

JORRIT VAN DEN BERK

BECOMING

A GOOD

NEIGHBOR

AMONG

Dictators

The U.S. Foreign Service in
Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras



Becoming a Good Neighbor among Dictators

Jorrit van den Berk

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The U.S. Foreign Service in Guatemala,
El Salvador, and Honduras

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U.S. CHIEFS OF MISSION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Dates refer to presentation of credentials and termination of mission.

Guatemala

Sheldon Whitehouse – March 21, 1930 to July 23, 1933

Matthew Elting Hanna – October 28, 1933 to February 9, 1936

Fay Allen Des Portes – May 22, 1936 to May 14, 1943

Boaz Walton Long – May 19, 1943 to April 11, 1945

Edwin Jackson Kyle – May 8, 1945 to August 22, 1948

Richard Cunningham Patterson – November 24, 1948 to March 28, 1950

Rudolf Emil Schoenfeld – April 24, 1951 to October 19, 1953

El Salvador

Warren Delano Robbins – February 27, 1929 to April 30, 1931

Charles Boyd Curtis – November 6, 1931 [to January, 1932]

Francis Patrick Corrigan – April 30, 1934 to August 28, 1937

Robert Frazer – December 6, 1937 to October 31, 1942

Walter Clarence Thurston – January 14, 1942 to October 14, 1944

John Farr Simmons – February 21, 1945 to July 1, 1947

Albert Frank Nufer – August 13, 1947 to July 16, 1949

George Price Shaw – August 23, 1949 to April 25, 1952

Angier Biddle Duke – June 5, 1952 to May 21, 1953

Honduras

Julius Gareche Lay – May 31, 1930 to March 17, 1935

Leo John Keena – July 19, 1935 to May 1, 1937

John Draper Erwin – September 8, 1937 to April 16, 1947

Paul Clement Daniels – June 23, 1947 to October 30, 1947

Herbert S. Bursley – May 15, 1948 to December 12, 1950

John Draper Erwin – March 14, 1951 to February 28, 1954

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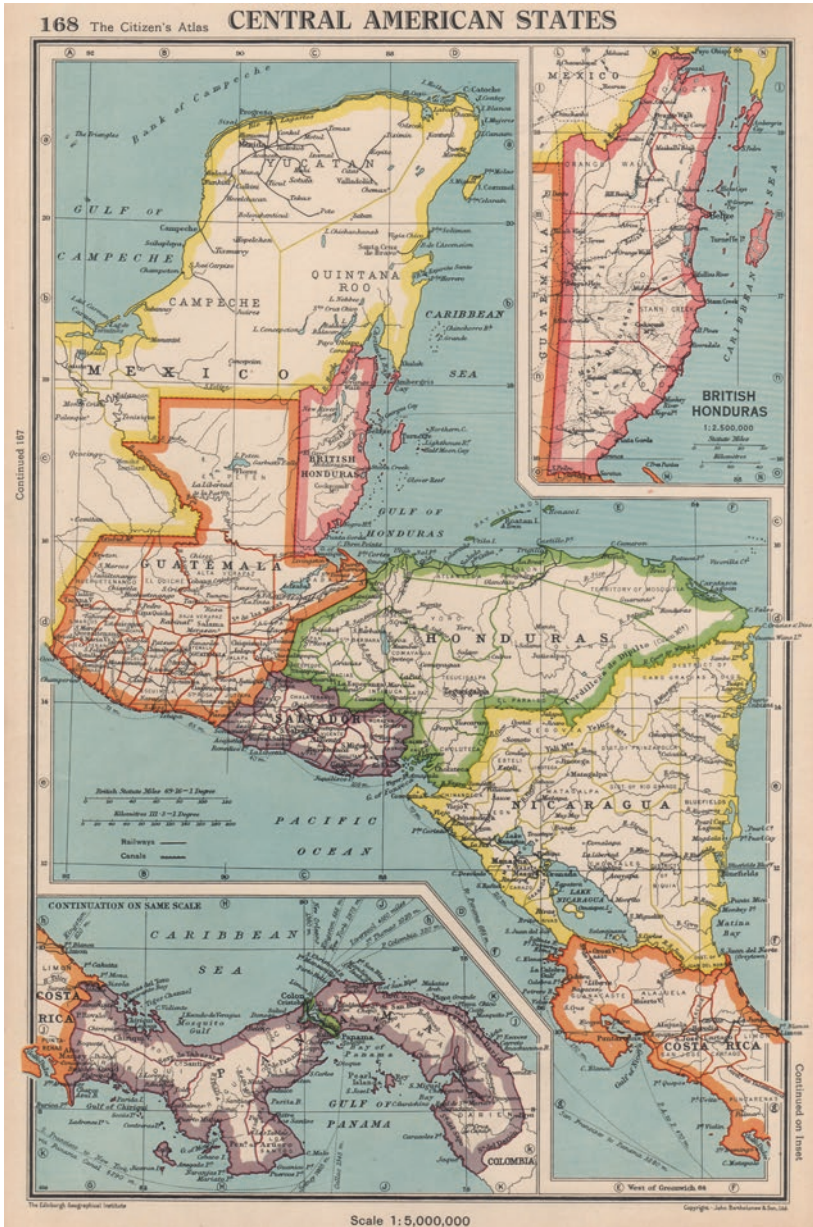
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Jorrit van den Berk



“Central America, 1944”. Source: Alamy Stock Photo/*The Citizen's Atlas of the World* (London: John Bartholomew & Son Limited, 8th Edition, 1944)

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Coping with the Caudillos

Superpower, hegemon, hyperpower, empire. Some of the labels used in the last years to characterize 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 before it was a world power, the United States had a sphere of influence in the Caribbean and Central America. Even the leaders of the early Republic thought of that region as a proper space for U.S. expansion. But this largely remained an empty ambition until the United States could claim a position of almost exclusive regional hegemony after the defeat of Spain and the demise of the Spanish empire in 1898—a position that was confirmed when Europe all but committed collective suicide in 1914.

Born in revolution itself, the United States became a status quo power within the confines of its Southern sphere of influence. It opposed extra-continental threats on the basis of the Monroe doctrine of 1823, which was expanded, during the early twentieth century to also oppose threats to the status quo emanating from the region itself: conflicts between the various states, civil wars, political and social revolutions, and what U.S. observers considered to be general misgovernment or financial irresponsibility. All these occurrences could jeopardize the lives and investments of U.S. 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 nineteenth century onward, the United States desired and attempted to establish *stability* in its sphere of influence—much like it would on a global scale after its rise to superpower status. Stability, in this case, does not mean the mere absence of war and revolution. From the point of view of U.S. national interests, it means the prevention, or containment, if you will, of any political, social, military, or economic development that could threaten U.S. leadership over the Western Hemisphere or convenient access to its markets. Another way of describing the U.S. role on the American continent would be to say that Washington sought *control* over it. However, “control” might imply a degree of formalized governance, as one would observe in an incorporated territory or colony, that did not always exist in practice. U.S. policymakers were often content to forego the costs inherent in formal colonization as long as the basic goal of stability could be safeguarded. Thus, even while the United States could withdraw its influence from European affairs in the 1930s, no U.S. leader challenged the basic need for stability in the Caribbean and Central America. The strategies used to achieve that goal, however, changed over time.

Except for the cases of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the United States has declined to take direct control over the nations of the Caribbean and Central America and to rule them as colonies. In the interest of stability, however, Washington did establish formal, treaty-based protectorates over Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Dressed up in a U.S. version of the civilizing mission, with Theodore Roosevelt asserting that Latin Americans should “behave themselves” while Woodrow Wilson wanted them to “learn to elect good men”, U.S. “experts” built schools, oversaw finances and trained constabularies in its protectorates. That policy would have tragic consequences when, for reasons that will be discussed at greater length below, the United States withdrew military forces from its protectorates during the 1920s and early 1930s and started to experiment with new tactics to promote stability.¹

The withdrawal of troops from Latin America and the termination of the protectorates marked the beginning of a new era in United States relations with the hemisphere under a policy known as the Good Neighbor.² That term was popularized by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who used it in his first inaugural address in 1933. Eventually, the administration adopted it to refer to its Latin American policy. The Good Neighbor became a multifaceted drive to improve the relationship with Latin American

nations—a relationship that had suffered severely from the United States' unilateral interventions of the past. Among others, it included the adoption of a more respectful tone when high policymakers spoke to or about the southern neighbors; the negotiation of new reciprocal trade agreements; cultural programs to improve the image of the United States among Latin Americans; and, eventually, a political alliance against the threats emanating from Nazi Germany and imperial Japan.³

For the purpose of this book, however, the United States' renouncement of intervention in the affairs of its sister republics is the most important pillar of the Good Neighbor.⁴ It is important to acknowledge, with regard to the adoption of the non-intervention principle, that it did not originate with the Franklin Roosevelt administration. Neither was its adherence to that principle without fault. The adoption of the non-intervention principle was a process that started with President Herbert Hoover, who announced that he would adhere to it and set in motion the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and was not complete until 1936, when Roosevelt's secretary of state, Cordell Hull, definitely renounced the "right" that the United States had claimed for itself to protect its nationals against war and unrest in Latin America.⁵

While some historians have given the United States, the Roosevelt administration in particular, high marks for the wisdom of the non-intervention policy, others have criticized the Good Neighbor for its cozy relationship with a new generation of dictatorships, particularly in the Caribbean and Central America. Beginning with the Dominican Republic, where U.S. withdrawal was first completed, local strongmen used their control over U.S.-trained constabularies to establish long-lasting military dictatorships. Thus, Rafael Trujillo came to power in the Dominican Republic, Fulgencio Batista became the king-maker of Cuba, and Anastasio Somoza García established an authoritarian dynasty in Nicaragua. Since the historiography of U.S. relations to Central American and Caribbean dictators focuses mostly on the former protectorates, and the relationship with men like Trujillo and Somoza, it is easy to forget that many nations in the region were not U.S. protectorates, even if they were undeniably part of a more informal U.S. sphere of influence. Remarkably, considering their lack of modern, U.S. trained constabularies, few of these nations escaped the regional trend toward military dictatorship. In Central America, Jorge Ubico assumed the presidency of Guatemala in 1931, Maximiliano Hernández Martínez did so in El Salvador in 1931, and Tiburcio Carías Andino in Honduras in 1933. Only Costa Rica maintained

a relatively liberal government while neighboring states were ruled by dictators until the end of World War II, with a legacy of violence and militarism that haunted Central America for the remainder of the century.

An important argument that historians have made about the Good Neighbor is that U.S. policymakers resolved the conflict between its emphasis on non-intervention on the one hand and the long-term desire to promote stability on the other, through their reliance on the peace and order provided by the new generation of dictatorships. Thus, Alan McPherson recently defined a symbiotic relationship between Washington and the dictators as one of the important pillars of the Good Neighbor: "... Roosevelt deepened what would be Washington's acquiescence to dictatorship in Latin America, also a crucial element of the Good Neighbor Policy. Support for strongmen such as Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, and Fulgencio Batista of Cuba outsourced the dirty work of keeping peace and order in the Caribbean area after the marines withdrew."⁶

The more general idea that a mutually beneficial relationship existed between Good Neighbor diplomats and Central American and Caribbean dictators is almost as old as the policy itself.⁷ However, it became more widely accepted among U.S. scholars during the Central American Crisis of the 1980s, when the Reagan administration supported right-wing governments and groups against the perceived danger of communist aggression. Historians sought to explain this policy, together with U.S. responsibility for the Crisis, in the context of a long tradition of U.S. resistance against social revolution and support for right-wing and authoritarian forces. Thus, with regard to the Good Neighbor, Walter LaFeber argues that support for dictators in Central America, including those beyond the former protectorates, became an important strategy to contain social revolutions in the region. A later generation of scholars explains U.S. tolerance of, and even support for, dictatorships during the Good Neighbor era in the context of a long tradition of North American racism and cultural arrogance toward its neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. Lars Schoultz argues that after the abandonment of intervention, the United States supported "friendly dictators", because it was "unwilling to grant complete freedom to the people of the Caribbean". David Schmitz argues that: "The quest for order ... without American intervention would lead the United States to support brutal dictatorships", initially in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Cuba, but later across the region.⁸

One of the reasons why the idea of U.S. acquiescence in the establishment and continuation of dictatorial rule throughout the Good Neighbor policy is attractive, is because it can explain important historical continuities. While military intervention was renounced under the Good Neighbor policy, Washington policymakers came to appreciate the ability of pro-American military dictators to provide the political and social stability that the United States had traditionally sought to establish in the region. In turn, the tactic of supporting dictatorships during the Good Neighbor era is argued to have informed U.S. policies during the Cold War. In that sense, this interpretation of the Good Neighbor establishes a tradition of U.S. foreign policy—support for pro-American dictators—that ties the interventionist or imperial era of the early twentieth century to the Cold War.

However, several historians have pointed out particular instances where the relationship between Washington and the dictatorships was problematic and at times even conflictual.⁹ Thus, Paul Coe Clark and Andrew Crawley, two authors who wrote detailed studies of U.S. relations with the Somoza regime during the Good Neighbor era, empathically reject the idea that the U.S. consistently supported the Nicaraguan regime.¹⁰ Additionally, Eric Paul Roorda shows, in his study of the Good Neighbor and the Trujillo regime, that it is difficult to identify a single U.S. policy toward the Dominican dictator. U.S. military representatives, for example, tended to appreciate the military-style order and discipline that the regime provided, while U.S. diplomats regretted the liberties that were lost under the Trujillo government. Additionally, he demonstrates how, due to the frictions and contradictions within U.S. policy, Rafael Trujillo himself played an important role in shaping the impact of U.S. policy on his government and his country.¹¹

This book seeks to enhance our understanding of the process whereby the dictators of Central America and the Caribbean were integrated into the Good Neighbor policy. Interpretations that emphasize long-term continuities—U.S. acceptance of regimes that promoted stability under the Good Neighbor—tend to exaggerate the ease with which Washington reached an accommodation with the dictators, while they downplay the significance of real frictions and conflict. On the other hand, the excellent case studies of U.S. relations with Trujillo and Somoza need to account for the unique legacies—both historic and historiographic—of the U.S. occupations of the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. Historically, U.S. policymakers showed a special concern for the elimination of all outward

signs of interference in the former protectorates, while the shared military culture that followed from the occupations enabled Trujillo in particular to forge strong bonds with U.S. navy representatives, as Roorda shows. Clark and Crawley are especially concerned with the common perception that Somoza was a pliant client of Washington and, understandably, emphasize periods of conflict in the relationship.

The current study shifts the focus from the military regimes in the former protectorates to the dictatorships of Ubico, Martínez, and Carías, all of whom are regularly mentioned in the same breath with Somoza and Trujillo, but have not received the same amount of attention in the literature.¹² By doing so, it seeks to reveal patterns and processes in the Good Neighbor's relationship to Central American dictators that cannot easily be deduced from a single case. The time-frame covered in this book, the years 1930–1952, goes slightly beyond the period that is traditionally regarded as the Good Neighbor era and also beyond the end of the regimes. In doing so, this study will engage the origins of the non-intervention principle, as well as the long process of its decline, thus connecting the so-called imperial era to the beginnings of the Cold War.

Finally, the focus of this study will be on the middle levels of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, specifically, the Foreign Service, which managed U.S. relations with the dictators—often from the specific perspective of them being dictators, as we shall see—on a day-to-day basis. As such, this is not a book that seeks to explain how policies were conceived in Washington. It is, rather, about what those policies came to mean in local contexts through the words and actions of U.S. Foreign Service officers. There are good reasons to choose this approach. Firstly, while high policy-makers set the parameters of the relationship—the policy of non-intervention or the alliance against European fascism, for example—there is little evidence that they put much conscious thought in the problem of U.S. relations with the dictators (with the exception of Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden). In and of itself, this does not mean that the problem did not exist. Both historians and Foreign Service officers certainly struggled with it, as did Central Americans, especially by the end of World War II.

Secondly, there is not always a one-on-one relationship between the intentions behind central policy directives and the ways in which those policies were executed by the “men on the spot”, even in cases where the State Department kept a fairly tight rein on its officers in the field. This is

most obvious in those cases where a U.S. chief of mission misunderstood his orders, which happened, or where he had enough leeway to obscure or redirect policy, which also happened. So the intentions and conscious actions of Foreign Service officers can be important, but this point should not be overstated. Washington's policies could also acquire unintended meanings in local contexts because of the culture of the Foreign Service, which tended to regard Central Americans as too immature for real democracy; its position in local networks of allies and informants, which tended to be limited and biased to the status quo; and the expansion of its functions and duties, which rapidly increased during World War II.

Thus, the main focus of this study is on 22 individual ministers and ambassadors spread over 3 countries and a period of 20 years. 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 U.S. Foreign Service: not the flashy ambassadors who served in London or Paris and who received acknowledgement for their work, but the men who worked in what they considered thoroughly unglamorous cities. An investigation of the daily interaction between U.S. diplomats and the local regimes will reveal the complexities, procedures, intrigues, and shifting alliances that characterized U.S. relations with the dictators of Central America. Foreign Service officers had to translate broad policy guidelines to local realities while local actors competed to translate local realities to them. The U.S. legations and embassies often found themselves squarely in the middle of these, at times, contending forces. As the official channel of information between the State Department and the Central American capitals, the Foreign Service negotiated between and at times gave practical meaning to information coming from different directions under conditions that were also shaped by its structure and its position in local society.

This is, then, explicitly and self-consciously a study of U.S. actors and their roles in creating the relationship with Central American nations. The current text will employ the research of specialists in the history of Central American politics and societies to contextualize and integrate sources produced by Central American actors and available through the archives of the U.S. Foreign Service. As such, the research presented here should be understood as a contribution to our understanding of U.S. diplomacy, not of Central American history, even while it seeks to emphasize the fact that Central American actors were equal partners in shaping the events described.

With its focus on the Foreign Service, this book will show that the process whereby the United States created a mutually satisfactory relation with the dictators is much longer and more complicated than might be expected. It did not follow automatically, or even very quickly, from the adoption of the non-intervention policy, as has been argued by several historians. A much more important context is the crisis produced by World War II. However, the argument presented here leaves no doubt that the fate of the Good Neighbor became entangled with the fate of the dictatorships by the end of the war, despite the many conflicts and even U.S. attempts to promote stability through democratic change.

While this text will mainly follow a chronological pattern, Chap. 2 sets the stage with an analysis of the ministers and ambassadors who served in Central America over the course of 20 years. Service to Central America is not an organizing principle and the 22 chiefs of mission discussed here did not regard themselves as a group distinct from the Foreign Service at large. However, several variables converged to shape the Foreign Service in Central America between roughly 1930 and 1952. Such factors include the developing culture and professionalization of the Foreign Service; patterns of appointment as determined by politicians and bureaucrats in Washington; and broad changes in foreign policy and the geopolitical position of the United States. Some of these factors were unique to Central America. Foreign Service officers who served in Central America during the early 1930s, for example, shared an aristocratic distaste for local society. Other factors, such as the growth and specialization of the U.S. Foreign Service, affected its diplomats everywhere, though some of its effects were noticeable in Central America and other Latin American posts some time before they affected the European missions.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 follow a chronological structure and can be divided into three periods. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the 1930–1936 years, which witnessed two major developments: the adoption of the non-intervention principle as the backbone to Washington’s Latin American policy and the establishment of several long-lived dictatorships in Central America. Some historians attach special significance to these parallel developments, arguing that Washington “propped up” or at least sought some special relationship with the dictators to ensure Central American stability without the “aid” of the Marine Corps. In fact, Foreign Service officers struggled to make sense of the new policy and to apply it to a Central American political scene that was quickly

becoming unrecognizable. U.S. diplomats in Central America initially sought local partners against perceived misgovernment and tyranny, but after some significant shifts in alliances and sympathies, the Foreign Service had to come to terms with the fact that it was those local partners that would set the standards and define the meaning of good government and good neighborliness in Central America.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with the years 1936 to 1944: the rise and fall of a U.S.–Central American alliance against fascism. While policymakers in Washington set the parameters of that alliance, which would come to span the entire globe, the archives of the U.S. Foreign Service show how political factions in Central America and local representatives of the U.S. government competed to determine what it would come to mean in the political context of the American isthmus. Honduran Liberals painted the regime of Tiburcio Carías as a fascist dictatorship; Jorge Ubico of Guatemala posed as staunch ally against extra-continental threats; Salvadorans of the middle classes debated the moral obligations of the United States to further the cause of democracy in their country. In the meantime, U.S. diplomats had to deal with the paradoxes inherent in a nominally pro-democratic alliance that included brutal dictatorships. By 1944, the result was that Central America was divided into a “democratic” and a “dictatorial” camp and a U.S. Foreign Service that was likewise divided—though the events of the war hampered the formation of connections that could bridge national differences.

Finally, Chaps. 8 and 9 show how Washington and its Foreign Service struggled with postwar divisions for years before settling for a new alliance with new Central American actors—one that would characterize much of U.S. Cold War policy. Though it is possible to identify continuities in U.S. policy between the “first” Cold War of the 1930s and the Cold War proper, as some historians have shown, these chapters will argue that the intervening World War II years had also changed U.S. diplomacy in specific and profound ways.

Based on the detailed investigation of the role that individual diplomats played in shaping U.S.–Central American relations throughout the 1930s and 1940s, a closing chapter will seek to draw wider conclusions about the patterns and structures of U.S. diplomacy. In doing so, it will move beyond reductionist images of the U.S. ambassador as a rational statesman or an agent of empire, while avoiding equally empty claims to historicism and uniqueness. Instead, the conclusion will demonstrate how elements that

are specific to time and place—individuals’ predilections, shifting alliances, and the historic experience of World War II—collided with more long-term and structural features—the political culture within the Foreign Service, an embassy’s position between Washington policymakers and local actors, and asymmetries of power—to shape U.S. diplomacy.

NOTES

1. On U.S. occupations, consult: Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during U.S. Occupation, 1916–1924* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1984); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti. Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Alan McPherson, *The Invaded. How Latin Americans and their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
2. The Good Neighbor is generally associated with the Franklin Roosevelt administration and the years 1933 to 1945. Since the non-intervention principle is taken to be a central element of the Good Neighbor policy in this book, it includes the years during which that policy was introduced and “dismantled”. See n5 below for the beginnings of the non-intervention principle under Herbert Hoover. For the slow process by which the non-intervention policy was abandoned, a process that ended with the 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala, see Bryce Wood, *The Dismantling of the Good Neighbor Policy* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985).
3. Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933–1945* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Fredrik B. Pike, *FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).
4. The definition and practice of non-intervention developed throughout the Good Neighbor era. At minimum, it refers to the absence of overt military intervention. At maximum, it means the total abandonment of any attempt, even in the form of advice, to interfere in the internal affairs of Latin American republics (at times, this book will use the term “non-interference” to refer to that latter definition). At several points throughout this text, the evolution of non-intervention will be described, mainly from the standpoint of the United States.

5. Probably the most recent and forceful argument for the importance of Herbert Hoover's administration in establishing the non-intervention principle is: Alan McPherson, "Herbert Hoover, Occupation Withdrawal, and the Good Neighbor policy", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 44:4 (December 2014), 623–639. DOI 10.1111/psq.12153. Wood explains how it developed during the early years of the Roosevelt administration and takes Hull's declaration at the Buenos Aires conference as the end-point of that development: Wood, *The Making*, passim, especially 118–122.
6. McPherson, "Herbert Hoover", par. 1.
7. William Krehm, a Canadian journalist and *Time* correspondent in Central America and the Caribbean during World War II, wrote several articles during the 1940s in which he provided colorful portraits of both the dictators of the region as well as several U.S. ambassadors of the time. He also criticized the non-intervention policy as a fraud because it permitted the persistence of the dictatorial regimes. A collection of his articles was published in Spanish in 1948 and in English in 1984. William Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1984).
8. Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions. The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983), 19–83; Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 271; David F. Schmitz, "Thank God they're on our side." *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 47. Additionally, Max Paul Friedman discusses U.S. cooperation with Latin American and Central American dictators during World War II, especially Ubico, but assumes that close ties dated to the 1930s, stating that "Support for dictatorship and military rule made it possible for the United States to behave in a more 'neighborly' fashion": Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against Germans of Latin America in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75. Brian Loveman argues that after the era of intervention, "some U.S. objectives could be secured, especially 'stability' and a commitment by Latin American governments to meet 'international obligations', by installing 'elected' dictatorships...". Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law. American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 242.
9. Thomas Leonard argues that U.S. policymakers scorned the illegal practices by which the dictators of Central America remained in power. In his interpretation, the way in which the dictators came to power could be considered a test of U.S. devotion to the non-intervention principle: Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search*

- for Stability* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 99–101. Alternatively, John Findling finds that while the U.S. was quite satisfied to accept dictatorial rule in Central America during the 1930s, the State Department never got along with Jorge Ubico or Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and did not shed a tear when those leaders were toppled in 1944: John Findling, *Close Neighbors Distant Friends: United States-Central American Relations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), Chap. 5.
10. Paul C. Clark, Jr., *The United States and Somoza, 1933–1956. A Revisionist Look* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992) and Andrew Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt. Good Neighbour Diplomacy in Nicaragua, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). References to specific findings from these works can be found throughout this book.
 11. Eric Paul Roorda, *The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 1–2, Chap. 6, and 242–243.
 12. Kenneth Grieb has published several articles on U.S. involvement in the regimes of Jorge Ubico and Maximiliano Hernández Martínez at crucial moments in their rise to power. See especially: Kenneth J. Grieb, “American Involvement in the Rise of Jorge Ubico”, *Caribbean Studies*, 10:1 (April 1970), 5–21; *ibid.*, “The United States and General Jorge Ubico’s Retention of Power”, *Revista de Historia de América* 71 (January to June 1971), 119–135; *ibid.*, “The United States and the Rise of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez”, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 3:2 (November 1971), 151–172. His major monograph on the regime of Jorge Ubico contains many insights into the caudillo’s relationship with the United States: Kenneth J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo. The Regime of Jorge Ubico: Guatemala 1931–1944* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1979). Several other studies that deal with the governments of Ubico, Martínez, and Cárías from a domestic angle, but which do offer insights in their relationship with the United States will be quoted throughout this book. Studies that focus specifically on U.S. relations with these governments are scarce. One recent exception is: Adam Fenner, “Puppet Dictator in the Banana Republic? Re-examining Honduran-American Relations in the Era of Tiburcio Carías Andino, 1933–1938”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25:4 (2014), 613–629.

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The Envoys: The Foreign Service in Central America, 1930–1952

The word “diplomat” probably has different connotations for different people. Some may believe that the diplomatic service is an elitist club made up of the scions of old 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 an 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 U.S. Foreign Service 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 seven chapters will feature 22 U.S. ministers and ambassadors who worked in Central America between 1930 and 1952. As representatives of U.S. foreign policy, their work was shaped by international conditions, State Department instructions, and developments in local politics. However, over the course of 20 years, the Foreign Service itself went through important changes as well. The social background of Foreign Service officers, patterns of appointment to the Service, and its expanding tasks, especially during World War II, would form its activity in Central America. But despite these changing conditions, some characteristics of the U.S. Foreign Service in Central America remained remarkably constant. Chiefs of mission in Central America were overwhelmingly newly appointed to that rank; their networks of informants rarely reached beyond

the local establishment; and their confidence in the benign role that United States policy played in local politics was generally high. To understand what form policies made in Washington actually took in different Central American countries, we need to understand the intermediate role of its Foreign Service. Crucially, this chapter sets the stage by showing that it was not just the worldviews and intentions of U.S. diplomats which determined who they talked to and what they did, but also the way in which the function of the Foreign Service and its position in local societies changed over time.

HOOVER'S FOREIGN SERVICE, 1930–1935

The first generation of diplomats to be discussed here managed the difficult transition, during the early 1930s, from an interventionist policy to a non-interventionist policy, as will also be shown in Chaps. 3 and 4. Throughout the early twentieth century, Central American treaties that 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 uprisings 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 Henry Stimson noted in 1932 that: "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."¹

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.² Between 1928 and 1936, the evolution of an 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 several times throughout the 1920s and early 1930s).

While the Hoover administration moved away from intervention in Latin America, the State Department's 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 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 self-proclaimed arbiters of free elections and the protectors of constitutional governments, even if they were expected to accomplish their tasks without the benefits of armed assistance.³

Between 1929 and 1935 the U.S. legations in the northern republics of Central America were led by Sheldon Whitehouse in Guatemala, Warren Delano Robbins in El Salvador, and Julius Gareche 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 government in the United States.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, all six officers 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 El 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 likely, therefore, that the State Department wanted to test its young ministers in these small posts before

sending them to more important ones. In fact, during the late 1920s many Foreign Service officers still looked upon Central American tours as a demotion or as punishment duty. Hoover's under-secretary for Latin American Affairs, Francis White, was determined to change this mentality. In the context of a broader push to improve U.S.–Latin American relations, White made sure that experienced career men were appointed to the Latin American posts.⁴ 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.”⁵

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.⁶ 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.”⁷ 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 fifty dinner guests at a time during the summers of his three year tenure in Guatemala.⁸ Likewise, Robbins was named the “social mentor” (later Chief of Protocol) of the Hoover administration during his tour to El Salvador. He regularly left the legation in the care of his chargé for extended periods, while he returned to Washington “for the season.”⁹

The ministers were concurrently selective in establishing social contacts at their new posts. It is difficult to reconstruct a complete picture of these ministers' social and professional network in Central America, since they did not leave any personal papers 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.¹⁰ 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 these “better elements” or the local “society” in their reports and invariably sympathized with them.

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 they felt *mattered*. A legation secretary of Caffery later recalled the latter worked on the assumption 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.” Caffery’s strategy was to “establish a very, very close working relationship with such centers of power” and whenever he needed something done “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.”¹¹

During the early 1930s many U.S. 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 U.S. 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 otherwise 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.”¹²

The relationship with the Central American elite was not unambiguous, however. In many ways, the elitist outlook of U.S. 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 U.S. schools; a light skin and Spanish aristocratic heritage were highly prized. U.S. 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 indolent to cultivate.¹³ Yet, an undertone of patronizing contempt marked the U.S. 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 1926.¹⁴ Somewhat of a rarity among the diplomatic 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 North American position toward the local ruling classes. Engert 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 North American elite. No matter how “white” the local aristocrat might be, he was not an Anglo-Saxon. 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.”

Engert reserved similar contempt for the upper middle class of politicians, military officers, and administrators, which was even less worthy than the landowners. This class 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. Engert 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.” Thus, “the Mestizo realizes that he can rise from the masses by his own efforts and this 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 too demanding for the Indian.

U.S. ministers understood the local Indian populations to be essentially peaceful, if not passive, people. They lacked the mental capacity 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.” Lacking its own political agency, in Whitehouse’s assumptions about the matter, 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* (a disparaging term for Indian peasant) did not desire change. While a measure of social unrest was always evident, it was not serious. The legation considered that jobs were always obtainable in industrious, intensely cultivated El Salvador. And even those who could not find work should be able to live off the land. Minister Robbins imagined that “[u]nemployment has this characteristic in Salvador, namely, that nobody need go hungry for it is easily possible to live on the country without money.” Besides, the wealthy coffee grower James Hill had convinced him that

unemployment itself was unnecessary, since the latter had been unable to find 200 additional workers for his plantations. 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.¹⁵

Only Lay and the Honduran legation were somewhat more pessimistic about the essentially peaceful nature of the local masses of peasants. Hondurans, who, in the eyes of the legation, 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 Lawrence Higgins more than once complained that Hondurans were led into patriotic frenzies against Guatemala, because of wild and unfounded rumors about President Jorge Ubico’s designs for Central American domination: “These allegations, fomented by the press and falling on the fertile 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.”¹⁶

During the early Depression years, however, it was inevitable that the Indian communities would be touched by the economic letdown and this worried the U.S. legations. Whitehouse feared that hunger and unemployment would cause Guatemalans to “join *any* movement which may promise to improve their condition.” Whitehouse probably had in mind 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.”¹⁷

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—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 U.S. legation feared that large groups of Hondurans who had nothing to lose 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, the North 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."¹⁸

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 El 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."¹⁹

The fear for "communism," or any other kind of "radicalism," at the U.S. legations at this particular time should not be entirely equated, 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.²⁰

Since any unrest among the *campesinos* was thought to have been caused by a discreet and limited group of (foreign) agitators, it could be controlled fairly easily. Government repression of strikes or other unrest was deemed appropriate by the U.S. legations. What was needed was “firm” or “purposeful” action by the government, untainted by “opportunistic” attempts to woo the labor vote. U.S. diplomats 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.²¹

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) historians.²²

The Good Neighbor policy was a multifaceted attempt to win the trust and respect of the United States’ Latin American neighbors. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, U.S. 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 World War II.²³

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 altogether satisfied with the state of the diplomatic service 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.²⁴

Whether it was due to the large amount of supposed 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.²⁵

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 many (though not all) lacked experience in professional diplomacy. Before they became diplomats, these men had had careers in business or the professions: Corrigan was a surgeon, Des Portes 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. Their political connections and their records as life-long supporters of the Democratic Party led to their appointment to the Foreign Service.

One interesting sidelight to these appointments should be mentioned: Des Portes, Erwin, and Kyle were from the South. Long was from New Mexico. Corrigan, Keena, and Frazer were from the Northern states, but, as their names indicate, they were of Irish heritage. 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 Latin Americans was 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 supposedly extravagant Latins. According to the Division of Latin American Affairs, the field posts needed men who took an interest in Latin American culture and who 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."²⁶

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 U.S. foreign relations was an asset in so far as they were untainted by Republican policies. It seems probable that 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 war effort. However this may be, it can safely be said that due to their long tenures, and the fact that those overlapped with much of the crucial World War II period, the Roosevelt appointees played an important role in the development of U.S.–Central American relations.

The political appointees took widely different experiences, talents, and ideas 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ Des Portes was eager to sniff out Nazi sympathizers—though he was not entirely out of step with his contemporaries in this regard.²⁹ 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.”³⁰

Long, the diplomat and businessman, was always working on some plan 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 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.”

Long had a very strong interest in the material improvement of the southern republics, which, he believed, required active U.S. involvement because Latin peoples were too passive to do it themselves.³¹ 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: "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." 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?"³²

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, confided in a letter to his president that he regarded the latter as a "social and economic savior."³³ Before the 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'."³⁴ Likewise, Des Portes propagated to the Guatemalan press the "true feelings" of Good Neighborliness entertained by his government and was always sure to link those directly to President Roosevelt.³⁵ Except for "impersonal" Long perhaps, the politicians attempted to embody the policy of their chief with a more informal, friendly, and welcoming attitude than their predecessors.³⁶ 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."³⁷

While their friendly, informal approach to diplomacy, combined with a somewhat condescending impulse to help the Latin American neighbors, may have been 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 attitudes did change over time, however. It was no longer acceptable during the Good Neighbor era, for example, to refer to Latin Americans in racist terms in diplomatic correspondence.³⁸ Other terms were found, though, to express the U.S. 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.”³⁹ 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 among the locals.⁴⁰ Based on the well-established historical and anthropological views of the time, a report signed by Des Portes stated that “[t]he Guatemalan Indian has preserved his customs, habits, dress, and manner of thinking from the time of the Spanish conquest to the present.” For years the Spanish colonists had imposed a state of serfdom on the Indians and as a result the latter had become “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.”⁴¹

There is no evidence to suggest that the Roosevelt appointees expanded the legations’ 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. By about 1935, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were ruled by dictatorships. While civil liberties had not been very secure in the region before, the regimes of the 1930s were better equipped than earlier regimes to positively suppress free press, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. 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.

Since the U.S. 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 it was extremely difficult to stay abreast of the political situation in El Salvador, “because of the dictatorial nature of the existing Government.” There were hardly any independent sources of information. The local press, for example, was completely controlled by the regime. Therefore, “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 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.”⁴²

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, 1935.⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴ Describing the one-sidedness of available sources, the legation in El Salvador noted in 1943 that: “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.”⁴⁵

Although this subject will be further developed later in this text, it should be noted that Good Neighbor diplomacy itself only made it more difficult for U.S. 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.”⁴⁶ 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 U.S. legations could not maintain public contact with the opposition and 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.

As the State Department was mainly preoccupied with European affairs throughout the late 1930s, it was content to leave purely Central American matters to the stewardship of the ministers who were expected to maintain the Good Neighbor policy there. This attitude, combined with the parallel developments toward authoritarian government and strict non-interference, made that the day-to-day diplomatic relations between the United States and the isthmic republics were virtually reduced to the personal bonds between legation staff and local government officials. This situation was to have profound effects on U.S.–Central American relations throughout and after World War II, especially as new anti-government movements demanded that the U.S. be a good neighbor to the people rather than the dictators of Central America.⁴⁷

THE WAR AND POSTWAR FOREIGN SERVICE, 1943–1952

Taking the Central American region as a whole, the pattern of appointments to the U.S. diplomatic posts during the war and the postwar years seemed to favor career men. Only in Honduras and Guatemala were political appointees kept on throughout the war. The postwar years were almost entirely dominated by career men, although the politicians 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 El 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 diplomat 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 three years, until he was again forced into retirement by the Eisenhower administration.

These well-trained, dedicated professionals represent the rank-and-file of the postwar Foreign Service. Except for Daniels (b. 1903), all were born in the closing years of the nineteenth 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 such as 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 extent, 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 contributing 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 1940s and had to evacuate his posts several times due to the advance of Axis armies.⁴⁸ Schoenfeld was the 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 Cologne during the early 1930s.⁴⁹ Shaw, Daniels, and Bursley were involved in the coordination of U.S. 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.⁵⁰

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 plausible explanations come to mind. First of all, the Truman administration may have found it prudent, initially, to hold back on the appointment of politicians, 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 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 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 World War II 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 U.S. government. While World War II would accelerate the drive toward specialization within the Foreign Service, the expected 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, and so on. 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 handful 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). Also evident during this period was a trend toward the expansion and specialization of Foreign Service 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, and so forth, 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.⁵¹ 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 U.S. ministers and ambassadors.

The expansion of the staff of the legation in Honduras is a good 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 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 coordination of the U.S. embassy in Guatemala during the war (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).

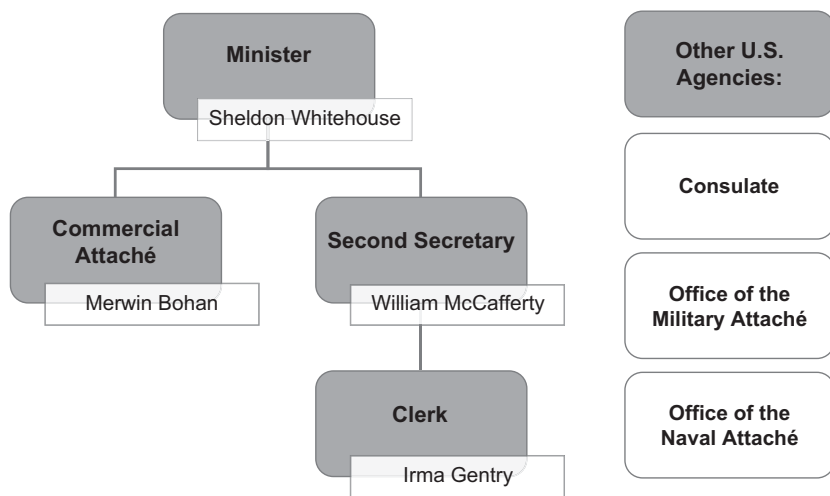


Fig. 2.1 The U.S. legation in Guatemala, ca. 1930

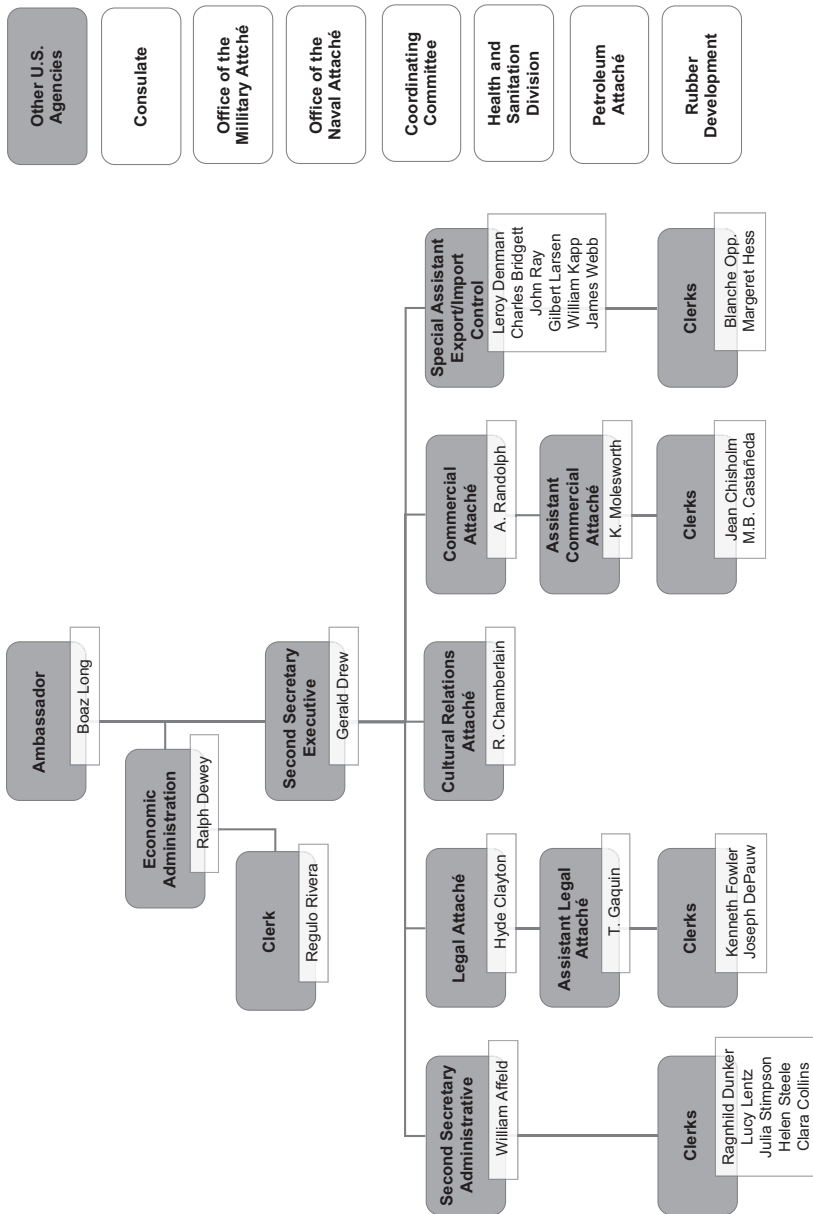


Fig. 2.2 The U.S. embassy in Guatemala, ca. 1945

The implication of this development was 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 U.S. embassies. Aside from the regular contacts between the embassies and important politicians and government officers, which is the traditional function of the 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 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 U.S. 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, and so on: They all felt the U.S. presence in some way or another.⁵²

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 Foreign Service is generally associated with the postwar period (which is true for Europe), U.S. 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 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.⁵³

THE FOREIGN SERVICE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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 to assign 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 unable to deal with changing circumstances. 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 unremarkable reports of professionals in neighboring republics.⁵⁴

The more significant patterns that can be identified in the development of the U.S. Foreign Service in Central America are unrelated to the much remarked upon distinction between career officers and political appointees. Two such interrelated patterns will play recurring roles throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Firstly, the social and professional networks of the U.S. diplomatic posts, which served as their main sources of information, remained relatively small and partial toward the local political establishment throughout the period. A tradition of social and racial prejudice on the part of U.S. diplomats played a role here, but the restrictive political culture under the dictatorships of Ubico, Cárías, and Martínez also conspired against the expansion of social and political contacts. This bias made it difficult to avoid (the impression of) partiality to particular regimes or to cultivate a relationship with opposition movements, a limitation that would be especially significant as opposition to Central American authoritarianism expanded by the end of World War II.

Secondly, but also related, several changes in U.S. policy and Foreign Service organization worked at cross-purposes with each other. While the standard of non-intervention formed the backbone of U.S. policy through-

out the 1930s and 1940s, other policies and general attitudes tended toward U.S. involvement in local politics. The non-recognition policy that was based on the 1923 Treaty of Peace and Amity is a case in point, but the more general idea that North Americans could and should play a moderating role in Central American politics is also significant. The expansion of Foreign Service duties during and after World War II made the pretense of non-involvement almost impossible to maintain. Such paradoxes left plenty of room for debate on the extent and meaning of the role of U.S. diplomacy in Central America, a topic of almost continuous discussion and contention within the U.S. foreign policy establishment and between U.S. diplomats and Central American actors.

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 their individual prejudices and experiences—had a profound impact both on the course of U.S. 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’s 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? Recurring patterns, combined with the backgrounds and preferences of individual diplomats, and the twist and turns in Central American history, account for the high degree of complexity and richness of this topic that will be evident in the historical narrative that follows.

NOTES

1. Henry Stimson (U.S. Secretary of State) to Sheldon Whitehouse (U.S. Minister to Guatemala), November 23, 1932, National Archives of the United States at College Park, MD, Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Legation in San Salvador [PRES], volume 116, class 710.
2. On the development of non-intervention under the Roosevelt administration, see Chap. 4.
3. On the 1923 Treaties: Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 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 naïve. 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*, Chap. 4.

4. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 3–4; “The Presidency: The Hoover Week”, *Time Magazine* [*TM*] (December 16, 1929).
5. Matthew Hanna (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua) to Whitehouse, June 1, 1932, National Archives of the United States at College Park, MD, Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Legation in Guatemala [PRGU], volume 286, class 800.
6. Julius G. Lay (U.S. Minister to Honduras) to Whitehouse, January 13, 1933, PRGU, volume 295, class 800.
7. “The Presidency: Practical idea”, *TM* (November 18, 1929).
8. “Sheldon Whitehouse dies at 82; Career Diplomat for 26 years”, *The New York Times* [*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.
9. “Robbins dead; N.Y. rites set for U.S. envoy”, *The Washington Post* [*TWP*] (April 8, 1935), 1.
10. For example: Personal Memorandum for the Minister, November 19, 1928, PRES, volume 106, class 844. A list of informers deemed reliable by the legation. Mainly businessmen, landowners, and foreigners.
11. “Interview with Robert Corrigan January 21, 1988”, Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training [ADST], CD-ROM. Also see: Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 16.
12. Lawrence Higgins (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Honduras) to Whitehouse, June 4, 1932, National Archives of the United States at College Park, MD, Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Legation in Tegucigalpa [PRHO], volume 188, class 800; Lay to Department, November 2, 1930, PRHO, volume 170, class 800; Lay to Department, February 4, 1932, PRHO, volume 187, class 800; Lay to Department, August 17, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Lay to Thomas C. Wasson (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes, Honduras), March 11, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800.
13. 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, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Rodolfo Cerdas Cruz, “Colonial Heritage, External Domination, and Political Systems in Central America”, in Louis W. Goodman, William M. LeoGrande, and Johanna M. Forman eds., *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1992);

- Jeffrey M. Paige, *Coffee and Power. Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 120–126; Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920–1932* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 8–16.
14. Cornelius H. van Engert, El Salvador, National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD, Record Group 59: Department of State Lot Files [Lot Files], Studies on Latin America, box 12, folder marked Salvador by Cornelius van H. Engert.
 15. William McCafferty (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires a.i. to Guatemala) to Department, November 13, 1930, National Archives Microfilm Publication, M1280, roll 1, #1020; W.W. Scott (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to Department, March 22, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Harold D. Finley (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to Department, May 2, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Warren D. Robbins (U.S. Minister to El Salvador) to Department, March 21, 1931, PRES, volume 112, class 800.B.
 16. Higgins to Department, June 10, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Higgins to Department, June 28, 1932, PRHO, volume 192, class 891.
 17. McCafferty to Department, November 13, 1930, M1280, roll 1, #1020.
 18. Lay to the U.S. Consulates on the Honduran North Coast, November 13, 1930, PRHO, volume 172, class 850.4; Lay to Department, September 10, 1931, PRHO, volume 179, class 800; Stewart to Lay, October 20, 1930, PRHO, volume 170, class 800; Higgins to Department, December 19, 1930, PRHO, volume 170, class 800; Stewart to Lay, April 8, 1931, PRHO, volume 178, class 800; Lay to Department, April 19, 1931, PRHO, volume 178, class 800.
 19. Scott to Department, March 22, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Scott to Department, August 1, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800.
 20. 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, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 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”.
 21. Higgins, Notes on the Political Campaign in Honduras in 1923, n.d., PRHO, volume 188, class 800: Honduras, January to June; Henry S. Haines (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Castilla, Honduras) to Lay, August 19, 1931, PRHO, volume 179, class 800: Honduras (Continued).

22. On the Good Neighbor and the outbreak of World War II, see Chap. 6, section “With Friends Like These ...”.
23. 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.
24. William C. Bullitt to R. Walton Moore, December 8, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Office Files, Part III: Departmental Correspondence [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, ROF, 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 [RPP], Official File [OF] 20: State Department, February to June, 1933; Unmarked files (Long to Hull, February, 1933), Elisha V. and Boaz W. Long papers. New Mexico State Records Center and Archives at Santa Fe, New Mexico, 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, RPP, OF729: Sheldon Whitehouse, 1933–1938. On Curtis’s final weeks in the service, see Chap. 3, section “Coups”.
25. U.S. Department of State, *State Department Register* (Washington, DC, 1941), 107; *Register* (1942), 147, 179–180, and 192; *Register* (1946), 218; *Register* (1948), 291; *Register* (1950), 110.
26. 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.
27. Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919–1970, ADST; Corrigan to Moore, October 30, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Corrigan Papers, box 7, folder: Moore, R. Walton.
28. On Erwin’s initial assessment of the Carías government, see Chap. 5, section “Appropriating Fascism”.

29. Fay Allen Des Portes (U.S. Minister to Guatemala) to Department, May 15, 1940, PRGU, Confidential Files [CF], box 3, class 711.
30. 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.
31. Long to Judge Vincent, 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.
32. Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919–1970, ADST.
33. Corrigan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 24, 1934, Corrigan Papers, box 9, folder: Roosevelt, F.D. & Eleanor.
34. 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 Department, February 1, 1937, PRES, box 7, volume II, class 123.
35. For example: Des Portes to Department, June 9, 1939, PRGU, box 23, class 800.
36. Correspondence and early diary entries of Gerald A. Drew, 1919–1970, ADST, gives a good impression of the U.S. Legation in El Salvador under Corrigan.
37. Corrigan to Department, February 1, 1937, PRES, box 7, volume II, class 123.
38. Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 296.
39. Corrigan to Willard Beaulac, April 15, 1936, Corrigan Papers, General Correspondence, box 1, folder: Beaulac, Willard.
40. The source of Erwin's information is unknown, but he used it often. For example: John D. Erwin (U.S. Ambassador to Honduras) to Department, August 21, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800; Lt. Col. Nathan A. Brown, Jr. (U.S. Acting Military Attaché to Honduras) to the Military Intelligence Division, April 14, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 22, volume 13, class 850.4; Erwin to Department, December 22, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 22, volume 13, class 850.4.
41. Des Portes to Department, August 22, 1941, PRGU, box 41, class 820.02.

42. Nathaniel P. Davis (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to Department, January 7, 1936, Lot Files: Inspection Reports, box 66, volume 1935.
43. Davis to Department, December 13, 1935, Lot Files: Inspection Reports, box 160, volume 1935.
44. Charles B. Hosmer (Foreign Service inspector) to Erwin, March 24, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 1, class 124.6.
45. H. Merle Cochran (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to Walter Thurston (U.S. Minister to El Salvador), January 25, 1943, PRES, box 77, volume IV, class 124.6.
46. E.R. Stettinius, Jr. to the U.S. Embassies in Latin America, February 2, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
47. Parts of Chap. 7 deal with Central American oppositionists and their views of U.S. relationships with the dictators.
48. On Thurston's background and work in El Salvador, see Chap. 7, section "The Embassies and the Opposition".
49. Memorandum enclosed in Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to Department, December 8, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800.
50. Unless indicated otherwise, all the information on the professional lives of these men is from: *Register* (1950), 71, 377–378, 458, 463, and 504.
51. 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.
52. Cabot to Department, Organizational Report Guatemala, July 9, 1940, State Department Central File, box 669; Drew to Department, Organizational Report Guatemala, State Department Central File, box 669; Cousins to Department, Organizational Report Honduras, January 1, 1940, State Department Central File, box 669; Erwin to Department, Organizational Report Honduras, June 26, 1944, State Department Central File, box 669; Gade to Department, Organizational Report El Salvador, November 8, 1940, State Department Central File, box 670; Gade to Department, Organizational 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, and so on.

53. On the expansion of the Foreign Service and how it affected U.S. policy before and during World War II, see Chaps. 6 and 7.
54. Using a statistical analysis, Phillip L. Kelly attempts 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 to scientifically measure the effectiveness of the training of these officers, let alone measure the "success" of their tenures in Latin America. 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.

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Origins: The Rise of the Caudillos and the Defeat of Non-Recognition, 1930–1934

A revolt in Honduras in 1931 provoked the famous 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 uprising in 1903.¹ Called “Opera Bouffe Revolts” the article was intended to amuse rather than to inform his compatriots. If Butler is to be believed, revolts 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 upheaval, Butler and his Marines went ashore only 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 U.S. flag in which he had wrapped himself—and to escort him to their ship “in a manner due his rank and station.”² 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.”

Butler’s description of Honduran uprisings was another low point in U.S. satire of Central Americans’ supposed fondness of rebellion.³ Against the background of these stereotypical portrayals of Central Americans, Washington perceived a need for U.S. assistance to its disorderly neighbors. Responding to specific threats to U.S. political and economic interests in

the region, policymakers conceptualized their policy toward Latin America as a demand for orderly, constitutional government, calling upon the sister republics to stop their “chronic wrongdoing” and learn to “elect good men” at least since the start of the twentieth century. More often than not, Marines were dispatched to add substance to these supposedly wise words and to attempt to enforce democratic development in the region.⁴ But things were about to change.

Between 1930 and 1936, stable and long-lasting dictatorships were established in Central America as U.S. Marines withdrew and the State Department adopted a non-intervention policy. Historians have long asked the question of whether there exists 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?”⁵ Some have made the argument that a link exists between the United States’ adoption of a non-intervention policy and the rise of dictatorship in Central America and the Caribbean. In a classic statement on the issue, Walter LaFeber suggests that during this time 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.”⁶ David Schmitz also argues that the withdrawal from intervention was quickly followed by support for dictatorship. Regarding Central America, he dates that development to 1932, when Washington extended “informal” recognition to the anticommunist regime of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez—an argument that will be explored further below.⁷ There are alternative interpretations. Thomas Leonard makes an argument that probably comes close to what U.S. diplomats at the time might have said: “the United States had no alternative except to watch these events [the establishment of dictatorships] unfold. Having abandoned its interventionist practices, Washington could not support the political factions opposed to the dictators.”⁸

The next two chapters present two complex and interconnected processes: Firstly, we will see how U.S. policy developed from the one practiced by the Hoover administration, avoidance of military interventions combined with diplomatic interference such as the non-recognition of unconstitutional governments, to the policy that would ultimately be championed by the Roosevelt administration, complete avoidance of any acts of interference. An interpretation of this development at the level of the Foreign Service adds an additional layer to the discussion of which administration was most responsible for developing the non-intervention

policy, as Foreign Service officers were slow to abandon the idea that Central Americans needed their “sympathetic interest” and “friendly advice.” Secondly, we will see how several Central American leaders who presented themselves as constitutionalists and proponents of progress were first elected to the presidencies of the Central American republics, but then developed into (in the cases of Jorge Ubico and Tiburcio Carías) or were replaced by (in the case of Arturo Araujo and Juan Bautista Sacasa) long-term dictatorships.

I have already argued elsewhere that in the early 1930s, the Foreign Service favored and, where possible—given the Hoover administration’s withdrawal from military intervention—actively promoted the elections of Jorge Ubico, Arturo Araujo, and Tiburcio Carías. U.S. diplomats did so not because they preferred dictators, but because they believed that they had found local allies who would promote constitutionalism and limited reform while they adhered to the friendly advice of U.S. legations.⁹ This chapter and the next will extend that argument by showing how the Foreign Service ultimately had to come to terms with the establishment of several dictatorships in the region, first as a consequence of the 1931 coup in El Salvador, which replaced Arturo Araujo with Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, and then with the *continuismo* campaigns of Jorge Ubico and Tiburcio Carías. The U.S. response to the 1932 “*Matanza*” in El Salvador plays a particularly important role in that process.

The arguments presented here expand our knowledge of how the Good Neighbor was reconciled with the establishment of dictatorship in Central America. It complicates the idea that “deals were easily struck” between the U.S. and the dictators, in the interpretation of LaFeber and others, while it shows that the dictators were not regarded as “puppets” of the United States—neither did they behave as such.¹⁰ Rather, Foreign Service officers considered the independent behavior that Martínez, Ubico, and Carías demonstrated as they extended their hold on power as threats to former accomplishments of U.S. diplomacy. As such, the relationship would be cool until later in the decade, when the rise of fascism created a new context for the re-evaluation of these leaders.

ELECTIONS

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 govern-

ments. 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, U.S. public opinion turned against the interventions as part of the larger movement against war and imperialism during the isolationist years. Finally, the arrogance with which the United States policed the sovereign republics of Central America and the Caribbean met with resistance from within the occupied territories and 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 Latin Americans. 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 might 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.¹¹

During the same period, factional strife began to make way for strong, centralized states in Central America. For decades, isthmian republics such as Guatemala and El Salvador had been largely dependent on the export of coffee. When international markets crashed after 1929, the export of coffee suffered from the letdown of consumption in the industrialized nations. Decline in coffee export and production affected imports, internal commerce, the transport sector, and government income, the latter being highly dependent on taxes on coffee. Unemployment and declining wages among coffee plantation workers led to social unrest while the governments' inability to meet payrolls caused dissatisfaction among its employees, including military officers. The contracting economy, unstable social situation, and decline in government budget put great pressure on the Liberal oligarchy: a network of coffee elites that justified its dominance of government and society through the assertion of racial superiority over the masses of indigenous workers and the wealth generated by export agriculture. While the effects of these problems were not the same in each nation—most notably, they led to major explosion of violence in El Salvador—ruling economic elites were scared 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 rule in Guatemala and was followed by Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1931–1944) in El Salvador.¹²

Since Honduras had no coffee industry to speak of at the time, the situation in that country was different from the one in El Salvador or Guatemala. The Honduran economy was dominated by the production and export of bananas, which was itself dominated by U.S. companies. These companies managed to delay the effects of contracting world markets on the export price of bananas through their control of shipment to the United States: export prices of bananas were administered by the companies themselves. While Honduras did suffer from political turmoil throughout the 1920s, this situation stemmed from the fact that control over the state was the only secure means of income to local elites, leading to decades of political battles and a full-scale civil war following the presidential elections of 1923. Rival banana companies aggravated the fighting by financially supporting opposing forces while their own plantations on the North Coast were generally insulated against the violence by the threat of U.S. intervention. Near-constant warfare disrupted production and commerce in the non-banana producing regions and depleted public finances. By the early 1930s therefore, Hondurans were more concerned about peace and order than they were about the Great Depression, opening the door to the long rule of Tiburcio Carías Andino (1931–1948).¹³

Ubico and Carías came to power through nominally free elections, but in 1935, Ubico had the constitution altered to be able to continue in office beyond his legal term. Eventually, he established a 13-year dictatorship. Some North American and European authors have portrayed him as a modernizer and nation builder who strengthened the institutions of the central government and improved the country's economic infrastructures.¹⁴ More recent contributions from Central American scholars, however, complicate that image by relating the Liberal oligarchic project of "nation building" to the ongoing and structural exclusion of indigenous people. Marta Elena Casaús Arzú characterizes Ubico's reign as one of the most repressive in the country's history and stresses Ubico's close ties of class and family to the more recalcitrant sections of Guatemala's oligarchy. Ubico strengthened the state's control over the indigenous labor force through the Vagrancy Law, obliging landless rural workers to provide 150 days of labor to the big fincas every year. Sergio Tischler Visquerra also argues that Ubico's government should be understood within the context

of an exclusionary Liberal oligarchic system. Unable to manage the discontent of the indigenous working classes with its traditional paternalism and equally unable to integrate the demands for democratization by the middle class, the ruling elite responded to the Great Depression by supporting Ubico's authoritarianism.¹⁵

Much like Ubico, Carías would adapt the national constitution so that he could remain in power beyond his legal term, which ended in 1936. He stepped down in favor of one of his government ministers in 1948. During his reign, the Honduran economy outside of the banana enclave slowly recuperated from the political upheaval and civil war of the 1920s, but the price of greater economic security was political repression. Carías would spend most of his government's resources on expanding tools of control—especially the new air force, which would form the nucleus of a new military order.¹⁶ In El Salvador, the rise to power of Martínez was preceded by the short-lived government of Arturo Araujo, who had inherited massive debts from the previous administration and faced ongoing rural unrest that was made worse by the perception on the countryside that he refused to live up to his campaign promises. The coffee elite, meanwhile, refused to come to the aid of the reform administration. Dissatisfied by the government's inability to pay their salaries, a group of young officers committed a coup in December 1931 and put Vice-President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in power. Araujo's reformist campaign platform heightened rural demands for change and elite fears of indigenous radicalization. Only weeks after the 1931 coup, the Salvadoran army violently put down a rural uprising in the west of the country, killing thousands. The massacre, known as the *Matanza*, was one of the most extreme acts of state violence in the history of the Americas.¹⁷

From the perspective of U.S. diplomats, the early 1930s presidential elections, which brought to power Jorge Ubico in Guatemala, Arturo Araujo in El Salvador, Tiburcio Carías in Honduras, and Juan Bautista Sacasa in Nicaragua, developed along parallel lines. Naturally, U.S. involvement in the Nicaraguan elections, which were supervised by the Marine Corps, was most obvious and most far-reaching. However, the State Department's support for the 1923 Treaty of Peace and Amity, combined with the conviction of Foreign Service officers that U.S. interference presented a "moral benefit" to the development of Central American countries, led to an active policy of promoting orderly elections in the other states. Paradoxically, considering the Marine presence in Nicaragua, the State Department repeatedly rejected calls from its legations in neighboring

countries to support its policies with military intervention. The whole purpose of intervention in Nicaragua was to create a stable, constitutional government supported by its own National Guard and no longer dependent on U.S. forces. In the absence of military intervention, Foreign Service officers in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras had to depend on local allies to realize their goals.¹⁸

The outlines of the U.S. policy toward Central American elections can be illustrated with its involvement in the Guatemalan presidential elections of 1931. When General Manuel Orellana committed a coup d'état in December 1930, the U.S. State Department and its mission in Guatemala, led by Minister Sheldon Whitehouse, agreed that the new government could not be acknowledged in the light of the 1923 Treaty of Peace and Amity. Under pressure from the United States Orellana decided to step down and a provisional government organized elections for 1931.¹⁹

Minister Whitehouse played an important role in shaping the field of candidates for the elections by informing Orellana that he and his associates should stay out of it. His attempt to play an even bigger role by “strengthen[ing] the provisional government” with a show of force by the U.S. Navy was blocked by the State Department, which saw no “compelling motives” to supply such aid as long as the lives of U.S. citizens were not directly threatened. Whitehouse did find common ground with, in his eyes, the most promising candidate for the presidency: General Jorge Ubico. Both Whitehouse and Ubico were supremely confident that a fair election would produce victory for the latter. Their only fear was another intervention from rival military factions. Ubico even suggested that the United States supervise the elections “as has been done in Nicaragua” (presumably a reference to Marine involvement). Whether the U.S. legation seriously considered the proposition is not clear, but challenges to Ubico’s candidacy failed to materialize anyway. Ubico’s political party, the *Partido Liberal Progresista*, turned out to be the only one that was sufficiently well organized to field a candidate before the election. In February 1931, Ubico was elected president unopposed.²⁰

Similar elements can be observed in the contemporaneous elections in El Salvador and Honduras where U.S. ministers, at times prodded by local actors, were willing to interfere in local politics in spite of the State Department’s aversion to military intervention. During the 1930–1931 presidential elections in El Salvador, Minister Warren Delano Robbins had committed himself to a policy of not “showing favoritism for any candidate,” but did request navy assistance to prevent the military from

intervening in the elections. While the Department quickly rejected the request, Robbins did make sure that Whitehouse's opposition to the Orellana coup was well-known in El Salvador, hoping that it would discourage potential plotters. The minister also warned then-president Pío Romero Bosque to "do his utmost to have constitutional elections." Such instructions were probably inspired more by Robbins's paternalistic attitude toward Salvadoran leaders than by Romero Bosque's lack of support for the elections. As Erik Ching has shown, the president had worked toward the organization of fair elections for some years, which probably explains why the elections proceeded fairly smoothly and resulted in the election of Arturo Araujo.²¹

Perhaps Robbins's most noteworthy role in the elections occurred after the votes had been counted. The runner-up, Alberto Gómez Zárate, threatened to challenge the legality of the elections. Araujo, who had visited the legation several times during the elections, now used his access to the U.S. minister in an attempt to diffuse the threat. Suggesting that his supporters might not accept Gómez Zárate's demands, he got Robbins to tell the *Zaratistas* that his legation would regard their intervention as a "disaster" and to counsel them to "try and get together with Araujo." It is not clear how Gómez Zárate interpreted Robbins's advice or what other channels Araujo may have used to end the threat to his victory, but on February 12, 1931, he was unanimously elected president by the Salvadoran National Assembly.²²

In Honduras, the contenders for the 1932 presidential elections, Angel Zúñiga Huete of the Liberal Party and Tiburcio Carías Andino for the National Party, were hosted at the U.S. legation by Minister Julius Lay. Both were all too familiar with U.S. interventionism. In 1924, when Zúñiga Huete was minister of government and Carías a candidate for the presidency, Washington intervened to end a civil war that resulted from undecided elections. Special envoy Sumner Welles brokered a deal between the warring parties that included new elections. The problem for Carías was that the agreement also barred participants in the civil war, such as himself, from running in the elections. He accepted the deal, however, and during the 1932 race, both he and his Liberal opponent visited the U.S. legation frequently to advertise their peaceful intentions. Lay used the insecurity of both candidates to extract promises concerning the procedures of the elections, setting himself up in the role of umpire. Despite Zúñiga Huete's reputation of being a hothead and labor agitator, Lay had no real preference for one or the other candidate. Carías appeared to have

the support of conservative business circles, including the United Fruit Company, but Lay considered him an old-fashioned warlord type of leader and “a very low type of Indian” on top of that. Zúñiga Huete, on the other hand, had discarded most of the radical rhetoric, according to Lay, and might well be “an excellent president for Honduras.”²³

Lay pressured Carías and Zúñiga Huete to promise that they would run a clean campaign and to instruct their followers to do the same.²⁴ Somewhat to Lay’s annoyance, neither candidate promised to also accept the outcome of the elections. This turned out to be a significant omission when Carías won a resounding victory—somewhat to the surprise of Minister Lay. While Zúñiga Huete appeared to take the defeat in stride, Liberal military leaders started a nation-wide uprising two weeks after the elections. Anxious to prevent a rebellion, 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.” The Department, however, thought it “much sounder on the whole that we should keep out of such transactions.”²⁵

Aside from his unsuccessful lobby for arms, Lay was deeply involved in the coordination of the military campaign against the Liberals. Apparently without the Department’s knowledge or concurrence, Lay 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 rebels 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 brethren in Honduras with arms. While Lay never explicitly admitted that he was in any way involved in the defense of the constituted authorities in Honduras, his reports during the revolt suggest that the leaders of the National militias, Carías and his running-mate Abraham Williams, regularly visited the legation and received advice from the minister. In the end, Lay’s efforts were rewarded. After a month and a half of fighting, the National militias defeated the Liberals. Although the Liberal president at the time was completely dependent on Carías’s troops throughout the ordeal, he was kept in power until February 1, 1933, when he duly handed over the presidential sash to Carías.²⁶

Following the early 1930s presidential elections, U.S. diplomats established cordial relations with all of the victors. The consensus among Foreign Service officers in Central America was that the elections had been remarkably free and fair and that the winners supported U.S. interest in orderly, constitutional government in the region. Whitehouse, Robbins, and Lay also assumed that the elections and (ultimately) successful transfers of power in their host countries were due in large measure to their personal guidance. Robbins, for example, wrote to the Department about his “considerable satisfaction” in seeing Araujo elected and noted that he took “a little pride” in making it happen. Likewise, Lay reported that local newspapers lauded his “efforts” in securing peaceful elections, which he characterized as “an extension of democracy in Honduras.” The new presidents themselves confirmed the ministers’ self-congratulatory view of U.S. involvement, with Ubico claiming 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.”²⁷

Aside from the new leaders’ elitism and outspoken pro-Americanism, their broader political programs appealed to the ministers’ conservative reformism. U.S. ministers allowed themselves to be convinced that the supposed victories for constitutionalism that the recent elections represented would be institutionalized by the new regimes. Whitehouse, for example, claimed that Ubico would end “the old abuses” by which former governments had remained in power illegally and against the will of the people, thus removing, according to the minister, “one of the principal causes of revolution” in the country. Likewise, Robbins reported that Araujo promised to make his country’s electoral law “more conscientious, more peaceful in its functioning, easier to apply, less open to evil influence.” Implicitly, both diplomats and politicians agreed that repairing minor defects in the existing situation would be sufficient. More fundamental reforms, an extension of the electorate for example, were never considered.²⁸

Foreign Service officers acted on the notion that it was their job to monitor and, where necessary, to regulate the electoral process in Central America. Their assumption that they had delivered a new generation of leaders who respected U.S. preferences for orderly democratic processes informed the State Department’s initial assessment of the new governments, as is illustrated by a 1933 study for the U.S. delegates to the International Conference of American States at Montevideo.²⁹ The report

starts with an analysis of recent events in Nicaragua, where U.S. Marines had withdrawn after they had supervised the 1932 presidential elections—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 U.S. “assistance” short of military intervention—also dominated its view of Guatemalan and Honduran politics. In Honduras, the fact that Carías’s election to office was free and fair, was considered “a tribute to the political progress which Honduras had made in the past decade.” Carías 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.

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.” Not all was well with Central America at this point, however. The major challenge, from the perspective of U.S. diplomacy, was the government of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, which had replaced that of Araujo.

COUP

In November 1931, a new minister arrived in San Salvador: Charles Boyd Curtis. Curtis’s last tour of duty was in the Dominican Republic where he found himself in the midst of an uprising that brought to power Rafael Trujillo—eventually one of the most hated tyrants of the hemisphere. During the revolt, Curtis had 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 rebellion 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 General Trujillo from being elected to the presidency. Trujillo, chief of the Dominican army, had switched allegiance to the rebels during the revolt—an unforgivable act of treason in the eyes of Curtis. Washington explicitly opposed its minister’s campaign against Trujillo, however. Quoting its non-intervention policy, the Department informed Curtis that it “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.³⁰

Even though his behind-the-scenes attempt to block Trujillo’s rise to power failed, Curtis’s public role in preventing a major battle between the

government and the rebels was a personal victory for the minister. According to the U.S. press, he had single-handedly prevented major bloodshed, loss of North American lives and property, and U.S. intervention in the island republic.³¹ From Secretary Stimson, Curtis received a letter of commendation for his service in the Dominican Republic. Other members of the Foreign Service sent personal letters of congratulation to the minister as well. Nevertheless, Curtis's 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."³² This was not to be.

Barely a month after Curtis's arrival, a revolt broke out in El Salvador. According to the U.S. legation's reports, Araujo's popularity had been dwindling for some time, but the direct cause of the rebellion 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," according to Curtis's unsympathetic reports. When attempts to raise troops and put up a fight had failed, the president crossed the border to Guatemala on December 4. By that time, Vice-President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez had taken over the government.³³

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 on U.S. citizens and their interests by making sure that the rebellion developed as smoothly as possible, regardless of who won. Shortly after the shooting started, the minister visited the different barracks and forts, trying to organize a cease fire. By the time the shooting stopped, the president had left town and the last resisters were about to surrender to the rebels.³⁴

Curtis seems not to have cared which party turned out on top in the revolt, 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 revolt, Curtis repeated that President Araujo had shown "a great degree of incompetence," especially in his handling of government finances: "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.” 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 the uprising 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.”³⁵

Curtis saw no reason to save the Araujo government, but he had no reason to promote the cause of the rebels either. During and right after the rebellion, Curtis claimed 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.”³⁶ The minister reported that the revolt was directed by “youngsters for the most part of strongly Indian blood and with the appearance of being little more than half-witted.” A “revolutionary directorate” was eventually 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 who, at most, “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 Araujo, Curtis assumed that the latter was 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.”³⁷

Although Curtis’s stated purpose was to prevent bloodshed and although he had no reason to prefer one faction over the other, he admitted that his actions had the effect of aiding the rebels. By the time that Curtis got involved in the revolt, 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’s 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.³⁸

In the meantime, Curtis’s reports on the uprising reached the highest echelons of the State Department and they were not well received. 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.” Some hours later, Stimson reminded Curtis that the Department still considered Araujo the constitutional president of El Salvador and acidly 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.” The next day, Stimson requested a report on Martínez’s role in the revolt (participation would bar him from recognition) and again urged Curtis to explain the 1923 Treaty to the military faction.³⁹

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 ... 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.” 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.”⁴⁰

Not only did Curtis bungle the handling of the rebellion itself, from the Department’s point of view, his misinterpretation of Department instructions also strengthened Martínez’s position. 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 revolt, 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.⁴¹ The minister believed that what was necessary to make the government constitutional and acceptable under the 1923

Treaty was to have the rebellious military directorate abolished. Curtis set out to accomplish this goal—with great success.

On December 10, Curtis told the Salvadoran minister of war that “every indication of even a possibility that the Directorate was influencing the actions of the Government of General Martínez ought to be avoided.” In addition, Curtis urged the minister 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.⁴² When the Directorate did dissolve the next day, Curtis started to refer to the Martínez regime as the “constitutional” government, instead 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 lauded 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.⁴³

Curtis’ actions would cost him his post and his career. 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 El Salvador as a “special adviser,” but in practice quickly took 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, the latter told Martínez and his foreign minister that they would never be recognized by the United States. It is indicative of Curtis’s handling of the crisis that both were genuinely surprised by the news.⁴⁴

In the days after his arrival, Caffery reported that the Martínez regime was “daily growing stronger.” The “better elements” in San Salvador had already thrown their support behind the Martínez regime.⁴⁵ The National Assembly, which was still made up entirely of Araujo supporters, had lost much of its credibility when its leader fled the country.⁴⁶ There were 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 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. Within the limited circle of Central American actors that U.S. diplomats deigned to speak with, Caffery had no-one to turn to aside from officers of the army, who had already established their control over the country.⁴⁷

Caffery was sent to El 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 supposedly 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. Many higher officers had joined Martínez's government and were therefore barred from recognition if any one of them should become president. The only group inside the army that had any measure of organization and influence apart from the generals was the 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 throughout the country by Martínez, who, Caffery reported while gracefully omitting Curtis's name, "had been made to believe that it would lead to prompt recognition."⁴⁸

After some two weeks of lobbying, Caffery finally convened a group of young officers whom he presumed were the leaders of the revolt.⁴⁹ In contrast to Curtis, 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 barred from recognition. The young officers would then have to force Martínez out so that one of the designates could assume the presidency.⁵⁰

This plan, which, according to Caffery, was the only one that had any chance of success considering Martínez's strong position, was rife with complications from the start. Salvadorans in general felt that the United States was forcing its will on their 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. 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.⁵¹ 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's ability to hang on to power was perhaps due as much to Curtis's lack of experience in Central American policy as it was to Caffery's haste to negotiate a wobbly deal and leave.

SLAUGHTER

The Department remained confident, however, that Martínez could be dislodged from the presidency. This task was now 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 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 desired effects. 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.⁵²

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.⁵³ Suffice it to say that the revolting peasants, who were armed mainly with sticks and machetes, were quickly subdued by El Salvador's

well-organized army and rural police. The quelling of the uprising was just the beginning, however. 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 Cívicas*, 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.⁵⁴

Several historians of U.S.–Central American relations argue that the United States supported Martínez during and after the 1932 uprising. Somewhat cryptically, Historian Ralph Woodward claims that U.S. ships were dispatched to Salvadoran waters during the *Matanza* to “assist in averting any Communist revolution.”⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶ The U.S. Foreign Service *is* responsible for the way in which the *Matanza* unfolded. McCafferty asked Washington to send U.S. war vessels to Salvadoran waters, because it would “have the effect of allaying the present feeling of panic among the people but would also undoubtedly prevent the de facto authorities from relaxing their repressive measures.”⁵⁷ It is not helpful, however, to define U.S. involvement as a Cold War conspiracy—which is arguably what several historians have done with their emphasis on anti-communism or counter-revolution. That analysis obscures the actual mechanics of the 1932 slaughter and thus conceals deeper patterns of U.S.–Central American relations that preceded and possibly survived the Cold War while it introduces the risk of minimizing the involvement and responsibility of Salvadoran actors. The ferocity of the *Matanza* was a result of the power struggle between the State Department and Martínez that was played out against the background of racial and social prejudices that U.S. diplomats shared with local elites. Tragically, El Salvador’s Indian communities were victimized by the maneuvers of U.S. diplomats and San Salvadoran elites even when the latter two did not see eye to eye. How

did the U.S. 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.⁵⁸ Blindly accepting the consensus among Salvadoran aristocrats, McCafferty felt that the massacres on the countryside were the work of communists rather than the government. The highest death toll that McCafferty ever reported, and which he believed should be ascribed to the communists in any case, was a rumored 4800 deaths. The chargé reported that this was probably a gross exaggeration.⁵⁹

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 beliefs about the “savagery” of the Indians combined with vague notions that communist agitators were trying to incite a class 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 alcohol and foreign agitators were intent on the slaughter of their social betters so that the latter's lands and properties could be taken. U.S. 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. They routinely quoted the communists' thirst for plunder and murder, rather than the designs of Comintern.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ In the characteristically understated tones of diplomatic reporting, 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.”⁶² According to the U.S. chargé, the Italian and the British ministers, the latter a landowner himself, completely lost their heads, which inevitably caused a panic among their compatriots. 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.” 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: “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.”⁶³

Against this backdrop, the British and the Italian envoys pleaded with McCafferty for U.S. 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 U.S. citizens and other foreigners. In this context, it would be hard to imagine that the legation refused to make a request for armed assistance, or that the State Department would reject it. How would the U.S. public and world opinion at large react if it became known that U.S., 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, U.S. ships were duly dispatched, accompanied by Canadian vessels. 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.⁶⁴

The uprising in western El Salvador lasted a mere 48 hours and by the time U.S. ships arrived in Salvadoran waters, the danger to foreign lives and property appeared to be past. No U.S. marines set foot ashore, although British marines made a brief landing.⁶⁵ The question remains what would have happened had U.S. intervention proceeded. Would U.S. marines 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 U.S. navy. Considering the fact that Washington 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 U.S. intervention during the uprising helpful or supportive. This does not mean that the United States does not bear responsibility for the *Matanza*. As Lindo-Fuentes et al. have pointed out, Salvadoran authorities tried to prevent intervention because they believed that it would be the end of their rule. This particular fear was one among a variety of reasons for the Martínez regime to lash out against the insurgents “like a wounded animal” and contributed to the apocalyptic nature of the event.⁶⁶

After initial panic died down, the United States very quickly forgot about the uprising. Both the legation and the Department were evidently satisfied that the revolt had ended without loss of U.S. lives and property. Despite their physical nearness to the slaughter, U.S. diplomats remained blissfully unaware of the fact that the *Matanza* was a singularly apocalyptic event that would haunt Salvadoran society for decades to come. Thus, McCafferty was satisfied to limit his reports on the massacre to the “gory and lustful” atrocities committed by the communists.⁶⁷ But while the chargé respected Martínez’s “cool and collected” attitude during the uprising, he also made sure that the president knew that U.S. policy had not changed. As the machine guns were still bursting and U.S. 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.”⁶⁸

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.

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 tactic 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 convinced. Although U.S. diplomats acknowledged that they had underestimated the strength of communism, they considered that it was stamped out effectively by Martínez's repression. As far as the United States was concerned, Martínez's *very* thorough handling of the uprising had obsoleted him. When Martínez argued 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.⁶⁹

McCafferty repeated this argument frequently and it must have become clear to Martínez at some point that his anti-communist credentials got him nowhere.⁷⁰

Recent research has demonstrated, however, that anticommunist rhetoric and repression were only two facets of Martínez's 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 Nacional Pro-Patria*; and a many-sided popular program to obtain the

allegiance of Indian communities. An indication of the effectiveness of Martínez's 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 1944.⁷¹

Abandoning his anti-communist spiel, Martínez played for time by presenting a more subtle line of argument to the legation. To establish a stable follow-up government, the general claimed, 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: "He apparently intends to secure complete control of the army by breaking the power of the young military officers ... 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..."⁷² 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 William Castle wondered "what excuse General Martínez will find not to resign in June."⁷³

Of course, once he was strong enough, Martínez did not step down. After five months of negotiations, and 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, however, deeply annoyed U.S. diplomats. Quite unaccustomed to successful resistance, the legation and the Department had always assumed that Martínez was just a particularly stubborn leader of the Orellana type who would have to capitulate to U.S. wishes in the end.⁷⁴

Historian David Schmitz presents the U.S. reaction to the *Matanza* as a significant step towards the acceptance of other dictators in the region during the Good Neighbor era. Central to this argument is his assertion

that Washington extended “informal recognition” to the Salvadoran general after June: “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.”⁷⁵ As several other historians have reached similar conclusions, this argument requires exploration.⁷⁶ There are two main arguments for the assumption 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 U.S. wishes. In fact, the legation in San Salvador remained open—be it in the hands of a *chargé* rather than a minister.⁷⁷

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 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 U.S. 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.”⁷⁸

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 would endanger the goodwill the Hoover administration had been able to build on its non-intervention policy in Latin America. Simply accepting defeat and extending 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 unconstitutional governments since 1907. Unable to seek Martínez’s downfall due

to the effect this would have on Latin American policy and unable to recognize him due to Central American policy, the State Department implicitly decided that the plan of action in El Salvador was not to act at all. Perhaps there was some hope that Martínez's hold on the reins of power would slacken over time and that there would be a second chance to convince him to step down.

Lastly, it is 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? Martínez's continued rule in defiance of Washington's official and well-publicized position could only hurt the prestige of the United States. If the object of *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 was out of the question. While McCafferty remained in San Salvador during these long years to collect information and to look after U.S. economic and financial interest, he was careful not to associate himself with the regime.⁷⁹ According to the chargé, Martínez felt very anxious about the continued state of non-recognition—especially when it became evident that the FDR administration was seeking a rapprochement with Stalin, but continued to ignore him⁸⁰—and went out of his way to please the North Americans on every occasion. U.S. businesses received preferential treatment from the Martínez government. The latter instituted financial conservatism, government honesty, minor social programs, and all the other policies that earned the Ubico government a good reputation with Washington. 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."⁸¹

Only after the Roosevelt administration had been in office for some months did it become clear that the non-recognition policy would have to

be revised in the context of the non-intervention policy. The actions of Central Americans themselves also pushed the new administration to this conclusion. 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 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 U.S. 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 the legation hypothesized that this realization 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, whose appetite for power was undoubtedly wetted by Martínez's seizure of power. In general, U.S. diplomats feared that Martínez's example undermined the ability of elected governments to deter coups and thus threatened the entire region's stability.⁸²

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 that same treaty almost immediately after the December 2 coup in El Salvador. Perhaps the general wanted to endear himself to Washington by presenting himself as a loyal supporter of its regional policy, or perhaps he supported the Treaty to discourage his domestic enemies from plotting against him. But while U.S. diplomats appreciated Ubico's support, his enthusiasm for the campaign against Martínez sometimes proved to be embarrassing. Ubico (rightly) thought that a passive policy of non-recognition would be ineffective and pushed the U.S. 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 El Salvador, they would endanger U.S. policy in the rest of Latin America. U.S. qualms about more rigorous actions against El Salvador annoyed Ubico and hurt U.S. prestige in Guatemala, where, Whitehouse reported, people felt that Martínez had "put something over on the United States."⁸³

Carías's 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 loser. On the other hand, when President-elect Carías was fighting Liberal insurgents and was dreadfully low on ammo, Martínez was the only one who was willing to send him supplies. 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 El 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 El 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.⁸⁴

It should have been clear to the Roosevelt administration that it only stood to lose 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 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 was with the sister republics and merely had the “sympathetic interest” of the State Department.⁸⁵

The plan was eventually supported by Sumner Welles and the under-secretary effortlessly got FDR and Hull on board, both of whom seemed rather uninterested in the details of the issue. Juan Bautista Sacasa of Nicaragua was chosen as the one 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, the acting secretary of state wrote Minister Arthur Bliss 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, he 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.⁸⁶

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 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.”⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua wanted to maintain some sort of treaty to protect its governments from challengers.⁸⁹ The conference’s outcome, a new “Treaty of Fraternity,” was quickly subverted by the *continuismo* campaigns of the middle 1930s. Hanna took it very 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 the fact that he was not chosen to lead the negotiations that resulted in the recognition of Martínez, he seemed to have been 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 21-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.⁹⁰

While the State Department had made clear its intention not to get involved in the conference, 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.”⁹¹

After about a month of negotiations—enlivened by more dinners, 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 ironically noted that the fact that it had taken place without U.S. 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 build.”⁹²

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’s 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.⁹³

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

NOTES

1. Smedley D. Butler, "Opera-Bouffé Revolts: What usually happens when the Marines have landed", PRHO, volume 181, class 891. The article originally appeared in the magazine *Liberty* on October 10, 1931.
2. Butler makes sure to point out that the U.S. consul in this case was actually a native of Honduras.
3. For a short description of U.S. representations of Honduras which are either satirical or idealized, see: Alison Acker, *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1988), 16–25.
4. On U.S. intervention and policy of coercive democratization during the early twentieth 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, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 3–40.
5. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 79.
6. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 19–83, particularly 64–69 and 81.
7. Schmitz, 'Thank God', Chap. 2.
8. Leonard, *The Search for Stability*, 100.
9. For a more elaborate argument about this topic, see: Jorrit van den Berk, "We Should not Content Ourselves with a Sham": The US Foreign Service and the Central American Elections of the Early 1930s", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 48:2 (May 2016), 221–246.
10. Max Paul Friedman argues, with special reference to Roorda's analysis of U.S. relations with the Trujillo regime, that the "assignment of agency to Latin American leaders" must also extend to the analysis "of Caribbean and Central American dictators long depicted as the classic puppets of the United States." Max Paul Friedman, "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations", *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (November, 2003), 621–636. A more recent argument that builds on Friedman's observation is: Fenner, "Puppet Dictator".
11. Wood, *The Making*, 3–155; Gilderhus, *The Second Century*, 71–79; Loveman, *No Higher Law*, 238–252; Allen McPherson, *The Invaded*, 194–261, 263.
12. Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2–3, 38–49, and 56–57; Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 107–109; Sergio Tischler Visquerra, *Guatemala 1944: Crisis y Revolución. Ocaso y Quiebre de una Forma Estatal* (2nd edition: Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2001), 155–170.
13. Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 2–3, 48–52; Darío Euraque, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic. Region and State in Honduras*,

- 1870–1972 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1–20 and 43–57; Miguel Cáceres Rivera and Sucelinda Zelaya Carranza, “Honduras. Seguridad Productiva y Crecimiento Económico: La Función Económica del Cariato”, *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* 31 (2005), 49–91, there 51–60, 68–70, and 76–77.
14. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo* and Stefan Karlan, *‘Paz, progreso, justicia y honradez’: Das Ubico Regime in Guatemala, 1931–1944* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1991).
 15. Marta Elena Casasús Arzú, *Guatemala: Linaje y Racismo* (3rd edition: Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2007), 133–135 and Tischler Visquerra, *Guatemala 1944*, 1–13 and 173–174. For more general discussions of these themes, consult: David Díaz Arias, “La Invención de las Naciones en Centroamérica, 1821–1950”, *Boletín de la Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica* 15 (December 4, 2005), online at <http://www.afehc-historia-centroamericana.org> and José Edgardo Cal Montoya, “La Escritura de la Historia como Genealogía Política: La Comprensión de la Nación en la Historiografía Guatemalteca Reciente sobre la Reforma Liberal de 1871”, *Boletín de la Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica* 16 (January 4, 2006).
 16. Cáceres and Zelaya, “Seguridad Productiva”, 78–83. Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, 61–62; Matías Funes, *Los Deliberantes: El Poder Militar en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Guaymuras, 1995), 24–25. While sensitive to the role of political repression, Thomas J. Dodd, *Tiburcio Carías. Portrait of a Honduran Political Leader* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005) positions the regime in a development of national consolidation and modernization. Mario Argueta, *Tiburcio Carías: Anatomía de una Época* (2nd edition: Tegucigalpa: Editorial Guaymuras, 2008) finds very little to admire in the Cariato. The work of Jesús Evelio Inestroza Manzanares traces the evolution and workings of the (secret) police under Carías: Jesús Evelio Inestroza Manzanares, *Historia de la Policía Nacional de Honduras (1526–2002)* (Tegucigalpa: Ediciones Nai, 2002), Chap. 6 and *ibid.*, *Documentos Clasificados de la Policía Secreta de Carías (1937–1944)* (Tegucigalpa: Instituto Hondureño de Antropología y Historia, 2009).
 17. See section “[Slaughter](#)” in this chapter.
 18. As noted, a more thorough analysis of U.S. diplomatic involvement in the early 1930s presidential elections in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras is: Van den Berk, “We Should not Content Ourselves with a Sham”.
 19. Whitehouse to Department, December 31, 1930, M1280, roll 2, General Conditions, 37; Stimson to Whitehouse, 23 Nov. 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 710. The Treaty of 1907 that Stimson mentions was a predecessor of the 1923 Treaty. For further analysis of the 1923 Treaty, see Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 80–3; Findling, *Close Neighbors*, Chap. 4.

20. Whitehouse to Department, December 28, 1930, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1035; Whitehouse to Department, December 29, 1930, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1036; Stimson to Whitehouse, December 30, 1930, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1036; McCafferty to Department, November 13, 1930, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1020; Whitehouse to Department, January 7, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1045; Whitehouse to Department, January 28, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1053; Whitehouse to Department, January 29, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1054; Whitehouse to Department, February 18, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1058. On the role of the United States in Ubico's election, also see: Grieb, "The Rise of Jorge Ubico".
21. Robbins to Department, September 26, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Robbins to Department, November 18, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Stimson to Robbins, November 20, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Robbins to Department, December 18, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Robbins to Department, December 30, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Robbins to Department, December 2, 1930, PRES, volume 104, class 800; Robbins to Department, January 2, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Robbins to Department, January 12, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Erik Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador. Politics and the Origins of the Military Regimes* [E-Book] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), Chap. 6.
22. Robbins to White, January 16, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Robbins to Department, February 12, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
23. Dodd, *Carias*, 23–35; Argueta, *Carias*, 21–44; Lay to Department, April 4, 1932, PRHO, volume 188; Lay to Department, November 23, 1932, PRHO, CF, volume 217; Higgins to Department, July 15, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Lay to Department, despatch 622, September 23, 1932, PRHO, CF, volume 217; Lay to Department, March 3, 1933, PRHO, CF, volume 218; Lay to Whitehouse, April 28, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800.
24. Lay is quick to take credit for the statements that the candidates made. However, Carlos Contreras explains the same statements in the context of a domestic movement for peaceful elections, evidence of which he found in Honduran newspapers of the time. See: Carlos A. Contreras, *Hacia la Dictadura Cariista: La Campaña Presidencial de 1932* (Tegucigalpa: Editorial Iberoamericana, 2000), Chap. 12, especially 176 and 179.
25. Lay to Department, October 28, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Lay to Department, October 31, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Lay to Department, November 25, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; White to Lay, November 30, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800.

26. Lay to Whitehouse, November 19, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Department, November 22, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Whitehouse, November 24, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Whitehouse to Lay, November 25, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Department, December 2, 1932, PRHO, CF, volume 217; Lay to Hanna, December 20, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Eberhardt, January 2, 1933, PRHO, volume 196, class 800; Lay to Department, February 3, 1933, PRHO, volume 196, class 800.
27. Whitehouse to Department, January 29, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1054; McCafferty to Department, November 13, 1930, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1020; Robbins to White, January 30, 1931, PRES, volume 114, class 891; Robbins to McDermott, January 30, 1931, PRES, volume 114, class 891; Lay to Department, November 4, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Department, November 8, 1932, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Wilson, November 4, 1931, PRHO, volume 189, class 800; Lay to Department, January 13, 1933, PRHO, volume 196, class 800; Whitehouse to Department, January 29, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1054.
28. Lay to Department, October 31, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800; Whitehouse to Department, January 28, 1931, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs, 1053; Robbins to Department, March 3, 1931, PRGU, volume 275, class 800.
29. 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, Montevideo, 1933", Lot Files, Studies on Latin America, box 20, folder marked Montevideo Conference, 1933.
30. Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, 31–62.
31. "Dominican Rebel becomes President", *NYT* (March 2, 1930), 9; "Two little Republics", *TWP* (March 2, 1930) S1.
32. "New minister named to El Salvador; Oriental dispatches rumor transfer of Japanese ambassador to China", *TWP* (August 9, 1931) S1.
33. Charles B. Curtis (United States Minister in San Salvador) to Department, December 5, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800. For historical descriptions of the coup, consult: Thomas P. Anderson, *Matanza. The 1932 "Slaughter" that Traumatized a Nation, Shaping US-Salvadoran Policy to this Day* (2nd edition: Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1992), 71–88; James Dunkerley, *The Long War. Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 18–31; Phillip J. Williams and Knut Walker, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 19–20; Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, Chap. 7, Sect. 1.

34. Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
35. Curtis to Department, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, November 19, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
This section was censured in *FRUS*.
36. Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
37. Curtis to Department, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
This section was censured in *FRUS*. On Curtis's assumption that Martínez was *at most* a collaborator of the rebels, and not a very enthusiastic one at that, also see: Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 6, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 6, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 15, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
38. Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 3, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
39. Stimson to Curtis, December 4, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Stimson to Curtis, December 4, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Stimson to Curtis, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Stimson to Curtis, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800.
40. Curtis to Department, December 5, 1931; PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 6, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
41. Curtis to Department, December 11, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800;
Curtis to Department, December 15, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
Acting on the advice of Salvadoran government officials, Curtis reported that Martínez's 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 Salvadoran government understood it—since the Salvadoran Congress had made some hazily worded amendments to Article 2, which debarred rebel leaders from the presidency and since Martínez's actual participation in the revolt could not be established. Most in-depth accounts by historians tend to agree that Martínez did not take part in the revolt or at least permit that his participation cannot be definitely established. Anderson, *Matanza*, 188; Patricia Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador: The Fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 18; Williams and Walker, *Militarization*, 19–20.

42. Curtis to Department, December 11, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800. Erik Ching discussed Martínez's dissolution of the revolutionary directorate entirely in the context of local politics and does not mention Hanna's possible influence. It is possible that Martínez's actions to disperse the young officers of the directorate were informed both by reasons of internal politics and Hanna's prodding. Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, Chap. 7, Sect. 1, Para. 11.
43. Curtis to Department, December 15, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 11, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 15, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 11, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
44. Jefferson Caffery (Special Advisor to the Legation in San Salvador) to Department, December 22, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 26, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Curtis to Department, December 11, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
45. Caffery to Department, December 23, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Caffery to Department, December 19, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
46. Caffery to Department, December 22, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Caffery to Department, December 30, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
47. Caffery to Department, December 22, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
48. Caffery to Department, December 23, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
49. 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, "Adventures", Caffery Papers, box 69-b.
50. Caffery to Department, December 30, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800.
51. Caffery to Department, December 30, 1931, PRES, volume 111, class 800; Caffery to Department, January 1, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.
52. Robbins to Department, March 21, 1931, PRES, volume 112, class 800. Also consult literature below.
53. The classic account is Anderson, *Matanza*. Valuable additions have been made in: Paige, *Coffee and Power*, 105–122; Lindo-Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, Chap. 1; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 209–238; Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 24–31; Erik Ching, Carlos Gregorio López Bernal, and Virginia Tilley, *Las Masas, la Matanza y el Martinato en El Salvador. Ensayos sobre 1932* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2007). Erik Ching argues against the idea that the Communist Party had a large role to play in the origins of the uprising: Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, Chap. 8, Sect. 2.

54. 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). Anderson, *Matanza*, 174–176 and 186, notes that official documents on the event were all destroyed by the Martínez regime, but, having consulted local sources, believes that 8000 to 10,000 victims should be a reasonably accurate number. Researchers still disagree about the death toll, however: John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade and Thomas W. Walker eds., *Understanding Central America* (4th edition: Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), 47 & 96, estimates 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. Dunkerley, *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.
55. Ralph Lee Woodward, *Central America: A Nation Divided* (Third Edition: New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97.
56. Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 30.
57. McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800; McCafferty to Department, January 20, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B; McCafferty to Department, January 31, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B.
58. On legation sources specifically with regard to the slaughter, consult: McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800 and McCafferty to Department, January 20, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B.
59. McCafferty to Department, despatch 57G, February 5, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800; Lay to Department, March 7, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800. Lay notes that reports about massacres are “communist” propaganda.
60. On Central American and North American perceptions of communism during the early 1930s, see Chap. 2, section “Hoover’s Foreign Service, 1930–1935”.
61. McCafferty to Department, January 20, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B; McCafferty to Department, January 23, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800B; McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800.
62. McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800.
63. McCafferty to Department, February 5, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800.

64. McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800; McCafferty to Department, January 23, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B; Stimson to McCafferty, January 29, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B; Stimson to McCafferty, February 1, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.B.
65. 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.
66. "Wounded animal" quote in Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering*, 66. On the very weak position in which Martínez initially found himself, also consult: Erik K. Ching, "Patronage and Politics under General Maximiliano Martínez, 1931–1939. The Local Roots of Military Authoritarianism in El Salvador", in Aldo Lauria-Santiago and Leigh Binford eds., *Landscapes of Struggle: Politics, Society, and Community in El Salvador* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 50–70, especially 50–55.
67. McCafferty to Department, February 5, 1932, PRES, volume 116, class 800.
68. McCafferty to Department, January 30, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.
69. McCafferty to Department, February 3, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801. McCafferty adds that Martínez "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."
70. McCafferty to Department, March 22, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, June 1, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, July 9, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 800; McCafferty to Department, June 20, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 80; McCafferty to Department, April 21, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 800.
71. Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 238–243. A good description of Martínez's success in building a highly effective patronage network from scratch can also be found in: Ching, "Patronage and Politics", 60–69. This argument is expanded in Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, especially Chaps. 7 and 8.
72. McCafferty to Department, April 16, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.
73. McCafferty to Charles C. Eberhardt (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica), May 15, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; William Castle (Acting Secretary of State) to McCafferty, May 6, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.

74. McCafferty to Department, June 8, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; Stimson to the U.S. Legations in Central America, June 2, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, June 10, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, June 13, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; McCafferty to Department, May 26, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801; Francis White (Assistant Secretary of State) to McCafferty, June 14, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.
75. Schmitz, *‘Thank God’*, 57.
76. 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.” LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 75. Phillip Dur argues 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.” 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 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.” 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.
77. Schmitz, *‘Thank God’*, 57–72.
78. White to McCafferty, June 14, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.
79. McCafferty to Department, January 31, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800; McCafferty to Department, October 20, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800; McCafferty to Department, November 4, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800.
80. McCafferty to Department, June 1, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800 and McCafferty to Department, July 1, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800.
81. McCafferty to Department, September 26, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.
82. 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, PRGU, volume 286, class 800; Lay to Department, May 5, 1932, PRHO, volume 188, class 800. Additionally, the rise to power of a strong military leader in El Salvador disturbed the

- fragile balance of power in Central America. Fearing Martínez's ambitions, Ubico seems to have made plans to send arms to Nicaragua and to seek a rapprochement to Mexico at the possible expense of U.S. influence in Guatemala: G.K. Donald (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala) to Department, June 21, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800; McCafferty to Department, June 30, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800; Whitehouse to Department, October 7, 1932; PRES, volume 117, class 800; Whitehouse to Department, December 8, 1932, PRES, volume 117, class 800.
83. Donald to Department, June 20, 1932, PRES, volume 118, class 801.
 84. McCafferty to Department, October 20, 1933, PRES, volume 122, class 800; Higgins to Department, July 6, 1933, PRES, volume 123, class 800; Higgins to Department, July 7, 1933, PRES, volume 123, class 800; Higgins to Department, September 9, 1933, PRES, volume 123, class 800; Higgins to Department, PRES, volume 123, class 800.S.
 85. Leo Sack (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica) to Department, January 1, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, January 31, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710; 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.
 86. 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.
 87. Lawton to Department, January 15, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; William Phillips (Acting Secretary of State) to McCafferty, January 17, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Lawton to Department, January 17, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Lane to Department, January 25, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Hull to McCafferty, January 26, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Hull to McCafferty, January 26, PRES, volume 130, class 801; Division of Current Information, Memorandum of Press Conference, Friday, January 26, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 801.
 88. Lane to Department, January 26, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710; Edward Lawton (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Guatemala) to Department, January 27, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710.
 89. Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 96.

90. Matthew Hanna (U.S. Minister to Guatemala) to Department, March 16, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710.
91. Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, January 31, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710; Hanna to Department, March 17, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710. In lieu of Department instructions on this subject, Hanna did add that “the idea was a purely personal one.”
92. Hanna to Department, April 14, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 710.
93. Grieb, “The Rise of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez”, 172.

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Continuismo: The Good Neighbor and Non-interference, 1934–1936

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

Sacasa had been elected to office in 1932, around the same time as Ubico, Carías, and Araujo. While Ubico and Carías are generally mentioned in the same breath with Martínez and Somoza and Caribbean dictators such as Trujillo, the U.S. legations and the State Department initially saw them as elected heads of state and part of a trend toward stable constitutional rule that also included Sacasa and Araujo. Naturally, the U.S. role in the election of Sacasa was larger, and certainly more evident, than in the contemporary elections in neighboring countries. U.S. Marines had occupied Nicaragua since 1928 and 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 of one of the sister republics. 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 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 U.S. diplomats in Latin America would have to refrain from any action that could be seen as an attempt to influence local politics, even if it was to support constitutionalism. 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. Anastasio Somoza, the chief of the Marine-trained *Guardia Nacional* that was supposed to safeguard constitutional government in Nicaragua, remorselessly pursued the presidency. 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.³ Minister Lane himself was certainly not deaf 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 U.S. 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 new reality in Central America: After many years of U.S. interference in favor of elections and constitutionalism, force was to be the new kingmaker of Central America.

U.S. policy toward the rise of Somoza is often studied in isolation. Thus, Andrew Crawley meticulously recounts how the Good Neighbor policy was applied in Nicaragua: Between 1934 and 1935, Minister Lane tried to obstruct Somoza’s rise to power by repeatedly reminding the general of the U.S. policy of non-recognition of illegal governments. While the Department initially tolerated Lane’s informal efforts to discourage Somoza, it absolutely prohibited public statements of that nature. Only by 1936 did the Department instruct Lane to also forego his behind-the-scenes diplomacy and to remain absolutely neutral in Nicaraguan politics. Crawley insists that the Department’s non-interference policy should not be taken as implicit support for Somoza’s seizure of power. Rather, Washington refused to formulate a specific policy for Nicaragua that might clash with its hemispheric policy of non-intervention—which was the backbone to the Good Neighbor policy. However, both earlier and later studies of U.S. diplomacy in Central America present Washington’s silence on Somoza’s coup as representative for a cynical policy of relying on local dictators to maintain stability in the region.⁵

As this chapter will show, our understanding of the development of the non-interference, and the way in which it coincided with the rise of dictatorship in Central America, cannot be complete when solely based on the case of Nicaragua. In developing a more stringent policy of non-interference, the Department did not respond to developments in Central American politics *per se*—more specifically, the process whereby Ubico, Cárías, and eventually Martínez continued themselves in office beyond their legal terms—but rather to the insistence of its envoys that U.S. diplomats should play a positive role in local politics through informal advice. Thus, Minister Lane’s efforts to discourage Somoza were not a unique threat to the Department’s policy of non-interference: by the time that the former came to power, Washington had already reversed or prevented similar interference by its officers in neighboring republics.

U.S. ministers were caught between the Department’s increasing insistence on non-interference and what they assumed to be an undesirable

trend away from constitutional government in Central America. Beginning with Ubico, all the Central American presidents had themselves “reelected” after 1935, despite constitutional limitations on presidential terms in all of these republics, a process known as *continuismo*. U.S. diplomats regretted that they could not play their traditional roles as guardians of good government in Central America. But while it was eventually overruled by the Department, the Foreign Service’s preference for constitutional government under U.S. tutelage remained. It allowed General Martínez of El Salvador to rehabilitate his image by convincing Minister Corrigan that he, Martínez, was the standard bearer of constitutionalism and honesty in Central America. It would feed U.S. suspicions of fascist influences in Central American governments after the *continuismo* campaigns. And it would return more forcefully in the policy regarding dictatorships and disreputable governments after World War II.

NON-INTERVENTION AND *CONTINUISMO* IN GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS

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 of the hemisphere—which led to the negotiation of several new trade treaties. After 1936, however, the president himself began to take the lead in Latin American policy. He attempted 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 U.S. 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, such public diplomacy could easily have come to naught if Washington's lofty words were not somehow backed up by deeds—or rather, the lack thereof.

That is why, regardless of the great variety of initiatives that made up the Good Neighbor, the non-intervention principle 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. Nicaragua continued to be occupied and the navy was deployed when U.S. 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 non-intervention.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 non-intervention a consistent and unbreakable standard. In terms of high diplomacy, that job was completed by 1936. Already at the Pan-American Conference at Montevideo in 1933, Secretary Hull promised that the United States would abide by the non-intervention principle. However, the language of that statement was vague on the issue of protecting U.S. 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.⁷

There was still the issue of practice. Many North Americans considered intervention in the “backward” states of Latin America quite appropriate, especially when it was dressed up in the language of a civilizing or democratizing mission. 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 U.S. legations and consulates in the region had become a matter of course, not to be given much thought to.⁸ Thus, there was a very real risk that everything the State Department had tried to accomplish at Pan-American conferences would be undone by officers in the field who still believed that they should play a role in local politics. 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 informal interference. This job the State Department took upon itself during the *continuismo* campaign, but only after considerable delay and confusion.

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*, by 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 strife 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. Based on this legal framework, the United States had intervened several times during the 1920s to prevent Central American presidents from clinging to power, most notably in Nicaragua.

At the same time however, an epidemic was developing in the Caribbean and had already swept Cuba and the Dominican Republic, promising to infect Central America next. The name of the new disease was *continuismo*. Russel Fitzgibbon notes that although the precise steps and constitutional processes varied, the general pattern of *continuismo* was “simple and uniform”: “*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 against two consecutive terms in office.”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 with political foresight 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 Edward 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.

By that time, charge of the legation in Guatemala had been transferred from Whitehouse to Matthew Hanna. The latter plays an important role in the historiography of U.S.–Central American relations, because he was 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*.¹¹ 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 that made Somoza the most powerful man—in military terms—of Nicaragua.

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.

It was due to his service in Nicaragua that Hanna was one of the officers in the Foreign Service who was best acquainted with the Good Neighbor policy and its emphasis on non-intervention. 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 essential that U.S. policy in Nicaragua was entirely in agreement with the non-intervention principle around the time of the Montevideo Conference. Marines left the isthmian republic only months before and unless U.S. policy toward that country was beyond reproach, the Latin American 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.¹²

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 1936.¹³ While it was undeniable that Ubico had followed a heavy-handed policy since his election, a State Department information bulletin explained that the president took effective measures to fight the Depression and he freed the Indians from the "system of debt servitude" that tied them to their landlords indefinitely. The general had plenty of enemies and sometimes employed harsh disciplinary actions, but this was mainly in the context of his 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 establishment of a strong and honest government, following a 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 drastic 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.¹⁴

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. On September 12, 1934, the government

dramatically revealed an extensive plot to assassinate 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.¹⁵ Hanna, who was after all a very experienced officer, remained skeptical about the official government position. He remembered that 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."¹⁶

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."¹⁷

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 plans for "reelection" in the Guatemalan exile communities in Costa Rica and New York. However, legation officials from minister down in both Guatemala and Costa Rica believed that the "emigrado politicians" should not be taken too seriously: In Central America, the "outs" were forever "disgruntled and bitter toward the 'ins.'"¹⁸

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 that 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.¹⁹

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.” 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.”²⁰

Hanna’s position is not surprising. As minister to Nicaragua, he had been thoroughly briefed on the non-intervention principle and in that same position he had also witnessed Martínez’s victory over U.S. resistance from close by. Furthermore, no-one inside Guatemala (or, rather, inside the legation’s circle of informants and acquaintances) 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. However, in Hanna’s 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.” By late April, nearly everyone in the legation’s circle of informants accepted Ubico’s continuance in power as a “fait accompli.”²¹

While Hanna came to accept the fact that 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 local citizens that “the end of it all will be a dictatorship and violence to terminate it.”²² 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 wanted 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 catastrophic.”²³

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.²⁴

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. It feared that the latter would denounce the Treaty (which could be done with one year’s notice: exactly in time for the 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.²⁵

Thus, Ubico’s plans 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 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.”²⁶

This telegram was part of 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 for 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.”²⁷

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 was 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 that would be prone to misinterpretation and the eventual result may prove to be “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.”²⁸

Despite his personal reservations, Hanna arranged an audience with Ubico on May 10. At the meeting, Hanna read a statement 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,” Hanna explained to the president, because that was “naturally ... a matter for his own decision.” However, it should be very clear 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.²⁹

Hanna studiously refrained from giving any comment, but in the days following the interview, the foreign minister kept calling on 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.”³⁰

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.³¹ 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 (not those of May 7 in which the

Department expressed its “concern” about *continuismo*) Welles claimed 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 exists, 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 Ubico and his minister of foreign affairs had “gained the impression” that Washington was opposed to the president’s continuance “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.”³²

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.” 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.”³³ The first secretary of legation, Sidney O’Donoghue, took charge of the legation.

O’Donoghue was naturally 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 that would tie the United States to the Treaty of 1923—on the basis of which Ubico’s continuance should have been objected to.³⁴ 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 Department of the outcome of the elections. For all intents and purposes, this was a silent acknowledgement of Ubico's reelection.³⁵

In Honduras, Carías had firmly entrenched himself in power by the middle of the 1930s. The archives of the U.S. legation in Honduras provide only an incomplete picture of the progress that the regime was making along those lines. Historical studies based on local sources, mostly by Honduran historians and mostly comparatively recent, offer a more complete picture of an expanding security apparatus and an opposition that was suppressed or exiled.³⁶ Also, the government and the U.S. legation under Julius Lay had established a cordial relationship and Lay was, on the whole, positive about Carías's achievements. Naturally, Lay assumed that Carías was a constitutionalist and in this sense the job of redefining Carías's rule as a consequence of his *continuismo* campaign fell to a new Minister, Leo Keena, who took over from Lay in July 1935. The fact that in the case of Carías, this redefinition was not accompanied by confusion and searching questions about the United States' role in Central America is 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.³⁷

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 National 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."³⁸ At this early date, Keena still believed that Washington would actively seek a legal transfer of power in 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.” Likewise, Angel Zúñiga Huete who had gracefully accepted his defeat in the 1932 presidential elections and had since focused his attentions on ending Carías’s rule through the use of the ballot box, 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.³⁹

Honduran politicians continued to try to elicit a sympathetic response from the U.S. State Department with their manifestos, expounding the virtues of international treaties and constitutionalism. Before being forced into exile in the 1930s, they had first-hand experience with U.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 chord in Washington, a view that was most likely confirmed by high profile speeches on the sanctity of international obligations by U.S. politicians (Zúñiga Huete regularly refers to such speeches in his writings). In his work on the ideology of the Liberal Party, Sergio Suazo Rubí notes that after 1932 and up to 1944, the leadership of the Liberal Party was remarkably passive. This was partly due to the suppression it faced and partly due to the attitude of its Supreme Council, which rejected the idea of supporting clandestine operations against the Carías government.⁴⁰ It seems possible, therefore, that its attempts to prompt attention and sympathy from the United States constituted at least one of its more important strategies at this point in time. Sadly, it did not recognize that the speeches referred to by Zúñiga Huete 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 1940s was that of non-intervention.

U.S. 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 believe that Central American politicians could truly entertain such idealistic notions, they regarded these writings as the opportunistic propaganda of the political “outs.” 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 summary. However, he too placed little value on them. The minister felt that 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.”⁴¹

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’s 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?” 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.”⁴²

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’s 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* 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 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. As of January

1, 1937, the inauguration date of the president's new term, Carías would be in office for six more years with a rubber-stamp Congress to support him and more direct authority over the country's security forces.⁴³

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 disorder during the elections: he ordered the consulates to compile lists of U.S. citizens in their district, probably to prepare for a possible evacuation.⁴⁴ The elections, however, proceeded smoothly, somewhat to the surprise of the legation and the consulates.⁴⁵ Carías's 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. 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.⁴⁶ Despite continuing rumors of revolt, 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 upheaval that everyone in the capital was expecting.⁴⁷ 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.

The legation could draw 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 rebellion 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 and the modern repression techniques of the government: systematic arrests, wholesale press censorship, a working

agreement with neighboring caudillos, and the airplane.⁴⁸ U.S. guidance to promote stability was no longer necessary: the future of Central America would be determined by force, not by U.S. backed treaties and elections.

CONSTITUTIONALISM IN EL SALVADOR

Obviously, Martínez and the United States 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.⁴⁹

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."⁵⁰

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. 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.⁵¹

Another potential irritant in U.S.–Salvadoran relations was Martínez’s “election” to the presidency in 1934. 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 *reelection* did not apply to him. The only obstacle to Martínez’s 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 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 resigning six months before the end of Araujo’s term and handing the reins of government to his trusted aide and vice-president, General Andrés Ignacio Menéndez. Shortly after Martínez’s inevitable election to the presidency, Menéndez was just as easily reinstated in his old position of vice-president.⁵²

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.⁵³ 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.

After the elections, the government did lift the state of siege, which had been in force, in Corrigan’s words, since the “so-called ‘communitic’ uprising” of 1932. Corrigan believed that 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 Martínez’s election, led Corrigan to conclude that “a trend toward greater liberality” was perceptible in El Salvador.⁵⁴ Erik Ching’s study of the Martínez regime does not mention the “liberalizing” trend that Corrigan thought he could discern. In fact, the general continued to expand his hold on power throughout the 1930s. With regard to the elections, which Corrigan quotes as an example of greater liberality, Ching shows that authoritarian governments in El Salvador had traditionally maintained a

discourse that celebrated democracy while elections were in fact carefully managed. In 1935, for example, the Martínez regime had orchestrated the elections, through force, suppression, and bribery, in order to guarantee high voter turn-out and an almost unanimous outcome. In Salvadoran political culture of the time, according to Ching, the government's ability to stage such an outcome was "a public demonstration of Martínez's power, proof of his capacity to serve as the supreme political boss. The more votes he could generate, the more he proved that superiority."⁵⁵ It is possible that Corrigan took the regime's discourse about democracy at face value. This is especially likely because Corrigan was a political appointee without previous experience in Central America and there are no indications that he maintained any contacts outside of official circles and the wealthier inhabitants of the capital.

However, it appears, based on the general's conversations with Corrigan, that the former was also anxious to improve his image with Washington. His colleagues in neighboring countries provided an excellent opportunity for just that. The *continuismo* campaigns in Guatemala and Honduras—together with 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 (the Honduran Liberal Party, for example) 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.⁵⁶

Corrigan's words may have inspired the Salvadoran president to set up an *anti-continuismo* campaign. Martínez's 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.⁵⁷ In a personal interview with Corrigan in August, Martínez further expressed his opposition to changes in the Guatemalan constitution and his fear that Carías's *continuismo* campaign in Honduras and Somoza's ambition for the presidency of Nicaragua

would renew the disturbances that had haunted Central America before the signing of the 1923 Treaty. Martínez claimed that he had sent two personal envoys to Somoza to dissuade the latter from seizing power by force. Underlining the irony of the new situation, the Salvadoran underminister 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.⁵⁸

The Salvadoran president's lobby for constitutionalism struck a chord with Corrigan, who concluded that "Martínez stands for public order and constitutionality." 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 reinforced Martínez's portrayal of the situation in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. For example, an exiled army general from Guatemala told the U.S. legation that his native country was the scene of wholesale executions and that a revolt against Ubico was eminent. The Honduran General Callejas claimed that civil war in Honduras could only be prevented if the United States told Carías to step down. Former president Sacasa of Nicaragua, who was finally removed from 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.⁵⁹

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 well-being 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 Jiménez, "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 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."⁶⁰

In 1935, Corrigan's ideas were strengthened when the Department sent Arthur Bliss Lane to El 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. 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 "should we feel ... 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." 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. As an indication of the latitude that the State Department permitted its envoys at the time, Sumner Welles had approved the above interpretation of the Good Neighbor policy.⁶¹

Lane was transferred to the Baltic states in 1936, but with Corrigan the Foreign Service in Central America retained an articulate advocate for interference, or, as he might have put it himself, a "responsible" Good Neighbor. As Lane was packing up in Nicaragua, Corrigan reported to the Department that he expected 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 U.S. legations for some guidance and in this light, the minister wrote, 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."⁶² 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 Carias 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.⁶³

By this time, however, Washington's thinking had evolved to its natural conclusion. 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. Bryce Wood shows that Corrigan's reports about the Good Neighbor and local dictatorships had at first been sympathetically received by Sumner Welles, but were then challenged by Laurence Duggan. The ensuing discussion ended in the Department's decision to send out "unprecedented" instructions⁶⁴:

[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.⁶⁵

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 abrogated the 1923 Treaty: first Ubico by continuing himself in office and then Carías and Sacasa by recognizing this step.⁶⁶

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 rebellions. 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 merely a philosophical point: in Honduras at least, a revolt was thought to be brewing, as Minister Keena had reported. 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.⁶⁷

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 rebellions 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. 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.”⁶⁸

“Good soldier” was perhaps a bit modest. Corrigan was hopelessly ambitious. He was not a man to stay put and fight a losing battle for his ideals. Nor was he so principled that he left the Foreign Service in disgust (which is what Arthur Lane did, eventually⁶⁹). 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, Sumner Welles, Cordell Hull, and (why not?) Franklin 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 Corrigan was the best of the political appointees, it was determined that he was most needed in Panama. The doctor left El Salvador in September 1937.⁷⁰

Corrigan never objected to Martínez’s 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 U.S. 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.⁷¹ But Corrigan obsessed over events in neighboring countries. Not until right before 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.”⁷² 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 [Martínez]’ future plans.”⁷³ The inversion of cause and effect in Corrigan’s analysis of Martínez’s 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. Erik Ching notes that Martínez had been positioning himself for reelection in 1939 ever since the elections of 1935.⁷⁴

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 Martínez’s own government, that several sub-secretaries and lower officials resigned to protest the unofficial plans for reelection.⁷⁵

The 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’s 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.” Even if there were some socialists and communists among them

who opposed *continuismo*, the suppression of the 1932 uprising had been so ruthless and complete that this group was no longer a factor in local politics. 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’s excellent administration but valued the “ancient principles” of the constitution.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷ While the “brightest minds” left the government in protest, they were not expected to take their opposition any further.⁷⁸ Moreover, the State Department had become much more careful in keeping its legations out of local politics. A timely telegram instructed the Salvadoran mission that it was to express no opinion whatsoever on the “controversial” reelection of Martínez.⁷⁹

Martínez’s 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.⁸⁰ 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 1945.⁸¹

The end ... almost. In January 1939, four generals of the Salvadoran army approached the secretary of the U.S. legation. How would the United States feel about a coup against Martínez, they wanted to know. The United States had no feelings either of sympathy or lack of sympathy toward such a development, was the (now standard) reply. This pleased the generals.⁸² 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. 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 U.S. 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.⁸³ 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.

DICTATORS RULE THE ISTHMUS

The 1931 coup in El Salvador, followed by the *continuismo* campaigns and ending with Somoza's rise to power consolidated authoritarian rule in every Central American nation except Costa Rica. From the patronizing perspective of early 1930s U.S. diplomats, these events could only be regarded as a string of defeats for U.S. diplomacy. The U.S. conception of "progress" in Central America had imagined constitutional stability under the watchful eyes of U.S. legations. 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. Treaties, constitutions, and opposition groups were sidelined and U.S. diplomats lost the ability to play different groups against each other or to arbitrate elections. Martínez, Ubico, and Carías's ability to stay in power in spite of U.S. reservation or even resistance, demonstrates that they were the actors, not those acted upon.

Caught between an increasingly passive State Department and dynamic dictatorial states, the Foreign Service 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 rebellion if it was not for U.S. arbitration, accounts for the fear expressed by the legations of Guatemala and Tegucigalpa that *continuismo* would lead to revolt. 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 U.S. pressure while Martínez had held out and eventually triumphed over it. However, neither had they established stable or friendly relations with the U.S. Rather, the Department merely tolerated the establishment of dictatorships as a trade-off for the non-intervention policy. Following the *continuismo* campaigns the U.S. legations actually began to express concern about many “fascist” tendencies of Ubico, Carías, and Martínez. It must have been clear to the latter that if they meant to regain the U.S. sympathy they had enjoyed after their election, they had to come up with new ways to make themselves useful to the United States.

NOTES

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. This Departmental report is discussed more elaborately in Chap. 3, section “Elections”. The report also shows that Ubico and Carías were considered part of the same trend in their countries. Araujo had been removed from office by this time and the Martínez government was regarded as an exception to the trend toward electoral politics in Central America.
3. This general overview is based on Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, Clark, *The United States and Somoza*, and Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1939–1956* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
4. Lane to Beaulac, July 27, 1925, Lane Papers, box 61, folder 1102.
5. Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, Chap. 2. LaFeber, Schoultz, Schmitz, and McPherson all make special mention of Somoza in their arguments about the Good Neighbor and dictatorship. See Chap. 1, n. 5 and n. 8.
6. Wood, *The Making*, 123–135; Gilderhus, *Second Century*, Chap. 3, especially page 73; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 293–296; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 3–29; McPherson, “Herbert Hoover”.
7. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 78; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 304–305.
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. Gordon Connell-Smith argues that “the Marines had been used so

- 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: Heinemann Educational, 1974), 146–147.
9. Russel H. Fitzgibbon, "Continuismo: The search for political longevity", in Hugh M. Hamill ed., *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 210–217, there 211.
 10. Edward P. Lawton (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Guatemala) to the Acting Secretary of State, January 19, 1934, *FRUS 1934, volume V: The American Republics*, 241–243.
 11. A good discussion on Hanna's portrayal in the historiography is in Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 19–22.
 12. Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 19–22.
 13. Hanna to Department, October 30, 1934, M1280, roll 1, Political Affairs 1174; Hanna to Ubico, February 13, 1934, PRGU, volume 311, class 800.1; Hanna to Department, February 15, 1935, PRGU, volume 311, class 800.1.
 14. Department of State, August 3, 1935, M1280, roll1, Political Affairs 1240.
 15. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*, 117–118.
 16. Hanna to Department, September 14, 1934, M1280, roll 1, 1151.
 17. Hanna to Department, February 28, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1185.
 18. Leo Sack (U.S. Minister to Costa Rica) to Hanna, August 8, 1933, M1280, roll1, 1122; Eberhardt to Department, August 8, 1933, M1280, roll 1, 1122; Lawton to Department, n.d. (March, 1933), M1280, roll 1, 1134; Edward G. Trueblood (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Costa Rica), April 26, 1934, M1280, roll 1, 1139; Hanna to Department, May 17, 1934, M1280, roll 1, 1141.
 19. Grieb, "Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power".
 20. Hanna to Department, April 6, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1191; Hanna to Department, April 10, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1192; Hanna to Department, April 16, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1197.
 21. Hanna to Department, April 30, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1202; Hanna to Department, May 3, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1204; Hanna to Department, April 13, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1195; Hanna to Department, May 3, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1204; Hanna to Department, April 30, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1202.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. Hanna to Wilson, May 18, 1935, PRGU, volume 311, class 801.1.
 24. Hanna to Department, 607, April 16, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1197.
 25. Division of Latin American Affairs to Wilson, April 16, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1193.

26. Hull to Hanna, telegram 15, May 7, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1201.
27. Hull to Hanna, telegram 11, April 30, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1197.
28. Hanna to Department, May 2, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1199; Hanna to Department, May 3, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1203.
29. Hanna, untitled memorandum, May 10, 1935, PRGU, volume 311, class 801.1.
30. Ibid.; Hanna to Wilson, May 18, 1935, PRGU, volume 311, class 801.1; Hanna, untitled memorandum, May 13, 1935, PRGU, volume 311, class 801.1.
31. Grieb, "Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power".
32. Welles to Hanna, May 24, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 1197.
33. Hanna to Department, June 3, 1935, M1280, roll 1, 814.00/1223. Emphasis in the original. Leave of Absence Card for 1935, January 1, 1936, PRGU, box 1, class 123. After a very brief return to his post, Hanna died suddenly in February 1936.
34. Beaulac to Wilson, October 1, 1935, M1280, roll 2, 814.00/1254; Phillips to Lane, July 17, 1935, M1280, roll 2, 814.00/1255; Lane to Department, September 20, 1935, M1280, roll 2, 814.00/1256; Lane to Department, September 27, 1935, M1280, roll 2, 814.00/1257.
35. Hull to Hanna, September 10, 1935, M1280, roll 2, 1250.
36. Aside from the work of Mario Argueta and Thomas Dodd, which has already been cited several times, valuable studies on this topic that are based on Honduran sources include: Sergio Suazo Rubí, *Auge y Crisis Ideológica del Partido Liberal* (Tegucigalpa, 1994), 215–235 and 279–297; Inestroza, *Policía Nacional*, 181–242; Ibid., *Documentos Clasificados*.
37. O'Donoghue to Keena, September 30, 1935, PRHO, volume 212, class 800; Keena to Department, November 23, 1935, PRHO, volume 212, class 800.
38. Keena to Department, August 22, 1935, PRHO, volume 212, class 800.
39. Vinancio Callejas (Honduran Opposition Leader) to Keena, December 11, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800; Dodd, *Carías*, 192; Keena to Department, August 17, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
40. Suazo Rubí, *Auge y Crisis*, 221–2 and 279–283.
41. Keena to Department, November 9, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
42. Keena to Department, January 1, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800; Hull to Keena, January 22, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
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44. Keena to the North Coast consulates, January 13, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800; Keena to Department, January 17, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
45. Keena to Department, January 31, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800; Stewart to Keena, January 8 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
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47. Keena to Department, April 17, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800; Keena to Department, September 2, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
48. Hoffman to Department, February 9, 1937, PRHO, box 23, class 800. See previous notes for studies on Carías's repression.
49. See Chap. 2, section "The Roosevelt Appointees".
50. Corrigan to Department, January 12, 1935, PRES, volume 128, class 800.
51. Corrigan to Department, July 9, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800; Corrigan to Department, May 9, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800; Corrigan to Department, July 31, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800.
52. Corrigan to Department, July 9, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800; Corrigan to Department, July 31, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800; Corrigan to Department, September 4, 1934, PRES, volume 128, class 800; Corrigan to Department, June 6, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 800.S; Corrigan to Department, December 5, 1934, PRES, volume 130, class 800.S; Corrigan to Department, February 15, 1935, PRES, Volume 135, class 800; Corrigan to Department, April 12, 1935, PRES, Volume 135, class 800.
53. Beaulac to Wilson, June 29, 1934, Lot Files, Individual Countries, box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1933–1940.
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55. Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, introduction and Chap. 7, section 4, paragraph 1.
56. Corrigan to Department, February 20, 1936, PRES, box 2, class 500.
57. Corrigan to Department, May 10, 1935, PRES, volume 135, class 800; Corrigan to Department, April 30, 1935, PRES, volume 136, class 800.1.
58. Corrigan to Department, August 19, 1935, PRES, volume 136, class 800; Corrigan to Department, October 1, 1935, PRES, volume 136, class 800; Corrigan to Department, January 21, 1936, PRES, box 4, 800.
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64. Wood, *The Making*, 150.
65. Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, April 30, 1936, PRES, box 4, class 800.
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Becoming Benign Dictators: The Good Neighbor and Fascism, 1936–1939

When Corrigan wrote that “dictatorships with their tyrannies, imprisonments, political exiles and political executions are abhorrent to the spirit of America,” he was not voicing an old cliché.¹ 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 U.S. foreign policy and politics would take many twists and turns before the United States got involved in the war against fascism, events around the world during the late 1930s presented the clear and immediate danger of a future conflict with the European dictatorships.

As historian Benjamin Alpers argues, the twenty-first century U.S. notion of dictatorship as the opposite of democracy is comparatively new: “[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.”² 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. Indeed, during the 1920s, U.S. 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-water mark of around 1930, however, the regard for dictatorship in the United States took an ever accelerating plunge.

The catalyst for this development was the increasingly blatant aggression shown by the European dictatorships, primarily Italy and Germany and, to an extent, Soviet Russia. Another development 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. North 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 U.S. image of totalitarianism was shaped by the persecutions, show trials, and international aggression of the European dictatorships.³

It so happened that the Central American *continuismo* campaigns of the second half of the 1930s coincided with these ominous 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, among contemporaries in the U.S. and in Central America, of whether these governments were somehow part of a global trend in favor of fascist dictatorships.

A steadily growing body of literature presents a fairly nuanced picture of the influence that different forms of fascist ideologies and organizations had in Central America during the 1930s, as will also be discussed below. What role this played in the interaction between U.S. and Central American actors is not nearly as clear. Those studies that do explicitly touch upon fascism as a factor in the interaction between Washington and the governments of Central America mainly do so for the purpose of denouncing U.S. support for these dictatorships. They rarely offer analysis of how fascist influences might have been perceived by U.S. observers.⁴ From the perspective of international relations, it was inevitable, as Kenneth Grieb has pointed out with regard to Guatemala, that Central American governments would follow Washington’s lead in its increasingly antagonistic attitude toward the European dictatorships. This could hardly have been otherwise, considering the U.S.’s overwhelming power in the region.⁵ What was not inevitable, was that U.S. diplomats would come to regard the Central American dictatorships specifically as particularly useful allies

in the prosecution of the war. That outcome was a result of the developments described in this chapter.

The term “fascism” and the role that it would play in Central America were contested issues during the latter part of the 1930s. At that point in time, it seemed likely that the dictatorial regimes would be burdened with the label of being fascist sympathizers. Local opposition groups appropriated the term fascism to mark their enemies, the caudillos. U.S. observers, most notably the press, but also the local legations and the State Department, initially shared the oppositionists’ 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. Rather than standing by as U.S. observers decided whether they were fascist sympathizers or not, Central American governments actively presented themselves as the first line of defense against fascist intrusions in the hemisphere. It is important to keep in mind, at this point, that because of Washington’s attention for Europe and the suppression of dissent in Central America, the relationship between the United States and local governments was reduced almost entirely to the personal bonds between U.S. ministers and the presidents of those republics, as was explained in Chap. 2. The almost exclusive access that men like Ubico had to the legations certainly contributed to their success, which opened the door *not just* to the close collaboration that characterized U.S. relations with the isthmian countries during World War II (which would have occurred regardless of the nature of local governments), but to their particular regimes being regarded as benign and even useful dictatorships while opposition movements were seen as potential footholds for fascist influence.

APPROPRIATING FASCISM

When studying U.S. legations’ archives, it is not always easy to ascertain whether presumably powerful U.S. diplomats were manipulating Central American actors, or the other way around. 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 years preceding U.S. involvement in World War II, years that involved 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 war represent an

excellent opportunity to show that Central Americans were not passive recipients of labels such as “Good Neighbor” or “fascist.” Those terms were actively claimed and contested.

Probably the first to enter the fray were the Central American opposition groups. 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 officers who were members of opposition parties; conscientious objectors to the *continuismo* campaigns who had been high- or mid-level employees of government or public institutions; and Salvadoran *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.⁶

Those who reached the comparative safety of the more liberal states surrounding Central America were the lucky ones: oppositionists who ended up in one of the other dictatorial countries of the Isthmus often found themselves being used to settle scores. If Ubico was on bad terms with Martínez, he might help the latter’s opponents. If not, he was liable to solicit his neighbor’s goodwill 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,” the legation reported almost ten years later. In August 1937, a prominent Honduran rebel leader was captured in Guatemala and shot “while attempting to escape.”⁷

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 stream 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 at Franklin Roosevelt personally. Despite Washington’s emphasis on non-interference over the past years, the idea that the United States could make and break governments appears to have been very much alive.

During the early 1930s, opposition letters addressed to the North 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 earlier U.S. administrations, it is not surprising that oppositionists expected this theme to strike a chord with the North Americans. For example, Angel Zúñiga Huete, who voluntarily left Honduras after Carías's election victory of 1932, had lived through several episodes of U.S. intervention in favor of the 1923 Treaty. During Carías's *continuismo* campaign, he sent lengthy and eloquent letters to the State Department on the constitutional articles that were being crushed in his homeland. His personal history with U.S. intervention did not prepare him for the new age of non-interference that was taking shape. For years, Zúñiga Huete wrote about treaties and laws that had long been abandoned both in Washington and in Tegucigalpa.⁸

With the rise of fascism in Europe however, the theme of democracy started to play an ever increasing role in U.S. newspapers and in the speeches of U.S. statesmen. In this pro-democratic and anti-fascist rhetoric, the Central American opposition movements found a new language to translate their concerns about local matters to Washington. 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.

Despite its leader's former stress on treaties and laws, the Honduran Liberal Party became particularly adept at appropriating the language of democracy versus fascism to translate its concern about Carías's 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." Central American opposition groups 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 no means of reconciling your noble[,] straightforward Declarations, with an Act of Recognition of that anti-democratic, illegal regime ...

The entreaties of men like Zúñiga Huete and Callejas 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 U.S. press.⁹

Grieb identifies a “myth” of a “Central American dictator’s league” in the U.S. 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 El Salvador’s early recognition of Franco’s regime and their subsequent retirement from the League of Nations.¹⁰

In fact, Grieb writes, 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 desperate 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, consistent cooperation between the dictators was never realized.¹¹

The New York Times, however, reported that the four Central American dictators had “joined in a protective alliance against political enemies.” The recent *continuismo* campaigns figured prominently in the newspaper’s 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 [Ubico and Carías] already are serving their second terms in office ... and a third [Martínez] is considering the same action. This is unprecedented in this part of the world, where United States influence has been great.” Since it was unthinkable, from the contemporary North American perspective, 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 New York 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.¹²

Throughout the years 1936 to 1937, the relationship between Central American dictatorship and fascism was also hotly debated at the U.S. 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 starting with the *continuismo* campaign, U.S. 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 characterize his administration. These were not value-neutral terms. While a “strong,” “firm,” or even “heavy-handed” government was deemed a 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.¹³

Earlier in the decade, Ubico had been on close personal terms with Minister Whitehouse, but after 1934, the caudillo became increasingly secretive and withdrawn. The U.S. 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.”¹⁴ 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 during this period 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 North 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.”¹⁵

While Ubico seemed to distance himself from the U.S. 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. 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 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.”¹⁶

Likewise, Carias destroyed the constitution of Honduras just as Franco set up his fascist government in Spain. It proved tempting for Minister Leo 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 Fascist 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.”¹⁷

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 U.S. 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.¹⁸

In August 1938, first secretary William Cramp wrote several damning reports on the Carías administration because of its uncompromising position in the Honduran-Nicaraguan boundary dispute. The administration, according to Cramp, had “fallen into such provincialism and corruption as might have been expected at the beginning of the century, but even for Central America is now somewhat unusual.” 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.”¹⁹ Although Cramp aimed most of his antagonism at Carías’s 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.²⁰

Up to about November 1939, Erwin reported with some regularity on the government’s laxness, corruption, provincialism, and dictatorial practices.²¹ So when Carías’s 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 indignation of the U.S. minister. Drawing implicit comparisons with the European dictatorships, Erwin reported to the Department that public support for Carías’s *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.”²²

Martínez was much more strongly and explicitly associated with fascism, most notably among observers outside of El Salvador. 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.” Such assertions were based on, or at least confirmed by, the U.S. press, Salvadoran opposition groups, and actions by the Salvadoran government—particularly its early recognition of Franco’s rebel government.²³

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 to Des Portes that the Salvadoran *continuismo* campaign provided “further evidence that Martínez has turned Fascist in the letter and the spirit,” a view that the minister seemed to have subscribed to. Meanwhile, the U.S. military attachés to Central America had been worried for some time about El Salvador’s purchase of Italian military airplanes and in 1939 captain F.M. Lamson-Scribner noted that, besides being morally questionable, Martínez’s *continuismo* probably enjoyed active support from local Nazis.²⁴

The U.S. legation in El Salvador was surprisingly philosophical about Martínez’s supposedly fascist inclinations, although there were a few acute “black scares” at the legation throughout the years. In August 1938, for example, the North Americans were anxious about the inclusion of an Italian national in Martínez’s retinue during a campaign trip. It was soon determined, however, that the Italian in question had imposed himself on some officials in Martínez’s following and had no personal connections to the president. 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 Robert 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.²⁵ Why this was so will be discussed in the following section.

Reports about fascist influences in the highest echelons of foreign governments caused anxiety in the State Department. The example of the Spanish Civil War in particular, raised concerns that a similar ideological conflict might erupt between the Central American dictators and Mexico, their leftist neighbor to the north. 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 emanating from Mexico. The matter was serious because inter-American solidarity

under U.S. leadership was high on the list of foreign policy objectives. Attempts to temper Central American fears about Mexico, however, had come to naught. The Mexican government, Duggan wrote, was probably blissfully unaware of the fact 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.”²⁶

Were the Central American dictators fascists? That question does not lend itself to straightforward answers. Certainly, the parallels between European fascism and Central American dictatorship that were pointed out by oppositionists, journalists, and U.S. diplomats reveal partial truths. Both were authoritarian, state-centered, and single party political systems that employed the secret service and the army to enforce their rule. Recent research also shows that the military establishments nurtured under the regimes of Ubico, Carías, Martínez, and Somoza adopted and adapted a language of violence and rejection of politics akin to that found in fascist states such as Italy. 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.²⁷

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 a bigger stake in the Central American economies—sometimes at the expense of the United States. Assisting the German effort was the fact that some Central American nations, Guatemala foremost among them, had sizable German colonies and a local Nazi Party organization. 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 had some appeal 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, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were among the first nations to extend diplomatic recognition to Franco’s rebel government.²⁸

It should not be surprising, then, that some historians have described the isthmian dictators as active supporters of fascism. Perhaps most recently, John Bratzel notes that Ubico and Martínez regarded fascism as a positive alternative political system, a claim supported in several earlier historical studies. Robert Elam, in a study on the Central American military, claims 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. In a historical study on El Salvador, James Dunkerley takes the claim that Central American dictators sympathized with fascism furthest by stating that Martínez was an “unashamed admirer of Hitler and Mussolini.”²⁹

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 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 U.S. press and the Central American opposition would have answered both of these questions with a solid “yes.” Even the U.S. Foreign Service entertained suspicions in this same direction. But do these suspicions reflect reality?

With regard to the first question, several historians have offered some important qualifications of the caudillos’ apparent regard for fascism. Thomas Leonard, one of the foremost experts on U.S.–Central American relations, argues 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 states that North Americans overestimated the prestige of fascism in that nation because they “did not consider [Martínez’s] Fascist sympathies within the context of Salvadoran nationalism or as a response to previous U.S. interference in El Salvador’s domestic affairs.”³⁰ 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.

Kenneth J. Grieb and Thomas J. Dodd, biographers of Jorge Ubico and Tiburcio Carías, respectively, expand that argument. Dodd argues that even though the political philosophers in Carías’s 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 that were more evidently relevant to the Honduran experience. Carías’s 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’s historical experience with the failure of limited democratic experiments during the early depression years. *Personalista* rule was based on the regional examples of Plutarco Elías Calles in México, Ubico in Guatemala, and Martínez in El Salvador, not on Hitler or Mussolini. Even Franklin Roosevelt and Ramsey McDonald were considered more appropriate models of 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’s ideologues, was based on the Mexican revolutionary experience, not on the fascist model.³¹

Grieb adds an analysis of Guatemala’s international perspective and the differences with that of the United States. While the North Americans focused on Hitler, arguably the harshest and most dangerous fascist dictator from a U.S. perspective, Guatemalans focused on Franco and Mussolini. Central 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 comparison, Ubico considered Hitler a “peasant” who was far inferior to his colleagues in southern Europe.³²

Grieb proposes 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 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 with regard to European politics, it was only natural for the isthmic republics to seek the friendship of the European states, leading to the many small signs of friendship described above.³³

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 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.³⁴ And considering the overwhelming superiority of U.S. power in the region, it was not long before the caudillos chose to play along with Washington in their international relations. They would have to convince the North Americans of their sincerity, however.

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 German and Italian nationals there. The Central American presidents, meanwhile, assaulted the legations with signs of goodwill in a purposeful attempt to convince the North Americans that they were not fascist stooges. In the case of Guatemala, for example, Des Portes eventually came to consider Ubico as an important bulwark against fascism and a staunch friend of the United States. Ubico's personal diplomacy combined with his and Des Portes's shared fear, fortified by the State Department, of "foreign" ideologies characterized the new relationship.

It appears likely that Ubico took the first steps, toward the end of 1937, to regain the affection of the U.S. legation. With the start of a new round of personal diplomacy the general may have wanted to break his

increasingly isolated position. In his classical account of Ubico's government, Grieb suggests that Ubico was very sensitive to the powerful position of the United States. The general adopted a "stridently pro-American stance" and courted Washington policymakers "actively by identifying his interests with theirs."³⁵ Thus, 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. In November, the Nicaraguan envoy to Guatemala, who was said to be on good terms with Ubico, informed Des Portes that Ubico had definitely changed his mind about Italy and Germany and that he had decided to support the United States instead. Such signals gave Des Portes the impression that Ubico now planned to follow U.S. 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 ... Whether or not such 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."³⁶

Des Portes's 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.³⁷ 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 North 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 North Americans during an adventurous ride over the countryside, that plan worked splendidly.

Des Portes's official report on the inspection tour suggests that it was set up more like a short vacation than a business trip. All the officers of the U.S. legation, including their wives and children, were invited for the

excursion. They were treated to a visit of the *Lago de Atitlán*, a volcanic lake said to be one of the most beautiful in the world, and they 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. If the issue at hand involved the local authorities, Ubico often decided on the matter in favor of the Indian petitioner. According to Des Portes, this practice made the president very popular among the rural populations, especially because previous governments had all but ignored them.

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's eyes to the reverential regard that 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 exploitation and political oppression under which they had labored for many, many years."³⁸

While the president's inspection trips and "social justice demagoguery" may account for his real or staged popularity among some indigenous communities, 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 that 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. While Ubico's manipulation of the triangular relationship between the state, the landed class, and the indigenous population was specific to his regime, the disregard that it reveals toward the interests of Indian communities was representative of a racial hierarchy that had dominated Guatemalan politics since independence.³⁹ This is not the side of the regime that Des Portes got to see during the trip—or, if he did get to see it, did not consider it noteworthy. As far as the minister was concerned,

the Indians' "gratitude and loyalty [to Ubico] were patently evident." Des Portes may have 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.⁴⁰ 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 North 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." The State Department was greatly relieved that Ubico was finally warming up to the U.S. minister again. After some years during 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."⁴¹

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 they had ever been.⁴² 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."⁴³

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's improved relations with Ubico, this minor personal triumph on the minister's side was buried beneath 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 prompt diplomatic statements in support of these policies on a very regular basis.⁴⁴ 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 U.S. politics and public opinion remained divided on the nature of the threat posed by European fascism, Minister Des Portes in particular and the U.S. diplomatic service more generally were early converts to the idea that the Americas were threatened by Japanese imperialism and German Nazism.⁴⁵ Already in 1937, Des Portes wrote a report on alleged Japanese designs on Lower California (Mexico). Throughout the following years, Des Portes's 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 on 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.⁴⁶

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 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 a U.S. 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. Some months later, the president himself lectured Des Portes on the dangers of communistic labor demands on U.S. industry. If he were president of the United States, the general asserted, he would end labor disputes in five minutes. 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."⁴⁷

To the legation staff, Ubico's "distrust of genuinely democratic Government" and his tendency to "profoundly confuse democracy and Communism" were supremely frustrating. 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 oppressive actions. 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.⁴⁸

Roughly toward the end of 1938, Ubico did exchange his anti-communist rhetoric for the anti-fascist kind. Whether it was his developing working relationship with Minister Des Portes; signals from the U.S. government; a concern for his image in the U.S. press; or genuine irritation over the behavior of some Nazi Party members in Guatemala cannot be ascertained. Many of the issues that preoccupied the general remained the same, but they 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 U.S. weapons if it was to play a useful role in any potential conflict. The legation was not unaware of Ubico's manipulation of these issues, but was satisfied that the general no longer underestimated the dangers of fascism.⁴⁹

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 U.S. legation, 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 cabinet ministers Carlos Salazar, Roderico Anzueto, and José Gonzáles Campo were fascist sympathizers. Furthermore, Des Portes reported, there were many disgruntled army officers who would like to see a regime change for "selfish or ulterior motives" and they were liable to seek an alliance of convenience with Nazi agents in the German colony.⁵⁰

The interesting effect of this shift of the legation's suspicions from Ubico to his subordinates is that it inflated the importance that the North 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." The danger brought Des Portes closer to 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 and his recognition of the fascist specter were. And as long as other military leaders were under suspicion for fascist inclinations, it was vitally important, in Des Portes's view, that the president was secure. Even the importance of a non-interference policy was only relative when compared to the fascist danger, as is evident from Des Portes's inclination to warn Ubico about Anzueto's supposed skullduggery. From late 1938 to the end of his term, 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.”⁵¹ Having been suspected of fascist sympathies in the past, Ubico had now established himself personally as a Good Neighbor in the face of the international threat of fascism.

The patterns that can be observed in Guatemala are also recognizable in Honduras, where Carías geared his policy toward that of the United States while he branded oppositionists as fascist sympathizers. Shortly after the 1937 confirmation of Carías’s 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. 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 that were practically copies of U.S. texts.⁵² When the United States edged toward a more pro-Allied policy, Honduras dutifully followed suit: in April 1939, Carías issued a decree that prohibited foreigners from engaging in political actions connected to their home country (the decree was clearly aimed at fascist and Nazi organizations) and in May 1940 it protested Germany’s invasion of Holland and Belgium. Before long, the legation admitted that Carías was very anti-German and, given his track record, would probably have his government follow the United States into war—if it came to that.⁵³

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 lose by following U.S. 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.⁵⁴ 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’s quick cooperation on European matters overshadowed his intransigence on local issues that truly mattered to him, such as the boundary dispute with Nicaragua—an issue that was eventually dropped from Washington’s list of priorities anyway.⁵⁵

Confronted on one side with a very demanding State Department and on the other by a regime that was extremely helpful, Erwin had every incentive to seek a working relationship with the Carías administration. Several weeks after the completion of the *continuismo* campaign, Erwin joined a diplomatic delegation that was assembled 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 than was the case before it was consummated.”⁵⁶ The State Department showed no interest in the event.

Legation reports on the successful *continuismo* campaign were among the last in-depth reports on the local political scene as such before the war. The State Department’s demands for reports on the activities of 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 United States 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 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 supposed Nazi propaganda emanating, it said, from the German legation in Guatemala.⁵⁷

Recent historical research shows that actual activities by German or Italian agents were insignificant compared to the draconian measures taken against them in Central America.⁵⁸ 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's 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.⁵⁹

As U.S. fear for the so-called "fifth column" developed, Carías's 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 U.S. 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."⁶⁰ Carías's 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 U.S. legation that his opponents could only be the very opposite. The situation that existed only four years earlier—when the Honduran Liberal Party's claim that Carías was a fascist sympathizer received considerate attention from U.S. observers—was now reversed.

Throughout the late 1930s the U.S. legation in San Salvador was considerably less alarmed about Martínez's supposed fascist sympathies than the outside world was. A likely explanation for the legation's peace of mind can be found in a combination of factors. First of all, Martínez kept a low profile while Ubico and Carías were 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 impressed Corrigan. The U.S. minister reserved his diatribes against dictatorship for Salvador's neighbors while Martínez's reputation remained largely untarnished by *continuismo* until about 1938.

Related to the previous point, Martínez's 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 plotting. Add to that mix the traditional rivalry between Guatemala and El Salvador and it becomes clear why Martínez felt, around the middle of the decade, that he was surrounded by hostile states.⁶¹

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that Martínez sought to sell his government to the United States. 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.⁶²

Yet Martínez *was* preparing for his continuance in office at the same time. While Frazer never commented publicly on *continuismo*, interested local observers could easily have gained the impression that the U.S. legation approved of it. Off the record, the minister regarded Martínez’s “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 form.” 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.”⁶³

TRADITIONAL DICTATORSHIP VERSUS FASCISM

Initial concerns in Washington about the fascist inclinations of the Southern neighbors had abated by the time the war broke out in Europe when policymakers had concluded that theirs was a familiar, non-threatening, traditional sort of dictatorship. The fact that Departmental studies on this matter leaned heavily on reports from the field shows that this understanding was built from the ground up and originated in the caudillos' goodwill campaigns and their personal relations with local ministers. One such study 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."

In Central America, the Department argued, there was reason to remain alert because "Nazism 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 Washington, however, is evident from the Department's assertion that: "*Even* such a self-admitted dictator as President Ubico of Guatemala has solemnly assured U.S. 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 [*sic.*] as this country does not swing to Communism."⁶⁴

The legations in Central America were more enthusiastic by this time. As the United States moved ever closer to involvement in the European war, U.S. ministers started to develop 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 U.S. 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 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. As a result, the regimes of Ubico, Carías, and Martínez came to be associated, for the first time since they had come to power, with the goals of the Good Neighbor. That development was completed during World War II.

NOTES

1. See Chap. 4, section "Constitutionalism in El Salvador".
2. Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1–2.
3. Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory. Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1973); Alpers, *Dictators*; David F. Schmitz, *United States Foreign Policy toward Fascist Italy, 1920–1940* (PhD Thesis: New Brunswick, 1985).
4. For example: Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 33. Also see n. 27–35 below.
5. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*, 248–251. See below for further discussion.
6. At the time, U.S. legations in Central America and Mexico kept each other and the Department informed about important activities of exiled oppositionists. For example: Harold A. Collins (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Costa Rica) to Department, February 5, 1937, PRHO, box 23, class 800. For historians, another source on the activity of these exiled communities, as well as collaboration between the caudillos to keep an eye on them, would be the published records of Carías's secret police: Inestroza, *Documentos Clasificados*, especially Chap. 2.
7. Erwin to Department, August 19, 1941, PRHO, box 68, class 800.B; Cramp to Department, August 9, 1937, PRHO, box 23, class 800.
8. Argueta, *Carías*, 295–299.
9. El Comité Central del Partido Liberal Hondureño to Erwin, July 4, 1938 enclosed in: Erwin to Department, July 12, 1938, PRHO, box 35, class 800; Venancio Callejas to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 30, 1936 enclosed in Callejas to Keena, December 11, 1936, PRHO, box 8, volume IX, class 800; Kenneth J. Grieb, "The Myth of a Central American Dictator's League", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 10:2 (November, 1978), 329–345.
10. Grieb, "The Myth", 329 and 330.
11. *Ibid.*
12. "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, 1939), 1; "Pact Stirs Central America", *NYT* (November 14, 1937), 68. The articles of July 20 and November 14

are also mentioned in Grieb, “The Myth”. Reiner Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich und Lateinamerika. Die Deutsche Politik gegenüber Süd- und Mittelamerika, 1939–1942* (PhD Thesis: Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977), 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.

13. Des Portes to Department, June 9, 1937, National Archives Microfilm Publication, M1280, roll 4, Jorge Ubico: 652–658; Des Portes to Department, August 30, 1937, M1289, roll 2, Political Affairs: 1308; Des Portes to Welles, July 17, 1937, National Archives of the United States at College Park, MD, Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Legation in Guatemala [PRGU], Confidential Files [CF], box 9, file marked “Des Portes”; Des Portes to Welles, August 6, 1937, PRGU, CF, box 9, file marked “Des Portes”.
14. Unknown author to Des Portes, Memorandum on present conditions in Guatemala, April 24, 1937, PRGU, CF, box 1, class 800.
15. Des Portes to Department, February 2, 1937, PRGU, CF, box 1, class 800.
16. Welles to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, March 7, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02; Des Portes to Department, June 9, 1937, M1280, roll 4, Jorge Ubico: 652–658.
17. Keena to Department, November 13, 1936, PRHO, box 8, class 800.
18. According to Adam Fenner, Carías instigated the boundary dispute “to inspire Honduras nationalism, improve employment opportunities for Hondurans, and rally the domestic opposition to his side.” In the meantime, he “successfully completed an elaborate ruse to make Washington believe that he desired a swift resolution” of the dispute. Adam Fenner, “Puppet Dictator in the Banana Republic? Re-examining Honduran-American Relations in the Era of Tiburcio Carías Andino, 1933–1938”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 25:4 (2014), 613–629, there 620. Considering the criticism from the legation, Carías’s ruse was perhaps not that effective initially, but he would ultimately establish a very satisfactory relation with Erwin. I would suggest that U.S. appreciation for Carías’s government as a *dictatorial* government came much later than Fenner suggests and the president’s manipulation of the fear for fascism was an important cause for that outcome. However, Fenner’s argument that this appreciation was “purposefully earned, not inadvertently won” (618) definitely holds true.
19. Cramp to Department, August 17, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800. Also see Cramp to Department, September 2, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800.
20. Cramp to Department, August 17, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800. 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, September 17, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800.
21. Erwin to Department, November 12, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800; Erwin to Department, November 15, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800; Erwin to Department, December 14, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800; Erwin to Department, December 2, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1939/I, class 500; Unknown author, Memorandum of Conversation with Don Fernando Lardizabal at the American Legation, November 24, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1939/I, class 500; Erwin to Department, May 20, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/II, class 800; Erwin to Department, June 2, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/II, class 800; Erwin to Department, December 7, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/II, class 800.
 22. Erwin to Department, December 18, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/II, class 800.
 23. Des Portes to Department, despatch 371, August 30, 1937, M1289, roll 2, Political Affairs: 1308; Duggan to Welles, March 9, 1937, Lot Files, Records of the Office of American Republic Affairs, its predecessors, and its successors [ARA], entry 211: Memorandums Relating to General Latin American Affairs, January 4, 1937 to December 31, 1947 [entry 211], box 2, folder marked January to June 1937; “Salvadorean” to Walter W. Hoffman (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires a.i. to El Salvador), September 17, 1938, PRES, box 13, volume VI, class 800; Rafael Menendez et al. to Frazer, January 6, 1939, PRES, box 21, volume VII, class 800.
 24. H.H.S. Birch (British Minister to Guatemala) to Des Portes, August 18, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800; Des Portes to Department, August 19, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800; Lt. Col. J.B. Pate (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Secretary of War, March 7, 1938, PRES, box 14, volume VII, class 820.02; Pate to the Secretary of War, March 11, 1938, PRES, box 14, volume VII, class 820.02; Pate to the Secretary of War, March 11, 1938, PRES, box 14, volume VII, class 820.02; Capt. F.M. Lamson-Scribner (U.S. Naval Attaché to Guatemala) to Frazer, January 13, 1938, PRES, CF, box 1; Lamson-Scribner to Frazer, January 20, 1938, PRES CF, box 1.
 25. Hoffman to Department, August 24, 1938, PRES, box 13, volume VI, class 800; Frazer to Department, February 24, 1939, PRES, box 21, volume VII, class 800. However, also note: Hoffman to Department, October 15, 1937, PRES, box 9, volume V, class 700; Frazer to Department, February 9, 1938, PRES, box 13, volume VI, class 800.

26. Duggan to Welles, March 9, 1937, Lot Files, ARA, entry 211, box 2, folder marked January to June 1937.
27. On the Central American military, the glorification of violence, and rejection of politics, consult: Susy Sanchez, "El Golpe de Estado Somocista de 1936: Un Espectáculo Político de Exaltación a la Violencia", *Boletín de la Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica* 49 (April 4, 2009); Robert H. Holden, *Armies without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50–95; Elam, "The Army and Politics in El Salvador, 1840–1927", in Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. eds., *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America* (updated and revised: Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1997), 52–57. On corporatism in the political ideology of the Carías regime, consult: Dodd, *Cariás*, 85–86 and 111–112. On the centrality of racism in Guatemala's political culture, consult: Casaús Arzú, *Linaje y Racismo*.
28. Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich*; Pommerin, "Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland und Lateinamerika, 1933–1945", in Karl Kohut, Dietrich Briesemeister, Gustav Siebenmann eds., *Deutsche in Lateinamerika—Lateinamerika in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 1996), 398–406; Günter Kahle, "Deutsche Landsknechte, Legionäre und Militärinstruktoren in Lateinamerika", in Kohut, *Deutsche in Lateinamerika*, 35–47; Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel, *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*.
29. Leonard and Bratzel, *Latin America*, 9; "Guatemala", in Booth, Wade, and Walker eds., *Understanding Central America*, 115–116; Lindo-Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, 82–86; Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 28; Elam, "El Salvador, 1840–1927", 57; Dunkerley, *The Long War*, 33.
30. Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 109–110.
31. Dodd, *Cariás*, 85–86 and 111–112.
32. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*, 248–249.
33. *Ibid.*, 250–251.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, 71.
36. Des Portes to Department, September 29, 1937, PRGU, box 11, class 710; Des Portes, Memorandum for the files, November 1937, PRGU, CF, box 1, class 820.02; Des Portes to Department, September 29, 1937, PRGU, box 11, class 710.
37. McKinney to Department, January 25, 1938, PRGU, box 17, class 800.1.
38. Des Portes to Department, despatch 512, February 23, 1938, M1280, roll 4, Jorge Ubico: 87.

39. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo*, 35. Ubico's relation with the Indian population was in fact much different from the situation described by Des Portes. Consult: Richard N. Adams, "Ethnic Images and Strategies in 1944", in Carol A. Smith ed., *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 141–162, there 141–142; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, 312–322; Casaús Arzú, *Linaje y Racismo*, especially 133–135.
40. This information comes from letters of Des Portes to his cousin, on his mother's side, Bernard Baruch and quoted in Margaret L. Coit, *Mr. Baruch* (Reprint: Washington, DC, 2000), 400.
41. Des Portes to Department, despatch 512, February 23, 1938, M1280, roll 4, Jorge Ubico: 87; Gerald Drew (Division of American Republic Affairs) to Duggan, untitled memorandum, March 3, 1938, M1280, roll 4, Jorge Ubico: 87.
42. As an illustrative sample, consult: Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 15, 1938, PRGU, box 23, class 800; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, February 27, 1939, PRGU, box 23, class 800.1; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 15, 1939, PRGU, box 23, class 800.1; Des Portes to Department, June 15, 1937, PRGU, CF, box 1, class 710; Des Portes to Department, October 28, 1937, PRGU, CF, box 1, class 800; McKinney, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, December 6, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, September 23, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02; McKinney, Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, December 6, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02.
43. Des Portes to Department, May 15, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800.C.
44. A representative sampling of such instructions: Frazer to Erwin, February 5, 1938, PRHO, box 36, class 820; Welles to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, May 7, 1938, PRHO, box 36, class 820; Hull to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 27, 1939, PRHO, box 49, class 824; Welles to Certain American Diplomatic and Consular Officers in Latin America, July 5, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, class 800; Berle to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, September 20, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 121; Berle to Albert H. Cousins, Jr. (U.S. secretary of legation in Honduras), October 21, 1940, PRHO, box 58, class 820.02.
45. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 91–96.
46. Des Portes to Department, May 15, 1940, PRGU, CF, box 3, class 711.
47. Des Portes to Department, September 24, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800; McKinney, Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, December 6, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02; Des Portes,

- Memorandum of Conversation with President Ubico, September 23, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02.
48. Des Portes to Department, September 24, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800; Des Portes to Department, December 13, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800.B; McKinney to Department, December 13, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02.
 49. John M. Cabot (U.S. secretary of legation in Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, February 5, 1940, PRGU, box 29, class 800.1; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 21, 1940, PRGU, CF, box 3, class 711; Hartwell Johnson (U.S. secretary of legation in Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, August 14, 1941, PRGU, CF, box 4, class 800.1.
 50. McKinney to Department, June 14, 1938, M1280, roll 2, Political Affairs: 1321; McKinney to Department, December 13, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 820.02.
 51. Des Portes to Duggan, July 28, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800.
 52. Erwin to Department, March 29, 1938, PRHO, box 35, class 800; Erwin to Department, March 30, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711; Erwin to Department, November 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, December 15, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 21, 1937, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Welles to Erwin, December 22, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 30, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, January, 29, 1940, PRHO, box 57, class 711.1.
 53. Erwin to Department, June 21, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/II, class 800; Hull to the U.S. Legations in Central America, May 13, 1940, PRHO, box 57, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, November 16, 1938, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1938, class 800; Fred K. Salter (U.S. secretary of legation in Honduras) to Department, October 3, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/I, class 800.
 54. While it doesn't deal with the war years, Fenner, "Puppet Dictator", suggests that Carías had used such tactics to influence the perceptions of Hondurans and U.S. observers during the 1930s.
 55. Erwin to Department, December 21, 1939, PRHO, box 47, volume VII, class 711.1; Salter, untitled memorandum, March 28, 1938, PRHO, box 35, volume VI, class 800; Erwin to Department, December 6, 1938, box 36, volume VII, class 801; Erwin to Department, December 26, 1939, PRHO, box 47, volume VII, class 711.1.
 56. Erwin to Department, December 27, 1940, PRHO, box 57, class 800.1.
 57. On Honduran war measures: Erwin to Department, June 21, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/I, class 800; Erwin to Department, June

- 24, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 1939/I, class 800; Erwin to Department, May 21, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 3, class 820.02; Hull to the U.S. Legations and Embassies in Latin America, June 3, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 711; Erwin, Memorandum of Conversation at the Presidential Palace, June 14, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 711; Unknown author, Memorandum of Staff Conversations between Representatives of the Government of Honduras and the Military and Naval Services of the United States, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 711; Erwin to Department, July 1, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 3, class 820.02. On the legation's perception of *El Cronista*: Salter to Department, October 3, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, class 891.
58. See Chap. 6, section "The Sixth Column".
59. Albert H. Cousins, Jr. (U.S. secretary of legation in Honduras) to Department, March 11, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 1, class 800. Many files in that same folder deal with the supposed connection between the Honduran Liberal Party and German agents. Also see: Erwin to Department, May 31, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 2, class 820.02; RDG, Memorandum, October 21, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 800; Erwin to Department, October 22, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 1, volume 1, class 800. Argueta confirms that Carías justified his suppressive measures by presenting them as measures against totalitarian subversion: Mario Argueta, *La Gran Huelga Bananera. 69 Días que Conmovieron a Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, 1995), 13. At the same time, the published records of Carías's secret police contain no information which suggests that the regime was actually concerned about the link between oppositionists and Nazi or fascist agents: Inestroza, *Documentos Clasificados*.
60. Cousins to Department, March 11, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 1, class 800.
61. Corrigan to Department, October 18, 1935, PRES, volume 136, class 800; Corrigan to Department, August 26, 1936, PRES, box 4, volume 5, 800; Corrigan to Department, September 5, 1936, PRES, box 4, volume 5, 800.
62. Meredith Nicholson (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua) to Hoffman, May 5, 1939, PRES, box 17, volume II, class 123; Frazer to Department, August 7, 1939, PRES, box 17, volume II, class 123; Frazer to Maximiliano H. Martínez (President of El Salvador), April 26, 1939, PRES, box 17, volume II, class 123; Frazer to Department, April, 26, 1939, PRES, box 17, volume II, class 123.
63. Frazer to Department, February 9, 1938, PRES, box 13, volume VI, class 800; Frazer to Department, September 6, 1939, PRES, box 20, volume VI, class 711.
64. Welles to the U.S. Legations and Embassies in Latin America, October 21, 1938, PRHO, box 36, class 820. Emphasis added.

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The Best of Neighbors: The Alliance Against Fascism, 1939–1944

After the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the Central American dictators 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 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.¹

Similarly, the caudillos of the American hemisphere were re-imagined in the United States as staunch, if somewhat eclectic, defenders of democracy. For example, U.S. journalist Hubert Knickerbocker, who visited Honduras in 1939, suggested that Carías’s impressive physique didn’t just make him “the world biggest dictator,” but also “the most formidable

physical obstacle” to totalitarian aggression. Knickerbocker cheerfully noted that Carías was “a third again larger than Stalin, twice the size of Hitler, and would make three of Mussolini.”² As this 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’s 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.

Chapters 6 and 7 address this important development in the context of U.S. diplomacy. After 1939, the Foreign Service established a close working relationship with local dictatorships that was unlike anything that had existed before. The current chapter argues that the two causes for this development were the challenges that were specific to the Foreign Service’s work in Central America—while U.S. military representatives, for example, became skeptical of cooperation with the caudillos—and the active campaigns of Ubico, Carías, and Martínez to promote themselves as staunch allies of the United States. One consequence of this wartime partnership between the Foreign Service and the caudillos was that U.S. diplomats’ attitude toward the dictatorships of Central America, which had been ambiguous before the war, came to include a new conceptual framework for U.S. collaboration with local dictators—specifically from the standpoint of them being dictatorships. However, Chap. 7 will argue that a second consequence was that the alliance with local dictators became problematic in light of the emergence of Central American opposition movements that adopted the U.S. promoted language of the war as one of democracy versus dictatorship. One of the arguments of this book is that these wartime developments play a much more important role in the history of U.S.–Central American relations than is often recognized. Indeed, the war years can be said to constitute a turning point. The development of a close working relationship between the United States and the dictatorships and the development of a progressive alternative to the dictatorships presented U.S. diplomats with two policy alternatives immediately after the war. The way in which diplomats and policymakers dealt with that choice would shape U.S. policy during the early Cold War.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE ...

During World War II, Washington had no policy aimed specifically at Central America. 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 a very small role in that policy, but there was no Central American policy as such.

Perhaps as a consequence, historical assessments of the diplomatic and political importance of U.S. wartime involvement in Central America are relatively recent. 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 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 Ambassador Spruille Braden's attempts to block the rise of Juan Perón in Argentina in 1944. From that time onward, the Good Neighbor was steadily "dismantled."³

Wood represents a generation of historians who regard U.S.–Latin American cooperation during World War II as a high point for the Good Neighbor policy, before the relationship soured again during the Cold War. More critical voices emphasize the continuity between the early twentieth century and the Cold War.⁴ According to Lars Schoultz, for example, the Good Neighbor represents only a tactical break with the interventionist past. While military incursions ended, Washington started to rely on local dictators to protect its interests during the 1930s. The war

only strengthened these ties and, in that sense, should be considered a continuation of the 1930s situation, according to Schoultz. The U.S. supported the dictators in the interest of local stability and the dictators 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 relationship continued into the Cold War as the strong bonds with local military regimes “would facilitate the transmission of anticommunist values to Latin America.”⁵

The wartime alliance of American republics, which eventually included every nation but Argentina, was undoubtedly a great diplomatic victory for the Roosevelt administration. However, Schoultz raises an important issue by drawing our attention to the fact that during the war, the United States worked closely with authoritarian regimes, especially in Central America and the Caribbean. An important related development was that the celebrated non-intervention principle was silently abandoned during the war. Washington introduced new treaties for the use of Central American airfields and harbors; arrangements to share intelligence; assistance in the blacklisting of German economic interests; collaboration with local security forces, including the supply of lend-lease equipment; extensive propaganda campaigns to sell the purpose of the war to American allies; programs for the deportation of Axis nationals; and many more initiatives. During the war years, U.S. legations (embassies from 1943 onward) in Central America were expanded to be able to deal with the vast amounts of work relating to the war.⁶

Max Paul Friedman acknowledges that Washington abided by the non-intervention principle more or less faithfully through the 1930s, but abandoned it during, rather than after the war as Wood argues. He argues that “overblown fears of an external threat to the hemisphere brought about the end of the Good Neighbor policy during the Second World War, not the Cold War.” As Friedman demonstrates, U.S.–German economic rivalry and exaggerated concerns for the existence of a Nazi “fifth column” in Latin America escalated into a U.S.-led deportation program during the war. Part of a broader program of economic warfare against German interests in the Western Hemisphere, thousands of Germans and Japanese and hundreds of Italians were deported from Latin American nations and interned in the United States. Much like Schoultz, Friedman observes that it was the dictatorships of Latin America who were especially keen to cooperate with the United States. Many local strongmen used the program to their advantage as the

properties of German deportees were expropriated, offering new opportunities for enrichment and graft. The democratic nations more carefully guarded their sovereignty against U.S. interference and tried to protect the interests of deportees who were often long-time residents or citizens of the nations in question.⁷

Friedman's focus on the deportation programs shows that the war years brought important changes to U.S. policies and should not be regarded merely as an extension of the 1930s. The remainder of this chapter extends our understanding of this period by showing how non-intervention was silently abandoned by U.S. diplomats and why the Foreign Service built a strong relationship with local regimes. However, the next chapter also cautions against the conclusion that the situation that existed during World War II naturally evolved into Cold War policies.

Exactly how the United States came to abandon non-intervention to work with Central American dictators (again, specifically because they were dictators) during the war is not easily explained. This new reality was not the result of high-level policy directives or decisions. Neither can it be said, however, that it was an entirely unintended side-effect of the war. Rather, U.S. Foreign Service officers first came to rely on, and then came to appreciate and justify, collaboration with the dictators in response to pressures from Washington and from local governments. The State Department expected its envoys to negotiate a plethora of new treaties, while the caudillos expected some pay-offs for their cooperative attitudes.

In Central America, the State Department was mainly concerned with the political side of the war—the war “on paper.” 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 Pan-American conferences; and the American Republics were all recruited into the allied camp during the war. 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 mold 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.

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 War Henry 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].”⁸ Yet the political—or “moral” as it was sometimes called at the time—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 and 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 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.⁹ 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 before it was solicited. Even before Pearl Harbor, Ubico, Martínez, and Carías told the ministers in their capitals that they would follow the U.S. into war (if necessary).¹⁰ 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 U.S. declaration of war against Japan by a couple of hours.¹¹

A brief overview of diplomatic actions around the start of World War II 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’s 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.” Central American states applauded the initiative. The isthmian 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, El Salvador, and Honduras signed the Atlantic Charter.¹²

Considering such activities, wartime cooperation placed great demands on the U.S. Foreign Service, even on the 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.¹³ But this process was accompanied by considerable confusion, especially in the 1941–1943 period when the workload for legations rose very quickly while new personnel was not readily available. Already in September 1939, John Moors 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.¹⁴ 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.” But when the legation had to deal with several urgent matters at the same time, the staff was “utterly swamped” and it was very difficult to avoid “slipshod work” or even “serious errors.” 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.”¹⁵

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.¹⁶ Similarly, 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.”¹⁷

Even if the Department sympathized with the dire situation at its Central American posts, which was not always the case,¹⁸ it was low on personnel itself¹⁹ 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 specialists who were sent 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 1943.²⁰

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 it would have under normal circumstances. 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.²¹ This was not just the fault of the men on the ground, of course. The Department itself showed little or no interest in local political affairs.²²

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, and so forth, 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 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 coor-

dination 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.”²³

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 American alliances. It wanted the isthmic states to back the inter-American war measures; it wanted photographs of the caudillos signing their declarations of war; it wanted quotations from the local president’s speeches that gave voice to local support for the war effort, all of it in the interest of presenting a united bloc of states under U.S. leadership for the benefit of both domestic and foreign audiences.²⁴ 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. As the context of local politics faded from the legations’ reports, the relation with local dictatorships was now almost entirely understood in the international context of fighting a totalitarian enemy.

Outwardly, the Central American administrations showed themselves very willing to cooperate with the legations. For the handful of overworked officials at the U.S. 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 U.S. 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. Erwin did not let an occasion go by to emphasize Carías’s 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.²⁵ Des Portes argued, in a personal letter to Lawrence 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.”²⁶

This sentiment was largely shared by the State Department, where the Central American desk was occupied by John Cabot, who was previously Des Portes’s 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.”²⁷ 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.

How the developments 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 U.S. military representatives in the region. It should be noted that historian Eric Paul Roorda does the same for diplomatic and military representatives in Trujillo’s Dominican Republic, but the outcome of his analysis differs sharply from the one presented here. According to Roorda, it was the Foreign Service that was most alert to the sacrifice of civil liberties under the Trujillo dictatorship, while representatives of the U.S. military appreciated the efficiency of the regime. In Central America, the situation appears to have been the reverse, during the war years at least.²⁸ Around the beginning of the war, military representatives greatly expanded their political reporting. Apparently, they were acting on the orders of the War Department, which were desirous to know how the political situation on the ground could affect military planning. The reports of the naval attaché in Central America, Frank June, are greatly at odds with the reports of the U.S. legations.

Taking Guatemala as an example, 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 while the Guatemalan government gave the appearance of cooperation, closer scrutiny “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.” Even more seriously, June believed 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”; that its government was full of Nazi sympathizers, and so on. Concerning the last point, the legation agreed with June, but he was not convinced (as the legation was) that Ubico himself was pro-American and that any signs of a non-cooperative attitude were the responsibility of his subordinates: “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].”²⁹

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.³⁰ In March of 1942, 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 ... 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.

June blamed Guatemala’s lax cooperation in the war effort on U.S. foreign policy, which he believed “has been on the wrong track or ... has been improperly administered in the field.”³¹ Des Portes, for 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 or Navy Departments to silence their representatives abroad.³²

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 intentions of the Honduran government. On a later occasion, Erwin proclaimed—at least somewhat diplomatically—his belief 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.” When a U.S. military instructor, “after much soul searching,” informed the legation that the military preparedness of Honduras against *foreign* aggression (as opposed to internal opposition) 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's cooperation, Erwin refused to listen to him, choosing to believe that the local regime was entirely frank in its support of the war-effort.³³

Why did the views of some of the military people differ so much from those of the legations? A major part of the explanation must be that U.S. diplomats and military officers worked with widely different sources of information. The legations came to rely on their personal relations with the local presidents, who put up quite a show to convince them of their cooperative stance. Furthermore, the legations were overwhelmed by the “paper” side of wartime cooperation, while 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 U.S. legation to voice their concerns about the Guatemalan dictatorship. Meanwhile, the attaché himself became well acquainted with the growing dissatisfaction over Ubico's long-time reign.³⁴ During the early 1940s, 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, June witnessed this growing discontent through his close acquaintances in the Guatemalan army. For the time being, however, the legations were out of touch with the latest internal political developments and apparently unaware of growing internal opposition. Foreign Service officers focused on war-time cooperation and, especially due to the perception of fifth column threats, developed new justifications for the cooperation with local dictators.

THE SIXTH COLUMN

The story of the fifth column scare and the (largely) unjustified program of internment of U.S. citizens and residents of foreign origin is fairly well known.³⁵ Somewhat less familiar is the fact that Washington actively pursued the alleged fifth column in Latin America too. The U.S. 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 U.S. expansion of intelligence activities in the region and the establishment of firm military ties with Southern governments. Historians assert that the danger of actual enemy subversion was too small to justify the disruptive and ethically questionable measures taken against the “fifth columnists.” Reiner Pommerin establishes 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.³⁶ Max Friedman quips that the real threat to Latin American society was not the fifth column, but a sixth column of people who believed in the existence of the fifth column.³⁷

The consequences of U.S. actions against the alleged German threat to Latin America were significant, however. In the words of Friedman: “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.”³⁸ It might be added—or specified—that the Nazi hunt in Central America had a particularly negative effect on the Foreign Service, which was the backbone of the “sixth column” there. First of all, the legations allowed themselves to lose sight of local events while they focused their attention on the apparition of the fifth column. Second, the non-intervention principle 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 dictators on their side against the Nazis. During the war, U.S. diplomats developed the justifications for tolerating and even supporting local tyrannies that would also inform Cold War policy.

In the context of the fight against fascism, U.S. diplomats became increasingly tolerant—even appreciative—of harsh measures to “save” the “free world.” Many formerly cherished aspects of international law and the Good Neighbor policy were abandoned because imminent dangers appeared to require 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 and Foreign Service 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. For example, the State Department felt that using cultural attachés to improve the image of the U.S. abroad was inappropriate, because “the conception of an official culture is entirely alien to the United States ... [I]t 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 conducive to the maintenance of stable conditions in the receiving countries, are sufficiently well known.”³⁹ 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 U.S. citizens 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.”⁴⁰

During the war itself, 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 U.S. 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 intended to bolster the stability of local governments and thus secure a constant flow of strategic materials to the United States. The effect was that more and more Central Americans came into direct contact with U.S. representatives, encouraging the view that the United States took a direct interest in their affairs (while the opposite was true).⁴¹

The legations were probably not completely aware of the extent to which U.S. agencies were interfering in Central America. While the ministers were supposed to coordinate all activities in the country where 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, and so on. 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. 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 where the legation in Guatemala prepared the laws that the local government needed to implement to make economic warfare possible.⁴² Paradoxically, the rhetorical commitment to non-interference remained intact, although it was necessary to come up with new definitions and justifications to harmonize wartime activities with the supposed attitude of non-interference. 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].”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴

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 non-intervention 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,” the Department opined, “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 emphatically 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.⁴⁵

In terms of cooperation with the Central American regimes, U.S. 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 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 Nazis 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 when confronted by a thug in a dark alley.” The dictatorial allies in Central America were particularly useful in this regard, since Washington’s 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.⁴⁶

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."⁴⁷ Ironically, 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, in the view of U.S. observers, hopelessly backward institutions. The War Department warned the State Department on several occasions that any weapons it sent 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 Coordinating Committees 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 has received fairly continuous attention in the historical treatment of the war years. Even before the war, the War Department had embarked on a project to push out external (mainly European) arms dealers and to make U.S. arms the standard for the entire continent. While this obviously benefited U.S. 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 U.S. 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.⁴⁸ 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 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 State 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 form 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 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 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 U.S. 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.”⁴⁹

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—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 North Americans into promising him the second best lend-lease terms of any nation—only Great Britain received arms on better terms at the time.⁵⁰ It was not the first time, of course, that the Guatemalan dictator tried to obtain modern U.S. weapons for his army. In 1939, the Guatemalan foreign minister suggested that his 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 5000 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 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.⁵¹

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 made, but the Guatemalan government kept reminding the North Americans that a deal with Spain was a possibility. Over the course of the next year, many more opportunities to put pressure on 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 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, José Gonzáles 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 issue 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 U.S. decided that a token of goodwill had to be made to ensure Guatemalan cooperation.⁵²

Around the end of January 1942, 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 percent 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. Philip Bonsal permitted that no-one really expected Britain to pay back a fraction of 60 percent 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—no strings attached!⁵³

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 motivated by political considerations. 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 dribble of arms”⁵⁴ Only after about 1943, when the U.S. arms industry was at peak production and the military started to make plans for a postwar world dominated by U.S. 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 of the lend-lease agreements it had negotiated around 1942. With the real crisis of the war over, the diplomats began to question the

effects that the arms deliveries would have locally. In 1943, for example, John Cabot noted that “99 percent” 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 dictatorships, or to bestow a hail of lead on the neighbors. We would scarcely wish to connive at either.”⁵⁵ The deliveries of tanks, airplanes, and machine guns 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 U.S. weapons on their own people (at least not on a large scale) and that rebel army units managed to capture some of the lend-lease material before it could be deployed. But, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the proliferation of U.S. arms was just one consequence of the war.⁵⁶

BEST FRIENDS FOREVER?

A very real external threat combined with the pressure of wartime cooperation and the overrated threat of the fifth column drove U.S. legations in Central America into the arms of the local caudillos and offered the latter opportunities to lobby for aid. 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.⁵⁷

In the short term, the legations’ close cooperation with the Central American regimes, and their redefinition of those regimes as part of a democratic alliance, blinded diplomats to the fact that a new, democratically inspired opposition movement was developing against the dictatorships. Taking Guatemala as an example, broad-based popular opposition to Ubico’s regime emerged. 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 U.S. legation was aware of these developments, if only because they had the potential of disturbing

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 U.S. 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 sector, democratically inclined forces of Central America became disillusioned about U.S. cooperation with the outmoded dictatorships. The North Americans, for their part, were unable to integrate the existence of a genuinely pro-democratic movement into their conception of Central American politics.

In 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 U.S. diplomats dealt with the communist specter. Also, the hollowing-out of non-intervention and the tolerance for harsh suppression of anti-establishment forces—also tendencies developed during the war—allowed the 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 World War II 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 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 non-intervention 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.

NOTES

1. Alpers, *Dictators*, 220–249.
2. Hubert Knickerbocker, Manuscript of Article, February 23, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 800.
3. Wood, *The Making*, 334–361; *Ibid.*, *The Dismantling*, ix–xiv.
4. Gilderhus, *Second Century*, 91–96.
5. Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 309–315.
6. An overview of State Department wartime programs can be found in: Findling, *Close Neighbors*, Chap. 5. For military programs, see: John Child, *Unequal Alliance: The Inter-American Military System, 1938–1979* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 27–62. For an overview of cultural programs, see: Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 35–61 and Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15–40. For local economic developments and the role of U.S. economic warfare, see: Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 87–100.
7. Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 230.
8. Quoted in Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 314.
9. Bonsal to Welles, March 14, 1941, Lot Files, entry 211, box 4, folder marked March to April, 1941.
10. Frazer, Memorandum on Call upon President Martinez, November 26, 1941, PRES, CF, box 4, Vol. 3, class 800; Salter to Department, October 3, 1939, PRHO, CF, box 2, volume 2, class 800; Erwin to Department, July 8, 1941, PRHO, box 71, volume XII, class 845; Des Portes to Department, July 9, 1938, PRGU, CF, box 2, class 800; Des Portes, Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, June 21, 1940, PRGU, CF, box 3, class 711; Hartwell Johnson (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum of Conversation with Ubico, August 14, 1941, PRGU, CF, box 4, class 800.1.
11. Cabot, Memorandum on Central America, General, January 9, 1942, Lot Files, entry 211, box 6, folder marked January to February, 1942.

12. For brevity's sake, only the files of the legation in Honduras will be quoted here: Erwin to Department, November 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 15, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 15, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Erwin to Department, December 16, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1: Neutrality. Duty of Neutrals; Welles to Erwin, Instruction 221, December 22, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 711.1; Department of State to Erwin, April 14, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 800; Erwin to Department, April 18, 1939, PRHO, box 47, class 800; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 27, 1939, PRHO, box 49, class 824; Erwin to Department, November 7, 1939, PRHO, box 49, class 824; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, July 29, 1939, PRHO, box 49, class 824; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, May, 1940, PRHO, box 57, class 711.1; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, June 3, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 1, class 711; Erwin to Department, June 4, 1940; PRHO, CF, box 1, class 711; Department of State to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, January 16, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, February 3, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, July 1, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, July 14, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, December 8, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, December 12, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Hull to Erwin, Paraphrase of Department December 31, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Erwin to Department, December 31, 1941, PRHO, box 67, class 711; Paraphrase of telegram 90 from the Department dated December 13, 1941, PRHO, CF, volume 2, class 820; Erwin to Department, December 18, 1941, PRHO, CF, volume 2, class 820.
13. Also consult Chap. 2, section "The War and Postwar Foreign Service, 1943–1952".
14. Cabot to Drew, September 29, 1938, PRGU, box 20, class 123.
15. Cabot to Department, July 19, 1940, PRGU, box 26, class 121.
16. Frazer to Department, February 27, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to G. Howland Shaw (Assistant Secretary of State), May 19, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to Department, August 16, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Shaw to Frazer, September 2, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Gade to Department, December 4, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Hull to Gade, December 9, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to

- Department, December 11, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Hull to Frazer, December 17, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to Department, December 23, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Hull to Frazer, December 23, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to Secretary of State, December 27, 1941, PRES, box 38, class 123; Frazer to Department, January 7, 1941, PRES, box 40, class 124.66; Frazer to Department, July 21, 1941, box 40, class 124.66; Frazer to Department, June 30, 1942, PRES, box 56, class 123; Frazer to Department, July 28, 1942, PRES, box 56, class 123; Frazer to Department, July 28, 1942, PRES, box 56, class 123; Gade to Department, December 10, 1942, PRES, box 56, class 123.
17. Albert H. Cousins (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Honduras) to Department, January 3, 1941, PRHO, box 64, class 124.66; Cousins to Department, July 8, 1941, PRHO, box 64, class 124.66; Erwin to Department, January 7, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 123; Erwin to Department, February 25, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 123; Erwin to the Division of Foreign Service Personnel, July 31, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 124; Erwin to Department, May 23, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 124.3; Hull to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, September 12, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 124.3; Erwin to Department, September 18, 1942, PRHO, box 75, class 124.3; Erwin to Department, January 7, 1943, PRHO, box 93, class 124.61.
 18. Bonsel to Drew, November 27, 1942, PRGU, CF box 5, class 711.5.
 19. For 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.
 20. Unknown author to Shaw, May 28, 1941, PRGU, box 34, class 123; Archer Woodward (U.S. Consul to Guatemala) to Des Portes, January 13, 1943, PRGU, box 59, class 123; Drew to John Erhardt (Chief of the Division of Foreign Service Personnel), February 19, 1943, PRGU, box 59, class 123ers; Drew to Cabot, April 2, 1943, PRGU, box 59, class 123; Drew to John William Baily, Jr. (Assistant Chief of the Division of Foreign Service Personnel), July 6, 1943, PRGU, box 59, class 123.
 21. Charles B. Hosmer (U.S. Foreign Service inspector) to Department, December 1, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 1, class 124.6; 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.

22. Dawson to Hanke, February 12, 1943, Lot Files, entry 211, box 14, folder marked Analysis and Liaison: November 1942 to July 1943.
23. Faust to Department, October 28, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 5, class 124.66.
24. Hull to Erwin, December 12, 1941, PRHO, box 68, class 800.1; Josephus Daniels (U.S. Ambassador to Mexico) to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, August 18, 1941, PRES, box 45, class 711; Frazer to Daniels, August 21, 1941, PRES, box 45, class 711; Hull to the Embassies and Legations in Latin America, November 10, 1942, PRHO, class 711.
25. Erwin to Department, January 8, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800; Pate, Memorandum for the American Minister, January 23, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 12, class 800.1; Erwin to Department, December 23, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800.
26. Des Portes to Duggan, November 27, 1942, PRGU, CF, box 5, class 800.
27. 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.
28. The fact that Trujillo had a long relationship with the U.S. navy, dating back to his Marine training during U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic, may account for these remarkable differences. See: Roorda, *Dictator Next Door*, Chap. 6.
29. June to Navy Intelligence Division, January 30, 1942, PRGU, box 47, class 121.
30. June to Navy Intelligence Division, April 14, 1942, PRGU, box 47, class 121.
31. June to Navy Intelligence Division, March 19, 1942, PRGU, box 57, class 800. June notes that this analysis applies particularly well to Guatemala and Nicaragua.
32. Drew to James B. Stewart (U.S. Minister to Nicaragua), October 17, 1942, PRGU, CF, box 5, class 800; Long to Bonsal, December 2, 1943, PRGU, box 69, class 121; Bonsal to Long, December 14, 1943, PRGU, box 69, class 121.
33. Erwin to Philip Bonsal (Chief, Division of Latin-American Affairs), December 24, 1942, PRHO, box 75, volume II, class 123; Faust to Department, June 9, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 15, class 891; Erwin to Department, July 11, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 2, class 820.
34. June to Navy Intelligence Division, January 19, 1943, PRGU, box 69, class 121; June to Long, February 6, 1942, PRGU, box 60, class 820.02; June to Navy Intelligence Division, January 11, 1943, PRGU, box 69, class 121.

35. Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes. The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 1995).
36. Pommerin, *Das Dritte Reich*, 27–44; *idem*, “Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland”, 398–406.
37. Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 57.
38. *Ibid.*, 12.
39. Messerschmith to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, December 12, 1939, Honduras, CF, box 1, volume 1993/I, class 121.
40. Messerschmith to Frederick F. Salter (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires a.i. to Honduras), October 23, 1941, Honduras, CF, box 1, volume 1993/I, class 124.66.
41. See Chap. 7.
42. Cabot, Memorandum, October 17, 1941, Lot Files, Individual Countries, box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936–1942.
43. Frazer to Department, July 2, 1941, PRES, CF, box 5, class 891.
44. Erwin to Department, April 6, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 8, volume 2, class 820.02.
45. 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.
46. Cabot to Department, July 23, 1940, PRGU, CF, box 3, class 820.02.
47. John Moors Cabot (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Costa Rica), Strictly Confidential Memorandum for Mr. Overton G. Ellis, n.d. (September, 1941), PRES, CF, box 42, volume VI, class 500.
48. 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, *Latin America*, 50–53. For the argument that U.S. military aid significantly increased the power and prestige of local military establishments, see: John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: The Clients and the Colossus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 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*. Brian Loveman, Brian and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. eds., *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1997), especially 29–30, offers a long-term analysis which indicates that, to the surprise of U.S. 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.

49. 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.
50. Child, *Unequal Alliance*, 48, shows the following figures for lend-lease aid to Central America: El Salvador \$0.9 million or less than 0.5 percent of the total amount of aid; Guatemala \$3.1 million or 1 percent of the total amount; and Honduras \$0.4 million or less than 0.5 percent of the total amount.
51. 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.
52. 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.
53. 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; Bonsal to Cabot and Duggan, June 16, 1942, Lot Files, Individual Countries, box 46, folder marked Guatemala, 1936–1942.

54. Cabot to Bonsal, August 4, 1943, Lot Files, Individual Countries, box 45, folder marked El Salvador, 1940–1947.
55. 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 U.S. 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.
56. 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 U.S. 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, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Department, April 5, 1944, PRES, box 98, volume XIII, class 800; Thurston to Department, April 11, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 800; Thurston to Department, April 14, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 824; Thurston to Department, June 21, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 824. 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, November 1, 1944, PRES, CF, box 9, class 710.
57. David F. Schmitz notes the same lack of conceptual differentiation between anticommunist dictators and “the free world” during the Cold War. See Schmitz, *‘Thank God’*, 7.

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The Casualties of War: The Central American Upheavals of 1944

In the summer of 1943, Julian Nugent, the U.S. 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 the U.S. 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

U.S. observers in Honduras had apparently forgotten that there had been free elections and comparative political liberty in that country during the late 1920s. Hondurans, evidently, had not. And even if the Honduran worker from Santa Bárbara idealized the time before the *Cariato* somewhat, his historical recollections were not incorrect either.²

Nugent's encounter is informative in other respects. The idea that Hondurans could entertain political ideologies that had anything but a direct connection with their immediate interests was quite foreign to the vice-consul. 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 officers at the embassy 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 [Carías's] overthrow is not widespread and is confined to political cliques dominated by disappointed seekers for presidential office."³ 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 U.S. 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." During the war 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, few diplomats had 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."⁴ Also, when Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* reached Guatemalan cinemas, Des Portes and some of Ubico's advisors 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).⁵ Erwin, on the other hand, never considered 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.⁶ Erwin was not naïve about the nature of Carías’s 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, U.S. wartime propaganda⁷ did contribute to local discontent about the dictatorship. Considering the extent of U.S. wartime propaganda activities in Latin America, several scholars suggest that a connection must exist between U.S. public diplomacy and the opposition against dictatorships throughout the Western Hemisphere. Exactly what that connection is remains unclear, however. It is unlikely that U.S. propaganda *caused* resistance to local dictatorships, especially since such opposition *predates* programs for the output of information about the war, but it must have had a supporting influence.⁸ The current chapter seeks to extend our understanding of the reception of allied propaganda in Central America. While it is difficult to present a full picture of how Central American oppositionists might have discussed that propaganda among themselves, this chapter will show what role it played in the interaction between the rising opposition and local embassies. When considering the collections of opposition letters that are available in U.S. embassy archives, it becomes clear that Central American oppositionists actively adopted and adapted the language of, for example, the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter, to translate the objectives of their struggle against the local dictatorships to U.S. diplomats. In turn, while the United States would ultimately denounce the “dictatorships and disreputable governments” of Latin America, as will be discussed in Chap. 8, the failure of the Foreign Service to respond effectively to the overtures of oppositionists prevented it from playing a more positive role in the 1944 experiments with democracy.

THE EMBASSIES AND THE OPPOSITION

U.S. public diplomacy in Latin America should be understood within the context of wartime interventionism discussed in the previous chapter. In order to strengthen “economic and cultural ties with Latin America and

ensure hemispheric solidarity in the face of a growing Axis presence,” the Roosevelt administration founded the Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics (later Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, or OCIAA). Headed by Nelson Rockefeller, the OCIAA initiated a range of projects, but it is best known for its cultural activities. Combining private initiative with government coordination, the OCIAA promoted the dissemination of Hollywood movies, radio shows, news items, and printed materials throughout the continent. According to Uwe Lübken, policymakers regarded the cultural programs as a benign alternative to forceful intervention, which was still taboo under the Good Neighbor.⁹ When viewed in the context of other wartime programs, however, it is clear that OCIAA propaganda represents one side to a more interventionist policy.

The OCIAA headquarters in Washington relied on coordinating committees in each Latin American nation to adapt its programs to local contexts and to disseminate information through such sources as were available. Coordinating committees were established in Central America in 1942 and their staffs of volunteers were recruited from U.S. businessmen with connections in local communities. Each committee worked with certain constraints, the most important of which were the interest that their voluntary staffs took in their task; the attitudes of the local government and the local U.S. embassy; and the communications infrastructure of the host nation. In Central America, the most important obstacle to the committees’ effectiveness turned out to be the limited infrastructure of the countries involved, especially outside of the main cities. The committees distributed news materials to newspapers, spread posters and pamphlets, offered scripts for radio programs, and showed movies, among a variety of smaller activities. However, due to poor transportation facilities and restricted radio ownership, the committees’ main audiences were the upper and middle classes of the capitals.

According to Thomas Leonard, the OCIAA informational programs for Central America concentrated on “the military strength of the United States, its wealth, resources, and productive capacity; its traditional concept of freedom and tolerance, and its lack of imperialistic motives; its sincere effort toward improved social conditions for all; and the importance of culture in American life.” By mid-1943, the coordinating committees in Central America had come to focus on the themes of inter-American solidarity and postwar economic and social ties. Walter Thurston, U.S. ambassador in El Salvador, also noted widespread attention

for the Four Freedoms and Atlantic Charter, which were, “blazoned by us throughout El Salvador in the form of posters.” As the coordinating committees kept careful track of their audience’s main interests, we know that the middle and upper classes in Central America expected a postwar world with strong ties to the United States and the possibility of greater participation in more democratic governments. Whether those expectations were directly linked to U.S. programs, is, in the words of Leonard, one of “the most perplexing” questions about the coordinating committees’ work.¹⁰

As the OCIAA set up its activities, Central America’s small middle sector was expanding and asserting itself. Through natural increase and rural–urban migration, the middle sector had become an identifiable element in the populations of Central American capitals by the 1940s. However, this growing class was not represented in the political system. Upwardly mobile groups such as university students and junior military officers saw their social advancement cut short by stagnant and aging groups of senior officers and government officials. During the war, moreover, economic growth in Central America’s urban centers fell behind due to the decline in commerce, causing further frustration for middle sector groups. These social and economic factors combined with the “espousal of the Atlantic Charter and Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms” would add up to “a powerful case for political change,” according to Victor Bulmer-Thomas. The developing middle-class opposition movement was “heartened” by the idealism of the war, Patricia Parkman finds, because it conferred respectability and legitimacy to its ambitions.¹¹

The case of El Salvador, which was the first of the nations discussed here to be touched by major protests against dictatorial government, clearly shows that Central American oppositionists apparently also used the language of U.S. propaganda to strike up a dialogue with the local embassies.¹² Already in May 1942, for example, one among several attempts was made to involve Minister Frazer in local politics by a newly founded organization of “anti-Fascist” writers—the so-called *Grupo de Escritores Anti-Fascista*, composed of journalists who hoped that they could avoid the regime’s censors by defining their activities in terms of the allied cause. The organization promptly named Frazer its honorary president and informed the legation that it would gladly follow its instructions, in effect surrendering itself to its 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.” 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.”¹³

In early 1943, Frazer reached retirement age and left the service. Walter Clarence Thurston took charge of the Salvadoran post. Like Frazer—but unlike his colleagues at the other Central American capitals—Thurston was a career diplomat with extensive experience in Latin American affairs and he 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 non-interference were somewhat uncertain—entertained a sophisticated understanding of his diplomatic duties, based on the Good Neighbor principle.¹⁴

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 U.S. 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 rebellions: in 1920, he was the U.S. chargé to Guatemala during the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Manuel Estrada Cabrera. 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.¹⁵

By 1944, local politics were heating up as rumors spread that Martínez was preparing another “reelection,” this time for the 1944–1948 tenure. Both the regime and the growing opposition used the U.S. language of the war in an attempt to draw the embassy into the fray. The Salvadoran president himself attempted to mentally prepare the minister for the *continismo* 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.¹⁶ As Erik Ching shows, Martínez had developed an elaborate defense of his regime's support for a "prodemocratic antitotalitarian foreign policy without animating demands for genuine democracy at home." In his weekly radio addresses, which were at least in part intended for international audiences, he defended the cause of the democratic nations while also insisting that democracy was a "mental state," that did not necessarily "exist in the public sector or in political structures."¹⁷ In his speeches, the general also regularly referred to wartime cooperation and the many U.S. projects to improve roads, sanitation, and agriculture—suggesting that his regime provided an irreplaceable link between El Salvador and Washington's largesse.¹⁸ Complementing the government's public propaganda was the tried-and-tested 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.¹⁹

Naturally, Martínez needed some more substantial signs of U.S. support to back up his claims. So, on July 7, Thurston was officially invited to attend a banquet in Santa Ana in honor of Martínez, which turned out to be the official kick-off of Martínez's 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.²⁰ 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 El Salvador.²¹

The underground middle-class opposition movement also aligned its goals with those of the war and also sought the support of the U.S. embassy. Trying to avoid censorship, the opposition press published editorials and open letters to President Roosevelt on the ideals of the United Nations while, in the opinion of Ambassador Thurston, "transparently alluding to local conditions." Oppositionists visited the ambassador and sent him letters and memoranda on the establishment of civic societies in support of the fight against fascism. While many of those communications were careful to avoid direct criticism of the regime, others were more explicit in their assertion that the Martínez government was a despotism "equal in pride and vanity to those we fight abroad."²²

Toward the end of 1943, a local student organization, the *Frente Democrático Universitario* (University Democratic Front), attempted to involve the embassy more directly in its protests against the regime. 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 people of the United States. The students asked the embassy for U.S. flags, pictures of President Roosevelt, and posters about the Four Freedoms to brighten their parade. The march would end at the embassy and its climax would be a speech in support of the United States, which (in its eventual form) called on “Latin American citizens” to “vigorously fight” the transplantation of fascism “on our continent.”²³

While Thurston lacked firm policy guidelines about local politics, 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. 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.²⁴ Seeing through the regime’s ploy to involve the embassy in a reform of the constitution, the embassy informed authorities in definite 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.²⁵ Perhaps Thurston’s most significant action was to cancel the shipment of 1000 U.S. sub-machine guns to the Salvadoran government. Navy intelligence had informed the embassy that these weapons would probably be distributed to members of *Pro-Patria*, to be used against the opposition in imitation of the 1932 *Matanza*.²⁶

Having told off the president’s henchmen, Thurston felt that he had to take the same position in his dealings with the opposition.²⁷ Thus, the ambassador often received oppositionists personally and politely listened to their criticism of the government, only to inform them that he was completely neutral in the matter.²⁸ 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 support their parade of December 8, as President Roosevelt had recently vetoed a bill proposing to commemorate the yearly anniversary of Pearl Harbor. 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 U.S. 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, tellingly, as the *Gestapo Martinista*.²⁹

Despite Thurston's evasive tactics, the embassy in El Salvador was most fully informed of the views that local discontents held of the war, U.S. policy, and the Martínez dictatorship, due to the efforts of a local U.S. businessman who was in close touch, and apparently in sympathy with, local oppositionists. The businessman in question was Winnall Dalton, a very wealthy and successful businessman of mixed Mexican and U.S. descent. Dalton did business with Salvadorans and apparently mixed well with the capital city's well-to-do. He is of course most famous for being the father (out of wedlock) of Roque Dalton, the Salvadoran poet and revolutionary who would write often about his distant and violent father. Although the *pater familias* was considerably more conservative than his son, in the context of 1944 El Salvador he was a true rebel. And thanks to his position as one of the most successful U.S. businessmen in San Salvador, he had the attention of the ambassador.³⁰

Dalton'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 U.S. economic interests; to plant

pro-Ally information in the papers; to supply lend-lease weapons to the regime, and so on. Furthermore, Minister Frazer had publicly 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 indicate that many Salvadorans had come to see war-time programs as direct intervention and they represent the gap that had come to exist between the United States’ 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?”³¹

Significantly, Salvadoran oppositionists did not ask the ambassador to put a halt to U.S. intervention. Rather, they pointed out that the United States should take responsibility for the ways in which it was already influencing Salvadoran politics and acknowledge the promises it had made in the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms. For example, an unnamed Salvadoran attorney, “whose friendship for the United States is not open to doubt,” told a member of the embassy in a private conversation that “he considered the avowed policy of the United States not to interfere in the internal policies of the Latin American countries as prejudicial to the cause of democracy and liberty ... asserting that thereby, the United States encouraged dictatorships in power.” Rather, this Salvadoran believed that Washington should institute a policy of non-recognition of dictators. A manager of an independent (though censored) newspaper volunteered to a member of the embassy the “feelings of resentment and frustration” that

his colleagues felt about the way in which U.S. activities in El Salvador were “allowed to be converted to the prestige of the Martínez administration.” According to this newspaperman, the publishers of the independent newspapers had considered a “declaration of war” on the U.S. by refusing to publish the materials of the OCIAA. On another occasion, the pressmen had considered to remind Nelson Rockefeller of the cooperation that they had furnished to him and to insist that he help them in return by getting Washington to withdraw its diplomatic recognition of the regime.³²

Initially, the argument of Salvadoran oppositionists caught Thurston’s interest and the ambassador counseled the Department that it might consider these sentiments in the definition of its *postwar* policy.³³ Thurston reported that “[o]ur pronouncements such as the Atlantic Charter and the Declaration of the Four Freedoms ... are accepted literally by the Salvadorans as official endorsement of basic democratic principles which we desire to have prevail currently and universally.” In a somewhat puzzled tone, the ambassador added that it was difficult for Salvadorans “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.” However, the ambassador concludes, “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 search for improvements and careful study of plans for a revision of policy after the war.”³⁴

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 radical 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 comprehend 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 “[p]rominent and seemingly intelligent” Salvadorans confused U.S. programs to build roads and improve health and sanitation with 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?'"³⁵

The patterns that can be identified in Thurston's experience with Salvadoran politics—that is, attempts by both the regime and the opposition to involve the embassy in local politics and the disappointment, on both sides, with the U.S. policy of non-intervention—are also recognizable in Guatemala and Honduras. In Guatemala, Ubico had legalized his continuance after 1944 in 1941 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 El Salvador, local impatience with the Guatemalan regime increased due to 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 waning. 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 with suppression of Nazi plots. No less than 90 people were arrested for "talking against" congress's generous gift to the president.³⁶ 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, according to the embassy's assessment, 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 the president's diatribes against "communists" and the laxness of the U.S. system increased.³⁷ According to Naval Attaché Frank June, whose views on the regime were described in the previous chapter, 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 and its officers.³⁸ While the link is undocumented (relevant documents were apparently destroyed by the embassy), it is telling that June, together with a Foreign Service officer and the U.S. director of the Guatemalan military academy, were transferred out of Guatemala after their names had come up during the government's interrogation of an arrested oppositionist.³⁹

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 to be related 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 black-listed. This Guatemalan–German family had connections in the government, among them Salazar, the former attorney of the family. According to Des Portes’s own account regarding the circumstances surrounding his transfer, it was the machinations of the “pro Nazi” foreign minister that discredited him with the Guatemalan authorities.⁴⁰

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. 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], although it is not as openly manifest as in the past.”⁴¹ 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 of 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.⁴²

At the same time, middle-class opposition to Ubico was growing and was apparently heartened by the pro-democratic propaganda of the United States.⁴³ Oscar de León Aragón, who was a law student in Guatemala during the war, remembers that U.S. propaganda had influenced discussions among students and had opened his eyes to the realities of Ubico’s dictatorship.⁴⁴ Word on the street was that with the end of the war in sight, the United States was beginning to rethink its relationship to the Latin American dictators and some believed that Long had been sent to replace Des Portes, assumed to be an old friend of Ubico, to prepare the country for such a move.⁴⁵ 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. Julio Bianchi. The doctor asked the

ambassador whether the latter would be interested to talk with several “young gentlemen” who, it was carefully implied, were out of tune with the present political situation. Long rejected the invitation 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.” The notion that the United States could remain entirely neutral in local affairs was 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 U.S. participation served to underscore the close ties, the caudillo claimed. As a symbol of the Guatemalan president’s closeness to his counterpart in Washington, a new hospital was completed and dedicated “Hospital Roosevelt.”⁴⁶

In fact, Long appears to have been biased to the status quo in Guatemala. Calculations that he made 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 seemingly believed that this was the natural state for a Central American republic.⁴⁷ When a U.S. citizen and businessman from El Salvador 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 that the former 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.”⁴⁸

With some six months to go before Ubico would be toppled, 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.⁴⁹

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’s 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 needs 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.⁵⁰

As in other Central American countries, new opposition to the regime gained strength inside Honduras during the war.⁵¹ 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 U.S. troops during the war were kept to a minimum

and the caudillo was 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 El Salvador and Guatemala was much smaller and weaker in Honduras. Furthermore, Honduras was economically the least developed of all Central American countries. The exploitation of its main export crop, bananas, was in the hands of U.S. 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 small) middle classes of neighboring states.⁵³

For the moment, new middle-class and urban opposition was ignored because 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 traditional 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 supporters 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 (interestingly, the Carías government seems to have been aware of Erwin’s hostile attitude toward the opposition, as its secret agents reported this fact on several occasions⁵⁴). Erwin seems to have overlooked the development of discontent among new social groups entirely. With the exception, perhaps, of Minister James 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 U.S. diplomats among Central American oppositionists.⁵⁵

During the early years of the war Erwin adopted Carías’s claim that the Liberals had a working relationship with Nazi agents,⁵⁶ despite the fact that other diplomatic posts reported on several occasions that proof for the connection was nonexistent.⁵⁷ Rather than substantial evidence, the idea that the political “outs” 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 rebellion 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 U.S. consulates in the area reported, around the same time, that U.S. naval vessels visited the area affected by the upheaval and that navy airplanes made flights over 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.⁵⁸

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's 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.⁵⁹

The embassy was taken completely by surprise. Part of the reason for the oversight may have been 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. In addition, both the government and the embassy were obsessed with the Liberal/Nazi threat. As the embassy had to admit, the military plot did not involve Liberals or Nazis—not even communists! Somewhat shaken by an upris-

ing where none was suspected, Erwin congratulated Carías on his near escape from death. The ambassador even reassured the president that, had the plot succeeded, the United States would have never recognized the rebel regime. Where Erwin got that idea is unclear. 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 ambassador that it had no policy of holding back recognition—adding somewhat acidly that Erwin might wish to consult some books on international law.⁶⁰

The 1943 murder plot, coming from such an unexpected corner, shook up the embassy'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.⁶¹ At the Department's request, the embassy reported in 1944 that there were no more totalitarian subversive movements in Honduras (either Nazi or communist). Attempts against the president were an "old fashioned Latin American affair":

As Latin American dictators go, President Carías 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 Carías smashed the guerilla generals. James and Richelieu fought and beheaded; Carías 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 Carías will leave this country more civilized and otherwise better off than he found it eleven years ago.⁶²

Up to the year 1944, therefore, all U.S. embassies underestimated the strength of new opposition groups and generally dismissed their claims to membership in an international alliance that was fighting dictatorships in Europe *and* in Central America. This attitude would not have caused any important problems if it was not for the fact that all Central American dictatorships faced significant challenges from urban, middle sector oppositionists in 1944.

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 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, which argued that the reigning regimes were stable and opposition movements small, this was a logical conclusion.

Therefore, a change in policy was considered unnecessary at the time. The Department did counsel 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 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.⁶³

A particularly interesting aspect in the Department's standpoint is its continued trust in the non-interference principle. During the 1944 upheavals, however, that policy became highly contested—as indicated by the letters that Thurston received from local oppositionists. The U.S. 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, and so on. 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 the Department believed that Central Americans would accept the philosophical argument that friendliness to an allied 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 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 discretion. The reality would turn out to be different, during and after 1944 U.S. Foreign Service officers made enemies on all sides with their claims to neutrality.

The weakness of Central American dictatorships was first manifested in El Salvador. To his annoyance, Thurston received an official invitation to the inauguration of Martínez's new term 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 Martínez's *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, as is illustrated again by its silence as Thurston had to make a difficult decision about the inauguration. Just days after the inauguration, Thurston sent the Department a slightly vexed telegram, asking to be kept up to date about policy decisions and announcements, as the embassy relied on the U.S. press for that sort of information. It was understandable that the Department was not too concerned about updating its policy, however. Reports coming from the embassies in Central America throughout the previous year painted a picture of stable regimes, despite some rising discontent.⁶⁴

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 politely sat through the inauguration ceremonies, a decision that met the general anger and indignation of oppositionists.⁶⁵

Martínez's third term was to be his shortest. On April 2 shooting broke out in San Salvador while the president was in Santa Ana. Initially, things went well for the opposition, which sent two trucks of armed men to Santa Ana to apprehend Martínez. By some inexplicable coincidence or oversight, however, the armed convoy of oppositionists going to Santa Ana 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's position because political prisoners were held at the barracks. By late afternoon, many oppositionists had decided to save their own lives. 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.

The April uprising 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: the leader of the revolt 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 uprising 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 meantime, the embassy had to come to terms with the April events. While the uprising 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. 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, as far as the embassy was aware, 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’s vengeance were also part-time students. While the president, due to his active interest in theosophy, had always been regarded as somewhat of an eccentric, the general consensus after the failed uprising was that he had gone “completely off the deep end.”⁶⁶

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 in general, a new uprising broke out around the start of May. This time, the cowed and thinned out military faction was hardly involved. The revolt started with a student “strike,” which spread first to the professional groups and later to shopkeepers, railroad workers, and so on, gradually paralyzing the city. Remembered as the *huelga de los caídos brazos*, 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’s 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 Andrés Ignacio Menéndez. The opposition, which was not entirely satisfied with Menéndez’s 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.” While the U.S. had taken no active part in the change of government, Salvadorans closely identified Martínez’s resignation with the war effort: “Four Freedoms posters and improvised variations thereon were carried throughout the city by the multitude celebrating the occasion. Several demonstrations—some small

and some numbering several thousand—paraded to [the U.S.] Embassy cheering the United States.”⁶⁷

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 on the Salvadoran revolt 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 underlings were getting uneasy. One of Ubico’s right-hand men, General Roderico Anzueto, was transferring funds to foreign bank accounts. Federico 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. The regime’s self-confidence declined in inverse proportion to the opposition’s rising optimism.⁶⁸ Long, however, remained certain that the trouble would be temporary. He believed that events in El Salvador only affected 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.⁶⁹

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 U.S. 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.”⁷⁰

It is true, perhaps, that the student parades would not 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, nonexistent) 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.”⁷¹

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.⁷²

“Ya no quiero más,” a visibly disheartened Ubico told Long on June 30. Somewhat to the disgust of the ambassador, the *macho* general was “almost to the point of weeping.” Apparently unbeknownst to the embassy, opposition to Ubico’s continuance had reached the president’s immediate circle. 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.⁷³ Thanks to historians who interviewed some of Ubico’s former advisors, it is known how Ubico eventually selected a successor: many “surplus” generals in Guatemala’s top-heavy army structure 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.⁷⁴

Shortly, Ponce emerged as the leader of the new government, but the political situation in Guatemala remained tense and Long was not sure what to make of it. 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, especially since the new government had promised to organize elections. Besides, the new government appeared to meet all the requirements for recognition under international law and could not be tied to Axis influence. In addition, the ambassador disliked the students noisy parades and 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

The embassy did its best to maintain an appearance of non-intervention. After the assassination of a journalist, for example, Long cabled General George 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 unconstitutional government by assassins in their own hemisphere when hundreds of thousands of their best men are dying to fight it elsewhere."⁷⁶

Despite his disregard for physical hardships, Long put in a request for sick leave in September 1944. The ambassador also argued that since many people were contacting the embassy to plead for support during the

upcoming elections that the Ponce regime had promised, 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.⁷⁷

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 chancery with a request to use its 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 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, ensuring 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.⁷⁸ How the new Guatemalan regime would fit into the postwar objectives of the United States was, of course, a different question. While some oppositionists had come to consider the U.S. a friend of Ubico, as, for example, the legal attaché reported, and while Long was indeed taken by surprise by the sudden political changes, the State Department was far more concerned with the continuity of wartime cooperation and showed little interest in the end of the Ubico era.

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 Tiburcio 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 1940s, 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 1948.⁷⁹

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’s 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 launching several armed excursions into the country from bases in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Internal opposition, encouraged 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 Sula—which was an old Liberal bulwark and a traditional center of opposition against Carías.⁸¹

Interestingly, representatives of the U.S. military in Central America also felt confident enough to express their anti-dictatorial standpoints after the fall of Martínez and Ubico. General George Brett 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 A local military attaché 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’s only wish was to be left alone.⁸³

Carías’s 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’s tiny middle class was stirring. July 1944 witnessed demonstrations by women, students, and professionals very similar to those in El Salvador and Guatemala. A large demonstration was held on the Fourth of July in Tegucigalpa and purported to be a march in support of the allied cause. According to embassy observers, the demonstrators used slogans such as “¡Viva la democracia!”, “¡Viva la libertad!”, and “¡Viva Presidente Roosevelt!”, demonstrating the effects of U.S. wartime propaganda, but leaving the embassy unimpressed. Carías publicly

blamed the protests on enemies of the United Nations while Erwin also publicly condemned the misuse of U.S. flags during the marches. 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’s nephew Calixto who, according to old legation reports, was many times a rapist and murderer.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 United States Independence Day, or because the government hoped that the city would quiet down after blowing off some steam. Carías sent Minister of the Interior Juan Manuel Gálvez to San Pedro Sula, purportedly to make sure that no rash actions were undertaken by either the local *comandante* or the oppositionists. But whatever Gálvez’s exact role in the following events was, that mission was a failure. According to a report by a U.S. vice-consul, some sort of incident took place during the demonstration of July 6, which provoked 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

The embassy did not report on the details of this incident. For a sense of the brutality of the slaughter in San Pedro Sula, which would ultimately claim the lives of over 50 people,⁸⁷ one has to consult the eye-witness accounts collected by the nearby U.S. 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 courtesousness. 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.⁸⁸

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 U.S. 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.’”⁸⁹ But while Erwin shrugged, many Liberals from San Pedro Sula fled the city and later consolidated into a radical wing of the Liberal Party that would reject the leadership that was left over from the 1930s and continued the resistance against Carías and his successors.

DOORS OPENED AND DOORS CLOSED

U.S. diplomats never fully grasped what meaning the ideals of World War II had for Central American oppositionists. Ambassador Walter Thurston did understand how both the Martínez regime and local oppositionists adopted the language of the U.S. war effort. The former stressed the need for solidarity and stability and used the expropriation of “Axis” properties as an excuse to tamper with the constitution. The latter pushed the analogy between the fight against European dictatorship and its own fight against local dictatorship. Thurston believed that by adhering to the traditional non-intervention policy, he could avoid becoming entangled in local politics. However, by 1943 the non-intervention policy was, to all intents and purposes, a fiction. The State Department itself emphasized “collaboration”

for the “common good,” fully aware of the fact that this would mean cooperation with dictatorships in many Latin American countries. Liberally minded Central Americans came to resent U.S. wartime programs, including the democratically flavored propaganda of the OCIAA, because they could not harmonize what was to them obviously an interventionist policy with U.S. embassies’ refusals, based on the non-intervention principle, to distance their country from the dictatorships.

Nonetheless, 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 hand, 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 hand, 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: “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.”⁹⁰

In the Department’s estimate, therefore, the policy of non-intervention 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

United States. The embassies tended to ignore entreaties by opposition groups while modern lend-lease weapons were delivered for use by 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 whose behalf was a matter of confusion.

The existence of middle-class urban opposition to the isthmian dictatorships went unacknowledged by the U.S. embassies for a long time. When this new group finally came out into the open, it was almost impossible for its members to strike up an intelligent dialogue with the Foreign Service. 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, in spite of what should have been a shared political ideology. Some members of the 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.

NOTES

1. Julian L. Nugent (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes) to Thurston, Report 52, August 25, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 12, class 800.
2. On Barahona period, see: Dodd, *Carias*, 43–44 and Argueta, *Carias*, 56–66.
3. Erwin to Department, May 13, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800.
4. RSC to Des Portes, Memorandum for the Minister, August 28, 1942, PRGU, box 60, class 820.02; Des Portes to Department, September 3, 1942, PRGU, box 60, class 820.02.
5. Hull to Des Portes, January 3, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Cabot to Department, January 4, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Hull to Cabot, January 8, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Cabot to Department, January 17, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Cabot to Guy W. Ray, January 18, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Cabot to Department, March 11, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06; Des Portes to Department, March 19, 1941, PRGU, box 43, class 840.06.

6. Erwin to Department, September 28, 1942, PRHO, box 84, class 820.02.
7. I will use the term “propaganda” to refer to attempts by the U.S. government to influence the opinions of foreign audiences. For the sake of variety, I will occasionally use terms such as “public diplomacy” or “information programs” to refer to the same phenomenon. I choose to use the term propaganda most often, because it links up to the language that U.S. diplomats and Central Americans used at the time. It does not imply a value judgement or adherence to a particular theoretical framework.
8. Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 101; Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 32–33; Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, “The Postwar Conuncture 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: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–32, there 6–7; David Rock, “War and Postwar Intersections: Latin America and the United States”, in idem ed., *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 15–40, there 19–21; Thomas M. Leonard, “The OIAA in Central America: The Coordinating Committees at Work”, in Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch eds., *¡Américas Unidas! Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940–1946)* (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012), 283–312, there 288. Kornell Chang studies the reception of allied propaganda in Mexico and concludes that general interest in the war among the Mexican population was low and the penetration of propaganda shallow: Kornell Chang, “Muted Reception: U.S. Propaganda and the Construction of Mexican Popular Opinion during the Second World War”, *Diplomatic History* 38:3 (June 2014), 569–598. On the other hand, Monica Rankin shows how propaganda for the allied cause could be employed by local actors to promote domestic goals (an argument similar to the one presented here, even if the context is very different). She shows that such propaganda was used by the Mexican government in part to legitimize an aggressive push for industrialization: Monica Rankin, *¡México, la patria! Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln, NA and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), chapter 6.
9. Uwe Lübken, “Playing the Cultural Game: The United States and Nazi Threat to Latin America”, in Cramer and Prutsch eds., *¡Américas Unidas!*, 53–76.
10. The discussion of the OCIAA in El Salvador is based on: Leonard, “The OIAA in Central America”. The quotation of the U.S. ambassador is from: Ambassador Walter Thurston to Department, December 30, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.

11. Bulmer-Thomas, *Political Economy*, 100–104, quote on 101; Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 30–45, quote on 32–33. Victor Hugo Acuña Ortega adds an important caveat to these findings, showing that some middle class groups had a vested interest in the continuation of the authoritarian state: Victor Hugo Acuña Ortega, “The Formation of the Urban Middle Sectors in El Salvador, 1910–1944”, in Lauria-Santiago and Binford eds., *Landscapes of Struggle*, 39–49.
12. Parts of the section dealing with El Salvador also appear in: Jorrit van den Berk, “The Promise of Democracy for the Americas: U.S. Diplomacy and the Meaning(s) of World War II in El Salvador, 1941–1945”, in Hans Bak et al. eds., *Politics and Cultures of Liberation. Media, Memory, and Projections of Democracy* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2018).
13. Frazer, Memorandum on *Grupo de Escritores Anti-Fascista*, May 18, 1942, PRES, box 58, class 500; Frazer to Department, May 26, 1942, PRES, box 58, class 500; Maleady, Memorandum on Salvadoran Censorship of Newspapers and Radio Stations, July 20, 1942, PRES, box 75, class 891; Frazer to Department, February 26, 1942, PRES, CF, box 6, class 800; Maleady, Memorandum on Detention of Honduran Political Exiles, March 4, 1942, PRES, CF, box 6, class 800; Frazer to Department, March 11, 1942, PRES, CF, box 6, class 800.
14. Henderson ADST interview: “Walter Thurston, former envoy to the Americas, is dead at 79”, *NYT* (March 27, 1974), 46; “Walter Thurston, ex-envoy to Mexico”, *TWP* (March 27, 1974), C4.
15. “Career diplomat named ambassador to Mexico”, *NYT* (April 12, 1946), 8; “Barcelona’s fierce resistance to Franco”, *The Manchester Guardian* (January 24, 1939), 11; “Americans run bomb gantlet out of Barcelona”, *TWP* (January 26, 1939), 1; “U.S. aides quit Moscow”, *NYT* (July 19, 1941), 5; “Thurston now minister”, *NYT* (November 23, 1941), 28; “Walter Thurston, ex-envoy to Mexico”, *TWP* (March 27, 1974), C4.
16. Thurston to Department, January 14, 1943, PRES, box 76, class 123.
17. Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, chapter 7, section 7, paragraphs 1 and 18.
18. Thurston to Department, March 23, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 802.1; Thurston to Department, April 6, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 802.1; Thurston to Department, April 8, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 802.1; Thurston to Department, February 19, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 803.
19. Ellis to Thurston, September 9, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 800.
20. Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to El Salvador), untitled memorandum, July 19, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Department, July 19, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Mauricio Callardo (Chief of Protocol of El Salvador), July 24, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 800; Thurston to Department, July 28, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 800.

21. Thurston to Department, June 26, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 711.3; Acheson to Thurston, July 27, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 711.3; Thurston to Department, November 16, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 711.3; Thurston to Department, December 16, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 711.3; Thurston to Department, December 29, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume I, class 711.3.
22. J. Cipriano Castro to Thurston, June 20, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800 (translation from Spanish by the author). The 1943 files contain many opposition letters and embassy reports on opposition activity. For a non-exhaustive sample covering the month of September, see: "El Pueblo Salvadoreño" to Thurston, September 4, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Asociacion Nacional Democratica to Thurston, September 21, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Frente Magisterial Democratico to Thurston, September 28, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
23. Rafael Eguizábal h. et al. to Thurston, December 4, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; "Discurso pronunciado ante la estatua de la Libertad por el Sr. Rafael Eguizábal h., a nombre del Frente Democratico Universitario, con ocasion del homenaje a los Estados Unidos de América, el 11 de diciembre de 1943", PRES, box 82, class 800 (translations from Spanish by the author).
24. Thurston to Department, June 4, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Callardo, July 24, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume 1, class 800; Thurston to Department, July 28, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume 1, class 800.
25. Thurston, untitled memorandum, June 21, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume 1, class 800; DVR, Memorandum on Projected Reform of the Salvadoran Constitution, June 29, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume 1, class 800.
26. Maleady to Department, July 20, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume II, class 824; Maj. C.P. Baldwin (U.S. Military Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, July 23, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume II, class 824; Lt. R.W. Rastetter (U.S. Assistant Naval Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, August 26, 1943, PRES, CF, box 8, volume II, class 824.
27. Thurston to Department, December 13, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
28. For example: Thurston, untitled memorandum, September 8, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Department, despatch 955, November 12, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
29. Thurston to Eguizábal, December 4, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Eguizábal to Thurston, December 6, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston, untitled memorandum, December 11, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Eguizábal to Thurston, December 13, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Department, December 13, 1943, PRES, box 82,

- class 800; G.B. Massey (U.S. Acting Military Attaché to El Salvador) to Thurston, December 14, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
30. On the Dalton family, see: Lindo-Fuentes et al., *Remembering*, 84 and Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, 36 and especially Roger Atwood, "Gringo Iracundo: Roque Dalton and His Father", *Latin American Research Review* 46:1 (2011), 126–149, there 130–139.
 31. Winnall A. Dalton to Thurston, December 28, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
 32. Thurston to Department, December 30, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800; Thurston to Department, January 8, 1944, PRES, box 98, volume XIII, class 800; R.T.S., confidential memorandum, March 10, 1944, PRES, box 98, volume XIII, class 800.
 33. Thurston to Department, December 30, 1943, PRES, box 82, class 800.
 34. Thurston to Department, January 8, 1944, PRES, box 98, volume XIII, class 800. Vargas and Trujillo were the presidents of Brazil and the Dominican Republic respectively.
 35. Thurston to Department, June 12, 1944, PRES, box 93, class 124.
 36. Des Portes to Department, May 8, 1940, PRGU, CF, box 3, class 800.1.
 37. Des Portes to Department, August 14, 1941, PRGU, CF, box 4, class 800.1; Dudley Dwyre (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Guatemala), Memorandum for the Files, December 4, 1941, PRGU, CF, box 4, class 800.
 38. June to Navy Intelligence Division, January 19, 1943, PRGU, box 69, class 121.
 39. Drew, Memorandum on Subjects discussed by the American Ambassador, Mr. Boaz Long, with his Excellency, Licenciado don Carlos Salazar, July 16, 1943, PRGU, box 79, class 800.2; Long, Memorandum of Conversation with Carlos Salazar, July 16, 1943, PRGU, CF, box 6, class 800; Justin Tobias to Navy Intelligence, March 16, 1943, PRGU, CF, box 6, class 800; Unsigned memorandum on Carlos Mirón, March 19, 1943, PRGU, CF, box 6, class 800. Note that box 6 is part of the 1942 files. Apparently, these documents have been filed under the wrong year. Friedman seems to discuss the same event as the result of two embassy officials having leaked information about Guatemalan–German collaboration to the U.S. press: Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 185. As several other diplomatic representatives were also involved, it appears that Ubico was trying to eliminate all his critics in the diplomatic corps.
 40. Drew to Des Portes, February 17, 1943, PRGU, CF, box 7, class 123.
 41. Diary entries of October 31 and November 1, 1943, Long Papers, box 66, file 333: Diaries.
 42. Long to Department, June 22, 1943, PRGU (SFC), box 9, class 820.02: Espionage and Propaganda; Long to Stewart, November 12, 1943, PRGU, CF, box 8, class 800.

43. In his study the 1945 constitutional convention of Guatemala, which gathered after the fall of Ubico and Ponce, Gómez Díez shows that its ideas were in part influenced by the language of pro-Allied propaganda. Francisco Javier Gómez Díez, “La Política Guatemalteca en los Orígenes de la ‘Década Revolucionaria’: La Asamblea Constituyente de 1945”, *Revista de Indias* 55:203 (January–April, 1995), 127–148, *passim*, especially 138.
44. Oscar de León Aragón, *Caída de un Régimen. Jorge Ubico – Frederico Ponce, 20 de Octubre de 1944* (Guatemala: FLASCO, 1995), 151 and 173–174.
45. Gerald A. Drew (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Guatemala) to Department, February 22, 1944, PRGU, CF, box 10, class 800. This report also contains an interesting account on how the embassy deals with the regime and the opposition in light of the non-intervention principle.
46. Drew to Department, March 11, 1943, PRGU, box 79, class 803.
47. Diary entry of November 20, 1943, Long Papers, box 66, file 333: Diaries.
48. Diary entry of April 9, 1944, Long Papers, box 66, file 334: Guatemalan Diary, 1944.
49. Drew to Department, January 4, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
50. Dodd, *Cariás*, 183–209 and Argueta, *Cariás*, 268–326.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Cousins to Maj. J.H. March (U.S. Military Attaché to Honduras), December 30, 1940, PRHO; Unsigned (Erwin) to Philip W. Bonsal (Acting Chief of the Division of American Republic Affairs), March 11, 1942, PRHO, box 82, class 800. Also see: Leonard and Bratzel, *Latin America*, 12 and 36–39; Dodd, *Cariás*, 81–82.
53. Dodd, *Cariás*, 183–209 and Argueta, *Cariás*, 268–326.
54. “Amenazas de muerte al Presidente y la incomoda posición de Zuñiga Huete ante la diplomacia de Los Estados Unidos”, in Inestroza, *Documentos Clasificados*, 69–70 and “El Jefe de Protocolo de la Casa de Gobierno mal informa al Presidente con el Embajador de Estados Unidos”, in *ibid.*, 185–186.
55. See Chap. 8, section “A Bull for Every China Shop?”.
56. Erwin to Department, May 31, 1940, PRHO, CF, box 2, class 879.6; Division of Commercial Affairs to Cousins, October 2, 1941, PRHO, box 70, class 820.02; Department to Erwin, February 4, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 1, class 800: Exiles and Revolutionaries; R.D. Gatewood (U.S. Secretary of Legation to Honduras) to Department, May 7, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 2, class 820.02.
57. Nugent to Department, October 2, 1941, PRHO, CF, box 3, volume 2, class 820.02; Erwin to W.L. Taillon (United Fruit Company), January 23, 1941, PRHO, box 70, class 820.02.

58. Erwin to Department, September 18, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 7, volume 6, class 800; Wymberly DeR. Coerr (U.S. Vice Consul to La Ceiba) to Erwin, October 15, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 7, volume 6, class 800; Nugent to Erwin, September 22, 1942, PRHO, CF, box 7, volume 6, class 800.
59. Paraphrase of telegram 257 of November 21, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800; Erwin to Department, November 26, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800; 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, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800.
60. Berle to Erwin, December 29, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800.
61. Erwin to Department, May 13, 1943, PRHO, CF, box 11, class 800.
62. Erwin to Department, August 21, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800.
63. E.R. Stettinius, Jr. to the U.S. Embassies in Latin America, February 2, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
64. Thurston to Department, February 29, 1944, PRES, box 93, class 124; Thurston to Department, March 25, 1944, PRES, box 93, class 124.
65. Thurston to Department, March 2, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 800; Gade to Department, January 4, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800.
66. Thurston to Department, June 21, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 824; Berle to the U.S. Embassies and Legations in Latin America, March 23, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 824; Thurston to Department, April 14, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 824; Thurston to Department, April 26, 1944, PRES, CF, box 10, class 800.
67. Thurston to Department, May 5, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 7, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 7, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston, untitled memorandum, May 8, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 8, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 8, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 9, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; AFM, Memorandum on Political Situation, May 10, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; B. Dreyfus (U.S. Secretary of Legation to El Salvador), untitled memorandum, May 10, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Long, May 11, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 11, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; El Salvador; Thurston to Department, May 12, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 12, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800. The single best study on this period is: Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection*, especially 62–79.

68. Drew, Memorandum for the Files, May 27, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800. De León Aragón, *Caída de un Régimen*, 175, notes the impression that the fall of Martínez made among oppositionists.
69. Long to Department, May 30, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 16, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
70. Long to Department, June 22, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; [SC], Memorandum for the Ambassador, June 22, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Maj. Victor R. Rose (U.S. Assistant Military Attaché) to the Military Intelligence Division, June 23, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800. De León Aragón offers an insiders account of the demonstrations: De León Aragón, *Caída de un Régimen*, 189–192.
71. Long to Department, June 23, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
72. Long to Department, June 25, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Rose to Military Intelligence Division, June 26, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 26, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Hull to Long, June 27, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 27, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 24, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 27, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
73. Long to Department, June 30, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, June 30, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, July 1, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Laurence Duggan (Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), July 4, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800.
74. Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 26.
75. Long to Laurence Duggan (Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), July 4, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, July 5, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, July 14, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, July 14, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, August 15, 1944, PRGU, box 106, class 800; Long to Department, September 25, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800.
76. Long to Department, October 3, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800; Maj. Victor R. Rose (U.S. Assistant Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 1324–1344, October 3, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800.
77. Cabot to Long, August 8, 1944, PRGU, box 98, class 123D; [Howland Shaw] to Long, February 19, 1944, PRGU, box 98, class 123D; Norman Armour (Acting Director of the Division of American Republic Affairs), October 10, 1944, PRGU, box 98, class 123D; Long to Armour, October 14, 1944, PRGU, box 98, class 123D.

78. William C. Affeld (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Guatemala), Memorandum starting with “Was awakened by gunfire...”, n.d. (October 1944), PRGU, box 107, class 800; Colonel Fred T. Cruse (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala), Memorandum, October 20, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800; Affeld, Memorandum starting with “The representatives of the Government...”, n.d. (October 1944), PRGU, box 107, class 800; Affeld, Memorandum starting with “At 10:30 A.M. J.H. Wilson, Jr...”, n.d. (October 1944), PRGU, box 107, class 800; Affeld to Department, October 23, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800; Affeld to Gerald A. Drew (U.S. Embassy, Paris), November 1, 1944, PRGU, box 107, class 800; Unsigned letter (Department of State) to Affeld, November 17, 1944, PRGU, box 98, class 123D.
79. For overviews of the Somoza and Carías regimes in the postwar years, consult: Argueta, *Cariás*, 312–328; Dodd, *Cariás*, 210–224; Clark, *The United States and Somoza*; Walter, *The Regime*, 129–164.
80. Thurston to Department, June 12, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 15, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 16, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 17, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Gade to Department, June 20, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Thurston to Department, July 24, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 8, class 800; Norman Armour, Memorandum of Conversation with the Honduran Ambassador, December 13, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800.
81. An excellent study on San Pedro Sula’s role in Honduran socio-economic development is: Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, 1–60.
82. Erwin, Memorandum for the Files, December 13, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 21, volume 12, class 824.
83. Erwin to Department, December 26, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800.
84. Erwin to Department, July 7, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800. Descriptions of the purported goals of the protests, as well as the public responses of Carías and Erwin, can be found in Alexis Argentina González de Oliva, *Gobernantes Hondureños. Siglos XIX y XX*. Tomo I (Editorial Universitaria, 1996), 318–319.
85. Higgins to Department, November 3, 1933, PRHO, CF, volume 218.
86. Lee M. Hunsaker (U.S. Vice Consul to Puerto Cortes) to Erwin, July 15, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800. According to the Honduran historian Darío Euraque, the circumstances of the shooting remain unclear, but Liberal writers claim that Gálvez ordered the massacre. Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, 170, note 61.
87. Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, 39.

88. Hunsaker to Erwin, July 15, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800.
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The Postwar Moment: An Opening for Democracy, 1944–1947

“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.”¹ Such, at least, was *Time Magazine’s* assessment of the new assistant secretary—and it was not that far off the mark. Spruille Braden, a Montana mining engineer with extensive experience in diplomacy, had been a political appointee to the Foreign Service during the war. Considering himself an “anti-Nazi paladin,” he had battled supposed Nazis and their local sympathizers in and out of official circles in Colombia, Cuba, and Argentina.² Only during the war, when old principles of non-intervention 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.

With Braden as assistant secretary, the Department of State developed a policy to match the growing democratic idealism in Latin America, which included the 1944 upheavals in Central America. Under this “policy regarding dictatorships and disreputable governments” the United States publicly 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. The real test, however, came in 1947 when Somoza tried to assuage internal opposition by stepping down and installing one of his uncles in the presidency. As it turned out that the new president was too independent, he committed a 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's 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. By not recognizing his government, Washington 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 by 1947 and Somoza, a talented political tactician, managed to keep his opponents divided and his hold on power unrelenting. Because of Somoza's successful defiance in the context of a new trend toward ultra-conservative politics in the region, combined with a wish to promote Latin American solidarity in the counsels of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN), the United States abandoned its attempts to oust Somoza in 1948. In that same year, at the Pan-American conference in Bogotá, the American nations 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 on good terms with Washington again, the recognition of his regime signaled the end of U.S. policy of discouraging dictatorship.³

Despite the rather inglorious end to the U.S. 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."⁴

However, Leonard argues 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 that the Braden policy was really completely out of step with general thinking in the State Department, which was that Latin Americans were unfit for democracy. David Rock argues that: “The support of the United States for democratic change in Latin America in 1945 was mainly due to a desire to establish client states that could be used to support the United States in the United Nations.”⁵

While the current chapter will not resolve the debate specifically with regard to U.S. policy in Nicaragua, a comparison of the different choices that U.S. diplomats made with regard to neighboring Central American countries will reveal patterns and paradoxes of U.S. postwar policy against dictatorship that cannot be deduced from a single case. The current chapter shows that the goal of discouraging dictatorship in the Western Hemisphere was widely (though not unanimously) supported by U.S. Foreign Service officers in Latin America. It was not a lack of sincerity that caused the policy to fail. Rather, a combination of factors conspired against the policy. One fundamental reason for the failure of the policy was the close working relationship that the U.S. Foreign Service had established with the caudillos during the war (Chap. 6) and the haphazard way in which it responded to the revolutions of 1944, thus alienating some of the movements behind the democratic opening (Chap. 7). However, the conflicting goals of the State Department as well as the difficulty that its field posts had in defining clear cases of dictatorial rule also contributed to that outcome. Even before Cold War considerations started to play an important role in the foreign policy establishment, the policy against dictatorship was a dead letter, surviving only as a more abstract, long-term ambition.

BULL IN THE CHINA SHOP

Washington’s new policy against “disreputable government,” was introduced as the whole world seemed to be moving toward democratic government. The dictators of Germany, Italy, and Japan were toppled while

anti-colonial movements were revived in Asia and Africa. Though Latin America had been touched by war only indirectly, that region also experienced a period of profound change and turmoil between roughly 1944 and 1948. Characterizing this so-called postwar “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 democratic government 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.⁶

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 nineteenth century and in the growing strength and importance of the middle and lower classes, which were spurred to action by wartime inflation. But they also ascribe a large role to international developments and the role of the United States therein. The “principal” factor in the developments of 1944–1946, according to Bethell and Roxborough, was the victory of the allies: “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.” 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 encouraged oppositionists to press their case.⁷

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 powers they lost in nearly every Latin America country after that date except, perhaps, in 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 U.S. 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 to the question of whether or not the United States had a role to play in the demise of democratic fervor in Latin America.⁸

At least part of the answer must be found in the successes and failures of Spruille Braden's policies, but is often overlooked as a real factor in U.S.–Central American relations. As an example, Thomas Leonard, in a book entirely devoted to the postwar years, neglects to pay much attention to Braden's so-called "policy regarding dictatorships and disreputable governments," stating only that: "Braden expressed interest in encouraging democracy throughout the region, but the limitations of the U.S. nonintervention policy provided only the opportunity to express support for Central American constitutionalism."⁹ By itself, the non-recognition of Somoza suggests that this cannot be entirely true. In fact, the policy regarding dictatorships was the subject of intense debate and disagreement among U.S. diplomats, but that episode is also largely ignored in Leonard's analysis. Thus, the current chapter and the work of Leonard are based on widely different assumptions. Like many works of the 1980s, Leonard's book deals with the events of the 1940s from the perspective 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 he puts it.¹⁰ 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.

Presumably, Braden would not have accomplished anything at all while Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles, who had built their diplomacy around

the non-intervention principle, were in charge of Latin American policy. However, many personnel changes occurred at the top of 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 awaited a similar fate shortly thereafter. Cordell Hull, who had in fact been instrumental in Welles's 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 under Byrnes that Braden was brought 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 he thought to be in line with the progressive revolutions and uprisings that were occurring all over the region. The ambassador argued that the United States could only thrive in an environment of "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 others," 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 his proposals could be interpreted as a move away from the Good Neighbor's non-intervention policy. However, argued the ambassador, while the United States 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 Latin America was 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 U.S. 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 United States' 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. According to Braden, "the success or failure of our policies will largely depend on the competency and judgment of our representatives abroad, and ... it is almost impossible either to draw any hard and fast rule for their decisions and action in a given case." On the one hand, U.S. 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 Latin American peoples could be cultivated even while the United States maintained formal diplomatic relations with the dictators that governed them. 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."¹¹

Braden's "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. 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 the United States' ability to spread its political culture and institutions to other countries had probably

not been this strong since the end of World War I, and would not be as strong until the introduction of the Alliance for Progress, 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. He feared that Braden's definition of "disreputable" governments was unworkable and that the proposal would mark the end of the non-intervention policy. 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."¹²

In all, comments from 12 different posts were collected and cited in the report (a few reports came in later). As Hussey himself summarizes: "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." 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 a majority was 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 related to the conditions of the country in question. Officers in the smaller authoritarian states mostly offered reservations. 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 noted that any action against the Carias 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 during the war.

However, Braden's proposals were enthusiastically received by officers who served in more 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. Bowers had served in Spain for six years during the rise of General Franco.¹³ 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 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 traditional dictatorship] than under the systems of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco." Furthermore, the conditions for such a policy were favorable, in Bowers's 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 aggressively advocate their system the enemies of democracy will certainly make it their business to implant their particular ideology."¹⁴

In May, Braden 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 non-interference 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 of 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."¹⁵

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 ambassadors who believed that the United States should exert its power 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’s recent pro-democratic policy. In the context of the time, this was not simply a friendly gesture to the government, but a warning to Vargas that he better follow through on his promise to hold fair and free elections rather than to continue himself in office—which was rumored to be the president’s real intention.¹⁶

There were several problems with the approach of Braden and his followers, however. On the level of “high policy,” discrimination against “disreputable” governments in the hemisphere clashed with the ongoing effort to build an inter-American community of nations—an effort that was redoubled after the war with the founding of the OAS and with the United States’ 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.¹⁷

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 cases, the Department tended to defer policy decisions to the chief of mission in question. In effect, the execution of U.S. policy toward hard-to-classify governments would depend on 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.

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 upheavals 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 U.S. ambassador in Guatemala showed only a passing interest in politics and U.S. 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 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.

In Guatemala, Ambassador Boaz Long struggled to come to terms with the events of 1944. A festive, optimistic mood prevailed in that country after the October revolution. The ruling junta organized fair elections, which were won by Juan José Arévalo, a liberal-minded university professor who set in motion land reform and education programs that were moderate by international standards, but revolutionary in the Central American context. Initially, 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 foreign colony took the

political changes in good humor—the manager of the U.S.-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.”¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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 of the unsettling effects that the Guatemalan revolution had in neighboring countries. The remaining dictators in the isthmus complained that the new Arévalo regime was communistic and invited the United States to join them in an anti-communistic alliance against the threat. At this point in 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.”²⁰

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 70s.²¹ 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.²²

One of the first tasks that Kyle had waiting for him when he arrived at his post was to formulate his comments on the suggested policy against dictatorships and disreputable governments. His eventual report offers a glimpse of the new ambassador's generous idealism. Kyle did not just support 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 as a result of the war justified this more assertive attitude and 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: "We should above all things be fair, just, and charitable to all peoples and all nations," the ambassador wrote to the Department, "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."²³

Despite Kyle's idealism, the honeymoon between the U.S. diplomatic establishment and the new Guatemalan government lasted only three years. After 1947, it became evident that the two had different understandings of 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 revolutionaries. 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 U.S. policymakers developed against Guatemala—unless the Cold War, with all its complicated causes and effects, is taken as a single factor.²⁴

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 U.S. conception of democratic governance. For example, both countries adopted an anti-dictatorial policy, but the contrast between the tactics they chose could not have been greater. Braden's proposals were confined to symbolic and diplomatic acts that would not interfere with inter-American solidarity and cooperation. Arévalo, meanwhile, had come to regard diplomacy as a dead-end strategy after negotiations with El Salvador to establish greater Central American unity had come to naught. For ideological reasons as well as self-defense, Arévalo came to support the so-called "Caribbean Legion"—a loose network of politicians

and political exiles that sought to topple the remaining dictators in the region through armed intervention. The actions of the Guatemalan-backed “Legion,” while ineffectual in terms of actually spreading democracy, were part of a larger international conflict between the democracies and the dictatorships in the Caribbean (the U.S., however, seems to have been less aware of the actions of a counter-revolutionary network supported by the dictators). 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 OAS 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’s actions, the Legion’s own internal divisions, 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 his role in the regional unrest and started to think of the Caribbean Legion as a movement influenced by communism.²⁵

Another major difference between the U.S. 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 U.S.-owned United Fruit Company (UFCO), 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.²⁶ The company employed a small army of very effective lobbyists who received a sympathetic hearing, ironically, from assistant secretary Spruille Braden. In 1945, the latter had put a stamp of U.S. 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 of 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.²⁷

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 North 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 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.²⁸ 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 U.S. 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 a U.S. 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.²⁹ His 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 bent were quick to pick up on that message and to seek out Patterson. General Miguel Ydígoras-Fuentes, former 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."³⁰

After its own 1944 uprising, El Salvador seemed to be heading in the same general direction as Guatemala, but politics in the former country would eventually turn toward conservative military rule—to the disappointment of the U.S. embassy. Martínez's fall from the presidency cleared the way for General Andrés Ignacio Menéndez who was a former collaborator of Martínez and had been a figurehead president on the latter's behalf once before in 1934, but seems to have been genuinely interested in the democratic experiment of 1944.³¹ The democratic opening in El Salvador was characterized by feverish activity. Some ten political parties were formed—or came out into the open—in the two months after Martínez's downfall. Some were radical, some reactionary, but all referred in some way or another to the democratic ideology of the war.³² New newspapers were published while existing newspapers began to express editorial comments freely.³³ Lawyers organized themselves in a professional organization and forced the Martínez appointees from their positions in the judicial branch.³⁴ The sessions of the national legislature, still made up of *Martínistas*, were thoroughly dominated by the spontaneous—and somewhat disorderly—contributions from the public in the galleries.³⁵ While there was something of an anarchic quality to all this activity, many Salvadorans seemed to focus their hopes on Arturo Romero, 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 the U.S. embassy, there was a good chance that the disfigured young doctor would be elected president had the elections that were promised by Menéndez taken place.³⁶

The 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, embassy officers also recounted, with barely suppressed glee, how Martínez's 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."³⁷ Thurston apparently sympathized with 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 embassy to profess his pro-Americanism and distaste of the radical factions in the revolution. He also appears to have been under the impression that the embassy had played an important role in Martínez's downfall and was very grateful for that.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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. Rumors about communist agitators, which were followed, ironically, by bloody riots induced by reactionary agitators set the tone for the month of August.⁴¹ It seems likely that these latest "communist uprisings" were the work of the local chief of police, Colonel Osmin Aguirre y Salinas. 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."⁴² 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.⁴³ On October 21, Aguirre made his move and, with the help of his supporters in the army, forced Menéndez resign. Quoting the threat of communist agents, Congress was made to appoint the police chief president.⁴⁴

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 embassy 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 after the coup, 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 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 crisis in El Salvador had "a significance far greater than the confines of this country, or even Central America." The ambassador asserted that the United States "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."⁴⁵

During the next couple of weeks the situation in El Salvador remained in the balance. The Aguirre regime was opposed by rival army factions and the liberal middle sectors of the capital who had removed Martínez.⁴⁶ While the State Department did not formally distance itself from the Aguirre government, it did not formally acknowledge its existence either. Simmons was careful not to 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 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. In turn, the ambassador's reports on the insecure position of Aguirre and his supposed Nazi sympathies 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.⁴⁷

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's 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 1944.⁴⁸

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 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 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.⁴⁹

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 El 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 against dictatorial

governments. 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.⁵⁰ 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 “Liberal opinion ... would be profoundly shocked in this country were we to extend recognition to the Aguirre regime prior to March 1.”⁵¹

It is obvious then, that U.S. 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 El Salvador, its participation would indicate that diplomatic recognition of Aguirre did not imply approval of his regime.⁵² Unfortunately, and to the considerable annoyance of the Department, the Guatemalan government flatly rejected to recognize Aguirre together with the United States. 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.⁵³

The fact that the 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, had 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.⁵⁴ Throughout the following years there was very little contact between the U.S. embassy and oppositionists.

Diplomatic recognition did not affect the political power struggle in El Salvador to the extent that Aguirre could prevent Castañeda from being inaugurated into the presidency on March 1. Simmons was initially optimistic about Castañeda’s government. 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.⁵⁵ That this was not to be may have been due to the fact that 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 preferred 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 interpret conciliatory moves made by the president as concessions wrung from a weak government, rather than grand gestures made by a strong one.⁵⁶

Thus Simmons found himself in a considerably more ambiguous situation than 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 Castañeda and his successors as an integral part of the military and often authoritarian rule that characterized Salvadoran politics between the early 1930s and the middle 1980s.⁵⁷ But Simmons lacked the broad 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,” as “[c]ertain 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. 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 Castañeda’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 Castañeda a chance to involve the liberal opposition in his government. The ambassador still considered that group of “forward-looking liberals, small in number but strongly influenced by Jeffersonian concepts of democracy,” to be the best hope for El 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.” 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.” He regretted to admit, however, that U.S. diplomats tended 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 prevented the Foreign Service from developing wider contacts and “liberal and progressive elements in the country ... have failed to gain contact with our representatives.”⁵⁸

While Simmons was unable to reach out to Salvadoran liberals, he also lost confidence in Castañeda, who, despite his continued rhetorical dedication to “conciliation,” became entirely dependent on the support of the conservative generals to ward off coups by younger officers and to suppress food riots and increasingly militant labor protests against the government’s meandering social policies.⁵⁹ The ambassador concluded in November 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.”⁶⁰ At the same time, the ambassador chided the liberals for their complete lack of willingness to compromise with Castañeda’s conciliation policy. In October 1945, for example, a cabinet crisis had offered an opening for President Castañeda to invite more liberals into his government. In Simmons’s opinion, the liberal faction should have jumped at this “golden opportunity” to increase its influence and work towards a “greater degree of democracy and popular participation.” However, it had insisted on an unrealistic demand, in Simmons’s eyes, to reinstitute the more progressive 1886 constitution, something that Castañeda was unwilling or unable to do.⁶¹

Beginning in 1947, the Department of State acknowledged that Simmons’s “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.”⁶²

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 3–4 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. Throughout the war, however, Erwin developed a very close working relationship with the Carías regime and, as his years of residence in Tegucigalpa accumulated, he began to appreciate the peace and calm that Carías provided: “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!”⁶³

Neither the State Department nor the Truman administration showed an interest in replacing Erwin. Career officers had no interest in a post as dull as Tegucigalpa and traditionally 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 Foreign Service were thoroughly fed up with him around the end of the war. Officers at the U.S. 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 ‘Carías can do no wrong’ attitude of Tegucigalpa.”⁶⁴

If even his colleagues were losing 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 rumors that he was on Carías’s 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’s 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.⁶⁵ They would be disappointed: Erwin was not even halfway through his tenure as ambassador to Honduras. With Erwin remaining in his utopian “Shangri-La”⁶⁶ 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, as becomes clear from its position regarding the Caribbean Legion, which organized armed excursions from Guatemalan territory into Honduras in 1945. Carías complained loudly 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 com-

munism. Erwin took Carías's 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 radical activity against a friendly government. 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 for 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's 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 countries, for the time being.⁶⁷

It was prudent of Carías to keep a low profile in international matters, because the Department's attitude toward him cooled down more in the next two years. 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. The Honduran ambassador to Washington, Dr. Julián 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 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.⁶⁸

Perhaps because of Carías's 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.⁶⁹ Two months earlier, when the Honduran ambassador visited the Department to explain that Honduras was a democracy, but of a "different nature" than North 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 when it was informed about Carías's intention to leave the presidency in 1948, it did not directly inform the Hondurans that special restrictions on weapons deliveries applied in the meantime.⁷⁰

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." The fact that no such election had taken place in Honduras since 1933 "influenced our approach to the question of military cooperation." 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."⁷¹

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. When secretary John B. Faust, who was something of amateur historian, joined the embassy in 1942, the embassy's reports on the local dictatorship were augmented with a historical perspective:

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 Carías 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 Carías 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.⁷²

The embassy's basic argument was that the choice in Honduras was not one between dictatorship and democracy, but one between dictatorship and chaos. In this light, the embassy alleged, Carías's 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, the embassy claimed to have no records 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.

Erwin insisted 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 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's rule, according to the embassy. Only Carías's 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."⁷³

It is clear that Erwin's defense of the Carías regime is very one-sided. While historians have noted the "modernizing" aspects of his government, especially in terms of strengthening the power and the institutions of the central state, the repressive techniques that it employed have also been well documented. Carías had made the national police into an agent of "authoritarian peace" and his regime relied on the secret police to keep tabs on its opponents. During the war, the ability of these security forces to monitor political opponents was significantly expanded due to the

training and support it received from the U.S. FBI. While Erwin argued that the political prisoners of the government were basically violators of human rights, hundreds of women in Tegucigalpa were signing petitions for their release.⁷⁴ Whether Erwin was completely aware of these facts, especially the extent of Cárías's security apparatus, is hard to say. It is clear, however, that his attitude toward critics of the regime was very hostile. As has been noted before, he rejected critical reports from U.S. military representatives; refused to listen to political opponents of the regime; and downplayed the tragedy of the San Pedro Sula massacre.

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."⁷⁵ 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."⁷⁶ 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 Cárías 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. The U.S. military attaché in Tegucigalpa claimed that the attitude of the United States was "impossible to evaluate from this end." While it had seemed, for a while, that the U.S. might intervene in favor of democracy in Latin America, "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[ident] Carias."⁷⁷

While it is true that the Department made no attempt to intervene in Honduras, the U.S. ambassador would have had considerable leeway to express opposition to the local regime at this point in time. If someone of Braden or Berle's temperament and ideological inclinations had been the ambassador to Tegucigalpa during the late 1940s, the Cárías regime would

most probably have been exposed to more forceful opposition. Considering the U.S. 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 *Carriato*.

Astonishingly, the State Department allowed Erwin to linger in Honduras. 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. Lilienthal to head the Atomic Energy Committee. According to newspaper reports, Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who was a big supporter of Lilienthal, wanted to punish McKellar for his opposition to the nomination by firing Tennessee's senior diplomat: John Erwin.⁷⁸

Erwin was just one year short of witnessing the end of Carías's presidency. The Honduran chief survived the 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 National 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 National Party and former members of the Carías cabinet: the regime would survive without Carías and Erwin.⁷⁹

DEMOCRACY BY UPS AND DOWNS

Why did the policy regarding "disreputable" governments fail? Firstly, certain international trends conspired against it. Two of the more important are a general return to more conservative politics in many Latin American states and the failure of Washington policymakers to formulate measurable goals and specific timetables for the policy, or to synchronize it with other objectives such as the establishment of the OAS. Secondly, Washington's failures caused confusion among U.S. diplomats in specific countries. Lack of goals, timetables, or even a sound definition of "reputability" gave the policy its patchwork appearance in Central 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 also wavered in the case of hard-to-classify governments such as that of Castañeda, which gradually turned to the right. The best opportunity, from a diplomatic angle, to influence the direction of political developments in El Salvador 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 El Salvador when it prematurely recognized Aguirre. That action was met with disappointment and anger by Salvadoran liberals and probably made it much harder on Ambassador 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. Kyle was rather popular in Guatemala for his friendly interest in the country's agriculture, but 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 that was evident in that country.

Several long-term trends help to explain these policy inconsistencies. Firstly, while the U.S. had arguably abandoned the non-intervention principle to collaborate with several dictators during World War II, few people in the foreign policy establishment recognized that fact. Officers like Erwin clung to the idea that the United States had no right to intervene in local politics or to dictate to Latin Americans what kind of government they were to have. Secondly, the Foreign Service in Central America had never been successful at extending its networks of information beyond establishment politics, but it had failed completely to anticipate the growth of opposition or to strike up an intelligent dialogue with oppositionists during and after the revolutions of 1944. Thirdly, though closely related

to the second point, even if Simmons and Kyle and other officers in Central America sympathized with the progressive movements in El Salvador and Guatemala, they were largely in the dark as to the goals or relative strength of those movements. Kyle never managed to understand the role that social programs played in Guatemala's revolution, nor did Simmons understand why Salvadoran liberals refused to work with Castañeda. In this context, U.S. observers quickly and easily blamed Central Americans themselves for the lack of progress toward democratic government. Over time, Washington policymakers concluded that it could only play a relatively modest role in promoting democracy in the isthmus, or the hemisphere more generally.

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*.⁸⁰ While the article has been characterized as signaling the abandonment of Braden's policy, Halle probably considered it a refinement. He starts by establishing a timeframe. The article argues 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. However, this development toward democracy is achieved by "evolution rather than revolution": It will not be attained just by the overthrow of dictators. 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".

Halle continues by establishing the proper role for the United States. In the recent past, that role was assumed by "paternalistic" interventionists, but the way forward, according to Halle, was not for the United States 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 principal stockholder), combined with the active dissemination of U.S. 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 republics], as they stand today, between those that are immaculate democracies and those that are black dictatorships. All of them are shades of grey.” These perceptions would inform the actions and sympathies of U.S. diplomats as the Cold War began to play an ever bigger role in hemispheric relations.

NOTES

1. “Latin America: Democracy’s Bull”, *TM* (November 5, 1945).
2. Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946–1950* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 11.
3. Clark, *Diplomatic Relations*, chapters 10 and 11; Walter, *The Regime*, 129–163; Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators Never Die. A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 101–109.
4. Clark, *Diplomatic Relations*, 326–327 and 342 and Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 232. While his focus is on internal dynamics, Knut Walter at least acknowledges that U.S. opposition was the main reason for Somoza not to compete in presidential elections personally. Walter, *The Regime*, 144–145.
5. Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 122–123; Bethell and Roxborough, *Latin America*, 28; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 316–331; Rock, *Latin America*, 5–6.
6. Bethell and Roxborough, “The Postwar Conuncture”, 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 Conuncture”, *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 Lowenthal, *Exporting Democracy*, 41–71. The articles collected in Rock ed., *Latin America in the 1940s* rivals Bethell and Roxborough’s analysis by their focus on internal, rather than international developments. The book rarely discusses Central America, though.
7. Bethell and Roxborough, “The Postwar Conjunction”, 6–7.
 8. *Idem*, 16–23.
 9. Thomas M. Leonard, *The United States and Central America, 1944–1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 10.
 10. Leonard, *Perceptions*, ix.
 11. 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.
 12. 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.
 13. Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).
 14. 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.
 15. Wood, *Dismantling*, 14–131; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, chapter 16.
 16. Wood, *Dismantling*, 121–131. Quote is on page 123.
 17. Schmitz contextualizes these policy considerations in the emerging Cold War: Schmitz, ‘*Thank God*’, 138–144.
 18. 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. Gleijeses also describes the optimism of the time after Ubico and Ponce’s fall. However, he also refers to the revolutionary government’s violent suppression of an indigenous uprising. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 30–32.
 19. 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.
20. Wise to Woodward, Briggs, Braden, and Acheson, April 25, 1947, Lot Files, General Memoranda, box 13, folder marked May to June, 1947.
 21. Interview with Woodward, ADST.
 22. On Arévalo and his administration, see Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, chapter 2.
 23. 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.
 24. On U.S. relations with Guatemala during the early Cold War, see chapter 9.
 25. Aaron Coy Moulton, "Building Their Own Cold War in Their Own Backyard: The Transnational, International Conflicts in the Greater Caribbean Basin, 1944–1954", *Cold War History* 15:2 (2015), 133–154; Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 4–5, 31, 34; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 107–116; and *Ibid.*, "Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21:1 (February 1989), 133–145, there 134, 137 and 142–144.
 26. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 99.
 27. 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.
 28. Kyle to Arnold Nicholson, Memorandum on Dean Kyle's background, Kyle Papers; Kyle to Liberty Hyde Baily, March 29, 1946, Kyle Papers.
 29. Consider for example, Patterson's method for identifying communists, discussed in LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 116.
 30. Gen. Miguel Ydígoras-Fuentes to Richard S. Patterson, December 3, 1948, Richard S. Patterson Papers, Harry Truman Presidential Library at Independence, Missouri, box 5, folder marked Appointment; Patterson to Ydígoras-Fuentes, February 28, 1949, Patterson Papers, box 5, folder marked Appointment.
 31. Ellis, Memorandum on Political and Social Opinions of Mrs. Menendez, wife of the provisional President, May 25, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Developments, July 17, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 32. This trend is noticeable in the names of the new parties, which stressed democracy and solidarity: *Unión Democrática Nacional*, *Partido Emancipación Nacional*, *Frente Popular Salvadoreño*, *Partido Unión*

- Democrata*, *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 Department, May 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 29, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 29, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 31, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 2, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 5, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Gerhard Gade (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to El Salvador) to Department, June 22, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Gade to Department, June 24, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
33. Thurston to Department, May 12, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 17, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 34. Thurston to Department, June 2, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 35. Thurston to Department, May 22, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, June 17, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Gade to Department, June 29, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 36. Ellis, Memorandum on Support of Augustín Alfaro for the presidential candidacy of Dr. Arturo Romero, May 25, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Developments, July 17, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Ellis, Memorandum on Politics, July 19, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 37. Gade to Department, June 29, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 38. Maleady, Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Arturo Romero, May 17, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 39. Ellis, Memorandum on Support of Augustín Alfaro for the Presidential Candidacy of Dr. Arturo Romero, May 25, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
 40. Thurston, Memorandum starting with: "I told the Minister...", August 30, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.

41. Thurston to Department, August 4, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Thurston to Department, August 21, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
42. Ellis, Memorandum on Colonel Aguirre Salina, Chief of Police, September 9, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Gade to Department, October 23, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
43. Maleady, Memorandum starting with "An informant, whose reliability...", October 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
44. Maleady, Memorandum starting with "This memo is presented...", October 23, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
45. Gade to Department, October 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800.
46. Gade to Department, November 1, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Simmons to Department, November 10, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, November 21, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 7, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 10, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 18, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 22, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800.
47. Gade to Department, November 7, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, November 21, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, November 24, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Stettinius to Simmons, November 28, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Berle to Gade, November 1, 1944, PRES, CF, box 9, class 710.
48. R. Arrieta Rossi (Salvadoran Minister of Foreign Affairs), Radiogram to the American Governments, November 29, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Gade to Department, December 26, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800. Castañeda lost his position in the Martínez government (and his freedom) when he "admitted" to involvement in a conspiracy against the regime. See Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, chapter 7, section 1.
49. Gade to Department, January 16, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 4, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 8, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 9, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 19, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, February 7, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 16, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, February 9, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800;

- Gade to Department, February 15, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, March 7, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, March 10, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, March 10, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800.
50. 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.
 51. Gade to Department, January 25, 1945, PRES, CF, box 11, volume II, class 800.
 52. John F. Simmons (U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador) to Department, March 22, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, May 19, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800.
 53. Simmons to Department, April 11, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800.
 54. PRES, box 119, volume XVII, class 800: Salvador. Protest against Recognition.
 55. Gade to Department, February 15, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800. Simmons to Department, March 14, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Gade to Department, January 25, 1945, PRES, CF, box 11, volume II, class 800.
 56. Simmons to Department, March 28, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, June 1, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to the American Embassies in Central America, June 11, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, 304, June 13, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, August 8, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, August 29, 1945, PRES, box 118, volume XVI, class 800; Simmons to Department, July 30, 1945, PRES, CF, box 11, volume II, class 800; Gade to Department, November 30, 1945, PRES, box 119, volume XVII, class 801.1.
 57. While not referring to Castañeda specifically, Ching briefly discusses this continuity: Ching, *Authoritarian El Salvador*, conclusion.
 58. Simmons to Department, July 9, 1945, PRES, CF, box 11, volume I, class 710.
 59. Simmons to Department, September 18, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to Department, September 23, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to certain embassies, September 25, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to Department, September 25, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to Department, September 27, 1946, PRES, box 130,

- volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to Department, September 27, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800; Simmons to Department, September 30, 1946, PRES, box 130, volume XVII, class 800.
60. Simmons to Department, November 27, 1946, PRES, box 131, volume XVIII, class 800.
 61. Simmons to Department, October 10, 1945, PRES, CF, box 11, volume II, class 800.
 62. Simmons to Department, January 17, 1947, PRES, CF, box 14, class 800; 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. A brief discussion of Castañeda's plans for *continuismo* can also be found in: Roberto Turcios, *Autoritarismo y Modernización. El Salvador 1950–1960* (Ediciones Tendencias, 1993), 25–26.
 63. Erwin to Department, November 2, 1944, PRHO, CF, box 19, volume 7, class 800.
 64. Simmons to Briggs, March 13, 1946, PRES, CF, box 13, volume I, class 020; Newbegin to Braden, August 12, 1946, Lot Files, Miscellaneous Memoranda, box 64, folder marked Neutrality, September 21, 1938 to August 14, 1940.
 65. Thurston to Department, July 27, 1944, PRES, box 100, class 800; Thurston to Department, August 19, 1944, PRES, box 100, class 800; The U.S. Legal Attaché to El Salvador to Department, September 13, 1944, PRES, box 100, class 800. 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.
 66. One of secretary Faust's favorite terms to describe Honduras. Faust to William P. Cochran, Jr. (Department of State), January 21, 1946, PRHO, box 147, class 801.1.
 67. Erwin to Cabot, January 11, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Erwin to Department, January 11, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Erwin to Department, January 12, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Robert F. Woodward (U.S. Secretary of Embassy to Guatemala) to Department, May 29, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Erwin to Department, June 14, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Erwin to Department, October 12, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Kyle to Department, October 13, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Erwin to Department, October 15, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Kyle to Department, October 16, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7,

- class 800; Erwin to Department, October 20, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800; Kyle to Department, November 9, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 26, volume 7, class 800. Moulton notes that Carías would become involved in the counter-revolutionary activity supported by Somoza and Trujillo, but this appears to have been in 1947 and 1948. Moulton, “Building Their Own Cold War”, 145–147.
68. Braden, Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Don Julián R. Cáceres, Ambassador of Honduras, August 13, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 31, volume 3, class 800; Lt. Col. Nathan A. Brown, Jr. (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the American Embassy in Guatemala, January 16, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 33, volume 6, class 824.
 69. Byrnes to Erwin, Paraphrase of telegram received from the Department, March 14, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 32, volume 5, class 800.1.
 70. Cochran, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, January 4, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 31, volume 3, class 800.
 71. Briggs, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, December 26, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 32, volume 5, class 820; Newbegin, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, October 24, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume 5, class 800.
 72. Faust to Department, April 3, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 31, volume 3, class 800.
 73. Erwin to Department, August 3, 1945, PRHO, CF, box 24, class 710.
 74. Inestroza, *Policía Nacional*, 184–185 and 199–203; *Ibid.*, *Documentos Clasificados*, 13–26. “Copia de la solicitud hecha al Señor Presidente por más de doscientas señoras y señoritas de la capital”, in *ibid.*, 180–184.
 75. Faust to Dean Acheson (Acting Secretary of State), May 14, 1946, PRHO, CF, box 31, volume 4, class 800.
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 78. “Furious debate on Lillenthal rages in Senate”, *Chicago Daily Tribune* [CDT] (March 25, 1947), 11; “Would consider stopgap aid to Greece: Truman”, *CDT* (March 27, 1947), 16.
 79. Dodd, *Carías*, 210–224; Mario R. Argueta, *Juan Manuel Gálvez. Su Trayectoria Gubernativa* (Banco Central de Honduras, 2007), 5–23.
 80. Y (Louis Halle), “On a Certain Impatience with Latin America”, *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review* 28:1/4 (1949–1950), 565–579. 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 U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America—much like Kennan’s article with regard to the Soviet Union. Also consult Schmitz, “*Thank God*”, 145–157.

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The Middle of the Road: The Cold War Comes to Central America, 1947–1954

The “ten years of spring,” as the Guatemalan experiment with democratic government is known, started out under the sympathetic observance of 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 anti-communist and a good friend of Anastasio Somoza, was allowed to remain in Nicaragua for much of the 1950s. Thus, Peurifoy’s appointment extended the front of the Cold War to Central America.

As for Peurifoy himself, 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 U.S. journalists through Guatemala City waving a pistol while bombs dropped on all 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.¹ If only in personal style, Peurifoy could hardly have been more different from the diplomats of the Good Neighbor era. It is fitting that this study of Good Neighbor diplomats in Central America 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.

This chapter shows how both U.S. diplomats and Central American politicians moved away from postwar idealism. Policymakers in Washington started to interpret the world in terms of the Cold War while Central American governments made a turn to the political right. Foreign Service officers were squeezed in the middle and needed to make sense of the ambiguous lessons of the war and the more recent crusade against dictatorship. Most diplomats were disappointed in what they believed was Central Americans' failure to advance along the path toward democracy after 1944. The left-wing government of Guatemala became, in North American eyes, a textbook example of how a democratic experiment could go astray in a developing country. On the other hand, neither the State Department nor its Foreign Service was ready to embrace right-wing politicians, some of whom were regarded as fascist sympathizers. In El Salvador, and in Honduras to some extent, U.S. diplomats eventually recognized a "middle-of-the-road" solution in the military regime of Oscar Osorio, which was nominally devoted to democratic procedures, devotedly anti-communist, and committed to economic progress rather than political experimentation. As the Cold War took shape, U.S. diplomats preferred this new kind of Central American leader, who held the middle between fascism and postwar idealism.

GOING DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Historians of U.S.–Latin American relations 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 twentieth century.² Also, the purported U.S. support for anti-communist dictators is supposed to form a connection between pre-war and Cold War policies. It is undeniable, of course, that U.S. diplomats in the pre-war period shared their disdain for the (Indian) lower classes with the local aristocracy and were 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 fear of social revolutions and work with local forces as they were. The early Good Neighbor policy is one example, while Braden’s diplomacy entailed a tolerance for local change and social experimentation that was unthinkable some years later. Only when the Soviet Union was widely perceived to be a direct threat in Latin America did old prejudices combine with 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 continuities 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 United States’ side closed that particular route, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

There was no way back to the early Good Neighbor policy either: the principle of non-intervention was thoroughly undermined during the fight against the fifth column in Latin America. New U.S. agencies meddled in everything from sewer building to military training. The diplomatic service itself took on a new role in the management of 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.”³

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. But while Washington policymakers started to view events in Latin America “through a Cold War lens,” the Truman administration remained “flexible” in its approach to the hemisphere, according to the analysis of Hal Brands.⁴ Initially, the developing “culture” of the Cold War had little effect on the embassies in Central America. 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.”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

This is not to say that U.S. Cold War policies had no effect on the local situation. Doubtlessly, reactionary groups in Central America felt encouraged by anti-communist rhetoric emanating from Washington or by contacts with other U.S. agencies such as the CIA or military representatives.⁷ However, with the memories of the fascist danger still rather fresh in the memory and new dangers looming on the political left, U.S. diplomats developed a definite preference for the so-called “middle of the road.” Much like in the 1930s, when 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.

In the Central American context, reaction was represented by Anastasio Somoza’s regime. While Washington and Managua reestablished diplomatic relations on May 30, 1948, putting a definite end to U.S. attempts to dislodge Somoza, the State Department’s attitude toward Somoza remained cool for some time. The attitude of the general himself was

anything but cool. The Nicaraguan delegates to the Organization of American States and the United Nations consistently and unconditionally supported U.S. propositions and Somoza was one of the few Latin American leaders who warmly welcomed U.S. action in Korea, promising to send troops to that theater 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 crisis. The U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua in the early 1950s, Thomas Whelan, told his superiors that “despite the widespread impression to the contrary” the general was not “a dictator in the true sense of the word.”⁸

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 White House. But taken on 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.⁹

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 infiltration and the new 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 pace 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 United Fruit Company. While it was not Washington's primary objective to protect United Fruit's interests, Guatemalan threats against U.S. 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 State 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.¹⁰

The attention that historians have paid to the political extremes in post-war Central America—reactionary Nicaragua and progressive Guatemala—easily obscures the importance that the State Department attached to what it understood as the political center. A good illustration of Department perceptions of Central American politics is a goodwill trip to the region by 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 mark of U.S. approval or disapproval for the particular brand of government in that country. Most important was the question of

where Miller would celebrate the Fourth of July, which was to be the climax of his trip to Central America.

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 Department 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: "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."¹¹ The tone of this memorandum of conversation alone demonstrates that the Department was exasperated with the ambassador's propaganda. In any event, no one was willing to associate the Fourth of July with the Somoza regime.

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 U.S. satisfaction with the liberal experiment in that country. But times had changed. The new ambassador in Guatemala, Richard Patterson, vehemently objected to the idea 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 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."¹²

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. Instead, apart 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 Guatemala.”¹³ 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 1948. 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*.¹⁴ By 1950, this was exactly what the Department had in mind for its southern neighbors. As Louis Halle had argued, careful, responsible, and evolutionary progress was the way to go for the isthmian republics.

After the demise of the policy against “disreputable governments,” Honduras also became an example of such progress in the eyes of U.S. diplomats. That development was eased by the recall and retirement of Erwin and the election of a new president, though neither represented a fundamental departure from the Carías era. The election of Juan Manuel Gálvez to the presidency and the latter’s 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 U.S. embassy in Honduras was an active supporter of the local dictatorship. 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.

In Tegucigalpa, U.S. 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 the 1930s, when non-intervention was dogma. Both reintroduced a high degree of 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 members of the political opposition. But while both Daniels and Bursley continued to pay lip service to the U.S. 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 that were understood to embody careful steps toward more liberal governance, but religiously maintaining the appearance of neutrality in local affairs. When the Honduran ambassador in Washington carefully inquired whether Braden’s replacement with Miller 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.”¹⁵

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. 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.”¹⁶ 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 U.S. ambassador hoped to express his “ideas of the democratic spirit.” While both Daniels and Bursley ended the overly optimistic reports on the *Cariato* 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.¹⁷

Daniels and Bursley showed careful, sympathetic interest in the presidential elections of 1948, which pitted Juan Manuel Gálvez, who was supported by Carías, against Angel Zúñiga Huete, the long-time leader of the Liberal Party. 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 took place. Indeed, Bursley reported that there were few *fundamental* differences between the contending parties: "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.'"¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ 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.²⁰

Bursley's reaction to the election results, a resounding victory for Gálvez, 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 Gálvez, but on the other hand, Zúñiga Huete had not won the ambassador's sympathy by withdrawing from the race 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."²¹ Ironically, the legation's commentary on the 1931 elections, which had brought Carías to power, was almost identical.²²

It is difficult to say whether the Gálvez election would have been acceptable to the U.S. some three years earlier, when Braden directed policy, but it coincided with the generally low expectations about Latin American politics in 1948. In that context, Gálvez's policies after his inauguration as president came as a pleasant surprise. Gálvez was not "dictator-minded," according to Bursley.²³ Indeed, he adopted a 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.²⁴ In the meantime, Gálvez 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 *Cariato* was relaxed, a change symbolized by the fact that the police in the capital started carrying batons instead of rifles.²⁵

Since the Gálvez 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. 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 Gálvez regime while still supporting the long-term goal of democracy for Central America. Some decades after the fact, it is more difficult to see the Gálvez administration in that light. Despite a change in governing style and modest economic growth and liberalization of politics, it did not represent a fundamental move away from Carías’s policies. Perhaps most significantly, in light of the military coup of 1963, the power of the armed forces continued to grow under Gálvez’s government.²⁶ From a U.S. perspective and in the late 1940s context, however, Honduras had become middle of the road.

Further improvements in U.S.–Honduran relations were achieved when it was Bursley’s time to be transferred to another post and the State Department decided to give the Honduran mission to the only man who ever showed any active interest for it: John Draper Erwin. Since the Lilienthal 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 please 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 Gálvez administration shrugged off the criticism as radical and even leftist.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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 Gálvez’s 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’s standpoint. For Erwin, whose romanticized image of Honduras was constructed around its supposed isolation from the modern world with its unions, social legislation, and class conflict, 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 and that after many years of suppression under Carías, “the lethargic giant [labor] should begin to stretch a bit and to sense a need and right for a measure of emancipation.”²⁹ 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 North 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 U.S. 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.”³⁰ There was no obvious reason for Erwin to take these alarmist rumors seriously, except for the fact that he thought Gálvez’s policy too indulgent: “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.”³¹

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 thought he knew, Erwin reflexively blamed outsiders for any trouble in his Shangri-La. A return to fatherly policies of the *Carriato* would be sufficient, however, to set things straight. Meanwhile, the ambassador kept the door to the outside world firmly shut: U.S. intelligence agencies, which would supposedly help local governments fight communists, were not welcome in Erwin’s bailiwick.³² It is not surprising, then, that 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.

By the time of the Guatemalan coup, U.S. diplomats saw eye to eye with a new kind of military regime in El Salvador. It had been a tortuous road, though. Due to several assaults on the Castañeda government from both rightist and leftist factions, the president was forced into the arms of the army and security forces and from 1946 onwards, the country was under a permanent state of siege. 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.³³

At this point, Albert Nufer was in charge of the embassy in San Salvador. A careful and unassuming career officer like Simmons before him, Nufer’s relationship with the Castañeda regime and its opposition was complex and ambiguous. The embassy held no brief for either camp. On the one hand, it was well aware of Castañeda’s intentions to remain in power, either officially as president or officiously as the power behind the throne of a puppet government. On the other hand, Nufer and his colleagues knew that Castañeda’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 Castañeda was supposed to organize. Hence, Castañeda’s attempt to continue in power, the embassy had predicted,

would convince opposition factions that the president had cheated them out of their *legitimate* ascent to power. The result could only be civil strife, which was the embassy's greatest fear.³⁴

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 Castañeda to hold genuinely free elections, but overall, it tried to stay out of politics. While the embassy respected the progress that the Castañeda 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. 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.³⁵

These were the conditions that determined the embassy's reaction to an army coup of December 1948, which was a response to Castañeda's secret reelection.³⁶ No-one at the embassy was sorry to see Castañeda go and no particular opposition group was thought to have a legitimate claim on the presidency. The fact that the December coup was quick and painless was welcomed as an alternative to the disorder that the embassy feared. Under the circumstances, the new junta was the best that could be had for El Salvador in the eyes of the embassy. 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 World War II, Central American "armies," aside from the U.S. 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 armies 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 Hernández Martínez and his immediate successors reflected their approach to politics: duty, tranquility, peace, order ... Although democracy was never mentioned, its dangers were implied in the usual criticism of factions, parties, disorder, and anarchy.” Thus, the military junta and its later successors introduced welfare programs and literary campaigns, 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.³⁷

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 Castañeda 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 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.”³⁸

To the ambassador's considerable dismay, Washington delayed its recognition of the junta, because the coup was associated in the U.S. press with right-wing military coups in Venezuela and Peru.³⁹ The Department assured Nufer, however, that: "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."⁴⁰ In the end, recognition did not depend 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 non-recognition 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 supposedly "fascist" coups in the larger Latin American countries (public opinion did not differentiate between the coups in El Salvador, Venezuela, and Peru).⁴¹

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.⁴² Osorio is a very difficult man to qualify in traditional political terms. 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 postwar liberal agenda in its respect for constitutional procedures and its adoption of social legislation in an overall drive to modernize the national economy.⁴³

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." After some weeks in power, the ambassador could more confidently report that the provisional government was "seeking a middle course": "Responsible Ministers realize that they have a patriotic duty to carry out their work between the pressures of the right and the left ... 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." 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 would "endeavor to effect social progress."⁴⁴

In September Osorio formally left the junta together with one of the civilian members, Galindo 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 the embassy's assessment.⁴⁵ However, the combination seemed to work—for the moment—and the embassy recognized that Osorio and Pohl's party, the *Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática* (PRUD), was "middle of the road" by "United States political standards," because it advocated social reforms without "threatening the capitalist structure of the nation."⁴⁶ 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 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 the embassy's opinion, it was so free as to revert to "license" at times. But the outcome was met with "moderate general enthusiasm."⁴⁷

The State Department and the embassy met Osorio's election with the same moderate enthusiasm. Both Nufer and his direct successor, Ambassador George Price Shaw, described the Osorio government as

moderate and as democratic as might be expected.⁴⁸ 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 reform-minded intellectuals and labor organizations.⁴⁹ Even more important, in the embassy’s assessment, was Osorio’s purported attempt to offer a way forward. 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.⁵⁰ 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.

United States’ efforts to manipulate the direction of the Salvadoran “revolution,” as the junta described its coup, dated back to 1949—even before Osorio was elected. 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 United States 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 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.⁵¹ After Osorio’s election, U.S. “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 El Salvador’s draft 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 Héctor David] Castro.”⁵² 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 El Salvador’s own ultra-conservative coffee interests, U.S. 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 leftists in the government.

The State Department showed itself to be generally appreciative of El Salvador’s mode of government. The election that brought Osorio to power was characterized as the most free that the country enjoyed since the 1931 election of Araujo. While “Leftists have attacked it for being too 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 El Salvador.⁵³ The U.S. position at this point, a few years before the CIA-directed coup in Guatemala that is sometimes regarded as the symbolic end of the Good Neighbor years, is best illustrated by the appointment and experiences of Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke, the last chief of mission to be appointed to Central America before the Eisenhower administration came in.

As scion of two wealthy families, the Biddles and the Dukes, Angier Duke seemed to be the prototype of an amateur political appointee. Duke had led a privileged and sheltered life as a child and young adult when the war broke out in Europe. In January 1941 he volunteered for duty and, in the army, Duke found discipline and direction. While not serving in combat, he 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 that 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 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, Duke 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.⁵⁴

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, Duke attracted the interest of a Congressional Committee inspecting relations with Spain and was appointed ambassador to El Salvador at age 36—the youngest U.S. 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. He did have a sincere desire to help those less fortunate than himself, but his conception of aid did have a 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 North 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 U.S. 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.”⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

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 1950s, 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 program and U.S. 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 believe that the seeds of discontent were successfully sown making inevitable the reform and revolutionary movement that started in 1980.”⁵⁷

EPILOGUE: THE CASTILLO ARMAS SOLUTION

In 1954, the Eisenhower administration toppled the Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz, presumed to be a communist sympathizer, and eventually helped Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas to power. Historians have suggested that by ending the Guatemalan years of spring, the United States wanted to go back to the 1930s situation of supporting friendly dictators.⁵⁸ A comparison with the early 1930s may be informative, but the experience of World War II and the subsequent rise and fall of the policy toward “disreputable” governments, coalescing in the acceptance of the Gálvez and Osorio governments as “middle-of-the-road” alternatives to reaction and revolution, should be regarded as the most important contexts of the 1954 counterrevolution.⁵⁹

The Castillo Armas experiment combined recent and older U.S. assumptions about—and historical experiences with—Central America. The idea that a firm leader backed up by friendly U.S. advice could set his country on track towards stability 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 World War II supplied the reasoning to get around the still popular non-intervention 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 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 1954.⁶⁰

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 Washington 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's 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 Francisco Javier 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, the State Department also stressed that “U.S. action [should] prevent Guatemala from reverting to a dictatorship.”⁶¹

Every official in the U.S. foreign policy establishment, from Ambassador Peurifoy up to President Eisenhower, 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 represents 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.”⁶² 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 discernible.

Thus, Washington initially believed that Castillo Armas had “overwhelming popular support” in Guatemala and told him that “in the not-too-distant future, say six months from now, you should hold free and democratic elections” to confirm that fact. Naturally, the ambassador in Guatemala told him that he would “do all in my power to help you” achieve that goal.⁶³ At the same time, Washington would financially support the economic rebuilding of Guatemala under Castillo Armas (channeling almost half of U.S. direct support for Latin America to Guatemala between 1954 and 1957).⁶⁴ 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.”⁶⁵

Undeniably, however, Washington was aware of, condoned, and even supported harsh measures against Castillo Armas’s opponents—who were, of course, Soviet agents. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Guatemala City, Castillo Armas had 2000 people arrested and interned in concentration camps. That initial action was only a foretaste of Castillo Armas’s dictatorial mode of government over the next three years, during which, in Richard Immerman words, he utilized “Gestapo-like tactics” to initiate “a series of political changes that codified the authoritarian nature of his rule.”⁶⁶ In Washington, however, the harsh measures of Castillo Armas’s early rule were imagined as 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].”⁶⁷

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 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.”⁶⁸

Castillo Armas continually backtracked on his promises to hold free elections or even to liberalize his regime, telling his U.S. 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.”⁶⁹ Despite good progress in the U.S.-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.”⁷⁰ 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.”⁷¹

So why did Washington continue to tolerate, even support, Castillo Armas’s dictatorial practices? The Eisenhower administration was obviously not averse to 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 unrealistic expectations about a controlled anti-communist experiment in Guatemala? The answer is, of course, that the colonel had come to control his U.S. allies at least as much as the U.S. controlled him. In building up the Guatemalan president as a great anti-communist and democrat; having provided him with modern armaments and hard cash; after one New York ticker tape parade, two state visits, and three personal meetings with Eisenhower, all in the context of battling

communism,⁷² 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.⁷³

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.

NOTES

1. Stephen C. Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982); Richard K. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 136–138.
2. Grandin and Joseph eds., *A Century of Revolution*, Part I: The First Cold War, especially the article by Jeffrey L. Gould.
3. Walter and Williams, “Antipolitics in El Salvador”, 327–329.
4. Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 15–16.
5. Williams, Memorandum on Dangers of Split in Junta, December 31, 1948, PRES, CF, class 800.
6. Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), chapter 1.
7. Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, 15. On the local origins of the Cold War, also see: Moulton, “Building Their Own Cold War”.
8. The Ambassador in Nicaragua (Whelan) to Department, Managua, March 6, 1953, FRUS IV, 1375–1377. On Whelan's relationship with Somoza,

- consult: Clark, *The United States and Somoza*, 190–191, and Karl Bermann, *Under the Big Stick. Nicaragua and the United States since 1848* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1986), 242–243.
9. “Memorandum of discussion at the 199th meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, May 27, 1954”, FRUS IV (GC), document 47; Clark, *The United States and Somoza*, 189–190 and 196, note 44.
 10. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 101–132; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 72–133; “Memorandum of conversation, by the Acting Officer in Charge of Central America and Panama Affairs (Clark), Washington, October 14, 1952. Subject: Export control policy toward Guatemala”, FRUS IV (GC), document 8.
 11. Miller, Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa 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.
 12. Bennett to Mann, Barber, and Miller, May 18, 1950, Lot Files, entry 1144, box 2, folder marked Memoranda, January to June, 1950.
 13. Bennett to Mann and Hughes, April 19, 1950, Lot Files, entry 1144, box 2, folder marked Memoranda, January to June, 1950.
 14. On the ideology of the military regime, consult: Walter and Williams, “Antipolitics in El Salvador”, 327–329.
 15. Newbegin, Memorandum of Conversation with Cáceres, October 24, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume V, class 800.
 16. Daniels to Department, July 18, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume V, class 800; Bursley to Department, July 8, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800.
 17. Daniels to Department, July 1, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume V, class 800; Daniels to Department, July 18, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume V, class 800; Daniels (Director of the Division for American Republic Affairs), Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Zúñiga Huete, Honduran Opposition Leader, December 30, 1947, PRHO, CF, box 34, volume V, class 800; Bursley to Reid, June 11, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800.
 18. Bursley to Gordon S. Reid (Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), July 14, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 40, class 800. While Bursley’s assessment of the differences between the Liberal and National Parties fits a long tradition of U.S. skepticism about the role of ideologies in Honduran politics, Suazo Rubí does note that both parties represented the interests of Honduras’s dominant classes during the 1932–1957 period. Suazo Rubí, *Auge y Crisis*, 262. However, a more radical wing of the Liberal Party, which rejected Zúñiga Huete’s leadership, had also emerged by this time: Euraque, *Reinterpreting*, 68–71.

19. Bursley to Willard Barber (Chief of the Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), September 30, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 40, class 800.
20. Daniels to Montamat, March 3, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800; Montamat to Daniels, March 8, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800; Montamat to Daniels, March 11, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800.
21. Lt. Col. Isaacson (U.S. Military Attaché to Guatemala) to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 42–48, May 6, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800. On Zúñiga Huete’s 1948 campaign, see González de Oliva, *Gobernantes Hondureños*, 323–235.
22. See Chap. 3, section “Elections”.
23. Bursley to Daniels, November 1, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 40, class 800.
24. Isaacson to the Military Intelligence Division, Report 42–48, May 6, 1948, PRHO, CF, box 39, class 800.
25. Bursley to Department, January 29, 1949, PRHO, CF, box 42, class 800.
26. For balanced accounts of the changes and continuities present in Gálvez’ government, consult: 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: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 161–211, there 178–179; Inestroza, *Historia de la Policía Nacional*, 245; Dodd, *Carias*, 225–226; Argueta, *Gálvez*, 47–50 and 153–157.
27. Erwin to President Truman, February 15, 1946, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official Files, box 1570, OF1002: Erwin, John D.; Syracuse 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 Department, despatch 473, January 29, 1951, PRHO, CF, box 48, class 350.
28. Erwin, Memorandum on Rumors of General Tiburcio Carias planning again to make race for Presidency of Honduras, December 7, 1951, PRHO, CF, box 48, class 350.
29. Bursley to Department, March 22, 1949, PRHO, CF, box 44, class 560.
30. Erwin to Department, June 7, 1951, PRHO, CF, box 48, class 350.
31. Erwin to Department, June 8, 1951, PRHO, CF, box 48, class 350.
32. 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 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.
33. Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to El Salvador) to Department, December 16, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Williams to Department, December 17, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Juan de Zengotita (Division of Central American and Panama Affairs) to Daniels,

- Memorandum on Background on Salvadoran Revolt of December 14, December 15, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, June 18, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador) to Department, December 16, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Williams to Department, January 23, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
34. Williams to Department, January 9, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, July 2, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, October 21, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, November 2, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
 35. Nufer, Memorandum on Elections, December 7, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Williams to Department, January 9, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, September 23, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
 36. On Castañeda's attempted *continuismo* and the ensuing coup, see Turcios, *Autoritarismo y Modernización*, 25–29.
 37. Walter and Williams, "Antipolitics in El Salvador", 327–329. Turcios, *Autoritarismo y Modernización*, is a good source on the new government's ideology of (economic) modernization.
 38. Nufer to Department, December 24, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, December 23, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Williams to Department, December 17, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, December 22, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, December 31, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, March 24, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350.21; Nufer to Robert F. Woodward (Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), June 29, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350.21; Murat W. Williams (U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to El Salvador) to Department, December 16, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, December 31, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
 39. Nufer to Robert F. Woodward (Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs), June 29, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350.21; Nufer to Zengotita, December 31, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800; Nufer to Department, December 22, 1948, PRES, CF, box 16, class 800; Nufer, Memorandum on Department's telegram 135, December 27, 1948, PRES, CF, box 16, class 800; Nufer to Willard F. Barber (Chief of the Division of Central American and Panama Affairs), December 22, 1948, PRES, CF, box 16, class 800.
 40. Zengotita to Nufer, December 21, 1948, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
 41. Barber to Nufer, January 12, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Nufer to Barber, January 21, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Barber to Nufer, January 28, 1949, PRES, CF, box 19, class 360.

42. Shaw to Department, August 25, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Nufer to Department, January 6, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Nufer to Department, April 7, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Williams to Department, July 29, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, September 30, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, January 29, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350.
43. For reports on Osorio's politics, consult: Nufer to Department, January 11, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Nufer to Department, January 21, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Shaw to Department, October 31, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Shaw to Department, November 1, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Shaw to Department, October 28, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, December 2, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, February 2, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350. On Osorio and Martínez, consult: Shaw to Department, December 6, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, December 19, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, August 1, 1951, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350. On Osorio's supposed fascist sympathies, consult: Maleady to Thurston, Memorandum on Miscellaneous Notes about Revolution. Rumored Plot to kill Martinez, April 26, 1944, PRES, box 98, volume XIII, class 800; Thurston to Department, May 25, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Maleady, Memorandum on Rumors of Coup d'Etat, June 14, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800. On Osorio's connections with the Aguirre faction, consult: Gade to Department, October 30, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XIV, class 800; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Notes, November 6, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800; Ellis, Memorandum on Political Notes, November 14, 1944, PRES, box 99, volume XV, class 800.
44. Nufer to Department, December 22, 1948, PRES, CF, box 16, class 800; Nufer to Department, February 4, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Nufer to Department, March 24, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350.21.
45. Shaw to Department, September 22, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350.
46. Shaw to Department, November 10, 1949, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800. Initially, Shaw thought that PRUD was a "Communist front": Shaw to Department, September 9, 1949, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
47. Shaw to Department, April 2, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350.
48. Nufer to Barber, January 21, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, April 26, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350; Shaw to Department, May 19, 1950, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350.
49. Nufer to Department, February 4, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800; Shaw to Department, March 10, 1951, PRES, CF, box 21, class 350; Shaw to Department, March 13, 1951, PRES, CF, box 22, class 350; Shaw to Department, March 20, 1951, PRES, CF, box 22, class 350.

50. Williams to Shaw, Memorandum on Comments on OIR Report, October 27, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 350; Shaw to Department, September 21, 1950, PRES, CF, box 22, class 350; Wieland to Department, September 13, 1951, PRES, CF, box 22, class 350.
51. Williams to Department, July 29, 1949, PRES, CF, box 18, class 800.
52. Shaw to Department, December 5, 1949, PRES, CF, box 15, class 800.
53. 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, box 2, folder marked Political Summaries.
54. Undated transcript of interview with Ambassador Angier B. Duke, Duke University Living History Program, Duke University, Durham, NC, David M. Rubenstein 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.
55. 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.
56. Duke, “An Ambassador Reports”, in Duke Papers, box 43, Scrapbook marked A.B.D. San Salvador.
57. Interview with Angier Biddle Duke, April 4, 1989, ADST. Emphasis added.
58. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 61–67 and 183; Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 61, 165, 199, and 200; Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 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’s *Shattered Hope* offers an unequaled account of the so-called “Ten years of Spring.” Bethell and Roxborough, *Latin America*, 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. Deborah Yashar, *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s–1950s* (Stanford, CA:

- Stanford University Press, 1997), 167–170 and 191–211, argues that CIA intervention in 1954 was a catalyzer for developments that would eventually pull Guatemala to the political right anyway.
59. The following section presents United States' goals for the Guatemalan counterrevolution in the context of its policy toward Central America since World War II. Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954–1961* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000) offers an overview of U.S. management of the counterrevolution, but mainly in a world system analysis framework. Streeter argues that Hubert Humphrey's assertion that "we should ... stop talking so much about democracy, and make it clear that we are quite willing to support dictatorships of the right," "accurately reflected U.S. policy at the time" (p. 33). In this text, I argue that the goal of the United States was to support what it considered middle-of-the-road politics, not dictatorships of the right.
 60. According to Clark, *The U.S. and Somoza*, 189–190 and 196, note 44, operation Success was a watershed in U.S. Nicaraguan relations.
 61. "Editorial note", *FRUS 1952–1954, volume IV: American Republics*, 1208–1209.
 62. Memorandum for the Record, by Richard Hirsch of the Operations Coordinating Board, Washington, October 28, 1953, *FRUS 1952–1954, volume IV: American Republics*, 1087.
 63. The Ambassador in Guatemala (Peurifoy) to Department, Guatemala City, July 7, 1954, *FRUS 1952–1954, volume IV: American Republics*, 1202–1208.
 64. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 61–62.
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 66. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 198–200.
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 68. Memorandum of Conversation, Panama City, July 22, 1956, *President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Office Files, 1953–1961. Part II: International Series* [EOF], Microfilms, Reel 25, frame 336; Memorandum of Conversation, Panama City, July 23, 1956, *FRUS 1955–1957, volume VII: American Republics*, 127.
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Becoming a Good Neighbor Among Dictators

Going back to the 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 an era of tyranny, is far removed from the experience and understanding of contemporary actors. The rise to power of Ubico and Cárías, 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. U.S. diplomats welcomed the rise of these leaders because they seemed to share their goals 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 U.S. advice.

In that context, it is clear that the coup that brought Martínez to power could not have been considered as consistent with U.S. policies in the region. The tragedy of the ensuing *Matanza*—at least when considered from the standpoint of U.S. involvement—was that it hardly registered with 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. It was Martínez’s defiance of the United States, his “unworthiness” in the words of Francis White, that ultimately dominated the U.S. view of the general during the non-recognition period. 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. From Washington's perspective, these were all minor inconveniences as compared to the fact that Martínez's hold on power made a mockery of the Treaty of Peace and Amity, which had provided a sense of direction to U.S. Central American policy for over 10 years.

Martínez's staying power, followed by the *continuismo* campaigns in neighboring republics, 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 U.S. ministers. Most, if not all, of them assumed that *continuismo* would meet with the disapproval 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 non-intervention principle, as indicated most clearly by Lane and Corrigan's advocacy of a "responsible" Good Neighbor. Washington tolerated *continuismo* and the more permanent establishment of dictatorship in Central America 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, U.S. diplomats reported with increasing frequency on the rise of corruption and nepotism in Central America and their growing fears that the local regimes secretly sympathized with fascism. However, the caudillos themselves found new ways to make themselves useful to the United States. 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 U.S. eyes—for the first time since the implementation of the non-intervention policy.

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 non-intervention principle was elevated to religious dogma. At the same time, U.S. diplomats came

to regard dictators as peculiarly useful allies in the fight against fascism. This tendency was strengthened by the diplomacy of the regimes, which emphasized their unconditional support for their northern neighbor. However, it was also the result of several momentous changes in U.S. diplomacy.

First of all, the period leading up to and including the first years of the 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 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's spirited defense of the cooperative attitude of Carías and Ubico. Considering the rewards that the local regimes might expect for such cooperation, 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. Also, the embassies did not have half as much time or inclination 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 be able 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 1930s, there was a fair amount of consensus among both North 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 World War II. 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 U.S. embassies.

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 U.S. interests that manifested itself in local political organizations, unions, cultural movements, and so on. 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 World War II is that the Foreign Service was taken completely off guard by the popular upheavals 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. Ironically, U.S. wartime propaganda against fascism and for democracy contributed to the growth of liberal ideology in Central America. Furthermore, pro-democratic propaganda in combination with an increased U.S. role in Central American life had caused the pro-democratic opposition to hope that the U.S. would eventually intervene in Central America to topple the dictatorships. This, after all, was the professed objective of the war. But while U.S. intervention did in fact increase during the war the Foreign Service continued to subscribe to, or pay lip service to, the credo of non-intervention. To Central American oppositionists, 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 a *fait accompli*, the U.S. chiefs of mission became 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 U.S. thinking on democracy versus dictatorship 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 U.S. rejection of the Perón, Somoza, Trujillo, and to a lesser extent Batista, and Carías 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. diplomats. Thus, there was considerable discussion in the State Department over the postwar 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.

Aside from the discussions on the merits of an anti-dictatorial (or pro-democratic) policy, there was the issue of practical, day-to-day diplomacy. That is to say, an anti-dictatorial policy clearly manifested itself when a concrete, limited problem presented itself. For example, when Somoza gave in to local and U.S. pressure and organized elections only to commit a coup against the elected government, the United States acted decisively and broke diplomatic relations with the Somoza regime. However, in countries where 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 seemingly 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 U.S. 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 El Salvador, where the embassy was carefully sympathetic to the liberals, Simmons grew impatient with the haphazard progress of democratic reform while Salvadoran liberals grew disappointed with the inconsistent policy of the United States. In Honduras, Erwin was quite firmly behind the dictator and refused to take local Liberals seriously. In the meantime, politically astute right-wing leaders reasserted their authority

everywhere and basically solved the dictatorship versus 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, which greatly reduced Washington's patience with political experimentation and ultimately led to the 1954 coup in Guatemala.

The relationship between the United States and the caudillos of Central America was never stable. The nature of the isthmian regimes—authoritarian and increasingly violent as opposition started to assert itself during World War II—never ceased to challenge U.S. diplomats' understanding of their country's position toward them. It is not only historians who criticize the non-intervention principle for allowing dictators to come to power; the paradoxes in fighting European dictatorships while allying with Latin American dictatorships; and the failure of Cold War policy to find a viable alternative to the support of military regimes. Such problems were discussed in Washington and within the Foreign Service throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Without exception, Central Americans themselves, be it the caudillos and their supporters, oppositionists, or the emerging military rulers of the Cold War era, actively contributed to the resolution of these questions.

Throughout the period, two seemingly irreconcilable but, in fact, closely related perceptions of Central American politics and U.S. responsibilities influenced the Foreign Service's thinking and acting. One was an appreciation of "firm" or even authoritarian government and the other a conviction that constitutionalism (during the early 1930s) or democracy (from the late 1930s onward) offered the best guarantee for stability. What combined these two notions was a U.S.-centered belief that Central Americans could not be left to direct their politics as they saw fit—leading U.S. diplomats to distrust or confuse both "alien" ideologies such as fascism and communism and indigent movements such as the 1932 uprising in El Salvador or the democratic initiatives of the 1940s. While the two traditions in U.S. perceptions can be artificially separated for analytical purposes, in reality they could be so closely entangled as to be inseparable. From Sheldon Whitehouse's insistence on elections and respect for Ubico's "firmness" to Angier Duke's admiration for El Salvador's democratic people and "responsible" military leader, these ideas often coexisted in the same mind, held together by a belief in the United States' benign influence in Central America.

Emanating from a common source, both U.S. policies in support of constitutionalism and democracy and in support of firmness and dictatorship were authentic and genuine. One was not a ruse or window dressing for the other. Foreign Service officers genuinely supported free and fair elections, mostly opposed *continuismo*, feared the spread of fascism, and sympathized with democratic movements as “disreputable” governments were denounced. Yet, from hindsight, there is a clear development from the U.S. supporting constitutionalism to becoming a Good Neighbor among dictators. That process took time and there were several fits and starts, but, again from hindsight, a turning point occurred during World War II. For the first time during the early 1940s, Good Neighbor diplomats began to appreciate the usefulness of having dictatorial allies, specifically for being dictators. The rise and fall of democratic movements and the anti-dictatorial policy after the war left their marks, but only to the extent that U.S. diplomats concluded, by the late 1940s, that new military regimes offered a middle way between radicalism and reaction.

While the process whereby Good Neighbor diplomats established close relations with Central American dictators was not quick or easy, as it is sometimes portrayed, it was not a historical accident either. Several factors made it a likely outcome. On the one hand, there was the Foreign Service’s unwillingness or inability to cultivate a large and diverse network of contacts and informants (a failure that Ambassador Simmons eventually recognized). It could be argued that such an approach should have been a necessary corollary to the non-intervention policy. Without it, Foreign Service reporting was consistently biased to the status quo, the results of which were most evident in the years 1944–1946, when U.S. diplomats failed to establish meaningful ties with new popular movements. On the other hand, there was the ability of the caudillos to outlast U.S. disapproval, especially considering the latter’s self-imposed non-intervention policy, and the ability to manipulate U.S. fears and concerns. Examples are manifold and include the caudillos’ successful self-definition as guardians against the spread of fascism, cooperative allies during the war, or middle-of-the-road nation builders by the beginning of the Cold War.

It is obvious 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. But 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 1930s, the Honduran Liberal Party attempted to define Carías as a fascist. Central American liberals of the early 1940s tried to convince North 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 countries. Thus, it was a combination of U.S. and Central American actions that prejudiced the Good Neighbor to dictatorial rule.

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