to be willing to stand up to Ubico. Hanna recognized that the expressions of support that Ubico was receiving were not as spontaneous as his supporters claimed. In fact, people were apathetic to what was going on. After many decades of personal rule and continuismo, Guatemalans had few illusions about their leaders.[36] Besides, people were not on the whole opposed to Ubico: The "average man" appreciated the advantages of Ubico's rule. In Hanna's more immediate circle, the foreign business community hoped that six more years of Ubico would bring six more years of "comparative security". The diplomatic community viewed recent events as the outcome of world-wide "economic and political chaos". Most diplomats were content to stay on the sidelines and to regard Ubico's scheming as "a matter of internal politics which Guatemala itself must determine".[37] By

[33] Hanna, untitled memorandum, March 8, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Sack to hanna, march 14, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna to Sack, March 15, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Sack to Hanna March 15, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala; Hanna to Sack, March 20, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 314, 800: Guatemala.
[34] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 598, April 6, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1191; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Telegram 13, April 10, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1192.
[35] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 607, April 16, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1197.
[36] Hanna to the Secretary of State, despatch 619, April 30, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1202; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 631, May 3, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1204.
[37] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 605, April 13, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1195; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 631, May 3, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1204.

late April, nearly everyone in Guatemala accepted Ubico's continuance in power as a "fait accompli".[38]

While Hanna came to accept the fact Ubico would continue in office and counseled a neutral stand for the United States, this does not mean that he positively supported that plan. He shared some of the fears of the locals that "the end of it all will be a dictatorship and violence to terminate it".[39] In fact, the major reason for his reluctance to get involved in the matter was his fear that the United States would get itself entangled in a no-win situation. This was what the minister was trying the Department to understand from the very beginning. He expressed his views most clearly, however, in an informal letter to Edwin Wilson, dated May 18: Hanna argued that "Guatemala must be left to settle this problem in her own way (…) Should we interfere and fail, the situation will be much worse. Should we succeed, we certainly will be held responsible for the ultimate consequences of altering the present course of events, and the consequences might be grave and far reaching, if not even catastrophal".[40]

Hanna's correspondence showed no inclination on his part to talk to Ubico about his career plans. While the minister recognized that Ubico would not be budged by either "national or international" pressure, he also observed that the caudillo was very anxious over Washington's reaction to his eventual "reelection". According to Hanna, this anxiety was the only reason why the General wanted to give his continuance in office a "semblance of legality" and this, the minister believed, should give him some leverage to steer Ubico in a direction that should be acceptable to the United States. Hanna would go no further, however, than to inform "private persons close to the president" that a way should be found to give a "semblance of legality" to his unavoidable continuance in office.[41]

Strangely, the minister had a better grasp of what nonintervention meant in the Guatemalan context than his superiors did. In far-off Washington, the State Department was still under the illusion that the 1923 Treaty had a bearing on the matter and it was unwilling to come to terms with Ubico's plans. The Division of Latin American Affairs immediately began a study of the Guatemalan constitution. It concluded that there was no way that amendments to Article 66 could legalize Ubico's reelection, since the constitution prescribed a delay of six years before any proposed change to Article 66 could even be considered by a Constitutional Assembly. Since the 1923 Treaty prohibited alterations to the "constitutional organization" of Guatemala and required its signatories to abide by the "principle of non-re-election", the report concluded that "we may have to come to a decision regarding our attitude to Ubico in the light of our relation to the 1923 Treaty". The only way out was a scenario in which Guatemala would denounce the Treaty (which could be done with one year's notice: exactly in time for the

[38] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 619, April 30, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1202.
[39] *Idem*.
[40] Hanna to Wilson, may 18, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol. 311, cl. 801.1: Constitution.
[41] Hanna to the Secretary of State, dispatch 607, April 16, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1197.

start of Ubico's second term). Since El Salvador and Costa Rica had also withdrawn their support for the treaty, Guatemalan denunciation would nullify the Treaty for the remaining signatories, Honduras and Nicaragua, too: one of the Treaty's stipulations was that at least three countries had to support it to remain in force.[42]

This situation directly affected U.S. policy in Central America and was discussed at the highest levels of the State Department. On May 7, Hull and Welles sent a telegram to the American legation in Guatemala: "This government is concerned over a tendency apparent in certain countries in Central America to endeavor to alter the constitutional manner of succession to the presidency by illegal methods in order that present incumbents may continue in office beyond the periods for which they are elected". The case of Ubico was a special one, according to the Department, because of his "great prestige" in the region. His actions would undoubtedly affect the attitude and future policies of other Central American leaders. The Department feared that the entire region might revert to a "system of personal rule" and the associated disturbances and international conflicts which "characterized the period prior to 1907 and 1923 when constitutional government was practically unknown in Central America". In this light, the Department told Hanna that "it will not have escaped your attention" that Ubico had the "unique opportunity" to greatly increase his prestige in the entire hemisphere by "resolutely declining to take part in any movement to continue him in office illegally".[43]

What followed was a very confused correspondence between Washington and the Legation. The State Department may have interpreted Hanna's stoic acceptance of Ubico's maneuvering as a sign of sympathy toward the General (or at least, it feared that other observers would regard it as such). Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles therefore instructed the minister to make sure that "the impression, if it exists, that this Government sympathizes with any plan to amend the Guatemalan Constitution illegally, or to continue President Ubico in power contrary to its provisions, be not (repeat not) allowed to remain uncorrected". To really complicate things for Hanna, the instructions also said that the "Department does not, of course, wish to convey the impression that it is endeavoring to advise President Ubico concerning the course he should follow".[44]

Hanna was naturally confused as to what was expected of him. As he was already following his own policy of non-interference, he interpreted his instruction to mean that he should take a tougher stand and inform Ubico that the United States were definitely unsympathetic to his plans for *continuismo*. In several telegrams and airmail reports dated May 2 to May 5, Hanna argued that Ubico did not have the slightest reason to believe that the U.S. sympathized with his actions and that any affirmative action to change the caudillo's mind would be futile. The minister feared that any statement he would care to make would offer Ubico an opportunity to draw him into a discussion on the legal aspects of the case. In that way, the General might provoke statements which would be prone to misinterpretation and the eventual result may prove to be

[42] Division of Latin American Affairs to Wilson, April 16, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1193.
[43] Hull to Hanna, Telegram 15, May 7, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1201;
[44] Hull to Hanna, Telegram 11, April 30, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1197.

"embarrassing". Instead, Hanna counseled a policy of "complete aloofness [so that] we will in nowise compromise ourselves and will retain absolute freedom for future action, especially when the question of recognition arises".[45]

Despite his personal reservations, Hanna tried to arrange an audience with Ubico on May 7. This proved to be difficult as the Chief of Protocol and the Minister of Foreign Affairs kept stalling his request and tried to learn why Hanna wanted to see the President. Some days later, Hanna finally got his interview with Ubico and read him a Spanish translation he had prepared on the basis of his instructions:

> The Department of State does not of course wish to convey the impression that it is endeavoring to advise President Ubico concerning the course he should follow, which, naturally, is a matter for his own decision, but the Department nevertheless believes that it should make very clear to President Ubico that the Government of the United States is not in sympathy with any effort to alter the Guatemalan Constitution illegally or to continue President Ubico in office contrary to the provisions of that Constitution.

Immediately after Hanna finished his reading, Ubico remarked that "the clear meaning of the statement was that the Department of State did not want him to continue in the Presidency". The General added that it was not his wish either, but the Guatemalan people and the Constituent Assembly would insist that he did.[46]

Hanna studiously refrained from giving any comment, but in the days following the interview, the Foreign Minister kept calling upon him to get back on the statement. The initial efforts of the Foreign Minister, Dr. Skinner Klee, were bent on finding loopholes or ulterior interpretations for Hanna's statement. When this had no effect on a stoic Hanna, Skinner Klee described in dramatic terms Ubico's pain and surprise that the State Department did not trust or appreciate its staunch ally. When, in the course of several days, the Foreign Minister grew increasingly anxious over Hanna's non-committal responses, he started to paint ever more gloomy pictures of a future without Ubico, which would certainly be marked by "political confusion, conflict and possible disorder".[47]

Interestingly, historian Kenneth Grieb hypothesizes that Ubico deliberately dramatized U.S. resistance to his continuance to force it to play down its statement or to stand accused of direct intervention.[48] If so, this may explain why the Department lost its nerve and finally—after almost two weeks of silence—decided that there had been a terrible misunderstanding. The blame was put squarely on Hanna. On May 24 Sumner Welles wrote Hanna a very strict letter, stating that "[t]he Department does not consider that the statement you prepared [for the interview with Ubico on May 10] accurately transcribes the" position of the United States. Referring only to instructions of April 30,

[45] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Telegram 17, May 2, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1199; Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 628, May 3, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1203.
[46] Hanna, untitled memorandum, May 10, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol 311, 801.1: Constitution. Hanna reported his believe that the statement he read to President Ubico expressed "faithfully the attitude of my Government as it had been transmitted to me".
[47] *Idem*; Hanna to Wilson, May 18, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol 311, 801.1: Constitution; Hanna, untitled memorandum, May 13, 1935, PR Guatemala, Vol 311, 801.1: Constitution.
[48] Grieb, "Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power".

Welles claims that the State Department only wished to correct any previously existing impression that the U.S. government sympathized with Ubico's continuance in office. Remembering Hanna's statement that he had informed private citizens close to the President that a "semblance of legality" could be given to Ubico's continuance, Welles now claimed that the State Department feared that these statements could be interpreted as active interest and sympathy for Ubico's plans. It was only this gaffe by the minister that the State Department had wished to correct when it wrote that Hanna should correct "the impression, if it exist, that this Government sympathizes with any plan to amend the Guatemalan constitution illegally". In fact, Welles goes on, the State Department did not have any views, "either of sympathy or lack of sympathy", toward the internal affairs of Guatemala and it would not have broached the issue if Hanna had not been so talkative. In conclusion, Welles argued that:

> Since both President Ubico and the Minister of Foreign Affairs appear to have gained the impression that this government is opposed to President Ubico's continuance in the Presidency, you are instructed to (…) make it clear to those two officials that this Government has no attitude, either of sympathy or lack of sympathy, toward any movement of the character being discussed and neither approves nor disapproves of whatever action may be contemplated, which it considers an internal matter, in which it cannot intervene".[49]

After Hanna had executed these orders—much to his personal embarrassment, one would imagine—he wrote a somewhat indignant report to the Department, asserting that: "My conception of the proper way to correct an impression that the Government of the United States did sympathize with any plan was to say that it did not sympathize with it". [50] While the minister was probably right, he was suddenly transferred out of Guatemala days later. After having spent almost two weeks "in transit", he was granted two months of "vacation leave".[51] The first secretary of Legation, a very experienced officer called Sidney O'Donoghue, took charge of the Legation. Hanna never returned.

O'Donoghue was naturally much more careful not to get caught making any remark about the elections and Ubico was finally "reelected" with a wide margin. The State Department also kept a very low profile and instructed its Legations not to make any public statements which would tie the United States to the Treaty of 1923—on the basis of which Ubico's continuance should have been objected to.[52] Although the United States did not officially recognize the fact that elections had taken place, it did acknowledge a note from Guatemala's Foreign Ministry which informed the State

[49] Welles to Hannna, Instruction 199, may 24, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 1197.
[50] Hanna to the Secretary of State, Despatch 669, June 3, 1935, M1280, Roll 1, 814.00/1223. Emphasis in the original.
[51] Leave of Absence Card for 1935, January 1, 1936, PR Guatemala, Box 1, cl. 123: Hanna. After a very brief return to his post, Hanna died suddenly in February 1936.
[52] Beaulac to Wilson, October 1, 1935, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00/1254; Phillips to Lane, Instruction 337, July 17, 1935, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00/1255; Lane to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1064, September 20, 1935, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00/1256; Lane to the Secretary of State, September 27, 1935, M1280, Roll 2, 814.00/1257.

Department of the outcome of the elections. For all intents and purposes, this was a silent acknowledgement of Ubico's reelection.[53]

2.2 Continuismo in Honduras

> In general the situation is calm. Each party, however, is building political fences for the 1936 elections. Also, political deportations have occurred and one newspaper has been suspended. The Nationalists are still considering an extension of President Carías' term of office and the Liberals appear disorganized and discouraged.[54]

Such was the political situation in Honduras as Leo Keena encountered it when he arrived at his post in July, 1935. This short summary immediately captures the main themes for the next two years: increased repression and censure, an opposition party in disarray, and, eventually, Carías' reelection.

Despite the importance of events during Keena's service in Tegucigalpa, the Legation records do not show special concern for Carías' *continuismo*. This was partly a result of earlier events: Carías was by now entrenched in the presidency and the rival Liberal party was still in disarray, so there were no major disturbances or realistic alternatives to Carías' reign during this time. Also, the American Legation under Julius Lay had established an effective working relation with the Carías administration and was, on the whole, positive about its achievements. Naturally, Lay had assumed that Carías was a constitutionalist and in this sense the job of redefining Carías' rule fell to Keena. The fact that this redefinition was not accompanied with searching questions about America's role in Central America is, again, partly due to past happenings: the non-intervention principle was now more firmly at the center of U.S. policy toward Latin America and the question of recognizing *continuistas* was settled in Guatemala.

However, there is also a personal dimension to this question: as compared to Lay, the American ministers in other Central American republics, or even his secretaries, Leo Keena did not betray much intellectual curiosity about Honduran domestic politics or about the question of its relation to the United States. Nor did he show a great deal of initiative or assertiveness. His reports are fairly bland and devoid of original or personal observations on Honduran politics. Furthermore, Keena was always careful to confer with colleagues or with the Department on courses of action to follow, even if it concerned matters of ceremony. This was not necessarily a bad thing: Lay's personal observations about Honduras often betrayed a bigoted view and his assertiveness often bordered on intervention in local politics. These were the kind of things that the architects of the Good Neighbor Policy wished to eliminate. Whether Keena was an apt student of the Good Neighbor Policy or personally very conservative cannot be ascertained. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle: his personal style seamlessly fused with Washington's policy.

[53] Hull to Hanna, September 10, 1935, M1280, Roll 2, 1250.
[54] Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 14, August 7, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: General Conditions.

One of the first things the new minister did after his arrival in Honduras was to turn to his colleagues in Guatemala to inform himself on U.S. policy toward unconstitutional extensions of presidential terms in Central America: Assuming that the Secretary of State had provided instructions on how to deal with Ubico's *continuismo*, and since "action similar in effect may be taken or attempted in Honduras", Keena asked secretary O'Donoghue for a copy of the secretary's instructions. Unfortunately, O'Donoghue could not offer much in the way of policy guidelines: he only sent Keena a copy of a Department telegram acknowledging Ubico's "reelection". Naturally, government controlled papers in Tegucigalpa also learned about this telegram and about a letter from FDR to Ubico from a later date and presented them as examples of active American support for *continuismo*, despite the fact that the wording of both messages was the standard diplomatic dribble.[55]

Keena initially thought that the *continuismo* campaign would cause renewed instability.[56] In August 1935, shortly after Keena arrived and before Carías had decided on a definite strategy for his continuance in office, the minister reported that the President was considering two courses of action: either he would proclaim his continuance in office unilaterally, or he would renounce a second term and appoint his own candidate for the presidential elections of November 1936. Keena believed that the first course of action would "undoubtedly lead to violence" while the second course "might result in a Nationalist victory in the elections" if the selected candidate could unite the Nationalist Party and attract a fair number of undecided voters. The minister also believed that continuismo "would be viewed with distinct disfavor by the Government of the United States".[57] At this early date, Keena still believed that Washington would actively seek a legal transfer of power in Honduras.

[55] O'Donoghue to Keena, September 30, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Guatemala; Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 121, November 23, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Guatemala. FDR's letter to Ubico, addressed to "my great and good friend", noted the "cordial sentiments" expressed by Ubico and expressed the wish that the "friendship" existing between the United States and Guatemala be continued. Such had been the standard of diplomatic correspondence with Latin American heads of state for decades. As an indication of loose connection between the wording of such messages and actual relationships: Theodore Roosevelt had once parodied the diplomatic wording of his communications to central American chiefs by cynically referring to them as "My great and good friends, the Presidents of the various Central American Republics, and the excessively free and independent peoples over whom they preside." Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable revolutions: The United States and Central America* (1993) 51.

[56] Examples of specific instances of repression in 1935: Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 57, October 2, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras; Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 59, October 4, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras; Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 71, October 18, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras; Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 139, December 5, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras. Keena believed that the heavy-handed action of the government would push people into open revolt: Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 72, October 18, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras; Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 50, September 25, 1935, PR Honduras (SCF), Volume 220.

[57] Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 26, August 22, 1935, PR Honduras, Vol. 212, cl. 800: Honduras.

Honduran oppositionists entertained the same notions. Venancio Callejas, a one-time vice-presidential candidate of Carías, but now an independent Nationalist who fled to Costa Rica when the repression accompanying the continuance program was well underway, wrote a personal letter to Franklin Roosevelt in which he slammed Carías for his cynical disregard of the Honduran Constitution, the 1923 Treaty, and democratic procedures in general. He expressed the conviction that "the Government of the United States will flatly refuse to extend its recognition (…) to the Dictatorship which General Carías pretends to establish by force upon Honduras".[58] Likewise, Angel Zuñíga Huete who, despite a history of violence, had gracefully accepted his defeat in the 1932 Presidential elections and had since focused his attentions on ending Carías' rule through the use of the ballot box[59], sent a manifesto to the State Department and all the U.S. ministers in Central America in which he gave a brief overview of the Honduran constitution and argued that the Carías regime was a "Government of delinquents" and a "dictatorship" which should not be recognized by the international community.[60]

Honduran politicians continued to try to illicit a sympathetic response from the U.S. State Department with their high-minded manifesto's, expounding the virtues of international treaties and constitutionalism, well into the second half of the century. Before being forced into exile in the 1930s, they had first hand experience with America's policy of intervention and non-recognition of unconstitutional governments. In their writings they referred to treaties and constitutions which had become dead letters long ago. Apparently they believed that such talk would strike a cord with the Americans, a view that was most likely confirmed by high profile speeches on the sanctity of international obligations by American politicians (Zuniga regularly refers to such speeches in his writings). Sadly, they did not recognize that such speeches were intended for audiences in Europe: the only principle that the government in Washington would uphold in the Western Hemisphere throughout the 1930s and early 40s was that of non-intervention.

American diplomats in Central America referred to the manifestos that reached their desks as "the usual diatribes" to which they paid little attention. Unwilling or unable to consider that Central American politicians could truly entertain such idealistic notions, they regarded these writings as the opportunistic propaganda of the political "outs".[61] Keena was a little more conscientious than that: he had the Spanish manifestos duly translated and sent to the Department, sometimes accompanied by a dry analysis of his own. However, he too placed little value on them. He feared that Honduras, which now had to forego United States guidance, would revert to revolution and caudillo politics.

[58] Vicento Callejas (Honduran Opposition Leader) to Keena, December 11, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[59] Thomas J. Dodd, *Tiburcio Carías. Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader* (Baton Rouge 2005) 192.
[60] Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 488, August 17, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.
[61] The consistency of the ideas expressed in these writings, combined with the fact that many of their writers flocked to Guatemala after a socialistic democracy of sorts was established there in 1944, seems to belie this analysis.

Keena himself ascribed some legitimacy to the idea, locally held, that the Honduran peasant had a primitive notion of democracy: "The idea persists (…) in some quarters and possibly based on hope, that the Honduran *penco* [peon] bases his idea of liberty on the right to elect a president every four years and if this is denied him he will revolt and overthrow the government denying him that right". The minister believed that this "premise may be well founded", since "it is historically true that an urge toward revolution is latent in the Honduran penco".[62] However, the lethargic masses of peons would only move if led by strongmen. In this regard, the exiled opponents of Carías "will have to show more personal daring in fomenting and leading a revolutionary movement than has been exemplified in the pamphleteering campaign carried on during the past year from the other side of a neutral border".[63] For much of 1936 Keena anxiously scanned the horizon for a man-on-horseback who would continue to cycle of revolutions and dictatorships that the United States had tried to stop only a couple of years before.

Remembering that the old policy was to prevent trouble in Central America by supporting local elections, Keena reported in January 1936 that the upcoming elections for a constitutional assembly that would take a decision on Carías' second term "cannot be considered with justice as fairly representing the will of the electorate as practically all prominent leaders of the opposition have been placed in detention by the Government or forced to leave the country to escape imprisonment". Confirming his cautious temperament, Keena respectfully inquired if "the Department wish[es] me to make any statements to the President of Honduras in regard to these elections?".[64] Shortly, Hull replied that the non-intervention principle of the Good Neighbor policy took precedence over concerns for local elections:

> The Department does not wish you to make any statement to the President of Honduras regarding the conduct of the Honduran elections. However regrettable the conditions you describe may be from the point of view of a friendly observer the matter at issue is one solely of internal policy for the Honduran people themselves to determine.[65]

When the Honduran Congress convened on January 1, 1936, it immediately started work on its most important task for that year: to legalize President Carías' continuance in office. First, responding to the "petitions" in favor of continuismo which had been filed by the municipalities, Congress called for a Constituent Assembly to reform the 1924 constitution which prohibited the reelection of a President. Elections for the Constituent Assembly were held on January 26 and, not surprisingly, only candidates who supported continuismo were elected. The government had been laying the groundwork for these elections throughout 1935: getting the municipalities in line, suppressing newspapers, and jailing or exiling opponents. Now the continuismo

[62] Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 508, November 9, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.
[63] *Idem*.
[64] Keena to the Department of State, Telegram 12, January 1, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Reform of the Constitution.
[65] Hull to Keena, Telegram 6, January 22, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Reform of the Constitution of Honduras.

campaign moved along smoothly, although arrests of opponents continued throughout 1936. In March, the Constituent Assembly cranked out a constitution in just 20 days. The new constitution, which went into effect on April 15, appointed President Carías and Vice President Williams for a second term which was to last until January 1, 1943. The members of the Assembly also appointed themselves as the new National Congress, its period of office running to December 5, 1942.[66] As of January 1, 1937, the inauguration date of the President's new term, Carías would be in office for 6 more years with a rubber-stamp Congress to support him.

Keena remained in an anxious state throughout this whole process. Only after the inauguration of Carías did he become more optimistic about the prospects for continued peace in Honduras. Beginning in January, Keena took concrete steps to deal with a possible revolution during the elections: he ordered the consulates to compile lists of American citizens in their district, probably to prepare for a possible evacuation.[67] The elections, however, proceeded smoothly, somewhat to the surprise of the Legation and the consulates.[68] Carías' opponents used the occasion to flee Honduras unnoticed and prepared to overthrow the government from neighboring countries before the opening of the Constituent Assembly in March.[69] Just after the Assembly convened, Keena warned the Department that "the penitentiary and the barracks in Tegucigalpa are reported to be filled with political prisoners. This policy is causing a great deal of ill will against the government (…) It is regarded in all circles that in time an armed movement will be made against the Government". Keena believed that the strength of such a movement would depend on the support that the laboring classes were willing to give to an armed incursion of the opposition. Which way the sympathy of the lower classes would go, no one seemed to know.[70] Despite continuing rumors of revolution, the new constitution went into effect in April without any untoward incident. Yet Keena kept up a fairly constant flow of reports on the imminence of the great revolution that everyone in the capital was expecting.[71] Not until the start of the rainy season, which seemed to make any military campaign impossible, did Tegucigalpa in general and Keena in particular utter a sigh of relief.

[66] The following document provides a good summary of this process and includes references to all relevant correspondence on the subject: Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 600, January 8, 1937, PR Honduras, Box 23, cl. 800: Honduras.
[67] Keena to the North Coast consulates, January 13, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 208, January 17, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.
[68] Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 233, January 31, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department; Stewart to Keena, January 8 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Reports from the consulates.
[69] Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 263, February 20, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.
[70] Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 292, March 6, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.
[71] Keena to the Department of State, Despatch 355, April 17, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department; Keena to the Department of State, Telegram 62, September 2, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, cl. 800: Despatches sent to Department.

The American legations drew some important lessons from the 1936 *continuismo* campaign. The first lesson, clearly established by Department instructions during the first half of 1936, was that the legation could not play any positive role in local events. The Department made it clear that the old policies of supporting elections and the 1923 Treaty were now obsolete. A second lesson was that both the Liberal opposition to Carías and the general population's taste for revolutions were not as strong as expected. Even if it had been, the Nationalist government proved much more powerful than expected. Stability now seemed assured by the indecisiveness of Liberal leaders, the lethargy of the people, and the modern repression techniques of the government: systematic arrests, wholesale press censorship, a working agreement with neighboring caudillos, and the airplane.[72] American guidance to promote stability was no longer necessary: the future of Central America would be determined by force, not by treaties and elections.

2.3 Constitutionalism in El Salvador

Obviously, Martínez and the United Status got off to a bad start. If the Department of State was serious about adopting El Salvador into the hemispheric system of friendly states that was being built with the help of the Good Neighbor, it needed to mend some fences. What better way to do that than to send a diplomat who could give a personal touch to the new relationship. The choice for a new Minister fell to Francis Corrigan: a political appointee who could give the impression of being intimately connected with the Roosevelt administration, rather than just to the Department, and also an Irishman who would doubtlessly be considered *más simpático* by the Latinos than an Anglo Saxon.[73]

Corrigan's tenure in San Salvador initiated a brief honeymoon between the Legation and the Martínez regime. The new minister was initially friendly to the government, welcomed local journalists to his office to propagate FDR's Good Neighbor, and negotiated a new reciprocal trade agreement between the United States and El Salvador. Corrigan was clearly willing to let bygones be bygones and painted a sympathetic picture of the local government: arguing that it enjoyed a great degree of public support because it had rectified the economic and financial dislocation that had characterized the Araujo administration (significantly, the 1931 coup and 1932 uprising were not mentioned for a while). In January 1935, Corrigan approvingly stated that "the political philosophy of this administration seems to have a definite trend toward a strong, scientifically operated financial system centrally controlled and a gradual decentralization of ownership of land".[74]

Corrigan did have to swallow some bitter pills to be able to continue his labors toward reconciliation: in 1934, the Martínez regime negotiated a trade pact with Germany before U.S.-Salvadoran negotiations on a new trade agreement even started.

[72] Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 619, February 9, 1937, PR Honduras, Box 23, cl. 800: Honduras.
[73] See Chapter 1, page 44.
[74] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 138G, January 12, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports.

In that same year, the administration also extended diplomatic recognition to the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo in formerly Chinese Manchuria. The U.S. minister carefully explained that these dealings were not an indication of Salvador's sympathy with these dangerous regimes, but merely a result of diplomatic pressure from Germany and the relative inexperience of Salvador's Foreign Minister.[75]

Another potential irritant in U.S.-Salvadoran relations was Martínez' "election" to the presidency in 1934. It should be remembered that, formally, Martínez had only been Araujo's replacement in the past years. When Araujo's tenure officially ended in 1935, Martínez could, according to the letter of the constitution, present himself as a candidate for the presidential elections: since he was never *elected* to the presidency, the constitutional ban on *re*election did not apply to him. The only obstacle to Martínez' election was a constitutional ban on the election of any presidential candidate who had served in the previous government in the six months preceding the election. This ban was intended, of course, to prevent a government that came to power by extra-constitutional means (say, a coup) from legalizing its reign by getting itself elected to office. In short, it was directed against Martínez. The general, however, skillfully dodged the issue by abdicating six months before the end of Araujo's term and handing the reins of government to his trusted aide and vice-president, General Menendez. Shortly after Martínez' inevitable election to the presidency, Menendez was just as easily reinstated in his old position of vice-president.[76]

Minister Corrigan double-checked the legality of these maneuvers and eventually concluded that the whole affair complied with "the letter" of the constitution. His superiors in the Department let it go at that.[77] The Legation's and Department's quiet acceptance of what was obviously an attempt to get around *the spirit* of the Salvadoran constitution (an interpretation that was carefully avoided) probably stemmed from a genuine desire to normalize the relationship with El Salvador by not getting into another debate on the legality of its government. The last disagreements on that point had been put to rest—at great costs to U.S. prestige in the region—only months before.

[75] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 33G, July 9, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 6G, May 9, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 45G, July 31, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports.

[76] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 33G, July 9, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 45G, July 31, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 66G, September 4, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 128, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 17, June 6, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 800.S; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 110, December 5, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 130, cl. 800.S; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 159, February 15, 1935, PR El Salvador, Volume 135, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 211G, April 12, 1935, PR El Salvador, Volume 135, cl. 800: General Conditions Reports.

[77] Beaulac to Wilson, June 29, 1934, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder markes El Salvador, 1933-1940

After the elections, the Government did lift the state of siege which had been in force, in Corrigan's words, since the "so-called [*sic*.] 'communistic' uprising" of 1932.[78] It also relaxed its censorship over the press and invited exiles to return home. These actions, combined with seemingly spontaneous popular celebrations on the occasion of Martinez' election[79], led Corrigan to conclude that "a trend toward greater liberality" was perceptible in El Salvador.[80] Whether Martínez liberalized his regime specifically to sugarcoat his election for the Americans is uncertain. This move is probably merely an indication of the growing confidence the president had in the security of his position.

Martínez was, however, anxious to improve his image with the *yanquis*. His colleagues in neighboring countries provided an excellent opportunity for just that. The continuismo campaigns in Guatemala and Honduras—and Somoza's naked ambition for the Nicaraguan presidency—allowed Martínez to present himself as the standard bearer of constitutionality in Central America. While policymakers in Washington were moving away from an interventionist policy based on treaties and constitutions, U.S. policy in Central America continued, for a while, to be discussed in those terms both by Central Americans and by Legation officers. In fact, Corrigan himself introduced the Good Neighbor policy to the Salvadoran press by explaining that its objective was to prevent the rise both of dictatorship and of communism and to further the spread of democracy in the hemisphere.[81]

Corrigan's words and past experiences must have inspired the Salvadoran president to set up an *anti*-continuismo campaign (although opposition against the phenomenon among his compatriots and even close collaborators must also have played a role in this tactic). Martínez' campaign started in May 1935—the exact month in which rumors about U.S. objections to Ubico's continuismo campaign started to surface—when the Salvadoran President expressed his approval for calls to change the country's constitution which were emanating from the National Assembly. Martínez immediately declared that a revised constitution should prohibit the reelection of a president or the extension of his term.[82] In a personal interview with Corrigan in August, Martínez further expressed his opposition to changes in the Guatemalan constitution and his fear that Carías' continuismo campaign in Honduras and Somoza's ambition for the presidency of Nicaragua would renew the disturbances that haunted Central America

[78] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 176, March 9, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[79] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 211G, April 2, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 135, cl. 800: General Conditions.
[80] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 179G, March 13, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 135, cl. 800: General Conditions.
[81] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 598, February 20, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 2, cl. 500: Economic Conferences.
[82] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 244G, May 10, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 135, cl. 800: General Conditions; Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 228, April 30, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800.1: Constitution.

before the signing of the 1923 Treaty.[83] Backing up his words with action (in the diplomatic field at least) Martínez claimed that he had sent two personal envoys to Somoza to dissuade the latter from seizing power by force.[84] Underlining the irony of the new situation, the Salvadoran Sub-Secretary of Foreign Affairs told Corrigan that, not so long ago, the Central American states had refused to recognize the unconstitutional government of Martínez, but now the same states that still adhered to the 1923 Treaty on paper were destroying their own constitutions while Martínez had come out in favor of constitutionalism.[85]

The Salvadoran President's lobby for constitutionalism struck a cord with Corrigan, who concluded that "Martínez stands for public order and constitutionality".[86] The public stance of the Salvadoran Government also attracted refugees from all over Central America who opposed the *continuismo* campaigns in their own countries. The presence of these men—some of them not as politically pure as they would like to claim—reinforced Martínez' portrayal of the situation in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. For example, General Solórzano from Guatemala told the American legation that his native country was the scene of wholesale executions and that a revolution against Ubico was eminent.[87] The Honduran General Callejas claimed that civil war in Honduras could only be prevented if the United States told Carías to step down.[88] Former president Sacasa of Nicaragua, who was finally kicked out of the presidential palace and had made his way to San Salvador, told Corrigan that Somoza had destroyed three decades of patient labor toward constitutionality in Nicaragua. The result, said the president-turned-refugee, could only be complete chaos.[89]

Proceeding from the information available to him locally, Corrigan concluded that Ubico and Martínez stood on opposite sides on the matter of their Central American policy. While Ubico had a "Napoleon complex" and tried to dominate the region with his "Machiavellian" tactics, the more moderate and "Erasmian" Martínez was solely concerned with the wellbeing of his own country. Corrigan recognized that vigorous leaders like Ubico and Martínez represented the future of Central America in contrast to Costa Rican President Jíminez, "the aging older statesman (…) with his wise and liberal viewpoint". The two however, were "of totally different type and temperament". Carías and Somoza both admired Ubico as their "prototype" and the former at least wanted to

[83] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 381, August 19, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[84] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 433, October 1, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[85] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 561, January 21, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, 800: El Salvador.
[86] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, dispatch 381, August 19, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 135, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[87] Corrigab to the Secretary of State, dispatch 795, September 18, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[88] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Telegram 11, March 2, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[89] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, dispatch 763, August 19, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: Nicaragua.

emulate Ubico's tactic of continuismo. Corrigan only foresaw trouble and uprisings resulting from these actions and hoped that older, democratically inclined statesmen like the Honduran ex-President Paz Barahona would have a moderating influence in these "American Balkans".[90]

Corrigan was a medical doctor with the temperament of an academician, not that of a weathered diplomat. He liked to tackle abstract and philosophical problems and even though he was a good representative, he did not have that sixth sense for intrigue and infighting that some of the better political reporters in the Foreign Service had. While his political preferences or ideologies do not seem to have differed markedly from his colleagues in neighboring countries, he did express them more eloquently and vigorously. In his reports, he liked to touch on the Big Issues of diplomacy, those that, to paraphrase the minister's own word, would be studied by historians and judged by history.[91]

This streak in Corrigan's character was reinforced by his friendship with Arthur Lane, the U.S. minister to Nicaragua. Much like Corrigan's, Lane's convictions do not seem to differ that much from contemporaries, but he did share the doctor's way with words and he was an unusually conscientious man on top of that. In 1935, the Department sent Lane to Salvador on a visit for consultation and an exchange of views. Lane gave Corrigan a few of his more important reports, based on his experience in Nicaragua, to serve the new minister as reference materials.[92] The 1935 files of the Salvadoran Legation still hold one of the most interesting of these, in which Lane recounts his struggle to reconcile the "Good Neighbor" with "non-interference", eventually concluding that:

> We should not interfere in Nicaraguan internal affairs; should we feel, however, that a word from us might serve to maintain the peace of the country and consequently avoid bloodshed or disorder we should not refrain from assuming the responsibility of the "good neighbor" by expressing our views, preferably as the personal views of our diplomatic representative.[93]

While stated in neutral terms, in the Nicaraguan context, this memo clearly implied that Lane intended to use his personal influence to prevent Somoza from committing a violent coup against the Sacasa Government. Indicative of the latitude that the State Department permitted its envoys at the time, Sumner Welles had approved above interpretation of the Good Neighbor policy.[94]

Lane was transferred to the Baltic states in 1936, but with Corrigan the Central American diplomatic corps retained an articulate advocate for interference, or, as he

[90] Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 448, October 16, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 135, cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.
[91] Corrigan to Beaulac, April 15, 1936, Corrigan Papers, Box 1, folder marked Beaulac, Willard; Corrigan to Franklin Roosevelt, March 17, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 9, folder marked, Roosevelt, F.D. and Eleanor.
[92] Fisher, Memorandum for the Files, n.d., PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: Nicaragua.
[93] Lane to the Secretary of State, May 4, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: Nicaragua.
[94] Welles to lane, may 21, 1934, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: Nicaragua.

might have put it himself, a "responsible" Good Neighbor.[95] As Lane was packing up in Nicaragua, Corrigan reported to the Department his expectation that the continuismo campaigns in Guatemala and Honduras would be confronted with revolutionists bearing the banner of constitutionalism. Local people were looking to the powerful American legations for some guidance and in this light, said the minister, it was imperative that the United States develop some positive side to the Good Neighbor, which was currently focused too much on a negative stance of non-intervention. Corrigan himself opined that the U.S. missions should apply their influence to prevent bloodshed or dictatorship and to stimulate liberal and democratic policies: "It takes more than one good neighbor to make a good neighborhood".[96] Some weeks later, as Somoza was poised to take over the presidential palace, Corrigan expressed himself more frankly:

> Cynical disregard of constitutional guarantees, first by General Ubico in Guatemala, second by General Carías in Honduras, and now imminently by General Somoza in Nicaragua, for their own personal interests, will have destroyed the result of a generation of patient diplomatic effort to advance these countries (some of them still embryonic) on the road to become constitutional democratic republics.

The Department's retreat from Central America had gone far enough, the minister opined, and it should be prepared to offer friendly and tactful advice to the sister republics.[97]

By this time however, Washington's thinking was entirely out of step with that in the Central American Legations. The Department had indulged Lane's musings about the "responsible" Good Neighbor, had derailed Hanna's essentially correct handling of Ubico's continuismo, and had deflected Keena's questions about the elections in Honduras, but in 1936—finally—it was ready to lay down the law:

> [T]he Department expects its diplomatic representatives in Central America to conduct themselves in their relations with the Governments to which they are accredited, and with the people of the countries, in exactly the same manner they would if they were accredited to one of the large republics of South America or with any non-American power; that is to say, they should abstain from offering advice on any domestic question, and if requested to give such advice they should decline to do so.[98]

While these instructions fitted the general trend of U.S. policy—the adoption of non-interference as official policy was made public in the same year—the State Department told its envoys that the Central Americans themselves were to blame for the U.S. retreat from a pro-constitutionalist policy. It was, after all, the signatories themselves who

[95] This was Lane's description of his own methods.
[96] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 561, January 21, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[97] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, dispatch 684, may 14, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[98] Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, Instruction 216, April 30, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: General.

abrogated the 1923 Treaty: first Ubico by continuing himself in office and then Carías and Sacasa by recognizing this step.[99]

It should be noted with special emphasis, however, that Washington's withdrawal from the 1923 Treaty—and, more broadly, from a pro-democratic stance or any other kind of interference—was not an *ex post facto* nod of approval to Ubico and Carías: As the Department noted, both presidents would have been happy to keep the Treaty in the books, as it would protect them from coups and revolutions. According to the Department, by publicly withdrawing its support from the Treaty, the U.S. was saying that it would not object if either Ubico or Carías was overthrown. This was not an academic point: In Honduras at least, a revolution was thought to be brewing. Washington's only regret at this time was that its new policy would leave the fate of the Sacasa Government in the hands of General Somoza.[100]

Corrigan cared very little for the argument that Hondurans themselves would take care of Carías, and even less for the fact that Somoza would take care of Sacasa. The old circle of dictatorship followed by revolution followed by…etc. was exactly the one that had to be broken up by the moderating influence of the U.S. legations: "Dictatorships with their tyrannies, imprisonments, political exiles and political executions are abhorrent to the spirit of America. A swing to the other extreme always follows". The Isthmian and Caribbean countries, argued Corrigan, needed the United States. Betraying his medical background the minister stated that "they are politically embryonic and still need obstetrical care lest they be born badly and grow up idiots". Therefore, Corrigan objected to the 1936 instructions: The U.S. should not have to bend over backwards to keep its hands off.[101] It was an objection for the record. The Roosevelt administration was not going to change the course of its Latin American policy to humor the constitutionalist factions of Central America. Minister Corrigan realized as much and, in the end, decided that "like a good soldier [I will] go along and follow orders".[102]

"Good soldier" was perhaps a bit modest. Corrigan was hopelessly ambitious. He was not a man to stay put and fight a loosing battle for his ideals. Nor was he so principled that he left the Foreign Service in disgust (which is what Arthur Lane did, eventually[103]). In fact, he was pulling strings to get appointed to a more prestigious post. And what strings! Letters went out throughout 1937 to other ambassadors, senators, Undersecretary Welles, Secretary Hull, and (why not?) President Roosevelt. Spain, Chile, Cuba, even Peru would be "acceptable", but privately, Corrigan entertained the hope of being appointed Assistant Secretary. Alas, while Roosevelt apparently thought that

[99] "Recommendation that American Policy in Central America no longer be affected by any Provision of the Central American General Treaty of Peace and Amity of 1923, February 18, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: General.
[100] *Idem*.
[101] Corrigan to Beaulac, May 20, 1936, Corrigan Papers, Box 1, folder marked Beaulac, Willard.
[102] Corrigan to Beaulac, April 15, 1936, Corrigan Papers, Box 1, folder marked Beaulac, Willard.
[103] Arthur Bliss Lane, *I saw Poland betrayed. An American ambassador reports to the American people* (Indianapolis and New York 1948).

Corrigan was the best of the political appointees, it was determined that he was most needed in Panama. The doctor left Salvador in September 1937.[104]

Corrigan never objected to Martínez' rule; his gall was reserved for Ubico, Carías, and Somoza. Up to Corrigan's leave, the Salvadoran General himself kept a low profile and a relatively clean house. Some incriminating rumors reached the American legation at times: the government was said to be relaxing its standards of honesty; journalists complained of intimidation; a young sergeant was executed in the city's graveyard, the blood stains remaining visible for days.[105] But Corrigan obsessed over the Big Issues. Not until right up to his transfer did he get a sense that Martínez was moving in the same direction as Ubico and the other apostles of continuismo. On March 13, 1937, Corrigan allowed that the Salvadoran regime might be called a "military *semi*-dictatorship". But as it was made up of lower army officers and "liberals", it should still be recognized as a "middle class movement and may be considered as a step toward democracy".[106] Two months later, Corrigan reported on the growing cult of personality surrounding Martínez. The Assembly's recent decision to bestow the title of "benefactor of the nation" on the executive was a case in point. As the U.S. minister ominously noted, such flattery might "affect [Martinez'] future plans".[107]

The inversion of cause and effect in Corrigan's analysis of Martínez' future plans is emblematic of his interpretation of local politics. It seems much more probable that the Salvadoran chief of state had left the door to continuismo ajar even as he criticized his neighbors. Such cynical maneuvering was not unheard of. In 1927, for example, President Machado of Cuba had declared—with tears in his eyes, one imagines—that "a man whose lips had never been defiled by a lie, would lower his dignity, and dishonor himself, if after a political labor of twenty-five years during which he opposed the principle of reelection with the word and the sword in two revolutions, he should now

[104] Corrigan to Bulkley, February 20, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 2, folder marked Bulkley, Senator Robert J.; Bulkey to Corrigano, May 29, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 2, folder marked Bulkley, Senator Robert J.; Bulkley to Corrigan, June 3, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 2, folder marked Bulkley, Senator Robert J.; Bulkley to Corrigan, July 24, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 2, folder marked Bulkley, Senator Robert J.; Corrigan to Hull, March 20, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 4, folder marked Hull, Cordell; Corrigan to Moore, December 19, 1936, Corrigan Papers, Box 7, folder marked Moore, R. Walton; Corrigan to Franklin Roosevelt, March 17, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 9, folder marked Roosevelt, F.D. and Eleanor; Corrigan to Welles, June 4, 1937, Corrigan Papers, Box 10, folder marked Welles, Sumner.

[105] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 578, February 6, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: El Salvador; Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 743, July 17, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: El Salvador; Corrigan to the Department of State, Despatch 710, June 10, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 6, cl. 891: Public Press; Fisher to the Secretary of State, Despatch 841, November 3, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[106] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 975, March 13, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 9, Vol. VI, cl. 800: El Salvador. Emphasis added.

[107] Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1024, June 2, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 9, Vol. VI, cl. 800: El Salvador.

accept the principle for himself".[108] A little over a year later, Machado had himself reelected in a single-candidate election. Likewise, Ubico and Carías had started out with a strong constitutionalist program. Now Martínez was ready for his 180 degree turn.

In May 1935 Martínez had approved a plan to rewrite the Salvadoran constitution and, at the time, had voiced his demand for the adoption of stricter laws against reelection. Since that time however, the president had not seen fit to convene a constitutional convention, even though a complete draft for a new constitution was ready to be discussed. Throughout 1937, Martínez carefully kept alive the hope that a constitutional convention would be organized shortly. When asked whether he entertained plans for continuismo, the President remained noncommittal. The Government controlled press however, floated several trial balloons in the form of editorials calling on the chief to continue his labors. Whether Martínez was so circumspect because he feared Washington's reaction is unknown. It seems more probable that he had to take into account local opposition to his continuismo. El Salvador had a much stronger constitutional tradition than its neighbors, and any untoward designs on the nation's first law were considered unacceptable. In fact, opposition against continuismo was so strong inside Martinez' own government, that several sub-secretaries and lower officials resigned in 1937 to protest the unofficial plans for reelection.[109]

The American Legation, now under the leadership of Minister Robert Frazer, a career officer who was temperamentally more akin to Keena than to Corrigan, closely watched and meticulously reported the process. Frazer sympathized with government professionals, journalists, and liberal aristocrats who objected to Martínez' evident plans for *continuismo*. The illiterate masses, opined the minister, were incapable "of forming intelligent political opinions and virtually do not count in a juncture of this kind".[110] Even if there were some socialists and communists among them who opposed continuismo, the

[108] Russel H. Fitzgibbon, , "Continuismo: The search for political longevity", in: Hugh M. Hamill, *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America* (Norman and London 1992) 210-217, there 211.

[109] Salvador Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 318, September 27, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1174, October 22, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 9, Vol. VI, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1110, September 29, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 9, Vol. VI, cl. 800: El Salvador; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1132, October 30, 1937, PR El Salvador, Box 9, Vol. VI, cl. 800: El Salvador; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 48, January 25, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 129, April 22, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 202, June 22, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 224, July 11, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 281, August 18, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 294, September 2, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffmann to the Secretary of State, Despatch 308, September 14, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 327, October 7, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

[110] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 444, January 19, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: El Salvador II.

suppression of the 1932 uprising had been so ruthless and complete that this group was no longer a faction in local politics.[111] Aside from a small group of discontents who opposed Martínez for selfish reasons, Frazer argued that the most important opposition emanated from the wealthy and educated "honorable citizens" who appreciated Martínez' excellent administration but valued the "ancient principles" of the constitution.[112]

The Legation was pessimistic, however, about the opposition's chances to successfully resist continuismo, as it suffered under the restrictions of press censorship and the suppression of free speech and remained inarticulate and unfocused.[113] While the "brightest minds" left the government in protest, they were not expected to take their opposition any further.[114] Moreover, the State Department had become much more careful in keeping its Legations out of local politics: a timely telegram instructed Salvadoran mission that it was to express no opinion whatsoever on the "controversial" reelection of Martínez.[115]

Martínez' constitutional coup began in earnest in July 1938. Discontented army officers and government officials were replaced and the independent newspaper *Diario de Hoy* was closed down. One liberally-minded editor was given a canoe and told to row upriver and not get out until he reached Honduras.[116] In October, government organized elections brought together government sponsored deputies for a Constituent Assembly. The new deputies, opined Frazer, were of so little ability that original ideas were not to be expected from the Assembly. It would doubtlessly serve as a rubber stamp congress only. Indeed, on January 24, 1939, a new constitution was promulgated which prohibited reelection, but at the same time made an "exception" for President Martínez, who was to remain in office until March, 1945.[117]

[111] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 48, January 25, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[112] *Idem* and Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 129, April 22, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[113] Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 294, September 2, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 318, September 27, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[114] Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 327, October 7, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[115] Welles to Hoffman, Instruction 88, September 29, 1938, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 1. Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 294, October 7, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[116] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 249, July 23, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 281, August 18, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 294, September 2, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs
[117] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 430, January 6, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: Political Affairs II; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 449, January 24, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: Political Affairs II; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 348, October 29, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 368, November 15, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 386, November 28, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 801.1: Constitution.

The end…almost. In January 1939, four generals of the Salvadoran army approached the secretary of the American Legation. How would the United States feel about a coup against Martínez, they wanted to know. The United States has no feelings either of sympathy or lack of sympathy toward such a development, was the (now standard) reply. This pleased the generals.[118] It told them that the United States felt no obligation to protect the status quo, as had been the norm under the defunct 1923 rule. For what it was worth, there were a handful of individuals in Central America who understood that the State Department's quiet shelving of the 1923 Treaty was not a mark of approval or an implicit invitation for *continuismo*.

It was worth very little, though. A grand total of four generals might seem like a formidable force in a small country like El Salvador, but in fact, the Salvadoran army boasted some 30 generals of the brigade rank only (while the army itself was no larger than a single American brigade). In any case, the four rogue officers were no match for the security apparatus that Martínez had developed in the preceding years. The generals were arrested before they even had a chance to execute their plans.[119] Times had changed: the caudillos were building modern, centralized states with all the newest techniques for the suppression of dissent at their disposal. Political stability no longer required the tutelage of the U.S. legations. Whether the attendant gain in state sovereignty equaled the loss of political liberties is a question no historian could answer.

3. DICTATORS RULE THE ISTHMUS

In 1934, Arthur Lane drew the Department's attention to the large outlay of funds that the Nicaraguan Government made available for its army: "When a country which has nothing to fear from its neighbors spends 60 per cent of its budgeted income on the maintenance of its army, there cannot be much optimism for its economic and educational development".[120] Some weeks later, Lay echoed that:

> The Government here [in Honduras] has contracted for 3,000 modern rifles, 1,250,000 cartridges, clips for same, about 100 machine guns, 500 airplane bombs, and the budget provides for three more bombing airplanes. There seems to be no good explanation for the purchase of this enormous quantity of munitions at this time. There is no internal revolt in sight, anyway, for two years. Nicaragua is no longer a real menace, although they sometimes try to make me think it is. By a process of elimination I have come to the conclusion that the purchase of these munitions and arms is for graft.[121]

At the time, both Lane and Lay missed the point, which was that the governments of Central America were thinking in terms of power. Both the Legations and the Department were still thinking in terms of treaties and moral suasion: Undersecretary Welles' only suggestion regarding the increase of weaponry was to express his devout hope that the

[118] Lamson-Scribner to Frazer, January 13, 1938, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 1.
[119] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 42, July 3, 1936 (M1280, Roll 2, frame 1288).
[120] Lane to Welles, February 10, 1934, Lane Papers, Box 9, Folder 180.
[121] Lay to Lane, August 14, 1934, Lane Papers, Box 9, Folder 179.

ongoing discussions on arms reductions that the Central American governments had themselves engaged in would offer a solution.[122]

The American conception of "progress" in Central America had imagined constitutional stability under the watchful eyes of American observers. The Central American governments, meanwhile, entertained a vision of strong and dynamic states that would rule for the people, rather than being ruled by the people. The idea of a 'Somoza solution', whereby the United States ruled Central America by dictatorial proxy, denies the fact that during the early 1930s, Central Americans were shaping the Central American future. That the future they imagined was unattractive in terms of American ideas of good government was entirely beside the point. Martínez', Ubico's, and Carías' ability to stay in power in spite of American reservation or even resistance, demonstrates that they were the actors, not those acted upon. The masters, not the students.

Caught between an increasingly passive State Department and increasingly dynamic and dictatorial states, the diplomatic corps experienced considerable difficulty in coming around to the new balance of power in Central America. Doubtlessly, the realization that its guidance was no longer appreciated by the local government was a bitter pill to swallow. The traditional perception of Central America as a region that would be subjected to chronic cycles of dictatorship and revolution if it was not for American tutelage, accounts for the fear expressed by the Legations of Guatemala and Tegucigalpa that *continuismo* would lead to revolution. Lane and Corrigan may have been the most vocal proponents of intervention in favor of constitutionalism, but even timid minister Keena expressed a need to "talk to" Carías about the reelection campaign. It seems highly doubtful that "friendly advice" would have made a difference at this point anyway. There is no reason to assume that Ubico and Carías would fail to withstand American pressure while Martínez had held out and eventually triumphed over it.

The continuismo campaigns required a new conception of the relations between the local regimes and the legations. As we shall see in the next chapter, one interesting effect of the reelection campaigns—combined with international developments—was that the American legations began to report on the many "Fascist" tendencies of Ubico, Carías and Martínez. It must have been clear to the latter also that if they meant to win back the American sympathy they had enjoyed after their initial election, they had to come up with new ways to make themselves useful to the *yanquis*.

[122] Welles to Lane, February 19, 1934, Lane Papers, Box 9, Folder 180.

Chapter 5

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS
The Good Neighbor and Fascism, 1936-1939

Meanwhile, the trend towards Fascism is increasingly pronounced throughout most of Latin America. Fascist trappings naturally appeal to the "strong men" dictators (…) [T]he four reigning Central American dictators (…) started flirtations with the Euro-Asiatic dictatorial countries; El Salvador was the first nation in the world outside Japan to recognize Manchukuo and Jorge Ubico of Guatemala—who has frequently described President Roosevelt as "a dangerous communist"—once planned an alliance with Italy, but was restrained by his aides.

~ *Wilbur Burton,* The Spectator, *1938* [1]

When Corrigan wrote that "dictatorships with their tyrannies, imprisonments, political exiles and political executions are abhorrent to the spirit of America"[2], he was not voicing an old cliché. Rather, he expressed a concern that would not—and perhaps could not—have presented itself with the same urgency only a couple of years earlier. Although American foreign policy and politics would take many twists and turns before the United States got involved in the War, events around the world during the late 1930s presented the clear and immediate possibility of a future conflict with the European dictatorships.

As historian Benjamin Alpers argues, the contemporary, 21st century American notion of dictatorship as the opposite of democracy is comparatively new:

> There is nothing necessary about the peculiar and central role that dictatorship has played in the political life of this country (…) [F]or most of the history of Western political thought, dictatorship and democracy were regarded as only two of many possible forms of political organization—among them, tyranny, aristocracy, and monarchy. Although dictatorship and democracy were certainly distinct from one another, they were not complete opposites.[3]

The identification of a democracy/dictatorship dichotomy and its association with a more fundamental good/evil divide is the result of a historical development, not a timeless truth.

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[1] Wilbur Burton, "Fascism and the Monroe Doctrine", *The Spectator*, 160-2719 (February 4, 1938) 178.
[2] See chapter 4, page 153.
[3] Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, democracy, and American popular culture. Envisioning the totalitarian enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill and London 2003) 1-2.

Indeed, during the 1920s, American intellectuals held a fairly benign view of strong men and dictators in "backward" countries. After the stock market crash of 1929, as capitalist democracies around the world struggled to survive economically and even politically, the idea that dynamic dictatorships, such as that in Mussolini's Italy, were the way of the future gained even more ground. From its high watermark of around 1930, however, the regard for dictatorship in the United States took an ever accelerating plunge. The catalysis of this development was the increasingly blatant aggression shown by the European dictatorships, primarily Italy and Germany and, to an extent, Soviet Russia. Another development in the history of the idea of dictatorship was that a new category of dictatorship was proposed in Italy: This was the notion of the "Totalitarian State" which, briefly summarized, was a particularly dynamic, aggressive, "modern" form of dictatorship which sought "total" domination over its subjects. Americans eventually applied the term not just to Italian Fascism, but also to German Nazism and even to Soviet Communism. From roughly 1935 to 1939, the American image of Totalitarianism was shaped by the persecutions, show trials, and international aggression of the European dictatorships.[4]

It so happened that the Central American *continuismo* campaigns of the second half of the 1930s coincided with these ominous international events. While Ubico, Carías, and Martínez were securing their continued rule, Italy occupied Ethiopia, Germany remilitarized the Rhineland, and Japan invaded China. The concurrence of these events, combined with the apparent sympathy of the isthmian regimes for Italian and Spanish Fascism, raised the question of whether the Central American governments were somehow part of a global trend in favor of totalitarian dictatorships.

This question was decided in favor of the caudillos, who were eventually adopted into the United Nations alliance. American historians have generally praised the Good Neighbor policy for enabling a close working relationship between the United States and Latin America during the Second World War. The situation during the First World War had been quite the opposite. Moreover, U.S.-Latin American relations had grown colder after that war as intervention became a contentious issue. The initiatives of the Roosevelt administration are said to have turned that state of affairs around.

1 The Good Neighbor and Fascism

In December 1941, nine Central American and Caribbean nations followed the example of the United States by declaring war on the Axis. They were only the forerunners, because, eventually, all Latin American countries joined the war on the side of their northern neighbor. This was a remarkable development considering the fact that all the major nations in Latin America (except Brazil) remained neutral during World War I. Moreover, Latin Americans long considered the United States—the so-called "Colossus of the North"—a threat to their own independence. Naturally, the Roosevelt

[4] Edward A. Purcell, *The crisis of democratic theory. Scientific naturalism and the problem of value* (Lexington 1973); Alpers, *Dictators*; David F. Schmitz, *United States foreign policy toward Fascist Italy, 1920-1940* (PhD Thesis: New Brunswick 1985).

administration considered the wartime alliance with Latin America to be the crowning achievement of its Good Neighbor policy, which allayed Latin fears about American intentions and cleared the way for cooperation. As Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle noted after the outbreak of the war: "The heartening thing (…) is the swift and virtually anonymous support from all of the republics of this hemisphere. If ever a policy paid dividends, the Good Neighbor Policy has. So far, they are sticking with us with scarcely a break".[5]

Many historians agree with Berle's assessment that the Good Neighbor laid the groundwork for the wartime cooperation.[6] In his classic study on the Good Neighbor policy, Bryce Wood argued: "Just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, then, it may be said that the United States had established, with the assistance of certain Latin American states, an unprecedented set of relationships productive of a nearly solidary American attitude toward threats from without".[7] The Roosevelt administration's strict adherence to nonintervention; rhetorical commitment to the ideal of pan-American solidarity and equality; and encouragement of reciprocal trade agreements significantly improved South American perceptions of the United States. By the end of the decade "the northern colossus no longer looked quite so much like Latin America's natural enemy".[8]

During the first term of the Roosevelt administration—while the Depression was still the number one concern and free-trade enthusiast Cordell Hull was in charge of foreign policy—Washington put its improved relation with Latin America to good use by stimulating a hemisphere-wide reciprocal trade program. During the second term however, the attention of the administration turned to the threat emanating from European fascism. Roosevelt himself got more and more involved in the execution of foreign policy and, in the Western Hemisphere, this meant that interest in trade agreements dwindled and the greatest stress was put on a policy of building inter-American solidarity against foreign threats. [9]

Too often ignored, however, is the fact that the Latinos were not passive receivers of Good Neighborliness. Martínez in particular was an adept student of the policy and appropriated it for his own purposes. While the general prepared for his own *continuismo* campaign toward the end of the decade, his regime further dramatized the neighborly relations between Washington and San Salvador for local and international audiences. Ubico, Carías, and Martínez successfully won the hearts and minds of American diplomats with a determined campaign that associated their governments with American goals and objectives, despite the ideological divides.

[5] Quoted in Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 96.
[6] For further discussion on this theme, see Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 91-108; Gellman, *Good Neighbor diplomacy*, 121-126 and Michael J. Kryzanek, *U.S.-Latin American Relations* (3rd edition: Westport, CT, and London 1996) 59-62.
[7] Wood, *The Making*, 334.
[8] Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 94.
[9] Leonard, *Latin America*, 1-8; Howard Jablon, *Crossroads of Decision. The State Department and Foreign Policy, 1933-1937* (Lexington, KT, 1983) particularly chapter 1 and 5.

The fact that the U.S.-Central American connection was a two-way street has been remarked upon in several excellent studies. Frederick Weaver, for example, notes that while "it is still true that many acting in the name of the United States have been complicit in what have frequently had very unpleasant consequences", he is also "impressed by some Central Americans' ability to manipulate U.S. fears and acquisitiveness for their own ends".[10] The ability of local actors to appropriate the goals or terms of U.S. policy is also the topic of some research. Thomas Leonard, a specialist in U.S.-Central American affairs, recounts how the leaders of Central America represented the signing of Hull's trade pacts as a sign of U.S. support for their regimes. Discussing the Cold War era, Joseph and Spenser note that: "Not infrequently, Latin American states used a Cold War rationale, generated outside the region, to wage war against their citizens, to gain or perpetuate power, and to create or justify authoritarian military regimes".[11]

When studying the legations' archives, it is not always easy to ascertain who manipulated who. Perhaps it is even somewhat misleading to put the matter in such terms, because it implies a degree of planning and purposefulness that may not have existed in fact. Concerning the subject of the next twenty pages, which involve many people accusing many other people of being closet fascists, there was doubtlessly as much frantic mudslinging as there was determined deception. However, the years before the outbreak of the Second World War represent an excellent case study to investigate how comparatively new terms like fascist and Good Neighbor were defined and redefined both by Americans and Central Americans.

2. THE SPECTER OF FASCISM

The rise of Fascism was a point of major debate in Central America throughout the late 1930s. But what this new term and the dangers that it implied meant in the local context remained a contested issue for some years. Initially, local opposition groups appropriated the term to label their enemies: the Central American dictators. American observers, most notably the United States press, but also the local legations and the State Department, initially shared the opposition's concern for the supposedly Fascist tendencies in Central American politics. By the end of the decade, however, the caudillos successfully turned the tables on their opponents: By the start of the Second World War, the Central American governments were identified in Washington as the first line of defense against Fascist intrusions in the hemisphere.

2.1 The opposition

From the early 1930s onward, actual repression—or fear thereof—in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras produced a steady stream of refugees. This was not a homogenous group, either politically or socially. It included aristocrats and high army

[10] Weaver, *Inside the Volcano*.
[11] Leonard, *Central America*, xii-xv and 104-108; Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Spenser eds., *In from the cold. Latin America's new encounters with the Cold War* (Durham and London 2008) 5.

officers who were members of opposition parties; conscientious objectors to the continuismo campaigns who had been high- or midlevel employees of government or public institutions; and simple *campesinos* who had fled the violence of the 1932 *Matanza*. Members of the first group formed stable exile communities in Panama, San José, Mexico, New Orleans, and New York City by the late 1930s. It was said that in Mexico, dozens of seats in local *cantinas* were occupied by as many disgruntled *politicos* and generals from Central America.[12]

Those who reached the safety of the more liberal states surrounding Central America were the lucky ones: oppositionists who fell into the hands of one of the dictators were submitted to their mercy. Whether mercy was granted or not depended on circumstances. If Ubico had a score to settle with Martínez, he might help the latter's opponents. If not, he was liable to solicit his neighbor's good-will by punishing his enemies. A group of Salvadoran peasants that reached Honduras in 1932, for example, was relocated to distant regions by the Carías regime and never heard from again: "[I]t is not known whether they have survived", reported the legation almost ten years later.[13] In August 1937, the Honduran rebel leader Umaña was captured in Guatemala and shot "while attempting to escape".[14]

In Mexico and Costa Rica, however, political exiles were fairly safe and generally free from government censorship. It was primarily from the capitals of these countries that a continuous barrage of propaganda against the caudillos was emitted throughout the 1930s. Interestingly, such propaganda was not only directed at compatriots, but also at the U.S. legations, the State Department, or to Franklin Roosevelt personally. Despite Washington's stress on non-intervention over the past years, the idea of the United States as a crusader for democracy was still alive.

During the early 1930s, opposition letters addressed to the Americans focused on constitutions and treaties and, of course, on how these were trampled by the Ubico, Martínez, and Carías regimes. Considering that the writers of these letters had years of experience with the pro-constitutionalist interventions of the Republican administrations, it is not surprising that oppositionists expected this theme to strike a chord with the *yanquis*. For example, Angel Zúñiga Huete, who voluntarily left Honduras after Carías' election victory, had lived through several episodes of U.S. intervention in favor of the 1923 Treaty. During Carías' continuismo campaign, he spammed the State Department with lengthy and eloquent letters on the constitutional articles that were crushed in his homeland. His personal history with the Americans did not prepare him for the new age of nonintervention that was taking shape. For years, Zúñiga Huete wrote about treaties

[12] For example: Harold A. Collins (U.S. Chargé d'Affairs a.i. to Costa Rica) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1329, February 5, 1937, PR Honduras, Box 23, cl. 800: Costa Rica.
[13] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1530, August 19, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 68, cl. 800.B: Relations between Communists and Nazis.
[14] Cramp to the Secretary of State, Despatch 764, August 9, 1937, PR Honduras, Box 23, cl. 800: Honduras.

and constitutions that had long been abandoned both in Washington and in Tegucigalpa.[15]

With the rise of Fascism in Europe however, the theme of democracy started to play an ever increasing role in American newspapers and in the speeches of American statesmen. In this pro-democratic and anti-Fascist rhetoric, the Central American opposition movements found a new parlance to translate their concerns about local matters to the Yankees.

The opposition's arguments did not undergo fundamental changes throughout the 1930s. Stated in neutral terms, it objected to the fact that no honest elections had been held since Ubico, Martínez, and Carías came to power; that these gentlemen changed the constitutions to remain in power; and that violent and non-violent means were employed by these regimes to keep opponents quiet. As such, the situation described in the writings of Central American oppositionists—while objectionable in itself—was not different in any meaningful way from the situation that had existed under earlier dictators and caudillos. Yet, by the late 1930s Central American oppositionists found a sympathetic audience for their writings by representing the authoritarian governments in their home countries as Fascist dictatorships.

The Honduran Liberal Party was particularly adept at appropriating the language of Democracy vs. Fascism to translate its concern about Carías' growing power to Washington. In one representative letter, Angel Zúñiga Huete claimed that "the Dictator Carías is in accord with the totalitarian doctrines of the Dictators Hitler and Mussolini, and (…) democracy in Honduras has been exterminated". The Liberal further claimed that President Roosevelt was "a true democrat, who is interested, according to his declarations and those of Mr. Hull, and Sumner Welles, in that which prevails in the Governments of America which sustain democratic doctrines and do not permit exotic doctrines such as Nazis, communists, etc."[16] Whatever declarations Zúñiga Huete referred to were likely to have been intended for European audiences. Central American opposition groups, however, were quick to point out that the ideals of democracy could only have universal application. As Venancio Callejas, a Honduran Nationalist who had broken with Carías during the continuismo campaign, argued in a personal letter to Roosevelt:

> If the United States actually believes[,] as you have stated Mr. President, in Democracy, in Liberty[,] and in the blessings conferred by Peace (…) we feel absolutely certain that the Government of the United States will flatly refuse to extend recognition (…) to the Dictatorship which General Carías pretends to establish by force on Honduras, against the express wish of the People of Honduras, and clearly violating our National Institutions[. T]here is absolutely

[15] Argueta, *Carías*, 295-299

[16] El Comité Central del Partico Liberal Hondureño to Erwin, July 4, 1938 enclosed in: Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 362, July 12, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 35, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

> no means of reconciling your noble[,] straightforward Declarations, with an Act of Recognition of that anti-democratic, illegal regime…[17]

The high-sounding words of men like Zúñiga-Huete and Callejas—who did not exactly have clean consciences themselves—did not go unnoticed. Historian Kenneth Grieb argued that the idea of a Fascist threat to Central America was "a masterstroke of propaganda", for it was quickly picked up by the American press.[18]

2.2 The American press

Grieb identified a "myth" of a "Central American dictator's league" in the American press during the 1930s. Newspapers and magazines of an impeccable reputation reported throughout 1937 and 1938 that the dictatorial regimes of Ubico, Martínez, Carías, and Somoza were in a secret alliance to keep each other in power and to suppress democratically-inclined opposition. There was no direct proof for the existence of such an alliance and the notion that it did exist was based entirely on circumstantial evidence: rumors spread by political exiles; isolated instances of actual cooperation between the isthmian republics; and the caudillos' seemingly ominous international acts, such as Guatemala's and Salvador's early recognition of Franco's regime and their subsequent retirement from the League of Nations.[19]

In fact, Grieb wrote, a Central American dictator's league never existed. It might have appeared that the regimes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua were ideologically related, but in reality they did not abandon old rivalries and jealousies. Ubico, for example, was determined to dominate his neighbors, but was actively opposed by Martínez, while Somoza also made occasional claims to the leadership of the old Central American Unionist movement. Honduras was caught in the middle of the expansionist ambitions of its neighbors and made frantic attempts to remain on good terms with both of its strong northern neighbors. At the same time however, it was also engaged in a border conflict with Nicaragua, which, despite U.S. attempts at mediation, dragged on for decades. Under such circumstances, cooperation between the dictators was never realized.[20]

Simultaneously, it was reported in *The New York Times*, that the four Central American dictators had "joined in a protective alliance against political enemies". The recent continuismo campaigns figured prominently in the New York Times' description of the local dictatorships, asserting that:

> matters are moving for the first time in history toward continuing dictatorships of the Fascist type in this section of Central America, where two Presidents [i.e. Ubico and Carías] already are serving their second terms in office, contrary to their Constitutions, and a third [i.e. Martínez] is considering the

[17] Venancio Callejas to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 30, 1936 enclosed in Callejas to Keena, December 11, 1936, PR Honduras, Box 8, Vol. IX, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[18] Kenneth J. Grieb, "The Myth of a Central American Dictator's League", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 10:2 (November 1978) 329-345.
[19] *idem*, 329 & 330.
[20] *Idem*.

> same action. This is unprecedented in this part of the world, where United States influence has been great.

The last sentence is especially significant. It gives witness to the assumption that the United States would not allow the existence of dictatorships in its "backyard" if that could be prevented. And since it was unthinkable that locals could successfully stand up to the United States, it was assumed that a more powerful, sinister force was behind this development. Therefore, a link with Fascism was imagined, even though the evidence for such a link was tenuous. When Martínez managed to succeed himself in 1939, *The New York Times* reported that the general had used "methods typical of Hitler and Mussolini" and that "[e]xpert assistance was given to his supporters by Fascists and Nazis". When Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the "anti-Communist" Rome Pact, the *Times* reported that the news was received "with glee" in Central America. Even if the dictators there did not join the Pact, it was obvious that their own League closely mirrored that of the Axis nations and there was "little need" to "take chances with [the] big good neighbor to the north" by formalizing those ties.[21]

That the American press saw a Fascist dictator's league where there was none, is partly explained, Grieb wrote, by the fact that:

> [t]he prevalence of the charges [against Central American dictators] was coincidental with alarm in the North American press about the spread of Fascism. The resulting sensitivity caused Yankees to perceive 'Fascist influence' throughout the world, much as in a subsequent era they would do the same with Communism. This mentality rendered the North American press susceptible to tales of a Central American Dictator's League, which was presumed to be the extension of some vast plot hatched in Germany or Italy, since dictatorship was equated with Fascism in the Yankee mind.

Claiming that "dictatorship was equated with Fascism in the Yankee mind" was stretching the point. Mussolini, for example, was a respected foreign head-of-state in the United States during the 1920s. However, throughout the years 1936 to 1937 at least, the relationship between Central America dictatorship and Fascism was hotly debated at the American legations.

2.3 The Legations

Ubico was initially regarded as the legitimate and rightful president of Guatemala and all his minor sins were disregarded in the light of his honest and progressive administration. But from 1936 onward, American diplomats at the legation began to report the anti-liberal aspects of Ubico's reign. Increasingly, words like "regimented", "dictatorial", and even "totalitarian" were used to typify his administration. These were not value-neutral terms. While a "strong", "firm", or even "heavy-handed" government was deemed a

[21] "A Dictatorship Belt", *NYT* (September 5, 1937) 98; "Dictators agree in Latin America", *NYT* (July 20, 1937) 18; "Salvador extends President's term 6 years", *NYT* (January 5, 1939) 1; "Pact stirs Central America", *NYT* (November 14, 1937) 68. The articles of July 20 and November 14 are also mentioned in Grieb, "Myth". Reiner Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich und Lateinamerika. Die Deutsche Politik gegenüber Süd- und Mittelamerika, 1939-1942* (Düsseldorf) 27-33 shows that Germany had little interest to expand the anti-Comintern Pact to Latin America. Neither were Latin American States much interested to join the alliance.

stabilizing factor in a country that was considered to be plagued by "graft-hungry men" and "political passions", a totalitarian dictatorship was something else altogether.[22]

Earlier in the decade, Ubico was on very good personal terms with minister Whitehouse, but after 1934, the caudillo became increasingly secretive and withdrawn. The American legation noted on several occasions that Ubico was not the congenial man he was during the first years of his reign and that it had become very difficult to establish any kind of contact with him. A 1937 memorandum established that:

> [u]pon his entry into office, he [Ubico] was more friendly and congenial than he is at the present time. This attitude is believed to be due to a loss of confidence in many of the persons who surround him. He is extremely high tempered and very reluctant to take or allow advice. This is considered his one weak point.[23]

Such behavior, one can speculate, probably developed during the years 1934-1937, as the general schemed to continue himself in power.

It is likely that Ubico's aloofness contributed to the legation's suspicions about his alleged ties with European Fascism. At the very least, the distance that Ubico put between himself and the legation prevented the Americans from hearing his version of many developments. Concurrently, the new minister to Guatemala, Fay Allen Des Portes, had to rely on the outward appearances of Ubico's government. Throughout the year 1937 he became very concerned about Ubico's dictatorial measures. In January of that year, the minister noted that Ubico "is apparently reactionary to the point where he favors strongly the dictatorial methods of Fascism". He continued that Ubico "has little use for pure democracy in Guatemala and he is probably inclined to view with a certain measure of suspicion the acts or policies of any Governments of liberal tendencies".[24]

While Ubico seemed to distance himself from the American legation, he exchanged tokens of affectation with Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler: Guatemala was one of the first governments to recognize the rebel "government" of General Franco and when Germany left the League of Nations in October 1936, Guatemala followed suit some weeks later.[25] In June 1937, Des Portes reported that Ubico had received a decoration from the King of Italy. "The matter is of significance", the minister wrote, "as an indication of the orientation which has recently been noted in the policies and prejudices of President Ubico." The president, the report continued, was:

> [s]trongly attracted by and a great admirer of certain of the dictatorial Governments in Europe, and his own administration reflects the policies and

[22] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 267, June 9, 1937, (M1280, Roll 4) Jorge Ubico: 652-658; DesPortes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 371, August 30, 1937, M1289, Roll 2) Political Affairs 1308; Des Portes to Welles, July 17, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 9, Separate file, marked "Des Portes"; Des Portes to Welles, August 6, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 9, Separate file, marked "Des Portes".

[23] Unknwon author to Des Portes, Memorandum on present conditions in Guatemala, April 24, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 1, cl. 800: Guatemala.

[24] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 174, February 2, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 1, cl. 800: Guatemala .

[25] Welles to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, March 7, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.

> characteristics of such Governments. His prompt recognition of the Franco Government in Spain, his growing friendliness with Germany and Italy, and his correspondingly intense antagonism to liberalism in any form are straws which indicate the direction of the wind.[26]

As Franco set up his Fascist government in Spain, Carías destroyed the constitution of Honduras. It proved tempting for minister Keena to connect the two events and to compare the factional squabbles of Honduras with the dramatic divide between Right and Left in Europe: "The conflict between the Fascists and Communist ideas of government has its repercussions in Central America", Keena reported, "and translated to this area finds a lineup with Mexico definitely to the left and Costa Rica partially; Guatemala and El Salvador distinctly to the right and Honduras and Nicaragua now to the right but both facing possible conflicts". According to the minister, this division was also visible within Honduras itself. Since the Liberals were not able to connect their opposition to Carías with a greater cause that could attract a broader following, they may now be experimenting with Leftist ideologies:

> The Government of President Carías is strongly anti-Communist. In reflection of the alignment of forces in Spain this naturally throws the Liberal Party, which is seeking a cause to espouse in addition to its claim for the continuance of the Constitution of 1924, which, so far, has not awakened any fighting sentiment in the country, into the Communist fold since they must be diametrically opposed to the Government and also as partisanship of that idea appears to present the only opportunity they might have for obtaining the money and assistance [from foreign sources] which would be needed to overthrow the Government.

"[T]he next conflict for power in Honduras", Keena concluded, "may be on the lines now being so clearly marked out in Europe".[27]

Keena's predictions were not immediately adopted by his successor, John D. Erwin. In fact, the first couple of months of Erwin's service in Honduras were uneventful, if, at times, frustrating. The legation dutifully followed central policy as it tried to establish a working relation with the Carías government on inter-American neutrality and as it attempted to bring Honduras and Nicaragua closer together on a long-pending boundary dispute which endangered inter-American solidarity. Both were arduous tasks as the tiny Honduran Foreign Ministry was slow to answer legation queries and the government as a whole did not budge from its intransigent stance on the boundary dispute. Frustration at the American legation slowly built up. The inability or unwillingness of the Carías administration to work with the legation on important inter-American projects were interpreted as indicators of its provincialism, backwardness, and lack of concern for anything but the survival of the regime. When combined with the latent concern over Carías' dictatorial methods during the *continuismo* campaign, these apprehensions

[26] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 267, June 9, 1937, (M1280, Roll 4) Jorge Ubico: 652-658.
[27] Keena to the Secretary of State, Despatch 557, November 13, 1936, Box 8, cl. 800: Honduras.

caused the legation to define the Honduran government as an archaic 19th century caudillo regime.

In August 1938, first secretary William Cramp wrote a damning report on the Carías administration for its uncompromising position in the Honduran-Nicaraguan boundary. The administration, according to Cramp, had "fallen into such provincialism and corruption as might have been expected at the beginning or the century, but even for Central America is now somewhat unusual".[28] The government's backtracking caused the secretary many headaches:

> The Legation has had the greatest difficulty in obtaining action on even informal routine matters. Replies to oral or written requests are not received for from one to three months, and sometimes never, in spite of repeated reminders. Favorable action, as promised in satisfactory replies, is seldom actually carried out.[29]

The legation was obviously considerably embarrassed by this situation, since it interfered with its own efficiency. This situation significantly influenced its evaluation of the regime: "[This] is not a Government of the people, but a small group of incapable, dishonest and extremely provincial politicians controlling the primitive capital of a small, backward Central American Republic".[30] Although Cramp aimed most of his antagonism at Carías' ministers, who "have no interest in the fate of Honduras and are swayed purely by hope of personal gain and glory", the president himself was not free of blame:

> [He] has the typical Indian characteristics of equivocation whenever possible. He dislikes decisions, but, when his hand is forced, his judgment is based entirely upon political expediency. He appears to me to feel that his incumbency of the presidency is far from secure and that he can only stay in office by holding the reins of Government with an iron hand and keeping the entire Executive Power therein. He apparently trusts no one, not even his own Cabinet, and the ever-growing discontent throughout the country with his regime has brought to him the realization that he can continue in office only by strong dictatorial methods and never through popular demand.[31]

Up to about November 1939, Erwin reported with some regularity on the government's laxness, corruption, provincialism, and dictatorial practices.[32] So when

[28] Cramp to the Secretary of State, Despatch 405, August 17, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras.
[29] *Idem*.
[30] Cramp to the Secretary of State, Despatch 410, September 2, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras.
[31] Cramp to the Secretary of State, Despatch 405, August 17, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras. The Department initially responded positively to this analysis by Cramp, noting that it would be "of assistance to the Department in evaluating the future political developments in Honduras". Adolf A. Berle (Acting Secretary of State) to Cramp, Despatch 103, September 17, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras.
[32] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 504, November 12, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 505, November 15, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 504, December 14, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 881, December 2, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1939/I, cl. 500: Economic Conferences; Unknown author, Memorandum of Conversation with

Carías' supporters, toward the end of 1938, announced that the president's tenure would be extended for a second time, they could not count on Erwin's sympathy. The government itself, confident of its powerful position, handled the issue with a matter-of-fact attitude and pushed a bill through congress within less than a month which allowed Carías to rule until 1944. This still was not fast enough, however, to avoid the moral indignation of the American minister. Drawing implicit comparisons with the European dictatorships, Erwin reported to the Department that public support for Carías' continuismo could only be explained by the secret police's silencing of the opposition and by prevalence of official propaganda which whipped up the sentiments of the uninformed masses: "Backward and unprogressive as it may be, Honduras certainly has not failed to take advantage of modern inventions and propaganda tricks in whipping up sentiment among the masses for CONTINUISMO".[33]

For many observers outside of El Salvador, there seemed little doubt that Martínez favored Fascism. The Salvadoran chief was often mentioned in one breath with his presumably Fascist-minded neighbors. In 1937, for example, Des Portes noted that "There appears a growing sentiment that president Ubico of Guatemala, Carías of Honduras, and Martínez of El Salvador, are leaning more and more toward the Mussolini and Hitler form of dictatorship, a sentiment which would seem to be founded on undeniable proof".[34] Similarly, Laurence Duggan of the Department noted that "the Governments of Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras are Fascist in character and sympathy, if not in name".[35] Such assertions were based on, or at least confirmed by, the American press, Salvadoran opposition groups, and actions by the Salvadoran government—particularly its early recognition of Franco's rebel government.[36]

In 1938, the year that Martínez followed in his neighbor's footsteps by starting a campaign for his continuance in office, rumors about the general's Fascist sympathies were particularly widespread. The British chargé in Guatemala wrote Des Portes that the Salvadoran continuismo campaign provided "further evidence that Martínez has turned

Don Fernando Lardizibal at the American Legation, November 24, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1939/I, cl. 500: Economic Conferences; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 685, May 20, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/II, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, dispatch 698, June 2, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/II, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 885, December 7, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/II, cl. 800: Honduras. Continuismo.

[33] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 905, December 18, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/II, cl. 800: Honduras. Continuismo.

[34] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 371, August 30, 1937, M1289, Roll 2) Political Affairs 1308.

[35] Duggan to Welles, March 9, 1937, Lot Files, Records of the Office of American Republic Affairs, its predecessors, and its successors (henceforth ARA), Entry 211: Memorandums Relating to General Latin American Affairsm January 4, 1937 to December 31, 1947 (henceforth Entry 211), Box 2, Folder marked January to June 1937.

[36] "Salvadorean" to Walter W. Hoffman (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador), September 17, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; and Rafael Menendez et al. to Frazer, January 6, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: Political Affairs III.

Fascist in the letter and the spirit", a view that the American minister seemed to have subscribed to.[37] Meanwhile, the U.S. military attachés to Central America had been worried for some time about Salvador's use of Italian military airplanes and in 1939 captain Lamson-Scribner noted that, besides being morally questionable, Martínez' continuismo probably enjoyed active support from local Nazis.[38]

The American legation in Salvador was surprisingly philosophical about Martínez' supposedly Fascist inclinations, although there were a few acute "black scares" at the legation throughout the years. In August 1938, for example, the Americans were anxious about the inclusion of an Italian national in Martínez' retinue during a campaign trip. It was soon determined, however, that the Italian in question had imposed himself on some officials in Martínez' following and had no personal connections to the president.[39] The matter was soon forgotten and, overall, Martínez continued to enjoy the legation's sympathy. After the general was reelected to office in 1939, minister Frazer's only comment was that the president's political philosophy was akin to that of "certain" European leaders. Until about 1941, this was as close as Frazer got to accusing Martínez of Fascist sympathies.[40] Why this was so will be discussed in the following section.

While the Department itself was not particularly interested in Central American affairs during the late 1930s, reports about Fascist influences in the highest echelons of foreign governments did cause some anxiety. The example of the Spanish Civil War in particular, raised concerns that a similar ideological conflict might erupt between the Central American dictators and their leftist neighbor to the north: Mexico. In March, 1937, Laurence Duggan, a close collaborator of Assistant Secretary Welles, complained that Ubico had a "Communist fear psychosis" which made the latter unreasonably fearful of supposedly "Communist" influences from Mexico. The matter was serious because inter-American solidarity under U.S. leadership was high on the list of foreign policy objectives. American attempts to temper Central American fears about Mexico, however, had come to naught. The Mexicans, Duggan wrote, were probably blissfully unaware of the fact

[37] H.H.S. Birch (British Minister to Guatemala) to Des Portes, August 18, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: El Salvador; Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 671, August 19, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[38] Lt. Col. J.B. Pate (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Secretary of War, Report 4,215, March 7, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 14, Vol. VII, cl. 820.02; Pate to the Secretary of War, Report 4,228, March 11, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 14, Vol. VII, cl. 820.02; Pate to the Secretary of War, Report 4,280, March 11, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 14, Vol. VII, cl. 820.02; Capt. F.M. Lamson-Scribner (U.S. Naval Attaché to Guatemala) to Frazer, January 13, 1938, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 1; Lamson-Scribner to Frazer, January 20, 1938, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 1.

[39] Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 286, August 24, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

[40] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 478, February 24, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: Political Affairs III. However, also note: Hoffman to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1118, October 15, 1937, PR EL Salvador, Box 9, Vol. V, cl. 700 Relations of State. General and Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 62, February 9, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

that its publications were considered revolutionary propaganda in Central America and "[i]n connection with such consideration as may be given this question, it should not be forgotten that the Governments of Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras are Fascist in character and sympathy, if not in name, and that the Governments of the first three named States have already recognized the 'Government' of general Franco".[41]

2.4 The Dictators

Were the Central American dictators closet Fascists? Taken as a whole, the literature on Central American history provides no conclusive evidence, *pro* or *contra*, for the alleged Fascist sympathies of Ubico, Martínez, or Carías. Although there are studies that describe the influence of Nazis and Fascists in Latin America during the War[42], there are no in-depth studies that show how the European ideologies were perceived or received by Central American leaders themselves.

There were certainly outward *parallels* between the European Fascist regimes and the Central American dictatorships. Most obviously, both were authoritarian, state-centered, and single party political systems that employed the secret service and the army to enforce their rule. On the economic level, the Fascist and the caudillo governments both had a conception of modernization that focused on state-directed development through corporations. The object of modernization under both systems was understood to be a strengthening of the state, not a reform of the social structure. Both the Fascist and the Central American idea of social stratification were based on a hierarchy of race. And even though the Central American idea of race was more traditional and less Spenserian than that of the Fascists, anti-Semitism was rather pronounced in Central America.

Also, the foreign policies of the caudillos at times appeared to favor the Fascist nations. Germany was an important market for Central American coffee and many Central American nations accepted the Aski mark system of bartering, giving the Germans an even bigger stake in the Central American economies—sometimes at the expense of the United States. Italian efforts to revive its armament industry by vigorously pushing its weapons on the international arms markets were modestly successful in Central America, where the Salvadoran government bought several airplanes and pieces of artillery at discount prices. Meanwhile, Franco's ideology of 'hispanidad' and his 'Falange' party naturally appealed to the culturally Hispanic elites of Central America. Besides a traditional interest for the politics of the "mother country", Central American elites sympathized with Franco's fight against the Communist specter. Concurrently,

[41] Duggan to Welles, March 9, 1937, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 2, Folder marked January to June 1937 .

[42] Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich*; Pommerin, "Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland und Lateinamerika, 1933-1945", in: Karl Kohut et al. eds., *Deutsche in Lateinamerika – Lateinamerika in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main 1996) 398-406; Günter Kahle, "Deutsche Landsknechte, Legionäre und Militärinstrukteure in Lateinamerika", in: Kohut, *Deutsche in Lateinamerika*, 35-47; Bratzel and Leonard, *Latin America during World War II*; Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*.

Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were among the first nations to extend diplomatic recognition to Franco's rebel government.

It should not be surprising, then, that some historians have described the isthmian dictators as active supporters of Fascism. Perhaps most recently, John Bratzel noted that Ubico and Martínez regarded Fascism as a positive alternative political system[43], a claim supported in several earlier historical studies.[44] Elam, in a study on the Central American military, claimed that "in the period 1920-1965, military officers attracted to corporate, fascist, or military populist political models temporarily dominated governmental institutions" in several countries, including Guatemala and El Salvador.[45] In a historical study on El Salvador, James Dunkerley took the claim that Central American dictators sympathized with Fascism furthest by stating that Martínez was an "unashamed admirer of Hitler and Mussolini".[46]

While there are enough parallels between the Fascist and caudillo political system and enough outward signs of sympathy and limited cooperation between Central American and European Fascist governments, two important questions require further exploration: Firstly, if Central American leaders sympathized with or admired European leaders, did that mean that they were firm adherents of the Fascist ideology? Secondly, could the caudillos in any way be described as proxies of the European Fascist regimes or did their sympathy for certain European leaders translate to a viable security threat for the United States? The American press and the Central American opposition would have answered both of these questions with a solid "yes". Even the American diplomatic corps entertained some suspicions in this same direction. But do these suspicions reflect reality?

With regard to the first question, several historians have offered some important evaluations of the caudillos' apparent regard for Fascism. Thomas Leonard, one of the foremost experts on U.S.-Central American relations, argued that many of the supposedly Fascist tendencies of Ubico's regime "were peculiar to the nature of Guatemalan politics". With regard to El Salvador, Leonard stated that Americans overestimated the prestige of Fascism in that nation because they "did not consider [Martínez'] Fascist sympathies within the context of Salvadoran nationalism or as a response to previous U.S. interference in El Salvador's domestic affairs".[47] In other words, Central American statesmen admired those aspects of European Fascist governments that were already "peculiar" to their own style of government, such as a strong demand for order and material progress. This did not translate to a complete

[43] John F. Bratzel, "Introduction", in: Bratzel and Thomas Leonard eds., *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham, MD, 2007) 9.
[44] "Guatemala", in: John Booth, Christine J. Wade & Thomas Walker, *Understanding Central America* (4th edition: 2006) 115-116; Lindo-Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, 82-86; Parkman, *Non-violent insurrection*, 28.
[45] Robert V. Elam, "El Salvador, 1840-1927", in: Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies eds., *The Politics of antipolitics: The military in Latin America* (Lincoln 1978) 52-57, there 57.
[46] Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 33.
[47] Leonard, *Central America*, 109-110.

understanding of, or adherence to the Fascist program of virulent racism, glorification of violence, brutal international competition, etc.

Kenneth J. Grieb and Thomas J. Dodd, the foremost American bibliographers of Jorge Ubico and Tiburcio Carías, respectively, offered an even more nuanced picture of the political ideas of these statesmen. Dodd argued that even though the political philosophers in Carías' party considered Mussolini's Italy as a model for establishing order, other "Fascist-like" aspects of the Honduran regime were actually based on regional sources which were more evidently relevant to the Honduran experience. Carías' ideas on order and progress, and the important function of the state in achieving these goals, were more akin to the ideas of Auguste Comte—whose philosophy played a significant role in the Central American Liberal tradition—than to the practice of Mussolini. Hostility toward democratic practice reflected Honduras' historical experience with the failure of limited democratic experiments during the Great Depression. *Personalista* rule was based on the regional examples of Plutarco Eías Calles in México, Jorge Ubico in Guatemala, and Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador, not on Hitler or Mussolini. Even Franklin Roosevelt and Ramsey McDonald were considered more appropriate models of strong executive power during a time of economic crisis than the European dictators. Lastly, the idea of a corporate state, which appeared so attractive to some of Carías' ideologues, was based on the Mexican revolutionary experience, not on the Fascist model.[48]

Grieb added to these observations an analysis of Guatemala's international perspective and its differences with that of the United States. While the North Americans focused on Hitler, arguably the harshest and most dangerous Fascist dictator from an American perspective, Guatemalans focused on Franco and Mussolini. Latin American culture was more intricately tied to that of Southern Europe, especially Spain, the "mother country". So it was primarily Franco, not Hitler, who was regarded as the model of Fascism in Guatemala. Ubico respected Franco's military background and leadership style and sympathized with his fight against Communism. This is what Fascism meant to the Guatemalan statesman. As a former cabinet minister of Ubico later told Grieb: "General Ubico did not recognize the Franco government because of any ideological sympathy, but simply because it was a military regime. General Ubico had a great appreciation for a military career". By contrast, Ubico considered Hitler a "peasant" who was far inferior to his colleagues in southern Europe.[49]

The files of the American legation in Guatemala also offer an interesting sidelight on Guatemalans' distaste for the German variant of Fascism. There were two groups of Germans in Guatemala: The older families of long residence who had become part of the coffee aristocracy and the lower class newcomers who had not achieved any kind of economic or social stature yet. The older Germans, many of whom had left the *Heimat* when it was still an empire, found the ideas of the Nazi Party distasteful and considered its very existence a symptom of the disease of the factionalized Weimar Republic.

[48] Dodd, *Carías*, 85-86 and 111-112.
[49] Grieb, *Guatemalan caudillo*, 248-249.

Members of the second group, however, were attracted to the Nazi Party, because it offered them a chance to increase their prestige and stature by climbing the Party's ranks. Correspondingly, it was the young German "upstarts" who managed the Nazi Party in Guatemala. The newfound confidence and self-importance of the young Nazis affronted the sensibilities of the Guatemalan aristocracy, both German and native. Guatemalan society ostracized a local Nazi leader, for example, because he had presumed to demonstrate his seniority over the German minister by having the distinguished old gentleman sit and wait in the anteroom of his office for two hours before seeing him.

Added to the arrogance of local Nazi "upstarts" was the racial component of Nazi teachings. It was well-known in Guatemala that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had allotted an inferior place to the "Latin races". While this was enough reason for many Guatemalans to look down on the German variant of Fascism, the racism expressed by young Nazis in Guatemala was even harder to swallow. One local incident, which carried much more weight in Guatemala than any news that could have come from Europe, involved a German Party member who refused to offer his seat to a colored Guatemalan lady at a society *dansant*. The incident caused a scandal in local society and it was said that Ubico himself was considerably dismayed. According to the American legation, the president was "proud of his racial heritage" and profoundly shocked by the behavior of local Nazis.[50]

It appears then that such sympathies as Central American statesmen may have entertained for Fascism were rather superficial; they were based more on outward similarities between Southern European Fascism and *caudillismo*—authoritarianism and a strong demand for order and national progress—than on a shared body of concepts and ideas. Kenneth Grieb proposed that, for a time, Central American leaders attempted to stay on good terms with both the United States and with the new powers of Europe. On the one hand, the Central American states had considerable economic and cultural ties with Germany, Italy, and Spain. On the other, the United States' attitude toward the European dictators was for a time, in Grieb's words, "torn by indecision and immobilized by internal dissension regarding neutrality". As long as the power of Fascist states appeared to be on the rise and the United States remained tied to its isolationist policy, it was only natural for the isthmian republics to seek the friendship of the European states, leading to the many small signs of friendship described above.[51]

However, at the Pan-American conferences at Buenos Aires in 1936 and Lima in 1938, the United States took on an increasingly hostile posture toward the Fascists. Combined with increasingly belligerent speeches made by Roosevelt, it must have

[50] On the German colony in Guatemala in General, see: Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 21-38.Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 717, October 18, 1938, PR Guatemala, Box 18, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; Lamson-Scribner to Des Portes, December 8, 1938, PR Guatemala, Box 18, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; McKinney to the Secretary of State, Despatch 759, December 13, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.

[51] Grieb, *Guatemalan caudillo*, 250-251.

become increasingly obvious to the Central American chiefs that they would not be able to continue friendly relations with *both* the United States and the Fascist powers.[52] And considering the overwhelming superiority of American power in the region, it was not long before the caudillos chose to play along with the *yanquis*.

3. BECOMING GOOD NEIGHBORS

From roughly 1938 onwards, the legations were exposed to pressure and incentives both from "above" and from "below" to redefine their relationship to the Central American dictatorships. The developing crisis in Europe moved the State Department to renew its interest in Central America. Significantly, its focus was not on Central American politics *per se*, but on the alleged activities of mainly German and Italian nationals there. The Central American presidents, meanwhile, battered the legations with signs of goodwill in an attempt to convince the *yanquis* that they were not Fascist stooges.

3.1 Winning hearts and minds in Guatemala

Three factors contributed to Des Portes' redefinition of Ubico as an opponent of Fascism and a staunch friend of the United States. The first was personal diplomacy; second came their joint fear, encouraged by the State Department, of "exotic" ideologies; and third were the intrigues of Ubico's underlings.

It appears likely that Ubico took the first steps, toward the end of 1937, to regain the affection of the American legation. With the start of a new round of personal diplomacy the general probably wanted to break his increasingly isolated position. In September 1937, Ubico's Chief of Protocol visited Des Portes to inform the minister of Ubico's great admiration for the United States and his personal support for the latest U.S. initiative to loan destroyers to Brazil, which, in the words of the Chief of Protocol, formed a "bulwark of defense (…) against foreign aggression". In the following weeks, the government-controlled press, probably with the "tacit approval" of Ubico, started to denounce the aggressive maneuverings of the dictatorships in Europe.[53] In November, the Nicaraguan envoy to Guatemala, who was said to be on good terms with Ubico, had a chat with Des Portes at the presidential palace and also informed the minister that Ubico had definitely changed his mind about Italy and Germany and that he had decided to support the United States instead.[54] Such signals gave Des Portes the impression that Ubico now planned to follow United States policy, if hostilities were to break out in Europe or Asia. "The legation has felt at various times in the past", Des Portes reported:

> "that President Ubico, because of his somewhat dictatorial administration, had strong leanings for and sympathy with the dictatorial Governments of Europe, even to the extent possibly of permitting his policies and administration to be colored by their ideology. Whether or not such

[52] *Idem*.
[53] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 400, September 29, 1937, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 710: United States.
[54] Des Portes, Memorandum for the files, November 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 1, cl. 820.02: Foreign Activities.

> observations were correct at the time, they would now appear to be refuted by the tenor of the comment published from day to day in the local papers".[55]

Des Portes' observations about Ubico's change of heart were guarded at first, but the general prepared a diplomatic coup to win the minister over. On January 25, 1938, the legation reported that Ubico had just completed his customary annual inspection trip to the provinces. Somewhat at variance with the usual procedures, a second inspection trip was announced for February.[56] The official purpose of this trip was to hold public audiences and to open a new road in a very remote, isolated region mainly inhabited by Indian communities. It appears probable however that Ubico's real or secondary motive was to showcase his popularity and mode of government to the Americans: In February, Des Portes was officially invited to join the general on his trip. If it was indeed Ubico's plan to ingratiate himself to the Americans during an adventurous ride over the countryside, that plan worked splendidly.

Des Portes' official report on the inspection tour[57] suggests that it was set up more like a short vacation than a business trip. All the officers of the American legation, including their wives and children, were invited for the excursion. They were treated to a visit of the *Lago de Atlitlán*, a volcanic lake said to be one of the most beautiful in the world, and got to see the nearby Indian settlements where the inhabitants still adorned the colorful dress of their Maya ancestors—all sights that a modern tourist would want to take in. As was the usual practice, Ubico set up court in the villages he visited to receive local inhabitants and to listen to their troubles and concerns. In the case of complaints against local officials or disagreements among locals, the president would provide quick justice on the spot. If the issue at hand involved the local authorities, Ubico often decided on the matter in favor of the Indian petitioner. Needless to say, this practice made the president very popular among the rural populations, especially because previous governments had all but ignored them.[58]

The spectacle of the village audiences, combined with the ceremonies surrounding the opening of the local road, demonstrated Ubico's fatherly concern for the Indians and opened Des Portes' eyes to the reverential regard which many peasants showed for the president. He recounts how eager "the natives" were to "touch his [Ubico's] clothing, kiss his hands or to receive from him a paternal touch on the head". When the minister talked to the president about this, Ubico piously remarked that:

> …he felt himself fortunate to have been able during the course of his administration to do much to liberate them [the Indians] from the economic

[55] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 400, September 29, 1937, PR Guatemala, PR Guatemala, Box 11, cl. 710: United States.
[56] McKinney to the Secretary of State, Despatch 498, January 25, 1938, PR Guatemala, Box 17, cl. 800.1: President.
[57] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 512, February 23, 1938, (M1280, Roll4), Jorge Ubico: 87.
[58] On Ubico's relation with the Indian, consult: Richard N. Adams, "Ethnic images and strategies in 1944", in: Carol A. Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988* (Austin 1990) 141-162, there 141-142; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, 312-322.

> exploitation and political oppression under which they had labored for many, many years.[59]

While the president's inspection trips and "social justice demagoguery" account for his genuine popularity among many peasants, there was a wholly different side to his treatment of the Indians. While Ubico had abolished a system of debt peonage early in his administration, he also instituted vagrancy laws which basically allowed authorities to pick up any peasant who could not provide proof of employment and to deliver the latter to the landlords for penal labor. In this manner, the government could control the rural populations while the large landowners depended on the authorities for an adequate supply of workers.[60] This is not the side of the regime that Des Portes got to see during the trip, of course. As far as the minister knew, the Indians' "gratitude and loyalty [to Ubico] were patently evident". The American minister readily identified with Ubico's patronizing attitude toward local Indians, because he held similar feelings for the 400 "Negro families" that worked his farm in North Carolina. In this regard the president turned out to have a lot in common with the plantation owners who Des Portes knew from his home state.[61] Clearly then, this could not be a Fascist dictator.

After the trip, Des Portes enthusiastically reported that Ubico was a "most delightful and entertaining host". He found that the personal contact with Ubico was "the most gratifying and personally satisfactory result" of the undertaking. Through such personal contact, Des Portes was able to establish that Ubico was not physically or mentally sick (as rumors had it) and that the president was in fact "a man of extraordinary intelligence, ability and keen perception". Touching on the more general effects of the trip, Des Portes claimed that Guatemalan army officers were delighted with the president's decision to take the Americans along with him: "they have been fearful of Fascist tendencies in the Chief Executive, and our association with him is believed by them to denote his rejection of such influences and his decision to cooperate with the United States in every action of his administration".[62]

The State Department was greatly relieved that Ubico was finally warming up to the American minister again. After some years in which Ubico had been very withdrawn, the latest road trip "indicates that Mr. DesPortes has been successful in making himself persona grata to president Ubico, which is of the greatest importance in the conduct of our relations with Guatemala".[63]

During the months following the inspection trip, Des Portes and Ubico grew closer. Personal interviews between the minister and the president became more common than

[59] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 512, February 23, 1938, (M1280, Roll4), Jorge Ubico: 87.
[60] Grieb, *Guatemalan caudillo*, 35.
[61] See chapter 1, pages 46-47.
[62] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 512, February 23, 1938, (M1280, Roll4), Jorge Ubico: 87.
[63] Drew (Division of American Republic Affairs) to Duggan, untitled memorandum, (March 3, 1938, (M1280, Roll4), Jorge Ubico: 87.

they had ever been.[64] The caudillo continued to make dramatic signs of good-will, which were greatly appreciated by Des Portes. Slowly but surely, the legation revisited its interpretation of Ubico as a Fascist sympathizer. By the beginning of 1938, its opinion of him was merely that he was "undoubtedly an opportunist in his international relations and astute enough to play Democratic and Fascist influences against each other". In the domestic field, Des Portes reported, Ubico seemed "satisfied to consider his Government, however dictatorial it may be, as being based on democratic principles".[65]

Another point on which Des Portes and Ubico grew particularly close eventually was their common concern for the threat of "exotic ideologies" and foreign aggression. While the Department had shown appreciation for Des Portes' improved relations with Ubico, this minor personal triumph on the minister's side was buried under Washington's concerns for the rise of Fascism in Europe. Starting in 1937, the Department produced a steady stream of instructions which related to its inter-American policy in opposition to "totalitarian" influences from Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan. These instructions prioritized reporting on German, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese activities in Latin America. Furthermore, the Department was very anxious to get pan-American approval for all its public statements on events in Europe, requiring legation personnel to pry diplomatic statements in support of these policies on a very regular basis.[66] Compared to the sheer volume of instructions and reports on these matters, as well as the importance that the Department obviously assigned to them, interest in local affairs definitely took a back seat.

While American politics and public opinion remained divided on the nature of the threat posed by European Fascism, minister Des Portes in particular and the American

[64] As an illustrative sample, consult: Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 15, 1938, PR Guatemala, Box 23, cl. 800: Miscellaneous; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, February 27, 1939, PR Guatemala, Box 23, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 15, 1939, PR Guatemala, Box 23, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 279, June 15, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 1, cl. 710: Japanese Activities; Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 429, October 28, 1937, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 1, cl. 800: Guatemala.; Walter McKinney (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, December 6, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities. Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, September 23, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities; Walter McKinney (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, December 6, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.

[65] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 533, May 15, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800.C: Communism.

[66] A representative sampling of such instructions: Frazer to Erwin, unnumbered telegram, February 5, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 36, cl. 820: Military Affairs; Welles to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, May 7, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 36, cl. 820: Military Affairs; Hull to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 27, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 49, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Welles to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers in Latin America, July 5, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, cl. 800: Honduras; Berle to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, September 20, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 121: Cultural and Educational Attaché; Berle to Albert H. Cousins, Jr. (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i.), Instruction 318, October 21, 1940, PR Honduras, Box 58, cl. 820.02: Propaganda.

diplomatic corps more generally were early converts to the idea that the Americas were threatened by Japanese imperialism and German Nazism.[67] Already in 1937, Des Portes reported on alleged Japanese designs on Lower California (Mexico). Throughout the following years, Des Portes' reports showed a rising concern for German threats to the Americas. In Guatemala, the biggest threat came from Nazi attempts to assimilate the large German colony; to spread discontent among the Indian peons on German *fincas*; and to bribe or otherwise influence important government officials. After the start of the war in Europe, Des Portes became convinced that the United States should take a much tougher stand against the Nazis. In May 1940 Des Portes drafted a report at his own initiative—which he admitted was somewhat presumptive—about the dangers of U.S. passivity in the face of German aggression. The minister argued that "the American nations must not stand, like the European democracies, gaping at the approaching storm and hoping that it will pass them by even if others get wet (…) it seems desirable to take immediate diplomatic steps to frustrate in so far as possible any German effort to establish bases in this Hemisphere, either in the European colonies or the American Republics. We must not repeat the mistake of European democracies in passively awaiting a German attack when our national safety is at stake".[68]

While the Department and the Guatemalan legation agreed early on that Fascism was a major threat, Ubico had his own monsters to fight. In the general's worldview, it was not Fascism that threatened his reign, but Communism: his catch-all phrase for everything reeking of Mexican influences, labor activity, or political opposition. While Des Portes tried to open Ubico's eyes to the dangers of the Right, Ubico tried to convince the minister of those from Left. In July, 1938, Señora de Ubico told an American citizen that the United States was not active enough in combating Communism. At the presidential palace it was believed that Communist tendencies—possibly Ubico's interpretation of New Deal measures—made the United States an unreliable partner.[69] Some months later, the president himself lectured Des Portes on the dangers of Communistic labor demands on American industry. If he were president of the United States, the general asserted, he would end labor disputes in five minutes.[70] In another personal talk between the president and the minister, Ubico warned that his friendship for the United States had its limitations: "Guatemala will follow the policy of the United States as long as it is not Communistic".[71]

To the legation staff, Ubico's "distrust of genuinely democratic Government", and his tendency to "profoundly confuse democracy and Communism" were supremely

[67] Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 91-96.
[68] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1256, May 15, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 711: War. Peace. Friendship. Alliance.
[69] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 697, September 24, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[70] Walter McKinney (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, December 6, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.
[71] Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, September 23, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.

frustrating.[72] According to the legation, the threat of Communism in Guatemala was actually negligible, as it considered the native Indian workers too docile and passive to take an interest in that doctrine. The only possible converts were disgruntled middle-class Ladinos and former soldiers, but only in so far as the government was actually driving them in the arms of the Communists by its suppressive actions.[73] The appeal that Fascism had to members of the military officer corps posed a much more serious risk to the government's safety, according to the legation, but Ubico continued to overestimate the dangers of Communism at the expense of his alertness to the Fascist danger.[74]

Whether it was his developing working relationship with minister Des Portes; signals from the American government; a concern for his image in the American press; or genuine irritation over the behavior of some Nazi Party members in Guatemala can not be ascertained. Roughly toward the end of 1938, Ubico did exchange his anti-Communist rhetoric for the anti-Fascist kind. The issues which preoccupied the general—fear of Mexico, the Belize dispute, and development of the Guatemalan military—remained the same, but were now dressed up differently: Ubico told the legation at various times that German agents had infiltrated the Mexican government; that the war in Europe might necessitate a Guatemalan seizure of Belize if Great Britain were ever subdued by Nazi aggression; and that his country needed a standing army of at least 70.000 men armed with American weapons if it was to play a useful role in any potential conflict. The legation was not unaware of Ubico's manipulation of local issues, but was satisfied that the general no longer underestimated the dangers of Fascism.[75]

That Des Portes and Ubico were back on speaking terms did not mean that all fears of Fascist influences in the Guatemalan government had disappeared. In the eyes of the Americans, the president himself was now free from suspicion. But the fact remained that the Guatemalan government had dealt with Fascist governments in the past. If this had not been Ubico's doing, then there must be Nazis in his cabinet. Already in June 1938, the secretary of legation reported rumors that ministers Carlos Salazar, Roderico Anzueto, and José Gonzáles Campo were Fascist sympathizers. [76] Furthermore, Des Portes reported, there were many disgruntled army officers who would

[72] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 697, September 24, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: Guatemala.
[73] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 759, December 13, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800.B: Communism.
[74] McKinney to the Secretary of State, Despatch 759, December 13, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.
[75] John M. Cabot (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, February 5, 1940, PR Guatemala, Box 29, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 21, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 711: War. Peace. Friendship. Alliance; Hartwell Johnson (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, August 14, 1941, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[76] McKinney to the Secretary of State, Despatch 619, June 14, 1938, (M1280, Roll 2) Political Affairs 1321.

like to see a regime change for "selfish or ulterior motives", and were liable to seek an alliance of convenience with Nazi agents in the German colony.[77]

The interesting effect of this shift of the legation's suspicions from Ubico to his underlings is that it inflated the importance that the Americans ascribed to the Guatemalan president as a guard against Fascist scheming. In an informal letter to Laurence Duggan, Des Portes wrote that he had worried about Ubico's Fascist tendencies in the past, but that the president was now "grand" towards him. As long as the caudillo remained in power, U.S.-Guatemalan relations would be satisfactory. The very fact that Ubico was now openly friendly to the United States made Des Portes fear that the president would become a target for Fascist plots: "he shows it [friendliness to the U.S.] so plainly in every way that I am fearful the Germans or Italians may try some plot against him". "As soon as the German and Italian Ministers found", Des Portes continued:

> …that they had no more influence with President Ubico they started a secret friendship with General Anzueto. Of course, as you know, General Anzueto has great presidential ambitions, but he is now being very closely watched by the President. I have been very much tempted to inform President Ubico in some of our informal talks, just what General Anzueto is doing and of his activities, but I have thought it best not to do it so far. But on the other hand, it would have a very serious effect on our relations if anything should happen to President Ubico and General Anzueto should gain control here.

The quote illustrates just how effective Ubico's personal diplomacy was. And as long as other military leaders were under suspicion for Fascist inclinations, it was vitally important, in Des Portes' view, that the president was secure. A hint of doubt about the importance of a noninterference policy, when compared to the Fascist danger, is evident from Des Portes' inclination to warn Ubico about Anzueto's skullduggery. From late 1938 to the end of his tenure, Des Portes remained convinced that "[a]s long as President Ubico is in power, I do not think that we need be fearful of any German, Italian, or Japanese influence here".[78]

3.2 Winning hearts and minds in Honduras and El Salvador

While the Department concentrated on events in Europe, the Carías administration geared its policy toward that of the United States. Shortly after the 1937 confirmation of Carías' continuance in office, the administration (possibly in an effort to neutralize local rumors that the United States opposed continuismo) began to model much of its "policy" toward Europe and Asia on that of the United States. So in March 1938, the Carías government declared on its own initiative that it would follow United States policy regarding the Austrian *Anschluss*. Over the next months, it also declared its support, without question or delay, for U.S. neutrality policy and issued neutrality proclamations

[77] McKinney to the Secretary of State, Despatch 759, December 13, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities.
[78] Des Portes to Laurence Duggan (Chief of the Division of American Republic Affairs), July 28, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: Guatemala.

which were practically copies of American texts.[79] When the United States edged toward a more pro-Allied policy, Honduras dutifully followed suit: In April 1939, Carías issued a decree which prohibited foreigners to engage in political actions connected to their home country (although neutrally worded, the decree was clearly aimed at Fascist and Nazi organizations) and in May 1940 it protested Germany's invasion of Holland and Belgium.[80] Before long, the legation admitted that Carías was very anti-German and, given its track record, would probably follow the United States into war if it came to that.[81]

Of course, such cooperation was cheap for the Carías government: it never had an international policy beyond Central America; it had few connections with either Germany or Italy; German and Italian colonies were correspondingly small; and it probably could not care less if Austria was merged with Germany. In other words, it had nothing to loose in following American policy in Europe. Actually, its association with the United States in these matters, which was given wide publicity in Honduras, probably conveyed the impression that Carías was an important ally of FDR. To the legation, the uncharacteristically swift response of the Carías government to any query about its position on European affairs was a true asset: it enabled Erwin and his colleagues to respond quickly and satisfactorily to any State Department instruction on the subject. Over time, Carías' quick and cheap cooperation on European matters overshadowed his intransigence on local matters that truly mattered to him like the boundary dispute with Nicaragua—an issue that was eventually dropped from Washington's list of priorities anyway.[82]

[79] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 236, March 29, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 35, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 638, March 30, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711: War. Peace, Friendship. Alliance; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 863, November 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, December 15, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 56, December 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 907, December 21, 1937, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Welles to Erwin, Despach 221, December 22, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 915, December 30, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 941, January, 29, 1940, PR Honduras, Box 57, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals.

[80] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 16, June 21, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/II, cl. 800: Honduras and Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, May 13, 1940, PR Honduras, Box 57, cl. 711.1: Joint Declaration.

[81] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 509, November 16, 1938, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1938, cl. 800: Honduras and Salter to the Secretary of State, Despatch 822, October 3, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/I, cl. 800: Honduras.

[82] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 907, December 21, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, Vol. VII, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Fred K. Salter (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Honduras), untitled memorandum, March 28, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 35, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 528, December 6, 1938, Box 36, Vol. VII, cl. 801: Government; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 910, December 26, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, Vol. VII, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals.

Confronted on one side with a very demanding State Department, as in the case of Guatemala, and on the other by a regime that was extremely helpful, Erwin had every incentive to seek a working relationship with the Carías administration and to treat its moral shortcomings as a matter of academics. Several weeks after the completion of the *continuismo* campaign, Erwin joined a diplomatic delegation which was put together at the initiative of the Papal Nuncio in Honduras to offer his congratulations to Carías on his successful continuance in power. Somewhat apologetically, Erwin reported that he could not have "tactfully refuse[d] to participate" in the Nuncio's plan. Anyway, "[t]he population as a whole appears to accept it [continuismo] as a fait accompli, and there is now less discussion of the political policy involved in this arbitrary extension of the Presidential term then was the case before it was consummated".[83] The State Department showed no interest in the event.

Legation's reports on the successful continuismo campaign were among the last in-depth reports on the local political scene *per se* before the War. The State Department's demands for reports of the activities on local "totalitarian" agents taxed the limited capacities of the small legation. By 1941, at the latest, the legation's activities consisted almost completely of research and activities related to the European war. Carías meanwhile, was hard at work to outdo the Yankees in anti-totalitarian measures. In 1939 Carías cleverly issued a decree against "anti-democratic" activities—a decree that only formalized his suppression of any form of opposition. Some months later, the president cut all government subsidies to the local newspaper *El Cronista*, which was considered pro-Axis by the legation. In June, 1940, Honduras eagerly consented to a U.S. proposition for "combined staff conversations" on a coordinated military response to foreign threats. U.S. officers who visited Honduras for the talks were very pleasantly surprised by the government's more than cooperative attitude. The next month, the semi-official newspaper *La Epoca* began to actively propagate the government's anti-totalitarian standpoints and the regime itself stepped up activities against supposedly Nazi propaganda emanating, it said, from the German legation in Guatemala.[84]

Recent historical research showed that actual activities by German or Italian agents small and ineffectual compared to the draconian measures taken against them in

[83] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1212, December 27, 1940, PR Honduras, Box 57, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive. Continuismo.

[84] On Honduran war measures: Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 16, June 21, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/I, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 724, June 24, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 1939/I, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1037, May 21, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 3, cl. 820.02: El Cronista; Hull to the U.S. Legations and Embassies in Latin America, June 3, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 711: Staff Conversations; Erwin, Memorandum of Conversation at the Presidential Palace, June 14, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 711: Staff Conversations; Unknown author, Memorandum of Staff Conversations between Representatives of the Government of Honduras and the Military and Naval Services of the United States, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 711: Staff Conversations; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1070, July 1, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 3, cl. 820.02: Anti-Totalitarian Propaganda. On Legation's perception of *El Cronista*: Salter to the Secretary of State, Despatch 823, October 3, 1939, Box 2, cl. 891: Attitude of the Honduran Press.

Central America.[85] Some of the legislation and action against the totalitarian threat may have been provoked by a genuine "fifth columnist scare", as the legation reported at one point. It is clear however that Carías also had an ulterior motive for playing up his measures against the Axis. In May, 1940, an agent of Carías visited the legation to warn Erwin that due to Carías' effective measures against them, the local Nazis were now seeking a rapprochement with the Liberals and other enemies of the regime. Five months later a belated revolt of the Liberal Party against the recent continuismo campaign actually broke out, but was very quickly suppressed by the authorities. Carías was quick to point out to Erwin that the defunct Liberal Party could not have pulled off any type of military action without the active collaboration of the Nazis.[86]

As American fear of the so-called "Fifth Column" developed, Carías' assertions about a supposed alliance between the totalitarians and the Honduran Liberal Party were fully adopted by Erwin and his legation. In 1941, when the Honduran authorities alerted the American Legation about another plot by Honduran exiles in collaboration with Nazi agents, the Legation reported that "[i]t has long been suspected and thought probable that the Nazi organization would welcome an opportunity to assist any conspiracy to overthrow the present Honduran Government which is definitely anti-Nazi".[87] Carías' efforts to align himself with U.S. policies could not have been more fruitful: By presenting himself as a staunch protector of "democracy", he had convinced the American legation that his opponents could only be the very opposite. The situation that existed only 4 years earlier—when the Honduran Liberal Party's claim that Carías was a Fascist sympathizer received considerate attention from the Americans—was now reversed.

Throughout the late 1930s the American legation in San Salvador was considerably less alarmed about Martínez' supposed Fascist sympathies than the outside world was. A likely explanation for the legation's peace of mind is found in a combination of factors. First of all, Martínez kept a low profile while Ubico and Carías were busy changing constitutions to fit their needs and Somoza armed for battle with the Nicaraguan president. The Salvadoran general's declarations in favor of constitutionalism and his (unsuccessful) attempts at mediation in Nicaragua appear to have impressed Corrigan. The U.S. minister reserved his diatribes against dictatorship for Salvador's neighbors while Martínez' reputation remained largely untarnished by continuismo until about 1938.

[85] See Chapter 6, pages 207-209.
[86] Albert H. Cousins, Jr. (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1293, March 11, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 1, cl. 800: Honduras. Many files in that same folder deal with the supposed connection between the Honduran Liberal Party and German agents. Also see: Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 105, May 31, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 2, cl. 820.02; RDG, Memorandum, October 21, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 800: Attempt to overthrow the Honduran Government; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1140, October 22, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1, cl. 800: Attempt to overthrow the Honduran Government.
[87] Cousins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1293, March 11, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 1, cl. 800: Honduras.

Related to the previous point, Martínez' self-identification as a proponent of constitutionalism was not appreciated by his neighbors, who appeared to be usurpers by comparison. This matter was complicated by the fact that many politicians who were put on the sidelines in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua initially sought the protection of the Salvadoran government. This made San Salvador, for a while at least, a seedbed of revolutionary plotting. Add to that mix the traditional rivalry between Guatemala and Salvador and it becomes clear why Martínez felt, around the middle of the decade, that he was surrounded by hostile states.[88]

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the Martínez government tried to curry the favor of the powerful Americans. The language of the Good Neighbor policy was translated by the Salvadoran government and official press to fit the circumstances of its regional position. The "international peace" and "inter-American solidarity" aspects of Roosevelt's foreign policy were appropriated by Salvadoran authorities and vigorously pushed in the national press. The message, for anyone who cared to listen, was clear: if peace-loving El Salvador ever got embroiled with its neighbors, the fault was not on her side.

Frazer was naturally eager to jump on the Good Neighbor bandwagon in El Salvador. It was, after all, his job to promote the Roosevelt administration's policy there. On several occasions the minister cheerfully told local newspapers that, yes, the Roosevelt administration was interested in peace and inter-American solidarity, and, yes, Presidents Martínez and Roosevelt did seem to agree on those issues. At one point, Martínez was so flattered by a press interview Frazer had given that he wrote him a personal thank-you note. In response, the minister wrote that the interviews represented no less than his "heartfelt" admiration for the governments' pro-American standpoints.[89]

Yet Martínez was preparing for his continuance in office at the same time. While Frazer never commented publically on continuismo, interested local observers could easily have gained the impression that the American legation approved of it. Off the record, the minister regarded Martínez' "reelection" and the supposed Nazi influence—that *The New York Times*, for example, thought to be behind it—as philosophical matter: To the Latin mind, Frazer wrote to the Department, "a strongly centralized Government, tantamount to a dictatorship suppressing all but the outer form of representative government, does not constitute a denial of the aims of American democracy as long as it is free from the label of Fascism or Naziism, however similar it may be in actual

[88] Salvador; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 454, October 18, 1935, PR El Salvador, Vol. 136, cl. 800: El Salvador; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 777, August 26, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, Vol. 5, 800: Honduras; Corrigan to the Secretary of State, Despatch 786, September 5, 1936, PR El Salvador, Box 4, Vol. 5, 800: Honduras.

[89] Meredith Nicholson (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua) to Hoffman, May 5, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 17, Vol. II, cl. 123: Frazer; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 668, August 7, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 17, Vol. II, cl. 123: Frazer; Frazer to Maximiliano H. Martínez (President of El Salvador), April 26, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 17, Vol. II, cl. 123: Frazer; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 554, April, 26, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 17, Vol. II, cl. 123: Frazer.

form".[90] As it was, the minister and his superiors in Washington were satisfied to leave these philosophical questions for what they were and to focus on the Good Neighbor. And by that measure, Frazer reported, El Salvador was the country where the Good Neighbor policy "has borne the finest fruit".[91]

4. TRADITIONAL DICTATORSHIP VS. FASCISM

Initial concerns in Washington about the Fascist inclinations of the Southern neighbors abated by the time the war broke out in Europe. The caudillos' goodwill campaigns convinced policymakers that theirs was a familiar, non-threatening, traditional sort of dictatorship. A Department study that leaned heavily on reports from the field, argued that "dictatorship as distinct from Fascism so-called [is] no new phenomenon in the American Republics and (…) were one of the American Republics *at this time* to adopt Fascist forms of government, its Fascism would be merely a new cloak for traditional Latin-American personalist dictatorship".

The caveat "at this time" was significant, however. Developments such as the centralization of power, nationalistic policies toward foreign (American) companies and "radical" social policies aimed at the Indian masses, did indicate that the particular mix of authoritarianism, nationalism, and socialism that characterized Fascism was present in many Latin Republics. Hence, the Department noted, the development of an "embryo Social Nationalism" was a matter of continued, if not particularly acute, concern.

In Central America, the Department argued, there was reason to remain alert because "Naziism and Fascism are said to have made some converts in high Government circles". That the caudillos themselves had been successful in dissociating themselves from Fascism in the Yankee mind, however, is evident from the Department's assertion that:

> *Even* such a self-admitted dictator as President Ubico of Guatemala has solemnly assured American representatives that he will oppose in every way the spread of European rightist totalitarian principles in this country and will follow the lead of the United States as long as this country *[sic]* does not swing to Communism.[92]

The legations in Central America were no less enthusiastic. As the United States moved ever closer to involvement in the European war, American ministers developed a symbiotic relationship with the local regimes. The groundwork for that relationship had been laid during the late 1930s. It should be stressed that the caudillos themselves played a major role in the development of a cordial working relationship by adopting the American concerns for a Fascist threat and representing their own governments as an important barrier against it. But the fact that the caudillos were ultimately more

[90] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 62, February 9, 1938, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. VI, cl. 800: Political Affairs.
[91] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 695, September 6, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 20, Vol. VI, cl. 711: Peace. War. Friendship.
[92] Welles to the U.S. Legations and Embassies in Latin America, October 21, 1938, PR Honduras, Box 36, cl. 820: Military Affairs. Emphasis added

successful than their opponents in appropriating anti-Fascist language was also due to pressure from Washington on the legations. Toward the end of the decade, the Department showed little or no interest in field reports on local political matters. The legations accordingly learned to put aside their concerns about local dictatorial measures and to focus on subjects of inter-American solidarity and foreign threats thereto.

Up to about 1939, the collaboration given by the local caudillos, primarily in the form of support for U.S. international declarations and initiatives pertaining to the European situation, allowed Washington to present itself as an important international leader in favor of peace. From the standpoint of Central America, such international cooperation was cheap in the sense that it never had much of foreign policy toward Europe anyway. Washington, however, considered Central American support an important asset to its international position. It should not, therefore, be surprising that in the end the legations' function during the war was to serve as a catalyst for allied cooperation. Their old functions of local power brokers or independent political observers, functions which the legations had performed more or less successfully in the past, moved to the background.

Chapter 6

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE…
The alliance against fascism, 1939-1943

> The world's biggest dictator is America's Best Neighbor between here and the Rio Grande. The million people and the resources of the 46,332 square miles of Honduras are behind the United States in peace or war, and the efforts of the totalitarian states to undermine the influence of America run up here against the most formidable physical obstacle to be found anywhere on earth. (…) General Tiburcio Carias Andino, President of Honduras (…) is a third again larger than Stalin, twice the size of Hitler, and would make three of Mussolini.
>
> ~ *Hubert R. Knickerbocker, 1939* [1]

After the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the Central American caudillos were adopted in a hemisphere-wide, and later worldwide, alliance led by the United States. Initially, the hemispheric alliance was aimed at keeping the Americas out of the war. After Pearl Harbor, the new worldwide alliance that came to be known as the United Nations was aimed at defeating fascism. Whatever its aim or reach, though, the alliance that formed under U.S. leadership was conceived of as a league of freedom-loving countries, democracies even, who jointly faced the evil of totalitarianism.

The alliance was considerably more diverse than the symbolism of "the democracies vs. the dictatorships" would permit, however. And its commitment to the ideal of democracy was, at best, pragmatic. Of the Big Three—the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—one was an outright dictatorship, while the other two were, during the War at least, colonial empires. Hence, some subtle—and not so subtle—artifices were needed to force the alliance partners into the mold of democracy. In the United States, for example, Joseph Stalin, the notorious mastermind of the show trials and a former ally of Hitler, was re-imagined as "Uncle Joe", a benign patriarch for the Russian people.[2]

Similarly, the caudillos of the American hemisphere were re-imagined in the United States as staunch, if somewhat eclectic, defenders of democracy. As Knickerbocker's

[1] Knickerbocker, Manuscript of Article, February 23, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, 800: Honduras.
[2] Alpers, *Dictators*, 220-249.

prosaic description of Carías indicates, the caudillos were never conceived of as anything other than dictators—that would have required outright denial of the facts. But together with his formidable bulk (weighing in at 250 pounds), the journalist considered Carías' firm hold on power to be an obstacle against the spread of fascist influence in the Western Hemisphere. The sins of the Central American dictators were absolved after the start of the War, because they became allies in the fight against the even more vicious tyranny of fascism.

1. WARTIME COOPERATION REVISITED

United States policy toward Central America during the Second World War has received scant attention in the historiography. As far as the history of the War is concerned, Central America was not, of course, a very interesting theatre. This might have been different if a real threat against the Panama Canal had developed; if German submarines had attacked the isthmian shores; or if the large German colonies in the region had developed into a fifth column movement. Even though fear for such events was very real during the earlier phases of the War, nothing came of it and Central America remained free from external threats.

Washington had no policy aimed specifically at Central American during the War. Its plans for the region were part of a larger hemispheric policy, which was itself part of a larger strategy to fight the War and, roughly from 1943 onward, to shape the postwar world. United States hemispheric policy as it concerned Central America was a strange mixture of feverish activity and negligence. The activity sprang entirely from the multifaceted efforts to win the War. Meanwhile, Washington also neglected the region in the sense that matters not related to the War, matters that had no significance beyond the strictly Central American context, received no attention. There was only wartime policy and Central America played an (infinitely) small role in that policy, but there was no Central American policy as such.[3]

In the absence of a Central American policy, or Latin American policy for that matter, historians have found little to write about where the World War period is concerned. Bryce Wood's classic, two volume account of the rise and decline of the Good Neighbor policy, for example, almost entirely ignores the War. The first book ends in 1939 with the observation that "[j]ust before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (…) it may be said that the United States had established, with the assistance of certain Latin American states, an unprecedented set of relationships productive of a nearly solidary American attitude toward threats from without". Especially as compared to inter-American cooperation during World War I and the later Korean War, the support that the United States received from its Latin American allies was, according to Wood, the

[3] A brief overview of State Department wartime programs can be found in: Findling, *Close Neighbors*, chapter 5. For military programs, see: Child, *Unequal Alliance*, 27-62. For cultural programs, see: Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas*, 35-61. For local economic developments and the role of U.S. war-related economic measures therein, see: Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 87-100.

greatest triumph for the Good Neighbor. Wood's second monograph, this time on the decline of the Good Neighbor, picks up the story in 1944, with Braden's attempts to block the rise of Perón in Argentina in 1944.[4] One would get the impression that nothing had happened in the meantime.

Many later books on U.S. inter-American policy offer a similar perspective on the war years—i.e. that they represent nothing more than an afterthought to the Good Neighbor policy and a prelude to the Cold War.[5] Those who present a more critical view of the Good Neighbor, such as the proponents of a "Somoza solution" interpretation, adopt a similar timeline, but are, of course, less enthusiastic than Wood is about the nature of wartime cooperation. According to Lars Schoultz, for example, the Good Neighbor was merely a cosmetic cover for the promotion of self-seeking economic and strategic interests. The War was another extension of this tendency, with the external threat serving as a justification for the attainment of more bases and raw materials in exchange for lend-lease weapons. The War only made it easier for Washington to strengthen its ties to the military regimes that had kept order in its backyard since the early thirties. The U.S. unconditionally supported the dictatorships in the interest of local stability and the dictatorships unconditionally supported the U.S. in order to be illegible for lend-lease aid, flexible trade and financial agreements, and prestigious United Nations status. After the War, the strong bonds with local military regimes "would facilitate the transmission of anticommunist values to Latin America", according to Schoultz.[6] Thus, the War was a bridge between the 1930s and the Cold War, but not a period of inherent interest.

The theme that Schoultz describes—the continuity between U.S. imperialist policy in Latin America during the first half of the century and its ruthless Cold War policy during the second half of the twentieth century—has been popular in the historiography for a while, but, remarkably, did not lead to an upsurge of interest in the connecting years of the War. Rather, the events of the Cold War proper provoked an interest in what has been called the "first Cold War" in Latin America: The convergence of North and South American elitist, anticommunist ideologies in the wake of the Mexican and Bolshevik revolutions and the concurrent attempt to "contain" social changes in the Latin republics.[7] The Somoza solution interpretation fits this narrative particularly well, as it appears to foreshadow U.S. support for Latin American dictators during the Cold War itself. The intervening World War period, with its emphasis on external threats, seems nothing but a brief departure from this general trend of containment of internal social forces. In this context, Andrew Crawley recently observed a tendency in the early historiography of U.S.-Central American relations to combine "what was known of the pre-1930 era" with "what was known of the post-1945 period" and to make some

[4] Wood, *The Making*, 334-361; Idem, *The Dismantling*, ix-xiv.
[5] Gilderhus discusses to this trend: Gilderhus, *The Second Century*, 91-96.
[6] Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 309-315. Similar arguments can be found in: Schmitz, *Talons of the Eagle*, chapter 3; Coatsworth, *The Clients and the Colossus*, 45-48.
[7] Gould, in: Grandin and Joseph, *A Century of Revolution*.

"intuitive leaps" for the period in between.[8] The current chapter seeks to fill in those gaps in the historiography, at least as far as the day-to-day diplomatic relations between the United States and the Central American states are concerned.

2. WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE…

An old truism about Americans is that they tend to have a simplistic, dualistic view of the world, dividing it into friends and foes; black and white; good and evil.[9] The freedom/tyranny divide is a familiar example that instructed popular conceptions of both World Wars and the Cold War.[10] It is certainly true that during the Second World War, all those fighting fascism on the American side were considered part of the "free world", including the dictatorships of Central America. One can be cynical about America's "easy" acceptance of dictatorial allies during the War. Yet, there was nothing particularly easy about it. At least in the eyes of contemporaries, the war against fascism was the biggest challenge that civilization had ever faced. Any discussion of America's wartime cooperation with the Central American dictators, therefore, should stress that it was accompanied with doubts and ambiguities on the American side—even if these were eventually put aside in the interest of the larger goal of defeating fascism.

The U.S. foreign policy establishment during the Second World War was an enormous organization and to claim that everyone working within that establishment had a simple, dualistic view of the world would not do justice to the rich variety of competing voices and viewpoints that, in reality, informed U.S. foreign policy. In fact, an undercurrent of ambivalence about America's dictatorial allies was noticeable in the State Department and the Foreign Service throughout the war years. Among the American legations in Central America, that undercurrent was most clearly in evidence, somewhat ironically, at Frazer's post.

Before the War, Frazer remained untouched by concerns voiced in the American press and among his colleagues in the Foreign Service that the dictators of Central sympathized with fascism. When, in December 1940, a Spanish informer in Nicaragua told the American minister there that Martínez was "with" the Nazis and that the latter had gleefully predicted that when Germany won the War he would have the pleasure of hanging 50 Americans and of "eating their fried testicles", Frazer countered that: "I know President Martínez very well and admire him greatly, not only as the ablest administrator and president this country ever had, but [also] because of his scrupulous honesty and

[8] Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 3

[9] Bratzel argues, for example, that the United States had a dualistic view of the war as between good and evil. This tendency writes Bratzel, also extended to Latin American policy during the war: Cooperating countries became close allies while uncooperative countries were seen almost as traitors. See: Bratzel, "Introduction", in: Leonard and Bratzel eds., *Latin America during the Second World War* (2007) 1-16, there 1-2 and 8; Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 82-84.

[10] Alpers, *Dictators*, 188-302; Purcell, *Crisis*, 233-272.

fair dealing".[11] During the year following, however, Frazer experienced a profound crisis of confidence in the Martínez regime.

In September 1941, the minister admitted that although "the Legation is loath to alter the favorable opinion it has long held as to the sincerity of President Martínez' continually expressed pro-democratic sympathies" there were certain aspects of the regime that raised legitimate doubts on this count and "it should be reported that an already considerable, and it would appear growing number of responsible people here certainly do harbor this doubt [about Martínez' pro-democratic sympathies]".[12] In October, Frazer reported the prevalence of government actions "of a more or less totalitarian character".[13] In December, days after Salvador's declaration of war, Frazer announced that the Martínez government was developing from a "liberal dictatorship" to an out-and-out "totalitarian government". At that point, the minister admitted, the President's good qualities—his honesty, progressivism, and social programs—only just outweighed his bad qualities.[14]

What might explain Frazer's doubts about Martínez, which, it will be noted, developed at a time when his colleagues in Guatemala and Honduras had just left similar qualms behind them? The minister in El Salvador was not unusually sensitive to signs of political abuse, otherwise he would have raised his doubts at the time of Martínez' 1939 "reelection" campaign. Nor could the minister count on the sympathy and understanding of his colleagues and superiors, who, by this time, were only interested to hear about the unbreakable ties of inter-American solidarity in the face of totalitarian aggression. Actually, it was a belated local reaction to the *continuismo* campaign, played out in the context of El Salvador's unique political culture, that opened Frazer's eyes to the reality of Martínez' repressive tactics.

Traditionally, Salvadorans considered themselves more civic-minded than the people of neighboring Central American republics and they valued the strength and endurance of constitutional rule in their country. Compared to its supposedly volatile and dictator-ridden neighbors, El Salvador seemed stable and progressive. Looking down upon Guatemalans and Hondurans, the people of El Salvador felt a stronger bond with liberal Costa Rica—which partially explains why Costa Rica was the first to recognize the Martínez government. So when Martínez, after repeated promises to the contrary,

[11] Meredith Nicholson (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1355, December 23, 1940, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 2, cl. 820.02: Military Activities; Frazer to Col. J.B. Pate (U.S. Military Attaché to Costa Rica), January 14, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 3, cl. 121: Diplomatic Branch. General; Frazer to Capt. Frank M. June (U.S. Naval Attaché to Guatemala), January 14, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 3, cl. 121: Diplomatic Branch. General Frazer to Nicholson, January 14, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 3, cl. 121: Diplomatic Branch. General.

[12] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1673, September 4, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Non-American Activities.

[13] Secretary of State to Frazer, Despatch 464, October 8, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 801: Government; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1777, October 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 801: Government.

[14] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1786, December 20, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

changed the constitution to continue himself in office, in imitation of Ubico and Carías, many Salvadorans were deeply indignant. A considerable number of government employees, from the lowest rungs to the cabinet level and including many conservative aristocrats, quit their jobs in protest against *continuismo*. Several of them told the American minister that they still admired Martínez personally and supported many of his policies, but refused to work for an unconstitutional government.[15]

There were no alternative political parties that those who deserted Martínez after 1939 could turn to. Despite its purported progressivism, a stable system of political parties had never developed in El Salvador. Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua had their traditional two-party system of Liberals and Conservatives—even if that system fell apart as a result of the rise of the caudillos—but in El Salvador, political parties had always been *ad hoc*: Organizing around a leader when presidential elections were due and mostly dissolving shortly after elections. Martínez broke with this tradition, in a way, by founding and sustaining his own political party, the *Partido Pro Patria*, after his rise to power. In fact, however, the party was more of a traditional patron-client system than a political organization and served as a solid power base for the President. Concurrently, *Pro Patria* was the only legal party in El Salvador: There was no opposition party, "loyal", exiled, or otherwise.[16]

But much like in the Honduran case, where the exiled Liberal Party tried to capture the banner of "democracy" in the late 1930s, the ideological battle with fascism offered opportunities for disgruntled Salvadorans to express their concerns. In September, 1941, two new organizations were founded: The *Acción Democrática Salvadoreña* (ADS) and the *Juventud Democrática Salvadoreña* (JDS)[17] —the first made up of former government employees and professionals, the second of young, idealistic writers. Formally, these were not political parties, but civic organizations that wished to express their sympathy with the Allies by promoting democratic ideals and counteracting the spread of totalitarian ideas.[18] The regime was not duped, however: Shortly after the founding of said organizations, Foreign Minister Araujo visited minister Frazer to warn him that ADS and JDS were in fact anti-government parties and therefore, naturally, communistic and pro-Nazi. The Martínez government was somewhat embarrassed by the situation because it was on record as promoting democracy and opposing totalitarianism itself, but, argued the President and the Foreign Minister, the present world crisis required unity and patriotism in the face of threats: If the members of ADS and JDS were *genuinely* interested in the defense of democracy, they could join *Pro Patria*. The fact that they did

[15] Parkman, *Nonviolent insurrection*, 4-8 and Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 444, January 19, 1939, PR El Salvador, Box 21, Vol. VII, cl. 800: Political Affairs II.
[16] Ching, "Patronage and politics", 50-70,
[17] Respectively: *Salvadoran Democratic Action* and *Salvadoran Democratic Youth*.
[18] Francisci Lime to Frazer, September 19, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1715, September 22, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica.

not proved that they were only interested in creating division.[19] Some weeks later, ADS and JDS were outlawed.[20]

The American legation had witnessed opposition to the Martínez regime before, most notably in 1932 when thousands of peasants revolted, but these episodes had generally been disregarded as being purely local affairs. This time it was different: The members of ADS and JDS were not peasants, professional politicians, or disgruntled army officers, but former government officials, physicians, lawyers, and professors—in a word, close friends and acquaintances of the legation.[21] Moreover, in the parlance of democracy, the new organizations found a theme that related both to traditional Salvadoran civic culture and the interests of its middle class supporters and to American war-time idealism.[22] Toward the end of September, 1941, Frazer reported to the Department that it was ridiculous to characterize ADS as communist or pro-Nazi, as the local government did, because its members were "all prominent, conservative and patriotic. Most of them are known to have resigned office because, although formerly in full accord with the President [Martínez], they disagree with the extension of his presidential term and his continuation of a de facto dictatorship".[23] When, in October, the government formally restricted the right of assembly and presented this as a measure to deal with enemy activities, Frazer reported that the decree was obviously directed at "legitimate" opposition such as that of ADS and that it was enacted "in spite of President Martínez' reiterated statements of his believe in and support for democracy".[24]

Notwithstanding Frazer's special reports on the suppression of ADS and his concurrent suspicion that the Martínez regime was showing a tendency toward totalitarian practices, only the middle level of the Department demonstrated a passing

[19] Frazer, Memorandum on Visits by Drs Araujo and Avila re New Democratic Parties, September 23, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1720, September 24, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1727, September 24, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica.

[20] Interestingly, James Dunkerley claims that Martínez made it a crime to express support for the Allied cause. According to him, this proves that Martínez sympathized with the Axis and, by implication, makes American war-time support of his regime all the more cynical. It is probable that Dunkerley refers to events such as the suppression of ADS and JDS, but, as should be clear from the foregoing, these organizations were concerned with local affairs and their suppression was also a matter of local politics. The American legation was fully aware of this fact. See: Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 33.

[21] One year earlier a comparable "Central American Democratic Party" was founded, but the legation concluded on that occasion that it was made up of unimportant people without influence. Its leader was described as a "dark" and "cheaply dressed" man who appeared to be "rather a crackpot". The legation basically ignored the existence of the party. Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1158, October 18, 1940, PR El Salvador, Box 32, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Frazer, Memorandum of Conversation with Frorencio Calderón, November 25, 1940, PR El Salvador, Box 32, cl. 800: Political Affairs.

[22] Weaver, *Inside the volcano*.

[23] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1720, September 24, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica.

[24] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1740, October 3, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica.

interest in the matter.[25] The suppression of ADS almost coincided with America's formal engagement in the War. When former members of the, now illegal, ADS visited Frazer at the legation on December 18, only 11 days after Pearl Harbor, the minister could not help but sympathize with those "sincere men of high ideals, actuated by unselfish, patriotic motives". They left a manifesto with the minister that expounded their ideals, perhaps in a last effort to involve the Americans in their conflict with the regime. Writing his report on the meeting that evening, Frazer regretfully noted that there was nothing more he could do to help, since the Department had already been notified about the situation but, under the circumstances, could not act "without indulging in improper criticism of President Martínez' administration". "This memorandum, therefore, is being filed merely to complete the records".[26]

To argue that American foreign policy establishment simply held a dualistic view of the world is to oversimplify matters. It might be said that the State Department as a whole was temporarily too involved in the execution of wartime measures to be bothered by the idea that it was cooperating with Latin American dictators to fight European dictators, but there was definitely an undercurrent of moral ambiguity about this situation. This undercurrent came to the surface toward the end of the War, as the acute threat to the American continent passed and the State Department briefly turned against its former dictatorial allies. But this was still in the future. Around 1941, people like Frazer had no choice but to put their doubts aside—or, at most, on file—and work with the caudillos. It was the stresses of total war that forced a close alliance upon the Americans and the Central Americans, regardless of any *mutual* dislike for each other's political culture (Ubico, it should be remembered, was suspicious of the New Deal's "communistic" tendencies).

Wartime cooperation was to leave its own marks on the thinking of the Foreign Service, however. It turned out that the caudillos were able to provide quick and supposedly effective cooperation in the fight against the Nazi danger. There were no courts or legislatures to deal with: One man could commit his country to a new treaty or introduce measures to suppress subversive elements. And so, the historical experience of wartime cooperation would produce two competing modes of thought about the cooperation with local regimes: One was a deep sense of ambiguity about U.S. association with dictatorships; the other was that the caudillos proved effective allies against an external, totalitarian threat. In Central America, the latter mode of thinking would be represented by Erwin, who, despite his pre-war criticism of Carías, became the regime's staunchest supporter after the War. Both ideas would profoundly influence post-war developments.

[25] Secretary of State to Frazer, Instruction 464, October 8, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 800: Government; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1777, October 16, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 4, cl. 801: Government.
[26] Frazer, Memorandum on Call at Legation of Dr. Francisco A. Lima and six other members of the Central American Committee of the Acción Democrática Salvadoreña, December 18, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: Accion Democratica.

2.1 Friends on paper. The diplomat's war.

The State Department was mainly concerned with the political side of the War—the "war on paper" if you will. Inter-American cooperation and coordination had always been important objectives of the Good Neighbor policy and was put to good use throughout the international crises that the Roosevelt administration faced. Reciprocal trade treaties were pushed as a remedy against the Depression; neutrality policy was coordinated at inter-American conferences; and the American Republics were all recruited into the allied camp during the War. Interestingly, material benefits were not always expected from inter-American cooperation. Individual reciprocal trade agreements did not always yield beneficial economic results and most American Republics were not thought capable to protect their neutrality or to contribute to the war effort in the military sense. For an important part—and this is particularly true where U.S.-Central American relations are concerned—the benefits of inter-American cooperation were political in nature. The ability of the United States to mould a regional block in favor of its policies of either "free trade", "peace", or "democracy" (as was the case with reciprocal trade, neutrality, and war respectively) reflected on its ability and stature as a world leader.[27]

Where Central America was concerned, the State Department never expected substantial material benefits in the cases of reciprocal trade, neutrality, or war. The economies of the United States and Central America were non-competitive, so there were generally no tariffs or trade barriers against coffee and bananas in the United States, neither were there trade barriers against manufactured products in Central America—yet, reciprocal trade agreements were duly negotiated. The Central American states had no important political ties with either Europe or Asia—yet they duly followed U.S. neutrality policy. Lastly, no one in the Roosevelt administration expected the isthmian republics to contribute to the war in a traditional military sense. For example, Secretary of the Army Stimson noted after a dinner with representatives of Latin American armies that "when I saw the swarthy faces of some of the representatives of countries like Honduras who sat in front of me at this table, I 'had me doubts', so to speak, as to how much they would take of this burden [of military cooperation]".[28] Regardless of the overtly racist argument of Stimson, Washington's skepticism about the war-making potential of a country like Honduras was solidly realistic. Yet the political—or "moral" as it was sometimes called—support of Central American states for the war effort was aggressively sought and greatly appreciated when forthcoming.

The caudillos actively supported U.S. international initiatives before the start of the European war, this trend continued at an accelerated pace after 1939. Events in Europe set in motion the machinery of inter-American cooperation that was created at pre-war conferences and the Department aggressively pushed the sister republics to toe the line. During the first half of 1941, the Department considered measures to "motivate" the Latin American republics to take a more aggressive stance against totalitarian actions. At that point, a position of strict neutrality, which was still the position taken by the major Latin

[27] Also see chapters 4 and 5 for these policies.
[28] Quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 314.

nations, was no longer considered adequate by the Department. The benefits of Lend-Lease and "sympathetic" consideration of export licenses were dangled before the southern governments to make them go along with the U.S.[29] No such actions were needed in Central America—its leaders apparently being well-aware of the U.S. ability to wield stick and offer carrot. In many cases, Central American governments offered their help even before it was solicited. Ubico, Martínez, and Carías explicitly told the American ambassadors in their capitals that they would follow the U.S. into war (if necessary) at some point before Pearl Harbor.[30] Those promises were kept alive in the official press and resulted in the spontaneous declarations of war in December—those of Honduras and El Salvador actually preceding the official American declaration of war against Japan by a couple of hours.[31]

A brief overview of diplomatic actions around the start of the Second World War serves to illustrate the nature of cooperation sought by the United States and provided by Central America. In the second half of 1939, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras proclaimed their neutrality, following U.S. wishes. One month later, the Department requested that American nations jointly condemn the *Graf Spee* incident off the Uruguayan coast—Central American states concurred. On December 22 of that year, the Department requested blanket permission for the use of Central American waters, airspace, and airfields for the purpose of a "neutrality patrol". The request was quickly granted. In May 1940, the Central American states joined the U.S. in condemnation of the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries and provided maximum press attention to the event at the request of the Department. During the summer of that year, the U.S. and Central America agreed, at Washington's initiative, to coordinate their actions against Axis propaganda and started to exchange information on that subject. Around the same time, the State Department brought together representatives from the War Department and the Central American armies to hold preliminary talks on defensive cooperation. Carías' assertion that he expected nothing in return for his complete cooperation particularly impressed the War Department.

Naturally, 1941 saw another scurry of diplomatic activity. The Department actively sought Latin American approval for a set of plans and strategies called the "Defense of Democracies", that was introduced to Congress and to the sister republics at the Montevideo Conference. Central American states applauded the initiative. The isthmian

[29] Bonsal to Welles, March 14, 1941, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 4, Folder marked March to April, 1941.

[30] Frazer, Memorandum on Call upon President Martinez, November 26, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 4, Vol, 3, cl. 800: Political Affairs; Salter to the Secretary of State, Despatch 822, October 3, 1939, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, Vol. 2, cl. 800: Honduras; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1447, July 8, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 71, Vol. XII, cl. 845: Etiquette; Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 634, July 9, 1938, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 2, cl. 800: Guatemala; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 21, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 711: War. Peace. Friendship. Alliance; Hartwell Johnson (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, August 14, 1941, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.

[31] Cabot, Memorandum on Central America, General, January 9, 1942, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 6, Folder marked January to February, 1942.

states also extended their "moral" support for the occupation of Iceland and the European possessions in Latin America. Closer cooperation toward the suppression of "totalitarian activities" was achieved when the Central Americans agreed to keep a check on Axis diplomatic activity, communications, and travel. The alliance between Central America and the United States—which might be said to have existed *de facto* for some time—became official with the isthmian declarations of war against the Axis. Toward the end of 1941, beginning of 1942, Guatemala, Salvador, and Honduras signed the Atlantic Charter.[32]

Wartime cooperation made great demands on the U.S. Foreign Service, even on those officers in the tiny Central American republics. During the 1940-1945 years, the U.S. legations in Central America were expanded to be able to deal with the vast amounts of work relating to the War.[33] But this process was accompanied by considerable confusion, especially in the 1941 to 1943 period when the workload for legations rose very quickly

[32] For brevities sake, only the files of the legation in Honduras will be quoted here: Erwin to the Department of State, Despatch 863, November 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 15, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 56, December 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 15, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 57, December 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 910, December 16, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Welles to Erwin, Instruction 221, December 22, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Department of State to Erwin, Telegram 6, April 14, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 800: Germany; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 654, April 18, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 47, cl. 800: Germany; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 27, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 49, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 21, November 7, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 49, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, July 29, 1939, PR Honduras, Box 49, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, May, 1940, PR Honduras, Box 57, cl. 711.1: Joint Declaration; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 3, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, cl. 711: Staff Conference; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 30, June 4, 1940; PR Honduras (SCF), Box 1, cl. 711: Staff Conference; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, January 16, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 5, February 3, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1437, July 1, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1455, July 14, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 110, December 8, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1703, December 12, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Hull to Erwin, Paraphrase of Department Telegram 105, December 31, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 140, December 31, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 67, cl. 711: Declaration of War Paraphrase of Telegram 90 from the Department dated December 13, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 2, cl. 820: Military Affairs; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 129, December 18, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Vol. 2, cl. 820: Military Affairs.

[33] Also consult the figures in chapter 1.

while new personnel was not readily available. Already in September 1939, John Cabot, first secretary at the legation in Guatemala, wrote his friend Gerald Drew at the State Department that the legation was cutting back on routine reports and reports on political matters because the Department was probably being "swamped" by other matters anyway, but also because the legation was short on clerks.[34] What had been a friendly reminder of a shortness of personnel in September became a desperate plea for help in July, 1940: In an official report to the Department, Cabot noted that "the work of this Legation has substantially doubled in the past year" while the "personnel of the Legation has not been expanded to handle this increase in business". The situation became so serious that:

> "…matters have now reached the point where it is impossible to conduct the Legation's business as it should be conducted. Important matters requiring detailed study can not be given the time which should be devoted to them. Less important matters must be slighted in order that more important matters may receive attention. The most serious difficulty which the Legation faces, however, is the fact that so many matters which it handles must be done by or at a certain time. When, as frequently happens, a number of these urgent matters must be handled simultaneously the small Legation staff is utterly swamped, and it is very difficult for both the officers and clerks to avoid slipshod work. I do not need to point out that under such circumstances serious errors might readily be made. Moreover, no margin exists for the handling of a possible real emergency on top of the Legation's regular business."

To compound these difficulties, several people at the legation were showing physical signs of exhaustion due to the workload and lack of leave: Two officers (probably Des Portes and Cabot) were suffering from chronic stomach problems that, in Cabot's view, were in part caused by "the constant strain of work". If this situation continued, the secretary opined, there was the very real risk that "the Legation's business would be forced virtually to stop" or that one or more members of the staff would "suffer a complete breakdown".[35]

The situation at other legations in Central America was substantially the same. Beginning in 1941, Frazer reported that all his clerks were overworked and urgently asked for more personnel, both at the clerical and officer level. In the following two years, every new addition to the personnel of the legation in El Salvador was only followed by more urgent appeals for more people because the workload kept increasing.[36] Similarly,

[34] Cabot to Drew, September 29, 1938, PR Guatemala, Box 20, cl. 123: Cabot.
[35] Cabot to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1372, July 19, 1940, PR Guatemala, Box 26, cl. 121: Diplomatic Branch.
[36] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1333, February 27, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to G. Howland Shaw (Assistant Secretary of State), May 19, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1640, August 16, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Shaw to Frazer, Instruction 438, September 2, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Telegram 100, December 4, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Hull to Gade, Telegram 155, December 9, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Telegram 113, December 11, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Hull to Frazer,

Erwin started pleading for more personnel in 1941. Halfway through 1942, the minister reported that his legation was operating with a minimum of employees. The clerks were overworked and, most damningly, the "minister [was] doing at least half his own typing".[37]

Even if the Department sympathized with dire situation at its Central American posts, which was not always the case[38], it was low on personnel itself[39] and devoted most of its attention to other parts of the world. It was slow to react to the shortness of personnel in its relatively unimportant Central American posts. From 1941 onward, the legations did welcome several new colleagues: Officers, clerks, and specialist who were send to work on war-related projects. However, it appears that the increase in personnel did not keep up with the increasing workload. Requests for extra personnel from the field continued until at least 1943.[40]

December 17, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Telegram 132, December 23, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Hull to Frazer, Telegram 179, December 23, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to Secretary of State, Telegram 137, December 27, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 38, cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1252, January 7, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 40, cl. 124.66: Conduct of Office; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1590, July 21, 1941, Box 40, cl. 124.66: Conduct of Office; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2642, June 30, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 56, Cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-29, July 28, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 56, Cl. 123: General; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Telegram 210, July 28, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 56, Cl. 123: General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-153, December 10, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 56, Cl. 123: General.

[37] Albert H. Cousins (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, January 3, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 64, cl. 124.66 Records and Correspondence; Cousins to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 64, cl. 124.66 Records and Correspondence; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1762, January 7, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 123: Cousins; Erwin to the Secretary of State, telegram 50, February 25, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 123: Mendez; Erwin to the Division of Foreign Service Personnel, July 31, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 124: Embassies and Legations; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2072, May 23, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 124.3: Employees; Hul to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, September 12, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 124.3: Employees; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2332, September 18, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, cl. 124.3: Employees; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-9; January 7, 1943, PR Honduras, Box 93, cl. 124.61: Office Hours.

[38] In November 1942, after another plea for more personnel Philip Bonsal of the Department wrote Gerald Drew (chargé in Guatemala at that point) that he appreciated the heavy burden on the staff in Guatemala, but added somewhat acidly that "under present conditions we all of us have our hands more than full". Bonsal to Drew, November 27, 1942, PR Guatemala (SCF_. Box 5, cl. 711.5: Deportation.

[39] For some comments on ARA's workload, see: Daniels, Memorandum, January 6, 1941, Lot Files, ARA, Entry 212: Memorandums relating to Administrative Matters, January 6, 1938 to June 29, 1943 (henceforth Entry 212), Box 1, Folder marked 1941; Ray to Daniels, May 19, 1941, Lot Files, Entry 212, Box 1, Folder marked 1941.; Daniels, Memorandum, May 24, 1941, Lot Files, Entry 212, Box 1, Folder marked 1941; Chapin, Memorandum, May 9, 1942, Lot Files, Entry 212, Box 1, Folder marked 1942.

[40] Unknown author to Shaw, may 28, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 34, cl. 123; Archer Woodward (U.S. Consul to Guatemala) to Des Portes, January 13, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 59, cl. 123: Personal Records of Officers; Drew to John Erhardt (Chief of the Division of Foreign Service Personnel), February 19, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 59, cl. 123: Personal Records of Officers; Drew to Cabot, April 2, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 59, cl. 123: Personal Records of Officers; Drew

Not surprisingly, the work of the legations suffered from the constant strain and shortages of personnel. This situation had some very significant consequences for the efficiency of the Central American posts. First of all, the attention of the legations shifted from their usual focus on internal political matters to the many new tasks surrounding the war-effort. As Cabot indicated, routine reporting and in depth analysis of local politics did not receive as much attention as under normal circumstances. This claim is backed up by the volume and topic distribution of the legation's files. The volume of files devoted solely to reports on local political conditions dropped while the number of subject headings and volume of paperwork related to the war-effort greatly expanded. Comments of outside observers, mainly State Department inspectors and officers, confirm the direction of the trend away from political reporting: A 1941 inspection report of the Honduran post, for example, shows that the legation devoted most of its manpower to reports on supposed Axis activities in the region, at the expense of reports on local conditions. A broader State Department study of that same year noted that political reports from the field focused mainly on totalitarian activities, rather than local events.[41] This was not just to blame on the men on the ground, of course. The Department itself showed little or no interest in local political affairs.[42]

Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, even war-related work was often handled in a somewhat superficial manner. In and of itself, the need for coordination between the many wartime agencies operating in Central America; the complex and ever-changing requirements of economic warfare; the surveillance of thousands of locally resident Axis nationals; the negotiation of new agreements and treaties, etc, etc was so demanding a job, especially considering the lack of personnel, that the legations mainly confined themselves to the handling of these matters on paper. There was no manpower available to handle the practical side of these matters or even to check up on their correct execution. For example, when the Department inquired after the efficiency and significance of the work that several wartime agencies were doing in Honduras under the general coordination of the legation, the best answer that the legation could provide was that "aside from wasting money and time, the agencies appear to do no particular harm".[43]

The State Department rarely pressured its legations to follow up on the cooperative agreements negotiated with the caudillos, except, perhaps, where the suppression of fifth column activities and the flow of strategic materials was concerned. The Department never expected much in the way of material benefits from its Central

to John William Baily, Jr. (Assistant Chief of the Division of Foreign Service Personnel), July 6, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 59, cl. 123: Personal Records of Officers.

[41] Charles B. Hosmer (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to the Department of State, December 1, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 1, cl. 124.6 : Inspection Report; Background Memorandum Explanatory of Principal Services Requested of our Diplomatic Missions and certain Consulates, May 9, 1941, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 5, Folder marked May, 1941.

[42] Dawson to Hanke, February 12, 1943, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 14, Folder marked Analysis and Liaison: November 1942 to July 1943.

[43] Faust to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-102, October 28, 1942, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 5, cl. 124.66: Records and Correspondence.

American alliances. It wanted the isthmian states to back the inter-American war measures; it wanted photographs of the caudillos signing their declarations of war[44]; it wanted quotations from the local president's speeches that gave voice to local support for the war-effort[45], all of it in the interest of presenting a united bloc of states under American leadership for the benefit of both domestic and foreign audiences.[46] In a word, the Department was well aware of, and imminently satisfied with the fact that cooperation with the Central American republics existed mainly on paper.

The result of these developments for the relationship between the legations and the local regimes was twofold: First, the legations relied more and more on their personal associations with the local presidents and their trusted allies. Second, the legations lost sight of the local political situation. The context of local politics faded from the legations' reports, to be largely replaced by the context of fighting an international war.

Outwardly, the Central American administrations showed themselves very willing to cooperate with the legations. For the hand-full of overworked officials at the American legations, this cooperative pose must have been very gratifying: Without it, it would be well nigh impossible to meet the demands of the State Department. The stability and continued rule of the Central American regimes thus became an important asset to the American legations—leading to a grossly inflated estimate of the importance of the regimes to U.S. wartime interests and of the consequences of their possible demise. Thus, Frazer would not raise the issue of the suppression of ADS, for fear of "indulging in improper criticism" of Martínez, as we have seen. Erwin and Des Portes went much further. Erwin did not let an occasion go by to emphasize Carías' personal cooperative stance. The minister also came to believe that if anything happened to Carías the country would be thrown into chaos, because there was no one in Honduras who was of sufficient prestige to take his place.[47] Des Portes argued, in a personal letter to Laurence Duggan of the State Department, that "any political disturbances" would be very unfortunate "in view of the international situation". The minister goes on that—despite the views of some observers who feel that the government is dominated by Nazi sympathizers—he personally felt that "we are getting one-hundred percent cooperation from President Ubico (…) and any change that might occur could only operate to the detriment of our war effort".[48]

[44] For example: Hull to Erwin, Telegram 87, December 12, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 68, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive

[45] For example: Josephus Daniels (U.S. Ambassador to Mexico) to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, August 18, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 45, cl. 711: War Peace. Friendship. Alliance; Frazer to Daniels, August 21, 1941, PR El Salvador, Box 45, cl. 711: War Peace. Friendship. Alliance.

[46] For example: Hull to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, November 10, 1942, PR Honduras, cl. 711: War. Peace. Friendship. Alliance.

[47] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2551, January 8, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800: Honduras; Pate, Memorandum for the American Minister, January 23, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 12, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Telegram 304, December 23, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800: Revolutions. Honduran Political Exiles.

[48] Des Portes to Duggan, November 27, 1942, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 5, cl. 800.

This sentiment was largely shared by de State Department, where the Central American desk was occupied by John Cabot, who was previously Des Portes' secretary in Guatemala. Synthesizing the reports coming in from the field, Cabot noted that "in the larger aspect (…) we are unfortunate in having to back in effect at least three long-standing dictatorships in Central America which no longer command the confidence and respect at home and abroad that they once did. There is danger that we will find ourselves caught in the dilemma of either supporting an unpopular tyranny or of fomenting disorder which could scarcely fail to redound to the benefit of the totalitarians". [49] This seems to be the highest level at which this problem was contemplated and for the duration of the War, the State Department was satisfied to let matters in Central America run their course as long as cooperation was forthcoming.

2.2 Friends in practice? The soldier's war.

How the developments and prejudices described above influenced the thinking of the U.S. ministers in Central America can be more readily appreciated, if we contrast their views with those of the American military representatives in the region. Around the beginning of the War, American military representatives greatly expanded their political reporting. Apparently, they were acting on the orders of the War Department, which was desirous to know how the political situation on the ground could affect military planning. The reports of the American Naval Attaché in Central America, Frank June, are greatly at odds with the reports of the American legations. This is significant because it demonstrates that the opinions of the American legations should not be taken at face value.

Taking Guatemala as an example, Captain June was carefully optimistic about Ubico's willingness to cooperate with the United States at the start of the War. Only a few months into the War, however, the Naval Attaché came to the remarkable conclusion that:

> At first glance, the Guatemalan Government appears to be cooperating fully with the United States. Closer scrutiny however reveals certain flaws in her spirit of cooperation which tend to indicate that the Government is pursuing perhaps a policy of economic and political expediency. There are likewise certain considerations which tend to indicate that Guatemala may be prepared to reverse its position at some time in the future, if such reversal is warranted by world events.

The attaché came to this conclusion after a very extensive investigation of Guatemala's practical contributions to the war-effort. June noted that Guatemala refused to use its own artillery to protect its ports; that it had deported Nazi prisoners to the U.S. only to be rid of the burden of taking care of them; that its decrees against Nazi activities lacked "teeth" in practice; that its government was full of Nazi sympathizers; etc, etc.

[49] Cabot to Winters and Bonsal, October 6, 1941, Lot Files, ARA, Entry 209: Memorandums Relating to Individual Countries, March 3, 1918 to December 31, 1947 (henceforth Entry 209) Office of American Republic Affairs: Individual Countries, Box 46, Folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947.

Concerning this last point, the legation agreed with June, but the captain was not convinced (as the legation was) that Ubico himself was pro-American:

> The American Legations feels strongly that the President himself is sincere in his desire to cooperate with the United States and it is therefore possible that the aforementioned points are the responsibility of his subordinates. However, in a country which is so dominated by one man, it is difficult to believe that he should be unaware of the topics brought out in this [report].[50]

The attaché stuck to this analysis throughout his tenure in Guatemala and even grew more disillusioned as time progressed. Over the course of about two years, he became convinced that Ubico only cooperated because he wanted U.S. military and economic assistance without the sacrifices involved in fighting the War.[51] In March of 1942, Captain June summarized the effects of U.S. policy on Central American governments in general:

> They regard us as A-1 suckers. They believe that their own particular country is now vitally important to the United States and that they can therefore put pressure on the United States to obtain economic or other concessions in exchange for permitting the use of their territory for military purposes. They construe our foreign policy, in its application to them, as anemic and as a sign of our softness and impending disintegration. While they are willing to accept our handouts, they neither trust nor respect us. We are speaking to them in a language which Latins, long accustomed to tyrannical and dictatorial treatment, do not understand (…) The dictator-presidents of some Central American Countries are so accustomed to dictate to their own people that they are under the impression that they can now dictate to the United States also."[52]

June blamed Guatemala's lax cooperation in the war-effort on United States Foreign Policy, which he believed "has been on the wrong track or (…) has been improperly administered in the field".[53] Des Portes, on his part, complained on several occasions that June and other military representatives were venturing beyond their jurisdiction with their political reporting. The State Department agreed, but was unwilling to tell the War Department to silence its representatives abroad.[54]

While Frazer seemed to have had little trouble with the military people, Erwin's relationship with the military attachés was even tenser than that between Des Portes and June. In many cases the point of contention, cooperation with the local regime, was the same. Erwin reported that his military attaché, Thomas Austin, was paranoid about the

[50] June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 51-42, January 30, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 47, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.
[51] June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 181-42, April 14, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 47, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.
[52] June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 134-42, March 19, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 57, cl. 800: Guatemala. June notes that this analysis applies particularly well to Guatemala and Nicaragua.
[53] *Ibid*.
[54] Drew to James B. Stewart (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua), October 17, 1942, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 5, cl. 800: Central America; Long to Bonsal, December 2, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 121: Naval Attaché; Bonsal to Long, December 14, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.

intentions of the Honduran government.[55] On a later occasion, Erwin proclaimed—at least somewhat diplomatically—his believe that "our Military Attaché obtained [his] information where the spider gets the material for his web and that some of his reports had little more substance".[56] When an American military instructor, “after much soul searching”, informed the legation that the military preparedness of Honduras against *foreign* aggression was not up to par, Erwin offhandedly dismissed the information because, the minister believed, the instructor was biased and, due to his low military rank, not fit to evaluate state policies anyway. When the same instructor offered further information on the substance of Carías’ cooperation, Erwin refused to listen to him, choosing to believe that the local regime was entirely frank in its support of the war-effort.[57]

Why did the views of some of the military people differ so much from that of the legations? A major part of the explanation must be that American diplomats and military officers worked with widely different sources of information. The legations came to rely on its personal relation with the local presidents, who put up quite a show to convince the Americans of their cooperative stance. Furthermore, the legations were overwhelmed by the “paper” side of wartime cooperation, while Captain June and others were more intimately familiar with the practical sides of that cooperation. Guatemala, for example, cooperated fully on paper (as June also attests), but its practical cooperation lagged behind. It seems probable that the legation was only acquainted with the different war-time treaties and agreements between the United States and Guatemala and did not have the manpower or the expertise to evaluate the execution of those treaties.

As June argued, the Ubico administration regarded anyone who showed undue enthusiasm for the war against dictatorship with suspicion (for obvious reasons) and it did everything it could to prevent people from visiting the American legation to voice their concerns about the Guatemalan dictatorship.[58] Meanwhile, the captain himself became well acquainted with the growing dissatisfaction over Ubico’s long-time reign.[59] During the early forties, junior officers in the Guatemalan army became restless because the Ubico administration hampered their upward mobility and relied mainly on the support of Guatemala’s many Generals (in 1944, these junior officers would have a major role to play in the revolution). Unlike the diplomatic officers at the legation, Captain June witnessed this growing discontent through his close acquaintances in the Guatemalan

[55] Erwin to Philip Bonsal (Chief, Division of Latin-American Affairs), December 24, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 75, Vol. II, cl. 123: Erwin.
[56] Faust to the Secretary of State, Telegram 127, June 9, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 15, cl. 891: Censorship of the Press.
[57] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1452, July 11, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 2, cl. 820: Military Affairs.
[58] June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 16-43, January 19, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.
[59] June to Long, February 6, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 60, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 10-43, January 11, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.

army. For the time being, however, the legations were out of touch with the latest internal political developments and focused on supposed fifth column threats.

3. THE SIXTH COLUMN

During the Spanish Civil War, the Nationalist General Emilio Mola boasted that the four columns of his army advancing on Madrid were aided by a clandestine "fifth column" of sympathizers within the city that would undermine the Republican government. Fear of agents provocateur, saboteurs, spies, agitators, etc. was as old as war itself, but the image of a fifth column was something new altogether. It suggested whole cadres of enemies—not just the lone spook—hard at work to deliver cities or even whole countries into the hands of the adversary without a shot being fired. After the Civil War, the image was applied in the West to explain German successes during the Second World War. Although the strength of the German fighting forces was generally recognized, their quick and easy victories in 1939 and 1940 seemed impossible unless they had received assistance from the inside. Thus, inordinate significance was ascribed to the role of Norwegian "Quislings" or French collaborators, setting off an international fifth column scare that hit the United States with full force by 1940. As a result, thousands of "enemy aliens", Germans, Italians, and Japanese, were interned in the United States because of their potential to form a fifth column.[60]

The domestic fifth column scare, which lasted from roughly 1940 to 1942, had far-reaching consequences. Francis MacDonnell catalogued some of the results of the powerful wave of fear that swept the United States early in the War:

> The FBI's manpower, funding, and authority rapidly expanded. The British and American intelligence communities established close ties of cooperation. The United States developed its own capacity for Fifth Column operations in the form of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and later the Central Intelligence Agency. Congress passed important security legislation and took an active part in investigating alleged domestic subversion. Isolationism lost credibility as a viable foreign policy option for the United States…These changes fostered American internationalism abroad while accelerating the creation of a powerful intelligence establishment at home.[61]

The irony of it all was that there never was a *serious* fifth column threat against the United States: While small, ineffectual spy networks did exist and did form a basis for the scare, the latter was caused, fed, and sustained by a historic mistrust of German expansionism, lightning fast German advances from 1939 onward, and alarmist accounts by the American yellow press. The American government did not discourage the developing scare because, on the one hand, it was concerned about the fifth column too, while, on the other hand, the internationalist Roosevelt Administration gratefully employed the fifth column image to silence isolationist critics. Meanwhile, the British intelligence services chipped in by feeding information about German subversion to their

[60] Louis de Jong, *De Duitse Vijfde Colonne in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The German fifth column in the Second World War] (Arnhem and Amsterdam 1953) 3.
[61] MacDonnell, *Insidious foes*, vii

American counterparts. The British hoped that the United States would be more sympathetic to the travails of Europe if it felt directly threatened by the Nazi's. Lastly, as the United States developed its own intelligence agencies to hunt down Nazis across the hemisphere—FBI, OSS, Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), Military Intelligence Division (MID), Secret Service, and special divisions within the Treasury and State Departments—the competition, overzealousness, and ambitions of these agencies began to play an important role in the supply of misinformation about the extend of the fifth column threat.[62]

The Dutch historian Louis de Jong, probably the first to seriously investigate the phenomenon of the fifth column scare from a historical perspective, established that Hitler and the Nazi top were not interested in the conquest or invasion of the American continent—at least not in the short term—and did not develop spy rings to prepare for it. Later German studies confirmed De Jong's findings. Reiner Pommerin established that up to about 1941, Hitler was in fact careful not to antagonize the United States. Some halfhearted programs to establish spy rings or to elicit the loyalty of German colonies on the American continent were developed by the middle sections of the German Foreign Ministry and the *Auslandabteilung* of the Nazi Party. These programs failed because of lack of support from the German leadership; rivalry between the state bureaucracy and the Party; resistance from the German colonies; and watchfulness of the American nations. Only the German program to improve trade relations with South America was modestly successful before 1939, but quickly fell apart after the start of the War. The small German "spy rings" that did exist, notably in Uruguay and the United States, were amateurish affairs and were quickly eliminated by local intelligence services.[63]

The story of the fifth column scare and the (largely) unjustified program of internment of Americans of foreign origin inside the United States is fairly well known. Somewhat less familiar is the fact that Washington actively pursued the alleged fifth column in Latin America too. The American perception of a fifth column threat to Latin America led to the establishment of a hasty program for the deportation and internment of thousands of Germans and Japanese. It also justified the American expansion of intelligence activities in the region and the establishment of firm military ties with Southern governments. In this case also, historians later asserted that the danger of actual enemy subversion was too small to justify the disruptive and ethically questionable measures taken against the "fifth columnists". Historian Max Friedman even quipped that the real threat to Latin America society was not from a fifth column, but from a sixth column of people who believed in the existence of the fifth column.[64]

The consequences of American actions against the German threat to Latin America were no less significant than the results of the domestic fifth column scare. In the words of Friedman:

[62] *idem*, i-vii; Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 48-64 and 73; Bratzel and Leonard, *Latin America during World War II*, 5-7.
[63] De Jong, *De Duitse Vijfde Colonne*, 263-283 ; Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich*, 27-44 ; Pommerin, "Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland", 398-406.
[64] Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 57.

> …some of the same faulty practices established in the anti-German campaign were redirected toward the [Communists during the Cold War] – producing even more ineffective foreign policy and a sanguinary record that fueled further conflict with the rest of the Americas. The campaign against the Germans living in the region not only ruined the temporary gains of the Good Neighbor policy and failed to achieve its central goal of improving hemispheric security; it also created a precedent for the excesses of the anti-Communist crusade that obsessed the United States over the next fifty years…[65]

It might be added—or specified—that the Nazi hunt in Central America had a particularly negative effect on the American Foreign Service, which was the backbone of the "sixth column" there. First of all, the legations allowed themselves to loose sight of local events while they focused their attention on the apparition of the fifth column—a theme that will be further examined in the next chapter. Second, the nonintervention principle, which, rhetorically at least, had become something of a religious dogma, was all but abandoned in the interest of "fighting" the War. Third, and most damningly perhaps, Foreign Service officers in Central America and Washington started to appreciate the usefulness of having "sons-of-bitches" on their side against the Nazis. During the War, American diplomats developed the justifications for tolerating and even supporting local tyrannies that would also inform U.S. Cold War policy.

Throughout the 1930s, American Foreign Service officers in Central America were mainly preoccupied with internal political developments. That this should change during the War is partly due to the demands of the State Department, but a changing conception of what diplomacy should be about also played a major role. Geopolitical considerations became important during the War, even thought, at first glance, the Central American posts seemed far removed from battle. However, Central America's geographical position, in between the United States and the all-important Panama Canal, made it an obvious military target for the enemy. The relatively large colonies of German immigrants could easily be imagined to contain enemy agents. Also, "many in the United States thought Latin American countries could not manage their own affairs without paternal guidance from Washington, and assumed that the hidden hand of a European power lay behind any significant unrest or discordance with U.S. plans".[66]

In addition De Jong argued that many people who were not directly involved in fighting the War felt an urge to participate in some useful way. Calling to mind the feelings of uncertainty, undirected aggression, and helplessness that plagued those who lived through the War, De Jong wrote that:

> This inner tension, which is triggered by that acute though nameless fear, by that aggressiveness bereft of an immediate target, and by that feeling of helplessness and insecurity, could be discharged once one finds *in their own surroundings* an individual upon whom the mark of "hostile" could be set: then the fear would lose its mysterious, vague character; the undirected

[65] *Idem*, 12.
[66] Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 3.

> aggression [would] get a target; the helplessness and insecurity [would] be dissolved in an immediate duty: the attack on the "enemy in our midst". Executing that attack, one would "do something", "help to win the war".[67]

Officers in the United States Foreign Service did find a niche for themselves in the larger fight against fascism—even when they were serving in places far removed from actual combat. By securing the cooperation of neutrals and allies and by coordinating American wartime measures in other countries, thus securing lines of communication, flow of strategic materials, and keeping a check on enemy activities, the Foreign Service felt that it fulfilled a vital role in winning the War.

Though this self-perception became commonplace during the Cold War, it was a departure from situation in the 1930s. In his unpublished memoirs, Caffery, for example, described the job in idealistic terms: "If you are a good Foreign Service officer, you are very good, and you have the most marvelous opportunity in the world for doing really big things for your country and for the world and for humankind and even for God. But if you are not good, you are no good in the world. So decide for yourself".[68] Those officers whose professional education coincided with the War, however, entertained much more combatative—"realistic" would be their own term—ideas about their work. After the War, they no longer conceived of the world as a place where good, constructive things could be accomplished, but as a dangerous, threatening place where self-interest and vigilance were the prerequisites of sound diplomacy. John Cabot, secretary of legation in Guatemala around the start of the War, argued in his memoirs that:

> The United States has no imperial ambitions, but it must reckon with the imperial ambitions of others, and we cannot expect that we alone can sustain ourselves against any and all adversaries. We are irremediably dependent upon loyal allies and friendly neutrals to help us and supply us with our needs. And that is what I mean when I say that our diplomatic representatives abroad, who must do everything in their power to see that our international relationships are favorable in the event of a crisis, are our first line of defense.[69]

This bleak outlook came to dominate the view of the postwar generation—those "born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace" in Kennedy's words. Students as well as practitioners of diplomacy, Kennan, Morgenthau, Lippmann, Niebuhr, all expounded the "Realist" attitude shown by Cabot and maligned the starry-eyed idealism of men like Caffery.

Even if this changing attitude in the Foreign Service was very gradual and thus hard to pinpoint in the Legations' records, it will hopefully become clear that it provides a general background for the other two developments: The changing conceptions of nonintervention and cooperation with dictatorships. In the context of the fight against fascism, American diplomats became increasingly tolerant—even appreciative—of harsh measures to "save" the "free world". Many formerly cherished aspects of international

[67] De Jong, *De Duitse Vijfde Colonne*, 326. Translation by the author.
[68] Cabot, *First line of Defense*, 26.
[69] *Idem*, ix.

law, American political culture, and the Good Neighbor policy were abandoned because imminent dangers required it. One cannot define a single government directive or State Department decision that revoked the previously "neighborly" attitude of the United States toward Latin America. Rather, the prewar taboo on such things as intervention, propaganda measures, and military and intelligence cooperation with local tyrants were slowly and sometimes unconsciously subverted—be it in the name of protecting democracy against fascism—by State Department officials. In the meantime, the ideal of Good Neighborliness was still upheld rhetorically.

Up to about 1940, the State Department and the Foreign Service maintained a principled attitude in matters such as intervention, propaganda, intelligence, and arms trade. The non-intervention policy is of course well known, but with regard to the execution of its diplomacy, the State Department also felt that cultural attachés were inappropriate, because "the conception of an official culture is entirely alien to the United States":

> …it may be pointed out that it has been particularly the totalitarian states which have been desirous of appointing "cultural attachés", whose activities and whose identification with propaganda not conductive to the maintenance of stable conditions in the receiving countries, are sufficiently well known.[70]

An illustrative example of the Department's attitude toward intelligence gathering is Secretary of State Henry Stimson's famous decision in 1929 to cut funding of the "Cipher Bureau"—a Department agency devoted to cracking the diplomatic codes of other countries. The reason given by the Secretary was that: "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail". In 1940, the Department did suggest, tentatively, that its legations in Latin America should use "to a greater extent than heretofore the information available to intelligent and loyal American citizens resident abroad" in connection with "present world conditions". However, the Department refused to acknowledge that it was "organizing an intelligence service". Instead, it considered its first steps into the realm of intelligence gathering merely as an informal arrangement with trusted Americans abroad: "The Department believes (…) that most reputable Americans will welcome an opportunity to be of service at this time even though their activities must necessarily be rendered gratis (no funds being available for the purchase of information) and without evidence of public recognition".[71]

During the War, however, cultural attachés and FBI agents ("legal attachés") were sent to all American republics to conduct large scale propaganda programs and to gather intelligence on "non-American" activities. These men were joined by military instructors who were to ease the introduction of American armaments to the sister republics and economic advisors to wage economic warfare on Axis nationals. These new activities were also accompanied by more benign programs for the improvement of roads, hospitals, sewers, agricultural techniques, and educational programs—all

[70] Messerschmith to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 12, 1939, Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1993/I, cl. 121: Cultural and Educational Attaché.
[71] Messerschmith to Frederick F. Salter (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Honduras), October 23, 1941, Honduras (SCF), Box 1, Vol. 1993/I, cl. 124.66: Records and Correspondence.

intended to bolster the stability of local governments and thus secure a constant flow of strategic materials to the United States. What the proliferation of wartime agencies and programs meant for "non-intervention" has been observed in the first chapter and will be further developed in the next chapter: More and more Central Americans came into direct contact with the Americans, encouraging the view that the United States took a direct interest in their affairs while the opposite was true.[72]

The legations were probably not completely aware of the extend to which U.S. agencies were interfering in Central America. While the ministers were supposed to coordinate all American activities in the country were they served, it proved difficult to manage the expanding duties of the legations themselves and still be aware of the details of programs executed by representatives of the War Department, Justice Department, Sanitation Division, Coordination Committee, etc. Furthermore, activities expanded faster than regulations on lines of command, so there was a lot of uncertainty about which agencies fell under the jurisdiction of the minister and which ones did not.[73] That the ministers in Central America were not professionals, except for Frazer, probably did not help.

However, the Legations themselves were very much involved in the internal affairs of Central America as well: Far-reaching economic warfare on German companies, for example, could only be accomplished by far-reaching cooperation with the local governments—to the point were the legation in Guatemala prepared the laws that the local government needed to implement to make economic warfare possible.[74] Strangely, though, the rhetorical commitment to noninterference remained intact. Naturally, it was necessary to come up with new definitions and justifications to harmonize wartime activities with a supposed attitude of noninterference. In 1941, for example, Frazer argued that encouraging Salvadoran newspapers to print "solidarity-of-the-Americans propaganda" did not constitute propaganda: "to regard the exercise of such an influence [over the Salvadoran press] as circumscribing their independence is, we think, perhaps an extreme view. As a matter of fact, the entire press of Salvador is pro-Pan-American anyhow, so that no paper would be violating its principles or sacrificing its ideals by printing [U.S. propaganda]".[75] Likewise, when the Honduran government arrested four Honduran citizens of German stock at Erwin's request, the Minister maintained that "in supplying these names to the Honduran Government, I did so informally and merely suggested the possibility that the Government might wish to consider the desirability of removing them".[76]

[72] Also see chapter 7, pages 226-240.
[73] See chapter 1, pages 54-62.
[74] Cabot, Memorandum, October 17, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942.
[75] Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1437, July 2, 1941, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 5, cl. 891: Public Press.
[76] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1946, April 6, 1942, PR Honduras, (SCF), Box 8, Vol. 2, cl. 820.02: Military Affairs.

Interestingly, in 1942 the Department of State became concerned about the "impression" prevalent in some Latin American countries that the United States had abandoned its popular nonintervention policy during the War." The Axis nations were using this sentiment to their advantage, the Department believed, with propaganda about "Yankee Imperialism":

> The pretext for this propaganda is the increasing activity of this government in various enterprises on the soil of the other American republics: the construction and operation of military and naval bases, the Proclaimed List, deportations, a wide variety of economic operations (ranging from the war-connected rubber programs to projects with a pronounced "welfare" aspect, such as the health and sanitation program).

The Department patently rejected the notion that such activities were acts of intervention: "After all, intervention on behalf of special groups in the United States [a reference to business interests] has not been revived". Furthermore, all U.S. activities were executed on the basis of "collaboration" and "what can honestly be described as [the] interests of the whole hemisphere". This turned out to be the magic formula: As long as local collaborators could be found and as long as the objectives of the United States could be described as serving a common cause, the Department was not, in fact, intervening: "We must get off the defensive. The expression 'nonintervention' should give way to 'collaboration', as a sign of changed conditions". Although it was not acknowledged at the time, the problem remained that local collaborators might use their connections to U.S. programs to increase their own power and prestige. Also, there was no democratic method by which the definition of the "common good" could be established: The State Department would take it upon itself to determine that.[77]

In terms of cooperation with the local regimes during the War, American diplomats began to appreciate the harsh measures against subversion taken by local dictatorships. For example, in the early summer of 1940, Ubico suggested to the American legation that he could have the whole German colony expelled if this would further the cause against Nazism. John Cabot, the chargé at that time, admits that his first reaction to the plan was to "recoil at its drastic and rather inhumane implications". However, "after having the opportunity to think it over several days", he came to the conclusion that the idea merited serious consideration. On July 23, Cabot wrote to his superiors that the "natural instinct" to be shocked by such mass exportation should be suppressed, since the Nazi's themselves deported thousands of Germans from Tyrol and the Baltic States—not to mention their policies against the Jews. So, even if "two wrongs do not make a right", it was true that Hitler would not be "appeased" and that only a firm stand might stop him. To summarize his views, Cabot argues that "[it] is one thing to behave like a gentleman in a drawing room, and quite another thing to be a Casper Milquetoast

[77] Memorandum on Propaganda about Relations between this Government and the other American Republics, September 17, 1942, Lot Files, ARA, Entry 214: Miscellaneous Memorandums, January 4, 1938 to September 12, 1947 (henceforth Entry 214, Box 66, Folder marked Chapin and Toop, 1941 to December 1942.

when confronted by a thug in a dark alley". The dictatorial allies in Central America were particularly useful in this regard, since the American reply to Ubico's plan could be "worded in such a way as to place the decision entirely in the President's [i.e. Ubico's] hands". That way, the U.S. could conveniently keep its hands clean.[78]

In the context of expanding intelligence and propaganda activities and the arming of the Southern neighbors, the military dictatorships of Central America turned out to be peculiarly useful allies. Not only were they particularly keen to follow U.S. policies, they also had standing armies, intelligence networks, permissive laws against subversion, and propaganda machines that could—with a little help and direction from the United States—be employed to fight the fifth column. The only liberal country in Central America, Costa Rica, was at a disadvantage in this regard: "German and Italian activities in Costa Rica date from the very beginning of the Nazi and fascist regimes in Germany and Italy. This is accounted for by the fact that (…) the Government of Costa Rica is democratic in every sense of the word and activities could therefore be carried on without any hindrance".[79] Ironically, then, the most democratic Republic of the isthmus was most vulnerable to totalitarian subversion.

The only problem was that the armies and security forces of the dictatorships were hopelessly backward institutions. The War Department even warned the State Department on several occasions that any American weapons that were send to Central America would go to waste, because no one in those countries knew how to operate them. Thus military missions and FBI instructors were eventually sent to Central America to train the local security forces in the use of modern weapons, intelligence gathering, and surveillance—increasing the regimes' capability to control its own population. Nelson Rockefeller's famous Coordination Commission financed the dictators' official press and supplied upbeat "information" about the War and the United Nations—thus strengthening the impression that the dictators were important allies of the United States. Economic advisors helped the local authorities to nationalize German interest—giving the regimes new sources for graft and illegal enrichment. U.S. engineers built roads, sewers, hospitals, and schools with U.S. funds—but the local leaders claimed that the new services were the result of their progressive policies.

Among these many programs and activities, the growth of inter-American military relations, with its obvious implications for U.S. relations to military dictatorships and military suppression of communism during the Cold War, is one theme that receives more than passing attention in the historical treatment of war years is. Even before the War, the U.S. War Department had embarked on a project to push out external (mainly

[78] Cabot to the Secretary of State, dispatch 1304, July 23, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 820.02: Nazi Activities. Incidentally, "Casper Milquetoast" was a character in the comic strip "*The Timid Soul*", which was published from 1924 to 1953. During that time, the character's name became a generally accepted reference to an unusually meek, submissive, or cowardly individual. The word is now no longer in use. Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, *The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang* (5th edition: New York 1972).

[79] John Moors Cabot (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Costa Rica), Strictly Confidential Memorandum for Mr. Overton G. Ellis, n.d. (September, 1941), PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 42, Vol. VI, cl. 500: Congresses and Conferences.

European) arms dealers and to make American arms the standard for the entire continent. While this obviously benefited American producers, the rationale for this move was that it enabled inter-American defense cooperation. The War was a significant catalyst for inter-American military cooperation: United States lend-lease arms, military instructors, and military missions flooded the hemisphere. For historians, the proliferation of American arms and military know-how raises the question of whether the U.S. military program helped authoritarian military regimes, such as those of Central America, to maintain themselves in power. There is no easy answer to this question.[80] On the one hand, U.S. military aid to Central America was very limited both in terms of the overall lend-lease program and in terms of the inflated requests for arms made by the military regimes themselves. On the other hand, the military establishments of Central America were poorly armed and used antiquated weaponry before the War. Even a small delivery of modern (sub)machine guns or a single detachment of modern tanks represented a significant strengthening of local military forces.

The program of lend-lease was intended to provide to the American governments the means by which they could defend themselves against outside aggression and as such, could not be described as intervention, according to the Department. But in Central America, where opposition to the dictatorships mounted during the War, as will become clear in the next chapter, many people considered lend-lease to be a from of support for the local regime against its people. The State Department established jurisdiction over arms deliveries to Latin America in 1940 and was aware of the fact that any arms sent to the region could be used by the military dictatorships to maintain themselves in power. Therefore, the Department was extremely reluctant, before 1941, to deliver weapons to Central America. Such sage considerations were abandoned over the next two years, however. During those years, it should be remembered, there appeared to be a very real probability that Germany would win the War or that Japan might bomb the Panama Canal. So, without going into details about the why and wherefore of specific arms deliveries, it is understandable that the Department temporarily abandoned its carefulness in the interest of the common defense. But once the floodgates were open it was difficult to keep a check on the amount and sort of

[80] For the argument that the overall effect of military aid during the war was slight, see: John M. Baines, "U.S Military Assistance to Latin America: An Assessment", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 14:4 (November 1972) 469-487; Leonard, "Central America: On the Periphery", in: Leonard and Bratzel eds., *Latin America during World War II*, 50-53. For the argument that U.S. military aid significantly increased the power and prestige of local military establishments, see: Coatsworth, *The Clients and the Colossus*, 45-48. Authors who stress the importance of local military developments but do not assign a (major) role to U.S. programs are: Kenneth J. Grieb, "The Guatemalan Military and the Revolution of 1944", *The Americas* 32:4 (April 1976) 524-543; Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization*. Loveman and Davies eds., *The Politics of Anti-Politics*, esp. 29-30, offers a long term analysis which indicates that, to the surprise of American policymakers themselves, the Latin American professional officer corps created by U.S. programs showed increasing interest in politics after the war and became deeply involved in local government. Child, *Unequal Alliance*, 27-62 probably offers the most detailed discussion of wartime inter-American relations, but does not arrive at an explicit conclusion on how the military programs affected the local balance of power.

weapons that reached the arsenals of Central America. In 1941, for example, a representative of the Auto Ordnance Company inquired whether the Department had any objection to its promotion of the Thompson submachine gun among the American military attachés in Latin America. The so-called "Tommy gun" was particularly useful for street fighting and could hardly be said to serve the "common defense"—the weapon would most likely be used to suppress indigenous discontent. Yet, the Department somewhat cynically informed the company that "In view of the policy which the Department has adopted of lavishing weapons and ammunition on the other American Republics (…) there was no reason why [the company] should not make [its] product known to attachés here".[81]

Apart from the Department's own reasons to provide the Central American regimes with modern weaponry, the sense of crisis that marked the early war years—say, up to the Battle of Stalingrad and the invasion of North Africa—gave the caudillos a good bargaining position. And they used it. The prime example is that of Jorge Ubico, who managed to squeeze the Americans into promising him the second best lend-lease terms—only Great Britain received arms on better terms at the time. It was not the first time, of course, that the Guatemalan dictator tried to obtain modern American weapons for his army. In 1939, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister suggested that the Guatemalan Government had 200,000 well-trained soldiers at its disposal if the United States would supply them with weapons—in fact, the army was no larger than some 5,000 badly trained recruits. In 1940, Ubico again claimed that he needed 200,000 rifles for his "trained soldiers" if his country was to be of any use to the United States in case of war. At that point, the legation and the military attachés agreed that substantial arms deliveries for Guatemala would go to waste, since the Guatemalan army was only trained for parade exercises and "not remotely capable" of using modern American arms. But since Ubico would be "very hurt" if the request were denied outright, and might even turn to the Axis for supplies, the Department decided to just stall the issue by insisting that intensive studies should first be made of the training, capabilities, and needs of the Guatemalan army first.[82]

Ubico, however, considered such studies unnecessary and was hostile to the idea that his soldiers might require further training. So in 1941, he upped the ante. First, the Guatemalan Ministry of Foreign Relations pointed out on several occasions that fascist Spain had offered a very interesting coffee-for-weapons deal. The State Department answered that it would "prefer" that the deal did not take place, considering the "political orientation" of the government of Spain. Indeed, the deal was never closed, but the Guatemalan ministry kept reminding the Americans that a deal with Spain was a possibility. Over the course of the next year, many more opportunities to put pressure on

[81] Bonsal, Memorandum of Conversation with Frederick T. Willis of the Auto Ordnance Company, September 5, 1941, Lot Files, Entry 211, Box 5, Folder marked General Memoranda, August to September, 1941.
[82] Cabot to Bonsal, July 16, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Bonsal to Ray, Wilson, and Welles, January 2, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942;

Washington were thrown into Ubico's lap. In September, 1941, the United States started blacklisting German companies in Latin America, but Ubico stalled the matter for some time while the official newspaper of the capital started a bitter editorial campaign against the American plans. By the end of that year, the United States started negotiations for the unlimited use of Guatemalan airfields and ports, but Ubico delayed the matter by insisting that diplomatic protocol and ceremony be observed during the negotiations. Around that same time, Ubico allowed one of his cabinet ministers, Gonzalo Campo, to publish several articles critical of Minister Des Portes in the official press (the two had been on bad terms for some time). All the while, however, the Guatemalan President was sensible enough not to push the Americans too far: After Pearl Harbor, Guatemala immediately declared war on the Axis and some time later, Ubico suspended Guatemalan claims on British Honduras—long a source of friction with Great Britain—for the duration of the War. With this carefully balanced "push-pull" policy, Ubico managed to keep the State Department in suspense. Eventually, the Americans decided that a token of good will had to be made to ensure Guatemalan cooperation.[83]

Around the end of January, 1942, when an agreement for the use of Guatemalan airfields was settled, the Guatemalan Government implied that it was still waiting for a delivery of rifles for some 10,000 soldiers, but that it did not plan to pay 60% of the bill as suggested by the new lend-lease laws. Rather than feeling that Ubico was pushing them around, Department officials actually felt that it had not shown proper gratitude for Guatemalan cooperation. The Division of American Republic Affairs believed that there was something to be said for the idea of supplying weapons at nominal cost to countries that had declared war spontaneously. Bonsal permitted that no-one really expected Britain to pay back a fraction of 60% of the cost of lend-lease arms. So in June of 1942, around the time that the Department was negotiating an agreement for the use of airfields in Guatemala, Washington offered Ubico an even better deal than he had been lobbying for: his army was to receive arms to the value of 3 million dollars—no strings attached![84]

[83] See especially: Cabot, Memorandum, December 5, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942. Also consult: Duggan, Memorandum of Conversation with the Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Affairs, September 4, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot to Hooker, Meltzer, Reinstein, and White, October 29, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot to Winters, Daniels, Duggan, and Callado, November 15, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot to Toop, Winters, and Daniels, December 8, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942

[84] Cabot to Wright, Winters, Bonsal, and Hooker, January 27, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Bonsal to Hooker, Wilson, and Duggan, January 30, 1942 Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Tomlinson to Winters and Bonsal, March 24, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Bonsal to Duggan, June 12, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot, Memorandum for the files, June 10, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Bonsal to Welles, June 11, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942;

Interestingly, the War Department dragged its feet all the while, arguing that the weapons earmarked for Guatemala could be put to much better use and that the country's ports and airfields were not even that important from a strategic point of view. It should be stressed, therefore, that the decision to deliver arms to Guatemala and its neighbors was a motivated by political considerations: to strengthen bonds between the American Republics "on paper". Cabot wrote his chief at the Division, for example that the rejection of arms requests by the caudillos would "reveal a clear distrust of our allies, and thereby [give] them a cause for offense of greater intrinsic importance than any benefit they might derive from a driblet of arms…".[85] Only after about 1943, when the American arms industry was at peek production and the U.S. military started to make plans for a postwar world dominated by American arms and military tactics, did the War Department change its position on arms deliveries. Ironically, toward the end of the war the State Department began to take a dim view on the lend-lease agreements it had negotiated around 1942: with the real crisis of the War over, the diplomats began question the effects that the arms deliveries would have locally.[86] The deliveries of tanks, airplanes, and machineguns that had been negotiated in 1942 only began to arrive in the Central American capitals by 1944. In that year, the Central American populations began to mobilize against their tyrannical governments. As they marched on the presidential palaces, they encountered tanks clearly marked "U.S. army". In the end, the Department could count itself lucky that the caudillos did not have the stomach to use American weapons on their own people (at least not on a large scale) and that rebel army units managed the capture some of the lend-lease material before it could be deployed. But, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the proliferation of American arms was just one consequence of the War.[87]

Bonsal to Cabot and Duggan, June 16, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942.

[85] Cabot to Bonsal, August 4, 1943, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947.

[86] Cabot notes in July, 1943, that "99 per cent" of supposedly strategic reasons to supply arms to Central America had been eliminated and that future arms deliveries could "only be used either to put down local opposition to the dictatorship, or to bestow a hail of lead on the neighbors. We would scarcely wish to connive at either". Cabot mused that lend-lease credit might be employed to deliver road building equipment to Central America, but acknowledged that a whole series of new international treaties and American laws was necessary to make this possible. Cabot to Bonsal, July 12, 1943, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947.

[87] Cabot, Memorandum on the Protection of Puerto Barrios and other Central American Ports, May 28, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot to Hawkins, August 11, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942; Cabot to Bonsal, November 10, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936-1942. The archives of the American Embassy in San Salvador offer a very good overview of the problems involved in the deliveries of lend-lease tanks in 1944: HGA, Memorandum on Political Developments, December 29, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1448, April 5, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, Vol. XIII, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1452, April 11, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 800: Salvador. Political; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1465, April 14, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10,

4. BEST FRIENDS FOREVER?

A very real external threat combined with the pressure of wartime cooperation and the overrated threat of the fifth column drove the American legations in Central America into the arms of the local caudillos. While this reasoning makes the wartime alliance of convenience between the United States and the isthmian dictatorships justifiable—in a utilitarian sense anyway—and perhaps even understandable, the conceptual integration of these same dictators in a nominally democratic league of nations was not without its consequences, some of them imminently unjustifiable and difficult to understand.

In the short term, the American legations' close cooperation with the Central American regimes, and their redefinition of those regimes as part of a democratic alliance, blinded American diplomats to the fact that a new, democratically inspired opposition movement was developing against the dictatorships. Taking Guatemala as an example, there emerged broad based popular opposition to Ubico's regime. Partly inspired by wartime propaganda against dictatorship and partly inspired by purely local events, large groups in Guatemala's society rejected Ubico's rule by 1944 and they would eventually topple his regime and that of his short-lived military successors. One would expect to find some evidence that the American legation was aware of these developments, if only because they had the potential of disturbing U.S.-Guatemalan cooperation during the War. But in fact, the legation was blissfully unaware of the extent of opposition against Ubico. Even if its officials were not completely ignorant of Ubico's declining popularity, they did underestimate the dangers the regime was in. This is not to say that the American legation supported Ubico in the face of mounting opposition, but merely to argue that it expected Ubico's administration to outlast the War and that, therefore, U.S.-Guatemalan cooperation during the War was secure. Meanwhile, the new middle class, democratically inclined forces of Central America became disillusioned about American cooperation with the outmoded dictatorships. The Americans, for their part, were unable to integrate the existence of a genuinely pro-democratic movement into their conception of Central American politics.

On the long term, the language created during the 1940s to conceptualize the fight against fascism, reemerged toward the 1950s to give form and substance to the new alliances that formed to battle Soviet communism. While the supposed threat of "communistic" uprisings and disturbances played its own role in Central American politics during the 1930s, the idea that a fifth column could deliver whole countries to a foreign enemy without a shot being fired—an idea that became widely accepted during the War—influenced the way in which the American diplomatic corps dealt with the communist specter. Also, the hollowing-out of nonintervention and the tolerance for

cl. 824: Military Supplies and Equipment; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2023, June 21, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 824: Military Supplies and Equipment. Around that time, Berle notified Gade that the Department was aware of the fact that Central American oppositionists deplored the fact that the U.S. was delivering arms to the dictators, but countered that such deliveries were negotiated at a time when the fear of a German invasion was very real. Berle to Gade, Instruction 701, November 1, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 9, cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.

harsh suppression of anti-establishment forces—also tendencies developed during the War—allowed the American Foreign Service to play a much more significant role in support for Central American military administrations toward the end of the 1940s and especially the 1950s.

But while it is now obvious that the Second World War would be followed closely by the Cold War, it should be stressed that the future of U.S.-Central American relations remained uncertain for contemporary observers as the War came to its end. In fact, two very contradictory strands of thoughts would compete for dominance after about 1945. Firstly, many American Foreign Service officers had felt uncomfortable with dictatorial rule in Central America ever since the *continuismo* campaigns. While there was very little that could be done to change the political reality in Central America under the 1930s Good Neighbor policy, the nonintervention principle was all but hollowed out during the War. Democratically inclined diplomats had a free hand, after the War, to pursue the export of their ideology—especially because democratic opposition was growing within Central America itself. Secondly, the Foreign Service establishment had learned to work closely with the caudillos. Since internal political developments, including the growth of opposition, had largely been ignored by the Legations, some diplomats were convinced that cooperation with the military regimes should be continued after the War. Which one of these two perceptions of Central American affairs would come out on top would be worked out after the 1944 Revolutions.

Chapter 7

SACRIFICES OF WAR
The embassies and the upheavals of 1944

[W]hen people [on the Honduran north coast] read and hear American statements regarding the termination of the war, they think of local as well as of European dictators.

~ *Vice Consul Julian Nugent, 1943*

In the summer of 1943, Julian Nugent, the American Vice Consul at the small consulate of Puerto Cortés, Honduras, toured his district to collect economic information for his reports. It was a difficult journey, quite unimaginable from a modern standpoint or even from the standpoint of American embassy in Tegucigalpa at the time. Nugent had to make part of his trip on a mule; was immediately involved in local intrigues in every village he passed; and found himself caught up in talk of machete charges on the Presidential Palace in the grungy *cantinas* along the road. Inevitably, Nugent got in touch with people that were beyond his regular circle of acquaintances. Like an entomologist finding a rare species of butterfly, Nugent was surprised to encounter, on one of his mule treks, a "seemingly genuine representative of the average low-income class in Santa Bárbara". Even more astonishingly, the vice consul reported how this particular specimen:

> …described most fulsomely the lost liberties enjoyed during previous regimes, as compared with the present element of suppression. Since this person has never held public office and has little hope of ever getting one under any regime, his opinions—even if they turn out to be illusions—do not appear to be those of a thwarted office seeker. The fact that they are not wholly correct from a historical viewpoint would seem to make little difference, if this person and sufficient other countrymen really believe such opinions.[1]

The disconnect between the vice consul and the Honduran worker concerning Honduran history is interesting in itself. If Nugent had shared his view of Honduran political history with his road companion, he might have said something to the effect that Honduras had always been a backward country where a "General" with 20 odd followers could become president.[2] Americans in Honduras had apparently forgotten that there had been free

[1] Julian L. Nugent (U.S. vice consul to Puerto Cortes) to Thurston, Report 52, August 25, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 12, cl. 800: Continued.
[2] A paraphrase from Faust's description of the Honduran political process. John B. Faust (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 108, June 4, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 13, cl. 820.02: Foreign Activities.

elections and comparative political liberty in that country during the 1920s. Hondurans, evidently, had not.[3] And even if the Honduran worker from Santa Bárbara idealized the time before the *Caríato* somewhat, his historical recollections were not completely off the mark.

Nugent's encounter is informative in other respects. The idea that Hondurans could entertain political ideologies which had anything but a direct connection with their immediate interests was quite foreign to the vice consul and his colleagues. Thus, Nugent found the fact that his companion had little hope of obtaining public office particularly noteworthy. It was an indication that the latter's ideas were not a mere rationalization for his political ambitions. The *idée reçue* among Americans at the legation was that Honduran politics were an eternal struggle between the "ins" and the "outs" and that there were no significant ideological differences between the two, only conflicting ambitions. Erwin, for example, believed that "the desire to bring about his [Carías'] overthrow is not widespread and is confined to political cliques dominated by disappointed seekers for presidential office".[4] The fact that, by 1943, discontent had spread beyond the traditional political cliques and involved more than thwarted ambitions had not yet been digested by the embassy's officers.

Lastly, and intractably tied up with the American perception of Honduran history, politics, and politicians, there is considerable irony in the fact that Nugent was surprised to find that "when people here read and hear American statements regarding the termination of the war, they think of local as well as of European dictators". The State Department and other government agencies had vigorously pushed the dissemination in Latin America of propaganda about the fight against dictatorship in order to create more sympathy for the "democratic cause". Due to the notion that Hondurans were backward and politically opportunistic, many American diplomats had not considered it possible that the locals would conceive of the high ideals behind the war as applying to *them*. Some were more careful than others. Des Portes for example, cautioned the Department in 1942 that a propaganda leaflet about the "Four Freedoms" would not be "politically acceptable in Guatemala".[5] Also, when Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* reached Guatemalan cinemas, Des Portes and some of Ubico's underlings worried that the local, smaller dictator might take the movie personally (as it turned out, Ubico loved the film—he was not a man prone to self-reflection).[6] Erwin, on the other hand, never considered

[3] On Barahona period, see: Dodd, *Carías*, 43-44 and Argueta, *Carías*, 56-66.
[4] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 49, May 13, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800: Revolution. Exiles.
[5] [RSC] to Des Portes, Memorandum for the Minister, August 28, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 60, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-49, September 3, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 60, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda.
[6] Hull to Des Portes, Telegram 2, January 3, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements; Cabot to the Secretary of State, Telegram 4, January 4, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements ; Hull to Cabot, Telegram 4, January 8, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements; Cabot to the Secretary of State, Telegram 6, January 17, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements; Cabot to Guy W. ray, January 18, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements; Cabot to the Secretary of State, dispatch 1757,

the possibility that anti-dictatorial propaganda would affront the local government or upset the political status quo. Considering allied propaganda as nothing more than a conceptualization of the war, and Honduras as nothing less than an enthusiastic wartime ally, the minister reported in 1942 that the distribution of a leaflet about the "Four Freedoms" would, in fact, be welcomed in Honduras.[7] Erwin was not naïve about the nature of Carías' government; he knew full well that it was a dictatorship, it was just that he never dreamed that Hondurans could believe that the Four Freedoms applied to them.

Even though Honduras had its own history of liberal politics, as the worker from Santa Bárbara rightly reminded Nugent, American wartime propaganda did contributed to local discontent about the dictatorship. It would be misleading to argue that American propaganda *caused* the discontent, but the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms did provide a ready-made ideological context for it. And Nugent was right about one thing: if enough Hondurans—and Salvadorans and Guatemalans for that matter—believed in the "democratic cause", it mattered little if it was intended to apply to them or not. By about 1944, enough Central Americans had concluded that the dictators had to go. That year turned out to be a critical test for the endurance of the caudillos and also for the ability of the embassies to maintain a balance between changing conditions and America's long term interests. There were many failures that year.

1. THE RISE OF EXPECTATIONS

During the early thirties American diplomats had high hopes for dynamic Central American leaders like Ubico, expecting them to make "prosperous little countries" out of the republics under their stewardship. Even if their foresight was imperfect in other respects, the prewar diplomats were right on this point. At least, by the end of the war most Central American republics had recovered from the depths of the Depression. While it is impossible to estimate how much of the economic recovery was caused by government policy and how much by worldwide economic recovery, it is undeniable that the actions of the isthmian regimes had a profound impact on the social-economic makeup of their countries.[8]

Depending on the book one reads on the subject, the caudillos have been portrayed as builders, modernizers, and invaluable contributors to the creation of centralized states in Central America, or as military thugs of anachronistic Liberal oligarchies. While no one will deny that the caudillos were socially conservative, or that their economic policies came at a considerable to cost to civil liberties, historians have

March 11, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements. Des Portes commented that there was "considerable wonderment in Guatemalan circles that the Government permitted the film to be shown. This country's experience with dictators is somewhat greater and more actual than that in the United States". Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1766, March 19, 1941, PR Guatemala, Box 43, cl. 840.06: Amusements.

[7] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-65, September 28, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 84, cl. 820.02: Espionage. Propaganda. Gathering of Intelligence.

[8] The most complete discussion of this trend, largely from an economic angle, is Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 68-104.

also emphasized their contributions to Central America's economic and political development. Thomas Dodd, for example, concludes that "Carías laid the foundation for the growth of modern capitalism and development, expanding the state's role in society".[9]

Other historians claim that, from a wider perspective, *caudillismo* was merely a holding operation for the obsolete liberal oligarchic system. Mario Argueta, for example, denies that Carías did much of anything to modernize the country: the latter's rule, while nominally Nationalist and conservative, froze in time the precepts of classic Liberalism and Positivism while the world around Honduras was changing rapidly.[10] Woodward concluded that "[i]n retrospect, these dictatorships appear to have been desperate, rear-guard efforts to save the New Liberal oligarchies and foreign investments from the growing popular force of working people and youth".[11]

One can disagree, therefore, about the role the caudillos played in the modernization of the Central American state and economy: They might be viewed as the prime example of the Central American, Liberal builder and modernizer, but also as the last obstacle in the progression from nineteenth century liberalism to twentieth century social democracy. While they were probably both, every historian can agree on one thing: by the late 1940s, these rulers had outlived their usefulness and outstayed their welcome.

During the war, new opposition movements against the dictatorships developed, but differently in each Central American country. Generally speaking, though, they were urban and middle class (professionals, students, and mid-level army officers); emphasized nonviolent protest (if possible) and the ideals of the Atlantic Charter; and counted an unusually large number of women among its activists. In Guatemala, the movement seems to have lacked formal organization, although, since historians have to rely on the archives of the American embassy for information, it is also possible that opposition organizations in that country were unusually well-hidden or were ignored by American diplomats.

In El Salvador, attempts made to organize opposition under the banner of "democracy" (in the pro-allied, anti-Fascist sense), but such organizations were generally outlawed by the regime. However, a very careful reading of the embassy files does seem to suggest the existence of an informal or underground network or movement. For example, some former members of ADS appear to have found refuge with the editorial staff of a British propaganda periodical. The local press sometimes published articles which were pro-Ally in content, but which also contained implied criticism of the local dictatorship. Lastly, a small number of American businessmen of long residence in San Salvador appear to have sympathized with, and were perhaps involved in, opposition to the regime. These men formed a tenuous link between the U.S. embassy and local discontent.

[9] Dodd, *Carías*, 236.
[10] Argueto, *Carías*, 371-379.
[11] Woodward, *Nation Divided*, 215.

In Honduras, democratically-inspired opposition to the Carías regime seems to have been associated with the traditional Liberal Party, although that organization was itself largely defunct. It is unclear, however, whether people who were dissatisfied with the regime associated themselves with the Party or whether the Party leadership attempted to associate itself with the new undercurrent of dissatisfaction (or both).

Lastly, it seems highly probable, despite local variations, that there were some organized links between the nationally based opposition groups, forming a transnational network of sorts. The existing Central American Union Party (CAUP)—a political movement which pressed for the unification of Central American states—appears to have been an important element in bringing oppositionists from across Central America together. Again, it is not clear whether oppositionists associated with CAUP or *vise versa*. Moreover, the traditional leader of the Union Party, Salvador Mandieta, was closely associated with Anastasio Somoza, the dictator of Nicaragua, making his politics vulnerable to suspicion. Aside from CAUP, there was the continuous flow and intermingling of political refugees in Mexico and Costa Rica (and El Salvador and Guatemala, after the fall of the dictatorial regimes there) which likely stimulated international contacts. But such international coordination as there *appeared* to be between national opposition movements might also have been caused by ideological sympathy and convergence of interests rather than actual contact.

There seems to have been no organized political opposition to the central governments in the Central American countryside, although urban opposition groups, the liberal governments that originated from the latter, and historians suggested that there was a connection between the new movements and the suppressed peons.[12] This is not to argue that Central American Indian and/or peasant populations were not suppressed, or even that they accepted their lot passively. It simply implies that the interests, methods, and objectives of the rural populations differed from those of the urban populations in Central America. Thus, rural union organizations and strikes mushroomed from roughly 1944 onwards, but it was usually not directed at the overthrow of the central government or even in sympathy with the goals of the urban middle class. In other cases rural populations had found ways to protect their interests within the structure of dictatorial state and had no interest in subverting it. Recent research suggests, for example, that the Martínez government allied itself with the Indian populations of western El Salvador—the very same populations that had been subject to the *Matanza* in the early 1930s. Since the urban middle class populations, despite their liberal politics, shared many of the fears and prejudices toward Indians with the aristocratic classes, an alliance between those former groups was not easily established in any case. In some instances, the failing dictatorial regimes tried to evoke the urban dweller's fear for the Indian by actually stimulating the rural populations to revolt or by transporting hundreds of peasants armed with machetes to the cities to hold pro-government demonstrations—

[12] Dunkerley, "Guatemala", 217; Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 100-101.

thereby attempting to scare the middle classes into supporting their "peace and order" regimes.[13]

2. THE EMBASSIES AND THE OPPOSITION

The legations' experience with the opposition before 1944 was not a happy one. Due to the demands of wartime work and close cooperation with the local regimes, the Americans had no real understanding of the growing feeling of discontent among the urban middle classes. Old prejudices on the lack of political maturity of Central Americans did not help the matter. Something of a dialogue did develop between the Legations and the middle classes, but it was characterized by mutual misunderstandings. Many local oppositionists did not *want* to keep their ideals and plans hidden from the Americans. Taking American propaganda in favor of the "democratic cause" at face value, some hoped that the embassies could be involved in their political ambitions and sent their manifestos to the ambassadors—yet when the Americans did not react favorably to these entreaties, they became ever more accusatory, rather than solicitous, in tone.

2.1 Growing opposition in El Salvador

After his experience with the suppression of ADS, Frazer remained aloof of the periodical expressions of discontent and focused his energies on the war-effort. In May 1942, another attempt was made to involve the minister in local politics by a newly founded organization of "anti-Fascist" writers—composed of journalists who hoped that they could avoid the regime's censors by defining their activities in terms of the democratic cause. The organization quickly named Frazer its honorary president and informed the American legation that it would gladly follow its instructions, in effect surrendering itself to American protection. Frazer remained noncommittal, however. When the Martínez regime started to harass the anti-Fascist writers, the legation brushed it off as the latest episode of "political passions" that plagued the Latins. Likewise, when the legation found that the Salvadoran government had temporarily imprisoned political exiles from Honduras, Frazer would not confront the authorities about this because it was extremely "sensitive" to critique on its practice of keeping prisoners incommunicado and Frazer did not want to give "needless offence".[14]

[13] Carol A. Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540-1988* (Austin 1990) 143-162; Gould, *To Rise in Darkness*, 25-30 and 238-243; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 27-28.

[14] Frazer, Memorandum on *Grupo de Escritores Anti-Fascista*, May 18, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 58, cl. 500: Congresses and Conferences; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2488, May 26, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 58, cl. 500: Congresses and Conferences; Maleady, Memorandum on Salvadoran Censorship of Newspapers and Radio Stations, July 20, 1942, PR El Salvador, Box 75, cl. 891: Public Press; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1826, February 26, 1942, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 6, cl. 800: Exiles and Revolutionaries; Maleady, Memorandum on Detention of Honduran Political Exiles, March 4, 1942, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 6, cl. 800: Exiles and Revolutionaries; Frazer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2186, March 11, 1942 PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 6, cl. 800: Exiles and Revolutionaries.

In early 1943, Frazer reached retirement age and left the service. Walter Clarence Thurston took charge of the Salvadoran post. Like Frazer—but markedly unlike his colleagues at the other Central American capitals—Thurston was a career diplomat with extensive experience in Latin American affairs and had an admirable grasp of the Spanish language. Born in the nineteenth century, Thurston was an "old school gentleman" who liked to quote Talleyrand and told his younger officers not to display "too much zeal". The new minister was distinctly proud of what he claimed was his involvement in developing the Good Neighbor policy, particularly the non-intervention element. Thus, Thurston was both temperamentally inclined to remain aloof of politics and—unlike Frazer whose justifications for noninterference were somewhat uncertain—entertained a sophisticated understanding of his diplomatic duties, based on the Good Neighbor principle.[15]

Thurston was a serious looking man who, with his round spectacles and impeccably combed hair, looked more like a village school teacher than the tested diplomat that he really was. In 1939, he led the evacuation of the American legation near the Republican government of Spain, running a "gantlet of bombs" while Barcelona surrendered to Franco's troops. Some years later, when distinctly unlucky Thurston was chargé d'affaires in the Soviet Union, he had to evacuate his post because German troops were quickly advancing on the capital. Neither was he a stranger to Latin American revolutions: in 1920, he was the American chargé to Guatemala during the overthrow of the dictatorial Cabrera regime. The Salvadoran assignment offered no respite to the new minister: the pressures of wartime diplomacy had not abated yet while local political tensions were coming to the surface. Thurston was to lead his post through yet another crisis.[16]

While he had to devote much of his time to the war-effort, Thurston did seem to regret, however, that the normal, peacetime work of the legation suffered under the strain of war—needlessly so. Around March, the minister informed the Department that, as the real crisis of the war was abating, his post should not be burdened with the many required reports on wartime measures. Even more important, he felt that it was high time that the Department provide some guidance for its policy toward El Salvador.[17]

By the time Thurston made this carefully worded complaint, there was a real need for policy guidelines concerning local politics, as opposed to wartime policies. Local politics were heating up as rumors spread that Martínez was preparing another

[15] Henderson ADST interview; "Walter Thurston, former envoy to the Americas, is dead at 79, The New York Times (March 27, 1974) 46; "Walter Thurston, ex-envoy to Mexico", The Washington Post (March 27, 1974) C4.
[16] "Career diplomat named ambassador to Mexico", The New York Times (April 12, 1946) 8; "Barcelona's fierce resistance to Franco", The Manchester Guardian (January 24, 1939) 11; "Americans run bomb gantlet out of Barcelona", The Washington Post (January 26, 1939) 1; "U.S. aides quit Moscow", The New York Times (July 19, 1941) 5; "Thurston now minister", The New York Times (November 23, 1941) 28; "Walter Thurston, ex-envoy to Mexico", The Washington Post (March 27, 1974) C4.
[17] Stettinius to the U.S. Embassies and Consulates in Latin America, February 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 90, cl. 120: Foreign Service of the United States.

"reelection", this time for the 1944-1948 tenure. The Salvadoran president himself attempted to mentally prepare the minister for the continuismo campaign almost from the day he arrived at his post. He explained to Thurston, during the ceremonies surrounding the latter's presentation of credentials, that "liberty" in El Salvador was not the kind of liberty that a North American might be used to.[18] At the same time, the regime used every trick in the book to suggest that the United States supported the new continuismo campaign: In his weekly speeches, which were themselves inspired on Roosevelt's fireside chats, Martínez regularly referred to wartime cooperation and the many American projects to improve roads, sanitation, and agriculture in Salvador—suggesting that his regime provided an irreplaceable link between Salvador and American largesse.[19] Complementing the government's public propaganda was the tried and tested Central American tactic of the "whispering campaign": a welter of planted rumors which suggested that the United States would never accept a change of regime during the war.[20] Naturally, Martínez needed some more substantial signs of American support to back up his claims. So, on July 7, Thurston was officially invited to attend a banquet in Santa Anna in honor of Martínez, which turned out to be the official kick-off of Martínez' reelection campaign. The embassy found out about the real purpose of the banquet when it was too late to decline the formal invitation outright without causing something of a diplomatic scandal.[21] Even more deviously, the Salvadoran regime attempted to get a U.S. fiat for the constitutional changes that were necessary to keep Martínez in power by claiming that a review of the country's first law was necessary anyway to allow for the expropriation and sale of "Axis" possessions in Salvador.[22]

Continuismo had always been met with particularly stubborn resistance in El Salvador. During the 1943 campaign, that resistance was even more dogged than four years earlier. Much like the regime, the opposition aggressively sought American

[18] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1, January 14, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 76, cl. 123: Thurston.

[19] For example: Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 214, March 23, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 802.1: Executive Departments; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 259, April 6, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 802.1: Executive Departments; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 269, April 8, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 802.1: Executive Departments; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 115, February 19, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 803: Legislative Branch.

[20] Ellis to Thurston, September 9, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. I, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[21] Gerhard Gade, (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador), untitled memorandum, July, 19, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 624, July 19, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to Mauricio Callardo (Chief of Protocol of El Salvador), July 24, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 618, July 28, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[22] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 498, June 26, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 711.3: Proclaimed List; Acheson to Thurston, Instruction 259, July 27, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 711.3: Proclaimed List; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 966, November 16, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 711.3: Proclaimed List; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1080, December 16, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 711.3: Proclaimed List; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1119, December 29, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol I, cl. 711.3: Proclaimed List.

backing, although, unlike the regime, it seems to have been under the impression that the United States really did sympathize with its fight against dictatorship. Oppositionists lined up to speak with the ambassador, sent him their own propaganda leaflets, and initiated their own whispering campaign—always emphasizing the supposed analogies between the fight against European Fascism and Central American dictatorship.[23] Toward the end of 1943, a local student organization, the *Frente Democrático Universitario*, attempted to involve the embassy more directly in its protests against continuismo: On December 4, the students presented a plan to Thurston to hold a parade on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, supposedly to demonstrate their support for the Four Freedoms and Atlantic Charter and their solidarity with the American people. The parade would end at the American embassy and its climax would be the presentation of some sort of petition to the ambassador. Most probably, that text would be a veiled attack on the Martínez regime and its suppression of the Four Freedoms.[24]

While Thurston lacked firm policy guidelines, or even the opportunity to do an in-depth investigation of the local situation, his natural inclination as an experienced "Good Neighbor" was to avert all attempts to draw him into local politics—which he did with considerable skill. On the one hand, the ambassador discouraged the "scoundrels" of the regime to seek his help.[25] Being unable to ignore the invitation to the government's banquet in Santa Anna outright, Thurston convinced the organizers that pressing matters prevented his attendance and sent two lower ranking officers in his place.[26] Seeing through the regime's ploy to involve the embassy in a reform of the constitution, the embassy informed authorities in no uncertain terms that the United States had requested no changes to the constitution; that Salvadoran laws enabling the prosecution of the war were deemed adequate; and that the government should make no attempt to convey the impression that the United States was in any way involved with the contemplated revisions.[27] Perhaps Thurston's most significant action was to cancel the shipment of 1,000 American sub-machineguns to the Salvadoran government. Navy

[23] The 1943 files are replete with examples of this kind of activity. For a non-exhaustive sample covering the month of September, see: Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 714, September 1, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; "El pueblo Salvadoreño" to Thurston, September 4, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Maleady, Memorandum on Efforts of President Martinez to oust Certain Officials of Banco Hipotecario, September 9, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; "Asociacion Nacional Democrática" to Thurston, September 21. 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; "Frente Magisterial Democrático" to Thurston, September 28, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 801, September 28, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

[24] Rafael Eguizábal h. et al. to Thurston, December 4, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

[25] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 430, June 4, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

[26] Thurston to Callardo, July 24, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. 1, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 618, July 28, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. 1, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[27] Thurston, untitled memorandum, June 21, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. 1, cl. 800: El Salvador; DVR, Memorandum on Projected Reform of the Salvadoran Constitution, June 29, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. 1, cl. 800: El Salvador.

intelligence had informed the legation that these weapons would probably be distributed to members of *Pro Patria*, to be used against the opposition in imitation of the 1932 *Matanza*.[28]

Having told off the president's henchmen without confronting Martínez directly, Thurston felt that he had to take the same position in his dealings with the opposition.[29] Thus, the ambassador often received oppositionists personally and politely listened to their critique of the government, only to inform them that he was completely neutral in the matter.[30] The case of the student demonstration offered something of a challenge since its purported intention was to support the allied cause. Initially, the ambassador informed the students that he appreciated their initiative, but that he could not receive their petition on December 8, as the anniversary of Pearl Harbor was an official holiday. Having no intention to give up that easily, the students informed Thurston that they would happily postpone their parade to December 11, the day that war was declared on Fascism. This time, Thurston could only offer the rather thin excuse that he wished all manner of celebration to be called off until final victory in the war was secure. Without the embassy's patronage, the student parade, which had been intended to be a grand affair with much waving of the Salvadoran and American flags, turned out to be a modest gathering of some 400 nervous students (one sixth of whom, in the estimate of an embassy observer, were actually undercover policemen). While the government did not break up the supposedly pro-allied demonstration, some of the student leaders were spirited away by what oppositionists had come to describe as the *Gestapo Martínista*.[31]

Thus it appeared, at first glance, that Thurston managed to steer clear of local politics. Incidentally, the private sympathies of embassy officials seem to have been somewhat at variance with their public stance. The Americans recognized that many oppositionists were conservative members of the professional classes, among whom were many friends and acquaintances of the embassy rather than the "communist" radicals described in government publications. Moreover, government suppression, long hidden from the public view, came out into the open with soldiers patrolling the streets and policemen lifting prominent lawyers and doctors from their beds and carrying them

[28] Maleady to the Secretary of State, Telegram 150, July 20, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. II, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Maj. C.P. Baldwin (U.S. Military Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, July 23, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. II, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies; Lt. R.W. Rastetter (U.S. Assistant Naval Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, August 26, 1943, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 8, Vol. II, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies.

[29] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1070, December 13, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

[30] For example: Thurston, untitled memorandum, September 8, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, dispatch 955, November 12, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

[31] Thurston to Eguizábal, December 4, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Eguizábal to Thurston, December 6, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Thurston, untitled memorandum, December 11, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Eguizábal to Thurston, December 13, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, dispatch 1070, December 13, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador; G.B. Massey U.S. Acting Military Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, December 14, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

off. The younger members of Thurston's staff were sometimes unable to withhold their indignation over this situation from their official reports and it appears that even the ambassador himself, while trying to uphold his own maxim not to display "too much zeal", had to make an effort not to let his personal views color his assessments.

But whichever direction the sympathy of the embassy went, it maintained—perhaps had no choice but to maintain—a cordial working relationship with the regime when wartime cooperation was concerned. Despite some indications in opposite direction, Thurston maintained the widely held conviction that the local dictators would survive the war. The embassy had no reliable indication of the extent of opposition to Martínez' government. Furthermore, while Thurston's adhesion to the nonintervention principle was beyond reproach when the traditional theatre of diplomacy was concerned, times had changed since the introduction of the Good Neighbor. Some fifteen years earlier, diplomats of Thurston's generation had been in charge of small posts, with staffs of two officers and some clerks in the case of Central America. The chief of mission was generally able to put his stamp on all matters of diplomatic importance. Toward the end of the War, however, even the staffs of the small Central American posts had grown to include officers specialized in legal, cultural, intelligence, economic, and sanitary matters—bringing many spheres of local life into the field of one or another American embassy officer. While the "chief" coordinated the activities of these new officials, he generally limited his activities to diplomacy and rarely grasped the implications of his post's increased activity in non-political matters.

Mainly due to the efforts of a local American businessman who was in close touch, and obviously in sympathy, with local oppositionists from the professional classes, the embassy in El Salvador was most fully informed of the views that local discontents held of the War, United States policy, and the Martínez dictatorship. The businessman in question was Winnall Dalton, father to the famous Salvadoran poet and revolutionist Roque Dalton and grandfather to "Roquito" and Juan José Dalton, founding members of the F.M.L.N. While apparently little known to historians, the Dalton family's tradition of opposition to right-wing terror began with Winnall, not Roque. Although the *pater familias* was considerably more conservative than his heirs, in the context of 1944 El Salvador he was a true revolutionary. And thanks to his position as one of the most successful American businessmen in Salvador, he had the attention of the American ambassador.[32]

Winnall's first attempt to approach Thurston about the rising discontent among the professional classes was a letter which described the latter's plight in detail. Dalton claimed that he merely wanted to know how to respond to questions from his Salvadoran friends, who observed that while the State Department would not intervene against the dictators, it had in fact intervened on many occasions during the War and therefore had a "moral responsibility" toward the Salvadoran opposition. The United States, Dalton's friends said, had intervened to keep Nazi-sympathizers from being appointed to government offices; to deport Axis nationals and liquidate their property; to protect

[32] On the Dalton family, see: Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering a Massacre*, 84 and Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 36.

American economic interests; to plant pro-Ally information in the papers; to supply lend-lease weapons to the regime, etc. Furthermore, Minister Frazer had publically defended the Martínez regime and its cooperative stance during the war and had allowed the dictator to adopt the pro-democratic language of the war while he was in effect a "nazi-fascist". Aside from the political and economic angle…

> You intervened, with sincere sentiments we desire to believe, to give us sewers and modern slaughterhouses, swimming pools and bridges, highways and school-children feeding-programs. WHY? (…) We have had no voice in accepting these gifts you have brought. You have dealt with the illegal government your legation helped to perpetuate and your country has sustained by recognition. We resent this Good Neighbor program of yours – we do not want charity and you offend us by extending it. You are a great and powerful people – *why do you give us sewers but aid in the denial of Human Rights?*

Dalton's letters—too many and too long to deal with in full—represent the gap that had come to exist between the American conception of fighting a war for democracy and the Central American conception of living under a U.S. supported dictatorship. "Will it not be shameful for you Americans to see our people mowed down by your General Grant tanks? Could you not find a better and honorable use for them – or scrap them if you have too many?", this letter pleaded, "To whom do you pretend to be a Good Neighbor? To the dictator or to the people of El Salvador?"[33]

Initially, Dalton's letters on behalf of the Salvadoran middle classes caught Thurston's interest[34] and the ambassador counseled the Department that it might consider these sentiments in the definition of its *post-war* policy. Thurston summarized the views of the opposition, quite correctly it would seem, as follows:

> Our pronouncements such as the Atlantic charter and the Declaration of the Four Freedoms (the latter blazoned by us throughout El Salvador in the form of posters) are accepted literally by the Salvadorans as official endorsement of basic democratic principles which we desire to have prevail currently and universally, as is our assertion that the present war is a conflict between the forces of good and evil exemplified by the democratic doctrine and absolutism. It is difficult for them to reconcile these pronouncements with the fact that the United States tolerates and apparently is gratified to enter into association with governments in America which cannot be described as other than totalitarian – such as those headed by Getulio Vargas, General Trujillo, General Ubico, General Somoza, General Carías and, particularly, General Martínez.

However, the ambassador reported, "a problem of this complex nature is not susceptible of ready solution and the most that should be attempted at this time is an empirical

[33] Winnall A. Dalton to Thurston, December 28, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador. Emphasis added.
[34] Thurston to the Secretary of State, despatch 1123, December 30, 1943, PR El Salvador, Box 82, cl. 800: Salvador.

search for improvements and careful study of plans for a revision of policy after the war".[35]

Despite his initial sympathy, Thurston was very distraught when it became clear that the opposition would not await the outcome of empirical searches and careful studies. As revolutionary ferment against the Martínez regime came out into the open and required some response from the embassy lest it remain on record as a supporter of the dictator, the ambassador became frustrated with the "unfair" interpretations of U.S. policy. Complaining that the Latin mind, which was often concealed beneath a "plausible appearance of cosmopolitanism", could not wrap itself around U.S. policy, Thurston argued in June 1944 that from "our point of view (…) it would appear to be beyond further discussion that we have established and observed a policy of strict non-intervention". Parroting Dalton's letters, the ambassador angrily noted after the fall of Martínez that

> "Prominent and seemingly intelligent Salvadorans have informed me with conviction that the road building activities, the activities of the Health and Sanitation Division, and other undertakings being conducted by us here constitute intervention. These "acts of intervention" were frequently cited to me as an argument for political intervention – "You are intervening in all these ways, why pretend that you cannot intervene to rid us of a dictatorship and prevent civil war?"[36]

2.2 Growing opposition in Guatemala

Already in 1941, Ubico legalized his continuance after 1944 by having the rubber-stamp congress review some "petitions" from "all over the country" which "demanded" that the President finish his good works. As in Salvador, local impatience with the Guatemalan regime increased in conjuncture with the new continuismo campaign, particularly because it occurred shortly after congress had approved a $200,000.00 "gift" to the President. This demonstrated that even Ubico's much respected fight against official corruption was weaning. Government repression appears to have increased significantly during the war years, although the legation's files are largely quiet on the matter—possibly because it regularly confused suppression of local opposition and suppression of Nazi plots. Not less than 90 people were arrested for "talking against" congress' generous gift to the president.[37] Ubico himself began to show signs of increasing anxiety and his notoriously inflammable mood included increasingly violent impulses. While the regime had generally relied on exile and short imprisonments before the war, torture and execution became more common during the early 1940s, with Ubico reportedly joining in the former activity. Legation officials had to bear some of the brunt of Ubico's temper as

[35] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1154, January 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, Vol. XIII, cl. 800: El Salvador. Vargas and Trujillo were the presidents of Brazil and the Dominican Republic respectively.
[36] Thurston to the Secretary of State, dispatch 1706, June 12, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 93, cl. 124: Records. Correspondence.
[37] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1250, May 8, 1940, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 3, cl. 800.1: Government.

the president's diatribes against "communists" and the laxness of the American system increased.[38]

The split among the ranks of Americans in Guatemala continued through 1943. Naval Attaché Frank June attempted at various points to get the legation in touch with dissatisfied elements, but, perhaps partly due to the personal friction between Des Portes and the attaché, the legation ignored June's efforts.[39]

The growing opposition toward the regime, combined with friction among legation officers and Ubico's growing paranoia, caused an incident with far reaching consequences in 1943. Yet the details are sketchy because many of the legation files documenting it appear to have been destroyed. In that year, a [young] oppositionist from the Mirón family was arrested for plotting against the government. After interrogation and, probably, torture, Mirón named several accomplices, most of them young Guatemalan professionals like himself but also including several members of the diplomatic corps: Mexican ambassador Del Rio; Military Attaché June; Colonel Glass, the American director of the Guatemalan military academy; and Secretary Dunn of the American legation.

While it is highly unlikely that these people were actually involved in a plot against the government, it seems probable that there was enough circumstantial evidence to compromise their standing with local authorities. All the individuals mentioned appear to have been good friends with some of the Guatemalan plotters. This was not surprising in itself, since they were of comparable age and social background and, in tiny Guatemala City, likely became acquainted at official or societal occasions. By piecing together several otherwise unrelated snippets of information from the legation's files, it also seems probable that June, Glass, and Dunn shared a negative view of the local regime with their Guatemalan friends and ambassador Del Rio. June's views are, of course, well known by now. The major made several references in his reports to the Mexican ambassador whom he seems to have held in high esteem (at one point, June reports to his department, perhaps as a intentional affront to Des Portes, that Del Rio was the "most forceful" diplomat in Guatemala). Del Rio shared his very low opinion of Ubico with June on several occasions and throughout his tenure tried to ingratiate himself with Guatemalan discontents.[40] Glass appears to have joined June and Del Rio in several of these talks and may also have expressed an undiplomatic opinion about the Ubico government in public, since legation files refer to the colonel's many "indiscretions".

June reported his suspicion that Ubico sent fake oppositionists to his office to hear him out on several occasions. He also suspected that Ubico kept an eye on the legation

[38] Des Portes to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2057, August 14, 1941, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive; Dudley Dwyre (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum for the Files, December 4, 1941, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 4, cl. 800: political Affairs.

[39] [PR], untitled memorandum, January 18, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 60, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 10-43, January 11, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 131: Naval Attaché.

[40] Ivan Smith (Assistant Naval Attaché) to June, untitled memorandum, May 1, 1942, PR Guatemala, Box 57, cl. 800: Mexico.

and its officers.[41] It seems probable, therefore, that Ubico was well-aware of the unsympathetic attitude of several American officials. Whatever young Mirón did or did not "confess", Ubico seems to have jumped at the opportunity to make life hard on his enemies in the diplomatic corps. Due to aforementioned gaps in the files of the American legation—in combination with the legation's request to the Guatemalan government to have all references to the American legation removed from the government's files on the Mirón case[42]—it is unclear how far Ubico took his protests or even what the nature of the allegations against legation officers was. What is clear, is that the legation set to work almost immediately to dissociate itself from all persons connected to the Mirón case. Although the link is undocumented, it is telling that shortly after the Mirón confessions, June, Glass, and Dunn were all transferred out of Guatemala. The Mexican government also withdrew Del Rio from the country.

Some months later, Des Portes himself was transferred to Costa Rica because of the Department's fear that the Guatemalan government would declare him *persona non grata*. This time, the incident seems not to be related to the Mirón case, but to an old vendetta between the minister and the Guatemalan minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Salazar. Always serious about the supposed Nazi fifth column, Des Portes had lobbied hard to have the assets of the economically very powerful and allegedly pro-Nazi [Nottebohm] family [expropriated/frozen/blacklisted]. Naturally, this Guatemalan-German family had very powerful connections, among them Salazar, the former attorney of the family. According to Des Portes' own account regarding the circumstances surrounding his transfer, it was the intrigues of the "pro Nazi" foreign minister that discredited him with the Guatemalan authorities.[43] Since Des Portes' transfer occurred shortly after the Mirón case, one can speculate that Salazar, or other enemies of the minister, made their move in [late] 1943 because the Mirón case had demonstrated the Americans' extreme sensitivity to the displeasure of the Ubico regime.

Des Portes was replaced by Boaz W. Long, who went to Guatemala with some misgivings, as he had hoped to be named ambassador to one of the bigger Latin American republics. Despite his obsession with roads and his interest in the ruined Guatemalan city of Antigua, the restoration of which seems to have been one of Long's new projects, the new ambassador's capacity for work soon had the embassy up and running again since there was no time for a letdown while the war continued: "No American should lull himself asleep thinking that we have accomplished something very wonderful because there is a great deal of German influence left [in Guatemala],

[41] June to Navy Intelligence Division, Serial 16-43, January 19, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 69, cl. 121: Naval Attaché.
[42] Drew, Memorandum on Subjects discussed by the American Ambassador, Mr. Boaz Long, with his Excellency, Licenciado don Carlos Salazar, July 16, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 79, cl. 800.2: Cabinet; Long, Memorandum of Conversation with Carlos Salazar, July 16, 1943, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 6, cl. 800.
[43] Drew to Des Portes, February 17, 1943, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 7, cl. 123: Foreign Service Officers.

although it is not as openly manifest as in the past".[44] One of the first reports completed during Long's tenure was an inventory of German activities and Guatemalan wartime cooperation. The new ambassador found that Germans were less confident about the outcome of the war than they had been before and Guatemalans who formerly sympathized with the Axis were now switching allegiance to the United Nations. A report on the stability on the regime was deemed unnecessary since the political situation was stable in Long's assessment and had been so, with the exception of minor incidents, since the start of the Ubico administration.[45]

With Ubico's next term fast approaching, oppositionists tried to get the Americans on their side. Word on the street was that with the end of the war in sight, the Unites States was beginning to rethink its relationship to the Latin American dictators and some believed that Long had been send to replace Des Portes, assumed to be an old friend of Ubico, to prepare the country for such a move.[46] They were soon disappointed. The first attempt by local oppositionists from the professional classes to get in touch with Long was a polite request from one Dr. Bianchi to talk with several "young gentlemen", who, it was carefully implied, were out of tune with the present political situation. Long rejected the invite with equal courtesy, noting in his diary that "I thought it would be better not to receive groups of persons who might be unfriendly to the government, in view of our policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of other nations". Again, the notion that the United States could remain entirely neutral in local affairs appeared outdated: Some months earlier, Ubico had told legislators that relations with the United States had never been better: The many public works that were being completed in Guatemala with American participation served to underscore the close ties, the caudillo claimed. As a symbol of the Guatemalan president's closeness to his American counterpart, a new hospital was completed and dedicated "Hospital Roosevelt".[47]

In fact, Long appears to have been biased to the status quo in Guatemala. Calculations in his diary show that in the 122 years of Guatemalan independence, the country had been ruled by dictators more than half of the time. The ambassador

[44] Diary entries of October 31 and November 1, 1943, Long Papers, Box 66, file 333: Diaries. On his interest in Antigua: Diary entry of November 7, 1943, Long Papers, Box 66, file 333: Diaries and Diary entry of June 18, 1944, Long Papers, Box 66, file 334: Guatemalan Diary, 1944. Long notes that the inhabitants of that city are very poor and "sort of helpless and devoid of initiative. It would be interesting if some psychological stimulus could tend to rouse them from their lethargy". Long appears to believe that the ruined state of Antigua was due to the "lethargy" of its inhabitants. The real culprit, incidentally, was a major 18th century earthquake and subsequent neglect by the central authorities.

[45] Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 115, June 22, 1943, PR Guatemala (SFC), Box 9, cl. 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; Long to Stewart, November 12, 1943, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 8, cl. 800: General.

[46] Gerald A. Drew (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 880, February 22, 1944, PR Guatemala (SCF), Box 10, cl. 800: Guatemala. This report also contains an interesting account on how the Legation deals with the regime and the opposition in light of the non-intervention principle.

[47] Drew to the Secretary of State, Despatch 3683, Match 11, 1943, PR Guatemala, Box 79, cl. 803: Legislative Branch.

seemingly believed that this was the natural state for a Central American republic.[48] This may appear to be an uncharacteristically fatalistic view for a man who was so single-mindedly devoted to the uplift of Latin peoples, but in fact, Long's desire to help backward peoples had always been directed at economic development, not the "moral" or political kind. When an American called Renwick visited Long in April 1944—they were old acquaintances from Long's previous work in El Salvador—the former revealed to the ambassador a plan "for developing Central America, particularly for easing over the transition period from dictatorship to constitutional governments, which must inevitably follow the approaching (?) peace". Eager to drop the subject, Long suggested to Renwick that he talk to Thurston about it. Privately, the ambassador felt that "it seemed doubtful that any one who was active in our Foreign Service would get very far by dropping into Washington and making proposals calculated to eliminate the dictators from the Central American Republics". In the long run, "circumstances beyond our control could do this without our intervention".[49]

With some six months to go before Ubico's downfall, the entire embassy staff was assembled to report on the local political situation at the request of the Department. "Relations between the United States and Guatemala are excellent", was the general consensus: "the Government, under the direction of President Ubico, has cooperated wholeheartedly for the advancement of the common war effort". Echoing older rumors and suspicions that several officers of the administration were in fact Nazi sympathizers, the report noted that "the policy of friendship and cooperation with the United States pursued by President Ubico more than nullifies any such sentiments within the Government". As for the future of the regime:

> …the internal political situation of Guatemala is as stable as that of any country in Central and possibly South America. While it may be true that the Guatemalan people have lost a certain measure of freedom of speech and political activity under the administration of President Ubico, it is nevertheless true that the country as a whole has benefitted by stability and honesty in public administration. While there is an element of discontent in the country, the opposition of persons constituting this faction is based largely on dissatisfaction with lack of change rather than any specific complaint against the President or the administration. Such elements, furthermore, are disorganized and leaderless and are completely lacking in the physical means of bringing about an overthrow of the administration.[50]

2.3 Growing opposition in Honduras

For years, opposition to the Carías regime had been led by disgruntled presidential hopefuls and many "generals" from his own National Party and from the Liberal Party. Several armed incursions into Honduras from neighboring states were attempted by the

[48] Diary entry of November 20, 1943, Long Papers, Box 66, file 333: Diaries.
[49] Diary entry of April 9, 1944, Long Papers, Box 66, file 334: Guatemalan Diary, 1944. Long admitted that Renwick's ideas "were pretty good, theoretically. How they would have worked out in practice, no one could foresee".
[50] Drew to the Secretary of State, Despatch 726, January 4, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala.

traditional oppositionists, especially around the 1936 continuismo campaign. Yet, being poorly coordinated, all expeditions were repulsed with relative ease by the central government, partly due to the rather formidable air force that Carías had built. Incidentally, the effect of Carías' famed use of military airplanes (he was probably the first military leader in the world to use airpower against civilian targets) seems to have been largely psychological: one journalist estimates that throughout the 1930s, the Honduran air force claimed only two victims: one mule and one rebel general.[51] Considering that there was no scarcity of generals in Honduras, the death of the mule was probably the greatest loss that Carías' pilots inflicted on the enemy.

Prewar opposition to Carías was characterized mostly by division. Angel Zúñiga Huete was the most well-known Liberal opponent of the caudillo, but there were dissidents within his own party and only a tenacious alliance was maintained with the rebellious *Legalista* wing of the National Party—consisting of former members of Carías' party and led by the latter's one-time vice presidential candidate, Venancio Callejas. Moreover, opposition leaders were scattered all over Central America and Mexico where they were often used as pawns in the diplomatic games between the caudillos, who, according to the expediency of the moment, either helped or harassed the Honduran exiles. It was difficult for the exiled leaders to communicate securely and secretly, which, together with their very different political backgrounds, partly explains why they never managed to agree on a strategy to oust Carías: some preferred armed invasions, others wished to employ legal measures, while yet a third group managed to reconcile itself with the *Cariato* over time.

As in other Central American countries, new opposition to the regime gained strength inside Honduras during the war. Like those in neighboring states, the Honduran variant was middle class, urban, inspired by the war against Fascism, and could be roughly divided into a military wing and a civilian wing. But there were also important differences between developments in Honduras and in the rest of Central America. For one, Carías, the former militia general, had resisted all pressures in favor of the professionalization of the Honduran army.[52] Only his air force and "honor guard" were well-trained and equipped. Contact between Honduran troops and American troops during the war were kept to a minimum and the caudillo were very reluctant to send officers abroad for training. Hence, the professional cadre of young officers that played a significant role in the 1944 revolutions in Salvador and Guatemala was much smaller

[51] William Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean* (Westport, CT, 1984) 90. To be fair, Krehm quotes a lot of "amusing" facts and anecdotes about the Latin American dictatorships of the time. Many of these stories seem to originate from Central American oppositionists and exiles or the American press and sometimes bear a strong resemblance, in style or substance, to O. Henry's classic story on the "banana republics" and other such satirical treatments of Central America. Therefore, and even though it makes interesting reading, Krehm's rather well-known and much quoted book has been largely ignored in this text.

[52] Cousins to Maj. J.H. March (U.S. Military Attaché to Honduras), December 30, 1940, PR Honduras; Unsigned (Erwin) to Philip W. Bonsal (Acting Chief of the Division of American Republic Affairs), March 11, 1942, PR Honduras, Box 82, cl. 800: Honduras. Also see: Bratzel, *Latin America*, 12 and 36-39 and Dodd, *Carías*, 81-82.

and weaker in Honduras. Furthermore, Honduras was economically the most backward of all Central American countries. The exploitation of its main export crop, bananas, was in the hands of American companies which had formed an enclave economy in the north of Honduras. The rate of urbanization was correspondingly low in Honduras: Tegucigalpa was the largest city with some 70,000 inhabitants. The second largest city, San Pedro Sula, was far behind with roughly 20,000 inhabitants. Thus, the urban middle class of Honduras was also much smaller than the (in itself relatively insignificant) middle classes of neighboring states.[53]

The National-Liberal divide had been a fixture of Honduran political life for two or three decades. The Liberal Party was divided between an exiled community and a group of Liberals that was still resident in Honduras itself, although it kept a low profile to avoid harassment. It was convenient for the regime to focus on the Liberal Party as a readily identifiable enemy. The Liberals were easily linked to other enemies of the moment, particularly Mexican "communists" and German "Nazis", thus maintaining a straightforward divide between "good" (Nationalist) and "evil" (Liberal) which offered the necessary flexibility.

Minister Erwin never met any of the opponents of Carías. Zúñiga Huete and Callejas had left Honduras in 1932 and 1936 respectively, well before Erwin took charge of his post. Therefore, much of what Erwin knew about the traditional opposition, he learned from the Carías government itself. During the war, as the legation and the regime cooperated closely, Carías and his underlings aggressively pushed an image of the old Liberal Party as being a crypto-Fascist organization, an image that Erwin came to adopt and convey to Washington. Erwin seems to have overlooked the development of discontent among new social groups entirely. With the exception, perhaps, of minister […] Stewart in Nicaragua—who was reportedly so beholden to Somoza's wishes that the caudillo himself sardonically referred to the diplomat as "my steward"—Erwin became one of the most despised American diplomats among Central American oppositionists.

During the early years of the war Erwin adopted Carías' claim that the Liberals had a working relationship with Nazi agents[54], despite the fact that other diplomatic posts reported on several occasions that proof for the connection was nonexistent.[55] Rather

[53] Dodd, *Carías*, 183-209 and Argueta, *Carías*, 268-326 both dedicate a chapter to the discussion of opposition to the Carías regime. Together, they provide a fairly detailed image of the Honduran opposition movements. Curiously, Argueta's discussion of the opposition is based almost entirely on the files of American legation, while that of Dodd is based largely on interviews and Honduran sources. Dodd's discussion is rather confusing at times, while Argueta's can be rather bland.

[54] Erwin to the Secretary of State, May 31, 1940, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 2, cl. 879.6: TACA; Division of Commercial Affairs to Cousins, October 2, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 70, cl. 820.02: Military Affairs; Department to Erwin, Instruction 353, February 4, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 1, cl. 800: Exiles and Revolutionaries; R.D. Gatewood (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, may 7, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 2, cl. 820.02 Foreign Activities.

[55] Nugent to the Secretary of State, October 2, 1941, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 3, Vol. 2, cl. 820.02 Foreign Activities; Erwin to W.L. Taillon (United Fruit Company, January 23, 1941, PR Honduras, Box 70, cl. 820.02: Individual Cases.

than substantial evidence, the idea that the political "outs" were opportunistic and would welcome any alliance of convenience was persuasive enough to establish a link between Liberals and Nazis in Erwin's mind. More than anything else, the demonization of the Liberal Party cemented the legation's support for the local regime—acting on the assumption that the choice in Honduras was between a benign traditional dictatorship and an opposition backed by totalitarian allies.

Throughout September, 1943, for example, the Carías regime was on edge due to an elaborately planned revolution involving Zúñiga Huete's Liberals, which turned out a spectacular failure. The regime hit back hard against Liberals in the San Pedro Sula area, arresting at random many known Liberals. Interestingly, the American consulates in the area reported, around the same time, that American naval vessels visited the area affected by the revolution and that navy airplanes made overflights of Honduran territory in "a gesture of firm control". While the young consuls seem to have been at a loss to explain the presence of the U.S. navy, Erwin must have known—perhaps even requested—that the U.S. navy was to visit the area. Days before the first ships arrived on the horizon, the minister reported to Washington that the United States should help Carías keep the country stable in the interest of wartime cooperation.[56]

About one year later, another plot against the government was discovered—this time it did not involve the Liberals but appeared to foreshadow the 1944 revolutions in El Salvador and Guatemala. The men behind the 1943 plot, which involved an attempt on Carías' life, were young army officers who were professionally trained abroad (some at the Guatemalan military academy which eventually turned against Ubico), but who did not have any opportunity for advancement in their own country because the old Carías-men dominated the upper ranks of the army. The plot was uncovered before it was executed because Guatemalan spies picked up rumors and Ubico gave Carías a timely warning. The result was another wave of arrests, not aimed solely against those directly involved in the plot, but also against the community of Liberal opponents inside the country.[57]

The American legation was taken completely by surprise. Part of the reason for the oversight was probably the earlier conflict between Erwin and Military Attaché Austin—who had been transferred out of Honduras—since one of the plotters was an old informant of Austin and might have kept the attaché informed had the latter still been at his post. More important, both the government and the legation were obsessed with the Liberal/Nazi threat. As the legation had to admit, the military plot did not involve Liberals

[56] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2333, September 18, 1942, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 7, Vol. 6, cl. 800: Honduras; Wymberly DeR. Coerr (U.S. Vice Consul to La Ceiba) to Erwin, October 15, 1942, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 7, Vol. 6, cl. 800: Honduras. La Ceiba; Nugent to Erwin, September 22, 1942, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 7, Vol. 6, cl. 800: Honduras. Puerto Cortes.
[57] Paraphrase of Telegram 257 of November 21, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800 : Plot on the life of Carias; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 591, November 26, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800 : Plot on the life of Carias; Lee M. Hunsacker (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes), Memorandum on Rumors Circulating in San Pedro Sula Concerning the Attempt on President Carias' Life, December 4, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800 : Plot on the life of Carias.

or Nazis—not even Communists! Somewhat shaken by an uprising where none was suspected, Erwin congratulated Carías on his near escape from death. The minister even reassured the President that, had the plot succeeded, the United States would have never recognized the revolutionary regime. Where Erwin got that idea is unclear. The legation's archives or a history book are the likeliest candidates since the non-recognition policy had been dead for nearly ten years. Not surprisingly, the Department, while expressing its commendation for Erwin's prompt reporting on the plot, immediately informed its minister that it had no policy of holding back recognition—adding somewhat acidly that Erwin might wish to consult some books on international law.[58]

The 1943 murder plot, coming from such an unexpected corner, shook up the legation's evaluation of the opposition. Since the German threat also appeared less formidable in 1943 than it did before, the importance of the Liberal/Nazi connection receded to the background, although Erwin continued to focus on the traditional Liberal opponents of Carías, arguing that the "desire to bring about his downfall is not widespread and is confined to political cliques dominated by disappointed seekers for the presidential office".[59] On the Department's request, the embassy reported in 1944 that there were no more totalitarian subversive movements in Honduras (either Nazi or Communist). Revolutionary attempts against the President were an "old fashioned Latin American affair":

> As Latin American dictators go, President Carias is fairly good—far better than most, perhaps less enlightened than some. His record should be viewed in perspective, and with regard to local conditions. Most of the people he governs are illegitimate (54.5 percent) and illiterate (74.5 percent). When he assumed office, he was faced with substantially the same problem met and overcome by James I in Scotland and Cardinal Richelieu in France—the establishment and maintenance of order. James I (1394-1437) smashed the semi-independent chiefs (...); Richelieu (1585-1642) smashed the feudal power of the Rohans and Montmorencys; and Carias smashed the guerilla generals. James and Richelieu fought and beheaded; Carias merely imprisons or exiles. His measures are often arbitrary, and there are occasional cases of personal injustice, but, by and large, the system is fairly sound; like his great predecessors, President Carias will leave this country more civilized and otherwise better off than he found it eleven years ago.[60]

3. SPRINGTIME IN CENTRAL AMERICA

By January 1944, the middle levels Department of State became aware of the growing opposition against dictatorial regimes in Central America. Although Washington realistically assumed that discontent on the isthmus could lead to changes in the

[58] Berle to Erwin, Instruction 1540, December 29, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800: Revolution. Exiles.
[59] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 49, May 13, 1943, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 11, cl. 800: Revolution. Exiles.
[60] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1322, August 21, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras, August to December.

leadership in that region, its estimate was that such changes were still a distant eventuality. Considering the reports it received from the embassies in Central America, this was a logical conclusion.

Therefore, a change in policy was not necessary at the time. The Department did council its posts to be careful not to get drawn into politics, however:

> In view of the particularly delicate situation existing at the moment, the Department wishes to reiterate its injunctions against any avoidable act of omission or commission which might be interpreted as reflecting on the local political situation. Excessive public friendliness toward the Administration in power or the participation of United States officials in pro-administration meetings of a political nature would be [*sic.*] almost as undesirable as the identification of the Embassy with opposition to the existing Administration. It is to be remembered that there is bitter open and covert opposition to virtually all of the administrations in power; that it is almost inevitable that this opposition will eventually come to power in some countries; and that the rule of non-interference in internal politics applies even to those regimes which, in seeking to perpetuate themselves in power, have gone out of their way to emphasize their friendship for the United States. The respective missions will doubtless find it very difficult to define the line where friendliness toward the government of an allied sister Republic ends and friendliness toward a particular political regime begins, but the Department is confident that they will handle this problem with particular discretion.[61]

A particularly interesting aspect in the Department's standpoint is its continued trust in the noninterference principle. As far as local perceptions of American policy were concerned, that policy was dead. The American ambassador could not very well argue that the United States had no interest in local affairs while the War Department delivered tanks; the Sanitation Division built sewers; the Justice Department trained local law enforcement units; the Coordination Committee plastered walls with posters demanding victory for democracy; etc, etc. After three years of total war, the policy that was so successful in the 1930s just did not apply anymore.

Of further interest is that Department believed that Central Americans would accept the philosophical argument that friendliness to a certain government did not equal friendliness to a particular regime. The embassies would learn that this divide was meaningless in practice, but it did allow the officers in the Department to avoid difficult questions. As long as the illusion was entertained that the United States could maintain friendly relations with any government despite changes in the particular regime, the State Department did not have to reevaluate its policy and could continue with business as usual—which, in early 1944, meant the prosecution of the war in Europe and Asia. The Department was confident that its officers on the spot could work within these guidelines, as long as they maintained an attitude of particular discretion. The reality was often different.

[61] E.R. Stettinius, Jr. to the U.S. Embassies in Latin America, February 2, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala.

3.1 One down

To his annoyance, Thurston received an official invitation to the inauguration of Martínez' new term on March […], just days before the event was to take place. The ambassador knew that this was no simple oversight: the invitations were sent to all foreign diplomats in the capital at the very last minute to prevent them from consulting their own departments. Trouble was brewing in the capital and the presence of the entire diplomatic corps at the inauguration ceremonies could be interpreted as foreign support for Martinez' continuismo. The absence of any one diplomat would be regarded as a sign of disapproval. To attend or not was, therefore, an important policy decision with potentially far-reaching consequences. Policy—at least when local affairs were concerned—was not the Department's strong point in this period. Just days after the inauguration, Thurston send the Department a slightly vexed telegram, asking to be held up to date about policy decisions and announcement; as the embassy relied on the American press for that sort of information. It was not just the Department that was negligent, however: reports coming from the embassies in Central America in the previous year painted a picture of stable regimes, despite some rising discontent.[62]

It was up to Thurston to decide what to do with the invitation, but options were few. Thurston explained to his colleague the Mexican ambassador, who seems to have been willing to snub Martínez, that an ambassador was just an agent and not the maker of policy. In the absence of instructions, Thurston said, the best thing was to follow diplomatic protocol and ceremony so as to prevent insulting the host government and thereby embarking on a new policy. Thus the diplomatic corps polity sat through the inauguration ceremonies, a decision that met the general anger and indignation of oppositionists.[63]

Martínez' third term was to be his shortest. On April 2 shooting broke out in San Salvador while the president was in Santa Anna. Initially, things went well for the opposition, which sent two trucks of armed men to Santa Anna to apprehend Martínez. By some inexplicable coincidence or oversight, however, the armed convoy of oppositionists going to Santa Anna passed the armed convoy of the president going to San Salvador without noticing each other. By April 3, Martínez was firmly entrenched in the capital's police barracks and leading the defense of his government. The opposition was reluctant to bomb Martínez' position because political prisoners were held at the barracks. By late afternoon, many oppositionists had decided that to save their own skins: the failure to capture or kill Martínez had been very disheartening and many rebel leaders deserted their companions to seek the safety of foreign embassies.

[62] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1345, February 29, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 93, cl. 124: Conduct of Office; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-132, March 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 93, cl. 124: Conduct of Office.

[63] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1352, March 2, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 800: El Salvador; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2324, January 4, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: El Salvador.

The American embassy had its own brush with revolutionary upheaval when an American lend-lease tank passed in front of the chancery several times, spraying the surrounding streets with machine gun fire while no enemy seemed near. Eventually, the driver of the tank parked his machine on the front lawn of the chancery, disembarked, and applied for political asylum. As it turned out, the tank driver was one Colonel Tito Calvo, the military leader of the revolution. Why he chose the American embassy to apply for asylum is unclear, as the United States did not recognize the right to political asylum. Thurston informed the officer of that fact and also told him that he would have no choice but to hand him over to the authorities. The ambassador also hinted that if Calvo wanted to escape, there would be ample opportunity for him to do so, especially since he had arrived in a tank. It seems that Calvo had lost his nerve however and would not budge from the embassy. A short time later, government troops arrived to take him prisoner, although Thurston managed to extract the unlikely promise that his guest would not be harmed. Some ten days later, the official newspaper reported that the colonel had been executed.

Clearly then, the April revolution was a spectacular failure. Some 500 people lost their lives and an entire city block was destroyed. The failure seems to have been the result of bad planning and coordination, especially between the civilian and the military element of the opposition. The military oppositionists were even divided amongst themselves: Calvo was one of the most hated officers of the army—a former Nazi-sympathizer in the assessment of the embassy—and many officers and soldiers deserted the revolution when they heard who its leader was. But despite the collapse of the April 2 uprising, San Salvadorans did not return to business as usual. The city remained in a state of tension until a new revolt broke out.

In the mean time, the embassy had to come to terms with the April events. While the revolution was an obvious tactical loss for the opposition, the Martínez regime showed some very significant weaknesses. The President had called on *Pro Patria* and the *Guardia* to protect him. Both these organizations were considered firm pillars of the regime. Both neglected to come to its aid. So while the government was less secure than anticipated, it also turned out to be less benign than previously thought. While the usual reaction to a failed plot was to punish the ringleaders with relatively short jail sentences, often followed by exile, the April revolt was followed by wholesale torture and execution. The executions only led to more opposition. The soldiers of the *Guardia Nacional*, who were tasked with the executions, often refused to follow orders. Many of the killings had to be performed with machine guns by higher officers—veterans of the *Matanza*. The torture and executions also alienated the civilian population. The students of the National University were particularly indignant because many of the young officers who fell victim to Martínez' vengeance were also part-time students. While the president, due to his active interest in theosophy, was always been regarded as somewhat of an eccentric,

the general consensus after the failed revolution was that he had gone "completely off the deep end".[64]

For a month, the atmosphere in San Salvador remained dark. Martínez did not show himself in public without heavily armed guards and rumors of executions proliferated. The president obviously failed to restore peace and calm to the city and his severe handling of the uprising only made things worse. To protest the executions specifically and the regime general, a new revolution broke out around the start of May. This time, the cowed and thinned out military faction was hardly involved. The revolution started with a student "strike", which spread first to the professional groups and later to shopkeepers, railroad workers, etc., gradually paralyzing the city. Remembered as the *huelga de los caídos brazos* (strike of the broken arms) the protests were a successfully executed campaign of non-violent, passive resistance against state terror. Initially, Martínez tried to strike back by bringing armed peasants to the city. The strain of the past month, however, had been too much for most of his cabinet ministers and advisors, who managed to convince the president not to let the situation escalate. A climax occurred on May 8 when student protesters rejected Martínez proposition to step down after he named a successor. Instead, the students bluntly told Martínez that he was to leave the presidency by 9 A.M. the next day. Amazingly, the president announced his retirement over the national radio on May 9, handing over power to a provisional government under the leadership of minister of Defense Menendez. The opposition, which was not entirely satisfied by Menendez' appointment, kept up the pressure for some days, until Martínez fled to Guatemala and the interim government announced that it would govern "according to the norms of the most ample democracy, guaranteeing the Four Freedoms proclaimed by Mr. Roosevelt.[65]

[64] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2023, June 21, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 824: Military Supplies and Equipment; Berle to the U.S> Embassies and Legations in Latin America, March 23, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 824: Military Supplies and Equipment; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1465, April 14, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 824: Military Supplies and Equipment; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1503, April 26, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 10, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[65] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 136, May 5, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 141, May 7, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, telegram 145, May 7, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston, untitled memorandum, May 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 149, May 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 150, May 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 152, May 9, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; [AFM], Memorandum on Political Situation, May 10, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; B. Dreyfus (U.S. Secretary of Legation to El Salvador), untitled memorandum, May 10, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to Long, May 11, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 159, May 11, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 165, May 12, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1555, May 12, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: El

3.2 Two down

The fall of Martínez caused quite a stir in the Guatemalan presidential palace. No one had expected that the neighboring regime might fail. Now that it had happened, doubts arose about the stability of the Guatemalan government. Ubico ordered the press to stop reporting about the Salvadoran revolution and at the same time tried to ingratiate himself with local students and soldiers, a very unusual step for the increasingly reclusive and obstinate dictator. The president's henchmen, who could be relied upon to serve as astute political "weather vanes", were getting uneasy. One of Ubico's right-hand men, General Anzueto, was transferring funds to foreign bank accounts. Frederico Hernández de León, owner of the semi-official newspaper *Nuestro Diario*, put in a good word for the opposition in his editorials—an obvious attempt to spread his bets. Word on the street was that Ubico accepted the political asylum of Martínez, whom he heartily disliked, only because he might find himself in a similar situation in the future.[66]The regime's self-confidence declined in inversed proportion to the opposition's rising optimism. Long, however, remained certain that the trouble would be temporary. He believed that events in Salvador only effected a "minority [which was] usually so silent". Almost two generations older than the typical oppositionist, Long talked disdainfully about the "uneasy youngsters" who normally did not dare raise their voices. The more intelligent Guatemalan, the ambassador believed, would be satisfied with the "more liberal policy" and "reasonable change" that Ubico was now instituting to assuage the people.[67]

Both regime and opposition started to petition the embassy for help. Around the end of June, with rumors of an impending strike increasing, the government issued new directives against subversive Nazi and Fascist elements, but the embassy recognized this as a ploy to "lower the value of the opposition in our eyes". Meanwhile, Guatemalan students tried to obtain American flags from the embassy for use during a demonstration, explaining that they were enthusiastic supporters of the Atlantic Charter, but they were politely turned down. While students were already marching through the streets, Long reported to the Department that "although this movement may have serious consequences due to its deviation from the general trend of the perfectly-dominated Ubico regime, the situation in no way parallels the recent movement in El Salvador". Thus the possibility of the overthrow of Ubico was "not considered great at this time".[68]

It is true, perhaps, that the student parades wouldn't have caused Ubico's downfall by themselves, but to Long's surprise, they did spark demonstrations by a much larger group of Guatemalan citizens, especially after the regime formally suspended the (in fact,

Salvador. The single best study on this period is: Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, especially 62-79.

[66] Drew, Memorandum for the Files, May 27, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

[67] Long to the Secretary of State, despatch 1176, May 30, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1226, June 16, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

[68] Long to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase of Telegram, June 22, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; [SC], Memorandum for the Ambassador, June 22, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Maj. Victor R. Rose (U.S. Assistant Military Attaché) to the Militart Intelligence Division, Report 1234, June 23, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

non existent) constitutional guarantees and tried to restore order by force. Long now reported that "there is a large and wide-spread body of public opinion hostile to President Ubico, even among those who recognize that he has given the country an efficient and reasonably honest Administration". As if reporting some entirely novel notion, the ambassador added that Ubico was now being accused of "ruthless suppression of civil liberties and the exercise of despotic repressive measures for his perpetuation in office".[69]

Tense days of demonstrations, sit-in strikes, and marches followed, sometimes answered by random shooting and, at one point, a violent outburst of "hoodlums" who had been brought into the city by the government to intimidate the opposition. Long was involved in the conflict as the Acting Dean of the diplomatic corps, which attempted to mediate collectively between the opposition and the regime, but eagerly handed over that function when the Nuncio of the Holy See, and actual Dean, returned from a trip during the demonstrations. Yet, all eyes were constantly focused on the U.S. embassy which managed to make enemies on both sides with its non-intervention attitude. Carlos Salazar, the minister of Foreign Affairs, informed Long with diplomatic bitterness that it was "hard to escape the impression that [the government] was not receiving support, in one form or another, from a country which should be friendly". On the other hand, many oppositionists felt that the embassy remained silent while people were being shot in the streets, because it was grateful that Ubico had helped expropriate German holdings during the war. The general impression was that the embassy had enough influence with Ubico to at least force him to moderate the violence.[70]

"Ya no quiero más", a visibly disheartened Ubico told Long on June 30. Somewhat to the disgust of the American, the *macho* General was "almost to the point of weeping". Apparently unbeknownst to the embassy, opposition to Ubico's continuance (under the prevailing conditions, at least) had reached the president's immediate circle of former supporters. Ubico suggested to Long that General Anzueto might take over the presidency, but Long advised against it, feeling that the general was too closely associated with Ubico and, most importantly, had been under suspicion of being a Fascist sympathizer.[71] Thanks to historians who interviewed some of Ubico's former

[69] Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1241, June 23, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

[70] Long to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase of Telegram, June 25, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Rose to Military Intelligence Division, Report 1236, June 26, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase of Telegram, June 26, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Hull to Long, Paraphrase of Telegram, June 27, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1261, June 27, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1251, June 24, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1256, June 27, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala. In fact, Long did pressure the administration to stop the violence, but only in his role as a member of the Diplomatic Corps. The naval and military attachés appear to have prevented random shooting by security troops at one point, although the details of this event are vague.

[71] Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1269, June 30, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Telegram 433, June 30, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box

advisors, it is known how Ubico eventually selected a successor: The Guatemalan army structure was rather top-heavy, counting dozens of generals for an army that could get by on one or two of such officers. Many "surplus" generals, having nothing better to do, gathered every day in the anteroom of Ubico's office to accept whatever chore the president might have for them, serving, in effect, as very high-ranking errand boys. When Ubico decided to step down and hand over power to the army, one of his advisors walked into the anteroom of the president's office where, due to the early hour, only three generals had collected to play some cards or exchange the latest gossip. These three, Generals Buenaventura Pineda, Eduardo Villagrán Ariza, and Frederico Ponce Vaides, were appointed the ruling *junta* of Guatemala on the spot.[72]

Initially, the transfer of power was greeted as a victory by the opposition—not in the least because the Junta, which was led by General Ponce, declared its intention to organize free and fair elections.[73] Long, on the other hand, was skeptical. He had not sympathized with the protesters, whom he deemed too young and fanatical to be involved in politics. The very visible role of Guatemalan women in the anti-Government parades annoyed him and his employees most. Later acknowledging his mistake to get involved in local politics, secretary Drew reported that he had lectured a group of oppositionist women who came to the embassy during the demonstrations about the effects of "unnecessary" agitation without a "direct motive". One of the women showed signs of "mental instability", according to the officer. Likewise, Long had strongly advised another group of "fanatical women" to stay away from political manifestations. He called their purported willingness to die to get Ubico out "crazy". When the demonstrations achieved their first goal, the removal of the president, Long commented that "[t]heir willingness to die to secure the removal of Ubico suddenly fell flat, as he resigned without killing any of them. This should have deflated some, but on the contrary chests swelled and hundreds took credit for it".[74]

After Ponce's takeover, the political situation in Guatemala remained tense and Long was not sure what to make of the new political situation. The ambassador initially believed that Ponce would be a middle-of-the-road president who could unite different classes and interest groups under a more liberal government than Guatemala had known before. Besides, the new government appeared to meet all the requirements for recognition under international law and could not be tied to Axis influence. Now 68 years

106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1274, July 1, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to Laurence Duggan (Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), July 4, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

[72] Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 26.

[73] Long to the Secretary of State, Telegram 460, July 1, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

[74] [WCA], Memorandum for the Ambassador, June 30, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1270, June 30, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala; Diary entries of June 26, June 27, and July 1, Long Papers, Box 66, file 334: Guatemalan Diary, 1944. In fact, the Office of the Military Attaché had reported at least 2 dead and 75 wounded during a June 22 demonstration. See Rose to Military Intelligence Division, report 1236, June 26, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl 800: Guatemala.

old, Long's optimistic evaluation of Ponce was definitely colored by his disdainful attitude toward the "younger element", which kept up agitation against the government. The ambassador did not like the student's noisy parades or their "inappropriate" behavior in the National Assembly, where they shouted comments from the public galleries. At one point, a group of students visited the embassy to demand that the United States help it overthrow Ponce. If help was not forthcoming, they would turn to the Mexican ambassador who had always shown himself a supporter of the opposition. Not inclined to be bullied by youngsters who were "too immature to be taken seriously", Long reported that he "had only to explain [to the students] our established policy in a fatherly fashion and the interview ended".[75]

Events in the following weeks cast doubts over Long's initial observations, however. First of all, more and more "responsible" and conservative men of Long's own age and class came forward with criticism of the Ponce regime. Ponce himself began to harbor plans to continue his rule and stepped up repression against critics. Around mid September a prominent newspaperman was shot and killed in front of his home by government toughs. While the embassy considered his newspaper "moderate", the regime regarded it as too critical. Even more upsetting was Ponce's tactic of hauling Indians "of known fighting qualities" to the capital to intimidate opponents. According to Long, the government had made dangerous "socialistic" promises to the Indians in return for their support.[76]

Throughout, the embassy did its best to maintain an appearance of nonintervention. After the assassination of Cordova, for example, Long cabled General Brett, Commander of the U.S. Special Service Squadron in Panama, to cancel the latter's planned visit to Guatemala: "it was felt that anything that might conceivably be construed in the public mind as approval of, or even indifference to, anything in the nature of political assassination should be avoided". Such modest steps were hardly adequate to influence public opinion, however. "On all sides one hears the remark", the embassy's [legal attaché] reported, "How can the United States continue to recognize an

[75] Long to Laurence Duggan (Director of the Office of American Republics), July 4, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Telegram 474, July 5, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1308, July 14, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1309, July 14, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1428, August 15, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of Stare, Despatch 1564, September 25, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Mexico.

[76] Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1546, September 19, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1553, September 22, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1554, September 22, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1555, September 22, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1560, September 25, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatemala; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1576, September 29, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 106, cl. 800: Guatema; Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1594, October 3, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued).

unconstitutional government by assassins in their own hemisphere when hundreds of thousands of their best men are dying to fight it elsewhere".[77]

Despite his disregard for physical hardships, Long put in a request for sick leave in September, 1944. Some sort of "bug" had him down, he explained in a personal letter to president Roosevelt. "Bugs", probably referring to some sort of infection to the intestines, were the nemesis for many Americans who stayed in Guatemala for extended periods of time. They had immobilized Des Portes and Cabot for some time too. It wasn't surprising that they should get the best of the aging ambassador. In a note to Norman Armour, Long explained that he could safely leave the embassy at this time because, in his assessment, the real strain, "if any", would come just before the elections in December. And since many people were contacting the embassy to plead for support during the campaigning season, the ambassador's absence might actually be beneficial in the light of the non-intervention principle. Because the embassy's most experienced officer had been transferred to Algiers a short time before, Long left his post to the charge of young William Affeld.[78]

On October 20, as Affeld made ready to celebrate his birthday, heavy fighting broke out in Guatemala City. After having restrained his son from joining the revolutionaries with his toy pistol, the young chargé was almost immediately drawn into conflict by both sides. Ponce called the embassy to ask for fresh ammunition, which Affeld refused, and later that day a revolutionary Junta appeared on the front step of the Embassy with a request to use the embassy's telegraph to communicate the terms of surrender to the government, a request that was granted by the chargé. Although very intense, fighting in the capital was over quickly. The Ponce government capitulated some 12 hours after the start of the revolution. While the military faction that led the revolution had armed many volunteers from the civilian population, the relatively swift victory was mainly due to involvement on the side of the rebels of the presidential honor guard—the only army division armed with tanks and other heavy weapons, courtesy of the lend-lease program. The Department later commended Affeld for having enabled the government and the revolutionaries to negotiate the terms of surrender, which ensured a quick end to hostilities. This was the primary short-term objective for the Department, considering the importance of peace and stability in the Hemisphere during the war.[79]

[77] Long to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1594, October 3, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Major Victor R. Rose (U.S. Assistant Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 1324-44, October 3, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued).

[78] Cabot to Long, August 8, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 98, cl. 123D: Officers: Drew; [Howland Shaw] to Long, February 19, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 98, cl. 123D: Officers: Long; Norman Armour (Acting Director of the Division of American Republic Affairs), October 10, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 98, cl. 123D: Officers: Long; Long to Armour, October 14, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 98, cl. 123D: Officers: Long.

[79] William C. Affeld (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Guatemala), Memorandum starting with "Was awakened by gunfire…", n.d. (October , 1944), PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued).; Colonel Fred T. Cruse (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala), Memorandum, October

How the new Guatemalan regime would fit into the post-war objectives of the United States was, of course, a different question. For the moment however, the State Department was not overly concerned with the end of the Ubico era.

3.3 Two to go

Up to 1944, Central America was ruled by four caudillos and one fairly liberal regime in Costa Rica. With the fall of Martínez and Ubico, the demand rose among oppositionists in all countries to eliminate *caudillismo* from the isthmus entirely. The two remaining dictators were Tubircio Carías in Honduras and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. Both proved more resilient than their northern neighbors. Somoza, the most junior caudillo and a brilliant political tactician, hung on by his fingernails. Throughout the late forties, he employed conciliatory and violent measures to divide and defeat his opponents. Carías, now the most senior caudillo, never had to face the kind of powerful opponents that Somoza did and managed to maintain his presidency until 1948.

Several attempts were made against the Carías regime throughout 1944. One front of opposition was the exiled community. After the fall of Martínez, Honduran exiles "flocked" to El Salvador and it seems that even Somoza, who for a while thought that Carías' days were numbered and he might as well get on the good side of his opponents, allowed Honduran exiles to organize in Nicaragua.[80] Thus the exiles had direct access to the Honduran border for the first time in many years and made the most of the opportunity by lounging several armed excursions into the country from bases in Salvador and Nicaragua. Internal opposition, inspired by wartime propaganda and the fall of Martínez and Ubico, was also on the rise. Major protests were organized in the urban centers of Tegucigalpa and especially San Pedro Sulla—which was an old Liberal bulwark and a traditional center of opposition against Carías.[81]

20, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Affeld, Memorandum starting with "The representatives of the Government…", n.d. (October, 1944), PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Affeld, Memorandum starting with "At 10:30 A.M. J.H. Wilson, Jr…", n.d. (October, 1944), PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Affeld to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1658, October 23, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Affeld to Gerald A. Drew (American Embassy, Paris), November 1, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 107, cl. 800: Guatemala (Continued); Unsigned letter (Department of State) to Affeld, November 17, 1944, PR Guatemala, Box 98, cl. 123D: Officers.

[80] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1710, June 12, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1722, June 15, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1728, June 16, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1735, June 17, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1743, June 20, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1856, July 24, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 8, cl. 800: Honduras. Salvadoran Attitude; Norman Armour, Memorandum of Conversation with the Honduran Ambassador, December 13, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras: August to December.

[81] Although mostly too specialized to be of use to the current text, an excellent study on San Pedro Sula's role in Honduran socio-economic development is: Darío A. Euraque, *Reinterpreting*

Interestingly, representatives of the American military in Central America also felt confident enough to express their anti-dictatorial standpoints after the fall of Martínez and Ubico. General George Brett, commander of the Caribbean Defense Command and the Army's Panama Canal Department, conveyed his determination to avoid any action to "help the dictator Carías", provoking Erwin to denounce the General's "lack of judgment" and "bad taste".[82] Military attaché Smith told Erwin that "we cannot have a democracy in Guatemala and a dictatorship over here [in Honduras]". The former's assistants were reporting to their department that the dictatorships in Central America were planning to destroy the new democracies. Again, Erwin was livid, claiming that the military men allowed themselves to be misled by the "pseudo-democratic" opponents of Carías and instructing the State Department to ignore such reports, as Carías' only wish was to be left alone.[83]

Carías' wish was not granted. Aside from several rebel incursions, which caused some alarm in the Presidential Palace but generally turned out to be ineffective, Honduras' tiny middle class was stirring. July 1944 witnessed demonstrations by women, students, and professionals very similar to those in Salvador and Guatemala. According to embassy observers, the demonstrators used slogans such as "*¡Viva la democracia!*"; "*¡Viva la libertad!*", and "*¡Viva Presidente Roosevelt!*", demonstrating the effects of wartime propaganda, but leaving the embassy unimpressed. Rather than democratic ideals, the embassy believed that the crowds in Honduras were motivated by *guaro*: a local liquor, "one drink of which is said to embolden a rabbit to fight a bulldog".[84] Carías managed to sit out the protests by a combination of conciliation, a refusal to be provoked, and downright terror. Instead of the army or the police, which were kept away from the demonstrators to prevent incidents, unofficial militias roamed the streets, led by Carías nephew Calixto who, according to old legation reports, was many times a rapist and killer.[85]

More serious protests, with graver consequences, were held in San Pedro Sula. Oppositionists there obtained a permit to demonstrate around the beginning of July, either because they had tricked the authorities into believing that it would be a parade in honor of American Independence Day, or because the government hoped that the city would quiet down after blowing off some steam. As it was, both sides were intent not to provoke the other. Carías had sent minister of Defense Galvez to San Pedro Sula to make sure that no rash actions were undertaken by either the local *commandante* or the oppositionists. But whatever Galvez' exact role in the following events was, his mission

the Banana Republic. Region and State in Honduras, 1870-1972 (Chapel Hill and London 1996) 1-60.

[82] Erwin, Memorandum for the Files, December 13, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 21, Vol. 12, cl. 824: Lend Lease.

[83] Erwin to the Secretary of State, December 26, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras: August to December.

[84] Erwin to the Secretary of State, July 7, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras: August to December.

[85] Higgins to the Secretary of State, Despatch 944, November 3, 1933, PR Honduras (SCF) Vol. 218.

was a failure. During the demonstration which took place on July 6, some sort of incident took place which provoked either a soldier, a demonstrator, or perhaps even an entirely unrelated person to fire his pistol. Thinking that the demonstration had turned violent, soldiers stationed nearby opened fire: "The firing, from both rifles and sub-machine guns, lasted from 8 to 10 minutes. There were no means of escape; alleys leading off the main street were blocked by armed soldiers who fired on any and all that attempted to escape (…) Twenty-two, consisting of men, women and children, are said to have been slain before the firing ceased and scores wounded".[86]

Typically, the embassy did not report on the details of this incident. Such matters were apparently regarded as an inappropriate subject for political reports. Thus, for a sense of the brutish reality of the slaughter in San Pedro Sula, one has to consult the eye-witness accounts collected by the nearby American vice consulate:

> …a young lady of about 22 years of age, was literally sawed in two by sub-machine gun fire. When the firing ceased, one of the soldiers rushed up to the girl, [illegible] her of two rings, a small money bag and a necklace, lifted up her dress and, in a most coarse manner, spoke of her legs and the probabilities of her virginity. Another eye-witnessed story was told by a doctor who, upon learning of this outrageous slaughter, rushed to Hospital El Norte to help receive the wounded. He related that dump trucks were delivering the victims in an unbelievably heathenish fashion. The trucks drove up to the hospital, backed to the receiving door and with hydraulic dump truck lifters, dumped the victims to the ground. The doctor frantically enquired as to why they were using such a barbaric method and was bluntly informed by the drivers that they had so many to move off the streets that they had no time for courteousness. When the doctor stated to the drivers that they were hastening the deaths of the wounded, he was met with a disinterested shrug of the shoulders. These are but two of many stomach-turning happenings as told to me by actual witnesses.[87]

While the State Department seems not to have been aware of the exact details of the events in San Pedro Sula, Erwin was—or at least could have been. He took the position that a formal diplomatic protest, an action suggested to him by the British chargé, would constitute "intervention". While the killing of unarmed civilians was "unfortunate", no British or American citizens were involved. Somewhat more darkly, Erwin reminded the chargé that "rioting and illegal parading had been suppressed on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C. a few years ago by Federal Soldiers (the so-called bonus marches) with several casualties; that killings had occurred in Ireland, India and other British possessions in an effort to 'maintain order'".[88]

[86] Lee M. Hunsaker (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes) to Erwin, Report 43, July 15, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras. July Disturbances.
[87] *Idem*.
[88] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2042, July 26, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800. July Disturbances.

4. DOORS OPENED AND DOORS CLOSED

December 1944 found the State Department's division for American Republic Affairs in an apologetic frame of mind. While the Department continued to uphold the Good Neighbor policy—which, it was widely believed, had created the conditions in which an inter-American alliance against Fascism could be formed—it was also aware of many new problems that had to be addressed. High on the list was what the Department defined as the "support democracy vs. nonintervention theses": the opposing demands that the United States should both support a liberalization of politics in the south and at the same time continue its policy of not interfering in local politics. A Departmental memo to Assistant Secretary Nelson Rockefeller noted that, on the one had, Latin American dictators were dissatisfied because the United States had intervened by introducing democratic ideals to the region but had refused to intervene to help keep failing dictators in power. On the other had, the Department recognized, the opposition and "the masses" in Latin America were disillusioned with the United States because it had provided lend lease aid, money, and other types of support to the dictators during the war. These people now demanded to know why the United States had not actively supported democracy on the American continent, as it had purported to do in Asia and Europe. In the Department's own assessment, wartime policy was wise and prudent considering that the United States had had to walk an extremely thin line between two evils:

> We were bound by solemn obligation not to intervene. But in any case, it would have been monstrous to have given the dictators active support against the people. It would have been folly to have aided the alleged democratic elements against constituted governments; at best this would have resulted in chaos at a crucial moment, and it might well have furnished the enemy a foothold in this hemisphere.[89]

In the Department's estimate, therefore, the policy of nonintervention proved its usefulness during the war. But many Central Americans did not share this view. On the one hand, they witnessed the close cooperation between the United States and the local regimes during the war. The dictatorships made sure to advertise every aspect of such cooperation and presented themselves as highly-valued, irreplaceable friends of the powerful Americans. The American embassies tended to ignore entreaties by opposition groups while modern lend-lease weapons were delivered for use of the government. At the same time, pro-democratic propaganda spread throughout the isthmus while the United States seemed to demonstrate a very real concern for the lot of the common man in Central America with programs to build roads, hospitals, and schools. These actions made sense from the perspective of fighting a total war on a global scale. In the Central American context, they made no sense at all. The only obvious fact for local observers was that the United States was intervening. On who's behalf was a matter of confusion.

The existence of middle class, urban opposition to the isthmian dictatorships went unacknowledged by the American embassies for a long time. When this new group

[89] Cabot to Rockefeller, Memorandum on Certain Unfavorable Factors in our inter-American Relations, December 13, 1944, Lot Files, General Memoranda, Box 9, folder marked November to December, 1944.

finally came out into the open, it was almost impossible for its members to strike up an intelligible dialogue with the Americans. The embassies were unable to accurately assess the strength of the new opposition; unable to appraise its devotion to the democratic principles of the war; and unable (or unwilling) to understand its arguments about the United States' moral obligation to help it. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the democratic movements of Central America and the United States never became close, despite a shared political ideology. Some members of the American Foreign service tried to correct this situation after 1945, but their task was made very difficult by the mutual misunderstandings that existed from the start.

Chapter 8

THE POST-WAR CONJUNCTURE
The embassies and the democratic opening, 1944-1947

The principal defect of a policy of non-intervention accompanied by propaganda on behalf of democratic doctrines is that it simultaneously stimulates dictatorships and popular opposition to them.

~ *Ambassador Walter Thurston, 1944* [1]

Ambassador Walter Thurston was in a unique position to qualify the paradoxes in American foreign policy as it affected Latin America toward the end of the Second World War: He was a career officer whose experience in Latin American affairs dated back for decades; he claimed a role in the development of the non-intervention principle; he was stationed in El Salvador where opposition to *caudillismo* first manifested itself in 1944; and thanks to, among others, Winnall Dalton, he was fairly well-acquainted with the ideas and ambitions of the new opposition groups. Furthermore, he had seen it all before: In 1920, Thurston was the American chargé d'affaires in Guatemala during the revolution that ended the 22 year rule of Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Remembering his earlier tenure in Guatemala, Thurston reported to the Department in 1944 that:

> Members on duty in Latin America during and immediately following Word War I may recall the profound impression created by many of the pronouncements of Woodrow Wilson – and in particular by his advocacy of the right of self-determination. [I] was in Guatemala at that time and observed with interest that this doctrine – undoubtedly enunciated by President Wilson [*sic.*] with respect to European problems – was seized upon by those in opposition to the dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera as being a call addressed directly to them to make effective their own right to self-determination.

The ambassador considered this development as something of a handicap – the misrepresentation of American ideals as applying to Latins interfered with a proper execution of the nonintervention principle. Thus, throughout the final years of the War, Thurston found himself to be the subject of reproach among oppositionists who

[1] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1154, January 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, vol. XIII, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

demanded that the United States back up its lofty words with action against the local dictatorships.[2]

It was certainly inaccurate, even somewhat fatalistic, of Thurston to believe that nonintervention and democratic propaganda caused dictatorship and opposition to it, as suggested in the opening quotation. Putting the problem in those terms at the same time exaggerates the role of the United States in local politics and underestimates the ability of the United States to determine how its words and actions are perceived by Latin Americans. In fact, Washington had for years been rather careless in word and action: On the one hand, it continued to pay lip-service to the Good Neighbor and nonintervention while war measures touched almost all aspects of the lives Latin Americans. On the other hand, it spread the gospel of democracy while it cooperated with the dictators. Whereas such paradoxes might have gone unnoticed at other times, they seriously undermined the credibility of U.S policy around the end of the war when the old dictatorships faced the challenge of democratically inspired opposition. Thurston accurately gauged that situation when he reported that "by according dictators who seize or retain power unconstitutionally the same consideration extended to honestly elected presidents we not only impair our moral leadership but foment the belief that our democratic professions are empty propaganda and that we are in fact simply guided by expediency".[3]

Considering that previous policy had been careless—at least as far as the subject of democracy vs. dictatorship was concerned—Thurston's advise, as related in the previous chapter, to subject that policy to "an empirical search for improvement and careful study of plans for revision" was basically sound. The only problem was that the Central American opposition movements made their move before anyone at the Department had a chance to look into the problem. The result was that—aside from the careful planning of such postwar projects as the United Nations, Organization of American States, World Bank, etc—the American policy with regard to political developments in Latin America maintained a quality of trial and error for some years after the end of the war. In the end, solving the dilemma between—again, in Thurston's words—reverting to the "folly of intervention" or ignoring the "evil of dictatorship" became the responsibility of the practitioners of diplomacy: the Foreign Service.

1. THE CONJUNCTURE

The end of the Second World War was a historical watershed for Europe and East-Asia, which were directly affected by the war and the following peace treaties. The same is true for South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, where anti-colonial movements were revived. Though Latin America had been touched by war only indirectly, that region also experienced a period of profound changes and turmoil between roughly 1944 and

[2] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1990, September 7, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 93, cl. 124: Records. Correspondence.
[3] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1154, January 8, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, vol. XIII, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

1948—that is, between the end of the World War and the beginning of the Cold War. As in other parts of the world, this period was initially characterized by the growing strength of social democratic forces. But unlike the situation Western Europe and Japan, for example, this development was short-lived. More conservative groups would eventually regain power in most Latin American nations.

Characterizing this so-called post-war conjuncture, Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough note that during the final year of the war and the first year after the war democracy was strengthened in the liberal states of Costa Rica, Colombia, and Chile; significant moves in the direction of democracy were made in Ecuador, Cuba, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico; and a transition from military rule to democracy was accomplished in Guatemala, Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia. Furthermore, the dictatorial regimes in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay encountered serious opposition from the democratic left.[4]

According to Bethell and Roxborough, the momentous changes of the postwar years originated both in a "strong Liberal tradition" in Latin America that dated back to the late 19th century and on the growing strength and importance of the middle and lower classes, which were spurned to action by wartime inflation. But the editors also ascribe a large role to international developments and the role of the United States therein. The "principal" factor in the developments of 1944 to 1946, according to Bethell and Roxborough, was the Victory of the allies:

> As it became certain that the allies would win the war (…) and as the nature of the postwar international political and economic order and the hegemonic position of the United States within it became clear, the dominant groups in Latin America, including the military, recognized the need to make some necessary political and ideological adjustments and concessions.

Such signals as the United States was emanating about the "nature" of the "postwar order", however, were probably not intended for Central American audiences. Bethell and Roxborough argue that it was the "extraordinary outpouring of wartime propaganda in favor of U.S. political institutions" that attuned local leaders to the need to make some "ideological adjustments" and that stimulated oppositionists to press their case.[5]

Though agitation for more popular participation and democracy was successful up to about 1946, old elites and new, professional army groups managed to take back the

[4] Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, "The postwar conjuncture in Latin America: democracy, labor, and the Left", in: idem eds., *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (New York 1992) 1-32, there 3-6. The case for the existence of a postwar conjuncture in Latin America was first made in: Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, "Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War: Some reflections on the 1945-8 conjuncture", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 20 (1988) 167-189. A more detailed account, by the same author, of the role of the United States in this period is: Leslie Bethell, "From the Second World War to the Cold War, 1944-54", in: Abraham F. Lowenthal ed., *Exporting democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore 1991) 41-71. Though not directly relevant to the current text, the articles collected in David Rock ed. *Latin America in the 1940s. War and postwar transitions* (Berkeley et al. 1994) rivals Bethell and Roxborough's analysis by their focus on internal, rather than international developments. The book rarely discusses Central America, though.

[5] Bethell and Roxborough, "The postwar conjuncture", 6-7.

powers they lost in nearly every Latin America country after that date except, perhaps, Guatemala. Again, internal developments lie at the root of this development: Bethell and Roxborough note that the old elites were never really defeated by the new forces, they merely lost their nerve temporarily. Moreover, the middle and lower classes never formed a single front, divided as they were both by their class interests and by racial antagonism. Again, the United States had a role to play in the reassertion of authoritarian rule in the south. On the one hand, the refusal of the United States to extend any form of aid to Latin America and the Truman administration's insistence that the neighboring republics attract private investments from the north gave the old ruling elites an economic incentive to move against labor activities, which were assumed to repel American investors. On the other hand, the increasingly belligerent, anticommunist rhetoric emanating from Washington at least legitimized a turn to the political right in Latin America. Bethell and Roxborough maintain, however, that anticommunist ideology had long been a factor in Latin American culture, so the United States' Cold War stance did not necessarily cause its southern neighbors to return to authoritarian modes of government. In fact, Bethell and Roxborough do not provide a conclusive answer on the question of whether or not the United States had a role to play in the demise of democratic fervor in Latin America.[6]

As in previous chapters, the current chapter will focus on the perceptions of American diplomats "on the ground" and on how these informed their reaction to the "conjuncture". Therefore, this chapter rivals the analysis that Thomas M. Leonard set out in his book *The United States and Central America, 1944-1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics*. As the subtitle of the book indicates, it also deals with American perceptions of the events in this period, specifically those of the embassies. Although this chapter and the work of Leonard are similar in many details, they are based on widely different assumptions. Like many works of the 1980s, *Perceptions* deals with the events of the 1940s from the standpoint of the Central American Crisis: "Greater awareness of the pressures for change between 1944 and 1949 contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary crisis", as Leonard puts it.[7] And as the introduction of his book indicates, it basically regards the 1930s and 1940s as an extension of prewar imperialism and postwar Cold War policies. The current chapter rather assumes that the experience of the late 1930s and World War was multifaceted and included both measured opposition to- and cooperation with the isthmian dictatorships. In 1944, it was all but clear which one of these roads would be taken in the future.

As we shall see, there was at least one influential "paladin of democracy" in the Department in 1945: assistant secretary Spruille Braden. Curiously, Leonard neglects to devote much attention to Braden's so-called "policy regarding dictatorships and disreputable governments", stating only that: "Braden expressed interest in encouraging

[6] *Idem*, 16-23.
[7] Thomas M. Leonard, The *United States and Central America, 1944-1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics* (Tuscaloosa 1984) ix.

democracy throughout the region, but the limitations of the U.S. nonintervention policy provided only the opportunity to express support for Central American constitutionalism".[8] In line with his neglect of the Braden policy, Leonard also ignores much, if not all, of the discussion on that policy in the American Foreign Service. As an example, Leonard does not even offer passing mention of Simmons' resistance to the diplomatic recognition of Aguirre, or to the latter's efforts to define Castañeda—subjects that will be discussed at some length in this chapter.[9]

By 1945, the Department of State in Washington was well-aware of the growing democratic fervor in Latin America and would eventually develop a policy to match it.[10] With its "policy regarding dictatorships and disreputable governments", the United States publically denounced the most notorious dictators of the Hemisphere: Perón in Argentina, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Somoza in Nicaragua. With regard to the latter, the State Department began to express its disappointment with continued authoritarian rule in Nicaragua directly following the war by withholding military aid and other types of assistance to Somoza. The real test, however, came in 1947: facing urban, middle class opposition similar to that in other Central American countries, Somoza tried to assuage the opposition by stepping down and having an uncle of his "elected" to the presidency. When the uncle in question presumed to fare an independent course and tried to oust Somoza as chief of the Guardia, the latter committed a military coup and had another uncle appointed to the presidency. At this point, the United States decided that Somoza had gone far enough and withheld diplomatic recognition from the new puppet government. This might appear to be an ill-conceived action in the light of Martínez' successful defiance of non-recognition, but from the late 1940s perspective it is an understandable choice since political developments in the region seemed to be favorable to democratic change and Somoza was facing internal opposition. Not recognizing his government might just tip the balance in favor of the liberal opposition without committing the United States to more drastic acts.

As it turned out, however, the forces of reaction were gaining strength around 1947 and Somoza, perhaps one of the most talented political tacticians his country ever knew, managed to keep his opponents divided and his hold on power unrelenting. Because of Somoza's successful defiance in the context of a general return to ultra-conservative politics in the region, combined with a wish to promote Latin American solidarity in the counsels of the OAS and the UN, the United States decided to abandon its attempts to oust Somoza in 1948. In that same year at the inter-American conference in Bogotá, the American Republics jointly adopted the principle of continuance of diplomatic relations whenever government leadership changed, putting a definite halt to the use of non-recognition as a diplomatic weapon. While it would take a while before Somoza was back into the good graces of the American government, the recognition of his regime

[8] Leonard, *Perceptions*, 10.
[9] See: idem, *Perceptions*, 60-63 and section 3.2 of the current chapter.
[10] Details to be discussed below.

signaled the end of American policy of discouraging dictatorship. Around the same time, the threat of the Soviet Union became an issue in inter-American relations. For the next forty years or so, the specter of Communism was one of the most important determinants of American policy toward Central America.[11]

Despite the rather inglorious end to the American attempt to elbow out Somoza, historians have since debated the significance of that brief episode. "[These] actions were the strongest argument to date against those who claim that the United States always supported the Somoza regime", according to Paul Coe Clark, "it demonstrated the administration's sincerity regarding its policy of supporting democratic governments in Latin America [and] it had special meaning when applied to a dictatorial regime long associated with the U.S.". Andrew Crawley agrees that "the sense of affinity that the United States felt with rulers whose authority derived from popular consent helped bring Somoza's government to an end. This was not simply an end result; it was the State Department's specific intention". While his focus is on internal dynamics, Knut Walter at least acknowledges that U.S. opposition was the main reason for Somoza not to enter the presidential elections.[12] On the other hand, Leonard has argued that the postwar policy of opposition to dictators was merely a case of paying lip service to high ideals while the Truman administration focused on Europe. The fact that Somoza was eventually recognized supports that line of analysis, according to Leonard. Bethell appears to second this argument with the observation that U.S. support for democracy was merely rhetorical after 1946 and *direct* support for democracy before that time was highly ineffectual. Schoultz believes the Braden policy was really completely out of step with general thinking in the State Department, which stressed that Latins were unfit for democracy. In a reinterpretation of the conjuncture from a Latin American perspective, David Rock argues that: "The support of the United States for democratic change in Latin America in 1945was mainly due to a desire to establish client states that could be used to support the United States in the United Nations.[13] While the current chapter will not solve the debate specifically around U.S. policy in Nicaragua, it will address the question of the nature of U.S. policy toward dictatorship during the conjuncture.

2. BULL IN THE CHINA SHOP

> Last week the U.S. Senate turned loose a bull in the Latin American china shop. He was Spruille Braden, now confirmed as Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, a big, jolly, working democrat whose object was to smash the Western Hemisphere's dictatorial bric-a-brac.[14]

[11] Paul C. Clark, *Diplomatic Relations between the United States and the Somoza Garcia Regime, 1933-1956* (Tuscaloosa 1988) chapters 10 and 11; Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1939-1956* (Chapel Hill 1993) 129-163; Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators never die. A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty* (London 1979) 101-109.
[12] Clark, *Diplomatic relations*, 326-327 and 342; Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 232; Walter, *The regime*, 144-145.
[13] Leonard, *Search for stability*, 122-123; Bethell & Roxborough, *Latin America*, 28; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 316-331; Rock, *Latin America*, 5-6.
[14] "Latin America: Democracy's Bull", *TM* (November 5, 1945).

Such, at least, was *Time Magazine*'s assessment of the new Assistant Secretary in 1945—and it was not far off the mark. Spruille Braden, a Montana mining engineer with the diplomatic inclinations of a cowboy, had been a political appointee to the Foreign Service during the War. Considering himself an "anti-Nazi paladin", he had battled supposed Nazi's and their local sympathizers in and out of official circles in Colombia, Cuba, and Argentina.[15] Only during the War, when old principles of nonintervention were put aside for the cause of the allies, could a man who took such liberties with other states' sovereignty become ambassador. And only right after the War, when democratic fervor was running high, could he have become Assistant Secretary. Braden was both one of the most colorful characters of his time and an exponent of it.

Naturally, Braden would not have accomplished much while Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles, who had built their diplomacy around the nonintervention principle, were in charge of Latin American policy. However, many personnel changes occurred at the top op the Department around the end of the War. Sumner Welles was forced into retirement by his enemies within the Government in 1943 and his supporters fell victim to a similar fate shortly thereafter. Cordell Hull, who had in fact been instrumental in Welles' downfall, retired due to failing health in 1944. After a brief interlude when the State Department and its Latin American division were led by Edward Stettinius and Nelson Rockefeller respectively, James Byrnes became the Secretary of State in 1945. It was the latter who was ultimately responsible for bringing Braden into the Department.

Braden was stationed in Cuba when he first captured the attention of the State Department. From his Caribbean post he submitted new policy recommendations that were supposed to be in line with the progressive revolutions that were occurring all over the region. The ambassador argued that the United States could only thrive in an environment with "like-minded, friendly, and sympathetic neighbors and a high degree of hemispheric solidarity". This condition could only be created when democracy prevailed in Latin America. The United States could further the cause of democracy in Latin America by showing "warm friendship for the democratic and reputable governments" and it should discourage dictatorship and "disreputable" governments by "treating them as something less than friends and equals". This proposal was not a real departure from previous policy, the ambassador claimed, but the culmination of it. Calling to mind Roosevelt's description of a "Good Neighbor" as one who "resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of other", Braden argued that the United States could not retain its self-respect or the respect of others if it maintained friendly cooperative relations with dictatorships. In practical terms, this meant that no "special consideration" (medals, state visits, favorable mentions, etc), economic, or military aid should be given to the dictators.

Braden recognized that the non-intervention principle of the Good Neighbor could conflict with his proposals, if the United States were to dictate to others the kind of government they could have. However, argued the ambassador, while the United States

[15] Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion. Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950* (University Park, PA, 1996) 11.

could not intervene in other countries nor tell them what kind of government would be appropriate for them, it was under no obligation to accept "as equals and friends those governments which are the embodiment of principles and practices which we abhor, distrust, and to which we are irrevocably opposed". Anticipating critics who would argue that many countries in Latin America were not yet ready for democracy, Braden claimed that that situation was changing rapidly and that the United States should recognize the direction of current political developments of the region. Latin Americans themselves were demanding more openness and freedom, but the paradoxes of American policy—fighting dictators in Europe and cooperating with them in its own hemisphere—confused the southern neighbors. This situation could ultimately persuade them to reject the American example: "If…we fail to sustain and augment the enthusiasm for the practice of democratic ideals, the void will be filled by pernicious 'isms' imperiling our way of life".

Since Braden developed his ideas while serving as the U.S. ambassador to Cuba, it should not be surprising that his policy recommendations ascribed a large role to the Foreign Service, even though that point is often glossed over by historians. In Braden's own words:

> I would underscore that all of my observations are presented in full recognition of the fact that in this, as in all other matters, the success or failure of our policies will largely depend on the competency and judgment of our representatives abroad, and that it is almost impossible either to draw any hard and fast rule for their decisions and action in a given case or to replace the practical working out of these problems in the field

On the one hand, American ambassadors needed to be on good terms with people "of all classes" in the countries to which they were accredited—not just with the governments. In that way, the "understanding and respect" of others could be cultivated even while the United States maintained formal diplomatic relations with the dictators that governed them. On the other hand, the policy was highly dependent on accurate information on local conditions. While Braden neglected to propose a "hard and fast rule" by which to distinguish the "reputable" governments from the "disreputable" kind, he did stress that the former should be based on "general popular support". Whether such was the case—and especially where new governments were concerned—was "frequently…purely a matter of opinion and open to debate". Especially in the case of the recognition of a new government, the United States should move with deliberation and reach a decision "only when we are so sure as possible that our decision is accurate and in keeping with the will of the people concerned".[16]

The "Proposed Policy Respecting Dictatorships and Disreputable Governments in the Other American Republics" was disseminated among the Latin American field posts for comments in May 1945. Why the Department felt that its Foreign Service officers should be involved in policy making in this particular case is not altogether clear. It might be due to the inclination of Assistant Secretary Nelson Rockefeller, former chief of the

[16] Hussey, Ambassador Braden's proposed policy respecting dictatorships and disreputable governments in the other American Republics, October, 1945, Lot Files, ARA Analysis and Liaison, Box 16, folder marked Analysis and Liaison, September to November, 1945.

Coordinating Committee, to seek consensus and to prefer coordination over a top-down approach. Other factors may be the many practical issues related to the suggested policy, as set forth by Braden himself, or the preference for democratic procedures of the main supporters of such a policy. Whatever the case, comments were collected in June and July and digested in a report by the Department's Division of Research for American Republics (DRA).

The eventual 30 page report on the suggested policy was prepared by Roland D. Hussey, assistant chief of DRA. It offers a unique insight into the Foreign Service's crusading spirit, or lack thereof, shortly after the momentous victory of democracy over Fascism. While the faith in America's ability to spread its political culture and institutions to other countries had probably not been this strong since the end of the First World War, and would not be as strong until the introduction of the Alliance for Peace, the Foreign Service was still divided over the issue. To start with, Hussey himself was adamantly opposed to the policy and not shy about it. A former history professor at the University of California, Hussey had joined the Department as a consultant in 1944. Approaching the problem from an abstract angle, he found it impossible to relate to Braden's proposals which were the result of years of practical experience with both Latin American dictatorship and the effects of American pro-democratic propaganda in the hemisphere.

According to the chief, the concepts of democracy and dictatorship, or "disreputable governments", were so ill-defined in Braden's proposal as to be unworkable in practical situations. Moreover, it would obviously lead to intervention in countries that had a government the United States disapproved of—no "ingenuity in semantics", as Hussey characterized Braden's attempts to get around this subject, would long deceive the American republics. As it was, the United States was already leaning dangerously over the brink toward intervention with its many wartime projects in Latin America and Hussey clearly feared that Braden's suggestions would be the deathblow for the Good Neighbor. Hence, the report on comments from the field, which was drafted under Hussey's direction, showed a clear bias toward the opponents' views. Or, as Hussey himself wrote in the preface: "The report is meant to be solely an objective analysis of the various comments although the conclusions unavoidably reflect the judgment of the author as to the proper weights to attach to the arguments advanced".[17]

In all, comments from 12 different posts were collected and cited in the report; some other reports came in later. As Hussey himself summarizes:

> Of the replies from the twelve missions received so far, seven are fundamentally in agreement with the recommendations of Ambassador Braden, although three contain reservations. Of the remaining five, three can be described as definitely in disagreement. The remaining two are more sympathetic but indicate that the difficulties in the way of applying the policy render it impractical.

[17] Hussey to Dreier, January 25, 1946, Lot Files, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, 1945-1956, Box 2, folder marked Dictatorships, 1945-1946. For Hussey's own evaluation of the policy: Hussey to Boal, September 2, 1945, Lot Files, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, 1945-1956, Box 2, folder marked Dictatorships, 1945-1946.

Later reactions from Guatemala, Argentina, and Nicaragua were all in general agreement with Braden, although the ambassador in Nicaragua entertained some reservations. It could be said, therefore, that there was a consensus in favor of Braden's proposals, but Hussey argued in the conclusion that the favorable replies were "lacking in strong arguments" and stressed the counterarguments.

The answers from the field posts were strongly dependent on the idiosyncrasies of the local ambassadors or specific local conditions. For example, ambassador Orme Wilson, who was stationed in Haiti, felt that allowance should be made for the country's extreme backwardness and low levels of literacy, education, and political "maturity". Since Haiti also shared the island of Hispaniola with "an aggressive and ill willed dictator", Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, the United States ought not to punish the country for its lack of democratic practice. John Erwin, who wrote a very fulsome critique of Braden's policy, agreed with Wilson that some countries were just too backward to expect them to be anything but authoritarian, but also inserted something of an emotional argument in the debate when he noted that any action against the Carías dictatorship would result in a charge of ingratitude against the United States since the regime in question had, according to Erwin, provided cooperation to the limit of its ability when Washington needed it most: during the War.

On the other hand, Braden's proposals were enthusiastically received by those officers who served in relatively liberal countries. The ambassadors in Costa Rica and Uruguay reported, for example, that "liberals [in those countries] are frequently baffled and discouraged by the failure of the United States to make any distinction between their democracy and the dictatorship of other countries. Clearly the policy proposed would be welcomed" there. The most enthusiastic endorsement came from the mission in Chile, where ambassador Claude G. Bowers was stationed. Bower had served in Spain for six years during the rise of General Franco.[18] Having witnessed Franco's authoritarian mode of government and his attempts to drive a wedge between the Americas and the United States, Bowers was in "complete agreement" with Braden's proposal to discourage dictatorship in the Western Hemisphere. The ambassador had always been skeptical of the Department's practical distinction between Fascism and traditional dictatorship, arguing that "the liberty of speech, the freedom of the press, the right to assemble [and] to petition for the redress of grievances are no more tolerated [under a military dictatorship] than under the systems of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco". Furthermore, the conditions for such a policy were favorable, in Bowers opinion, because the people of Latin America were themselves making impressive progress toward democracy while the United States was in a strong position due to the effectiveness of its Good Neighbor policy and its achievements during the war: "[If] the friends of democracy do not

[18] Claude G. Bowers, *My mission to Spain: Watching the rehearsal for World War II* (London 1954).

aggressively advocate their system the enemies of democracy will certainly make it their business to implant their particular ideology".[19]

As the responses from the Latin American field posts indicate, there was no consensus in diplomatic circles on the wisdom of Braden's proposal regarding dictatorial and disreputable governments. In fact, there were more than enough vociferous critics of the proposal. Within the State Department, however, policy was not determined by a plurality of votes or even by the weight of arguments in favor or against, but by the distribution of proponents and detractors across the bureaucratic hierarchy. It so happened that in 1945, Braden had enough backers in the right places—and, just as important perhaps, there were enough doubters in the right places—to be able to put his ideas in practice. In May he was transferred to—"released upon", as some would have it—Buenos Aires, where he clashed almost immediately with the supposedly Fascist inclined, and definitely disreputable government of Edelmiro Farrell and his ambitious Vice President Juan Perón. Braden's sojourn to Argentina has been adequately described and analyzed in numerous studies. Suffice it to say that he took great liberties with the noninterference principle of the Good Neighbor to be able to support what he thought were the regime's democratic opponents. Despite Braden's ultimate failure to bring down the "Fascist-minded" clique in Argentina, and despite stiff criticism from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and other apostles of the Good Neighbor policy in and outside the United States, Braden was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American Affairs in October 1945 in recognition of "his accurate interpretation of the policies of this Government in its relations with the present Government of the Argentine".[20]

In his function of Assistant Secretary from 1945 to 1947, Braden applied his recipe of "formal aloofness", that is, the absence of military and economic aid, to all Latin American governments thought to be "disreputable". Moreover, several Latin American dictators, most notably Perón, but also notoriously brutal Trujillo and infamously greedy Somoza, were singled out by the Department for persecution. Braden's example also elicited imitation from American ambassadors who were inclined to exert the power of the United States in favor of the actual advancement of democracy—as opposed to the mere disapproval of dictatorship. In Brazil, which had been ruled by Getúlio Vargas since the 1930s, ambassador Adolf Berle decided "after much sweating (…) that the only way to have democracy was to have it, and that the United States was beginning to be expected to express a view". Concurrently, Berle took the very unusual step of publicizing his support for Vargas' recent pro-democratic policy in the form of a speech for the benefit of the Brazilian audience. In the context of the time, the speech was not simply a friendly gesture to the current government, but a warning to Vargas that he

[19] Hussey, Ambassador Braden's proposed policy respecting dictatorships and disreputable governments in the other American Republics, October, 1945, Lot Files, ARA Analysis and Liaison, Box 16, folder marked Analysis and Liaison, September to November, 1945.
[20] Wood, *The Dismantling*, 14-131; Schoutz, *Beneath the United States*, chapter 16.

better follow through on his promise to hold fair and free elections rather than continuing himself in office—which was rumored to be the president's real intention.[21]

There were several problems with the approach of Braden and his followers however. On the level of "high policy", a discrimination against "disreputable" governments in the hemisphere clashed with the ongoing effort to built an inter-American community of nations—an effort that was redoubled after the war with the founding of the Organization of American States (OAS) and with the American desire to lead a solid block of American votes (representing 20 of a total of 50 votes) in the United Nations. Such a community would never materialize if its "disreputable" members faced, or were threatened to face, ostracism.

A further problem was the definition of "disreputable". As one of the detractors of Braden's policy had asked, rhetorically: "What wise man or wise group of men is going to decide which governments are reputable and which are disreputable?". Due to their international unpopularity and cynical disregard for widely accepted norms of political behavior, men like Somoza and Trujillo were easily singled out. But there were other leaders and governments in Latin America who were not so easily classified. Particularly in those case, the Department tended to defer policy decisions to the chief of mission in question. In effect, the execution of American policy toward hard-to-classify governments would be dependent on the idiosyncrasies of the local ambassador. As the discussion of Braden's original proposal would suggest, this led to a rather varied assortment of responses to local conditions: ranging from Berle's veiled threats against the Brazilian regime to Erwin's praise for Carías.

3. A BULL FOR EVERY CHINA SHOP?

All the disagreement and inherent problems and paradoxes of Braden's policy were present in U.S.-Central American relations after the War. The region witnessed several democratically inspired revolutions in 1944 and would witness countercoups in the future. On the face of it, therefore, the Central American situation offered a good opportunity for Washington to take a stand, which it did in the case of Somoza. However, the American ambassador in Guatemala showed only a passing interest in politics and American and Guatemalan definitions of what democracy should mean eventually became irreconcilable. In El Salvador, the ambassador basically agreed with Braden's standpoints, but the political realities in that country eluded easy definition according to the standard of "reputability" and American policy wavered. Erwin, the longest serving ambassador in Central America, refused to embrace the new policy guidelines. While he continued to observe Department instructions to the letter, his close relationship to the Carías dictatorship blunted Washington's efforts to dissociate itself from the Honduran regime.

[21] Wood, *The Dismantling*, 121-131. Quote is on page 123.

3.1 Friend of the Americas

A festive, optimistic mood prevailed in Guatemala after the October revolution. The ruling junta promised fair elections and actually carried them out (the former is the usual practice for revolutionary governments; the latter is a rare occurrence). Winner of the election was Juan José Arévalo, a liberal-minded university professor who set in motion land reform and education programs which were moderate by international standards, but revolutionary in the Central American context. People in Guatemala anticipated a brighter future, a hope that was doubtlessly strengthened because the Guatemalan experiment in democratic governance seemed to be part of wider, international developments in favor of democracy—including the downfall of several longstanding tyrants in Latin America and the defeat of European Fascism and Asian militarism.

Observing the atmosphere in Guatemala, even grumpy old ambassador Long had to admit that “the unbounded enthusiasm of the young patriots is admirable”. Long entertained some reservations about the supposed lack of experience by the new rulers, noting that the "history of Guatemala is undoubtedly going to be affected by the almost complete elimination of people beyond middle age and their replacement by youngsters who run from 22 to 40 years". At the same time, however, everyone around him was optimistic: “I…was told by many people what a marvelous blessing the new administration was”. The Mexican ambassador opined that the junta was a “dream” of good government and the American colony took the political changes in good humor—the manager of the American-owned railroad assured Long that “everything is satisfactory as far as the railroad people are concerned”. The openness and friendliness of the new rulers offered a stark contrast to the gloomy secretiveness of Ubico’s final years in office. Having attended a banquet in honor of the new Junta, Long confided to his diary that it “was quite a grand affair and completely free from all of the stilted reservations which had affected previous government parties under Ubico".[22]

The State Department, which interpreted events in Guatemala in the context of its new pro-democratic policy in Latin America, initially welcomed the revolution. Department studies presented Guatemala as an example of the “genuine” and “authentic” democratic movement that seemed to engulf Latin America.[23] Throughout the first years of the Arévalo administration, Washington’s policy of “aloofness” to the dictatorships and friendliness toward the democracies expressed itself in benign tolerance for the unsettling effects that the Guatemalan revolution had in neighboring countries. The remaining dictatorships in the isthmus complained that the new Arévalo regime was Communistic and invited the United States to join them in an anti-

[22] Long, diary entries of June 1, June 2, June 3, October 27, and December 22, 1944, Long Papers, Box 66, Folder 334: Diaries and Long, diary entries of January 10, January 12, and March 16, 1945, Long Papers, Box 66, Folder 335: Diaries.

[23] Cochran to Rockefeller, n.d. (March, 1945), Lot Files, General Memoranda, Box 10, folder marked January to May, 1945; Hussey, Report on the Current Situation in the other American Republics, January 13, 1945, Lot Files, Analysis and Liaison, Box 15, folder marked December, 1944, to February, 1945; Hussey to Butler, August 23, 1946, Lot Files, Analysis and Liaison, Box 16, folder marked May to September, 1946.

Communistic alliance against the threat. At the time, this argument did not affect thinking in Washington. A Department memorandum noted that "the definition of 'Communism' in Central America is flexible and suited to local purposes". In this case it was merely a cover, the Department recognized, for the dictatorships' hostility toward Arévalo. "Inasmuch as the Government of President Arévalo is one of the most nearly democratic that any Central American country has recently had, we should lend no support to any movement of his neighbors that may possible be hostile to him".[24]

Another token of Washington's sympathy for the new Government in Guatemala was the appointment to that country of ambassador Edwin J. Kyle, a Texan educator and agriculturalist. If Braden, with his "bull"-like approach to diplomacy, presented one end of a spectrum, Edwin Kyle might present the other side. Known as "Dean Kyle" among admirers due to his former position as the head of the School of Agriculture at Texas A&M, ambassador Kyle was a gentle, friendly, academic type of man in his early 70's.

Considering the fact that Guatemala's first democratic president, Juan José Arévalo, was himself an educator and the fact that his administration took a keen interest in the improvement of agriculture and education, the appointment of Kyle to Guatemala was a felicitous choice. However, the new ambassador was not easily adopted into the Service itself. Political appointees were not particularly popular among the career officers and Kyle himself made a point of not being a "traditional" diplomat. The somewhat malicious gossip among Kyle's secretaries was that the trustees of Texas A&M had pushed for the Dean's nomination to an embassy because the latter was an obstacle for the trustees' choice for a new university president. Kyle's secretaries were also a bit cynical about their new chief's enthusiasm for inter-American friendship. As one of his secretaries remembered:

> I found one of these little desk ornaments put out by Pan American Airlines, which had a sort of ark-like wooden base with holes for the flags of all the American republics. I had a little brass plate made to put on the base saying: To Ambassador Edwin J. Kyle, Friend of the Americas, and gave it to him. He took this quite seriously. It was really kind of a prank on my part because I was just pandering to his ego. He was very proud of this, and he put it in a prominent place on his desk as Ambassador.[25]

One of the first tasks that Kyle had waiting for him when he arrived at his post was to give his comments on the suggested policy against dictatorships and disreputable governments. His eventual report offers a glimpse of the new ambassador's generous idealism and, consequently, a complete blind spot for cultural relativity or nuance with which his colleagues of the career rank were so liberally imbued. Kyle not only supported Braden's suggestions, but argued that the United States go further and take a firm stand against dictators. He felt that the dominant position that the United States had acquired

[24] Wise to Woodward, Briggs, Braden, and Acheson, April 25, 1947, Lot Files, General Memoranda, Box 13, folder marked May to June, 1947..
[25] Interview with Woodward, ADST. The exact wording was "His Excellency Edwin J. Kyle, Ambassador of the United States of America and friend of the American Republics".

as a result of the war justified this more assertive attitude and, as a "friend of the Americas", he felt confident to speak for the "large majority of the best people in these countries" who, in the ambassador's assessment, demanded such an attitude of their powerful neighbor:

> In my judgment we have not fully asserted our rights which this power and this position among nations gives us. We should above all things be fair, just, and charitable to all peoples and all nations, but at the same time we should be firm and we should assert our rights which have come as the result of saving the world from ruthless dictators twice in a single generation, and thus become the greatest defender of democratic principles of all times.[26]

Even despite Kyle's idealism, the honeymoon between the American diplomatic establishment and the new Guatemalan government lasted only three years. After 1947, it became evident the two had different conceptions as to the meaning of democracy. In fact, Washington policymakers would come to define the Guatemalan revolution as a front for Communist infiltration and in 1954, the Eisenhower administration ordered the CIA to topple the government of Jacobo Arbenz—the successor of Arévalo and one of the original revolutionists. The breakdown of relations between the United States and Guatemala during the late 1940s has been the subject of several historical studies, due to interest in the 1954 intervention. No single factor could explain the growing animosity that American policy makers developed against Guatemala—unless the Cold War, with all its complicated causes and effects, is taken as a single factor.[27]

Even if there had not been a Cold War, the patience of the Department might have been severely stretched because Guatemalan ambitions were at variance with the American conception of democratic governance. As different elements in above-quoted Departmental and Embassy reports indicate, American diplomats conceived of the movement towards a more democratic world as a respectable political affair in which the United States—the champion of democracy—rightly took a leading role. The Guatemalan idea of democracy was broader and more militant: It included social and economic reform and assigned to Guatemala a role as a revolutionary vanguard. In the local context, where many supposed voters were dirt-poor and illiterate and where the whole experiment was threatened by reactionary landlords and dictatorial neighbors, this could hardly be otherwise.

From the start, the Guatemalan government agitated against its dictatorial neighbors and vice versa. While the State Department initially sympathized with Guatemala's position in the international shouting match between democrats and dictators, the conflict took on a more troublesome aspect when actual fighting broke out. Throughout the late 1940s, political exiles from all over the Caribbean area organized military campaigns against the surviving dictatorships of Somoza, Carías, and Trujillo. While the American press came to refer to the impromptu armies involved in this activity

[26] Hussey, Ambassador Braden's proposed policy respecting dictatorships and disreputable governments in the other American Republics, October, 1945, Lot Files, ARA Analysis and Liaison, Box 16, folder marked Analysis and Liaison, September to November, 1945.
[27] See chapter 9, pages 301-305 and 325-330.

as the "Caribbean Legion", a truly coordinated campaign against the dictatorships never materialized. Unconnected groups of "patriots, politicians, and soldiers of fortune" launched several military campaigns against the dictatorships, but none of those were very effective or successful. It was clear however, that the Arévalo government sympathized with the so-called legion and provided it with a safe-haven in Guatemala and probably with arms and planes.

The contrast between the Department's anti-dictatorial policy and that of the Arévalo administration could not be greater. Braden's proposals were confined to symbolic and diplomatic acts that would not interfere with inter-American solidarity and cooperation. The actions of the Guatemalan-backed "Legion", while ineffectual in terms of actually spreading democracy, provoked countless international conflicts between the democracies and the dictatorships in the Caribbean. The situation caused considerable embarrassment for the State Department, because it could not mediate the conflicts without appearing to favor one side over the other. Eventually, Washington chose to employ the newly created Organization of American States as a front to investigate the Caribbean conflicts and to chide supposed perpetrators on both sides. By 1950, the crisis subsided due to the OAS' actions, the Legion's own incompetence, and a return to authoritarian politics in many Caribbean countries. But by that time the damage to U.S. Guatemalan relations had already been done: the State Department would not forgive Arévalo for putting it on the spot in the fight between the democracies and the tyrannies of the Caribbean.[28]

Another major difference between the American and the Guatemalan conception of democracy was the question as to the social-economic implications of that political doctrine. Due to the progressive (but by no means radical) Labor Code instituted by Arévalo, relations between his government and the American-owned United Fruit company, the largest employer of the region, soured. Apart from *Ubiquistas* and other reactionary Guatemalans, UFCO was probably the first to raise the issue of Communist infiltration of the Guatemalan government. The company employed a small army of very effective lobbyist who received a sympathetic hearing, ironically, from Assistant Secretary Spruille Braden. In 1945, the latter had put a stamp of American approval on Arévalo's election by personally attending the inauguration of the Guatemalan president. But aside from being a "practical democrat", Braden was also a former businessman with considerable assets in Latin America and, as his behavior in Argentina indicates, a vehement opponent of everything smacking of Totalitarianism—be it from the left or the right. While it would take many years for the break between Washington and Guatemala to become irreversible, UFCO's introduction of the Communist specter around 1947 was a definite step in that direction.[29]

[28] On Guatemala, the United States, and the Caribbean Legion, consult: Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, passim.

[29] Braden, Memorandum of Conversation with Mr. John L. Simpson, Mr. Tennyson (International Railways of Central America) and Mr. Pollan (Vice President, United Fruit Company), November 29, 1946, Lot Files, General Memoranda, Box 12, folder marked November 18, 1946 to January 17, 1947.

Throughout this period, Edwin Kyle managed to uphold his image in Guatemala of a respectable educator and agriculturalist. The Guatemalan government appreciated Kyle's friendly interest in these fields, which manifested itself in the form of educational exchange programs, the translation in Spanish of American books on the newest developments in agriculture, and numerous study trips of Guatemalan agricultural engineers to the United States and vice versa—all made possible by the Dean's involvement. But gentle Kyle had no interest in the international conflicts involving the Caribbean Legion and his concern for the improvement of agriculture did not include labor laws or other social matters. In his own, patronizing way, he sympathized with Guatemalan efforts to modernize its agriculture, but he also admired the enormous, well-ordered and scientifically managed plantations of UFCO.[30] Basically, Kyle's interest in local politics ended with his somewhat abstract defense of Guatemalan democracy in 1945. He did not play a real part in the issues surrounding the Caribbean Legion or the Labor Code—except as the Department's voice in Guatemala. If the ambassador had taken an effort to gauge Guatemala's standpoint in these matters, communication between Washington and Guatemala might have been improved. Instead, UFCo was allowed to put a definite stamp on the Department's conception of events in Guatemala. When compared to Erwin's spirited and persistent defense of Honduran authoritarianism or Braden's attacks on Argentine "totalitarianism", one cannot help but conclude that Kyle could have played a much more forceful—and perhaps positive—role in his function as American ambassador to Guatemala.

In 1945, the State Department considered it appropriate to send an agriculturist to Guatemala. In 1948—when 72 year old Kyle was definitely up for retirement—the changing mood in Washington was expressed by its decision to send one of the very first "Cold Warriors", Richard C. Patterson Jr., to Guatemala. While Patterson was also a political appointee, the attitude of an American embassy toward the local government probably never changed as much as when Patterson took over from Kyle. A former army officer and businessman, Patterson did not have the patience, gentleness, and intellectual ability that made Kyle a successful teacher and scholar. Rather, Colonel Patterson was overbearing and arrogant and tended to reduce complex issues to straightforward dichotomies.[31] Patterson's previous assignment was to Yugoslavia, where his experience with Marshall Tito had not been a happy one. However, being the officer to have served "behind" the Iron Curtain longest (in 1947), made Patterson something of a recognized expert in Communist tactics, a role which he appears to have cherished. His transfer from Communist Yugoslavia to Guatemala was in itself a sign that the Truman administration was not pleased with the direction which Arévalo's social experiments were taking. Guatemalans of a reactionary bend where quick to pick up on that message and to seek out Patterson. General Miguel Ydígoras-Fuentes, former

[30] Kyle to Arnold Nicholson, Memorandum on Dean Kyle's background, Kyle Papers; Kyle to Liberty Hyde Baily, March 29, 1946, Kyle Papers.
[31] Consider for example, Patterson's method for identifying communists, discussed in LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 116

Ubico crony and future president of Guatemala, for example, commended Patterson on his “brilliant performance in Jugoslavia” and added that the new ambassador must “know perfectly well all the tricks of International Communism”. “Indeed, yes” Patterson answered, “I feel that I know many of the tricks of international communism”. And, ominously, “my three years of experience with Marshal Tito should be helpful in my future work”.[32]

3.2 Caught in the middle

Around 1941, second secretary Overton G. Ellis had an informal talk with Augustín Alfaro, a prominent Salvadoran civil engineer and a revolutionary leader in 1944. While steering clear of any concrete comment on the local regime, Alfaro discussed in general terms the failure of the constitution to clearly define the voter. Assuming that the conversation was going to continue on an abstract plane, Ellis responded with some local truisms about “the illiteracy and lack of any political education or consciousness of the masses” which made them “easy prey for any demagogue”. Betraying, perhaps for the fist time, his practical interest in politics, Alfaro rebuked the secretary’s fatalism with the straightforward observation that “We learn to walk by walking”.[33]

After the fall of Martínez, it was time that Salvadorans learned how to walk. Under the right circumstances they might have succeeded, but the democratic experiment that started in May was cut short by a military coup in October. It is hard to say why Salvadorans failed where Guatemalans succeeded, at least for the time being, in setting up a relatively liberal government. Granted, the Provisional President after the fall of the old regime, General Andrés Ignacio Menéndez, was a former collaborator of Martínez and had been a figurehead president on the latter’s behalf once before in 1931. However, Menendez seems to have been genuinely interested in the democratic experiment of 1944 and was doubtlessly encouraged in this by his much more forceful and liberally-minded wife who—being only 26 years old at the time—was a new arrival on the Salvadoran political scene.[34] In the end, it was not the many political leftovers from Martínez’ days who ended the experiment, but the Salvadoran army.

The position of the Salvadoran army after the revolution was entirely different from that of the Guatemalan army. Since Ponce was removed by the army, the power and the prestige of the Guatemalan armed forces remained intact. In fact, with two officers in the ruling junta and a new revolutionary aura, the position of the army was better than ever. In Salvador, however, the army lost much of its standing in the botched April uprising and nearly all of its political influence when the civilian element singlehandedly bested

[32] Gen. Miguel Ydígoras-Fuentes to Richard S. Patterson, December 3, 1948, Patterson Papers, Box 5, folder marked Appointment; Patterson to Ydígoras-Fuentes, February 28, 1949, Patterson Papers, Box 5, folder marked Appointment.

[33] Ellis, Memorandum on Recent Revolt, April 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, Vol. XIII, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[34] Ellis, Memorandum on Political and Social Opinions of Mrs. Menendez, wife of the provisional President, May 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Developments, July 17, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

Martínez. So in Salvador, many army officers felt that they could only regain their standing at the expense of the revolution while their Guatemalan colleagues could flourish within the revolution.

The Salvadoran brush with democracy lasted for only four months, but was characterized by feverish activity. Some ten political parties were formed—or came out into the open—in the two months after Martínez' downfall. Some were radical, some reactionary, most centered around a charismatic leader rather than a principle, but all referred in some way or another to the democratic ideology of the War.[35] New newspapers were published while existing newspapers began to express editorial comments freely.[36] Lawyers organized themselves in a professional organization and forced the Martínez appointees from their positions in the judicial branch.[37] The sessions of the national legislature, still made up of *Martinistas*, were thoroughly dominated by the spontaneous—and somewhat disorderly—contributions from the public in the galleries.[38] While there was something of an anarchic quality to all this activity, the Salvadoran revolution also had a hero from the start: Arturo Romero. Romero was a young physician who was one of the early leaders of the anti-Martínez movement. He came to personify the revolution much like Arévalo would in Guatemala—partly, perhaps, because the dramatic scar of a machete blow to the face served as a constant reminder of his personal sacrifices during the uprising. Judging from the information in the archives of

[35] This trend is noticable in the names of the new parties, which stressed democracy and solidarity*: Unión Democrática Nacional*, *Partido Emancipación Nacional*, *Frente Popular Salvadoreño*, *Partido Unión Demócrata*, *Partido del Pueblo Salvadoreño*, *Frente Social Republicano*, *Partido Fraternal Progresista*, and *Partido Unificación Social Democrática*. Not all parties were as progressive as their names suggested: *Partido Fraternal Progresista*, for example, was led by an old caudillo while *Partido Unificación Social Democrática* represented conservative coffee interests. It is indicative of the prestige of democratic principles that even the old coffee barons felt obliged to acknowledge it in the name of their party. Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1628, May 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1644, May 29, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1648, May 29, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1658, May 31, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1662, June 2, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1687, June 5, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1753, June 22, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1756, June 24, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[36] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1557, May 12, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1576, May 17, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[37] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1663, June 2, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[38] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1610, May 22, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1736, June 17, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1772, June 29, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

the American embassy, there was a good change that the disfigured young doctor would be elected president had the planned elections taken place.[39]

The American embassy was clearly impressed by the optimism prevailing in San Salvador throughout May and June. Although it was sometimes regretted that the young revolutionaries lacked a sense of decorum, the American diplomats also recounted, with barely suppressed glee, how Martínez' old cronies in the legislature were cowed into submission by enthusiastic crowds in the galleries, or herded into the front row of a celebratory parade and "made to like it".[40] Thurston also seems to have been sympathetic to Romero, although the embassy's secretaries, who were of comparable age and social background, were even more impressed with the doctor. One of Romero's first acts as a politician was to visit the American embassy to profess his pro-Americanism and distaste of the radical factions in the revolution. The young man also appears to have been under the impression that the embassy had played an important role in Martínez downfall and was very grateful for that.[41] Toward the end of May, the embassy furnished a visa to Romero so that he could undergo plastic surgery at the famed Mayo clinic and study the social laws of the United States. Around the same time, secretary Ellis reported that Romero was pro-democratic, pro-American, and pro-capitalist and added that the doctor was one of the few who would be able to unite all classes in El Salvador.[42] The embassy's bias for Romero was apparently so strong that it became public knowledge and Thurston felt it necessary to inform the government in August that the United States did not, in fact, prefer any candidate for the presidency over another.[43]

Although the army kept a low profile for a while and the younger officers actually showed some careful support for the Romero campaign, the older officers who had made their careers under the Martínez regime began to stir by late June. Increased rumors about communist agitators which were followed, ironically, by bloody riots induced by reactionary agitators set the tone for the month of August.[44] It seems likely that these latest "communist uprisings" were the work of the local chief of police, colonel

[39] Ellis, Memorandum on Support of Augustín Alfaro for the presidential candidacy of Dr. Arturo Romero, May 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Developments, July 17, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Ellis, Memorandum on Politics, July 19, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[40] Gade to the Secretary of State, despatch 1772, June 29, 1944, , PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[41] Maleady, Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Arturo Romero, May 17, 1944, , PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[42] Ellis, Memorandum on Support of Augustín Alfaro for the Presidential Candidacy of Dr. Arturo Romero, May 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1629, May 26, 1944, , PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[43] Thurston, Memorandum starting with: "I told the Minister…", August 30, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[44] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Telegram 259, August 4, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1927, August 21, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

Osmín Aguirre (y) Salinas.[45] The chief was a leftover from the Martínez days who, according to the embassy, was pro-Nazi and anti-American—"the prototype of the Indian militarist steeped in the old Central American traditions of the right of the military cast to rule".[46] Rumor had it that Aguirre had led a platoon of machine gunners during the *Matanza* and during the 1944 uprisings he had apparently counseled Martínez to break up the strikes with the help of Indian fighters and then shoot the Indians as communists.[47]

On October 21, secretary Maleady of the embassy was at the police station to interview Aguirre about recent shootings throughout the city when a group of army officers barged into the office and, not having noticed the American, bowed very low to Aguirre and said: "Ya está, mi Coronel, ya está arreglado el asunto".[48] Somewhat embarrassed, the chief shooed the officers out of his office and proceeded to inform a now very skeptical Maleady about the utter incapability of the Menendez government to establish order. As it turned out, the military men had come to tell Aguirre that they had forced Menendez resign and the Congress to appoint the police chief president. All of this had been done, of course, to save the country from communistic agents.[49]

It so happened that the embassy was without an ambassador during the military coup. Thurston was transferred some two weeks earlier. The young secretaries at the legation decided after the coup not to see Aguirre or to take any other action that might imply recognition of his regime, which they considered reactionary to the point of being Fascist inspired. Only five days later, while the political situation had not yet stabilized, the new ambassador, John Farr Simmons arrived at his new post. The State Department could have decided to delay the arrival of the new ambassador to demonstrate its lack of sympathy for the coup or at least until the local situation had straightened out, but it was apparently deemed more appropriate to have a senior officer assess the situation. Non-recognition, which was officially abandoned in the 1930s, was considered strong medicine, not to be applied carelessly. However, after just a few hours at his new post Simmons decided not to present his credentials or to talk to any government official, "pending instructions from the Department". As the Department was slow to act, the "policy" that was initiated by the secretaries of the embassy on October 21 remained in force. Explaining his decision, Simmons reported that:

> …the present crisis in El Salvador has a significance far greater than the confines of this country, or even Central America. Here we have a growing

[45] The insert "y" usually denotes a noble lineage and it is much used when referring to Osmín Aguirre. It would appear however, that the Colonel was known simply as Osmín Aguirre Salinas before he became president.
[46] Ellis, Memorandum on Colonel Aguirre Salina, Chief of Police, September 9, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2097, October 23, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.
[47] Maleady, Memorandum starting with "An informant, whose reliability…", October 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.
[48] "Already, my Colonel, already the matter has been settled".
[49] Maleady, Memorandum starting with "This memo is presented…", October 23, 1944, , PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

> liberal movement among an increasingly enlightened and articulate people. This movement had, earlier this year, made orderly and decent progress. Free and fair elections for January 1945 had been guaranteed. Suddenly this progressive tendency has been cut short by violent methods. The eyes of other countries and people are directed on what action the United States may now take towards recognition of the new regime. I believe that we should take very careful thought before giving encouragement to a forcible and apparently illegal assertion and assumption of power such as has taken place in El Salvador. I believe that our action in this matter will be a pattern, and perhaps an inspiration, to the decent and moderate liberals throughout the world.[50]

The next couple of weeks the situation in El Salvador remained in the balance. The Aguirre regime, while originating from an army/police coup, did not have full support from all army factions. Being made up of officers from the middle ranks (captain to colonel), the regime faced opposition from the more liberal younger officers on one side and the more reactionary general officers on the other. At the same time, the middle sectors of the capital, those who had removed Martínez, refused to submit to the new military regime. No week went by without a strike against the government, although the movement did not regain the strength on which it had ousted Martínez: Strike funds were depleted and, with the coffee picking season at hand, the upper classes no longer smiled upon disruptions in the labor and financial markets. The liberal opposition suffered a major defeat in December: restless *Romeristas* who had fled to Guatemala after the coup staged an ill-planned military invasion which was quickly routed by the Salvadoran army—thus eliminating the most militant wing of the opposition and prompting Romero to retire the leadership of his exiled party.[51]

Although Aguirre managed to stay in power in the face of civilian and army opposition, this appears to have been due to the weakness and dividedness of his opponents, rather than the innate strength of his own government. A most worrisome development—or lack of development—in this context was the complete silence of the United States. While the State Department did not formally distance itself from the Aguirre coup, it did not formally acknowledge its existence either. Simmons was careful not meet or associate with anyone in the Aguirre faction. In November 1944, Berle had informed the embassy that although it was not the function of the U.S. government to

[50] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2107, October 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[51] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2128, November 1, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2163, November 10, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2205, November 21, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2247, December 7, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2251, December 10, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2272, December 18, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2288, December 22, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of StateDespatch 2292, December 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

spread democracy, it "naturally" felt greater sympathy for such government. This line of policy, even if it was very vague, probably encouraged Simmons to maintain the embassy's distance from the new regime. His reports on the insecure position of Aguirre and his supposed Nazi sympathies—while not constituting valid reasons to break diplomatic relations according to international law—probably convinced the Department to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. Throughout the last quarter of 1944, and first months of 1945, the Department claimed that it was "consulting" with the other American republics on the question of recognition for the Aguirre government.[52]

In the early 1930s, Martínez held out in the face of U.S. non-recognition for two years, but he enjoyed full army support at the time and, especially after the *Matanza*, ruled over a cowed population. Since Aguirre faced at least passive resistance from all layers of the population, lack of U.S. recognition was a much bigger problem for him and he decided not to follow in Martínez' footsteps. In November, the Aguirre government announced that free and fair elections for the presidency would be held in January, 1945. Undoubtedly, the object was to have a puppet president elected, but the very slim basis of support that the regime enjoyed, combined with the need to find a candidate who could placate moderate Liberals as well as the State Department, disqualified any candidate from among Aguirre's immediate retinue. After much searching, the regime decided to back the candidature of Salvador Castañeda Castro, a moderately conservative army officer and one time Minister of the Interior under Martínez. Castañeda seemed both pliable and able to garner the support of the important coffee planting interests, while he was unobjectionable for moderate Liberals who longed for peace and quiet after the upheavals of 1944.[53]

With the help of Aguirre's army supporters and the conservative coffee planting association (and probably some creative redacting of voting results) Castañeda managed to garner a landslide victory. No one had expected the outcome to be different because the *Romeristas* boycotted the elections while the only two remaining candidates, both of the caudillo type, dropped out of the race right before the elections to protest supposed fraud. Probably to Aguirre's considerable dismay, however, Castañeda turned out to be his own man. Even before all the votes were counted, Castañeda broke with Aguirre over a dispute concerning the selection of future cabinet members. Aguirre naturally wanted to fill the cabinet with his own appointees, but Castañeda was bent on "national conciliation", his campaigning theme, and wanted to reunite the country by

[52] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2150, November 7, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2205, November 21, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2211, November 24, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Stettinius to Simmons, Telegram 318, November 28, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Berle to Gade, Instruction 701, November 1, 1944, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 9, cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.

[53] R. Arrieta Rossi (Salvadoran Minister of Foreign Affairs), Radiogram to the American Governments, November 29, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2292, December 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

inviting both Liberals and Conservatives to join his government. Over the next couple of weeks, the time remaining before the official inauguration of the new government on March 1, Aguirre and Castañeda were locked in a power struggle that would determine who was to be the real leader of El Salvador.[54]

The embassy followed that power struggle with great interest. Even if Castañeda's election was not of the democratic type, his program of conciliation, if practiced conscientiously, would put Salvador back on track toward a more open and Liberal society. Considering the fact that Aguirre was a *Matanza* veteran and a former Nazi-sympathizer, he fell squarely in the "disreputable" category. The power struggle between him and Castañeda thus presented a good context for action under the purportedly pro-democratic policy of Washington. Considerations of "inter-American solidarity" took precedence, however: A conference of American Foreign Ministers was to take place in Mexico in March and the U.S. State Department wished all nations of the hemisphere to be represented there. The official invitation could not be extended to El Salvador, however, as long as its government remained unrecognized. Washington felt that it could not wait until March 1, the inauguration of Castañeda, with the invitation and was therefore considering to extend recognition to Aguirre—reasoning that it was a "lame duck" government anyway.[55] Simmons vehemently opposed the idea. Arguing that recognition would "give Aguirre a tremendous prestige just at the moment of his waning power (…) would encourage him to take some extreme political action", the ambassador further noted that:

> It is also believed significant that comment among liberal circles in this country indicate that many liberal groups would understand it perfectly if we were to extend our recognition to Castaneda after March 1, realizing that the withholding of recognition cannot be continued indefinitely and that every opportunity has been given to the opposition to assert itself over a period of

[54] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2347, January 16, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2324, January 4, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2331, January 8, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2335, January 9, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2355, January 19, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2406, February 7, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2347, January 16, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2412, February 9, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2423, February 15, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 35, March 7, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 42, March 10, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 45, March 10, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

[55] Cabot to Messersmith, December 21, 1944, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947; Messersmith, Memorandum on Telephone Conversation with Toriello, February 14, 1945, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947.

> several months. Liberal opinion, however, would be profoundly shocked in this country were we to extend recognition to the Aguirre regime prior to March 1.[56]

It is obvious then, that American recognition of Aguirre would have a significant symbolic importance in El Salvador. The State Department felt, however, that a practical solution to the problem could be found. First of all, some way was found to pressure Aguirre into letting Castañeda select the delegates to the conference. Next, the Department tried to get Guatemala on board for its plan to recognize the Salvadoran government in February. Since the Guatemalan revolutionary regime enjoyed enormous prestige with liberals in Salvador, its participation would indicate that diplomatic recognition of Aguirre did not imply approval of his regime.[57] Unfortunately, and to the considerable annoyance of the Department, the Guatemalan government flatly rejected to recognize Aguirre together with the United States. It even turned out to be difficult to get the Guatemalans to attend the conference at all, since its delegates were unwilling to negotiate with Salvadoran representatives who, while informally selected by Castañeda, would bear letters of credence signed by Aguirre. In the end, the Department decided that the Guatemalans "confused" the matter of recognition and the conference with ideological matters, while the real issue was a "common front" during the war. The new leaders of Guatemala were, after all, "young, inexperienced and idealistic". In the end, Washington recognized the Salvadoran government on February 19. Guatemala followed suit only when it considered that Castañeda had validated his rhetorical commitment to conciliation—almost two months later.[58]

The fact that Salvadoran delegation to Mexico was made up of Castañeda's men seems not to have made a big impression on Salvadoran public opinion. The fact that the United States recognized Aguirre, while liberal neighbors such as Guatemala did not, made a more profound impact. In the days and weeks after recognition, the embassy in San Salvador received hate mail in such quantities that a separate file marked "protests against recognition" was created in the archives. Many letters accused the United States of fascist policies; some contained more traditional denunciations of "Yankee imperialism"; at least one letter was accompanied by a picture of Franklin Roosevelt adorned with swastikas.[59] While the fact that the Salvadoran opposition, as an organized body, never regained its old strength must have played a role in the development, it is noteworthy to observe that throughout the following years there was very little contact between the American embassy and oppositionists.

[56] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2362, January 25, 1945, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 11, Vol. II, cl. 800: El Salvador.
[57] John F. Simmons (U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 76, March 22, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 241, May 19, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General.
[58] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 126, April 11, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General.
[59] PR El Salvador, Box 119, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador. Protest against Recognition.

Eventually, the recognition of Aguirre had no lasting impact on political power struggle *inside* El Salvador and Castañeda was duly inaugurated on March 1. Simmons was initially optimistic about Castañeda's promises about national conciliation. While the President was not elected by fair means, at least he had been elected, the ambassador opined, and if Castañeda followed up on his pledge to invite liberal civilians into the government and to extend a general amnesty for those driven into exile by Aguirre, El Salvador might yet take some careful steps in the direction of more democracy.[60]

That this was not to be was due in part to the extreme polarization of Salvadoran politics. Like a classic zero-sum game, every concession that Castañeda did to the liberal civilians was considered a defeat by the army and the conservatives and vice versa. Thus, in Simmons' conception of the situation, Castañeda tried to please everyone but ended up pleasing no-one. Conservatives were concerned that the most important members of the Aguirre cabinet were left out of the government and that Castañeda sought a rapprochement with the Arévalo government. Liberals were disappointed that none of their leaders were invited into the new government and that, despite an amnesty decree, Castañeda refused to allow supposed Communists back into the country. Both factions came to interpreted conciliatory moves made by the President as concessions wrung from a weak government, rather than grand gestures made by a strong one. On the one had, the Liberal press forced Castañeda, after a very bitter newspaper campaign, to adopt the popular constitution of 1886. On the other hand, minor plots from both sides forced Castañeda to rely more and more on army and police support and to rule under a state of siege for much of his time in office.[61]

Thus Simmons found himself in a considerably more ambiguous situation then his colleagues in neighboring countries. While Guatemala could be considered a real democracy—especially in comparison with the previous regime and when seen through the eyes of an ambassador as charitable as Kyle—and while Honduras was still under the control of a 1930s caudillo, the new regime in El Salvador eluded definition. With the advantage of hindsight, historians regard the government of General Castaneda as an integral part of the military and often authoritarian rule that characterized Salvadoran politics between the early 1930s and the middle 1980s. But Simmons lacked the broad

[60] Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2423, February 15, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 54, March 14, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2362, January 25, 1945, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 11, Vol. II, cl. 800: El Salvador.

[61] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 93, March 28, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 279, June 1, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the American Embassies in Central America, June 11, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 304, June 13, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 385, August 8, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 423, August 29, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 118, Vol. XVI, cl. 800: Salvador. General; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 379, July 30, 1945, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 11, Vol. II, cl. 800: Salvador; Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 577, November 30, 1945, PR El Salvador, Box 119, Vol. XVII, cl. 801.1: Constitution.

view that hindsight offers and, more importantly, did not know in which direction the government in particular or the political climate more generally would develop. Thus, for the ambassador in San Salvador, the policy against dictatorships raised the very basic question as to "the type of government which exists in this country":

> [T]here is at least the question as to whether the present government of President Castaneda should or should not be classed as a dictatorship. Certain aspects of the Castaneda government might support the thesis that he is not a dictator and that he should be considered as a President elected by due constitutional processes and legally functioning as the chief of state of a democracy.

On the other hand, the ambassador argued, Castañeda's election was due only to the support of Aguirre and the army. Summarizing several other characteristics of the government, Simmons could not offer a real conclusion as to what type of government he was dealing with. And although he agreed with most of Braden's points, he studiously avoided any mention of how they would affect relations with El Salvador.

Simmons did betray some optimism about Castaneda's conciliation policy. Even though it was discouraging that the army had great influence over the president, the ambassador believed that the army itself was divided and this might offer Castaneda a change to involve the Liberal opposition in his government. The ambassador still considered that last group of "forward-looking liberals, small in number but strongly influenced by Jeffersonian concepts of democracy", to be the best hope for Salvador's future. It was fortunate that the Liberals in El Salvador were "more articulate" than in any other Central American countries and that they patterned their "ideals upon the democratic processes of our country". However, their "liking and respect for the United States [suffered] a severe setback at the time of our recognition of the Aguirre regime on February 19, 1945, nine days before President's Castaneda's inauguration". If the United States was serious about its intention to encourage a development towards more democracy, Simmons argued, the Liberal element in El Salvador "should be given every encouragement [because] in the long run, [it] is our greatest hope for the future in the gradual establishment in this country of what we understand as the democratic process".

As to how this last objective should be accomplished, Simmons offered no concrete ideas. He regretted to admit that:

> A justified criticism of our diplomatic service in the past [years], and even in a limited way at present, is the tendency often shown by our diplomats to limit their association and contacts to a certain international set or certain types of individuals whom they consider to possess known influence and importance. This tendency has in the past often prevented the development of the wide contacts, so necessary in this modern age, between our representatives and the representatives of all phases of the economic and cultural life of the country concerned. It has too often be the case in the past that the liberal and progressive elements in the country (…) have failed to gain contact with out representatives and that the latter have thus tended to obtain a distorted picture of the whole life of the country.

But while Simmons expressed his devout hope that this situation would change in the future, his only contribution to the realization of that ambition was to suggest that "the Department may find it possible to draft a policy instruction along these lines"[62]

In terms of long term policy, Simmons advised the Department to limit arms deliveries to Salvador because the army was a "bulwark of the non-progressive and reactionary elements here". Also, the United States should make sure that El Salvador always employed an American military officer to direct its military school so that the latter could "indoctrinate the cadets with the democratic character of our military tactics". On the issue of U.S. aid programs in the country, Simmons saw great opportunities for a literacy program: "From the point of view of gradual democratic development this illiteracy problem is virtually the whole problem".[63]

In terms of short term policy, the ambassador remained unsure how he might entice the liberal classes in El Salvador to play a bigger role in future political developments. There is no evidence to suggest that he improved his network of personal contacts. In fact, his reports over the next few months suggest that, in the face of growing army influence, the active Liberal opposition went underground and the ambassador lost touch with it. He also began to loose confidence in Castaneda who, despite his continued rhetorical dedication to "conciliation", became entirely dependent on the support of the conservative Generals to ward of coups by younger officers and to suppress food riots and increasingly militant labor protests against the government's meandering social policies. The plunging morale of Castaneda's government also manifested itself in increased cynicism, petty intrigues, and graft. This situation took on such extreme forms that Simmons eventually decided to advise against extending more aid or loans to El Salvador, despite the promises of such aid for the country's future development.[64]

A crisis occurred in September 1946, when a general strike broke out in San Salvador and steadily gained momentum throughout the month. The reason for this development was the Government's procrastination in the institution of promised labor laws. Some months earlier, the administration had created the new cabinet position of Minister of Labor, but subsequently neglected to appoint someone to that post. Also, a committee of "outstanding citizens" had been working on a new and badly needed Labor Code for some time, but in the end, the President rejected the committee's proposals

[62] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 349, July 9, 1945, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 11, Vol. I, cl. 710: Political Relations.
[63] Simmons to Hull, April 30, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 13, Vol. I, cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.
[64] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 744, March 2, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1051, September 18, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1063, September 25, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1065, September 27, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1095, October 11, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 131, Vol. XVIII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1582, June 9, 1947, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 14, cl. 800: Salvador. General.

without apparent reason. These actions alienated both labor and middle class liberals who initially joined forces in the September strike. The situation got out of control, however, when the police fired randomly at a peaceful student demonstration—killing four and wounding twenty, some of whom were innocent bystanders. In response, the strike turned violent as its moderate supporters were scared away by police brutality and only the militant participants remained. While the Castañeda government had initially been paralyzed by the opposing demands of Liberals and Conservatives, who respectively demanded surrender to and suppression of the strike, it now turned to the army. Martial law was decreed on September 24, allowing the police and the army to break up the strike—an objective that was accomplished some three days later. As a consequence, real power in El Salvador was now definitely in the hands of senior army officers responsible for the suppression of the strike, although the civilian government of Castañeda was allowed to remain as a front.[65]

In the absence of a concrete context for action—even the hope for slow progress through American aid became dim due to increasing government corruption—Simmons became disillusioned with political situation in El Salvador over the course of his tenure in that country. Summarizing Castañeda's accomplishments toward the end of 1946, Simmons reported that the former's position was now more stable than ever. However, this did not imply that he was good presidential material. His term of office was characterized by a "policy of expediency and undignified compromise". The ambassador opined that Castañeda's "political surrender" to a faction of senior army officers that was only concerned with its own political ambitions was "almost pathetic". Attempts at conciliation were completely abandoned under army pressure and the administration was now "settling down into the more usual Central American patterns of the past".[66]

Simmons' disillusionment now also extended to the Liberals who in the past had demonstrated, the ambassador believed, a complete lack of willingness to comprise with Castañeda's conciliation policy and were distressingly apathetic about the abuses of the government. In October, 1945, for example, a cabinet crisis had offered an opening for president Castañeda to invite more Liberals into his government. And while the president did extend an invitation to several men from this group, they had refused to join the government unless the popular and liberal constitution of 1886 was reinstated—something that Castañeda was unable or unwilling to do at that particular time. Simmons

[65] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1051, September 18, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1058, September 23, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to certain embassies, Telegram 202, September 25, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1063, September 25, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-222, September 27, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1065, September 27, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador; Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1070, September 30, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 130, Vol. XVII, cl. 800: Salvador.

[66] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1195, November 27, 1946, PR El Salvador, Box 131, Vol. XVIII, cl. 800: Salvador.

chided the Liberals for foregoing this "golden opportunity" to increase their influence and work towards a "greater degree of democracy and popular participation".[67]

Beginning in 1947, the Department of State acknowledged that Simmons' "recent fear that the Castaneda Government was drifting toward the usual pattern of Central American military dictatorship" had become a reality. Recent elections for the National Assembly, executed under the state of siege that had been in effect since the strike of 1946, represented a "new low" in Salvadoran politics. The Government had not even bothered to "go through the motions" of democratic procedure and many voters did not know that elections had taken place until the results were published. In February, the embassy reported that the administration of El Salvador "has reached an all-time low for corruption, cynicism and venality; that the cabinet is weak; [and] that the government has ceased to govern". Finally, the government of Castañeda, which had eluded definition two years earlier, could be classified: "It surely is not the democratic government that one had hoped it would be in the early stages".[68]

3.3 Utopia Inc.

John Erwin would serve a total of 13 years, divided over two tours of 10 and 3 years respectively, in Honduras—an unusual length of time, as the average was 3 to 4 years. A political appointee and former journalist, Erwin initially attacked the widespread government corruption he encountered in Honduras in the muckraking tradition that earned him some modest fame during his previous career.[69] Throughout the War, however, Erwin developed a very close working relationship with the Carías regime and, as his years of residence in Tegucigalpa accumulated, the ambassador settled in for a more comfortable life and assumed the complacent attitude of an American retiree in a tropical country. From the early 1940s onward, Erwin began to refer to Tegucigalpa affectionately as "our town" and adopted the perspective of foreign businessmen with long residence in Honduras who appreciated the years of peace and calm Carías had provided them:

> Honduras is really a wonderful country and (…) it is a pity that it is not more appreciated: no volcanoes, no earthquakes, no tornadoes, no army, no navy, no revolutions, no elections, no Communists, no labor unions, no wage or social security laws, no income tax, no doubt about who is boss![70]

Neither the Department nor the Administration showed an interest in replacing Erwin: Career officers had no interest in a post as dull as Tegucigalpa and traditionally

[67] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 502, October 10, 1945, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 11, Vol. II, cl. 800: Salvador.
[68] Simmons to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1292, January 17, 1947, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 14, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Williams to Newbegin, December 31, 1946, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947; Williams to Wise and Newbegin, January 23, 1947, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947; Williams to Newbegin, January 28, 1947, Lot Files, Individual Countries, Box 46, folder marked El Salvador, 1940-1947.
[69] See chapter 1, pages 47-48.
[70] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1442, November 2, 1944, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 19, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Honduras, August to December.

regarded appointment to that country as punishment duty. The Truman administration never took an acute interest in the region and could not very well fool its political appointees into thinking that the Central American backwater was somehow an important or interesting area—as was the case at the height of the Good Neighbor policy when Erwin was appointed. But while the top of the executive branch had no problem with Erwin's loitering in Tegucigalpa, his colleagues of the career rank in the middle positions of the Department and Service were thoroughly fed up with him around the end of the war. Officers at the American embassy in San Salvador cynically referred to Erwin's post as "Utopia Inc." and the Central American desk officer in Washington complained to Spruille Braden about the "rather nauseating 'Carias can do no wrong' attitude of Tegucigalpa".[71]

If even his colleagues were loosing their patience with Erwin, it should come as no surprise that the Central American Liberal factions regarded him as a dupe of the local regime. Erwin's refusal to meet oppositionists or even to accept their written manifestos gave cause to gossip that he was on Carías' payroll. It was widely believed that Erwin never fully informed Franklin Roosevelt—who was still regarded as a foremost champion of democracy—about the reality of Carías' tyrannical rule. When it was rumored in late 1944 that Roosevelt found out about Erwin's duplicity and decided to withdraw the ambassador, people in Tegucigalpa flocked to the churches to give thanks to God.[72] They would be disappointed: Erwin was not even halfway through his tenure as ambassador to Honduras.

With Erwin remaining in his utopian "Shangri-La"[73] and Braden in charge of Latin American affairs in Washington, policy toward Honduras developed a character that could only be described as schizophrenic.

Even before Braden came in, the Department was purposefully negligent of Carías. Throughout 1945 at least, Central American revolutionaries of all nationalities were roaming the isthmus and, flush with the successes experienced by the anti-dictatorial movements in Salvador and Guatemala, were busily planning (and sometimes executing) armed expeditions against the remaining tyrants. Some members of this "Caribbean Legion" found refuge in Guatemala where the Government was sympathetic to their cause; weapons could be obtained relatively easily; and hideouts in the rugged terrain along the Honduran border were plentiful. Since some armed excursions from Guatemalan territory into Honduras did materialize in 1945, Carías complained loudly

[71] Simmons to Briggs, March 13, 1946, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 13, Vol. I, cl. 020: Publications; Newbegin to Braden, August 12, 1946, Lot Files, Miscellaneous Memoranda, Box 64, folder marked Neutrality, September 21, 1938 to August 14, 1940.
[72] Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1229, July 27, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 100, cl. 800: Honduras; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-290, August 19, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 100, cl. 800: Honduras; The U.S. Legal Attaché to El Salvador to the Secretary of State, September 13, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 100, cl. 800: Honduras. The latter claim was made by an unidentified informant of the legal attaché at the U.S. embassy in San Salvador and it seems likely that it is at least an exaggeration.
[73] One of secretary Faust's favorite terms to describe Honduras. Faust to William P. Cochran, Jr. (Department of State), January 21, 1946, PR Honduras, Box 147, cl. 801.1: Constitution.

that his northern neighbor was neglectful of its international duties and told Erwin more discreetly that the military campaigns against him were actually coordinated by the Guatemalan government, which was itself a proxy of Mexican communism. Although Carías' fabrications did not illicit much interest from the Americans in the political environment of 1945, Erwin did take Carías' side in reporting to Washington that the caudillo only wanted to be left in peace and that the Guatemalans should get a firm dressing down from Washington for their failure to prevent revolutionary activity against friendly governments. Since Kyle reported from Guatemala City that the Arévalo government only wanted to be left in peace and that the Hondurans should get a firm dressing down from Washington because of the malignant rumors they were spreading about a friendly government, the Department could let its own sympathies decide the matter. As the general attitude of the division of American Republic Affairs was to go easy on the democracies and to be demanding of the dictatorships, Carías' complaints were ignored while Washington was uncharacteristically tolerant of the disorderly situation along Guatemala's borders. The Department's attitude in the matter may have inspired Carías to seek a rapprochement with his neighbor, which he did by declaring his support for Guatemala's territorial claims on British Honduras (Belize) toward the end of 1945, effectively ending the friction between the two country's, for the time being.[74]

It was prudent of Carías to keep a low profile in international matters, because the Department's attitude toward him cooled down further in the next two years or so. Despite the fact that Carías was traditionally considered the most "benign" of the four original isthmian caudillos, Braden's formula of cool politeness but no aid for "disreputable" governments was applied to him as well—perhaps *because* the Honduran president was always mentioned in one breath with the more tyrannical regimes of Ubico, Martínez, and Somoza. In any event, the Honduran ambassador to Washington, Dr. Julían Cáceres, found that his job became very difficult with Braden in charge of Latin American affairs. The bone of contention during the next two years was the status of U.S.-Honduran military cooperation. In Braden's conception of the policy toward disreputable governments, the delivery of military materiel to dictatorships or unstable

[74] Erwin to Cabot, January 11, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: General. Central American Relations; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1589, January 11, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: General. Central American Relations; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1591, January 12, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: General. Central American Relations; Robert F. Woodward (U.S. Secretary of Embassy to Guatemala) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 96, May 29, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-148, June 14, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase 192, October 12, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Kyle to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase 193, October 13, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase 199, October 15, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Kyle to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase 200, October 16, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Erwin to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase 202, October 20, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala; Kyle to the Secretary of State, Despatch 815, November 9, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 26, Vol. 7, cl. 800: Guatemala.

governments was decidedly out of the question. Since Carías was a dictator, he was not to benefit from the stream of surplus weapons going to Latin America after the War. Other countries that were barred from such deliveries were Argentina, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. In the case of Honduras, the policy was first applied, discreetly, toward the end of 1945, beginning of 1946, when the Department tied up in red tape the delivery of military type airplanes to Honduras. When the Honduran government approached Canada for the delivery of airplanes, the Department also managed to prevent that sale.[75]

For the better part of a year, the Department maintained a very dubious attitude toward Honduras, however. Perhaps because of Carías' very low profile, as opposed to that of the megalomaniacal president of the Dominican Republic, Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo, the Department did not come out to declare outright its disapproval for the Honduran regime. In March 1946, Byrnes informed the embassy in Tegucigalpa, again discreetly, that Carías was not to receive a birthday greeting that year and that the embassy itself should be careful not to show undue regard for the local regime.[76] Two months earlier, when the Honduran ambassador visited the Department to explain that Honduras was a democracy, but of a "different nature" than Americans might be accustomed to, he was told that the "only way to learn democracy was to practice it". And although the Department expressed its satisfaction at Carías' intention to leave the presidency in 1948, it did not directly inform the Hondurans that special restrictions on weapons deliveries applied in the meantime.[77] Only toward the end of 1946, as the Honduran ambassador in Washington became particularly insistent that the delivery of military airplanes to his country should be expedited, did Braden tell Cáceres directly that:

> …this Government [has] a more friendly feeling and a greater desire to cooperate with those Governments which [are] based on the periodically and freely expressed will of the people (…) There had been no such elections in Honduras since 1933 and (…) this fact influenced our approach to the question of military cooperation.[78]

It is doubtful that this carefully worded message ever reached Carías, as the Honduran ambassador later admitted that he "had not been able to inform his government in writing of this conversation (…) because of its delicate nature".[79] Fearful of losing his plush job in Washington, Cáceres probably decided to tell his chief that the delay in weapons

[75] Braden, Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Don Julían R. Cáceres, Ambassador of Honduras, August 13, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 31, Vol. 3, cl. 800: Honduras; Lt. Col. Nathan A. Brown, Jr. (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the American Embassy in Guatemala, January 16, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 33, Vol. 6, cl. 824: Equipment and Supplies.

[76] Byrnes to Erwin, Paraphrase of Telegram received from the Department, March 14, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 32, Vol. 5, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.

[77] Cochran, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, January 4, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 31, Vol. 3, cl. 800: Honduras.

[78] Briggs, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, December 26, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 32, Vol. 5, cl. 820: Military Affairs.

[79] Newbegin, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, October 24, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. 5, cl. 800: Honduras.

deliveries was due to administrative complications, rather than American disapproval of his regime.

Meanwhile, Erwin did an even better job of obscuring U.S. policy and of representing the peculiar nature of "democracy" in Honduras than Cáceres did. Given the number of years available to the ambassador to study the question, he managed to develop a thorough and sophisticated justification for authoritarian rule in Honduras which combined the best features of the local variation of Comte's Positivism (but purged from the Specerian notions of race with which upper class Hondurans had enriched it) and American anthropological notions of "national character". When secretary John B. Faust, who was something of amateur historian, joined the embassy in 1942, Erwin's reports on the local dictatorship were augmented with a historical perspective which gave his ideas a breath and depth comparable to later modernity theory:

> Recorded history has few examples of democracy developing directly from chaos; the usual sequence has been chaos, strong-man dictatorship, and then a gradual softening towards democracy. Since President Carias is at least moving in the same direction, and as nothing better is in sight, I would be derelict in my duty if I did not suggest that the Department reconsider the view [that the Carías regime is disreputable]. President Carias is a great and patriotic Honduran, entirely without ambitions beyond his own frontiers. He deserves more sympathy than has been given him up to now.[80]

Though it is impossible to discuss the full corpus that the embassy in Tegucigalpa produced on this subject, some of the more significant points might profitably be quoted. The embassy's basic argument was that chaos reigned before Carías and would return if the General stepped down. Therefore, the choice in Honduras was not one between dictatorship and democracy, but one between dictatorship and chaos. In this light, the embassy alleged, Carías' practice of arresting and jailing oppositionists without recourse to the law was an improvement on the situation existing before 1931, when local caudillos could freely plunder the countryside. Surely, during those bygone days many more Hondurans had their "human rights" violated by the rebel leaders and chieftains who were now subdued by Carías. Furthermore, there was no record of Carías ever executing or torturing his opponents, generally allowing them to go into exile after short jail terms. And Washington should not imagine that those political prisoners who were now in jail were "snowy-white devotees of liberty and democracy". Many of them (or at least the two examples out of 600 political prisoners that the embassy came up with) were former warlords who had committed many outrages during the civil wars of the 1920s. That they were now in jail for crimes of which they were "possibly" not guilty was beside the point, as they should have been punished for their earlier crimes a long time ago.

On the plus side, the embassy noted that there was no "effective" opposition to Carías; that he had put the country on a "pay-as-you-go basis" without recourse to "screwball economics"; Tegucigalpa was experiencing a building boom and many streets

[80] Faust to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2260, April 3, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 31, Vol. 3, cl. 800: Honduras.

now boasted working sewers and paved surfaces; and, finally Carías attended "strictly" to his own business in international affairs. There was, therefore no reason for the Department to object to Carías' rule, according to the embassy. Only Carías' decision to change the constitution and continue himself in power was somewhat objectionable. But since this happened first in 1936, Erwin (quite reasonably) told his superiors that "it seems a bit late to object now".[81]

Despite Erwin's very persistent opposition to Department policy on disreputable governments, he assured his superiors that "the officers of this Embassy recognize that policies [illegible] in Washington rather than in the field and that our first responsibility is to carry out the Department's policies; in conformity with this principle, we have faithfully adhered to every written instruction from the Department".[82] This was no major commitment, as written instructions had ventured no further than to demand that the embassy did not take "any action which might be construed as support of the Carias regime or which Carias might use to extend his term in office".[83] Definite as these words sounded, they were practically meaningless in the Honduran context. Erwin was locally known as a long-standing friend of the regime and anything but his recall or some other *active* denial of support would not change this impression. True, the Department denied weapons deliveries, but this was a very discreet policy and considering Cáceres deceit, perhaps even unknown in Honduras. The only possible source of anxiety to the Carías regime might have been the public denunciations of Latin American dictatorship made by men like Braden in Washington. But as long as no concrete action followed, the caudillo could breathe easy. As the American Military Attaché in Tegucigalpa described the perspective from Honduras:

> The attitude of the United States remains the big imponderable which it is [*sic.*] impossible to evaluate from this end. Towards the end of 1946 various statements by Asst. Secy. of State Braden, Secy. of State Byrnes and Pres. Truman were interpreted to mean that the United States was ready to abandon the Roosevelt policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. However, no such intervention occurred during 1946 and developments during the year tended to support the theory that the United States would not take any action to force the resignation of Pres. Carias…[84]

While it is true that the Department made no attempt to intervene in Honduras, the American ambassador would have had considerable leeway to express opposition the local regime at this point in time. If someone of Braden or Berle's temperament and ideological inclinations had been the American ambassador to Tegucigalpa during the late 1940s, the Carías regime would most probably have been exposed to U.S.

[81] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1978, August 3, 1945, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 24 cl. 710: Political Relations. Treaties.
[82] Faust to Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State), May 14, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 31, Vol. 4, cl. 800: Honduras.
[83] Byrnes to Erwin, Paraphrase of Telegram received from the Department, March 14, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 32, Vol. 5, cl. 800.1: Chief Executive.
[84] Brown to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 123-46, December 10, 1946, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 31, Vol. 3, cl. 800: Honduras.

democratic fervor. Considering the American ambassador's very prominent position in Honduras (as opposed to Argentina and Brazil, where Braden and Berle had been stationed) and also considering the wave of anti-dictatorial sentiment in Central America and the Caribbean, U.S. opposition might well have ended the *Cariato*.

Astonishingly, the State Department allowed Erwin to linger in Honduras. Being known as a good friend of Carías, the continued presence of Erwin served to symbolize Washington's unwillingness to enforce its anti-dictatorial policy. When Erwin was finally withdrawn in 1947, the Department's motives for that move were entirely extraneous. At the time, Tennessee Democratic Senator Kenneth McKellar was adamantly opposed to the administration's selection of David E. Lillienthal to head the Atomic Energy Committee. According to newspaper reports, Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who was a big supporter of Lillienthal, wanted to punish McKellar for his opposition to the nomination by firing Tennessee's senior diplomat: John Erwin.[85]

Erwin was just one year short of witnessing the end of Carías' presidency. The Honduran chief survived the revolutionary upheavals of 1944, but he was politically astute enough to realize that the era of *continuismo* was over. Thus he decided to "step down but not out", in the words of a biographer, when his term ended in 1948. Unlike Ubico or Martínez, Carías did not have to flee his country or even leave politics completely. He would remain as the chief of his Nationalist Party after 1948 and his administration skillfully orchestrated the election of Juan Manuel Gálvez Durón as president and Julio Lozano Díaz as vice-president. Both men were members of the Nationalist Party and former members of the Carías cabinet: The regime would survive without Carías and Erwin.

4. A CERTAIN IMPATIENCE

Neither Braden nor the Department ever set an objective or timeframe for the policy on disreputable governments. Was the whole hemisphere to become democratic or was a certain measure of democracy in some countries also acceptable? And what did democracy mean? The absence of dictatorship, respect for human rights, the right to vote for everyone? Assuming that Braden and his supporters had some idea of where their policy would lead, it is unclear how much time they believed it would take to obtain tangible "results". Would these be accomplished within a couple of years, within their lifetimes, within several generations? While an answer was never admitted to paper, it is fair to assume that some paybacks were expected within a few years. During the late 1930s it was not certain that democracy would survive at all, but after victory over Fascism, its spread seemed rapid and unstoppable. Former enemies like Germany, Italy, and Japan turned away from dictatorship, European colonial empires disintegrated, and popular revolutions swept the Western Hemisphere—all within the span of some five years. Was it not reasonable to expect that with a few more years and the help of the United States the waves of democracy would have swept most of the world?

[85] "Furious debate on Lillienthal rages in Senate", *Chicago Daily Tribune* (March 25, 1947) 11; "Would consider stopgap aid to Greece: Truman", *CDT* (March 27, 1947) 16; "J. Erwin", *CT*.

The advance of democracy stalled—even reversed—around 1947. It became clear that neither the Soviet Union, most of the old colonial empires, or the economic and military elites would tolerate popular sovereignty. In Latin America, popular revolutions were reversed by reactionary army officers in Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, and El Salvador. Military dictators who were previously considered to be relics of the past, Peron, Trujillo, Carías, and Somoza, managed to hold on—even in the face of U.S. opposition. Democracies like Guatemala went astray with their "screwball economics".

As Bethell and Roxborough indicate, the move to the right in Latin America was a consequence of internal developments and, as such, it is questionable whether any action on the side of the United States could have prevented it. It is certain, however, that the Braden policy was of little assistance to liberal factions in Latin America. While the most notorious dictators of the Hemisphere were singled out for persecution, there was no real policy to deal with less obnoxious dictators such as Carías. The Department made known its dissatisfaction with the Honduran regime on various occasions, but at the same time allowed its own embassy in Tegucigalpa to blunt its modest endeavors. Policy wavered in the case of hard-to-classify governments such as that of Castañeda, which gradually turned to the right without a hint of concern from Washington. The best opportunity, from a diplomatic angle, to influence the direction of political developments came with the Aguirre coup. While the Department initially snubbed the latter's military regime, it allowed its international policy of building hemispheric solidarity to take precedence over concern for internal developments in Salvador when it prematurely recognized Aguirre in stead of waiting for Castañeda to take over the presidency. That action was met with disappointment and anger by Salvadoran liberals and probably made it much harder on Simmons to stay in touch with the civilian opposition.

While initially sympathetic to the Guatemalan democratic experiment, the State Department's patience for its revolutionary aspects—as manifested in foreign adventures and domestic social reform—wore thin all too quickly. While Kyle was rather popular in Guatemala for his friendly interest in the country's agriculture, he was only interested in the technical aspects of that endeavor while the local government was increasingly preoccupied with social conditions on the countryside. Furthermore, the only time that the ambassador expressed his support for a pro-democratic policy, he betrayed an America-centered perspective, stressing the "rights" of the United States "which have come as the result of saving the world from ruthless dictators twice in a single generation" and made it "the greatest defender of democratic principles of all times". Thus, while it cannot be said that Kyle actively opposed Guatemalan actions, there was no reason to assume that he would understand the revolutionary fervor or economic nationalism which was evident in that country.

The changing mood in Washington was represented most completely in a 1950 article written by Louis Halle at the behest of the Department and published in *Foreign Affairs*. Halle used the pseudonym "Y" for the article: an obvious reference to Kennan's "X" article. The article was supposed to define for the public the groundwork of American foreign policy toward Latin America—much like Kennan's article with regard to the Soviet

Union. While the article has been characterized as signaling the abandonment of Braden's policy, Halle probably considered it a refinement. He starts out by observing "a certain impatience" among Americans with the progress of democracy in Latin America—a reference to the recent public outcry against right-wing military coups in Venezuela and Peru. Somewhat ironically—considering the article's stress on the "political immaturity" of Latin American countries—Halle chides Americans for their tendency to react like a "stern father" towards "his children" whenever political developments in Latin America are not to their liking. "But is the relationship of the United States to the Latin American nations in fact paternal? Or is it fraternal?", Halle asks his readers—rhetorically.[86]

The rest of the article argues firstly that the "historic drive" of the other American republics is "in the direction of the orderly practice of democracy". This is clear from the fact that dictatorships are fewer than they were some 12 years ago—with Ubico, Martínez, and Carías (among others) all gone. Also, the public outcry against government abuses is greater than it was some time ago and even the remaining tyrants present themselves as men of the people and show greater respect for human rights. This is not to say that dictatorship has vanished completely, but "in the alteration that so many countries experience between elective and arbitrary government, the periods of former appear to be growing longer, those of the latter shorter".

Hence, the United States should be patient with this process, because it will be marked by ups and downs: "perhaps in obedience to something like the Hegelian principle of action, reaction and synthesis". Also, this development toward democracy is achieved by "evolution rather than revolution". It will not be attained just by the revolutionary overthrow of dictators. Examples abound, Halle argued, of nations that overthrew their tyrants, only to fall prey to chaos followed by yet another dictatorship because it was not yet "mature" enough for democracy. Since "democratic government is the outward and visible sign of (…) inward and spiritual grace" it cannot be "assumed by a people as one puts on an overcoat". It must be carefully nurtured "over the generations":

> Consequently, the realistic approach to the promotion of democracy, regarded as something positive, must endeavor to provide the opportunity and the inspiration for growth. That done it is still necessary to maintain patience with the slowness of the process.

This observation leads Halle to the second part of his argument, regarding the role of the United States in nurturing the trend toward democracy in Latin America. In the recent past, that role was assumed by "paternalistic" interventionists:

> Almost invariably, national self-righteousness is dominant in the breast of the interventionists or quasi-interventionists who advocate forcing the Latin Americans to live up to our concept of political democracy. It is outspoken among those who would have us turn our backs on the other American republics because they are unworthy of us.

[86] Y (Louis Halle), "On a certain impatience with Latin America", *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review* 28:1/4 (1949-1950) 565-579.

The way forward, according the Halle, was not for the United States to turn its back on "unworthy" governments in Latin America, but to offer positive assistance and to nurture those developments that appeared to promise evolutionary advance toward democracy. Two realistic options were to invite the American Republics to participate equally in the councils of the OAS, thus promoting their sense of responsibility, and to hold up the "moral example" of U.S. domestic politics. "Active cooperation for economic development", however, was the most promising policy to make a "practical contribution to the growth of democracy". Assuming that "extreme economic and social misery, and inadequate education are obstacles to the growth of democracy", Halle believed that aid by the Export-Import Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (in which the U.S. was the principle stockholder), combined with the active dissemination of American technical know-how through the new Point IV program would stimulate Latin American political progress.

The two points of Halle's argument combined—patience and aid—entailed that the United States would no longer discriminate between supposed democracies and dictatorships. The proposition that all Latin American countries were moving toward more democracy slowly and by ups and downs implied, after all, that the United States could provide aid to any dictatorship and still maintain that it was promoting democracy in the long run. Besides, "it is a popular misconception that you can divide them [the American republic], as they stand today, between those that are immaculate democracies and those that are black dictatorships. All of them are shades of grey".

Chapter 9

THE MIDDLE MEN
The Cold War comes to Central America, 1947-1954

Sing a song of quetzals, pockets full of peace!
The junta's in the palace, they've taken out a lease.

The Commies are in hiding, just across the street;
To the embassy of Mexico they beat a quick retreat.

And pistol-packing Peurifoy looks mighty optimistic;
For the land of Guatemala is no longer Communistic.

~ *Betty Jane Peurifoy, 1954* [1]

The "ten years of spring", as the Guatemalan experiment with liberal government is known, started out under the sympathetic observance of gentle Ambassador Edwin Kyle and ended with the active intervention of Ambassador John Peurifoy—or "pistol-packing Peurifoy", undoubtedly one of the more unusual men in the Foreign Service. Peurifoy's appointment to Guatemala by the Eisenhower administration signaled the end of an era: the appointment of the dynamic and thoroughly anti-communist ambassador was a clear indication that the Eisenhower government disapproved of Guatemala's social and political experiments and intended to do something about it. Indeed, Peurifoy was selected for that particular post because he was thought to have the right qualifications to coordinate the coup that Eisenhower was planning against the Guatemalan government. And Peurifoy was not alone: in fact, the new administration also replaced the supposedly placid ambassadors in Honduras and El Salvador with proven cold warriors. Only Thomas Whelan, also a thorough anticommunist and a good friend of Anastasio Somoza, was allowed to remain in Nicaragua for much of the 1950s. Thus, Peurifoy's appointment spelled the end of the nonintervention principle and extended the front of the Cold War to Central America. Eisenhower's direct interference with the appointment of envoys to Central America are indications both of the more direct executive control over American foreign policy during the Cold War and of the importance that the new administration ascribed to the ideological inclinations and practical methods of its individual ambassadors.

As for Peurifoy, he had a grand time in Guatemala. His task was to coordinate the CIA coup against Arbenz, Arévalo's successor, in Guatemala City in 1954—a task that he executed with abandon. At one point, the ambassador guided a group of perplexed American journalists through Guatemala City waving a pistol while bombs dropped on all

[1] "People", *Time Magazine* (July 6, 1954).

sides. Only Peurifoy knew that the bombardments and coup were mainly a CIA-orchestrated show—neither he nor the journalists he was leading around were in any real physical danger. If only in personal style, Peurifoy could hardly have been more different from the diplomats of the Good Neighbor era. It is somehow fitting that this study on the perceptions of individual American diplomats should end with the appointment of a man of his character. If nothing else, it indicated that the era of Good Neighborliness, for all its inconsistencies, had definitely come to an end. For the next years at least, both Washington and its embassies in Central America believed themselves to be in the midst of a life-and-dead struggle against Soviet communism.

1. A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

The question of when the Cold War "started" has occupied many historians. It could be said that the conflict became manifest in March 1947, when Harry Truman announced that the United States would send economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey to prevent those countries from falling prey to Soviet machinations. But had an open clash between east and west been inevitable before that time? Were the United States and the Soviet Union set on a collision course as far back as 1917? The question of when the Cold War "came" to Central America would be equally difficult to answer. The 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala definitively set the tone for the next decennia, but "red scares" followed by violent suppression, which sometimes involved the United States, went as far back as the 1920s.

Historian Melvin Leffler found a straightforward answer to the larger question of when the Cold War started—or at least became inevitable. Before the Second World War, he argues, an ideological conflict existed between capitalist America and communist Russia, but the two were still able to work together if it suited there common interests—the alliance during the World War being an obvious example. Thus, ideological differences are a necessary, but in themselves not sufficient explanation for the Cold War. Only when the spheres of influence of the United States and the Soviet Union came to overlap in Central Europe as a direct consequence of the War did ideological differences combine with the realities of power politics to produce the conflict known as the Cold War.[2]

In the case of U.S. Latin American policy, historians have found hints of a "first" Cold War or of a tradition of "containing" labor activity and economic nationalism in the region dating back to the early 20th century.[3] Also, the purported American support for anti-communist dictators is supposed to form a connection between pre-War and Cold War policies. It is undeniable, of course, that American diplomats in the pre-War period shared their disdain for the (Indian) lower classes with the local aristocracy and were

[2] Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism. The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York 1994) especially 64-65.
[3] Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph eds., *A Century of Revolution. Insurgent and Counterinsurgent violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham 2010) Part I: The First Cold War, especially the article by Jeffrey L. Gould.

occasionally swept along in the hysteria of local red scares. But to argue that this situation should be defined in terms of a "war" or that it was somehow akin to the later Cold War, that latter term has to be stretched to include any signs of class or racial antagonism. As long as indigenous communism or radicalism was not combined with the outside threat of a rival superpower, the United States was still able to transcend its inordinate fear of social revolutions and work with local forces as they were. The early Good Neighbor policy is one example, while Braden's diplomacy implied a tolerance for local change and social experimentation that was unthinkable ten years later. Only when the Soviet Union was widely *perceived* to be a direct threat in Latin America did old prejudices combine with real power politics to reproduce the Cold War in the Western Hemisphere. This happened some years after superpower rivalry had become a fact of life in Europe and Asia.

Historical studies that emphasize the parallels between 1930s diplomacy and Cold War diplomacy tend to downplay the importance of the intervening World War. The War introduced new concepts, such as the "fifth column" threat, and new procedures, such as the development of "fifth column" capabilities in the form of intelligence agencies, that would come to characterize the Cold War period. As far as U.S. Latin American policy was concerned however, the Cold War did not seamlessly follow the World War. Towards 1945, there was the question of what kind of superpower the United States would be. Would it spread its own economic system and political culture or merely prevent the spread of totalitarian ideologies? Since Washington quickly became preoccupied with Soviet threats in Europe and Asia, the Division of American Republic Affairs under Spruille Braden enjoyed enough leeway to experiment with the first variant. The spread of communism was not considered a major concern at that time. However, a local backlash against liberal experiments combined with bad policy definition and execution on the American side closed that particular route.

There was no way back to the situation that had existed before the War either: the principle of nonintervention was thoroughly perverted during the fight against the fifth column in Latin America. New American agencies meddled in everything from sewer building to military training. The diplomatic corps itself took on a new role in the management of American assistance programs and in the sphere of political defense against ideological threats. The self-imposed limits of the Good Neighbor policy were most definitely a thing of the past, even if the term itself continued to be used. On the Central American side, the age of the traditional caudillos came to an end. Even where they were succeeded by military regimes that appeared superficially similar, training under U.S. supervision during and after the War had imbued the local armies with a new sense of professional mystique, which, in combination with older military traditions on the isthmus, was "anti-political" and devoted to national "progress".[4]

Roughly between 1948 and 1953, the political leaders of Washington together with the Europeanist professionals in the State Department extended their influence over the definition of Latin American policy. Initially, the developing "culture" of the Cold War had

[4] See pages 315-316 below.

little effect on the embassies. It could be argued, though, that the general shift to the right in the political thinking of both Central America and Washington left its marks in political reports: Political groups that were earlier defined as "liberal" came to be regarded as "leftist" while "reactionaries" were now dubbed "conservatives". A most illustrative internal memo, dated December 31, 1948, can be found in the archives of the embassy in El Salvador. Analyzing the political factions that made up a military junta at the time, someone at the embassy decided to redact the political labels that were used in the original memo:

> The danger of a split in the Junta is based now largely upon a conflict between the ~~conservative~~ moderate element led by Osorio and the ~~liberal~~ leftist element led by Cordova.[5]

For the time being, however, the region was assumed to be safe from Soviet threats because it was not "modern" enough to be susceptible to communism; because it was physically separated from the front lines of the Cold War by two oceans; and because U.S. influence was considered to be so large there.[6]

While the American policy toward Guatemala after 1948 exemplified Cold War thinking, the political reporting from El Salvador presents a more representative picture of the shift to the political right that was taking place within Central America. Around 1948, the American ambassador, Albert Nufer, noted a shift to the political right in El Salvador. Even mild critique on the country's social structure was now regarded as a mark of communism and "many of the reported communists or fellow travelers in El Salvador would probably be considered merely left of center in other countries".[7] Even traditional bastions of conservatism, such as the Catholic Church, were not free from suspicion: An edict by the Salvadoran Bishop that took note of the "disproportionate" divide in the allocation of wealth in the country so incensed the coffee barons that they accused the Church of "aligning" with communism.[8] In this context, former President Aguirre, whose recognition by the United States was met with general anger and disappointment in El Salvador a few years earlier, was now making a comeback:

> It appears to be quite likely now that Colonel Aguirre will be supported by many persons who in 1944 repudiated him as a totalitarian-type dictator. With his famous record in the suppression of El Salvador's "communist" uprising in 1932, Colonel Aguirre can probably make today, a most respectable appeal as a veteran in the currently popular anti-communist crusade.[9]

[5] Williams, Memorandum on Dangers of Split in Junta, December 31, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), cl. 800: Salvador, September to October.
[6] Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America. The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill and London 1988) chapter 1.
[7] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 162, April 30, 1948, PR El Salvador (SFC), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador.
[8] Nufer to the Department of State, Despatch 201, June 3, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador.
[9] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 348, August 19, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador.

While Nufer did not remain unaffected by the anti-communist milieu in El Salvador, he was skeptical about the acuteness of the threat from the left. Recognizing that most supposed "communists" were actually only somewhat left of center, the Ambassador also reported that conservative politicians were using the growing red scare to enhance their own popularity. Building on his anticommunist credentials, Aguirre and his supporters were known to spread rumors about sinister communist plots. President Castañeda, who was considering "reelection", also encouraged existing fears for the communist specter in the hope that the upper classes would seek the protection of a "law and order" regime.[10]

What this vignette of American reporting on Salvadoran politics suggests is that local politics were undergoing significant changes well before the local embassy was in the grip of the Cold War. This is not to say that U.S. Cold War policies had no effect on the local situation. Doubtlessly, reactionary groups in El Salvador felt encouraged by anti-Communist rhetoric emanating from Washington or by contacts with other American agencies such as the CIA or the Army. But as far as the late 1940s are concerned, it appears that most Foreign Service officers felt that Central American politics had taken a sharp turn to the right. While this made some conservative politicians appear moderate and some left-leaning politicians seem radical by comparison, the Foreign Service perceived a need for moderation.

2. GOING DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

The introduction of communism or "leftist" ideologies in the political mix lead to a reevaluation of local political actors by American diplomats: Parties and people who would have been considered conservative or even reactionary some years earlier, were now considered quite acceptable. In fact, with the memories of the fascist danger still rather fresh in the memory and new dangers looming on the political left, American diplomats developed a definite preference for the so-called "middle-of-the-road". Much like in the 1930s, when American diplomats had preferred leaders who could protect their countries against anarchy and social upheaval without reverting to out-and-out dictatorship—a preference which led to initial support for men like Ubico and Carías—the diplomats of the late 1940s supported men who were assumed to hold the middle between the extremes of reaction and communism.

2.1 The extremes: Nicaragua and Guatemala

The Department's attempt to dislodge Somoza from power using non-recognition turned out to be a failure. The explanation for the American defeat in this case is basically similar to the explanation for Martínez' successful defiance in the early 1930s: Within the

[10] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 173, May 6, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-91, April 16, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 389, September 30, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 368, September 9, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 16, cl. 800.B: Communism.

confines of his own private *hacienda*, as Nicaragua was sometimes called, Somoza was just too powerful to be threatened by mere diplomatic action against him. On May 30, 1948, the United States reestablished diplomatic relations with the regime of General Somoza.

The fact that Washington and Managua were back on speaking terms did not imply that all was well between the two. The Department's attitude toward Somoza remained cool for some time after the non-recognition debacle. Meanwhile, the attitude of the General himself was anything but cool. The Nicaraguan delegates to the OAS and the UN consistently and unconditionally supported American propositions and Somoza was one of the few Latin American leaders who warmly welcomed American action in Korea, promising to send troops to that theatre if the United States so desired. Additionally, an economic upturn during the late 1940s caused Nicaragua to be relatively prosperous and stable. This situation somewhat obscured the authoritarian nature of the local regime, which was characterized by rather extreme graft and nepotism and did not recoil from violence in times of violence. The American ambassador to Nicaraguan in the early 1950s, Thomas Whelan, a political appointee of the Truman administration, was so taken in with Somoza that he told his superiors that, "despite the widespread impression to the contrary", the General was not "a dictator in the true sense of the word".[11]

Aside from his developing friendship with Whelan, a friendship that would last some ten years, Somoza scored some other minor victories throughout Truman's second administration. Around 1952, Somoza apparently managed to convince the CIA to send him weapons, which he would use to topple the left-leaning Arbenz government in Guatemala. However, the operation, known as FORTUNE, was killed by the State Department, which found out about it at the last moment. During the same year, the General also managed to impose himself on Truman, leading to an unofficial lunch appointment at the Whitehouse. But taken over the whole, the Department kept Somoza at arm's length, consistently refusing to reestablish a military mission and arms deliveries to Nicaragua. Even Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who came in with the Eisenhower administration in 1953, initially worried that his plans to fight communism in Latin America were only supported by "the Somozas" of the hemisphere. Only after the 1954 CIA coup against Arbenz, in which Somoza managed to play a leading role, did the General become *persona grata* in Washington.

While the Department remained careful to dissociate itself from the most reactionary leaders of the hemisphere, relations with one of the most progressive governments, that of Guatemala, soured. Patterson's transfer from communist Yugoslavia to Guatemala was one indication of Washington's growing concern about labor activity and social legislation in that country. For the moment, however, the Truman administration believed that the Western hemisphere was relatively safe from communist

[11] The Ambassador in Nicaragua (Whelan) to the Department of State, Managua, March 6, 1953, FRUS IV, 1375-1377. On Whelan's relationship with Somoza, consult: Paul C. Clark, *The United States and Somoza, 1933-1956. A revisionist look* (Westport, CT, and London 1992) 190-191 and Bermann, *Under the Big Stick*, 242-243.

infiltration and Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs Edward Miller carelessly blamed the social revolution in Guatemala on President Arévalo, who was a "wooly head". Indeed, it would appear that the State Department hoped that some carefully applied outside pressure, combined with the supposedly inherent weakness of Arévalo's policies, would eventually lead to the end of social experimentation in Guatemala.

In 1950 Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán was elected to the Guatemalan presidency. Initially, the Department believed that Arbenz would at least slow down the tempo of social change, because he was an army man and a landowner. However, Arbenz was one of the original leaders of the Guatemalan revolution and, if anything, felt that Arévalo's policies on land reform had not gone far enough. While Arévalo had distributed land formerly belonging to German landlords, Arbenz openly prepared to nationalize and redistribute fallow lands of other large landowners, including that of the American United Fruit Company. While it was not Washington's primary objective to protect UFCO's interests, Guatemalan threats against American interests were taken to be an indication of Guatemala's flirtations with communism. Therefore, the Department stepped up the pressure against the Central American republic by discontinuing financial aid for the construction of the Guatemalan section of the inter-American highway and by stopping arms deliveries to the Guatemalan army. In the words of U.S. Ambassador Rudolf Emil Schoenfeld, the purpose of these actions was:

> …to bring the Guatemalans to the realization that they were dependent upon the United States and that if they expected assistance or consideration from the United States it behooved them to adjust their actions vis-à-vis the United States accordingly.

But even though agencies such as the CIA appeared ready to act against Arbenz, the Department under Truman went no further than this—as the killing of operation FORTUNE indicates. Only after Eisenhower settled in the White House did this situation change.

A good illustration of Department perceptions of Central America is a good-will trip to the region by the Assistant Secretary Miller. The trip was very carefully planned and considered in the Department, because every move Miller made was going to be interpreted as a sign of support or opposition by local political factions. Since all regimes in Central America were of a different political color, the amount of time spent in each of these nations was probably going to be interpreted as an American mark of approval or disapproval for the particular brand of government in that country. Even more important was the question of where Miller would celebrate the Fourth of July, as that holiday would coincide with his trip to Central America. Due to the special place this day occupied in the celebration of American history and values, the presence of a high-placed American officer like Miller in one of the Central American capitals during the Fourth of July would give off some of the brilliance of American power and prestige on the local regime.

Somoza was *dying* to have Miller visit Managua on Independence Day. The Nicaraguan ambassador to Washington, Dr. Sevilla Sacasa, made a point of visiting the Department during the preparations of Miller's trip to spread the *Somocista* gospel. He

was politely received, but his eulogies left the Americans unimpressed. Under the sardonic heading "The happy people", Miller recounts how Sevilla Sacasa "waxed lyrical over the recent elections in Nicaragua", which confirmed Somoza's power,

> …and the prosperity at home and peace abroad which he foresees as their inevitable results. He described the people of Nicaragua as being filled with *alegría* [joy] both during and after balloting, to the extent that their enthusiasm had erupted in a nation-wide celebration. He declared that Nicaraguan democracy and elections are not to be compared with those of other states; but an objective analysis in the light of Nicaraguan history, traditions and current conditions would undoubtedly prove that Nicaraguan elections are fully the equal of those of (…) other countries.[12]

The tone of this memorandum of conversation alone demonstrates that the Department was exasperated with the Ambassador's pipedreams. In any event, no one was willing to associate the Fourth of July with the transparent charade that Somoza was performing for the benefit of the *yanquis*.

A logical choice—at first sight—was for Miller to celebrate the Fourth of July in Guatemala. That, at least, was the largest and arguably most influential country of the region. Some years earlier Spruille Braden had visited Guatemala City on the occasion of Arévalo's inauguration to indicate American satisfaction with the liberal experiment in that country. But times had changed. The new American ambassador in Guatemala, Richard C. Patterson Jr., vehemently objected to any hint that Miller would even visit the country. Patterson claimed that such a visit could only be an "appeasement mission". The Department did not agree with Patterson's alarmist views, but did consider it wise to limit the length of Miller's visit to Guatemala and his exposure to the local government. By the early 1950s, the Department had come to consider the Arévalo government as too radical and did not want Miller's visit to Guatemala to convey the impression that "all is well in our relations". In fact, presidential elections were just around the corner in Guatemala, so this was a particularly bad time to put a stamp of approval on Arévalo's reformism. Hence the visit to Guatemala would be low-profile: "turkey to be talked with the President and the call on the Foreign Minister to be pure protocol".[13]

To the Department, Somoza and Arévalo represented two extremes. Both leaders presented their governments as democratic, but both were flawed in the eyes of Washington. Somoza was obviously reactionary, but Arévalo was too radical for comfort. Neither regime was a good translation of American values to the Central American situation—which is what Miller's choice of location for the Fourth of July was supposed to convey. Instead, except from "Tegucigalpa which will already have been visited, San Salvador, barring political troubles, would be the best place to spend the 4th of July with its celebrations. It would be preferable to be there rather than in either Managua or

[12] Miller, Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Sevilla Sacassa of Nicaragua, May 19, 1950, Lot Files, Office of Middle American Affairs (Entry 1144), Subject File, Box 2, Folder marked Memoranda, January to June, 1950.
[13] Bennett to Mann, Barber, and Miller, May 18, 1950, Lot Files, Entry 1144 , Box 2, Folder marked Memoranda, January to June, 1950.

Guatemala".[14] At this time, El Salvador was no longer ruled by Castañeda. Having survived in office much longer than might have been expected, the President confused lack of active opposition with a position of power and had concurrently attempted to continue himself in office in the 1930s tradition. This act, of course, provided the different factions that had grudgingly accepted his rule with a good reason and justification to rebel. Presenting themselves as guarantors of the Salvadoran constitution, a faction of young, professional army officers took control of the state after an almost bloodless coup in December 1949. Being neither liberal nor reactionary and neither lower class nor aristocratic, the military faction that came to power presented itself as middle-of-the-road. It rejected *Somocista* dictatorship, but had little sympathy for social experiments of the Guatemalan type. It pronounced a fundamental need for democratic, economic, and social change and progress, but *SLOWLY*. By 1950, this was exactly what the Department had in mind for its southern neighbors. Careful, responsible, and evolutionary progress was the way to go if the isthmian republics wanted to follow the path that the United States had taken after 1776.

2.2 The middle of the road in Honduras

In 1948, the Carías regime engineered the election of Galvez and Lozano to executive power. Both men were widely recognized as talented and relatively honest administrators. Lozano especially had long been regarded by American envoys as the brains behind Carías' successful, conservative financial policy.[15] So Carías left his country with the most professional, capable, and honest administrators his Party had on offer (which is not, of course, to say that they were entirely professional, capable, and honest).

Aside from the inherent merits of the Galvez-Lozano ticket, which was particularly attractive to the influential commercial classes because it promised six more years of predictable administration, the successful transfer of power was doubtlessly aided by a favorable economic climate, skillful—though not too blatant—manipulation of the election results, and the weakness of the Liberal Party. With regard to the latter factor, Angel Zúñiga Huete managed to capture the presidential nomination of his divided Party in 1947. Therefore, the Liberal ticket was nothing more than a—in the words of the American embassy—sixteen year old, warmed over dish, since Zúñiga Huete had been the Liberal presidential candidate in every campaign, free or otherwise, since the early 1930s. While of a different political color than Carías, he represented the same 1930s caudillo politics. And while Galvez' reputation was tinged by his presence at (if not, perhaps, role in) the 1944 San Pedro Sula massacre, Zuniga Huete was remembered (accurately or otherwise) for personally "machine-gunning" Carías-voters in the streets of Tegucigalpa in 1923. Eventually, Zúñiga Huete did not even bother to measure himself against the administration: in true 1930s style, he denounced the government for

[14] Bennett to Mann and Hughes, April 19, 1950, Lot Files, Entry 1144, Box 2, Folder marked Memoranda, January to June, 1950.
[15] See chapter 2, page 93.

imposition even before voting started; called for a revolution; and went into hiding. While this meant that Galvez would be "elected" unopposed, and thus could not claim electoral victory, it also meant that his opponents could not convincingly claim that he had been elected by fraud, as no fraud was necessary. In the end, and with the help of a Honduran law which obliged the electorate to either cast a vote or face a hefty fine, Galvez garnered some 300,000 votes (against some 200 who obstinately voted for Zúñiga Huete and some thousands of voided votes) which still allowed him to claim a popular mandate.[16]

While the recall and retirement of Erwin one year previous was not the result of a change in American policy and the "election" of Galvez not a fundamental departure from the Carías era, these changes together did lead to a smoothening of U.S.-Honduran relations. Galvez' election and his subsequent conciliatory policies eliminated Honduras as an obvious target for the anti-dictatorial movement in the Caribbean area, which focused on the older dictatorships of men like Somoza and Trujillo. Erwin's departure and eventual replacement with an experienced career diplomat eliminated grounds for rumors that the American embassy in Honduras was an active supporter of the local dictatorship. In its international affairs, Honduras, which was traditionally the battlefield of the isthmus due to its central location, successfully focused on being the least conspicuous and objectionable country in the region. While the neighboring countries of Guatemala and Nicaragua were showing alarmingly revolutionary and reactionary tendencies, respectively edging toward communism and fascism, Honduras became the eye in the storm of Central American politics. It was exactly the kind of peaceful and friendly country that the State Department liked to deal with.

In Tegucigalpa, American diplomatic representation after Erwin's somewhat irregular dismissal was performed by Paul C. Daniels for a while. Daniel's appointment appears to have been a stop-gap measure as he was already slated to become Director of American Republic Affairs at the Department and left Honduras after some months. Next was Herbert S. Bursley, an experienced career officer like Daniels who had been assistant chief of the Division of American Republic Affairs from 1938 to 1942. Daniels and Bursley were both born around 1900, had joined the Foreign Service around the time that it was professionalized by the Rutgers Act of 1924, and reached the level of secretary of legation—thus introducing them to the political work of their posts—during

[16] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Telegram 51, May 17, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 235, October 9, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 241, October 15, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III; Bursley to Daniels, November 1, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 246, October 19, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 236, October 11, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 237, October 11, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF) Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III. Actually, both the Department and the Legation noticed a curious gap in the files about the 1944 massacre and Galvéz' role therein: Reid to Bursley, July 2, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II; Bursley to Reid, July 14, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras.

the 1930s, when nonintervention was dogma. Both reintroduced a high degree professional detachment from local affairs to the embassy's political reports, effectively ending the "Carías-can-do-no-wrong" attitude of Erwin, and opened the embassy's doors to callers who were members of the political opposition. But while both Daniels and Bursley continued to pay lip service to the American interest in the spread of democracy, neither took the "Braden approach" of charging the china shop. They both represented the more measured approach presented in the "Y"-article, sympathizing with local initiatives which were understood to embody careful steps toward more liberal governance, but religiously maintaining the appearance of American neutrality in local affairs. When the Honduran ambassador in Washington carefully inquired whether Braden's replacement with Daniels as Assistant Secretary implied a move away from the former's pro-democratic policy, he was told that the only change would be a "difference in approach".[17]

Daniels and Bursley's tenures in Tegucigalpa are representative of this "difference in approach", which held the middle ground between Braden's crusade and Erwin's appeasement. First of all, both Daniels and Bursley reopened the dialogue with members of the opposition, who had long been unwelcome at the embassy. After one month in Honduras, for example, Daniels reported that opposition to Carías was more widespread and friendlier to the United States than Erwin had suggested in his reports.[18] Bursley also reported, in a somewhat sympathetic vein, that oppositionists in Honduras were "professional men of far better than average intelligence who seem to have strong and even bitter convictions".[19] Daniels started to receive oppositionists to the embassy and to answer their written missives and Bursley went so far as to invite both government officials and representatives of the opposition to the yearly Fourth of July reception at the embassy. In that way, the American Ambassador hoped to express his "ideas of the democratic spirit". While both Daniels and Bursley ended the overly optimistic reports on the *Caríato* and courteously engaged the opposition, they were careful to suppress the impression that U.S. sympathies had swung from the Nationalists to the Liberals. It was made clear to any representative of the opposition that the embassy would not be drawn into local politics.[20]

Daniels and Bursley showed careful, sympathetic interest in the presidential elections of 1948, which were nominally free and determined who Carías' successor

[17] Newbegin, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, October 24, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. V, cl. 800: Honduras.
[18] Daniels to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2861, July 18, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. V, cl. 800: Honduras.
[19] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 138, July 8, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II.
[20] Daniels to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2847, July 1, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. V, cl. 800: Honduras; Daniels to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2861, July 18, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. V, cl. 800: Honduras; Daniels (Director of the Division for American Republic Affairs), Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Zuñiga Huete, Honduran Opposition Leader, December 30, 1947, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 34, Vol. V, cl. 800: Honduras (continued); Bursley to Reid, June 11, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II.

would be. Bursley believed that a peaceful test of strength, in the form of elections, was the only way to dilute political tensions in Honduras and to avert an armed contest between government and opposition. How fair the elections were and who won was considered secondary to the fact that elections did take place. The embassy would be careful to remain on the sidelines during the campaigning season and the elections, unless government imposition was "so cruel as to shock humanity".[21] Indeed, the embassy was fairly certain that "some" official fraud did take place during the elections. But Daniels expressed "concern" over their course only once, after a known follower of Carías emptied his revolver on the Zúñiga Huete residence. From Washington, where Daniels had already taken up his new tasks, he wrote that the Department took a "dim view of [such] gangster activities". It was quickly determined, however, that the shooting had been a private initiative without official involvement.[22]

One reason why the embassy showed little interest in who won the elections was that it recognized few *fundamental* differences between the contending parties—it believed that both lacked real substance. "While there is much talk about ideals and all the rest of it, I am very much afraid that except in the case of a few individuals the struggle is simply the old one between the 'ins' and the 'outs'", Bursley reported to the Department.[23] This view fitted the more general cynicism toward Latin politics that characterized American views after the failed post-War experiments with democracy. Bursley reported in July, 1948, that local politics should not be viewed through "rosy glasses": Both Liberals and Nationalists had been guilty of fraud and abuses in the past and there was little indication that either had changed its ways in that regard.[24] Embassy reports on the campaign platforms of Galvéz and Zúñiga Huete were to the effect that there were few significant differences between the two and that neither should be taken too seriously.[25] According to the embassy, the real issue of the elections was not which party won, but whether a civilized contest could be held at all in Honduras.

Bursley's reaction to the election results, which showed a clear majority for Galvéz, underscored that perspective: By U.S. standards, the Ambassador reported to the Department, the election was a "pathetic travesty". On the one hand, Bursley chided the government for weighing the dice in favor of Galvez, but on the other hand, Zúñiga Huete had not won the Ambassador's sympathy by withdrawing from the race

[21] Bursley to Willard Barber (Chief of the Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), September 30, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III.
[22] Daniels to Montamat, March 3, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras I; Montamat to Daniels, March 8, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras I; Montamat to Daniels, March 11, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras I.
[23] Bursley to Gordon S. Reid (Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), July 14, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras. Zuniga Huete.
[24] Bursley to Reid, July 14, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras.
[25] On the platform of the National Party, secretary Montamat commented that it was basically sound but would be observed more in breach than in practice: Montamat to the Secretary of State, Despatch 56, March 12, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras I. On the program of the Liberal Party, the embassy commented that it would mean very little if that party managed to obtain the presidency: Montamat to the Secretary of State, Despatch 73, April 1, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras I.

prematurely. However, Bursley found that by local standards, the fact that elections were held at all and had not relapsed into violence was "a vast improvement and a significant step forward to an eventual day which may bring a more truly democratic life for this struggling country".[26] Ironically, the American legation's commentary on the 1931 elections, which had brought Carías to power, was almost identical.[27]

It is difficult to say whether the Galvez election would have been acceptable to the U.S. some three years earlier, when Braden directed policy, but it coincided with the generally low American expectations of Latin politics in 1948. In that context, Galvez' policies after his inauguration as president came as a pleasant surprise. Neither Galvez nor Lozano, Bursley reported, were "dictator-minded".[28] Indeed, Galvez adopted an explicit policy of "conciliation", intended to mend relations with moderate Liberals after the bitter fighting and campaigning of recent years. The new President also entertained the somewhat abstract notion that Honduras should eventually develop toward a democracy, although that process would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary and the Honduran people would have to undergo many years of political education before the ideal could be realized.[29] In the meantime, Galvez took no actions that had the potential to undermine Honduran social and economic hierarchy or to involve the lower strata of peasants and Indians in politics. He did, however, release political prisoners and invited political exiles back to the country. The repression that had characterized the *Caríato* was relaxed, a change symbolized by the fact that the police in the capital started carrying batons instead of rifles.[30]

Since the Galvez administration relaxed political control, as compared with the Carías administration, it was easy for the embassy to imagine that it represented a "step forward": A progressive move along the continuum that ranged from totalitarian state to democracy. Some decades after the fact, it is more difficult to see the Galvez administration in that light, since it did not represent a fundamental move away from elite/army control over Honduran politics; did not address the social injustices implied in the wide gap between upper and lower classes; and did not renounce the right to strike out against the opposition. As Carías himself admitted to a supporter in July of 1949, the policy of "democratization" under Galvez was a carefully controlled experiment and the government would only allow it to run its course as long as Hondurans showed themselves worthy of their increased freedoms and did not revert to the chaotic behavior in evidence before the *Caríato*. During the second half of the twentieth century, many successors of Galvez did find it convenient to put a stop to the supposedly democratic experiment initiated in the late 1940s.

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[26] Lt. Col. Isaacson (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 42-48, May 6, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II.
[27] See Chapter 2, page 91.
[28] Bursley to Daniels, November 1, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III.
[29] Isaacson to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 42-48, May 6, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 39, cl. 800: Honduras II.
[30] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-27, January 29, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 42, cl. 800: Honduras I.

Lacking the ability to look into the future and inclined to interpret the progression of Honduran history in terms of slow Progress, Bursley came to see the Galvez government as a step forward in the general direction of modernity. While Carías had undoubtedly been a dictator, the Ambassador reported in June 1949, he had done the "hard and dirty work" of pacifying Honduras, thus laying the necessary foundations for current progress.[31] In time, and if not provoked by violent opposition, the Galvez administration would improve further and would be much more democratic than the previous one, the Ambassador opined.[32] While Bursley was not blind to the authoritarian aspects of the new administration, he did appear to believe that as it represented a small step in the political development of Honduras, the United States could support the semi-authoritarian Galvez regime while still supporting the long-term goal of democracy for Central America. Therefore, he recommended that the State Department provide friendly attention to Honduras if it was threatened from the North or the South (the Left or the Right in political terms) by Arévalo or Somoza.[33] In the context of the late 1940s at least, Honduras had become middle-of-the-road.

Bursley's feeling that Galvez deserved friendly attention did not translate into concrete American support for the new government. Instead, with an optimistic prognosis for Honduras' political future and with its economy also in good shape, the State Department decided that it was safe to ignore the country in the late 1940s in favor of the pressing demands of the Cold War. Bursley himself was confronted by this attitude from Washington when he noticed that none of his reports and requests for policy guidelines on local political matters elicited a response from the Department. In November 1948, he reported his surprise—and not a small amount of bitterness could be detected in his report—that the Department neglected to answer a query of his as to the appropriateness of holding an embassy reception for the new Honduran president. More disturbing, Bursley noticed that the elections in Honduras were not even mentioned in the Department's internal publications (the Weekly Review of Latin American Affairs) while the Ambassador himself thought that it was "certainly more newsworthy than some of the alarmist stuff which was published".[34]

After the excitement of elections, the political situation in Honduras returned to its traditionally slow pace. Even Bursley became somewhat dissatisfied with the general "dullness" of his post: Only the periodical "regurgitation" of the long-standing boundary dispute with Nicaragua offered some diversion for the Ambassador.[35] When it was Bursley's time to be transferred to another post, the State Department decided to give

[31] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 111, April 7, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 42, cl. 800: Honduras I.
[32] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 13, January 10, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 42, cl. 800: Honduras I.
[33] Bursley to Reid, November 1, 1948, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 40, cl. 800: Honduras III.
[34] *Idem*.
[35] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Joint Weeka 5, August 3, 1950, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 46, cl. 350: Honduras, 1950.

the Honduran mission to the only man who ever showed any active interest for it: John Draper Erwin. Since the Lillienthal case, Erwin had persistently lobbied for reappointment and he managed to obtain the support from the Tennessee Senatorial delegation again. The administration was probably well-satisfied to humor the Tennesseans by reappointing Erwin to a post as quiet and unimportant as Honduras. The appointment did not present a real vindication for Erwin, though, since he had indicated a desire to be promoted to Chile. He settled for Honduras however. There was some agitation against Erwin along the North Coast and in San Pedro Sula, where the old Ambassador was still remembered for his failure to recognize the tragedy of the 1944 massacre. Both the embassy and the Galvez administration shrugged off the criticism as radical and even leftist.[36]

The reporting of the Honduran embassy quickly returned to the familiar "Utopia Inc."-style of Erwin's previous tenure: Everything was well and there was no opposition to the powers that be.[37] There was no denying, however, that some things had changed. Unofficial labor organizations were now active on the North Coast where United Fruit operated and Galvez' conciliation policy, while very conservative by international standards, at least allowed the possibility that social legislation might be considered, perhaps, sometime in the future—a radical departure from Carías' standpoint. For Erwin, whose romanticized image of Honduras was constructed around its supposed isolation from the modern world with its unions, social legislation, class conflict, etc, etc, this was too much to bear.

Three years earlier, Bursley had reported that the increased activity of labor on the North Coast was largely a normal phenomenon:

> It seems quite natural that after many years of the Carías regime during which a dictatorship, frequently benevolent, existed, that the lethargic giant [labor] should begin to stretch a bit and to sense a need and right for a measure of emancipation.[38]

The Ambassador was even somewhat impatient with those who claimed that labor activity was caused by communist agitation. Bursley was polite but noncommittal when UFCO managers warned him that communist agitation was out of control on the North Coast. The Ambassador pointedly asked them whether the activities they were describing were not, in fact, "promotional activities looking to [the] establishment of workers' unions in line with the well defined trend in so many parts of the world".[39] When

[36] Erwin to President Truman, February 15, 1946, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official Files, Box 1570, OF1002: Erwin, John D.; Syracusa to Mann and Miller, January 31, 1951, Lot Files, Office of Middle American Affairs Subject File, Box 3, folder marked Memoranda, 1951; Byron Blankenship (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Honduras) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 473, January 29, 1951, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 48, cl. 350: Honduras, 1951.

[37] Erwin, Memorandum on Rumors of General Tiburcio Carias planning again to make race for Presidency of Honduras, December 7, 1951, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 48, cl. 350: Honduras, 1951.

[38] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 98, March 22, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 560.

[39] Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 106, April 1, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 560.

the Department informed Bursley that certain unnamed individuals within the American government (most probably CIA agents) insisted that there "must" be dangerous communists in Honduras, the Ambassador calmly answered that there was "nothing to worry about". Further reporting on the matter was delegated to secretary Maleady, who thought that Departmental thinking on the matter was "disturbingly disjointed if not downright idiotic".[40]

Erwin was not quite so tolerant of labor activity. Relying completely on information provided by the anti-labor vice-president, Julio Lozano, and by the American manager of the railroad, Erwin reported several incidents of supposed communist agitation, instigated by migrant workers from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Evidence for a communist connection was extremely thin in all instances: A workers' petition against a particularly stern American superintendent was thought to be inspired by the typical communist "line"; a failed plot to hold up a United Fruit train was thought to be masterminded by well-known labor agitators who would have used their loot for future labor campaigns; some sub-rosa labor organizations were thought to be communist "fronts".[41] There was no obvious reason for Erwin to take these alarmist rumors seriously, except for the fact that he thought Galvez' policy too indulgent:

> The fruit company and rightist National Party elements are impatient of Galvez' temporizing, but he has insisted on continuance of his conciliation policy, at least until he is convinced that a clear and present danger to the stability of his Government exists. The miracle is that communist activity and unrest have been as slow in taking advantage of the freedom of the last two and one-half years, since Honduras is a fertile field for agitation, particularly in view of its proximity to virulent communist groups of Mexico, Guatemala and Salvador. [42]

While Erwin's reports from Honduras must have added to a general impression of communist activity in Central America, he was not the prototype of a "Cold Warrior". Highly conservative and unable to believe that anyone could be dissatisfied with the Honduras that he knew, Erwin reflexively blamed outsiders for any trouble in his Shangri-La. A return to fatherly policies of the *Caríato* would be sufficient, however, to set things straight. Meanwhile, the Ambassador kept the door to the outside world firmly shut: American intelligence agencies, which would supposedly help local governments fight communists, were not welcome in Erwin's bailiwick.[43] It is not surprising, then, that

[40] Reid to Bursley, january 27, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21; Bursley to Reid, February 14, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21; Bursley to Reid, February 10, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21; Department of State to Bursley, Instruction 18, March 1, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21; Reid to Bursley, February 24, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21; Bursley to the Secretary of State, Despatch 19, January 12, 1949, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 44, cl. 350.21.

[41] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 835, June 7, 1951, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 48, cl. 350: Honduras, January to December, 1951.

[42] Erwin to the Secretary of State, Despatch 838, June 8, 1951, PR Honduras (SCF), Box 48, cl. 350: Honduras, January to December, 1951.

[43] Mann to Randolph, November 10, 1952, Lot Files, Entry 1136, Records of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for Inter-American Affairs, Box 3, Folder marked Honduras; Randolph to

despite his hostility toward communism, Erwin was quickly replaced by the incoming Eisenhower government. The new administration wished to use Honduran territory as a springboard for its CIA operations against Guatemala and Erwin, a leftover from the 1930s, did not fit into those ambitions.

2.3 The middle of the road in El Salvador

While Simmons reported on the travails of the Castañeda regime with some interest and optimism at first, the Ambassador became disillusioned with it over the years. Several assaults on the government form both rightist and leftist factions forced the President into the arms of the army and security forces. From 1946 onwards, the country was under a permanent state of siege. Even if Castañeda was serious about his promises for reconciliation and more progressive government at the start of his tenure, nothing came of it. For all practical purposes, El Salvador was a military dictatorship by 1948, be it for the fact that the government was obliged by the constitution to hold presidential elections in that year.

Due to the state of siege, the fractious nature of the opposition, and the promise of elections, El Salvador was superficially calm for a while and Castañeda or his supporters may have been under the impression that they could extend their reign without too much opposition. Thus, in true 1930s *continuismo* style, Castañeda had himself secretly reelected for a second term by the National Assembly in December 1948. It turned out to be a big mistake: Almost as soon as the "reelection" became known, a faction of young army officers committed a coup and took over the reins of government under a five-man junta. These young officers did not represent the only opposition group, perhaps not even the most powerful one. Opposition to the Castañeda regime ranged from ex-President Aguirre and his reactionary friends among the coffee elites on the extreme right to student factions and labor organizations on the extreme left. Several opposition groups of different political leanings could be found in between. The young officers who took control in 1948 were simply in the best position to act on the news of *continuismo* quickly: These men had been organizing coups since the failed attempt against Martínez in April 1944. After four years of frustrated attempts to gain more power and influence, they were ready, able, and willing to act on every opening.[44]

Mann, October 30, 1952, Lot Files, Entry 1136, Records of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for Inter-American Affairs, Box 3, Folder marked Honduras

[44] Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 499, December 16, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Williams to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-331, December 17, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Joint Weeka; Juan de Zengotita (Division of Central American and Panama Affairs) to Daniels, Memorandum on Background on Salvadoran Revolt of December 14, December 15, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador: September to October; Nufer to the Secretary of State, despatch 264, June 18, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 499, December 16, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Williams to the Secretary of State, despatch 22, January 23, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador.

During the months preceding the army coup, Albert Nufer was in charge of the American embassy in San Salvador. A careful and unassuming career officer like Simmons, Nufer's relationship with the local Castañeda regime and its opposition was complex and ambiguous. The embassy held no brief for either camp. It was well aware of Castaneda's intentions to remain in power, either officially as president or officiously as the power behind the throne of a puppet government. The fraudulent elections for the National Assembly of January 1948, a major victory for the President of course, left little doubt on that count. On the other hand, Nufer and his colleagues knew that Castaneda's position was far from secure and that there were plenty of opposition groups. Most of these groups, the embassy reported, felt confident that they enjoyed enough popular support to win the presidential elections that Castaneda was supposed to organize. Hence, if Castaneda were to act on his intentions to scrap elections and continue in power, the embassy believed that many opposition factions would feel that the President had cheated them out of their *legitimate* ascent to power. The result could only be civil strive, which was the embassy's greatest fear.[45]

In this charged and insecure atmosphere, Nufer felt that the best that could be done, from the standpoint of U.S. interests, was to stay on reasonably friendly terms with all factions while not showing undue regard for any of them. Halfhearted attempts were made by the embassy to convince Castaneda to hold genuinely free elections, but overall, it tried to stay out of politics. While the embassy respected the progress that the Castaneda regime made in the fields of education, health, and sanitation during the last couple of years, these accomplishments were only possible due to the assistance of U.S. agencies. Besides, the President's will for power threatened to upset the country and to undo any material progress that had been made. At the same time, the embassy was very pessimistic about the nature of the opposition. Nufer hardly ever mentioned the ideologies that were supposed to inspire the different opposition groups—although he did acknowledge that there were dangerous fringe groups on both the left and the right. The names of the different political groups, nearly all of which made a claim on "democratic" ideals, meant very little, the Ambassador reported. Under the existing state of siege, only those groups who could obtain the backing of conservative army factions stood a chance to gain the presidency. In a word, the general picture painted in the embassy's reports was one of cynical power politics.[46]

[45] Salvador: Williams to the Secretary of State, Despatch 5, January 9, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 282, July 2, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Desptach 413, October 21, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 430, November 2, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October.

[46] Nufer, Memorandum on Elections, December 7, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October; Salvador: Williams to the Secretary of State, Despatch 5, January 9, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 379, September 23, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October.

A report by Nufer on one of the very few politicians in El Salvador who could be regarded as a genuinely honest man with popular support and liberal ideals is revealing in this regard. Minister of Culture Ranulfo Castro, the man in question, could not hope to become president under existing circumstance, because:

> [His] greatest strength is his most obvious political weakness. He is an honest man. His name is yet to be linked with graft, political compromises or deals. He is friendly, sincere and efficient. These merits, which might be expected to qualify him highly for a role as Chief of State, contrast sharply with the strength, power and ruthless action which have been considered normal attributes of most Central American presidents (...) To the army, the coffee planters and the urban capitalists, Dr. Castro may appear as a man of too great a heart to guarantee a continuation of a system which grants to the few, the much, and to the many, the little.

At that point, July 1948, Nufer believed that Ranulfo Castro was the most likely man to win *honest* elections, because he had the support of the lower classes (except for the "communist fringe").[47] But Salvadoran politics were heartless and Nufer focused his political evaluations on the power brokers—the men with money and arms.

These were the conditions that determined the American embassy's reaction to the army coup of December, 1948. No-one at the embassy was sorry to see Castaneda go and no opposition group was thought to have a legitimate claim on the presidency. The fact that the December coup was quick and painless was welcomed. Under the circumstances, the new junta was the best that could be had for El Salvador: It was neither reactionary nor revolutionary; neither ruthless nor weak-kneed. In fact, the army groups that came to power in 1948 were a new factor in Salvadoran and Central American politics and were at least partly a legacy of U.S. interference in the region, although the embassy did not recognize that fact at the time.

Before the Second World War, Central American "armies", aside from the American trained *Guardia Nacional* in Nicaragua, were mainly irregular militias led by local caudillos. Although there was a trend toward army professionalization, results were meager up to the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, which is when the United States began to take an active interest in the standardization of army training and equipment across the continent. After the War, the newly professionalized army's began to take an interest in politics and they did not like what they saw. Observing the poverty, backwardness, and instability that characterized many American Republics, professional militaries developed "anti-political" ideologies which blamed Latin American problems on politicians and provided a rationale for military intervention in national administration. The Salvadoran junta of 1948 was a local exponent of this new trend in the development of the Latin American military. According to Walter and Williams, the junta "sought to legitimize its existence via a new political rhetoric and new ways of ruling. The bywords of the regime of Hernandez Martínez and his immediate successors reflected their approach to politics: duty, tranquility, peace, order (…) Although democracy was never

[47] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 282, July 2, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador.

mentioned, its dangers were implied in the usual criticism of factions, parties, disorder, and anarchy". Thus, the military junta and its later successors welfare programs and literary campaign, but at the same time initiated an enormous expansion of the armed forces and, despite its theoretical support for democracy, kept tight control over elections and opposition parties.[48]

Perhaps the one thing that Nufer did not grasp entirely—or, under prevailing conditions in El Salvador, was willing to gloss over—was the danger of an ideology that combined claims on constitutionality and observance of democratic procedures with *de facto* military rule. As far as the Ambassador was concerned, the 1948 coup and subsequent governments were not refinements in the military's claim and hold on power—which, from the longer historical perspective, they were—but controlled steps in the direction of stable, progressive, and more democratic governance. As Nufer reported to the Department, one of the first acts of the military junta was to end the state of siege that Castaneda had put into effect in 1946. While the constitution was briefly abrogated, it was reinstated almost immediately, except for those articles dealing with the Presidency and the Assembly (which obviously did not apply while the junta was in power). The junta also declared that in time, free and fair elections would be organized. Until that time, civilians of liberal persuasion were invited into the de facto government; freedom of the press was allowed; and extremist groups on both the left and the right were suppressed so as not to be able to interfere with democratic processes. The reaction of the public at large, as Nufer was careful to point out, was favorable: The lifting of the state of siege was a generally popular move; liberals were assuaged by the institution of freedom of the press and the inclusion of civilian members in the junta; the moderate coffee planters, military officers not included in the junta, and labor unions were willing to give the new rulers a chance as long as they did not veer too much to the left or the right. In all, Nufer believed that the new government was inspired by "high, democratic idealism".[49]

To the Ambassador's considerable dismay, however, the Department neglected to recognize the junta. While all seemed well on the ground—i.e. from Nufer's perspective—events in Salvador happened to coincide with right-wing military coups in

[48] Knut Walter and Phillip J. Williams, "Antipolitics in El Salvador, 1948-1994", in: Loveman and Davies eds., *Politics of Anti-politics*, 327-349, there 327-329.

[49] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-337, December 24, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Joint Weeka; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 515, December 23, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Williams to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-331, December 17, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Joint Weeka; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 514, December 22, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Nufer to the Secetary of State, Airgram A-344, December 31, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Joint Weeka; Nufer to the Secetary of State, Despatch 127, March 24, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350.21: Communism; Nufer to Robert F. Woodward (Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), June 29, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350.21: Communism; Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador) to the Secretary of State, Despatch 499, December 16, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Nufer to the Secetary of State, Airgram A-344, December 31, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Joint Weeka.

Venezuela and Peru. To observers in the United States (both inside and outside of government) the sudden burst of military coups was a disconcerting development, especially since those in the bigger, more important countries appeared to be fascist-inspired. Nufer was livid that events in his country were being compared with entirely unrelated actions elsewhere, but to the political top in Washington and to the American press, El Salvador was just too small and insignificant to warrant close scrutiny.[50] For the time being, only the middle echelons of the Department sympathized with the Ambassador's position: Apologetically, officer Zengotita of the Division of American Republic Affairs assured Nufer that the Division was well aware of the differences between the Salvadoran coup and those in Venezuela and Peru. The order to put a brake on recognition, Zengotita wrote, came from the "highest levels". The recent splurge of coups had alarmed the administration and by "delaying" recognition, it wished to discourage further activity along those lines.[51] But while the political top was not ready to recognize the new junta, Zengotita ensured Nufer that the Department's thinking paralleled his:

> We are impressed with the fact that the revolt was touched off by what, after all, can only be considered unconstitutional and dictatorial measures taken by Castaneda. We are impressed also by the popular support that rallied to the junta, by its appointment of civilian junta members and a civilian cabinet, by its lifting of martial law, and by what in general appears to be a desire to organize along the lines of civilian rather than military administration of the country.

Zengotita does note that the Department would have to wait and see how the situation develops and whether the junta "will or will not depart from the traditional Latin American military pattern". Nufer was instructed to continue to report on "the measures taken by the junta to hold elections and restore constitutional government, in the democratic or non-democratic outlook and philosophy of its military members, on the base of the junta's support, etc."[52]

In the end, recognition was not dependent on the junta's success in restoring constitutional government. Indeed, the United States had signed the Declaration of Bogotá, article 35 of which basically denounced the use of nonrecognition as a political weapon, only some months earlier. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the recognition of El Salvador was only stalled because of the public outcry against

[50] Nufer to Robert F. Woodward (Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), June 29, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350.21: Communism; 2787; 2812; Nufer to Zengotita, December 31, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September-October; Nufer to the Secretary of State, despatch 513, December 22, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 16, cl. 800: Government. Recognition; Nufer, Memorandum on Department's Telegram 135, December 27, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 16, cl. 800: Government. Recognition; Nufer to Willard F. Barber (Chief of the Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), December 22, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 16, cl. 800: Government. Recognition.

[51] Zengotita to Nufer, December 29, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, September to October.

[52] Zengotita to Nufer, December 21, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December.

supposedly “fascist” coups in the larger Latin American countries (public opinion did not differentiate between the coups in El Salvador, Venezuela, and Peru).[53] After the junta had been recognized by the United States and its neighbors, it started to prepare for the elections it had promised to organize. Preparations actually took a full year and, aside from the admittedly complex technical issues that had to be solved, involved a lot of political infighting and clearing the field for the eventual official candidate. The most important military leaders of the junta jockeyed for power over a period of several months, a contest which led to the rise of Major Oscar Osorio as the leader of that body.[54] Osorio is a very difficult man to qualify in traditional political terms, although that is exactly what the American embassy tried to do. On the one hand, the Major had been suspected of fascist sympathies during the War; maintained some sort of liaison with the exiled Martínez, apparently his mentor; and was at one point the favored presidential candidate of the conservative coffee interests. On the other hand, Osorio counted many liberals and even radicals among his political entourage; discouraged Martínez from returning to El Salvador; and religiously observed constitutional procedures during the 1949 election campaign and his eventual presidency. The man only makes sense in the context of the professional mystique of the Salvadoran army officer, which was somewhat like fascism in the sense that it proscribed a major role to the army and vehemently rejected socialism, but also adopted parts of the post-War liberal agenda in its respect for constitutional procedures and its adoption of social legislation in an overall drive to modernize the national economy.[55]

[53] Barber to Nufer, January 12, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Nufer to Barber, January 21, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Barber to Nufer, January 28, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 19, cl. 360: Government.

[54] Shaw to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-210, August 25, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 12, January 6, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 164, April 7, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Williams to the Secretary of State, Despatch 293, July 29, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 362, September 30, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December; 3316-3320; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 58, January 29, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1951.

[55] For reports on Osorio’s politics, consult: Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 20, January 11, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 33, January 21, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Airgram A-270, October 31, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 411, November 1, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 403, October 28, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 467, December 2, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July-December; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 89, February 2, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952. On Osorio and Martínez, consult: Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 471, December 6, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 494, December 19, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 200, August 1, 1951, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-

Against the background of Salvadoran politics, both Nufer and his direct successor, Ambassador George Price Shaw, described the Osorio government as moderate and as democratic as might be expected.[56] In regional politics, which were still punctuated occasionally by stirrings of the "Caribbean Legion" and high words between the "democracies" and the "dictatorships, Osorio vowed to assume the role of mediator—thus presenting El Salvador as an island of peace amid the Central American imbroglio. In domestic politics, the President was careful to keep the middle ground between reactionary landlords and reformist-minded intellectuals and labor organizations. This was not an easy matter since militant fringes on both sides of political spectrum opposed the government. Coup attempts by one side were followed by government suppression against both sides. Thus, when a reactionary plot was discovered in March, Osorio had its leaders arrested and deported together with an equal number of known leftist radicals. In Salvador's polarized society, this was apparently the only policy by which the President could remain on speaking terms with both left and right.[57]

Much more important, in the embassy's assessment, than Osorio's attempts to dissociate his government from the political fringes, was his purported attempt to offer a way forward. The Salvadoran President was thought to be a democrat and a reformer, but not a visionary or experimenter: A measure of press freedom, unionism, and political organization was allowed, but only under strict government supervision so that "irresponsible" and "radical" elements did not take advantage of it. The regime suppressed "fascist" and "communist" organizations without reverting to out-and-out dictatorship: Instead, representatives of all factions—army officers, landowners, labor leaders, and intellectuals—were adopted into the government apparatus. A careful policy of "modernization", including limited social reform, under military management was supposed to undercut the appeal of extremist ideologies.[58]

1952. On Osorio's supposed fascist sympathies, consult: Maleady to Thurston, Memorandum on Miscellaneous Notes about Revolution. Rumored Plot to kill Martinez, April 26, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 98, Vol. XIII, cl. 800: Salvador; Thurston to the Secretary of State, Despatch 1626, May 25, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador; Maleady, Memorandum on Rumors of Coup d'Etat, June 14, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador. On Osorio's connections with the Aguirre faction, consult: Gade to the Secretary of State, Despatch 2114, October 30, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XIV, cl. 800: Salvador; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Notes, November 6, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Notes, November 14, 1944, PR El Salvador, Box 99, Vol. XV, cl. 800: Salvador.

[56] Nufer to Barber, January 21, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 283, April 26, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 329, May 19, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952.

[57] Salvador: Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 61, February 4, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Telegram 294, March 10, 1951, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 721, March 13, 1951, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 22, cl. 350: Joint Weeka, 1950-1951; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 741, March 20, 1951, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 22, cl. 350: Joint Weeka, 1950-1951.

[58] Williams to Shaw, Memorandum on Comments on OIR Report, October 27, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350: Salvador; 3476; Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 212,

Nufer reported from the outset that the ruling junta under Osorio's leadership included former fascists and communists, liberals and conservatives: "In fact, the rightist and leftist elements within the new government seem so well balanced that it would be difficult to state at this time whether the government is right or left of center".[59] After some weeks in power, the Ambassador could more confidently report that the provisional government was "seeking a middle course":

> The Cabinet is not looking for spectacular changes or quick success in its tasks. Responsible Ministers realize that they have a patriotic duty to carry out their work between the pressures of the right and the left. One of the Under Secretaries remarked to a member of my staff this week that the Cabinet had to move cautiously and "educate the Army". At the same time the Cabinet has to stand out against the intrigues of radical extremists who clamor that it is not moving fast enough. Despite the extremists, I believe that the public at large continues to be favorably impressed with the Government's work and is still disposed to lend its support.[60]

One of the more important tasks to be tackled, according to Nufer, was to provide a minimum of economic and social security for the landless masses: "informed persons" realized, the Ambassador reported, that 1932 could repeat itself today unless "substantial progress is made in improving the lot of the laboring masses". Luckily, Osorio was wise to the situation and his government would "endeavor to effect social progress".[61]

In September Osorio formally left the junta together with one of the civilian members, Galindho Pohl, to set up a joint campaign for the presidency. It was a remarkable combination because Osorio was known to have played around with fascist ideas in his youth, while Pohl was a "wild-eyed idealist and half-baked leftist individual" in Ambassador Shaw's assessment.[62] However, the combination seemed to work—for the moment—and Shaw recognized that Osorio and Pohl's party, the *Partido Revolucionario de Unificacion Democratica* (PRUD), was "middle of the road" by "United States political standards", because it advocated social reforms without "threatening the capitalist structure of the nation".[63] Even though Osorio was recognized as having the backing of the ruling junta, and even though the latter could be said to have "tweaked" the eventual

September 21, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 22, cl. 350: Joint Weeka, 1950-1951; Wieland to the Secretary of State, Despatch 257, September 13, 1951, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 22, cl. 350: Joint Weeka, 1950-1951.

[59] Nufer to the Secretary of State, despatch 513, December 22, 1948, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 16, cl. 800: Government. Recognition.

[60] Nufer to the Secretary of State, Despatch 61, February 4, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, January to June.

[61] Nufer to the Secetary of State, Despatch 127, March 24, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 350.21: Communism.

[62] Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 221, September 22, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952.

[63] Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 430, November 10, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December. Initially, Shaw thought that PRUD was a "Communist front": Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 335, September 9, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December.

presidential elections in his favor, the race turned out to be fairly competitive. In the end the Osorio/Pohl ticket beat the sole challenger by 345,139 over 266,271 votes. It was the first election in Salvadoran history in which women and soldiers were allowed to vote and, in Shaw's opinion, it was so free as to revert to "license" at times. But the outcome was met with "moderate general enthusiasm".[64]

The State Department and the American embassy met Osorio's election with the same moderate enthusiasm. The fact that Osorio was elected in a somewhat free competition; that his government enjoyed some popular support; that it included both military and civilian members of different political leanings; and that it promised to reform the Salvadoran economy and social structure were all appreciated by the United States. It was recognized that the Osorio government was not a "real" democracy, but it did fit into the slow progress toward better government described in the "Y" article. Compared to the leftist Guatemalan regime; the rightist Somoza regime; and the fascist-inspired coups in Venezuela and Peru, the situation in El Salvador was actually rather promising. Both the embassy and the Department were also quite willing to "help" the Salvadoran government to stick to the middle of the road.

American efforts to manipulate the direction of the Salvadoran "revolution", as the junta described its coup, dated back to 1949—before Osorio was elected. American aid programs, private loans, and Point IV technical assistance might have been modest when compared to Marshall Aid to Europe, but in a small nation like El Salvador, such programs offered the Americans enough leverage to encourage the local regime to adjust its political and economic policies to U.S. preferences. Thus, a possible loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to build a hydroelectric plant in Salvador offered enough incentive to the junta to hold elections so that the loan could be approved by a legally elected Assembly and signed by the President.[65] After Osorio's election, American "assistance" focused on the nature and direction of the developmental and social policies of the government. While Osorio was deemed trustworthy enough, Galindho Pohl's influence was thought to draw the government too much into a radical direction. As the new president of the National Assembly, Pohl directed efforts to formulate a modern constitution for El Salvador. According to the embassy, Pohl's plans for the new constitution were disconcertingly nationalistic—including, among others, a proposed article that would extend Salvadoran borders to 200 miles from its coasts. Shaw reported at the time that he commented "informally" to friends of the embassy that "I personally consider this draft [of the constitution] as extremely nationalistic and an excessive restriction on free economic, political, and social intercourses between El Salvador and the United States". According to the Ambassador, the Department should also express its opinion to the Salvadoran embassy in Washington that there were "undesirable features" in Salvador's draft

[64] Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 203, April 2, 1950, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 21, cl. 350: Salvador, 1950-1952.
[65] Williams to the Secretary of State, Despatch 293, July 29, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 18, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December.

constitution. “I am sure the effect of merely mentioning this matter at such a time would not be lost upon either Major Osorio or [Salvadoran ambassador to the United States] Castro”.[66] To back up this stance, Shaw advised the Department to freeze all financial assistance until a new constitution was published. Indeed, none of the controversial articles made it to the eventual constitution of El Salvador. While this must have been due partly to the influence of Salvador’s own ultra-conservative coffee interests, American meddling in the matter is sure to have had a major influence. In terms of politics, it is also likely that such meddling strengthened the hand of Osorio and the so-called “moderate” faction while it blocked the ambitions of Pohl and other leftist in the government.

The State Department showed itself to be generally appreciative of Salvador’s mode of government. The election that brought Osorio to power were characterized as the most free that the country enjoyed since the 1931 election of Araujo. While “Leftists have attacked it for being to moderate and the Rightists have attacked it for being too radical”, the Osorio government was holding its own. In May 1951, El Salvador and the United States signed their first Point IV agreement for technical assistance, thus declaring their joint interest in the modernization of the El Salvador.[67]

The last ambassador to be appointed to Central America before the Eisenhower administration came in was Angier Biddle Duke. On the face of it, Duke was an extreme caricature of the political appointee. A scion of two wealthy families, the Biddles and the Dukes, Angie led a privileged and sheltered life as a child and young adult: His days were spent at elite schools, his weekends by the pool or at the beach, and his vacations with hunting trips to Africa and Asia. Having no need to worry about money, a job, or the future in general, young Angie lacked direction or ambition. At 22 he dropped out of Yale and spent some years toying with unsuccessful business plans. Exactly the type of playboy, one might think, whose wealthy and influential father got him appointed to an embassy so that his loafing at Southampton Beach would not embarrass the family.

But this was not exactly what happened. Duke was still leading a relatively easy life when the War broke out in Europe. In January 1941 he volunteered for duty and, in the army, Angie found discipline and direction. While not serving in combat, Duke did climb the ranks from private to major in Air Force intelligence and went overseas in that capacity. At the end of the War, he was assigned as an escort officer to a congressional committee which was to visit Buchenwald very shortly after its liberation. The visit to the concentration camp turned out to be “the 48 most harrowing and horrifying hours” in Duke’s life and left a lasting impression. Noticing that many inmates of the camp had not yet left even though they had been “liberated” two days previous, Duke realized that “the

[66] Shaw to the Secretary of State, Despatch 468, December 5, 1949, PR El Salvador (SCF), Box 15, cl. 800: Salvador, July to December.
[67] Siracusa to Mann and Miller, September 31, 1951, Lot Files Entry 1144, Box 3, Folder marked Memoranda, 1951; Bennett to Mann and Miller, May 31, 1951, Lot Files, Entry 1144, Box 3, Folder marked Memoranda, 1951; Bennett to Miller and Barber, March 31, 1950, Lot Files, Entry 1144, File, Box 2, Folder marked Political Summaries.

inmates had been there many of them so long that they didn't want to leave. It was just so horrifying, so pathetic to see these beaten human beings, beaten into a way of life which they had gotten so horribly accustomed to that when the gates were thrown open, they couldn't – couldn't leave". After the War, Angie devoted many years of his life to helping those who were beaten and downtrodden by their governments and, quite naturally, he developed a lasting terror for the dehumanizing nature of totalitarianism.[68]

After the War, Duke went back into business for a while, but with some help and urging from a family friend who happened to be the U.S. ambassador to Argentina, ended up applying for and getting admitted to the Foreign Service. After two years as embassy secretary in Argentina and Spain, Angie attracted the interest of a Congressional Committee inspecting relations with Spain and was appointed ambassador to El Salvador at age 36—the youngest American chief of mission up to that time. Angier Duke was one of several political appointees appointed to Latin America toward the end of Truman's second term. Their task was not so much in the political field of representing U.S. policies to the Southern governments, but in "selling" the Point IV Program. The program, which in itself was a continuation of wartime aid programs, was aimed at developing the economies of the Third World with technical assistance so that they would be less susceptible to "radical" programs of a nationalist or communist bent.

It turned out that Angier Duke was particularly well-suited for the work. First of all, he did have a sincere desire to help those less fortunate than himself, but his conception of aid did have an quality of *noblesse oblige*—both in the sense that he believed that the wealthy United States had an obligation to help less developed countries and in how he, as a wealthy American, positioned himself toward underprivileged Salvadorans. In one of his many public speeches as the ambassador to El Salvador, Duke noted that the United States had world leadership "thrust upon it" and that this position entailed great responsibilities. One was to convince others of the vitality of the American economic system and the "real practical hope" it offered for the betterment of Salvadorans' lives. Only by accomplishments in this sphere could the hope of democracy be made manifest "to draw to it the faith of the unlettered and the underprivileged".[69]

Second, Angier turned out to have a knack for public relations and he spend most of his time as ambassador traveling, giving interviews, inaugurating public works, and attending parties to "illustrate the interest of the United States in the development of El Salvador". His good looks, natural charm, and talent for dramatic gestures made him the

[68] Undated transcript of interview with Ambassador Angier B. Duke, Duke University Living History Program, Duke University, Durham, NC, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, The Angier, Biddle Duke Papers, 1915-1995 (henceforth Duke Papers), Box 1, Folder 13; Transcript of CBS-TV interview with Ambassador Angier B. Duke, March 29, 1976, Duke Papers, Box 1, Folder 14; Transcript of "Interview 51", undated, Duke Papers, Box 1, Folder 18; Department of State, Swearing on of Angier Biddle Duke as Chief of Protocol, January 24, 1961, Duke Papers, Box 62, Folder marked Press Releases; Transcript of interview with Angier Biddle Duke, April 4, 1989, ADST.

[69] Address by the Honorable Angier Biddle Duke, United States Ambassador to El Salvador, at Florida Southern College, Lakeland Florida, Wednesday, April 15, 1953, Duke Papers, Box 43, Scrapbook marked A.B.D. San Salvador.

darling of the Salvadoran press. An exemplary incident that illustrates his style and attitude occurred when Duke asked an ordinary cook to dance with him at a formal ball. The Ambassador later claimed that the gesture was unplanned, but it turned out to be a great P.R. coup: Salvadoran newspapers lauded his egalitarian attitude and his friendly interest in the uplift of "simple" Salvadorans.

While Ambassador Duke quickly won over Salvadoran opinion for himself and for the Point IV program that he advertised in all of his many public appearances, President Osorio knew how to win the diplomat for himself. Days after Duke presented his credentials, Osorio invited him on a tour through a valley that had been struck by an earthquake two years earlier. Arriving in an impeccable blue suit on the morning of their appointment, the young Ambassador was somewhat embarrassed to see Osorio in an army style "open neck khaki shirt and trousers". Having "piled" three cabinet ministers in the back of a "rather beat up Buick sedan", Osorio told Duke to "hop in" and settled behind the wheel himself. Remembering the ensuing road trip some months later, Duke noted that:

> It was quite a day. In fact it was the best kind of introduction to this beautiful country and its friendly democratic people. He [President Osorio] showed me the reverse side of the coin too: the aching poverty, the potbellied children in miserable ugly tumbledown country towns; dirty filthy houses with no windows, no water. We talked of the social unrest that wells up from such situations of squalor, and the possible avenues to bring hope to such pitiable conditions of despair (...) The magnitude of the task to which President Osorio and his ministers had set themselves soon became clear. I got the point.[70]

Later in his life, during the Central American "crisis", Duke visited El Salvador several times for government and human rights organizations and came to recognize the road taken during Osorio's military rule. In a 1989 interview, Duke noted that back in 1952 General Osorio "was the undisputed leader of the military, which maintained an uneasy but working alliance with the so-called oligarchy, the land-owning, coffee growing class. This kept the country on, let us say, a politically peaceful and economically productive course but one that was stratified dangerously in terms of class structure". In the early fifties, however, Duke and Osorio, while being from radically different backgrounds, managed to find common ground in their objective to reform the Salvadoran economy from above with a Salvadoran public works programs and American technical aid—thus "bringing hope" to common Salvadorans and preventing "social unrest" like they discussed during their road trip. Whether either one of them truly wished to change the "dangerously stratified" social structure is not clear. Duke himself, in any case, thought that Point IV could have brought "social reform", but after 1953, the Eisenhower administration allowed the program to "dry up" and, incidentally, fired Ambassador Duke. Thus, according to Duke, "in those eight years *after* Harry Truman I

[70] Duke, An Ambassador reports in, Duke Papers, Box 43 Scrapbook marked A.B.D. San Salvador.

believe that the seeds of discontent were successfully sown making inevitable the reform and revolutionary movement that started in 1980".[71]

3. EPILOGUE: THE CASTILLO ARMAS SOLUTION

The general assumption among historians is that by ending the Guatemalan years of spring, the United States wanted to reinstate the 1930s "Somoza solution" in Central America.[72] The comparison with the early 1930s is indeed informative, but only in the manner in which that period was presented in chapter 2.

In 1953, the CIA picked an obscure Guatemalan colonel, one Carlos Castillo Armas, to lead the "liberation army" which was supposed to topple Arbenz. The advance of the army, which was a rather rag-tag bunch of exiles and mercenaries, on the Guatemalan capital was a ruse for the diplomatic offensive and psychological warfare that eventually got the better of Arbenz. Since Castillo Armas and his army did not play the leading part in the CIA coup against Arbenz, his selection as main liberator was a practical choice which initially did not imply American support for his eventual rise to the presidency. As it turned out, however, the U.S. embassy in Guatemala was not able to find a satisfactory successor to Arbenz among the country's existing officer corps and eventually settled for Castillo Armas, who was inaugurated as president on July 8, 1954.[73]

The Castillo Armas experiment combined recent and older American assumptions about- and historical experiences with Central America. The idea that a firm leader backed up by friendly American advise could set his country on track towards modernity dated back at least to Whitehouse's experience with Ubico or Lay's support for Carías. The more recent failure of liberal experiments in Guatemala and El Salvador undoubtedly reinforced the notion that Central Americans could not be left to their own devices. The successful experience of the fight against Nazism during the Second World War supplied the reasoning to get around the still popular nonintervention principle. Moving still closer up to the time of the coup itself, by the early 1950s the most successful local government was thought to be the "middle-of-the-road" type which combined careful liberalization with strong military influence in politics: The kind of government prevalent in El Salvador and Honduras (both of which were closely involved

[71] Interview with Angier Biddle Duke, April 4, 1989, ADST. Emphasis added.
[72] Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 61-67 and 183; Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 61, 165, 199, and 200; Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, 222; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 381. While it is obvious that the United States played a very significant role in the events of 1954, several scholars have pointed out that internal factors should not be overlooked. After all, it was the Guatemalan army that eventually betrayed Arbenz. Gleijeses' *Shattered Hope* offers an unequalled account of so-called "Ten years of Spring". Bethell and Roxbourgh, *Between the Second World War and the Cold War*, observes that the Guatemalan revolution is something of a regional anomaly, since the balance of political power in other countries had shifted to the Right long before 1954. Yashar, *Demanding Democracy*, 167-170 and 191-211, argues that CIA intervention in 1954 was a catalyser for developments that would eventually pull Guatemala to the political right anyway.
[73] The most detailed account of the invasion itself is: Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*. On the selection of Armas and his rise to the presidency, consult: Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 173-177 and Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 119-129.

in the execution of the coup). Only as a result of Somoza's active and, it would seem, partly unsolicited support for the coup in Guatemala was the latter welcomed back in the fold of reputable nations in the region after 1954.[74]

Since Washington was solely responsible for lifting Castillo Armas from the obscurity of exile and turning him into the "liberator" of his country, the new President was considered as something of a blank slate: To be filled in as the Americans saw fit. So, what sort of leader did Washington desire Castillo Armas to be? The model was not Ubico, as some historians have suggested. In fact, among the reasons for Castillo Armas' selection as *libertador* were his credentials as a supporter of the conservative branch of the Guatemalan revolution. The Colonel had fought bravely in the 1944 uprising against Ubico's successor Ponce and he had been a supporter of Fransisco Arana, the most conservative member of the revolutionary junta and, later, Arévalo's chief of staff, who was gunned down on a country road outside Guatemala city in 1949—probably because he had been a threat to the more liberal wing of the revolutionary movement headed by Arbenz. It was a conservative evolution toward modernity—as opposed to a radical reaction or revolution—that the Eisenhower administration preferred. While it was expected of Castillo Armas that he would break the supposed power of the communists in Guatemala—and he did, in fact, have over 2,000 "communists" arrested during the first days of his tenure—the State Department also stressed that "U.S. action [should] prevent Guatemala from reverting to a dictatorship (…) [I]f this happened we would suffer serious propaganda loss".[75]

Though this element in American policy of the time has generally been ignored, every official in the foreign policy establishment, from the Ambassador up to the President, regarded the Castillo Armas government as an exciting experiment in the formation of a perfect little proto-capitalist state—the sort of experiment that would later be called nation-building. As Ambassador Schoenfeld had put it already in 1952:

> Guatemala represent in miniature all of the social cleavages, tensions, and dilemmas of modern Western society under attack by the communist virus. Conditions will worsen considerably before we can improve them, and we should regard Guatemala as the prototype area for testing means and method of combating communism.[76]

The post-coup experiment in Guatemala was to be a shining example to the rest of the world: In the first country ever where the people had ousted its communist oppressors (as the official line ran), irrefutable evidence of improvement in the political, social, and economic spheres had to be readily discernable.

Thus, the Americans initially believed that Castillo Armas had "overwhelming popular support" in Guatemala and told him that "in the not-to-distant future, say six months from now, you should hold free and democratic elections" to confirm that fact.

[74] According to Clark, *The U.S. and Somoza*, 189-190 and 196, note 44, operation Success was a watershed in U.S. Nicaraguan relations.
[75] "Editorial note", *FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. IV: American Republics*, 1208-1209.
[76] Memorandum for the Record, by Richard Hirsch of the Operations Coordinating Board, Washington, October 28, 1953, *FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. IV: American Republics*, 1087

Naturally, the ambassador in Guatemala told him that he would "do all in my power to help you" achieve that goal.[77] At the same time, Washington would financially support the economic rebuilding of Guatemala under Castillo Armas (channeling almost half of American direct support for Latin America to Guatemala between 1954 and 1957[78]). The reason was that:

> A prosperous and progressive Guatemala is vital to a healthy hemisphere. The United States pledges itself not merely to political opposition to communism but to help to alleviate conditions in Guatemala and elsewhere which might afford communism an opportunity to spread its tentacles throughout the hemisphere.[79]

Undeniably, however, Washington was aware of, condoned, and even supported harsh measures against Castillo Armas' opponents—who were, of course, Soviet agents. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Guatemala city, Castillo Armas had 2,000 people arrested and, due to a lack of prison facilities, interned in concentration camps. That initial action was only a foretaste of Castillo Armas' dictatorial mode of government over the next three years. As Richard Immerman has noted:

> In addition to utilizing Gestapo-like tactics, Castillo Armas initiated a series of political changes that codified the authoritarian nature of his rule. His 1956 constitution institutionalized the 1954 statute that insured that there would be no organized opposition to his governing party. Returning to the *caudillo* tradition, he replaced almost all the local administrators and magistrates with his personal representatives and disenfranchised over two-thirds of the population.[80]

From the outset, Washington supported harsh measures against the allegedly communist opponents of Castillo Armas. But this was imagined as a temporary situation: A regrettable but necessary transition period during which communist influence needed to be weeded out. As the Council on Foreign Relations argued about one year after the coup: "The suppression of political freedoms that had characterized the Arbenz rule in Guatemala led many to the easy assumption that President Castillo Armas would at once install a fully democratic order [yet] determined as it was to prevent any renewal of the communist threat, the new government demonstrated great caution in permitting freedom of activit[y]".[81]

The unprecedented success of the CIA-organized coup against Arbenz fostered the belief that the United States could continue to control events in Guatemala after 1954. The most dangerous and, as it turned out, fatally flawed element in this assumption was that Washington could steer Castillo Armas through an initial period of dictatorship to exterminate the communists and then have him make a u-turn to lead the liberalization and modernization of his country. High and low officers of the State Department continually reminded Castillo Armas of his role as an example to the "free world" and his

[77] The Ambassador in Guatemala (Peurifoy) to the Department of State, Guatemala City, July 7, 1954, *FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. IV: American Republics*, 1202-1208.
[78] Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 61-62.
[79] Quoted in: Council on Foreign Relation, *United States in World Affairs, 1954*, 387.
[80] Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 198-200.
[81] Council on Foreign Relation, *United States in World Affairs, 1955*, 203-204.

concurrent obligation to give his country the best possible administration. At the 1956 Panama Conference, Secretary of State Dulles told Castillo Armas that "Guatemala was the only example of a country in which people have been able to free themselves after a Communist Government had been in power and (…) the world was watching Guatemala carefully and therefore it was important that an example be given to the free world of the success of a people recovering after a period of Communist rule". The next day, Henry Holland, the Assistant Secretary for American Republic Affairs, took the Guatemalan President under his wing, telling the latter that the communists were "doing their best to force him [Castillo Armas] into a position of a 'government of force'." While Guatemalan troops had opened fire on peaceful demonstration barely a month before, Castillo Armas assured Holland that he would not allow the communists to do so. Somewhat ill at ease with the Guatemalan President's easy promises, Holland notes in his report of the conversation that: "I congratulated him as warmly as I could and told him that the objective of the communist party was to drive a wedge between him and his people. If they could persuade his people that he had become a dictator, then the breach would be opened".[82]

Castillo Armas continually backtracked on his promises to hold free elections or even to liberalize his regime, telling his American allies that it was "very difficult at times to maintain democratic processes when those at the other side [i.e. the communists] were free of such restrictions".[83] Despite good progress in the American-backed efforts to modernize the Guatemalan army and reconstruct its economy, the State Department eventually acknowledged that progress on the political plane lagged behind. Already in 1956, the embassy in Guatemala reported that "President Castillo now appears committed to a policy of stronger action against opposition elements, in contrast to his former moderate position to which (…) it will be most difficult for him to return (…) His communist and other enemies may be expected to take full advantage of this situation to the probable detriment of his prestige with the Guatemalan people".[84] The State Department came to a similar conclusion several months later, when it acknowledged that Castillo Armas had at most been partially successful in his supposed objective to "provide positive, visual proof that life in Guatemala under a democratic government is preferable to life under a communist-dominated government".[85]

So why did Washington continue to tolerate, even support, Castillo Armas' dictatorial practices. The Eisenhower administration was obviously not averse to

[82] Memorandum of Conversation, Panama City, July 22, 1956, *President Dwight D. Eisenhower's office files, 1953-1961. Part II: international series* (henceforth *EOF II*), Microfilms: Roosevelt Study Center, Reel 25, frame 336; Memorandum of Conversation, Panama City, July 23, 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957, Vol. VII: American Republics*, 127.
[83] Memorandum of Conversation, Panama City, July 22, 1956, *EOF II,* reel 25, frame 336.
[84] Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American Affairs (Holland) to the Secretary of State, Washington, June 29, 1956, *FRUS 1955-1957, Vol. VII: American Republics*, 124-125.
[85] Memorandum from the Deputy Director of the Office of Middle American Affairs (Stewart) to the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American Affairs (Rubottom), Washington, April 9, 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957, Vol. VII: American Republics*, 135-137.

intervention if it suited its interests. Why not stop aid to Guatemala or take even harsher measures to force Castillo Armas to comply with Washington's pipedreams about a controlled anticommunist experiment in Guatemala? The answer is, of course, that the Colonel had come to control his American allies at least as much as Americans controlled him. In building up the Guatemalan President as a great anticommunist and democrat; having provided him with modern armaments and hard cash; after one New York ticker tape parade, 2 state visits, and 3 personal meetings with Eisenhower, all in the context of battling communism[86], the administration could hardly manhandle the colonel without being accused of aiding the cause of the enemy:

> It is in line with our objectives in Guatemala to do all we can to assure the success of the Castillo Government, to minimize the possibility of any return to communism, and to protect ourselves from charges that should the latter occur it did so because we failed to continue economic aid. If we are to be realistic, we must appreciate the fact that Guatemala's record as the only country in the world so far to have rid itself of a communist-dominated regime weighs heavily with the U.S. public and Congress. If conditions appreciably worsened in Guatemala, no amount of explaining by the Department could justify our failure to provide a comparatively small amount of aid to that country while we continue to do so to countries which are at best neutrals in the Cold War.[87]

Instead of guiding Guatemala to a brighter future, the Eisenhower administration had tied the direction of its Central American policy to the vagaries of a petty colonel who was simply more accustomed to the straightforward discipline of the army barracks than to the complexity of nation building.

[86] Program for the visit of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guatemala and señora de Armas to the United States of America, October to November, 1955, *EOF II*, reel 15, frames 505-510. Also consult: Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 180.

[87] Stewart to Rubottom, Washington, April 9, 1957, *FRUS 1955-1957, Vol. VII: American Republics*, 135-137.

Conclusion

In 1948 someone at the American embassy in El Salvador edited a memorandum of conversation and decided that the words used to describe local political actors were out-of-date. He crossed out "conservative" and "liberal" and replaced them with "moderate" and "leftist" respectively.[1] In hindsight, this simple revision was one of the first symptoms of the approaching Cold War: a dramatic restructuring of "us" and "them", friends and foes. In terms of causality, it is hard to determine whether this change of nomenclature preceded or followed developments in the political field. In all probability, their relationship was mutually enforcing. It is certain, however, that the U.S. diplomatic posts played a central role in the international transfer of information and the transnational contest for meanings. How that is so, is a central question of this text and the answers will be reviewed in these concluding remarks.

In an attempt to bridge theoretical gaps existent in the field of International Relations, political scientist Alexander Wendt hypothesized in a 1992 article that "people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meaning that the objects have for them". A preexisting mantra in constructivist social theory, Wendt applied it to international affairs:

> States act differently toward enemies than they do towards friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not. [The Neorealist conceptions of] anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to tell us which is which. U.S. military power has a different significance for Canada than for Cuba, despite their similar 'structural' positions (…) The distribution of power may always affect states' calculations, but how it does so depends on the intersubjective understandings and expectations on the 'distribution of knowledge', that constitute their conceptions of self and other.[2]

How useful Wendt's hypothesis is for his fellow political scientists is a question far beyond the framework of this text to answer. For diplomatic historians, however, these seemingly straightforward observations should be of considerable interest.

Indeed, the question of identity, of ascribing "meaning" to other actors based "conceptions of self and other", is one that has occupied (implicitly or explicitly) many

[1] See chapter 9.
[2] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics", *International Organization* 46:2 (Spring 1992) 391-425, there 396-397.

diplomatic historians. In this context, Lars Schoultz' straightforward observation that there is a fundamental differences in the relationship between the United States and various weaker states—the policy toward Peru being characterized historically by condescension, while that toward Denmark being characterized by polite respect—illustrates the limitations of a purely Realist approach.[3] But for historians, there is often an additional dimension to this question of meaning. The question of what the past "means" for "us", the contemporaries of the historian, can sometimes impose itself with particular intensity. Regarding the current subject, this "triangulation" in the production of meanings—those that derive from the interplay of historical actors and those that derive from the interplay of historian and history—is one of the most interesting aspects.

As was already observed in the introduction and as was referred to in several following chapters, the history of U.S.-Central American relations—especially when it concerns the right-wing military regimes of the region—is a subject that is often dealt with in terms of what that history *means* for the nature of the United States and its foreign policy. At least since the late 1970s, while the meaning of Vietnam was still busily debated and new imbroglios developed in America's backyard, the historiography of U.S.-Central American relations has been dominated by the project of "exposure": to expose U.S. imperialism; to expose U.S. racism; to expose U.S. support for brutal dictatorships. For the historians who were engaged in this "project", it was a meaningful venture, as it addressed contemporary issues of American foreign policy. But for the subjects of study, historical actors such as Sheldon Whitehouse, Matthew Hanna, Julius Lay, etcetera, the terms used in historiographical debates were not necessarily relevant. As historian Andrew Crawley stated in a very similar context, the historiography of U.S. Central American affairs has long been "hostage to [contemporary] politics [while a]n aim of writing history must be to present the past in the context of its own concerns, not in the context of ours".[4]

The purpose of this text is not to "whitewash" United States actions in Central America. Indeed, its role in the history of isthmian societies was often tragic—as has been observed at several points in the foregoing chapters. However, to suggest that the United States "propped up" or consistently and knowingly supported dictatorships in Central America is misleading. It obscures the actual workings of foreign policy and of international relations by ascribing an artificial coherence and single-mindedness to the American foreign policy establishment while it also obscures (even belittles) the role of Central American actors.

By "reducing" the diplomatic relations between the United States and Central America to a human scale and focusing it on this contentious issue of dictatorship, this text aspires not only to offer a "thick description" of certain historical events and developments, which can be an interesting exercise in itself, but also attempts to reveal the all too human confusion and the paradoxes that often accompanied the pursuit of U.S. foreign affairs. It also aims to be sensitive to the role that local, Central American

[3] See introduction.
[4] Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 3 and 5.

actors played in the eventual form that this policy took. This is not, of course, a study in Central American diplomacy. Due especially to the abundance of U.S. archive materials, as opposed to the scarcity of Central American sources, this could hardly have been otherwise unless the domain of the research were drastically reduced to a single country or to a smaller time scale. However, the role of Central American actors is certainly more visible in a study of embassy-level foreign affairs than it is in a study focused on Washington politics. Lastly, and most fundamentally perhaps, this is a study into the importance of information, in the sense of meanings and identities, in the pursuit of foreign policy.

However, the construction of meaning in the context of inter-state relationships is, of course, intimately tied up with the relative power of the states concerned. It is obvious, for example, that the United States determined what the conceptual framework of U.S.-Central American relations would be. Whether, in other words, that relationship would be based on understandings of "Peace and Amity"; the "Good Neighbor"; the "United Nations"; or the "free world" was largely up to policymakers in Washington. Moreover, American policymakers and diplomats were never quite comfortable with the conceptual framework of politics in Central America, as witnessed, for example, by the association made by American diplomats between *continuismo* and Fascism. This does not mean that some "meanings" could not be shared. Whitehouse and Ubico seemed to agree that "backward" countries such as Guatemala needed a "firm hand" to guide them to a better future. Likewise, Simmons seemed to share some of the democratic aspirations of the Salvadoran middle sectors shortly after the war.

While Washington policymakers defined the framework of the international dialogue, they could not completely control its contents. Despite their power, they were not, after all, omnipotent. On the one hand, Central American actors had some leeway in determining what abstract concepts would mean in the day-to-day reality of local life. They might seek to appropriate certain meanings and negotiate the details of others. During the late '30s, the Honduran Liberal Party attempted to define Carías as a Fascist. Central American Liberals of the early '40s tried to convince Americans that the United Nations' war aims implied a moral obligation on the part of the United States to rid the region of caudillos. But in the end, it was the caudillos themselves who were most successful in cultivating concepts such as the "Good Neighbor" or the specter of Communism, because they wielded most power in their respective bailiwicks.

Definitions had the power to determine the difference between "us" and "them"; dictatorship and democracy; Fascism and freedom; moderate and radical; modern and backward. Definitions mattered because they determined who got the money and the arms; who had credit to waste and who did not; who was in power and who was out. But the interplay between definitions and power was a two-way street. Those with power, be it, for example, military dominance on the U.S. side or censors and secret police on the Central American side, always enjoyed greater opportunity to determine or appropriate meanings than those with less or no means of power.

On the other hand, it is clear that American diplomats outside Washington, at the posts in Central America, did not always understand or agree with the abstract concepts cooked up in Washington. Neither did Washington policy makers always understand what their plans would come to mean in the very different countries of the isthmus. The most obvious example would be that the State Department felt obliged to remove Charles Boyd Curtis from his assignment to San Salvador in 1931, because he had completely misunderstood and misrepresented central policy guidelines. At the same time, however, Washington underestimated Martínez' ability to stay in power and garner local and international support on a national sovereignty platform, while American policy, based on the "Peace and Amity" Treaty, turned out to be bankrupt. In fact, only hostile neighbors such as Ubico wished to uphold the treaty because the latter regarded Martínez as a threat to his regional ambitions. The only truly Liberal state of the isthmus, Costa Rica, sympathized with Martínez' stance. Clearly then, American "progressive" policies such as the 1923 Treaty had lost its appeal to the supposed Liberal allies of the United States while only the reactionary regimes cynically acknowledged its usefulness for unintended purposes.

The U.S. legations and embassies often found themselves squarely in the middle of the competition over power and definition. As the official channel of information between the State Department and the Central American capitals, the embassies negotiated between and at times gave practical meaning to information coming from different directions. In fact, more than mere "channels" of information, the diplomatic posts and their officers were themselves important actors in that great contest of definition. The backgrounds, experience, ideals, and loyalties of Foreign Service officers left their marks on information flowing from North to South and vice versa.

Going back to early 1930s, to what we now know was the genesis of modern, military dictatorship in Central America, it becomes immediately apparent that the terms in which historians tend to speak of that time, the start of the "era of tyranny", is far removed from the experience and understanding of contemporary actors. The rise to power of Ubico and Carías, both by some form of election it should be remembered, was interpreted by Whitehouse and Lay in the context of the simultaneous elections of Araujo and Sacasa. Defined as the "Ubico solution", U.S. diplomats welcomed the rise of these leaders because they seemed to share their progressive ambitions for the future of Central America. Also, the new generation of Central American statesmen seemed to have at least something of a popular mandate and they were receptive to American advice. If the ambitions of the American legations seem to us paternalistic and elitist, that is simply because they are an extension of worldview of these *gentleman diplomats*—the latter being the only factor to give a semblance of consistency to American policy in the different isthmian republics: Washington provided limited guidelines which tended to be contradictory. At any rate, there was no conspiracy or intention to "prop up" dictatorships.

In terms of long-term developments, what should also be mentioned about this particular period is that progress, order, governmental stability, and limited social reform

were highly valued by U.S. diplomats, but not primarily as an antidote to Communism. Especially when compared to the Cold War period, this ideology was not considered a great or chronic danger. The diplomats did sometimes get caught up in local red scares, but this did not influence their overall assessment of Central American politics. Rather than a negative fear of Communism, the value of progress, order, etcetera lay in the modernization of local societies, the increased opportunities for American business, and the necessity for local and hemispheric U.S. leadership as opposed to the influence of the major South American and European countries.

In that context, it is clear that Martínez' coup and consequent slaughter of some 10,000 "Communists" could never have been considered as consistent with U.S. policies in the region. It was Martínez' defiance of the United States, his unworthiness in the words of Francis White, that ultimately dominated the American view of the General. What was on the line was not the local threat of Communism, the plight of the Salvadoran peasant, or even the *de facto* obliteration of the republican form of government in El Salvador. These were all minor inconveniences as compared to the fact that Martínez' hold on power made a mockery of the Treaty of Piece and Amity, which had provided a sense of direction to U.S. Central American policy for over 10 years.

From the standpoint of U.S. involvement, the real tragedy of the 1932 massacre was not that American warships stood by to assist, as Chomsky and others claim, but that it hardly registered with the American diplomatic personnel. McCafferty was doubtlessly concerned about the rumors about "lustful atrocities" committed by savage "communistic" Indians, but he also told Martínez that communism was a dead issue as soon as the crisis was over. As in Gabriel Garcia Marquez' fictionalized account of a massacre of banana workers, the events of 1932 simply disappeared from American's historical recollections once the diplomatic correspondence on the event had been neatly bound and archived. Only some 15 years later, and probably through the lens of the World War, the Nuremberg trials, and the post-War hostility against "disreputable" governments, did embassy officials remember that Osmín Aguirre had led a machine gun squat during the *Matanza*. But while this represents the first time that the massacre became meaningful in diplomatic parlance, time had taken off the sharp edges of that event. The exact date and death toll could not even be remembered with precision.

The *continuismo* campaigns challenged U.S. diplomats' perception of the local rulers as simply "strong" men who had come to power with the explicit or implicit consent of the people. After about 1936, there was no question that these rulers were dictators. This proved to be difficult to accept for the American ministers. Most, if not all, of them assumed that *continuismo* would not meet with the approval of the State Department. However, the State Department valued its policies of non-intervention and the Good Neighbor far too highly to be willing to discard it in favor of supporting honest elections in Central America. This was not always easy to understand for the local diplomats who were as yet innocent of the rigidity of the nonintervention principle, as indicated most clearly by Lane and Corrigan's advocacy of a "responsible" Good Neighbor. The

conclusion must be that *continuismo* and the more permanent establishment of dictatorship in Central America was accepted for reasons of hemispheric policy, not because the U.S., let alone its representatives, had any sympathy or even use for these regimes.

In the context of the local *continuismo* campaigns and growing concerns about the threat of Fascism—a concern that developed earlier and was more acute among the foreign service establishment than it was among the general population—U.S. diplomats reported with increasing frequency on the rise of corruption and nepotism in Central America and their rising fears that the local regimes secretly sympathized with Fascism. What makes this period confusing is that Washington's interest in Central America reached an all time low. Local legations received (almost) no guidance from the Department and it is very hard to say if their reports had any effect on their seniors, who were focused on European affairs. It is also in the context of the threats emanating from Europe that the caudillos themselves found new ways to make themselves useful to the Americans. By redefining their regimes in terms of continental solidarity in the face of an international crisis, they managed to turn the tables on local oppositionists who attempted to brand them as Fascist stooges. Thanks to their diplomatic acumen, they secured the legitimacy of their rule in American eyes before the start of the Second World War.

Relations between the United States and the Central American republics during the War itself represented both the culmination of developments since the implementation of the Good Neighbor policy and the harbinger of future developments. On the one hand, the nonintervention principle was elevated to religious dogma and the U.S. supported the dictatorships unconditionally in the interest of the war effort while the dictatorships unconditionally supported the U.S. in order to be illegible for lend-lease aid, flexible trade and financial agreements, and prestigious United Nations status. This is how the period is often characterized in the relatively scarce historical research. And while it is not a false image of U.S.-Central American relations during the war, it ignores the many momentous changes that were going on at the same time—leading many historians to underestimate the importance of the War in the history of U.S.-Central American relations and to overestimate the lines of continuity between the 1930s and the Cold War.

First of all, the period leading up to and including the first years of that war brought some major practical changes in U.S. policy toward Latin America. For the Foreign Service, this meant a major change of pace, functions, and objectives in the daily management of legations and embassies in the other American Republics. The demands that the State Department made on its embassies in Central America had two important consequences: First of all, the increased workload and demand for speedy action meant that the embassies became highly dependent on the local regimes for prompt and favorable action, as indicated by Erwin and Des Portes' spirited defense of the cooperative attitude of Carías and Ubico. Considering the rewards that the local regimes might expect for such cooperation (as noted above), none of them hesitated to

help. Due to this close cooperation, the embassies were far more favorably impressed with the local regimes than they had been right before the war. A second consequence of the increased demands that the State Department made on its Foreign Service due to the war, was that the embassies did not have half as much time to investigate local political developments as they had before the war. Consequently, many otherwise astute political observers in the Foreign Service reverted to a rigid, clichéd image of Central America as being basically static. Dictatorship in general and the contemporary regimes in particular were assumed to stay in power at least for the duration of the war. The possibility or desirability of political change was completely ignored up to (and including) 1944.

Second, the war years witnessed the hollowing-out and redefinition of non-intervention. Especially during the late thirties, there was a fair amount of consensus among both Americans and Central Americans on what non-intervention meant. Basically, a broad definition, the absence of all forms of interference as opposed to the mere absence of armed intervention, had become the norm. During the early years of the war the State Department and Foreign Service, partly under pressure from war-time needs, completely (although to some degree unconsciously) redefined non-intervention until only the narrow definition (absence of overt military action) was left. Close relations were established between the embassies and the local military regimes in the fields of economic warfare and anti-subversive activities. Through a system of blacklists for Axis companies and the founding of local economic coordinating committees the U.S. embassies acquired an important coordinating role in Central American economies. The long-term importance of this redefinition of non-intervention, aside from the short-term support for local regimes, was that it mentally prepared American Foreign Service officers for more far-reaching intervention in Central America during the Cold War.

Aside from a redefinition of non-intervention, the construction of an image of what the Nazi –threat could mean for Central America, mentally prepared American diplomats for the Communist threat after the war. There is an important difference between the Communist threat as it was perceived before and after the war. The turning point seems to have occurred during the World War. During the 1930s, there was no ongoing concern about Moscow-directed communist activity that was aimed at overthrowing local governments and establishing a Soviet sphere of influence. There were periodical red scares in Central America, as in El Salvador in 1932, which started among local society and could influence the American embassies. Thus, any researcher who *wants* to find evidence of a concern for Communism among US diplomats in Central America can do so, but taken as a whole, the sources do not indicate a *continuous* concern with communism before World War II.

After the war, a fundamentally different concern for communist influence developed. Aside from the ideological antagonism toward communist or other leftist organizations, a real fear for Soviet power developed and it was assumed that such power reached Central America. During the war the embassies and the Department developed the language that allowed them to imagine a monolithic, centrally organized

movement against American interests that manifested itself in local political organizations, unions, cultural movements, etc. This was the language of Nazi "subversion" and "fifth column" activity—quite unknown before the war. There are very striking similarities between the description of Nazi subversive activity and Soviet-communist activity, while there is a striking contrast with the description of communist activity before the war. In short, U.S. diplomats developed the language which allowed them to imagine the presence of Soviet-Communist power in Central America. The stage was set for the start of the Cold War, but it did not follow the World War directly.

The first observation to make about the final years of the World War is that the Foreign Service was taken completely off guard by the popular revolutions of 1944. The short term cause is, as noted before, that at least up to 1944, the Foreign Service was immersed in war related work and had little opportunity to investigate the momentous political developments in Central America. Some rare instances of contact between the American Foreign Service and discontented Central American citizens are Nugent's talk with and unidentified laborer and Thurston's liaisons with Dalton. The long term cause is that American diplomats had long thought that Central Americans were politically "immature" and thus unable to grasp the liberal ideas required for a democratic revolution unless they could depend on American assistance. Thus, Long had preoccupied himself with the uplift of Latins for decades, but was completely oblivious to the developing democratic resistance against Ubico before 1944.

Ironically, U.S. war time propaganda against Fascism and for democracy had stimulated the growth of liberal ideology in Central America. Furthermore, pro-democratic propaganda in combination with an increased US role in Central American life had caused the Liberal opposition to think/hope/wish that the US would eventually intervene in Central America to topple the dictatorships and bring democracy. This, after all, was the professed objective of the war. But while U.S. intervention did in fact increase during the war (as described above) the Foreign Service continued to subscribe to, or pay lip service to, the credo of non-intervention. To Central American Liberals, this was hopelessly inconsistent: "Why do you give us roads, hospitals, and sewers while you allow the tyrannies to continue in power?". The inability of the Foreign Service to anticipate this question or deal with it when it arrived caused bitterness on both sides.

In Guatemala and El Salvador, where the downfall of the dictators was very sudden and the embassies were basically confronted with the *fait accomplit* of Liberal governments, the US chiefs of mission were actually carefully optimistic about the new regimes. But Erwin, who was particularly close to Carías, resisted the idea that more liberal regimes were possible or desirable. The ambassador basically reverted to early 1930s justifications for dictatorial rule in Central America—a justification that had been fortified by three to four years of smooth wartime cooperation. Thus, the Foreign Service in Central America represented in miniature an important split in American thinking on democracy versus dictatorship in Central America after the war.

Some officers in the State Department and the Foreign Service, presumably due to the ideological constructs underlying the fight against Fascism, wanted to continue the

fight against dictatorship after the defeat of the European dictatorships. Spruille Braden and his supporters were the major proponents of the fight against dictatorship and for democracy. For a while, Braden and his collaborators had immense influence in the State Department and their crusading spirit led to the US rejection of the Péron (Argentina), Somoza (Nicaragua), Trujillo (Dominican Republic), and to a lesser extent Batista (Cuba), and Carías (Honduras) dictatorships.

It seems obvious that if the U.S. decided to fight dictatorship, it should support democracy. And even though everyone agreed on this point in principle, there was considerable disagreement over what constituted true democracy in Latin America and how it should be supported. In dictatorial countries, support for democracy meant that the U.S. had to ally with the forces of discontent and revolution. In the newly established liberal countries, support for democracy meant a tolerance for political experimentation and social reform that was not easily acceptable for U.S. observers. Thus, there was considerable discussion in the State Department over the post-war pro-democratic policy. As stated before, the Central American embassies represented this discussion in miniature, with the Guatemala and Salvador embassies basically supporting Braden and the embassies of Honduras and Nicaragua being in disagreement with his idea. The embassy of Honduras was especially vehement in its opposition to Braden's ideas and its arguments carried great weight in the Department.

Aside from the abstract discussions on the merits of an anti-dictatorial/pro-democratic policy, there was the issue of practical, day-to-day diplomacy in the context of this discussion. While it is generally accepted that the U.S. briefly had a pro-democratic policy during the post-war years, it is actually very hard to find any trace of it in practical diplomacy. That is to say, an anti-dictatorial policy clearly manifested itself when a concrete, limited problem presented itself. For example, when Somoza of Nicaragua gave in to local and U.S. pressure and organized elections only to commit a coup against the popularly elected government, the United States acted decisively and broke diplomatic relations with the Somoza regime. However, in countries were matters were not as clear cut, the embassies had to make do with very vague instructions and apply them to ambiguous situations. This is especially apparent in El Salvador, where experiments with more liberal government were halting and uncertain, or in Honduras, where a relatively benign dictator hung on to power by his fingernails. In the embassies in these countries the ambassadors had to fall back on their own assumptions about Central American politics and the U.S. position therein. Also, they had to deal with superiors who were very uncertain on whether they were committed to the overthrow of dictatorships and the spread of democracy, especially in the absence of an acute crisis such as that in Nicaragua.

In short, whether the US had an anti-dictatorial policy in countries like Honduras and Salvador mainly depended on the views of men like Erwin, Long, Thurston, Simmons, and Kyle—all men of very different experience and temperament. This situation created great uncertainty both in the embassies and among Central Americans who traditionally looked to the United States for signs of (dis-)approval. In the end, this

could only lead to mutual suspicions and disappointments. Especially in Salvador, where the embassy was carefully sympathetic to the liberals, Simmons grew impatient with the haphazard progress of Liberalism while Salvadoran Liberals grew disappointed with the inconsistent policy of the United States. In Honduras, the Erwin was quite firmly behind the dictator and refused to take local Liberals seriously. In the mean time, politically astute caudillos reasserted their authority everywhere and basically solved the dictatorship vs. democracy discussion by demonstrating their continued ability to provide peace and stability in Central America. They were of course assisted by the advent of the Cold War.

This development coincided with acute disappointment in the progress of democracy in Central America after 1947, which, it would appear, was an independent development. In El Salvador, the landowning classes and military caste gradually reasserted their power, while social reforms in liberal Guatemala went beyond what was considered appropriate by U.S. diplomats. Embassy personnel blamed these events on the weakness or immaturity of the Liberal movement in Central America and gradually concluded that they could not help people who could not help themselves. In this context of a perceived Communist threat combined with a perceived lack of strength and ability on the side of the Liberal factions, American diplomats placed their trust in the "middle men": populist leaders with a military background like Osorio who cultivated a language of ideological moderation and economic progress.

As has been remarked before, it is fitting for a text that focuses on the American Foreign Service officer to end with Eisenhower's wholesale replacement of chiefs of mission in Central America in 1953. The new president acknowledged the importance of the background and world view of his emissaries and believed that the old hands were too "soft" to execute his plans for the "liberation" of Guatemala. But while the style of an ambassador like Peurifoy differed greatly from the previous "Good Neighbors", some degree of continuity was also in evidence. Taken over the whole, one can note a tendency among American diplomats to favor "middle men": leaders who were neither too liberal nor too authoritarian (at least in the view of the Americans), but who held the middle ground between the two. Reigning pessimism about the nature of Central American politics stimulated American diplomats to support presidents who ruled with a firm hand, but who were also beholden of American advise. From Whitehouse to Peurifoy, and from the "Ubico solution" to the "Castillo Armas solution", the envoys believed that they could steer the middle men away from authoritarian rule and toward a brighter, perhaps even more democratic, future. They were mistaken.

While this text has attempted to portray American foreign policy in Central America on a human scale, a current trend in the historiography is to answer Big Questions as to the nature of America's position in the world. This has been true for some time now and is not surprising since America's existential enemies of the 20th century—Nazis and Communists—have all ended up in the dustbin of history. Throughout the century that the United States was faced with rival powers and ideologies, thinking on America's

place in the world focused on defense of the free world or at least of the national interest. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, historians grappled with the question of whether there was not some affirmative or positive tradition of American foreign affairs: a tradition that was not merely defensive (let alone isolationist) but that existed independently of foreign threats. During the 1990s—that is, after the Cold War had been "won"—so-called "triumphalism" provided an answer: The United States was the instigator, agent, or at least benefactor of a general trend toward more liberal democracy and an "open door" trade network.

Events around the turn of the millennium demonstrated, however, that liberal democracy was not about to engulf the world; that a capitalist economy did not necessarily show an upward trend; and that not everyone around the world appreciated the role that the United States had played over the last decades. Triumphalism, therefore, faded to the background and in the setting of the war on terror and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the question arose as to whether the United States played a much more sinister role in the world. Was the United States not, in fact, an Empire like so many others that had existed throughout human history?[5]

In the context of this debate the question arises as to whether the ministers and ambassadors discussed before fit into a larger interpretive framework which defines United States actions in the world as "imperial". In other words, were they mere diplomats who, while forcefully asserting the interests of their government, did not demand nor receive special privileges from the governments to which they were accredited? Or were they more like the proconsuls of older empires who acted like and were locally accepted as provincial governors sent from the metropolis. Were the military dictatorships with which they dealt most of the time compliant "treaty princes" like the Indian Rajas under the British Empire? Or were they cunning politicians who used the American ambassador as just another pawn in the local game of power politics?

From the outset, it should be noted that any of the diplomats discussed above would be abhorred at the mere suggestion that they were agents of an empire. Such accusations were not uncommon, though. The assertive role that the United States played in the Caribbean after the Spanish-American War and into the 1920s certainly left the impression that it was an imperial power. It was this impression that both Hoover and Roosevelt tried to take away with a nonintervention policy and, later, the Good Neighbor policy. Sensitivity to any sign of *Yanqui Imperialismo* did persist, however, regardless of the definite improvement of inter-American relations during the 1930s. Despite attempts to woo the Yankees, it is also likely that the authoritarian rulers of Central America would violently reject the accusation that they were subservient to the American empire. As has been described in some political biographies of these leaders, they were proud and nationalistic if nothing else.

[5] For an open-ended treatment of this question, see Maier, *Among Empires*. Not everyone agrees that an American empire is necessarily a "sinister" force in world affairs. Boot, *Savage wars of peace*, claims, for example, that U.S. imperial interventions across the globe have had the effect of ending bloody conflicts.

While one might detect a considerable amount of self-delusion or even outright hypocrisy in the self-definition of both diplomat and dictator, it is indeed questionable whether "Empire", as an interpretive framework, illuminates more than it obscures. Some of the more "fashionable" queries in the contemporary empire debate—"whether [it] is a new imperialism or business as usual, whether the United States should be properly called imperial or hegemonic, whether it is benevolent or self-interested, whether it should rely on hard power or soft power, whether this empire most closely resembles the British Empire or the Roman, and whether it is in its ascendancy or in decline"[6]—are of little relevance to the narrative of the past 300 pages.

This is not to say that contemporary research based on this inquiry into Imperialism is useless. Indeed, Kaplan herself made a potentially important and certainly thought-provoking contribution to the field of diplomatic history by demonstrating how porous the borders between "domestic" and "foreign" really are—an accomplishment that has eluded many of her peers in the aforementioned field. Also, the concept of "creolization", which has been proposed as a addendum the study of empire, has in a broad sense inspired some of the observations in the foregoing text. However, and this is something that current historians of U.S. imperialism tend to forget, the use of the term "imperialism" goes back a long, long way in the history and historiography of the United States and Latin America. Whether it is populist political leaders of Latin America deriding "yanqui imperialismo"; American historians denying that imperialist ventures in the Caribbean were anything but a "grand aberration"; or theorists of dependency and World System analysis on both sides of the Rio Grande, U.S. imperialism has been a contested issue perhaps as far back as 1898. Can a historian of U.S.-Latin American relations use a term with such a long and painful history and still make a claim to objectivity?

Again, this text makes no attempt to whitewash American actions. But considering the sensitivity of the term empire specifically in the context of U.S.-Latin American relations, it would seem that its use conceals more than it exposes. Despite a larger international context characterized by large discrepancies in power between Central America and the United States, it should be born in mind that the U.S. foreign policy machinery was not a bureaucratic behemoth created for the sole purpose of colonial rule. Neither were Central Americans remotely subservient if their own vital interests were involved. Instead, the U.S. Foreign Service was surprisingly chaotic while local actors were entirely independent—at least compared to much of what has been written on this subject. Therefore, a wholesome approach to the future study of the history of U.S.-Latin American affairs emphasizes the diversity of actors and competing interests over monolithic structures and local encounters over centrally directed policy—even if the ultimate conclusion must be that it is a tragic history indeed.

[6] Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today. Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003", American Quarterly 56:1 (March 2004) 1-18, there 2.

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Samenvatting

van

The Middle Men
The American Foreign Service and the dictators of Central America, 1930-1952.

door

Jorrit van den Berk

Dit proefschrift is een analyse van de rol van het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps in de Amerikaanse internationale betrekkingen door middel van het thema dictatuur. De introductie toont aan dat zowel historici als politicologen de buitenlandse politiek van de Verenigde Staten vaak weergeven als een proces dat wordt vormgegeven door onpersoonlijke krachten als staat, economisch belang, of machtspolitiek. Deze aannames treden vooral naar de voorgrond wanneer de Amerikaanse relatie met buitenlandse dictators besproken wordt en leidt in dat geval geregeld tot normatieve en monocausale verklaringen waarbij het Amerikaanse beleid, naar gelang de voorkeur van de onderzoeker, als "realistisch" of "imperialistisch" bestempeld wordt. Daar deze benaderingen geen recht doen aan de complexiteit en historiciteit van het onderwerp, is er in dit proefschrift voor gekozen om de Amerikaanse buitenlandse politiek te onderzoeken op het niveau van het diplomatieke corps en de individuele diplomaat in plaats van het niveau van de staat.

De keuze om het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps in Centraal Amerika (of, specifieker, Guatemala, El Salvador en Honduras) in de periode 1930 tot 1952 te bestuderen, is gebaseerd op verschillende overwegingen. Ten eerste vonden er in deze periode belangrijke veranderingen plaats in de structuur en organisatie van het diplomatieke korps. Enkele van deze veranderingen, zoals de uitbreiding van het takenpakket van Amerikaanse ambassades, vonden voor het eerst plaats in de Latijns Amerikaanse landen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Daarbij vertegenwoordigen de decennia rondom de Tweede Wereldoorlog een belangrijke overgang in het zelfbeeld van de Verenigde Staten op het gebied van hun positie in de wereld, vooral als het gaat om de verhouding met dictatoriale en totalitaire staten. Centraal Amerika was in deze periode één van de weinige regio's waarmee de Verenigde Staten continue contact onderhielden en bovendien maakte deze regio haar eigen ontwikkelingen door op het gebied van dictatoriale overheersing. Ten laatste is er in de historiografie sinds de jaren '80 veel debat geweest over de aard van het Amerikaanse beleid ten opzichte van Centraal Amerikaanse dictatuur in de jaren '30—een debat dat op een abstract niveau belangrijke implicaties heeft voor de waardering van de Amerikaanse rol in de wereld.

Dit proefschrift hoopt op deze punten een bijdrage te leveren aan de wetenschappelijke discussie.

In het eerste hoofdstuk wordt de sociale achtergrond alsmede het professionele milieu van het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps in Centraal Amerika tijdens de jaren ’30 en ’40 gereconstrueerd. Hieruit komt naar voren dat er drie generaties van diplomaten te onderscheiden zijn in de genoemde jaren: allereerst een generatie van diplomaten van elitaire komaf en paternalistische overtuigingen; ten tweede een generatie van New Deal diplomaten, door Franklin Roosevelt benoemd en gekenmerkt door een betrekkelijk progressieve instelling; en ten laatste een naoorlogse generatie van professionals met een terughoudende opvatting van hun persoonlijke rol in buitenlandse zaken en, noodzakelijkerwijs, meer oog voor het management van hun ambassades.

De chronologische bespreking van de ervaringen van het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps begint in Hoofdstuk 2. Elk volgend hoofdstuk is georganiseerd rond een historiografisch vraagstuk betreffende het Amerikaanse beleid ten opzichte van democratie en dictatuur in Centraal Amerika. Hoofdstuk 2 gaat terug naar het begin van de jaren ’30, een periode waarin, zo weten wij nu, een nieuwe generatie van militaire dictators aan de macht kwam in Centraal Amerika. Maar dit hoofdstuk maakt duidelijk dat de termen waarin historici schrijven over deze periode, als zijnde het begin van een “era van tirannie”, ver verwijderd is van de ervaring en het begrip van contemporaine actoren. De Amerikaanse gezanten Sheldon Whitehouse en Julius Lay interpreteerden de opkomst van Jorge Ubico in Guatemala en Tiburcio Carías in Honduras, die beiden de geschiedenisboeken zijn ingegaan als militaire dictators, in de context van de gelijktijdige verkiezing van gematigd progressieve leiders als Arturo Araujo in El Salvador en Juan Bautista Sacasa in Nicaragua. Amerikaanse diplomaten verwelkomden de opkomst van al deze staatshoofden, omdat verondersteld werd dat zij hun opvattingen over een progressievere en wellicht democratischer toekomst van Centraal Amerika deelden. Daarbij leek deze nieuwe generatie van leiders een breed populair mandaat te genieten en stond zij niet onwelwillend tegenover advies van de Amerikaanse legaties. Als de opvattingen van de Amerikaanse gezanten uit deze tijd ons elitair en paternalistisch lijken, is dat eenvoudig te verklaren door de aristocratische achtergrond van deze *gentlemen diplomats*. Hun sociale achtergrond en professionele ervaring waren de enige factoren die in deze periode een gelijkenis van consistentie verschaften aan het Amerikaanse beleid ten opzichte van Centraal Amerika: Washington verschafte slechts vage richtlijnen die bovendien met elkaar conflicteerden. Er was in ieder geval geen sprake van een Amerikaans complot om plaatselijke dictators aan de macht te helpen, zoals sommige historici die schrijven over het era van tirannie wel aannemen.

Hoofdstuk 3 maakt duidelijk dat de militaire coup en de daaropvolgende slachting van zo’n 10,000 Indiaanse “Communisten” in El Salvador in 1932 niet consistent was met het Amerikaanse buitenlandse beleid, zoals wel beweerd is in de historiografie. Het was de obstinate houding van El Salvador’s nieuwe militaire leider, Generaal Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez, die de Amerikanen zorgen baarden. Martínez’ greep

naar de macht en zijn deskundige manipulatie van de Amerikaanse gezanten in El Salvador vormden een diplomatieke nederlaag voor Washington en berokkende veel schade toe aan het Amerikaanse prestige in de regio. Vanuit het standpunt van de Amerikaanse betrokkenheid bij de genocidale slachting onder inheemse Indianen die volgde op Martínez' coup, was de werkelijke tragedie dan ook niet dat Washington de Salvadoraanse Generaal hielp om een communistische opstand neer te slaan, zoals sommige historici hebben geopperd, maar dat deze gebeurtenis nauwelijks aandacht kreeg van het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps. Herinneringen onder Amerikaanse gezanten aan de opstand en slachting vervaagden zodra de correspondentie hierover netjes ingebonden en gearchiveerd was. Pas 15 jaar later, en dan door de lens van de holocaust, de Neurenberg rechtzaken en het naoorlogse antidictatoriale beleid, herinnerden Amerikaanse ambassade medewerkers zich dat de toenmalige Salvadoraanse president, Osmín Aguirre, een grote rol had gespeeld in de genocide van 1932. Maar dit was de eerste keer dat de *Matanza*, zoals de slachting bekend is, betekenisvol werd in een diplomatieke context.

Hoofdstuk 4 zet het historische narratief voort met een bespreking van de "*continuismo*" campagnes die medio jaren '30 plaatsvonden in Centraal Amerika. Deze politieke manoeuvres, die tot doel hadden de lokale staatshoofden een nieuwe ambtstermijn te verschaffen, dwongen het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps om hun gematigd positieve opvattingen over leiders als Ubico en Carías bij te stellen, aangezien zij in strijd waren met plaatselijke grondwetten. Na ongeveer 1936 kon er onder diplomaten geen twijfel over bestaan dat veel van de Centraal Amerikaanse presidenten die een paar jaar eerder middels verkiezingen aan de macht waren gekomen dictatoriale regimes hadden opgezet. Dit bleek een moeilijk te accepteren feit voor het diplomatieke korps. Vele gezanten gingen ervan uit dat van hen verwacht werd dat zij zich tegen deze nieuwste ontwikkelingen zouden verzetten. Maar het ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken in Washington hechtte te veel waarde aan haar nieuwe non-interventiebeleid om het op te offeren ten behoeve van vrije verkiezingen in Centraal Amerika. Dit was niet makkelijk te accepteren voor de diplomaten ter plekke, zoals duidelijk wordt uit het pleidooi van Arthur Bliss Lane en Francis Patrick Corrigan voor een "verantwoordelijke" *Good Neighbor*.

In de context van de *continuismo* campagnes en de groeiende angst voor de dreiging van het fascisme kregen Amerikaanse diplomaten tegen het eind van de jaren dertig meer oog voor de corruptie, het nepotisme en de andere dictatoriale aspecten van Centraal Amerikaanse regimes, zoals besproken wordt in hoofdstuk 5. Wat deze periode verwarrend maakt, voor zowel de historicus als voor Amerikaanse gezanten in Centraal Amerika, was dat de interesse die Washington toonde voor ontwikkelingen in de regio een nieuw dieptepunt bereikte. De legaties ontvingen in deze periode nauwelijks informatie of beleidsrichtlijnen vanuit Washington, waar de aandacht hoofdzakelijk gericht was op de internationale crisis in Europa. In de tussentijd trachtten de Centraal Amerikaanse staatshoofden de sympathie van de Amerikanen te herwinnen door hun regimes te presenteren als bolwerken tegen de verspreiding van de fascistische

ideologie en niet, zoals de lokale oppositie beweerde, bolwerken *van* fascistische ideologie. Dankzij hun diplomatieke behendigheid wisten de dictators al voor het uitbreken van de Tweede Wereldoorlog de legitimiteit van hun regimes te herstellen in de ogen van Amerikaanse diplomaten

Hoofdstuk 6 omschrijft de relatie tussen de Verenigde Staten en de Centraal Amerikaanse dictaturen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog. De drie belangrijkste gevolgen van de Oorlog die in dit hoofdstuk geïdentificeerd worden, zijn: (1) de verstrekkende veranderingen in de structuur en de functies van het diplomatieke korps waardoor de legaties (ambassades vanaf 1943) in grotere mate afhankelijk werden van de coöperatieve houding van de lokale regimes en hun oog voor lokale ontwikkelingen verloren of deze alleen nog in de context van internationale gebeurtenissen interpreteerden; (2) de uitholling van het non-interventiebeleid, ondanks de lippendienst die aan dit principe gedaan werd, als gevolg van de verregaande samenwerking tussen de Amerikaanse staten die tijdens de oorlog bereikt werd; (3) de adoptie, door de Amerikaanse ambassades en het Amerikaanse ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, van een taalgebruik dat een monolithisch, centraal georganiseerde en subversieve bedreiging tegen Amerikaanse belangen kon duiden. Dit was de taal die zich vormde rondom de overdreven angst voor Nazi spionage en de Vijfde Colonne. Deze ontwikkelingen vormen tezamen een belangrijke oorzaak voor de vorm die de Koude Oorlog aannam in Centraal Amerika, in de zin dat de Tweede Wereldoorlog het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps leerde samenwerken met autoritaire regimes; een nauwe definitie van non-interventie tot gevolg had; en een nieuwe conceptie van totalitaire dreiging introduceerde.

Maar dat de Koude Oorlog geen noodzakelijk gevolg was van de Tweede Wereldoorlog wordt duidelijk gemaakt in hoofdstukken 7 en 8. In hoofdstuk 7 wordt allereerst een ingrijpende gebeurtenis in de laatste fase van de Tweede Wereldoorlog geanalyseerd. Vanaf 1944 vonden er in Centraal Amerika populaire revoluties plaats die het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps compleet verrasten vanwege haar focus op oorlogsgerelateerde zaken. Ironisch genoeg was het ondermeer de Amerikaanse propaganda tegen het fascisme dat onder de Centraal Amerikaanse middenklasse een antidictatoriale beweging in gang had gezet. Daarbij had deze propaganda onder dezelfde middenklasse de indruk gewekt dat de Verenigde Staten haar politieke aspiraties steunden. Het verdrijven van dictators en verspreiden van democratie was tenslotte het doel van de oorlog. Maar zolang de oorlog woedde in Europa hield het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps vast aan haar uitgeholde en inconsistent toegepaste non-interventiebeleid en bleef het de zittende regeringen van Centraal Amerika steunen. Voor de lokale middenklasse was dit een hopeloos tegenstrijdige stellingname en het onvermogen van het diplomatieke korps om dit in te zien leidde tot frustratie en verbittering aan beide zijden.

Na afloop van de Tweede Wereldoorlog bepaalde een antidictatoriale factie binnen het Amerikaanse ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken korte tijd de richting van het inter-Amerikaanse beleid, zoals omschreven in hoofdstuk 8. Washington verbrak de

diplomatieke banden met de meest beruchte alleenheersers van het continent—waaronder twee regimes in Centraal Amerika. Maar niet iedereen binnen het diplomatieke korps kon zich vinden in dit beleid. In Guatemala en El Salvador, waar de plaatselijke dictators waren afgezet door de eigen bevolking, vertoonden de Amerikaanse ambassades voorzichtige steun voor het antidictatoriale beleid, maar de ambassade in Honduras, waar Tiburcio Carías nog altijd aan de macht was, verzette zich er tegen op grond van de nauwe samenwerking met het plaatselijke regime tijdens de oorlog. Daarnaast ontstond er onenigheid binnen het diplomatieke korps over de koers die de Verenigde Staten na de Oorlog moesten varen wat betreft het stimuleren van democratie (niet slechts het bestrijden van dictatuur).

In zoverre als de Verenigde Staten naast hun antidictatoriale beleid ook een pro-democratisch beleid hadden in Centraal Amerika was het hoofdzakelijk afhankelijk van de persoonlijkheid van de Amerikaanse ambassadeurs in die regio. In landen waar geen concrete context voor een pro-democratisch beleid bestond, moesten de Amerikaanse ambassades vage richtlijnen vanuit Washington toepassen op ambigue situaties. Dit was bijvoorbeeld het geval in El Salvador waar democratische experimenten van een gematigd liberale overheid onzekere en niet altijd succesvolle uitkomsten opleverden. Of de Verenigde Staten een pro-democratisch beleid voerden, was daarom afhankelijk van diplomaten als Erwin, Long, Thurston, Simmons, en Kyle—personen van uiteenlopende achtergrond en temperament. Deze situatie leidde onder zowel de ambassades als onder Centraal Amerikanen tot onzekerheid en, uiteindelijk, wederzijdse verdenking en teleurstelling. Uiteindelijke waren het de tactisch behendige leiders van rechtse facties en regeringen die het beste gebruik wisten te maken van deze situatie door in vele Centraal Amerikaanse landen, behalve Guatemala, de macht te grijpen en zo in praktische zin een einde te maken aan de discussie over de toekomst van democratie en dictatuur in de regio.

Terwijl rechtse facties de macht overnamen in Centraal Amerika, ontwikkelde zich een Koude Oorlog tussen de Verenigde Staten en de Sovjet Unie. Zoals hoofdstuk 9 vaststelt, vielen deze ontwikkelingen samen met de teleurstelling die Amerikaanse diplomaten ervoeren met betrekking tot de uitkomsten van democratische experimenten in zowel de Amerikaanse buitenlandse politiek als de binnenlandse politiek in veel Centraal Amerikaanse landen. In El Salvador konden liberale facties bijvoorbeeld niet voorkomen dat het leger de macht greep, terwijl sociale hervormingen in het liberale Guatemala veel verder gingen dan de Amerikanen wenselijk achtten. Het Amerikaanse diplomatieke korps, blind als het bleek te zijn voor haar eigen tekortkomingen met betrekking tot een pro-democratisch beleid, besloot dat deze ontwikkelingen te wijten waren aan de politieke onvolwassenheid van Centraal Amerikanen zelf en concludeerde dat mensen die zichzelf niet konden helpen geen hulp van de Verenigde Staten konden verwachten. In deze context van een toenemende angst voor de communistische dreiging gecombineerd met grote teleurstelling in de liberale partijen van Centraal Amerika, wendden Amerikaanse diplomaten zich na 1947 tot een nieuw machtsblok dat in de Amerikaanse perceptie het politieke centrum in de regio vertegenwoordigde:

populistische leiders met een militaire achtergrond zoals de nieuwe president van El Salvador, Oscar Osorio, die de retoriek van ideologische gematigdheid combineerden met een sterke drang naar economische vooruitgang.

Een epiloog wijst, aan de hand van President Eisenhower's beleid ten opzichte van Guatemala, op het feit dat de continuïteit van het Amerikaanse beleid in Centraal Amerika tussen de jaren '30 en de jaren '50 niet zozeer gekenmerkt wordt door het bewust en doelgericht steunen van plaatselijke dictators, maar door de tragische misvatting dat militaire leiders die zich, zo veronderstelde men, in het midden van het politieke spectrum bevonden door de plaatselijke ambassades gemanipuleerd en gestuurd konden worden. De conclusie van het proefschrift benadrukt aan de hand van voorbeelden uit de voorgaande hoofdstukken het belang van een benadering die de nadruk legt op historiciteit en op de sociale constructie die diplomatieke actoren aan de wereld om hen heen oplegden en signaleert tevens mogelijke gevaren van een methode waarbij vooronderstellingen over bijvoorbeeld de "Realistische" of "Imperialistische" aard van het Amerikaanse buitenlandse beleid een rol spelen.

Curriculum Vitae

Jorrit van den Berk werd geboren in Venray in 1981. Vanaf 1999 studeerde hij Geschiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden waar hij in december 2004 *cum laude* afstudeerde. In 2005 nam hij deel aan een uitwisselingsprogramma met *The Ohio State University* en van 2006 tot 2011 werkte hij als AiO aan het Instituut voor Geschiedenis van de Universiteit Leiden. Vanaf september 2011 is Jorrit als docent verbonden aan het MA programma *North American Studies* van de Universiteit Utrecht.