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CONFLICT BEYOND BORDERS: THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF
NICARAGUA'S VIOLENT TWENTIETH-CENTURY, 1909-1990

by

Andrew W. Wilson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Thomas Borstelmann

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2016

CONFLICT BEYOND BORDERS: THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF
NICARAGUA'S VIOLENT TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1909-1990

Andrew William Wilson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Thomas Borstelmann

The purpose of this research is to identify the importance of Nicaraguan political contests in the global twentieth century. The goal is to demonstrate that, despite its relatively small size, Nicaragua significantly influenced the course of modern history. This has been done by examining the international contestations between Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents from Augusto Sandino's resistance to U.S. imperialism, to the machinations of the Somoza family, and the Contra War of the 1980s. Upon examination of these events, it becomes clear that Nicaraguans on both sides of the conflict proved adept at cultivating and utilizing transnational networks of material and moral support. By analyzing these events through a transnational lens, this research demonstrates the ability of local peoples to impact global politics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation represents the culmination of many years of work that would not have been possible without the support of a large community of people who have helped me along the way.

First, I would like to thank those groups and institutions that made this project possible through their generous support. I am deeply indebted to the History Department, which provided me with the financial and moral support to carry out my research. I would also like to acknowledge the staff at Love Library, particularly the Interlibrary Loan department, who processed my incessant requests for documents. The archivists at the Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis in Berlin and at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum also played an invaluable role, helping me navigate their holdings and directing me towards important documents.

To my faculty at the University of Nebraska, thank you for being such wonderful resources and role models. I am grateful to my dissertation committee members, Drs. James Garza, Margaret Jacobs, and Patrice McMahon, for agreeing to read and review my work. I am deeply appreciative of your comments and suggestions. I am particularly indebted to my adviser and mentor, Dr. Thomas Borstelmann, who has been a guiding influence since I started graduate school. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my own interests as a scholar and for modeling the kind of compassionate mentorship I hope to emulate someday.

To my parents, thank you for your love and support. You helped me develop a deep love of learning that I am appreciative of everyday. I am very lucky to be your son.

Finally, to Claire, I am so grateful for your affection. I could not have done any of this without you. You are my partner and my best friend.

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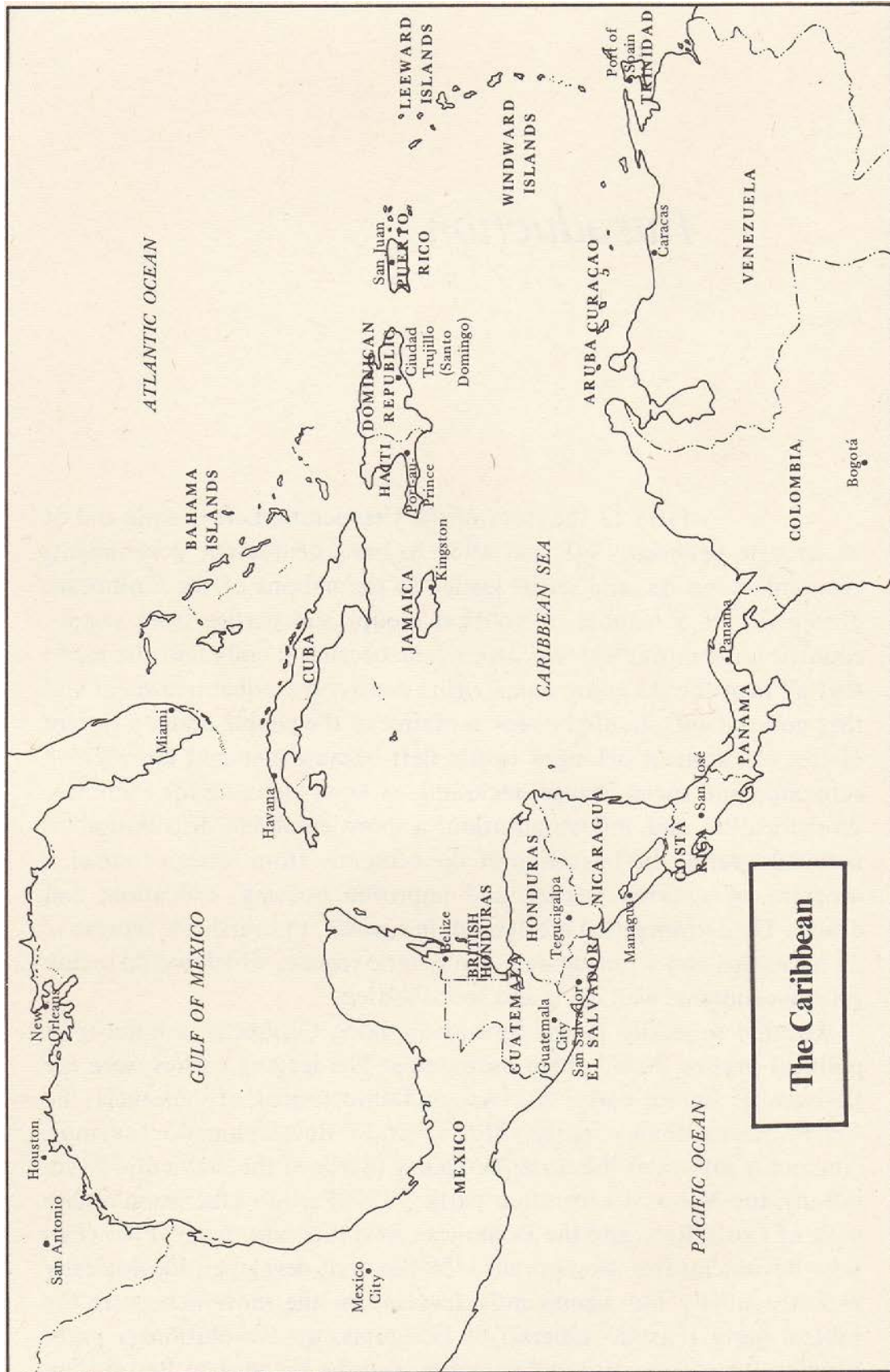
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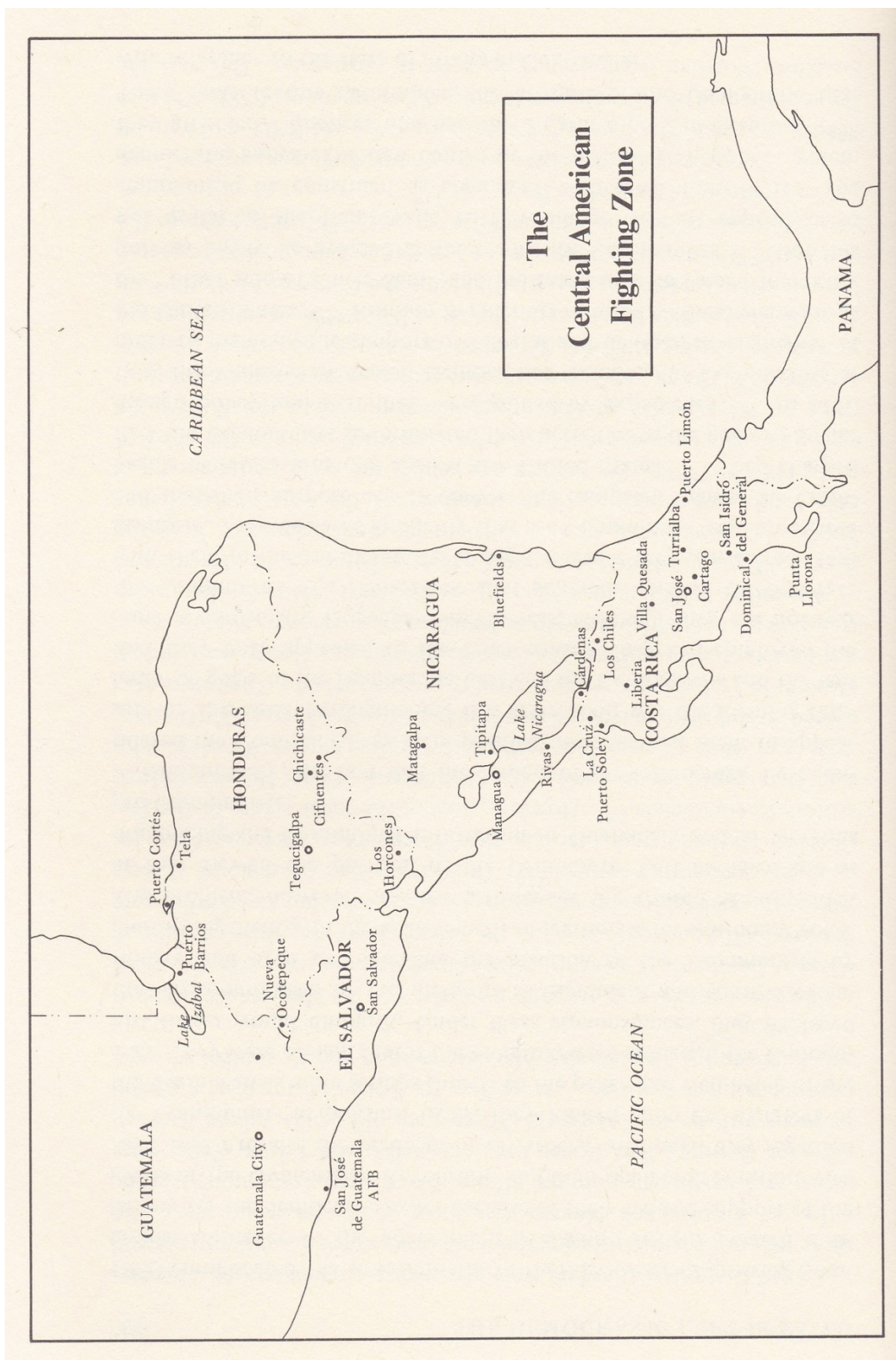
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INTRODUCTION

At 10:05 AM on September 17, 1980, a rusty Chevrolet pickup appeared stalled in the middle of a street in Asuncion, Paraguay, blocking the path of a Mercedes-Benz sedan. The stalled pickup belonged to a band of Argentinian revolutionaries bent on killing the passenger of the Mercedes-Benz, former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. As Somoza Debayle's car stopped, an Argentinian commando, Enrique Gorriarán Merlo, stepped out from behind a nearby bush and fired his M-16 into the Mercedes-Benz, killing the dictator, his chauffeur, and another passenger. To ensure the demise of the Nicaragua strongman, another member of the commando squad then launched a shoulder fired RPG at Somoza Debayle's car, completely destroying it and incinerating its occupants.¹ One week later, the remains of the exiled Nicaraguan dictator were flown to Miami, where they were buried before 1,500 mourners, including many Nicaraguan exiles and Cuban-Americans, who chanted "Viva Somoza" and sang the Nicaraguan and Cuban national anthems.²

The assassination of Somoza Debayle, the last reigning member of the Somoza dynasty that ruled Nicaragua from 1936 to 1979, epitomized the internationalization of Nicaraguan politics in the twentieth century. Between 1909 and 1990, Nicaraguan revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries competed for political control of their home country. From its inception,

¹ Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll, *Death of Somoza: The First Person Story of the Guerrillas who Assassinated the Nicaraguan Dictator* (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1996), 124-127; Guy Gugliotta, "Assassinating A Tyrant: How Somoza Died," *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1989, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-07-19/news/8902180576_1_argentine-army-sandinista-interior-ministry-enrique-gorriaran-merlo, (Accessed January 25, 2016).

² "Somoza Buried in Cuban Quarter of Miami," *The Guardian*, September 22, 1980, 7.

this conflict was transnational in its scope, with both factions engaging each other in international spaces. Both sides also relied on transnational networks of aid and support, turning to allies and patrons elsewhere. Somoza Debayle's presence in Asuncion, at the invitation of Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner, and the presence of Cuban-Americans at his funeral highlight the strength of the dictator's transnational counterrevolutionary linkages and their reliance on kinship networks. At the same time, his assassination at the hands of Argentinian revolutionaries demonstrates the international complexion of the opposition and the importance of non-Nicaraguans to the revolutionary struggle. News of Somoza Debayle's death quickly spread around the globe, drawing international attention to the unstable political situation in Latin America. However, it was not the first time, nor would it be the last time, that events related to the tiny Central American state of Nicaragua captured global awareness. In fact, the twentieth-century history of Nicaragua repeatedly demonstrates the ability of local peoples to deeply impact the course of international politics.

In order to begin understanding Nicaragua's role in the global twentieth century, it is first necessary to address its unique geography and demographics. Modern Nicaragua is a relatively small state, roughly the same size as the U.S. state of Alabama with a population equivalent to that of Missouri.³ Although the largest Central American state in terms of square miles, it is among the least populated and has the region's lowest population density, with 50 people per

³ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Fact Book: Nicaragua," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/nu.html>, (Accessed January 20, 2016); United States Census Bureau (USCB), "Missouri Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/29000.html>, (Accessed January 20, 2016); Ibid., "Alabama Quick Facts," <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01000.html>, (Accessed January 20, 2016).

square mile, or slightly less densely populated than the U.S. state of Colorado.⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century, roughly 500,000 people called Nicaragua home. That number grew dramatically over the course of the century and, by the 1970s, the population of Nicaragua reached 3 million and add another million during the 1980s.⁵

Based on its relative size and small population, it would be easy to assume that Nicaragua would avoid the violence often associated with more densely populated states. However, the history of modern Nicaragua is one of almost continuous turmoil, which can, in part, be explained by U.S. intervention. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the United States become increasingly interested in Nicaragua due to the prospect of building a transisthmian canal.⁶ Although this plan was never realized, the construction of the nearby Panama Canal ensured that the United States would be concerned with Nicaragua in order to protect its strategic interests. Because of this the United States occupied Nicaragua between 1912 and 1933, in the process spurring a guerrilla war against the imperial presence of U.S. forces.

Years later, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FLSN, or Sandinistas) sought to overthrow

⁴ The World Bank, "Population Density,"

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST/countries?display=default>, (Accessed January 20, 2016); USCB, "Colorado: 2010," <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-7.pdf>, (Accessed January 20, 2016).

⁵ The World Bank, "Population, Total,"

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL/countries/NI?page=5&display=default>, (Accessed January 25, 2016).

⁶ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 11-12; Theodore Roosevelt's Annual Message to Congress for 1904, House Records HR 58A-K2, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=56>, (Accessed January 25, 2016).

the authoritarian, and U.S.-supported, regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, while the U.S.-funded Contras sought the overthrow of the Sandinista government after the successful ouster of Somoza.

U.S. intervention, however, only partially explains Nicaragua's modern history. The actions of the Nicaraguan people, both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, shaped and developed their own story. This dissertation joins a growing body of literature that reveals local peoples exercising considerable agency, forming their own foreign policies and impacting global politics. In the process it challenges the traditional great power interpretation of global history, in which primarily European and North American empires dominated the global stage. In this traditional narrative, the story of the twentieth century is generally depicted as one dominated by the struggles of the great powers (Great Britain, France, the United States, Russia, Germany, Japan, and China) who vied with each other for global dominance.⁷ Those not considered in the category of great power, smaller or less powerful states, colonial possessions, and non-state actors, tended to be excluded from these histories or, if included, depicted as pawns in the machinations of the empires. In this history, European and North American elites tended to be the primary architects of global politics and the main drivers of world history. Unfortunately, this story of modern empires obscures the fact that the histories of other states and actors were also global. In fact, one could argue that most history is inherently global, with both state and non-state actors pursuing agendas across the borders of multiple nations.

In recent years, historians of foreign relations have moved beyond this history of empires, towards a more inclusive vision of world politics that recognizes the importance of indigenous

⁷ Robert Pastor ed., *A Century's Journey: How the Great Powers Shaped the World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

non-Western peoples. This new scholarship strives to locate the “globality” of the modern world through an understanding of “positionality,” or the idea that international history can best be understood from various vantage points.⁸ Among those many viewpoints are those of local peoples, who, rather than simply being the subtext for the activities of officials and politicians, were, instead, the creators and promoters of distinct foreign policies that played a pivotal role in creating the modern world. The resulting research has demonstrated the ways in which primarily “Third World” and non-state actors shaped the course of twentieth century history.⁹

Out of this body of scholarship, Paul Chamberlin’s *The Global Offensive: The Palestinian Liberation Organization, the United States, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* most deeply influenced this dissertation. In his work, Chamberlin examines the international dimensions of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, arguing that the PLO foreshadowed the trajectories of national liberation movements in the latter half of the twentieth

⁸ Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (Oct. 1995): 1034-1060.

⁹ Examples of this scholarship include Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

century. The strategies of the PLO heralded the beginning of an era in which the power of non-state actors grew, international terrorism emerged, and the United States advocated multilateralism. In doing so Chamberlin moves beyond “great power” history to demonstrate the power of non-state and non-European actors. In challenging the narrative of U.S. primacy, he recognizes the phenomenon of “de-mapping” in which post-colonial actors created their own geographies. Organizations such as the PLO broke down western-constructed boundaries through the transnational sharing of ideas and strategies between national liberation movements. National liberation movements from around the globe came together to destroy the boundaries of colonialism, and in doing so created and sustained a transnational political consciousness. In the process, these organizations challenged U.S. global hegemony in transnational spaces, whether physical spaces, such as international flights, or in the realm of ideas, such as human rights. Ultimately Chamberlin argues that globalization should not be taught as a story of top-down western imposition, but as a bottom-up story of Third World emergence.¹⁰

Although inspired by Chamberlin’s work, this analysis differs in a number of ways. First, it includes local counterrevolutionaries in the narrative, detailing the actions of those who sided with the United States in the global Cold War. In the process, this dissertation moves the focus away from the United States and highlights the impact of Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries, particularly the Somozas, on the course of the Cold War in Central America and beyond. Far from being beholden to the United States, Nicaragua’s counterrevolutionaries pursued an independent foreign policy that at times influenced U.S. actions. Second, the extended chronological examination of global Nicaraguan revolutionary activity undermines Chamberlin’s

¹⁰ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 5-7.

claim that the PLO represented the “world’s first globalized insurgency.”¹¹ In fact, Nicaraguan revolutionaries had waged a global campaign against the United States and its allies since Augusto Sandino began battling U.S. Marines in 1927. This campaign, which channeled Third World internationalism, persisted following Sandino’s death and remained a valuable asset to Nicaraguan revolutionaries in the following decades. To this extent, Nicaragua’s global insurgency developed earlier than, or at the least concurrently with, the PLO, while channeling the same global anticolonial sentiments.

Deeply influenced by the growing school of foreign relations history that emphasizes the importance of locality, this dissertation broadens our understanding of modern Nicaragua in the global twentieth century. It demonstrates the ability of a relatively small nation to have an oversized impact on global politics, establishing the importance of Nicaraguan agency. It also emphasizes the importance of locality and the uniquely Nicaraguan nature of events, highlighting the centrality of personal relationships in the construction and utilization of transnational networks. In order to move beyond an examination of elites, the narrative incorporates as well the history of global grassroots organizations and emphasizes the centrality of Nicaraguan actors in the global human rights revolution. Finally, this work challenges the primacy of the nation-state in Central American and Caribbean history, revealing the conceptual and practical weakness of state boundaries in the region.

Although smaller than most U.S. states, Nicaragua proved particularly influential in twentieth-century history. During the century, Nicaraguan issues played an important role in global politics, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. The development of new communication technologies and the subsequent growth of the international media helped spur global interest in

¹¹ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 3.

Nicaragua. However, Nicaraguan actors also played an important role in promoting their causes internationally. The Somoza regime proved extremely adept at influencing U.S. foreign and domestic policy, utilizing connections between the Nicaraguan ruling family and U.S. officials and policymakers. Nicaragua's revolutionaries also proved adept at influencing issues abroad, creating and coordinating with grassroots groups and other organizations in an effort to appeal to popular opinion. Both of Nicaragua's competing factions also utilized the international media, primarily newspapers, to fight a public relations campaign. These efforts gave Nicaragua an outsized influence on the international stage, in which its competing factions successfully rallied international support for their causes and, in the process, increased the profile of Nicaraguan issues.

Although the United States is not at the center of this story, significant attention must be paid to Nicaragua's northern neighbor. The United States figures into the narrative primarily as the patron of Nicaragua's counterrevolutionaries. During its occupation of Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933, the United States founded the *Guardia Nacional*, the military organization through which the Somoza regime gained and maintained its hold on power. U.S. support also proved to be the deciding factor in helping keep the Somoza family in power over the course of the mid-twentieth century, and supported the Contras following the 1979 revolution. However, the United States also played an important role as the key location for the grassroots anti-Somoza and, later, anti-Contra campaigns spearheaded by the FSLN and other Nicaraguan revolutionaries. The struggle for the hearts and minds of the U.S. public proved a crucial contest in the battle between Nicaragua's revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries.

The increased visibility and importance of Nicaraguan issues on the world stage reveals the importance of Nicaraguan agency. Actors, on both the left and the right, exercised a

considerable amount of agency, both politically and ideologically, throughout the course of the twentieth century. Often depicted as a supplicant of the United States, The Somoza regime proved adroit at manipulating its much more powerful ally. The Somozas not only pursued policies that proved antithetical to the wishes of U.S. officials, but also influenced U.S. domestic and foreign policy through a complex system of lobbyists and U.S. policymakers. Similarly, the Sandinistas developed a foreign policy independent of either Havana or Moscow. The Sandinistas also furthered the development of U.S. and European solidarity organizations that bolstered the international position of the FSLN. Instead of being driven by larger forces on the global stage, Nicaraguan actors on both sides of the struggle pursued independent foreign policies aimed at meeting their local objectives.

Both of Nicaragua's competing factions pursued policies that existed and operated largely on the basis of familiar relationships. Nicaragua's revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries built their transnational networks largely on personal relationships, often relying on close family members as conduits to aid and support. In part because of its small size, from a population of roughly 500,000 in the 1910s to nearly 6 million today, Nicaraguan kinship networks were, and still are, the dominant avenue towards political power.¹² With the internationalization of Nicaraguan politics in the twentieth century, these kinship networks expanded beyond the nation's borders. This expansion was in part fueled by the immigration of Nicaraguans to the United States and elsewhere in Latin America as a result of their home

¹² Carlos M. Vilas, "Family Affairs: Class, Lineage and Politics in Contemporary Nicaragua," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May 1992): 309-341; *ibid.*, *The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986); "The Nicaraguan Family in a Time of Transition," *Envio*, Number 34, April 1984, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3853> (accessed January 23, 2016).

country's ailing economy and the oppression of the Somoza regime. These extended networks of exiles, refugees, and immigrants provided resources and acted as safe havens for Nicaragua's revolutionaries, as well as facilitated the growth of connections with North American and European activists. For their part, the Somoza family also built its global network around the family, placing family members in important political positions and incorporating allies into the family's patronage system. To be an ally of the Somozas was to become a member of their family, enjoying the benefits and responsibilities that entailed. The internationalization of kinship networks proved to be one of the defining features of Nicaragua's global twentieth century.

Nicaraguan kinship networks proved particularly potent in coordination with the burgeoning human rights revolution of the mid-twentieth century. Nicaraguan exiles, particularly in the United States, created or aligned themselves with activists and grassroots organizations in an effort to build solidarity and win the hearts and minds of North Americans, Europeans and other Latin Americans. For example, the half-brother of Augusto Sandino, Sócrates, lived in New York in the late 1920s and spoke out against U.S. intervention in Nicaragua.¹³ Although there was public opposition to the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua in the 1920s and early 1930s, activism about Nicaraguan issues failed to gain significant momentum until the middle decades of the twentieth century when the human rights revolution burst onto the world stage. A product of the post-World War II world, the human rights revolution strengthened anti-imperialist and anti-Somoza activism in Nicaragua and abroad. Inspired by the revolution and generated by the

¹³ Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 222-223.

Nicaraguan Catholic Church and transnational grassroots organizations, human rights activism ultimately proved to be one of the key factors in the downfall of the Somoza dynasty.

Finally, the transnational nature of Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents reveals the weakness of the nation-state in Central America. Conceptually, the relative strength and importance of non-state actors in the narrative undermines the centrality of the Nicaraguan state. The family, and the myriad relationships springing from it, provides a stronger conceptual framework for understanding modern transnational Nicaraguan history. Although a seemingly universal concept, the internationalization of Nicaraguan kinship networks undermined the power of the state and held important implications for the global twentieth century. Also, the concept of Central American or Latin American unity, combined with a shared language and cultural background, undermined a strict sense of Nicaraguan nationalism. The majority of Nicaragua's internationalists espoused a commitment to the idea of Latin American nationalism and specifically Central American unity. Finally, the porousness of the region's border also demonstrates the relative weakness of the nation-state. Both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries moved throughout the region as exiles and as citizens, revealing a fluidity that facilitated the growth of safe havens for political dissidents but also heightened regional tensions. Ultimately, these factors highlight the conceptual and actual fragility of the borders of Central American and Caribbean states.

This dissertation offers a unique analysis of modern Nicaragua for a number of reasons. To begin with, it is the first international history of modern Nicaragua. In the literature on modern Nicaragua there is not an international history that examines events from a transnational viewpoint. Much of the writing is fixated on events occurring within Nicaragua, with little

discussion of Nicaragua's place in world history.¹⁴ During the Nicaraguan Revolution and the subsequent Contra War, participants on both sides of the struggle published accounts of their involvement in events, creating a substantial literature of personal recollections.¹⁵ Recently, commentators have examined U.S. relations with Central America and Latin America as a whole and, in the process, touched on important aspects of Nicaraguan history.¹⁶ However, there has

¹⁴ The majority of the literature on modern Nicaragua was written during the 1980s and tended to be politically biased, either defending or challenging the policies of the FSLN. Among those sympathetic to the Sandinistas was Thomas W. Walker, a scholar of Nicaragua since the 1960s, who was one of the first Americans to visit the country immediately following the Sandinista victory. Since the late 1970s Walker has edited a number of volumes addressing the Nicaraguan revolution. These include: *Nicaragua in Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1982); *Nicaragua: The First Five Years* (New York: Praeger, 1985); *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); and *Nicaragua Without Illusions: Regime Transition and Structural Adjustment in the 1990s* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Books, 1997). Walker is also the author of *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview, 2011), a concise history of modern Nicaragua.

¹⁵ Gioconda Belli, *The Country Under my Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Tomás Borge, *The Patient Impatience* (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1992); Omar Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985); Arturo Cruz Jr., *Memoirs of a Counterrevolutionary: Life With the Contras, the Sandinistas, and the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 1989); Felix Rodriguez, *Shadow Warrior: The CIA Hero of a Hundred Unknown Battles* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989); Alejandro Murguía, *Southern Front* (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 1990); Sergio Rarmírez, *Adiós Muchachos: A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Anastasio Somoza Debayle, *Nicaragua Betrayed* (Boston: Western Islands Publishers, 1980); Doris Tijerino, *Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978).

¹⁶ The most detailed analysis of U.S.-Central American relations during this time period is William LeoGrande's *Our Own Backyard*. Other valuable analyses include Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of New*

not been an attempt to synthesize these histories, while including non-state actors and other international players.¹⁷ Although Nicaraguan and North American actors figure heavily in the following analysis, the inclusion of nongovernmental organizations and other groups traditionally pushed to the periphery in earlier studies is a uniquely defining feature of this study.

The chronology used in this dissertation is also distinctive from previous scholarship. Most histories of modern Nicaragua dedicate the majority of their analysis to events that occurred around the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979 or during the subsequent Contra War of the 1980s.¹⁸ There is some scholarship that examines the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua

Imperialism (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1983); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Among the few histories that touch on transnational activism are Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Héctor J. Perla, “Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36 No. 6 (November 2009); Ibid., “Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá” Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 43, No.2 (2008); Ibid., “The FSLN and International Solidarity,” *The Sandinistas and Nicaragua Since 1979*, ed. David Close, Salvador Martí i Puig, and Shelley A. McConnell (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

¹⁸ In the wake of the Nicaraguan Revolution, a number of former U.S. officials published histories of their involvement. They include Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling: The Nicaragua Dilemma: The Portrait of Washington at Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: America Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); and Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Other valuable histories of Nicaragua from this time period include John A. Booth’s *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); Stephen A. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

between 1912 and 1933, as well as a handful of sources that detail U.S.-Nicaraguan relations during the Somoza years (1936-1979).¹⁹ Although hard to come by, there are also a limited number of texts on revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence prior to the 1970s.²⁰ Despite

2007); and Peter Kornbluh, *The Price of Intervention: Reagan's Wars Against the Sandinistas* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1987).

¹⁹ For the Sandino Rebellion see Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and McPherson, *The Invaded*. For U.S.-Somoza relations see Paul Coe Clark, Jr. *The United States and Somoza, 1933-1956: A Revisionist Look* (Westport: Praeger, 1992); Andrew Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Nicaragua, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Michael D. Gambone, *Eisenhower, Somoza, and the Cold War in Nicaragua, 1953-1961* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1997); *ibid.*, *Capturing the Revolution: The United States, Central America, and Nicaragua, 1961-1972* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001); Morris H. Morley, *Washington, Somoza, and the Sandinistas: State and Regime in U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1969-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁰ Besides the analyses of U.S.-Somoza relations, there are a limited number of studies of the Somoza family. The most cited are Richard Millet's *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), a condemnation of the Somoza regime at the beginning of the Nicaraguan Revolution; and Knut Walter's *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1936-1959* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), an analysis of Nicaraguan politics under the founder of the Somoza dynasty with little discussion of international relations. The literature on revolutionary Nicaragua between Sandino and the Nicaraguan Revolution is particularly thin. Matilde Zimmermann's *Sandinista: Carols Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) is an excellent beginning point. Another excellent although limited source on this period is Humberto Ortega's *50 años de lucha Sandinista* (Managua: Ministerio del Interior, 1979). However, the only source that addresses revolutionary violence during this period is Jesús Miguel Blandón's *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador* (Managua: Centro de Publicaciones, Departamento de Propaganda y Educación Política de F.S.L.N., 1982). In addition to these histories, there are also two autobiographical accounts: Rosendo Argüello Jr., *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How* (No publisher, 1955); and Abelardo Cuadra, *Hombre del Caribe* (San Jose: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1977).

this literature, there is no synthetic analysis that brings these histories into dialogue with each other. The events of the 1920s and 1930s appear to have no bearing on the later revolution of 1979 besides introducing Augusto Sandino, the namesake of the Sandinistas. Lost in these disparate analyses is a unified history that highlights revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements, not as sporadic events erupting seemingly out of nowhere in 1979, but as persistent undertakings operating in direct or indirect response to U.S. imperialism over much of the century. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which overthrew Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979, was the culmination of nearly seventy years of anti-imperial agitation against the United States and the Somoza regime.

Finally, this dissertation uniquely brings Nicaragua's competing factions into dialogue with each other. The actions of the Nicaragua's revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries are rarely examined together, with most analyses being dedicated to either one or the other. By examining these factions in concert, we are better able to gauge the fluidity of Nicaraguan politics, with individuals moving between the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence. Also, it highlights the areas of international contestation between the two groups. Transnational spaces, such as the global media, were arenas in which Nicaragua's competing factions battled with each other for the hearts and minds of both politicians as well as citizens elsewhere. Because of the growing importance of global media over the course of the twentieth century, these battles grew in increasing importance to both sides of the struggle. By examining Nicaragua's revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries in concert, we gain a better understanding of Central America's blurry political boundaries as well as a greater appreciation for the growing importance of global media and international public opinion over the course of the century.

Methodologically, this dissertation fits with the multi-archival and multilingual framework that is characteristic among international histories. Those seeking to understand the impact of local peoples on international history increasingly rely on multiple archives across the globe and consult sources in multiple languages. Although limited in comparison to the work of more established historians like Gleijeses and Westad, this examination includes materials from multiple archives located in the United States and Europe, as well as sources from throughout Latin America.²¹ It also benefitted from the prevalence of Nicaraguan source material in the United States, includes a substantial collection of primary sources related to modern Nicaraguan history. Online archives and advances in digital technology also greatly facilitated the development of this project.²² Because of these factors, this dissertation includes sources from multiple countries and in many languages, facilitating a transnational viewpoint.

The following dissertation is broken down into five chapters, each detailing a pivotal era of Nicaragua's global political contest. Chapter One examines the origins of Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents during the U.S.-occupation and the subsequent birth of the Somoza regime. Chapter Two details the growth of the global anti-Somoza movement in the 1940s and 1950s as well as the Somoza regime's integration into the U.S.-sponsored international counterrevolutionary alliance. Chapter Three discusses the impact of the

²¹ In 2013 I traveled to Berlin and spent two weeks researching German solidarity at the Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, or Green Memory Archive, where I found sources on Western European activism. I also spent some time researching at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and was able to receive archived materials from a number of North American activist organizations through inter-library loan, including all of Nicaraguan holdings of the North American Congress on Latin America.

²² *The Cold War International History Project* and the *National Security Archive* proved invaluable to my research, as did smaller local digital collections, such as *FoundSF*.

Cuban Revolution on the course of Nicaraguan history, inspiring the germination of the FSLN and the further integration of the Somoza regime into the global counterrevolutionary order.

Chapter Four breaks down the global Nicaraguan Revolution of the 1970s and the ultimate defeat of the Somoza regime in 1979. Chapter Five surveys the international Contra War of the 1980s, examining the persistence of the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary activity in the absence of the Somoza dynasty and the continued importance of transnational solidarity to the Sandinistas. This is followed by an epilogue that briefly discusses Nicaraguan history since 1990 and the transformations wrought by the previous eighty years.

What follows is an international history of Nicaragua in the twentieth century that emphasizes local agency. It demonstrates the ways in which Nicaraguan revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries deftly navigated international politics in their struggle with each other, battling over global spaces and maintaining transnational networks of aid and support. At the heart of these campaigns were Nicaraguan kinship networks, which provided the structure through which both sides created and maintained these connections. Although the United States played a central role in the conflict, it proved unable to totally control either its Nicaraguan revolutionary opponents or its counterrevolutionary allies. In the face of U.S.-imperialism, Nicaraguans of both camps demonstrated considerable autonomy and pursued independent foreign policies. Although global in focus, this is ultimately a uniquely Nicaraguan narrative.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ORIGINS OF NICARAGUA'S REVOLUTIONARY AND COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONALISM

Prior to the explosion of the violence in 1978, both the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary elements in Nicaragua were deeply interwoven in transnational networks. In fact, the internationalism expressed by Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents can be traced back to Augusto César Sandino and Anastasio Somoza García, both of whom provided the intellectual and spiritual groundwork that underpinned Nicaragua's two competing currents in the 1920s and 1930s. Sandino and Somoza García modeled or created the transnational networks that supported their predecessors. Therefore, in order to better understand the international nature of Nicaragua's competing factions, it is first necessary to examine the internationalism of Sandino and Somoza García.

Both Sandino and Somoza García pursued distinct objectives on the international stage, largely defined by their own ideological background. Following in the footsteps of Simón Bolívar, Sandino called for the unification of Latin America and received support from a burgeoning solidarity movement against North American and European imperialism. He was successful in creating a transnational network of support that undermined the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua and ultimately brought it to an end. After coming to power in 1937, Somoza García, by contrast, quickly ingratiated himself with the United States while at the same time cultivating ties to non-hemispheric powers. These transnational connections further buttressed his seemingly tenuous grip on power. Both Sandino and Somoza García laid the groundwork for the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary networks that transformed Nicaragua over the course of the twentieth century.

Nicaragua and the World

Although a relatively small and seemingly inauspicious territory, Nicaragua has historically been a place of interaction and contestation between diverse groups of people. This is in large part explained by geography. Located to the north of the Isthmus of Panama, a vital route for movement between North and South America as well as the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the territory of Nicaragua was, and in many ways still is, an important transnational node, connecting disparate places and peoples. Because of this, Nicaragua has been a place of *mezcla*, or mixture, in which different groups have left their cultural footprint.¹ At the same time, Nicaragua's geographic importance has made it a highly coveted space, with various groups competing to control the trade routes that cross it. Involved in these struggles were indigenous or local Nicaraguans, who both accommodated and resisted the imperial ambitions of outsiders and, in the process, pursued transnational policies. When looking at this long history, what becomes apparent is that Nicaragua's modern history of international engagement is part of a much older history of Central American global interaction. Sandino and Somoza García were not the primogenitors of Nicaraguan internationalism. They were, instead, the architects of a new Nicaraguan global agenda that drew from the past while also addressing the distinctions of the twentieth century.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the region that would become Nicaragua was a space of interaction between disparate indigenous peoples. In the western highlands, Meso-American peoples, cultural relatives of the Aztecs and the Maya in Mexico and the Yucatan, practiced agriculture and lived in established settlements. Meanwhile, in the eastern jungles and savannahs, indigenous peoples related South American tribes were primarily hunters and gathers,

¹ For a North American example see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

however they also practiced slash and burn agriculture. Although contact between the groups was limited, spaces of engagement did exist, with limited trade and some conflict characterizing relations between the two bodies of indigenous Nicaraguans.²

Driven by a desire to convert souls and find gold, Spanish conquistadors began the conquest of the territory that would become Nicaragua in the early 16th century. These initial incursions by Spanish adventurers, which devastated indigenous communities through disease, warfare and slavery, reduced the population of the region from roughly one million to tens of thousands a few decades later. During the three centuries of Spanish colonialism that followed, Nicaragua was a province in the Captaincy General of Guatemala, an administrative division of the Spanish Empire. Because of the demographic changes brought about by the Spanish conquest, Nicaragua remained an underpopulated backwater of the empire, eventually becoming a haven for British pirates who built a series of forts along the Atlantic Coast in eighteenth century.³

The colonial period also saw the formation and growth of Nicaragua's two competing political factions, the Liberals and Conservatives. The origins of the conflict can be found in the historic competition between the cities of León and Granada, which acted as the seats of power for Nicaragua's middle class and aristocracy respectively. Following independence from Spain in 1821, tensions between the two regions erupted in violence as the elites of Granada, who by this time had adopted the term Conservatives, and those of León, known as the Liberals, battled for control of Nicaragua. Reflecting the ideological shifts fomenting unrest elsewhere in Latin America, North America, and Europe, the conflict between the Liberals and Conservatives was ideological in nature. The Conservatives sought to uphold colonial values while the Liberals

² Thomas W. Walker and Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 7-8.

³ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

promoted economic liberalism, increased secularization, and democratization. However, the ideological distinctions between the two groups were blurry and both sides fought more over power than ideas.⁴

The civil war between Liberals and Conservatives, which lasted from 1821 until 1857, helped precipitate the demise of the Federal Republic of Central America and facilitated external intervention. Formed in 1823, the Federal Republic slid into civil war in 1838 and was formally dissolved in 1840. Tensions between Liberals and Conservatives did much to undermine the Central American unity, with both factions fighting each other as well as other regional opponents.⁵ These connections to other Central Americans resulted in the subsequent involvement of regional forces in the Nicaraguan civil war, particularly Guatemalan Conservatives who supported their Nicaraguan counterparts and Salvadoran Liberals who aided the Leonese.⁶ Although the Federal Republic of Central America failed, it created transnational political relations that would persist and help define Nicaraguan politics in the coming years.

Among the transnational players pulled into the Nicaraguan civil war were North American businessmen and filibusters. The California gold rush of 1848-1849 brought a steady stream of North Americans into Nicaragua. Seeking a quick passage to the west coast of the United States, thousands of North Americans traveled through Nicaragua on their way to the gold fields of California. Other North Americans, most notably the U.S. shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt, invested in and developed Nicaraguan infrastructure (roads, railroads, boats, etc...) in order to profit off of this movement of people.⁷ Greater North American interest

⁴ For more on the early conflict between the Liberals and Conservatives, see Bradford Burns, *Patriarch and Folk: The Emergence of Nicaragua, 1798-1858* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁵ For a discussion of the failure of the Federal Republic of Central America, see Thomas L. Karnes, *The Failure of Union: Central America, 1824-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

⁶ Luciano Baracco, *Nicaragua: The Imagining of a Nation: From Nineteenth-Century Liberals to Twentieth-Century Sandinistas* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 33.

⁷ Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University

and investment also brought about increased U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan politics. In 1854, the first official instance of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua occurred as Marines landed on the Atlantic coast to protect Vanderbilt's assets.⁸ The event marked the beginning of an era of increasingly intrusive North American interventions. However, the most notorious instance of North American intervention during the era would be carried out, not by representatives of the U.S. government, but by a private citizen.

In 1854-1855, the Liberal party faced the possibility of defeat at the hands of their Conservative opponents and, in a desperate move, enlisted the services of U.S. soldier of fortune, or filibuster, William Walker. Having previously failed in an attempt to seize and create an independent state in the Mexican territory of Sonora, Walker was a renowned adventurer and known military leader. Fortunately for Nicaragua's Liberals, Walker defeated the Conservatives. However, instead of turning power over to his Nicaraguan patrons, Walker seized the Nicaraguan government and made himself president, much to the chagrin of U.S. officials who denounced his actions. As president of Nicaragua, Walker instituted a number of policies, such as legalizing slavery and making English the official language, which quickly undermined what little local support he enjoyed. In the spring of 1857, a transnational alliance, consisting of Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala with support from Great Britain and Cornelius Vanderbilt, ousted Walker from power and, in the process, initiating a period of relative political stability in Nicaragua.⁹ Walker, who would be executed by British officials in 1860 for leading a third invasion of Central America, foreshadowed the involvement of private U.S. citizens in

Press, 2005), 23-25.

⁸ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 11.

⁹ Filibustering was a phenomenon of the Antebellum period in which U.S. citizens raised private armies to invade and overthrow the governments of other territories in the hemisphere in an effort to rule them outright or annex them to the United States. Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 40-52; Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 21-41.

Nicaraguan politics a century later.

Despite Walker's defeat, foreign powers, particularly the United States, became more involved in Nicaraguan affair. In large part, this was due to efforts to the efforts of foreign powers to create a transisthmian canal in Central America. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the United States competed with Great Britain and France in an effort to build a canal through Central America, greatly facilitating transit between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Discussions of a transisthmian canal often centered on Nicaragua, with possible routes surveyed. However, a Nicaraguan canal was never constructed and, after asserting its regional primacy, the United States ultimately assured its hemispheric dominance and in 1914 finished construction of the Panama Canal.¹⁰ The nearby presence of the Panama Canal ensured that Nicaragua would remain a vital piece in U.S. machinations.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the politics of a transisthmian canal would provide the backdrop for greater U.S. intervention and increased instability in Nicaragua. Following the initiation of the construction of the Panama Canal in 1904 and the elimination of a U.S. sponsored Nicaraguan canal, Nicaraguan president, José Santos Zelaya, began courting foreign powers for the erection of a competing canal. Presaging the strategies of Sandino and the Sandinistas, Zelaya saw the canal issue as a means of attracting allies who might challenge U.S. hegemony. The Nicaraguan president also aspired to create a Central American union, which required the elimination of U.S. intervention. He failed to attract France and Great Britain, but succeeded in obtaining German and Japanese interest.¹¹ By flouting the Roosevelt Corollary to

¹⁰ Theodore Roosevelt's Annual Message to Congress for 1904, House Records HR 58A-K2, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233, Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=56>; Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 10, 30.

¹¹ Thomas Schoonover, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 118-133.

the Monroe Doctrine and challenging U.S. claims to regional hegemony, Zelaya put himself at odds with U.S. officials.

Foreshadowing the actions of the U.S. government during the Contra War, U.S. officials in 1909 participated in a public relations campaign designed to undermine the Nicaraguan government and indirectly aided the movement opposed to ruling regime. Ironically, before the agreement to create the Panama Canal and Zelaya's falling out with U.S. officials, the Nicaraguan president enjoyed a high degree of popularity in the United States. In 1898 some in the U.S. media hailed the Nicaraguan president as "an enterprising, adventurous, shrewd, politic, brave, revolutionary Spanish-American gentleman."¹² However, with the help of government officials, U.S. popular opinion turned on the Nicaraguan president in 1909, with many in the press labeling him "a tyrant, [and] a mischief-maker."¹³ That same year, the governor of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast rebelled, launching an ineffectual insurgency against the president. The armed movement against Zelaya appeared stymied until Nicaraguan government troops executed two U.S. citizens fighting for the Nicaraguan opposition in November.¹⁴ Recognizing the opportunity to become openly involved in the Nicaraguan civil war, the following month U.S. Secretary of State Philander Knox called for the overthrow of Zelaya and sent one thousand U.S. Marines to the Atlantic Coast.¹⁵ Zelaya immediately resigned in order to prevent a U.S. invasion. However, U.S. forces maintained their support for the opposition, ensuring a rebel victory.¹⁶

The intervention of 1909 marked the beginning of U.S. imperial rule in Nicaragua. In the

¹² "The Man of the Week: Jose Santos Zelaya," *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1898, 3.

¹³ Frederick Palmer, "The Worst Governed Country," *New York Times*, March 2, 1909, 8.

¹⁴ "Nicaraguan Tyrant Executes Americans and Gets Quick Action from Washington," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 19, 1909, 6.

¹⁵ Philander Knox, Letter to the Nicaraguan Chargé, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1909* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 455-457.

¹⁶ "Zelaya Resigns, Denouncing US," *New York Times*, December 17, 1909, 1; Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 69-70.

fall of 1910, Nicaraguan leaders signed the Dawson Pact, a U.S. drafted agreement that made Nicaragua a U.S. protectorate and, in the process, handed over Nicaraguan finances to U.S. officials.¹⁷ The United States also extended a series of loans meant to bring stability to the Nicaraguan economy but, ultimately, enriched U.S. interests. As U.S. economic control over their country became more pronounced, Nicaraguan nationalists, particularly Liberals, chafed under the U.S. imposed oligarchy of Conservatives and sought the creation of a more democratic government.¹⁸ By 1912, U.S. officials found “an overwhelming majority of Nicaraguans... antagonistic to the United States.”¹⁹

These antagonisms exploded in July 1912 as Liberals rebelled against the Conservative government they viewed as the willing accomplices of the United States. The revolutionary movement, buttressed by popular support, appeared on the brink of victory when the Nicaraguan Minister of Foreign Relations, prodded by U.S. officials, called on the United States to intervene, warning that the violence spawned by the current civil war threatened US lives and property. With U.S. officials determined to prevent a rival power from exploiting Nicaraguan unrest to intervene and build a competing transisthmian canal, U.S. sailors and Marines soon landed in Nicaragua and subdued the country’s rebellious factions in a matter of weeks. Although pockets of popular resistance persisted, the States Department left a small U.S. occupation force of 120 and restructured Nicaraguan politics, restoring the Conservatives to power and placing the Liberals in political exile.²⁰ However, true power rested with a handful of U.S. bank representatives, who managed Nicaraguan finances.

¹⁷ “Establishment of a Tribunal or Mixed Commission to Settle Claims of Aliens Against Nicaragua,” *Papers Relation to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1911* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 625-627

¹⁸ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 80, 128.

¹⁹ Elliot Northcott, cited in Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 143.

²⁰ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 14.

With a small contingent of Marines on the ground, and the ever-present threat of U.S. invasion looming, the United States created an economic and political system in 1912 that would manage Nicaraguan affairs until the United States completely withdrew in 1933. Despite the appearance of stability created by the U.S. occupation, unrest towards the occupation and its local collaborators simmered beneath Nicaraguan society. When the United States withdrew its Marine presence in 1925, old animosities quickly came to the surface and exploded in civil war as Liberals and Conservatives again battled for control of Nicaraguan society. The Marines would return in December 1926 and a new era of Nicaraguan unrest and internationalism would begin.²¹

Augusto Sandino and Latin American Nationalism

In response to the return of the U.S. Marines in 1926, a young Nicaraguan named August “César” Sandino took up arms against the United States and aligned with it. Sandino’s movement would, in many ways, mirror that of Zelaya before him, utilizing transnational connections to challenge U.S. hegemony and attempt to build Central American unity. Although emphasizing the local politics of Central America, Sandino’s movement was truly global. He called for the creation of a Central American, and ultimately a Latin American, union, believing that the only way in which Latin Americans could emerge from under the shadow of the United States was through a pan-Latin American union. He also cultivated solidarity with organizations and governments sympathetic to his cause. Sandino wrote to the World Anti-Imperialist Congress, worked with the Mexican Hands-Off-Nicaragua Committee, and received support from the Anti-Imperialist League of the United States. In fact, it has been argued that Sandino’s utilization of a transnational network was the single most important factor in ending the U.S.

²¹ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 141-146.

occupation of Nicaragua in 1932.²²

Sandino's revolutionary movement saw itself as part of a larger international struggle and associated with likeminded organizations from around the world. In fact, the actions of the Sandinistas were influenced by and closely mirrored Sandino's of decades earlier. The Sandinistas cultivated international solidarity and advocated for a degree of pan-Latin Americanism. They also reached out to the thousands of organizations from around the world that stood in solidarity with their cause, and often promoted a message of Latin American unity in the face of Western imperialism. For example, the Sandinistas supported the Argentine government's seizure of the Falkland Islands in 1982, even though the military junta in Buenos Aires actively sought the downfall of the Sandinista regime.²³ Therefore, to understand the internationalism of the Sandinistas it is necessary to begin with a discussion of Augusto César Sandino's thoughts and actions on the world stage.

Sandino was born on May 18, 1895, in Niquinohomo, a village of mud and straw huts located in Nicaragua's densely populated department of Masaya. His mother, Margarita Calderón, was an indigenous coffee harvester who labored on the plantation of his father, Don Gregorio Sandino. As a child Sandino's father recognized him and accepted him into his household, where he was able to receive an education. As an adult Sandino worked for his father before eventually becoming an agricultural broker.²⁴ However, he was forced to abandoned his business and flee to Mexico after shooting a man in a dispute. Sandino traveled to Tampico, Mexico, and began working as a mechanic for Standard Oil of Indiana.²⁵

²² This is precisely Alan McPherson's argument in *The Invaded*, 215-16.

²³ Karl Bermann, "Sandino in Plain English," *Sandino Without Frontiers: Selected Writings of Augusto César Sandino on Internationalism, Pan-Americanism, and Social Questions*, ed. Karl Bermann, (Hampton: Compita Publishing, 1988), 11-12.

²⁴ For a history of Sandino's life, see Gregorio Selser, *Sandino* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981).

²⁵ Walker, *Nicaragua*, 20.

It was while in the Mexican oil fields that he became acquainted with the ideas of communism, socialism, and anarcho-syndicalism. Although Sandino fought for a more egalitarian Nicaraguan society, he never called for a centralized economy and only redistributed uncultivated lands through cooperatives.²⁶ In fact, Sandino vehemently opposed being labeled a communist. On one occasion he chastised the Salvadoran revolutionary, Agustín Farabundo Martí, for preaching to him about communism, stating that “if you think that you will seduce me with your ideals, do me a favor and don’t stay here one more minute. I am not a communist.”²⁷ Although not explicitly leftist, Sandino would align himself with communist and socialist organizations in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. These groups would be the transnational advocates and allies of Sandino’s movement.

In 1926, Sandino returned to Nicaragua and began working in a U.S.-owned gold mine, but later that year he left to join the brewing Liberal rebellion. Sandino, who organized his own fighting unit, refused to accept any political solution as long as the U.S. troops remained in Nicaragua and continued to lead an insurgency from the mountainous department of Segovia.²⁸ An ardent nationalist and critic of U.S. imperialism, Sandino waged a guerilla war against the United States and its Nicaraguan allies for over five years, the reverberations of which were felt the world over.

At the pinnacle of his popularity, Sandino received moral support from prominent nationalist leaders abroad such as India’s Jawaharlal Nehru and Madame Sun Yat-Sen.²⁹ There was even a Guomindang unit that called itself the “Sandino brigade.”³⁰ Sandino’s movement

²⁶ Donald C. Hodges, *Sandino’s Communism: Spiritual Politics for the Twenty-First Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 3, 14, 7, 13.

²⁷ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 216.

²⁸ Walker, *Nicaragua*, 19-20.

²⁹ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 224.

³⁰ Marco Aurelio Navarro-Génie, *Augusto “César” Sandino: Messiah of Light and Truth* (Syracuse: University of

appealed to these non-Nicaraguans because he placed it in the broader international struggle of oppressed peoples against imperialism. Sandino agreed with the opinion of a visitor who said to him: “I believe, General, that your struggle for the complete liberation of Nicaragua is not just limited to this country but is rather the beginning of a Race War. You represent in these moments all the energy and the proud spirit of the Latin soul, the young soul of Indo-America, which has risen against the Anglo-Saxon Imperialism brought to these virgin lands by the brutal and ultra-CIVILIZED blondes.” As Sandino saw it, his movement was not solely dedicated to the liberation of Nicaragua, but represented the vanguard of a war against international imperialism. Sandino believed that the struggle “will become international as colonial and semicolonial peoples learn to unite with peoples of the imperialist metropolises.”³¹ The Nicaraguan revolutionary intended his fight against the U.S. Marines to inspire and motivate other anti-colonial uprisings across the globe.

Central to the struggle against North American and European imperialism was pan-Latin Americanism. In order to better battle U.S. hegemony in Latin America, Sandino envisaged the peoples of the hemisphere uniting together as a political counterweight to the United States, a colossus of the south to balance that of the north. In a letter to Froylán Turcios, Sandino wrote that “among us [Latin Americans] there should be no frontiers, and that all of us have the clear duty to be concerned with the fate of each of the Hispanic American nations, because all of us face the same danger before the colonizing and absorbing policy of the Yankee imperialists. Sandino is Indo-Hispanic and he has no frontiers in Latin America.”³² Although he initially saw his struggle as limited to Nicaragua, he soon came to view it in terms of the creation of a united

Syracuse Press, 2002), 53.

³¹ Cited in Hodges, *Sandino's Communism*, 42.

³² Sandino to Turcios, El Chipotón, June 10, 1928, *Sandino: The Testimony of a Nicaraguan Patriot, 1921-1934*, comp. Sergio Ramírez, trans. Robert Edgar Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 202-03.

Central American republic. In a discussion with a French writer Sandino explained that “at the beginning of my campaign I thought only of Nicaragua. Afterward... my ambition grew. I thought of the Central American Republic... Tell Hispano-America that as long as Sandino breathes, the independence of Central America will have a defender. I shall never betray my cause. That is why I am the son of Bolívar.”³³

In working towards his pan-Latin American dream, Sandino filled his ranks with fighters from throughout the hemisphere and beyond. Sandino labeled the Latin Americans in the top echelons of his army “the Latin American Legion” and referred to them as “eloquent proof of the immense value of the ties of blood, language, and race that united the Latin American peoples.” The Latin Americans in Sandino’s Army for the Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua (EDSNN) included among the officers “eleven Hondurans, six Salvadorans, three Guatemalans, three Mexicans, two Venezuelans, two Colombians, two Costa Ricans, one Peruvian, and one Dominican. Among the more famous of the officers were Farabundo Martí of El Salvador, José de Paredes of Mexico, Estevan Pavletich of Peru, and Juan Pablo Umanzor of Honduras.”³⁴ Sandino’s Latin American Legion closely resembled that of the Simon Bolívar Brigade, a group of Latin Americans who fought with the Sandinistas fifty years later.³⁵ Both Sandino and the Sandinistas viewed their struggles as encompassing all of Latin America and not simply Nicaragua.

In 1928, as an attempt to create a pan-Latin American union or at the least garner support for his struggle against the United States, Sandino called on the leaders of Latin America for aid. In a letter to fifteen Latin American presidents, Sandino chastised them for their “cold

³³ Cited in McPherson, *The Invaded*, 216.

³⁴ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 217.

³⁵ Nahuel Moreno, *The Simon Bolívar Brigade: The Latin American Combatants Who Fought to Overthrow the Dictator Somoza* trans. by Daniel Iglesias (Buenos Aires: Ediciones *El Socialista*, 2014), 1-2.

indifference” towards the plight of his Nicaraguan guerilla army. Believing that the United States would not stop with Nicaragua and would soon colonize all of its southern neighbors, Sandino called on the presidents of Latin America to form “a united front and to stop the conqueror’s advance over our lands.”³⁶ When these leaders failed to challenge U.S. imperialism, Sandino attacked them for their “failure to do your duty” and “protest diplomatically, or with arms... the uncounted crimes being committed by the Government in the White House.”³⁷ In the spring of the following year Sandino again called on the presidents of Central America to unite in order to “stop being humiliated by the Yankee.”³⁸ Days later Sandino sent a letter to “the leaders of the Americans” in which he proposed a conference to discuss political unification, as well as the construction and governance of a trans-oceanic canal in Nicaragua.³⁹ The conference was to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the subject of discussion was to be the creation of a “Latin American Alliance” of the “twenty-one states comprising the Latin American nationality.” Through this alliance Sandino hoped to abolish the Monroe Doctrine, create a Latin American court of justice to oversee regional disputes, and implement an apolitical military force to police the hemisphere.⁴⁰ Sandino envisaged the conference leading to the creation of a “Hispano-American Oceanic Union” with the ability to stand up to the United States and control its own destiny.⁴¹

Despite the lofty goals of the proposed “Latin American Alliance,” Sandino’s efforts to fulfill Bolívar’s dreams came to naught. There was little interest amongst the heads of state that Sandino invited to the conference, and when the conferences were eventually held in 1929, the

³⁶ Sandino to the rulers of Latin America, El Chipotón, August 4, 1928, *Sandino*, 204-06.

³⁷ “Sandino Against Asks Ibero-American Aid,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1928, 60.

³⁸ Sandino to the presidents of Central America, El Chipotón, March 12, 1929, *Sandino*, 246.

³⁹ Sandino to the leaders of the Americas, El Chipotón, March 20, 1929, *Sandino*, 248-50.

⁴⁰ Sandino, “Plan for the Realization of Bolívar’s Highest Dream,” March 20, 1929, *Sandino*, 251-62.

⁴¹ Hodges, *Sandino’s Communism*, 87.

tone was too leftist to sway popular opinion.⁴² Also, at the time he proposed his alliance, his army was facing serious setbacks in its struggle against the U.S. Marines and the new Liberal government of José Moncada. Moncada's electoral victory of 1928, which was the most open and fair election in Nicaragua to that point, stole much of Sandino's thunder. With a Liberal in power it appeared that part of Sandino's struggle against the Conservative regime no longer held any validity. For many in both Nicaragua and elsewhere, Sandino's decision to continue fighting appeared self-serving.

Because of this decline in internal and external support, in June 1929 Sandino traveled to Mexico in an effort to reignite interest in his cause, taking with him his Latin American Legion in order to find "moral support, the sympathy that we have always had from all the countries of America. We were overwhelmed by the silence, by the isolation. The desperation of being ignored. We missed the world knowing that we were still in the fight."⁴³ Sandino intended to meet with the Mexican president Emilio Portes Gil to discuss further arming and financing for the EDSNN.⁴⁴ In anticipation of Sandino's arrival Portes Gil contacted the U.S. ambassador and secretary of state, who approved Sandino's visit as long as he did not continue his war, stayed out of Mexico City, and remained in a remote part of Mexico.⁴⁵ The U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kellogg hoped that the Mexican government might be able to isolate Sandino and keep him out of the public eye.⁴⁶ After languishing in the Yucatán for weeks with little financing, Sandino finally met with Portes Gil who informed him that because of its non-interventionist policy Mexico would not be providing him the money or weaponry he desired. Portes Gil later

⁴² McPherson, *The Invaded*, 224.

⁴³ Sandino, interview with *El Dictamen*, October 1929, *Sandino*, 276-77.

⁴⁴ Navarro-Génie, *Augusto "César" Sandino*, 61-63.

⁴⁵ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 225.

⁴⁶ Hodges, *Sandino's Communism*, 73.

admitted that his real reason for denying Sandino aid was to avoid damaging Mexico's improved relations with the United States.⁴⁷ Although Latin American leaders like Portes Gil would grant small concessions to pan-Latin American ideals, the opinion of the United States proved more important. As long as the United States stood in opposition, there was little hope for pan-Latin American assistance coming to Sandino's aid. Over a half-century later the Sandinistas faced the same kind of intransigence in attempting to cultivate hemispheric assistance.

The Transnational Sandino Rebellion

Ultimately Sandino failed to create a pan-Latin American alliance, but he was successful in garnering support for his movement and creating international opposition to the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua. Benefitting from a number of technological advances, the Nicaraguan revolutionary spread his message and cultivated ties to sympathetic individuals and organizations throughout Latin America. The growth of cable lines and new steamship routes, as well as developing radio, telephone, and aviation technology all allowed for the quicker dissemination of news and information throughout the hemisphere.⁴⁸ Messages that had taken days to transmit across the expanses of the Western Hemisphere and Atlantic Ocean now took moments, and travelers were able to traverse North and South America in hours instead of days. Sandino's revolution occurred at a time in which technology was making the world much smaller, allowing him to better connect with sympathetic people from across the globe.

Aided by these technological advancements were a number of friendly journalists and organizations from North America, South America, and beyond who sympathized with Sandino. Perhaps his most valuable asset in distributing his message to the world was a bookish, middle-

⁴⁷ "The Journey to Mexico as Told to José Román in 1933," *Sandino*, 329-31.

⁴⁸ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 194.

aged Honduran named Froylán Turcios. Turcios owned and operated *Ariel*, a bi-monthly magazine largely dedicated to Sandino's movement. Although the two never met, Sandino and Turcios proved to be like-minded Latin American nationalists dedicated to eliminating the threat of U.S. imperialism. Through *Ariel*, Turcios disseminated Sandino's writings to the outside world, fomenting much of the outcry against U.S. occupation. *Ariel* was read widely in Central America and Mexico, with editors throughout Latin America, Europe, and the United States reproducing its articles.⁴⁹ Besides telling the world of Sandino's thought and deeds, Turcios also proved to be the conduit for much of Sandino's financing and the main avenue through which men and materiel reached the EDSNN.⁵⁰ The Honduran editor was an invaluable conduit for Sandino and the outside world.

In order to facilitate the dissemination of Sandino's message, Turcios connected a number of North American and European journalists with the Nicaraguan revolutionary. Arguably the most important of these journalists was Carleton Beals, a writer for *The Nation* and a U.S. critic of imperialism, who traveled to Nicaragua in late 1927. With the aid of Turcios, Beals became the only journalist to interview Sandino in the Segovias during the occupation, and his interviews were published throughout the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Australia. In his dispatches to *The Nation*, Beals depicted Sandino as a nationalist and a defender of Nicaraguan sovereignty. Using Sandino's own words, Beals countered the U.S. government's claim that Sandino was simply a bandit, instead painting him as a heroic figure of national liberation and defense. Sandino instructed Beals to "tell your people there may be bandits in

⁴⁹ Navarro-Génie, *Augusto "César" Sandino*, 52-53; McPherson, *The Invaded*, 217-18.

⁵⁰ José Antonio Funes, "Froylán Turcios y la campaña a favor de Sandino en la revista *Ariel*," Centro de Investigaciones sobre América Latina y el Caribe, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, www.cialc.unam.mx/cuadamer/textos/ca133-181.pdf, June 20, 2014.

Nicaragua, but they are not necessarily Nicaraguans.”⁵¹ Beals’s articles proved vital in transforming the debate in the United States from whether or not Sandino was a bandit to whether or not the United States had any right being involved in Nicaragua.

Although Beals’s interviews challenged the narrative forwarded by U.S. officials and helped to spur a more vocal opposition to the conflict, Sandino added much to his own literary arsenal. He wrote prodigiously, contacting important publications, organizations, and political figures from throughout the Western Hemisphere and around the world. As mentioned earlier, Sandino contacted all of Latin America’s leaders in an attempt to create a Pan-Latin American union. He also wrote individual letters to a number of important political figures in the hemisphere, including Emilio Portes Gil (President of Mexico), Hipólito Yrigoyen (President of Argentina), William E. Borah (U.S. Senator), and Herbert Hoover (President of the United States). Sandino’s letters to Portes Gil and Yrigoyen were further calls for unification, whereas his messages to U.S. politicians proved hostile, even those to members of Congress who opposed the occupation. In a letter to Borah, which was apparently transmitted to the senator through Carleton Beals, Sandino demanded “the immediate withdrawal of invasion forces,” otherwise he would “not be responsible for the life of any North American public official who resides in Nicaraguan territory.”⁵² Sandino’s message to Hoover also contained a threat, although, it was hidden in a congratulatory message. Taking credit for Coolidge’s decision not to run for reelection, Sandino congratulated Hoover on winning the presidency: “I [Sandino] am pleased to inform you that through the efforts of our soldiers we have managed to remove from action the ex-leader of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, and his Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg.... We wish to inform you [Coolidge] as well that we are ready to punish every abuse of the United

⁵¹ Carleton Beals, “With Sandino in Nicaragua I: To the Nicaraguan Border,” *The Nation*, February 22, 1928, 204.

⁵² Sandino to William Borah, February, 1928, *Sandino*, 184.

States of America in the affairs of our country.”⁵³ To politicians in the United States, Sandino’s message denounced the occupation and called for U.S. withdrawal.

Internationally Sandino cultivated ties to and received support from a number of influential organizations. Although he refused to be labeled a communist, Sandino allied himself with organizations under the aegis of the Communist International or Comintern. In the spring of 1928, the Venezuelan Communist Gustavo Machado arrived in Sandino’s camp with a proposal from the Mexican Hands Off Nicaragua Committee, which called for hemispheric unity in the face of North American imperialism. Sandino accepted Machado’s proposal but refused to abandon the ideal of a “United Front” that included Nicaraguan Liberals. The Comintern initially appealed to Sandino because of its Leninist tendencies, which advocated a less centralized path towards revolution, but its move towards a Stalinist approach in 1929 severely strained relations.⁵⁴ Having abandoned the idea of social cooperation in favor of the primacy of the communist party in the struggle against imperialism, the Comintern became increasingly critical of Sandino’s stance that “neither extreme right nor extreme left but rather United Front is our motto. That being said, it would not be unreasonable if in our struggle we were able to achieve the cooperation of all social classes.”⁵⁵ Ultimately, Sandino’s adherence to a popular front strategy cost him the support of the Comintern but not before many of the organizations under its umbrella provided his struggle with moral and financial support.

Hemispheric labor organizations proved particularly sympathetic to Sandino’s struggle. Following the defeat of Sandino’s forces at the battle of Ocotal in July 1927, delegates attending the fifth Congress of the Pan-American Federation of Labor denounced the U.S. occupation of

⁵³ Sandino to President Herbert Hoover, March 6, 1929, *Sandino*, 239.

⁵⁴ Hodges, *Sandino’s Communism*, 68-75.

⁵⁵ Cited in Hodges, *Sandino’s Communism*, 72.

Nicaragua. William Green, the president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) “decried the use of arms by the United States in Latin-American countries... and ‘deplored the unhappy state of affairs in Nicaragua.’”⁵⁶ Citing that “the people of Nicaragua have been the unfortunate victims of a foreign intervention,” the delegates of the congress unanimously approved a resolution that called for the “immediate withdrawal of United States Forces on land, sea, and air.”⁵⁷ Transnational labor movements would become a vital backer of Nicaraguan revolutionary movements in the coming decades as well as an outspoken opponent of the Somoza regime.

In the United States, one of Sandino’s most important allies was the All-American Anti-Imperialist League (AAAIL), located in New York City. Affiliated with the Communist Party of United States, the AAAIL held pro-Sandino marches and demonstrations, sent medical supplies, and raised funds for the EDSNN, which Sandino politely thanked them for.⁵⁸ In 1928, the AAAIL held a number of protests in New York and Washington D.C against U.S. involvement in Nicaragua.⁵⁹ On one occasion, the AAAIL picketed the White House with slogans that included “Wall Street Not Sandino Is the Real Bandit,” “We are for Sandino and Not Against Him,” “We Demand an Immediate Withdrawal of Marines From Nicaragua,” and “Millions Are Unemployed While We Squander the Treasury on Conquest.”⁶⁰ The FBI and other law enforcement officials, who were particularly concerned with the threat of communist subversion in the United States, closely monitored these gatherings, which observers estimated were

⁵⁶ “Nicaragua Battle Stirs Labor Parley,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1927, 10.

⁵⁷ “Calls on America to Quit Nicaragua,” *ibid.*, July 22, 1927, 3.

⁵⁸ Sandino to the U.S. section of the All-American Anti-Imperialist League, El Chipote, May 20, 1928, *Sandino*, 200-01.

⁵⁹ “Arrest 107 Pickets at the White House,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1928, 21; “New York Police Disperse Foes of ‘Imperialism,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1928, 2; “Radical Groups Meet on War Anniversary,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1928, 9;

⁶⁰ “84 in Sandino Parade, Taken, Include Girls,” *Washington Post*, April 15, 1928, 1; Richard Grossman, “Solidarity with Sandino: The Anti-Intervention and Solidarity Movements in the United States, 1927-1933,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 67, (November 2009), 72.

attended by hundreds of people.⁶¹ Because of this, the leaders of these movements faced arrest by and harassment from U.S. law enforcement.

Among the leaders of the AAAIL was Sandino's half-brother Sócrates, who had been living and working in New York since 1926. In an attempt to raise awareness about the Nicaraguan occupation and provide funds for his brother's movement, Sócrates embarked on a speaking tour in 1928, visiting members of the AAAIL, the U.S. Communist Party, and various labor organizations in New York and Chicago.⁶² At his first and largest speaking engagement, Sócrates spoke to a crowd of fifteen hundred, in which he compared his brother to George Washington and Simón Bolívar.⁶³ Championing his brother's internationalism, Sócrates spoke of Sandino's struggle as "not merely a fight for the freedom of Nicaragua, but for the freedom of all Latin America... and the laboring people of America."⁶⁴ Because of his outspoken support for his brother, Sócrates was eventually deported, returning to Nicaragua and joining his brother.⁶⁵

The AAAIL drew the considerable attention from both the media and U.S. officials for their efforts to raise funds for Sandino. Besides the speaking engagements, which were excellent fundraising ventures, the AAAIL also sold and encouraged its members to use stickers that read "Protest Against Marine Rule in Nicaragua."⁶⁶ U.S. officials quickly moved to stop the disbursement of the supposedly subversive stamps, which the U.S. Post Office deemed "obscene."⁶⁷ The AAAIL challenged the Post Office censure in federal court but lost the case after the State Department submitted an affidavit that, according to Judge Thomas Thacher,

⁶¹ The FBI's records on the AAAIL are available online at <https://vault.fbi.gov/All%20American%20Anti%20Imperialist%20League%20/All%20American%20Anti%20Imperialist%20League%20Part%201%20of%201/view>.

⁶² "Brother Here Calls Sandino Safe From U.S.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 3, 1928, 16.

⁶³ "Sandino A Patriot, Says Brother Here," *New York Times*, January 16, 1928, 44; "Sandino's Brother, Speaking in Brooklyn, Compares him to Washington," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1928, 5.

⁶⁴ "Sandino's Brother Demands Freedom," *New York Times*, February 20, 1928, 6.

⁶⁵ Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino," 72.

⁶⁶ "Defies Postoffice on 'Protest Stamp,'" *New York Times*, January 30, 1928, 3.

⁶⁷ "New Upholds Ban on Sandino Stamp," *ibid.*, February 2, 1928, 8.

revealed the AAAIL claim of Marine rule to be a “falsehood.”⁶⁸ In general, the AAAIL’s efforts to raise funds for medical aid for Sandino came under persistent attack from U.S. officials, who claimed the “fund’s real use will be to buy ammunitions.”⁶⁹ Despite the best efforts of those in the U.S. government, the AAAIL proved to be a valuable asset to Sandino, providing much of his transnational money. In April 1928 alone the AAAIL sent \$33,000, with another \$15,000 from the Soviet Union, to Sandino through its sister organization in Mexico.⁷⁰ As a financier and propagandist, the AAAIL proved a valuable asset in Sandino’s struggle against the United States.

Another organization vital to Sandino’s struggle was the Hands-Off Nicaragua Committee (MAFUENIC), a Mexico City-based organization formed under the umbrella of the Latin American branch of the All-American Anti-Imperialist League (LADLA). LADLA was transnational in focus and consistency, with members from thirteen Latin American countries and associations with Haitian, Cuban, and other Caribbean anti-imperialist groups. Like the AAAIL, MAFUENIC held demonstrations in support of Sandino and raised funds for his cause. Lead by such notable Mexicans as the artist Diego Rivera, members of MAFUENIC pledged to “wage war to the death against Yankee imperialism” and struggle “for the union of Latin American peoples to expel the Yankees from Latin America.”⁷¹ On April 1, 1928, MAFUENIC organized the largest pro-Sandino rally ever, in which 5,000 assembled to hear speeches from the likes of Carleton Beals. One month later the leaders of MAFUENIC traveled to Sandino’s camp, delivering medicine and money. Sandino so valued the efforts of MAFUENIC that he gave them a U.S. flag that he claimed his men stole from the Marines, although it more likely came from a

⁶⁸ “Sandino Stamp Ban is Upheld by Court,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1928, 8.

⁶⁹ “Gillet is Challenged,” *ibid.*, May 9, 1928, 7; “Denies Charges of Felony,” *ibid.*, June 7, 1928, 20.

⁷⁰ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 222-23.

⁷¹ “Mexico’s ‘Reds’ Denounce Hoover,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1928, M5.

U.S.-owned mine.⁷² The flag later found its way into the Mexican Chamber of Deputies where Hernan Laborde, a deputy and member of MAFUENIC, waved it while claiming “solidarity for Sandino who represents the possibility of a unified struggle against the common enemy.”⁷³

By the fall of 1928 Sandino had successfully created a transnational network operating throughout the western hemisphere, with ties to Europe and other anti-colonial struggles. However, just as Sandino reached the zenith of his international support a number of factors converged to greatly diminish his presence on the international stage. The Nicaraguan elections of November 4, 1928, stole much of Sandino’s thunder and his attempts to stop the election hurt his image. Second, Sandino lost the support of his most important international allies. In the summer of 1928, the Honduran government shutdown *Ariel*, and in December 1928 Froylán Turcios resigned as Sandino’s spokesperson. Within a month of his resignation Turcios left for Paris with a new job as consul, possibly as part of an agreement with Honduran government and the United States. Sandino informed Turcios that any further communications would “not [be] desired in this camp” and in another letter labeled his former Honduran ally as “my Judas.”⁷⁴ In the wake of his break with Turcios, Sandino entrusted “the general representation on the continent” to MAFUENIC and asked the organization to continue publishing material on his movement so that his struggle might “be known by the civilized world.”⁷⁵

It was at this time that Sandino took his disastrous sojourn to Mexico in order to bolster his flagging cause.⁷⁶ Despite being snubbed and disrespected by the Mexican government, the worst outcome of Sandino’s trip was his falling out with MAFUENIC and the Mexican communists. In December 1929, the Communist Party of Mexico, LADLA, and MAFUENIC all

⁷² McPherson, *The Invaded*, 221.

⁷³ “Mexican Laborite Raps Hoover’s Trip,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1928, 2.

⁷⁴ Froylán Turcios to Sandino, Tegucigalpa, December 28, 1928, *Sandino*, 228-30.

⁷⁵ Presentation to the Hands-Off-Nicaragua Committee, January 18, 1929, *Sandino*, 231.

⁷⁶ “Sandino Acclaimed in Vera Cruz,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1929, 6.

accused Sandino of taking a bribe of \$60,000 from the United States in order to keep a low profile in Mexico.⁷⁷ Sandino vehemently denied the claims, which were most likely fabricated by the Mexican communists in order to discredit Sandino, possibly out of jealousy and disapproval of his Latin American union or because of Sandino's rejection of the Comintern.⁷⁸ Having lost Turcios and MAFUENIC, Sandino possessed few avenues through which to spread his message to the outside world. Besides the Mexican organizations, Sandino also came to an impasse with some of his own Latin American officers, most notably Agustín Farabundo Martí, who left Sandino's camp after an argument about his loyalty, returning to El Salvador to start his own revolutionary movement. Having lost many of his closest supporters, Sandino sneaked out of Mexico in the spring of 1930 and returned to the Segovias.⁷⁹

Ultimately, Sandino's break with MAFUENIC and the Comintern was most likely the result of transformations in the Soviet Union. Under the influence of Josef Stalin, the Comintern quit supporting non-communist national liberation struggles in February 1928. It quickly abandoned efforts towards coalition building and emphasized the Communist party as the vanguard of the revolutionary left. Sandino, who advocated for a united front that incorporated a broader element of Nicaraguan political life, rejected the Comintern's directives. The result was not only the end of Comintern support but also that of any affiliated organizations. In 1929, the AAAIL cut its support for Sandino and, in June of that year, held a conference against imperialism without any mention of Nicaragua or Sandino.⁸⁰ Further hindering transnational support, the Great Depression, which began in October 1929, curtailed Sandino's financial support. Abandoned by his supporters on the left, the beginning of the Depression further pushed

⁷⁷ "Investigate Story Sandino Took Bribe," *New York Times*, December 26, 1929, 12.

⁷⁸ "Sandino Denies Charge," *ibid.*, January 18, 1930, 6; Navarro-Génie, *Augusto*, 68.

⁷⁹ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 227.

⁸⁰ Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino," 75.

Sandino to the fringes of international attention.

Events in Nicaragua also stymied Sandino's international popularity. In 1928, the newly founded *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard, GN) began to take over responsibilities from the Marines. Under the command of Anastasio Somoza García, the *Guardia Nacional* started the task of patrolling and policing rural Nicaragua, diminishing the cost in both U.S. lives and money. With fewer Marine deaths and attacks on U.S. properties, U.S. popular interest in the conflict waned. In the first three months of 1928 the *New York Times* listed 269 stories about Nicaragua, 282 stories for all of 1931, and 144 for 1932.⁸¹ By the early 1932 it appeared as popular interest in Sandino had waned. In the fall of 1931 Sandino wrote "we have come to realize that we do not have at our disposal one single Indo-Hispanic government, much less any other nation of the globe. Nicaragua is directly and solely represented by our army."⁸² Isolated and seemingly defeated, Sandino turned inward and restructured his movement, unaware that his greatest triumph was nearly at hand.

Although he had lost much of his transnational support network and international attention had shifted away from his struggle, Sandino had helped shape the political dialogue around the occupation and created public pressure that forced a shift in U.S. policy. Popular figures such as Will Rogers questioned the purpose of the U.S. occupation: "Why are we in Nicaragua, and what the Hell are we doing there?"⁸³ The U.S. press questioned its government's intervention in the Nicaraguan civil war as early as 1926, with the *New York Times*, *New York World*, and *Baltimore Sun* all speaking out against the interventionists' motives. In 1929 the *Boston Globe* asked "What is all this fighting about? Why are these young men in marine

⁸¹ Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino," 75.

⁸² Sandino, communique, October 20, 1931, *Sandino*, 388.

⁸³ Cited in McPherson, *The Invaded*, 197-98.

uniforms being killed?” and, believing that the government was lying to its citizens, the *Washington News* wrote that the U.S. public was being “shamelessly deceived by its officials.”⁸⁴

Negative international opinion of the U.S. occupation cast doubt in the minds of many in the United States. In particular, the occupation of Nicaragua undermined the U.S. image in Latin America, hurting diplomatic relations and making it difficult to conduct trade. Guatemalan students protested the U.S. occupation in both 1926 and 1927, with many of the local papers writing in favor of their demonstrations. Latin American books such as *Barbaric Yankeeland* and *The White House Shadow* painted the United States as an agent of evil throughout the hemisphere. The Latin American press proved particularly vocal, with major newspapers in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru voicing opposition to U.S. actions in Nicaragua.⁸⁵ At the Sixth Pan-American Conference in January 1928, which was attended by an unofficial delegation representing Sandino, activists from throughout Latin America protested U.S. intervention, cheering the Nicaraguan flag “more loudly and longer than any others” at the flag unveiling ceremony that inaugurated the conference.⁸⁶ Latin American opposition to the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua proved a vocal counter to U.S. policies.

Negative Latin American attitudes towards the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua ultimately hurt U.S. trade with the region. Since 1926, U.S. policymakers had noticed a decline in commerce with Latin America, which was in part due to businesses choosing not to sell to the United States.⁸⁷ For example, a Salvadoran newspaper called for a boycott of U.S. goods, and as

⁸⁴ “Nicaragua’s Bloody ‘Peace,’” *Literary Digest*, January 14, 1928, 8.

⁸⁵ “Sandino Revolt in Nicaragua Explained in Terms of History,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 6, 1928, 3; “Marine Planes Check Rebels in Nicaragua,” *ibid.*, January 12, 1928, 3; “Argentina Sees ‘Discordant Note,’” *New York Times*, January 6, 1928, 4; “Marines Kill 14 in Nicaragua Fights,” *ibid.*, January 12, 1928, 1; “America is Criticized by Mexico City Paper,” *ibid.*, January 15, 1928, 26;

⁸⁶ “The Pan-American Conference,” *The Manchester Guardian*, February 8, 1928, 7; “Havana Delegates Indicted by Ugarte,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1928, E8.

⁸⁷ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 199.

one journalist noted, “Your Latin-conscious Central American will sell his coffee to a German or an English buyer if the price is anywhere near being equal, and he will buy a German sewing machine in preference to one coming from the country which he thinks is oppressing Nicaragua.”⁸⁸ The continued presence of U.S. troops in Nicaragua made Latin America an inhospitable place for both the United States and its trade.

Outside of the western hemisphere, support for Sandino was more symbolic than material, with journalists and activists voicing their displeasure with the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua. In Europe, journalists were quick to condemn the actions of the United States. A British editor with the *Daily News* expressed his pleasure that “protests [were] being made in the American press and elsewhere,” highlighting how the occupation was “in complete contradiction to the high standard of political morality” set by President Calvin Coolidge and that it had “already done the United States immense political injury and some economic damage throughout Latin America.”⁸⁹ Following Coolidge’s speech at the Pan-American Conference, major newspapers in France, Spain, and Italy all derided the president’s policies towards Nicaragua, with a Spanish journalist arguing that “the conciliatory words of President Coolidge will not ring sincere while sharpshooters in Nicaragua continue hunting the troops of Sandino.”⁹⁰ European labor organizations also voiced their support for Sandino, with the Spanish Federation of Labor voting in favor of Sandino’s continued “warring upon the oppressors of his country.”⁹¹ European pacifist and anti-imperialist organizations also protested the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua. The German League for Human Rights sent a letter to three U.S. senators and the President of Mexico, stating that “American troops have no business on the soil of other independent states

⁸⁸ Carroll Binder, “On the Nicaraguan Front: How the American Intervention Looks to an Eye-Witness,” *New Republic*, March 16, 1927, 90.

⁸⁹ “Protest Voiced in London,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1927, 3.

⁹⁰ “Difficulties Seen in Peru,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1928, 17.

⁹¹ “Spanish Labor for Sandino,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1928, 58.

and it is not the business of American cabinet members to abuse other nations.”⁹²

Among the most influential organizations to support Sandino was the World Anti-Imperialist Congress, a transnational conglomeration of organizations committed to ending North American and European imperialism. In June 1929, members of the Anti-Imperialist League of America, which would elect delegates for the World Anti-Imperialist Congress, condemned U.S. policies in Nicaragua and elsewhere as carrying “out the imperialist designs of Wall Street.”⁹³ In July 1929, at the Second World Anti-Imperialist Congress Meeting held in Frankfurt, Germany, Sandino sent a letter to the delegates in which he sought to call the congress’s “attention to the abominable deeds committed by the imperialist policy of the United States in Nicaragua.” Sympathetic to his cause, the congress responded in favor of Sandino and labeled the U.S. occupation “a brutal offensive against the autonomy and independence of a small nation” that “violates the most fundamental human rights.” The Second World Anti-Imperialist Congress ultimately passed a resolution that condemned the “acts of barbarism carried out by the forces of the Army of the United States” and deemed “them as worthy of universal reprobation.” The congress also agreed to “the full and effective support of the Army in Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua which General Augusto César Sandino commands.”⁹⁴ Other International bodies, such as the First International Congress Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression and the Communist International’s Sixth Congress, spoke out in solidarity with Sandino’s struggle but provided no concrete assistance to the revolutionary.⁹⁵ Aside from moral support, Sandino could expect little from the international organizations. However, their advocacy raised the profile of the conflict, putting greater public

⁹² “Germans Protest Nicaraguan Fighting,” *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1927, 5.

⁹³ “Anti-Imperialists Deride Peace Move,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1929, 21.

⁹⁴ Sandino to the Second World Anti-Imperialist Congress Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany, July 1929, *Sandino*, 268-71.

⁹⁵ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 224.

pressure on the United States to withdraw.

In the face of domestic and international disapproval of the occupation of Nicaragua, U.S. legislators, such as William Borah of Idaho and Henrik Shipstead of Minnesota, doubted the necessity of the intervention and called for the removal of U.S. forces from the country. Borah, Shipstead, and other anti-occupation congressmen took a number of measures to try to end the conflict in Nicaragua. Many traveled to Nicaragua and spoke with local officials about the situation, while others tried to track down Sandino in the mountainous Segovias. In Congress they attempted to cut or eliminate occupation budgets, and called for investigations of U.S. military activities. After the Liberals won the Nicaraguan elections of 1928, many in Congress saw no reason to continue the military occupation of the country. Senator Cleveland Dill of Washington threatened to attach a rider to a Navy appropriations bill that would have ended all funding to the occupation, marking the first time that Congress cut off funding for an active war abroad. Although the Senate initially voted for the rider, it eventually voted against it because of pressure from the Hoover administration.⁹⁶ By hindering financing for the occupation, U.S. members of Congress made it increasingly more difficult for Hoover to maintain a force in Nicaragua, making the U.S. presence there less and less attractive.

By 1930, a number of factors converged to make U.S. officials reassess their attitudes towards the occupation. First, the Great Depression, which had so distracted the U.S. populace, raised the cost of occupation. It eliminated the chances of a Nicaraguan canal and significantly undermined the monetary resources for the occupation. Before the 1928 election there were 5,000 U.S. servicemen in Nicaragua, 2,500 by 1929, and fewer than 1,000 by mid-1930. At the same time, Sandino began a series of offensives that shook the confidence of U.S. officials in

⁹⁶ Borah had been a vocal opponent of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean as early as 1913 but intensified his criticism after 1926. Robert D. Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 135-40.

their ability to end the conflict. Sandino's force of 2,000 launched attacks along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts with orders to "kill all Americans and destroy their property." During the offensive Sandino's men murdered a German missionary and his family, as well as ambushed a detachment of Marines fixing telephone lines, killing eight outright, while the other two were "brutally hacked by machetes." Finally, public outcry in Latin America, the United States, and Europe demonstrated the damage done to the image of the United States by the continued occupation of Nicaragua. In explaining the withdrawal of the Marines in 1932, the State Department's Division of Latin-American Affairs wrote that "public opinion in this country [Nicaragua] would not understand their remaining there any longer, and their presence there was a fruitful cause of misunderstanding and criticism in Latin America."⁹⁷

In the face of global depression, a resurgent Sandino, and global disapproval, U.S. officials began the U.S. withdrawal from Nicaragua. On January 2, 1931 William Borah, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces, and by June of that year the U.S. presence had been reduced from 1,300 to 500 and an aviation section, with all U.S. troops out of Nicaragua following the elections in November 1932.⁹⁸ On January 2, 1932, the United States ended its occupation of Nicaragua, leaving in its place a Liberal government and the *Guardia Nacional* under the command of Anastasio Somoza García. The U.S. occupation had ended but violence persisted long after the Marines withdrew.

Sandino, who had outlived the occupation and successfully helped bring about its demise, agreed to a cease-fire with the new Nicaraguan government. With his forces weak and low on resources, he signed an agreement on February 2, 1933, that called for his disarmament in exchange for amnesty, public works jobs for his men, and the right to a cooperative on the Rio

⁹⁷ McPherson, *The Invaded*, 229-31.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

Coco. Sandino now committed himself to bringing change to Nicaragua through example. However, Somoza García had ambitions of his own and could not abide Sandino's presence on the Nicaraguan political stage. On February 21, 1934, the *Guardia Nacional* seized Sandino after a dinner at the Nicaraguan president's home and executed him at a nearby airfield. At the same time, *Guardia* troops attacked Sandino's cooperative and killed 300 men, women, and children. Afterwards, guardsmen hunted down any alleged Sandino supporters, killing them and their families and burning down their homes.⁹⁹

With the murder of Sandino, Somoza García subdued Nicaragua's revolutionary current and began the creation of the counterrevolutionary establishment that would dominate the country for over four decades. In January 1936, Somoza García overthrew the elected president of Nicaragua and staged an election in which he won the presidency. With the support of the *Guardia Nacional*, Somoza García began ingratiating himself with the United States and securing the support of Nicaraguan elites. The dynasty that he would establish became a locus of counterrevolutionary activity both regionally and internationally. Just as Sandino sought out the aid of like-minded entities, the Somoza regime turned to the United States and other counterrevolutionaries for support. One of the oldest and most enduring of Somoza García's counterrevolutionary relationships was with the state of Israel, an ally that would assist Somoza senior and his son Anastasio Somoza DeBayle.

Somoza García and the Birth of the Global Counterrevolution

Following his rise to power, Somoza García pursued a foreign policy that guaranteed the security of his own regime by ingratiating himself with the United States. He supported the policies of the United States both internationally and hemispherically. However, Somoza García

⁹⁹ Selser, *Sandino*, 175-179.

was not simply a puppet of the United States who blindly followed the lead of the United States. He placed the survival of his regime at the forefront of his foreign policy even if that meant coming into conflict with the United States. Somoza García's connections to the burgeoning state of Israel in the 1940s reveal his complicated relationship with the United States, and point towards the forging of a transnational counterrevolutionary alliance that would impact Nicaragua later in the century.

Anastasio Somoza García was born February 1, 1896, on a coffee *finc*a (plantation) near San Marcos, Nicaragua. The son of a landowner and local politician, the young Somoza enjoyed a privileged childhood. In 1913, the Somoza's sent their son to study in the United States where he attended the Pearce School of Business in Philadelphia. On completion of his studies, Somoza García returned to Nicaragua where he held a number of odd jobs, including car salesman and toilet inspector.¹⁰⁰ Following the outbreak of civil war in 1926, Somoza García led a brief Liberal uprising in San Marcos before being soundly defeated by government forces. After weeks of hiding, Somoza García received a government pardon and pledged to never join another insurgency. As part of the U.S. intervention in 1927, future Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson visited Nicaragua in order to bring about a peace. During Stimson's meetings with members of the Liberal party, Somoza García impressed the U.S. representative who asked the young Somoza to be his interpreter.¹⁰¹ Having made important connections with U.S. officials and Liberal politicians, Somoza García quickly moved up the political ladder, becoming the Minister of War to Jose María Moncada in 1932. As the Minister of War, Somoza García's fluent English and familiarity with North Americans made him a go-between for U.S. officials

¹⁰⁰ Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 237; Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 49.

¹⁰¹ Millett, "Anastasio Somoza García: A Brief History of Nicaragua's 'Enduring' Dictator," *Revista/Review Interamericana*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1977, 487-488.

dealing with the difficult Moncada.¹⁰² It was this familiarity with U.S. officials that ultimately helped Somoza García secure his position as Jefe Director (Chief Director) of the *Guardia Nacional* in 1932.¹⁰³ With U.S. support secured, Somoza García would utilize his position as Jefe Director to ultimately seize power in Nicaragua and begin the creation of his family's dynasty.

Anastasio Somoza García's ascension to power, who was installed as president of Nicaragua on January 1, 1937, was, in part, the result of series of local and transnational circumstances. First, the creation of the *Guardia Nacional*, which was under the control Somoza García, and the demilitarizing of the Liberal and Conservative parties placed military supremacy in the hands of Nicaragua's new president. The assassination of Sandino and the destruction of his movement further diminished the possibility of a significant armed threat against the Somoza regime. With the threat of military opposition blunted, Somoza García initiated a populist political campaign, similar in many ways to that of Huey Long in the United States, which appealed to a broad swath of Nicaraguan society. However, unlike Long, the social policies Somoza García promised failed to materialize and most reform programs simply enriched the Somoza family. Finally, the United States, which had meddled in Nicaraguan politics for decades, stepped back from its interventionist policies under the Good Neighbor policy of President Franklin Roosevelt.¹⁰⁴ Having created the *Guardia Nacional* and forged strong ties with key political figures, U.S. officials were secure in allowing Nicaraguan politics to find their own equilibrium.¹⁰⁵ Conservative protests to U.S. officials following Somoza García's putsch in

¹⁰² Millett, "Anastasio Somoza García," 489.

¹⁰³ Matthew Hanna to Secretary of State Stimson, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1932: The American Republics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 899-900.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed history of U.S.-Somoza relations during the Roosevelt administration, see Andrew Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt: Good Neighbour Diplomacy in Nicaragua, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ "Policy of the United States of Non-Intervention in the Internal Affairs of Nicaragua," *Foreign Relations of the*

1936 fell on deaf ears as policymakers with policymakers in Washington confident that political mechanisms in place would maintain Nicaraguan stability.¹⁰⁶

World War II presented an opportunity for Somoza García to further solidify his ties with the United States. Fearful of Axis penetration of the Americas, U.S. officials sought to shore up its support in the hemisphere. On the one hand this meant increased military aid and support for Latin American allies. In 1941, Nicaragua entered into a Lend-Lease agreement with the United States with the intent of promoting hemispheric defense under the idea that “the defense of each of the American republics is vital to the defense of all of them.”¹⁰⁷ It also entailed the elimination of Axis commercial interests in the hemisphere. In 1942, the United States and its Latin American allies sought to aggressively root out German and Japanese business interests in the hemisphere, declaring “economic warfare” on the Nazis.¹⁰⁸ In line with the agreement, the Somoza regime first froze the assets of and then expropriated the property of German coffee plantations in Nicaragua.¹⁰⁹ Highlighting the systemic corruption that would become emblematic of his regime, Somoza García ultimately claimed the majority of the plantations as well as the proceeds from land sales.¹¹⁰ By aggressively following the U.S. agenda during World War II, Somoza García not only secured U.S. support but enriched his regime at the same time. Although the World War II era would present opportunities for Somoza García to solidify his hold on power, the post-war political climate would challenge the dictator’s relationship with the United

United States, 1940: The American Republics (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 1069-1071.

¹⁰⁶ Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1936-1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 63-65.

¹⁰⁷ “Lend-Lease Agreement Between the United States and Nicaragua,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941: The American Republics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 410-413.

¹⁰⁸ “The Inter-American Conference on Systems of Economic and Financial Control,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942: The American Republics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 55-73.

¹⁰⁹ “Efforts of the United States and Nicaragua to Control Financial Transactions Involving the Axis,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943: The American Republics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 632-639.

¹¹⁰ Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 108-110; Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt*, 212.

State and force him to find new allies.

One of these new allies was the burgeoning State of Israel. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, Israel and Somoza García developed a reciprocal relationship of diplomatic and military support. Somoza García assisted the Israelis in procuring armaments and voted for the partition of Palestine in the United Nations, and in return the Israelis provided monetary compensation and aided Somoza García in his relations with the United States. Initially this relationship was simply one of opportunity, with both Somoza García and the Israelis seeking to have their needs met through a partnership with the other. However, because of their shared connections to the United States and the evolving Cold War world, relations between Israel and the Somoza regime became more entangled and by the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution had developed into a significant counterrevolutionary alliance.

The origins of the Nicaraguan/Israeli alliance can be traced back to the volatile situation present in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. At the turn of the century, the influx of Zionist settlers into what was Ottoman Palestine created tensions between the region's old Arab and new Jewish inhabitants. Zionists viewed Palestine as the divinely ordained homeland of the Jewish people, with Jerusalem as its spiritual and political capital, and its Arab inhabitants as squatters. Following World War I the victorious powers severed Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, placing it under a British mandate. Riots in 1920 and 1921 convinced the leaders of Palestine's Jewish population that the British could not protect their people from Arab violence. In response they created Haganah, a paramilitary force tasked with defending the region's Jewish population. Because they were a paramilitary organization acting in defiance of the British Mandate, Haganah clandestinely armed itself, with Haganah agents scouring Europe, the United States,

and Latin America for weaponry.¹¹¹

The governments of Latin America proved attentive to the needs of Haganah agents, especially that of Anastasio Somoza García. Contacts between Haganah and the Somoza regime date began as early as 1938, when Yehuda Arazi, an agent working to procure arms for Haganah, purchased letters of introduction from Somoza García in order to buy small arms in Poland.¹¹² This initial transaction marked the beginning of relations between what would become the State of Israel and the Somoza regime. A decade later the Haganah would call on Somoza García to not only protect the Jewish people but also help in the birth of the State of Israel.

During the 1940s tensions continued to increase between Palestinian Arabs and Jews, with British attempts at maintaining peace reaching a breaking point following World War II. The war greatly weakened the British, making it difficult to govern its far-flung empire, and the influx of Holocaust survivors dramatically increased Arab-Jewish antagonisms. Because of these developments the question of what to do with the fractious British mandate in Palestine became increasingly salient. Having failed to create a compromise between Zionists and Arabs, the British turned the question of Palestine over to the United Nations on April 2, 1947.¹¹³ The United Nations created the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and tasked it with finding a solution to the region's unrest. In the fall of 1947 UNSCOP recommended that the British mandate be terminated immediately and that only two options existed for Palestine:

¹¹¹ Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 207-15.

¹¹² Leonard Slater, *The Pledge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 257; Amitzur Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race: Arms, Embargo, Military Power and Decision in the 1948 Palestine War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 101; Ignacio Klich, "Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel: The Case of Somoza's Nicaragua." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 20, 2 (November, 1988): 423.

¹¹³ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA), "Request for a special session of the General Assembly on Palestine," <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook1/Pages/Request%20for%20a%20special%20session%20of%20the%20General%20Assem.aspx> Retrieved on June 27, 2014.

partition or federation.¹¹⁴

In response to the United Nation decision, Jewish and Arab Palestinians began courting world opinion. Because they were the majority population in Palestine, the region's Arabs desired the federal option in which they would be able to dominate. Aware of their demographic inferiority, Palestine's Jews advocated for partition and the creation of a Jewish state. Although the Jewish Agency for Palestine had begun courting world opinion prior to the UNSCOP decision, these efforts were accelerated in 1947. To this extent the Jewish Agency created a Latin American department in the hopes of obtaining the support of the region's political leaders towards the goal of a Jewish state. Initially the Jewish Agency for Palestine viewed Nicaragua as "a colony of the United States" and assumed the path to a Nicaraguan vote lay not in Managua but in New Orleans, the corporate headquarters of United Fruit Company. However, Nicaragua hesitated to agree to a special session of the UN, following the lead of other Latin American countries who believed that the U.S. and Great Britain had gone behind their backs on the issue of Palestine and that obstruction of that project would show their disfavor. It appeared to the Jewish Agency that Nicaraguan support could not be guaranteed and that greater attention needed to be given to the small Central American state.¹¹⁵

Despite Nicaragua's apparent hesitance on the issue of Israeli statehood, a series of events would conspire to bring Managua and Jerusalem into closer alignment. By the late 1940s, Somoza García's hold on power appeared (very) tenuous as actors within and without Nicaragua sought his ouster.¹¹⁶ Much of the agitation surrounding Somoza García's hold on power came to

¹¹⁴ IMFA, "United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, Recommendations to the General Assembly," <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook1/Pages/Creation%20of%20a%20Special%20Committee%20on%20Palestine-%20Gene.aspx> Retrieved on June 27, 2014.

¹¹⁵ Klich, "Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel," 396-98.

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of Somoza García's relations with the U.S. during this episode, see Jeffrey Gould, "Nicaragua" in *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian

a head in the build-up to the 1947 Nicaraguan presidential election. As early as 1945 the United States had made it clear to Somoza that they did not want him to run for president of Nicaragua in the 1947 elections. Although the United States still spoke in terms of the Good Neighbor Policy, there were those in the White House and State Department who sought to block Somoza García's bid for the presidency. The United States government opposed Somoza García for two reasons. First, the Good Neighbor Policy and the struggle against the Axis powers created an upsurge in democratic sentiments in Latin America and many of the region's nations disliked Somoza García's regime. They viewed Somoza García as a brutal dictator in the same league as Adolf Hitler, and to a certain degree officials in the United States, particularly in the State Department, followed these currents. Second, the United States was angry over Nicaragua's default on its Lend-Lease repayments. To this extent the United States not only refused to sell weaponry to Somoza García, but also blocked his ability to purchase arms from Great Britain and Canada.¹¹⁷

Somoza García not only faced outside pressure from the United States and the other states of Latin America, but internal dissent also challenged his regime. By 1944 the popular consensus that Somoza García had enjoyed since seizing power in 1936 was crumbling and various factions in Nicaragua, including those within the *Guardia Nacional*, began to voice their discontent. Dissident Liberals and some Conservatives, mostly members of the urban middle class, demonstrated against the continuance of the regime, but these groups lacked the ability to actually oust Somoza García because real power in Nicaragua rested with the *Guardia Nacional*.¹¹⁸ However, there were those within the *Guardia Nacional* who either disliked Somoza García's efforts to remain in the presidency or saw U.S. and Latin American displeasure

Roxborough, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹⁷Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 203-04.

¹¹⁸Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 161-63.

as an opportunity to move against the general. Young military officers, motivated by U.S. military officials in Nicaragua, were especially restive. Somoza García's own brother-in-law resigned from the *Guardia Nacional* in protest and informed the U.S. ambassador that he was debating whether to lead a Guardia revolt or leave the country.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, this internal unrest, combined with the external hemispheric pressure, convinced Somoza García to withdraw his bid for reelection in 1947, but he still remained commander of the *Guardia Nacional*, the real source of power in Nicaragua.

With his aspirations of being elected president denied, Somoza García hoped to create the veneer of democratic change while still maintaining power over the presidency. To this end he chose Leonardo Argüello to run for president in 1947 and then engineered his victory. However, Argüello refused to be a puppet and three weeks before his inauguration Somoza ousted him and placed Benjamín Lacayo Sacasa in the presidency. Sacasa was president for three months before Somoza replaced him with his uncle, Víctor Román y Reyes. The Truman administration, already critical of the Somoza García, frowned on this blatant power grab and denied recognition to either of Argüello's successors, encouraging many other countries and multinational business interests to do likewise.¹²⁰ The United States also froze all military aid to Nicaragua and spearheaded the ostracizing of Nicaragua in hemispheric affairs.¹²¹ Facing political pressure from the United States and internal unrest, by late 1947 Somoza García's hold on power appeared perilous and he was in desperate need of assistance.

¹¹⁹ Millet, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 206-07. Somoza particularly disliked the U.S. Military Attaché, Colonel Judson, whom he accused of telling his officers that the "Guardia should be nonpolitical," and that political appointees in the Guardia should be kicked out." In regards to U.S. relations, Judson told the officers that the Guardia "could not expect planes, arms, ammunition, or related materials" until the crisis around Somoza García's presidential campaign ended.

¹²⁰ Acting Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett to Embassy in Nicaragua, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947: The American Republics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 867-868.

¹²¹ The Nicaraguan government was treated as a pariah at the Pan-American Union and only allowed to observe at the inter-American foreign ministers' conference in Rio de Janeiro. Klich, "Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel," 401.

The assistance that Somoza García was looking for came from an unlikely place, the Jewish Agency for Palestine. In the months leading up to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine's vote on partition in November of 1947, the Jewish Agency feverishly worked to garner the necessary votes in the UN to support the division of Palestine. Part of their agenda was the recruitment of Latin American states to their cause. According to Moshé Tov, the director of the Latin American Division of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the Nicaraguan representative at the UN, Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa (who was also Somoza García's son-in-law and would eventually become ambassador to the United States) confided to him that Nicaragua would be willing to vote for Israeli statehood if the United States would no longer question Somoza García's legitimacy. Against this backdrop, two American Zionists - the Jewish Agency's Hayim Greenberg and Abraham Tulin of the American Zionist Council - traveled to Washington to speak on Somoza García's behalf. Although it would appear that political pressure from U.S. allies of Somoza and other Latin American states were largely responsible for Somoza remaining in power, Tov implies that the Zionists' visit was a factor in Somoza García's political survival. According to Tov, Greenberg and Tulin left Washington with "a promise that the State Department would consider favorably" the request on Somoza García's behalf.¹²² Days before the crucial vote on Palestine, the State Department reported that supporters of Jewish statehood had advised Nicaraguans that a favorable vote would ensure that Somoza García's regime was "recognized by the U.S." U.S. diplomats were also aware that American Jewish leaders had persuaded Sevilla Sacasa to support partition and "as a result of a promise that these leaders would use their influence with the White House to bring about recognition of the

¹²² Moshe Tov, *El murmullo de Israel: historial diplomático* (Jerusalem: La Semana, 1983), 224.

Nicaraguan government.”¹²³ By November 1947 the Jewish Agency considered Nicaragua supportive of their cause and no longer in need of prodding.

On November 29, 1947, Nicaragua, along with 32 other countries, voted for the partition of Palestine. However, recognition of the Somoza regime by the United States would not come until May 6, 1948. To say that U.S. recognition of Somoza García’s puppet regime was due solely to Israeli intervention misses the fact that ultimately Cold War considerations lay at the heart of U.S. recognition. As long as Somoza García remained anti-communist and protected U.S. interests in Nicaragua, the United States would support Somoza. In August of 1947 Somoza promised the U.S. ambassador that the new Nicaraguan constitution would include provisions outlawing all “Communist propaganda and activities” and allowing U.S. military bases on Nicaraguan soil in times of crisis.¹²⁴ The State Department eventually came to the conclusion that although there was little chance for an increase in representative or constitutional government in Nicaragua’s future, Somoza García maintained stability and honored international obligations.¹²⁵ Although Somoza García’s coup strained relations, the United States sought stability and an ally in the global struggle against communism.

Despite the fact that Nicaragua’s vote in favor of partition was not decisive and that Cold War considerations played a larger role in U.S. recognition of Somoza’s regime than Israeli intercession, these acts initiated a relationship between Nicaragua’s counterrevolutionary current and the State of Israel. In the following years this relationship would be strengthened by the counterrevolutionary Cold War imperatives of the United States in which both the United States and Nicaragua played key roles in maintaining the global status quo. It also proved to be a

¹²³ Klich, “Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel,” 402-405

¹²⁴ The Chargé in Nicaragua Maurice Bernbaum to Secretary of State Lovett, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947*, 864-866.

¹²⁵ Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 167.

mutually advantageous relationship in which both the Somoza regime and the Israelis utilized clandestine arms trafficking networks. This relationship began with Somoza García providing Haganah agents with the means to procure arms in Europe, which ultimately created avenues for the Nicaraguan tyrant to purchase illicit weapons of his own.

Following the battle over partition in the United Nations, violence between Jewish and Arab Palestinians immediately erupted as both sought to promote their own agendas. As a result both Arab and Zionist efforts to acquire arms increased. However, because of conflicting requests for weapons and training from Israel and the Arab states, as well as the fear that further arms deals might spur Arab-Israeli conflict and play into the hands of the Soviet Union, the United States placed an arms embargo on Palestine on December 14, 1947.¹²⁶ This embargo forced the Jewish Agency to seek more clandestine avenues in its attempts to arm itself. This included breaking U.S. law and using friendly governments as third parties in their quest for armaments. One of those friendly governments who helped arm the burgeoning State of Israel was that of Anastasio Somoza García.

At the end of World War II, David Ben-Gurion, the then head of the Jewish Agency, organized a group of influential North American Jewish leaders to put their resources towards supplying Palestine's Zionists with arms and materiel. This group came to be called the Sonneborn Institute - named after Rudolf Sonneborn, a U.S. businessman and owner of the apartment in which the meeting with Ben-Gurion was held - and it worked closely with the Jewish Agency in funneling weapons to Palestine.¹²⁷ The Jewish Agency, with the assistance of the Sonneborn Institute, developed a two-pronged plan in regards to acquiring military material:

¹²⁶ Shlomo Slonin, "The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 94, No. 3, (Autumn 1979): 495-514.

¹²⁷ Wolfgang Saxon, "Rudolf Sonneborn Dies at 87; A Zionist Leader in the U.S.," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/04/obituaries/rudolf-sonneborn-dies-at-87-a-zionist-leader-in-the-us.html>.

they would attempt to purchase it through legitimate channels, and if that failed, they would turn to more clandestine methods. Following the U.S.-imposed embargo of arms to Palestine, the Jewish Agency was forced from the prescribed avenues of arms acquisition and turned to its network of agents operating in the world of underground weapons trafficking.¹²⁸

By the late 1940s, members of the Jewish Agency scoured Latin America for a friendly government willing to aid in arming the embryonic Jewish state, ultimately following previous networks of political and military assistance. Although other Latin American countries, such as Mexico, provided more military equipment to the Zionist cause, Nicaragua played an important role. Utilizing the connections established by Yehuda Arazi in 1938, Moshé Tov traveled to Managua in November of 1946 and met with Laszlo Weis, a young university professor and Zionist, to discuss Nicaraguan support for a Jewish state. Weis, a Jewish immigrant from Hungary, introduced Tov to another Hungarian immigrant, Morris Pataky. Pataky, a rancher and close business associate of Somoza García, assisted Arazi in arranging meetings between the Jewish Agency and the Nicaraguan dictator.¹²⁹ These Nicaraguan connections eventually proved fruitful in gaining both political and military support from Somoza García for the Zionists.

In early 1948, members of the Jewish Agency utilized these Nicaraguan contacts to facilitate the movement of arms to Palestine. Tov, Kollek, and Arazi all traveled to Managua in the hopes of obtaining some form of agreement with Somoza García. The three eventually struck a deal with the dictator in which he provided two diplomatic passports, one for Kollek and another for Arazi, who purchased weapons in Europe under the Nicaraguan alias, Dr. José Arazi. Somoza García then signed a letter authorizing the purchase of \$5 million in military hardware, which would then be shipped to Palestine, not Nicaragua, thus circumventing the U.S. arms

¹²⁸ Llan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 78.

¹²⁹ Teddy Kollek, *For Jerusalem: A Life by Teddy Kollek* (New York: Random House, 1978), 70; Tov, *El murmullo de Israel*, 223.

embargo. The dictator also allegedly agreed to ship over 5,000 surplus rifles to the young Jewish state.¹³⁰ For his part Somoza was rewarded handsomely. He received 2-3.5% of every purchase made in his name and over the course of several months Somoza García received over \$200,000 into his private bank account in New York, as well as a billiards table and a large diamond.¹³¹

With Somoza García's assistance, Arazi traveled to Zurich, Switzerland, and purchased two 20-mm Hispano-Swiza mini-guns, which were the first "artillery" owned by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).¹³² The guns were in fact antiaircraft pieces which the Zionists loaded on the backs of trucks and drove up and down the length of Palestine. The Israelis eventually bought over one hundred of these guns for \$13,000 a piece, including 1,000 shells per gun. The IDF purchased these weapons, as well as others, under the name of Somoza García; however, the manufacturers knew that they were intended for Palestine, allowing IDF officers to train on the weapons prior to their being shipped.¹³³

Somoza García aided the Zionists not out of a "real interest and sympathy" towards the Jewish cause as Teddy Kollek recounted in his memoir, but out of a sense of greed and opportunism. The Nicaraguan dictator made a substantial sum off of his dealings with Kollek, Arazi, and the other Zionists. He also gained knowledge of the clandestine networks of illicit arms trafficking that the Israelis used in securing their own weaponry, which he intended to use against his neighbors and ensure his own hold on power. Following the Costa Rican civil war (March-April 1948), Somoza García saw a friendly regime on his border replaced by a hostile

¹³⁰ JoAnn Fagot Aviel, "Enemy of My Enemy": The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Nicaragua," in *Central America & the Middle East: The Internationalization of the Crises*, ed. Damián J. Fernández. (Miami: Florida International Press, 1990), 14; Marc Edelman, "Lifelines: Nicaragua and the Socialist Countries," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (May-June 1985), 37.

¹³¹ Kolleck, *For Jerusalem*, 70-71; Slater, *The Pledge*, 257-259; Tov, *El murmullo de Israel*, 230; Klich, "Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel," 400; Llan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 101.

¹³² Haganah was disbanded on May 28, 1948 and became the Israeli Defense Force.

¹³³ Llan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race*, 189.

one. The new president of Costa Rica, José Figueres Ferrer, sought to eradicate Central America's dictatorial governments. In response Somoza García supported a rebel force loyal to Rafael Calderón Guardia, the former Costa Rican president and Figueres Ferrer's main political opponent. However, because of U.S. arms restrictions, Somoza García faced difficulties arming the National Guard, let alone a burgeoning rebel army. Although the Truman administration had extended diplomatic recognition to Somoza García's puppet regime, they continued to withhold military aid, forcing the Nicaraguan despot to examine more clandestine avenues.¹³⁴

In order to support both the *calderonista* rebels and his own National Guard, Somoza García turned to the connections the Zionists had utilized in contacting him. Again the Pataky family played a central role in facilitating illicit arms deals. In May of 1948 Morris Pataky's nephew, László, traveled to Canada on an official Nicaraguan passport with the expressed purpose of attending a Canadian college. However, U.S. agents stopped the younger Pataky, who had headed the Nicaraguan invasion of Costa Rica two months earlier, in New York because they believed that he was buying weapons for a fresh invasion. Ultimately, László Pataky failed to enroll in college in Canada, and subsequently joined the IDF under the advice of Teddy Kollek, strengthening the claim that his intended mission was to purchase military hardware.¹³⁵

Although the younger Pataky failed in obtaining arms for a Nicaraguan invasion of Costa Rica, another of Yehuda Arazi's connections proved fruitful in providing Somoza García with the arms he desired. In December of 1948, Somoza García planned a fresh *calderonista* invasion with a batch of newly purchased rifles. These rifles were supplied by J. Wilson Brown, a Mexican-American arms merchant with ties to Haganah, who had helped Arazi in his failed

¹³⁴ Andrés Pérez Baltodano, *Entre el Estado Conquistador y el Estado Nación: Providencialismo, pensamiento político y estructuras de poder en el desarrollo histórico de Nicaragua* (Managua: Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica - Universidad Centroamericana, 2003), 496.

¹³⁵ Klich, "Latin America, the United States, and the Birth of Israel," 428.

attempt to purchase a number of B-25 bombers, P-51 Mustangs, and P-47 Thunderbolts from Mexico in 1947.¹³⁶ By 1948, Brown was aiding Somoza García in clandestinely arming his guerilla force. Although it is unclear whether Somoza García accepted these agreements with the Jewish Agency with the expressed intention of taking advantage of their arms networks, it is clear that he utilized them after the fact. Besides the monetary incentive to be had from working with the Jewish Agency, Somoza García saw an opportunity to obtain arms under the nose of the United States for a future conflict with Costa Rica. Because the United States continued to refuse arms sales to Nicaragua in early 1948, it would make sense for Somoza García to explore other avenues through which to obtain arms.

These interactions also highlight a high level of agency in Somoza García's relations with the United States. Although he acted deferentially toward the United States at times, Somoza García placed his own interests first, often acting against the wishes of the United States, as in the case of clandestinely aiding the Jewish Agency during the embargo of Palestine. Clearly Somoza García saw the incentives of helping the Jewish Agency and utilizing their arms networks as more rewarding than the possible repercussions from the United States. It is also reasonable to assume that Somoza García recognized that U.S. support might not last, and that his regime would need to find support elsewhere, which is what ultimately happened to his son thirty years later. Although Somoza García cooperated with the United States, he recognized the need to develop contingency plans. Somoza García's relations with the Jewish Agency demonstrate a high level of agency on the part of the dictator and a willingness to sometimes buck U.S. hemispheric hegemony.

It could also be argued that Somoza García did not challenge U.S. policies but acted with

¹³⁶ Slater, *The Pledge*, 134, 228, 238.

the explicit or implicit support of the United States. Although the United States may have outwardly expressed displeasure with the dictator, U.S. officials may have communicated support on less official channels. This argument is certainly viable but the evidence suggests that in the late 1940s the United States sought to distance itself from the dictator. In 1946, before the uproar over his coup, Somoza García planned a number of trips to the United States to “create the impression among the Nicaraguan people that he has the ‘official support’ of the U.S. government. At the time of the first visit in March, 1946, the State Department wrote a scathing memorandum to President Truman about the Nicaraguan strongman. Officials in the department were concerned that Somoza García was ruining the image of United States, stating that the dictator sought to “show that we (the United States) are imposing him upon the Nicaraguan people, in so far as it has been successful, he tended to turn many of the better element against us.” They also did not hold Somoza García in very high esteem, writing that he “runs the country for his own financial benefit and suppressed freedom of speech, press and assembly. He has continually sought to evade the constitutional provision against re-election in order to remain in power.” Again stressing the importance of the U.S. image abroad, officials stressed that “it is important to our relations with the entire hemisphere that we not give even the appearance of lending our support to the present re-election campaign.” In order to discourage Somoza García’s visits, the State Department went so far as to inform him “that an official visit would not be convenient and that no formal invitation would be extended.”¹³⁷ Despite this discouraging message, Somoza García visited the United States unofficially, which displeased U.S. officials who strongly recommended “that under no circumstances he be received at the White House.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (HSTL), Independence, Missouri, Memorandum to the President of the United States, March 5, 1946. President’s Secretary’s File (PSF):161:5.

¹³⁸ HSTL, Memorandum for President Harry Truman from Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs William Clayton, September 3, 1946. PSF: 161:5.

Still operating under the democratic premises of the Good Neighbor Policy, and not yet fully influenced by the pressures of the Cold War, officials in Washington did not see Somoza García as an asset but as a liability.

Although the United States expressed its displeasure towards Somoza García in the late 1940s, by the early 1950s that relationship warmed significantly in the face of the Cold War. In 1952, Somoza García unofficially visited the United States in order to receive medical treatment, however on this occasion U.S. officials gladly welcomed the dictator. In the matter of a few years the State Department had changed its opinion of Somoza García, stating that, although he ran Nicaragua as “largely a one man show,” he had “restored order to Nicaragua and in recent years has been less repressive.” More importantly, Somoza García demonstrated that he was a strong Cold War ally of the United States, having “consistently supported United States foreign policy.”¹³⁹ The Cold War presented the perfect opportunity for Somoza García, always the opportunist, to garner support from the United States and secure his position.

Conclusion

By the start of the 1950s, Nicaraguan revolutionary and counterrevolutionary internationalism had been established on the world stage. Sandino’s movement created a transnational network of like-minded activists, politicians, and journalists determined to counter U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua. This network proved crucial to ending U.S. occupation of Nicaragua, although it also set the stage for rise of Anastasio Somoza García, who in turn utilized a transnational network to bolster his regime and ingratiate himself with the United States. The successes of both Sandino and Somoza García stemmed from their abilities to create

¹³⁹ HSTL, State Department Memorandum to the President entitled “Visit of General Anastasio Somoza: President of Nicaragua,” May 1, 1952, PSF:161:5.

and utilize international networks for their own advantage.

Both Sandino and Somoza García set the course that Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents would take over the course of much of the twentieth century. Sandino provided an example of revolutionary internationalism, on which Carlos Fonseca and the Sandinista National Liberation Front would model decades later. The Sandinistas recognized Sandino as their spiritual successor and adopted many of his ideals and strategies, including his internationalism. Sandino provided an intellectual groundwork for revolutionary internationalism and a model for how to carry out such a struggle. For his part, Somoza García molded Nicaragua into a counterrevolutionary bastion and created transnational connections that outlived his own regime. In the decades that followed, he stood in opposition to the hemispheres' leftist revolutionaries and further strengthened his ties to other counterrevolutionary states. Moving into the middle decades of the twentieth century, Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents were firmly established both domestically and internationally.

CHAPTER TWO: THE INTERNATIONAL ANTI-SOMOZA MOVEMENT AND THE COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY REACTION

The years between the murder of Sandino and the turbulent events unleashed by the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 have received little attention in the literature of the Nicaraguan Revolution, with the exception of the assassination of Anastasio Somoza García in 1956. However, these years proved pivotal in the growth of Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents on the international stage. They saw the expansion and consolidation of the Somoza regime in the global counterrevolutionary struggle, as well as the birth of an international movement against it. As the Somoza regime cooperated with the hemisphere's other autocratic regimes and aided the United States in eliminating problematic governments in the Caribbean, there arose a transnational counter movement bent on protecting the region's democracies and removing its dictators from power. Out of this competition emerged the oppositional forces that would define the Nicaraguan Revolution in the late 1970s, revealing how Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents often crossed. Many who opposed the Somoza regime would, years later, lead the struggle against the FSLN. Never monolithic blocs, members of Nicaragua's competing currents often supported both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary endeavors.

By the early 1950s Somoza García had secured his hold on power and achieved the explicit support of the United States. Over the following decades the United States would turn to Somoza García and his sons - Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle - to help prevent leftist revolution and maintain the status quo in the hemisphere. The Somoza regime enthusiastically aided the United States in the overthrow of the Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala and helped check the growth of revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean. As

an ally of the United States in the global struggle against communism, the Somozas also strengthened their ties to other counterrevolutionary states, particularly the Dominican Republic and the various dictatorships of the Caribbean. However, Somoza García's actions were not selfless and without motive. By closely allying himself with the United States, Somoza García and his sons benefitted from military and economic assistance provided by the United States and its other allies. They used this support to strengthen the Guardia Nacional and pad the wallets of their supporters. By the mid-1950s Nicaragua possessed the largest and best armed military in Central America, making it difficult to oust the Somozas through force of arms. These alliances also allowed the Somozas greater influence in regional affairs. Because of their anti-communist stance and closeness to the United States, the Somozas undermined unfriendly regimes, including that of the Arbenz government in Guatemala. As the Somozas further integrated Nicaragua into the global counterrevolutionary community led by the United States, the more they seemed to secure their regime from internal and external threats.

When discussing the relationship between Somoza García and the United States, it is important to highlight the fact that the Nicaraguan dictator was not a simple lackey of U.S. officials and exercised a great deal of agency in dictating his nation's foreign policy. Although maintaining a close relationship with the United States was a priority, it did not trump the survival of the Somoza regime. Somoza García often moved in opposition to the desires of U.S. officials, especially when pursuing those he deemed his enemies. On numerous occasions U.S. officials were forced to step in and curtail Somoza García's adventurism, fearful of the dictator creating an international incident. Many U.S. officials viewed the dictator as a liability. However, Somoza García remained a close ally of the United States due, in large part, to the fact that he was a clever opportunist who played upon U.S. fears of communist infiltration. Although

he himself was not ideological (Somoza García's closest ally in Central America during the 1940s and 1950s was Teodoro Picado, the communist leader of Costa Rica), the dictator kept close ties with a number U.S. officials who viewed Somoza García as a stalwart Cold War ally.¹ Demonstrating the often divided nature of U.S. foreign policy, Somoza García strengthened his ties to hawkish U.S. officials and undermined the efforts of those opposed to him. In fact, on one occasion the dictator received assistance from one U.S. agency while being criticized and sanctioned by another. An examination of Somoza García's foreign policy not only reveals the agency of the Nicaraguan dictator but demonstrates the sometimes fractious nature of U.S. policy formation.

Besides the opposition of some U.S. officials to Somoza García, there also existed a multinational alliance of individuals and organizations seeking to destroy the regime. This extraterritorial anti-Somoza movement included individuals from the North America, Latin America, and Europe. Its members covered the political spectrum, but the majority tended to advocate liberal democracy. The Nicaraguans who participated in the movement included a number of former officers under Sandino who had escaped Somoza García's purge of the 1930s. It also included former members of the *Guardia Nacional* as well as a number of political exiles, members of both the Conservative and Liberal parties who had run afoul of the dictator and been forced to flee the country. Because of their diverse backgrounds, the Nicaraguan opposition struggled to create a unified front and more often fought each other over the limited resources made available to them by friendly governments and organizations in Central America.

Despite their differences, these Nicaraguan revolutionaries briefly united under the banner of the multinational and anti-dictatorial Caribbean Legion, which sought to eliminate the

¹ Kyle Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States During the Rise of José Figueres* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 115.

region's authoritarian leaders, including Somoza García. Central American political leaders, such as Juan José Arévalo of Guatemala and José Figueres of Costa Rica, led the Caribbean Legion, and Nicaraguans constituted the largest nationality amongst its ranks and played important roles in the movement. The Caribbean Legion's greatest success came in 1948 with the overthrow of the Costa Rican government, which was an ally of Somoza García, and the installation of Figueres as president. Figueres promised that the movement would next target Nicaragua; however an invasion never materialized due in large part to Somoza García's ability to precipitate incidents with Costa Rica and undermine the Nicaraguan revolutionaries in Costa Rica. The Caribbean Legion ultimately dismantled in the early 1950s, having failed to remove Somoza García.² However, exiled Nicaraguans continued to launch a number of insurrections, each of which proved to be a massive disaster and served to strengthen the Nicaraguan dictator's Cold War credentials.

Mirroring the aid received by Sandino in his struggle against U.S. intervention, the Caribbean revolutionaries opposed to Somoza García benefitted from the support of transnational organizations. This group included the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom (IADF), the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores, ORIT-ICFTU), and the Inter-American Press Agency (IAPA). Working for political, labor, and press freedom, these organizations opposed Somoza García and provided moral and material support for the revolutionaries seeking to oust him. They also sought to sway public opinion in opposition to the Caribbean's dictatorial governments and petitioned U.S. officials to end their support for dictators. Resembling those organizations that

² For histories of the Caribbean Legion and the antidictatorial struggle, see Charles D. Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1974); *ibid.*, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996); and Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*.

stood in solidarity with Augusto Sandino, the IADF, ORIT-ICFTU, and IAPA raised international awareness about events in the Caribbean, marshalled support for revolutionaries or opposition to Somoza García, and on a few occasions extracted concessions from the Somoza regime.

Throughout this neglected period, Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents continued to battle over the fate of the small Central American country. With a population of 1.3 million in 1950, many of the same Nicaraguan actors regularly appear, charting the course of both currents. The Nicaraguan revolutionary movement, begun under Sandino, continued to play out on the international stage during the 1940s and 1950s and provide the

Somoza García versus the Caribbean Exile Movement

Beginning in the late 1940s Somoza García faced significant challenges to his regime from democratic elements both within and without Nicaragua. Besides initial U.S. qualms with the Somoza regime born of the anti-dictatorial sentiments of World War II, there appeared a similar movement in Central America. The "Democratic Left," as Charles D. Ameringer terms it, emerged in the Caribbean between 1945 and 1959 and manifested as both political and military opposition to the region's dictators.³ At its core the Democratic Left constituted a number of overlapping groups and organizations bent on bringing democratic change to the Caribbean. This conglomerate included a number of political parties such as the Acción Democrática (AD) party of Venezuela; the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC) or the Auténtico party; the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) of Costa Rica; the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD); and the Movimiento Revolucionario Nicaragüense (MRN).

³ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 15.

In the years following Somoza García's assassination of Sandino, Nicaragua's revolutionary current was beaten but not defeated. In the late 1940s the Caribbean Legion proved an attractive option for Nicaraguans dissatisfied by the Somoza regime. In the wake of the Second World War, the dictators of the Caribbean faced forces emboldened by the democratic rhetoric of the struggle against the totalitarianism of the Axis powers. By the end of 1945 democratic movements ousted the Ubico regime in Guatemala (July 1944) and overthrew the Venezuelan dictatorship of General Isaías Medina Angarita in Venezuela (October 1945), as well as electorally defeated Fulgencio Batista's regime in Cuba.⁴ However, this democratic wave did not wash away the region's most notorious strongmen, Somoza García and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The two dictators, often collaborating together, sought to suppress the Caribbean's democratic spring and return friendly governments to power. By the late 1940s what developed was an extremely volatile situation in which the dictators and democratic forces sparred over the fate of the region.

Tensions quickly escalated as both democratic and despotic forces became more interventionist in their relations with each other. Opposed to the Caribbean dictators were a number of leaders who had come to power in the wake of democratic upheavals: Guatemala's Juan José Arévalo, Cuba's Carlos Prío Socarrás and Ramón Grau San Martín, and Venezuela's Romulo Betancourt. These leaders envisioned a democratic Caribbean and saw it as their duty to eliminate the region's dictatorial regimes. Following World War II, these governments saw an opening to pursue democratic change in the region, which they attempted through peaceful means. Although some gains were made in the immediate postwar years, the onset of the Cold

⁴ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25-26.

War prevented the realization of democratic and social reform.⁵ Growing U.S. concerns about Soviet penetration of the hemisphere proved a particularly strong deterrent towards regime change, with officials fearing that instability would benefit communist sympathizers. However, U.S. anticommunism was not the sole impediment towards reform in Latin America.⁶ Latin American elites, including the dictators, played a significant role in preventing social change. Cognizant of the power of U.S. anticommunism, conservative elements played up the threat posed by instability in order to retain their power and privileges.⁷ In fact, these conservative sentiments proved so pervasive that they were a central tenet of the armed movements that sought to unseat Somoza García and other dictators.⁸

Despite these conservative elements, many of Latin America's democratic leaders initially rallied behind a more ambitious and intrusive policy. In 1945 the Foreign Minister of Uruguay, Eduardo Rodríguez Larreta, called for collective intervention in order to promote democracy. In a letter to the governments of hemisphere, Larreta defended the principle of non-intervention. However, he argued that it did not protect "the notorious and repeated violation by any republic of the elementary right of man and of the citizen." The Larreta Doctrine, as it came to be known, was emblematic of the post-war anti-authoritarian atmosphere and revealed the growing impact of the global human rights revolution.⁹ The document argued that Latin American dictators could no longer abuse their citizens while hiding behind the principles of non-intervention. As a means of ending this maltreatment, Larreta called for the pursuit of "multilateral collective action, exercised with complete unselfishness by all other republics of the

⁵ For a discussion of post-war Latin America, see Leslie Bethell and Ian Foxborough, ed., *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 9-10.

⁷ Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 30.

⁸ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 18.

⁹ G. Daniel Cohen, "The Holocaust and the 'Human Rights Revolution' a Reassessment," in *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Akira Iriye et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

continent, aimed at achieving in a spirit of brotherly prudent the mere reestablishment of essential rights.” It was also important that the intervention follow international law and not “injure the government affected” because it was “being taken for the benefit of all, including the country which has been suffering under such a harsh regime.”¹⁰ A number of American states, including the United States, initially supported the Larreta Doctrine. However, the onset of the Cold War quickly stifled U.S. backing for it, ensuring that other Latin American states would be hesitant to give their support.¹¹ Despite the fact that many of the hemisphere’s states distanced themselves from the the Larreta Doctrine, many Latin Americans, including Arévalo and Betancourt, saw it as an opportunity to promote their democratic agenda through direct intervention. Inspired by the Larreta Doctrine, exiled democrats flocked to Venezuela, Guatemala, and Cuba in an effort to raise arms for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the Caribbean.

These armed and intervention-minded Latin American democrats collectively became known as the Caribbean Legion, an “army” of exiles bent on eliminating the region’s dictators. In reality the Caribbean Legion never existed as an army or permanent body of troops. U.S. journalists invented the term in 1948, and the only group with a similar name was José Figueres’ general staff, known as the Liberation Army of the Caribbean, which fought during the Costa Rican civil war in 1948.¹² But, the term caught on and was used to represent the anti-dictatorial struggle in the Caribbean. The movement was multinational in both its consistency and scope. Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Venezuelans, Spaniards, and

¹⁰ Eduardo Rodríguez Larreta, Letter to U.S. Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), 194.

¹¹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 53-54. “Mexico Rejects Uruguay’s Plan” *New York Times*, December 12, 1945, 9. “Cuba Shuns Uruguay Aim,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1945, 6.

¹² Piero Gleijeses, “Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 21, 1 (February 1989): 134.

North Americans all participated in the struggle with dreams of eliminating dictatorial regimes and creating a democratic Caribbean. Nicaraguans constituted a large and well-funded wing of the Caribbean Legion, with prominent members including Emiliano Chamorro, a member of Nicaragua's elite and ex-president of Nicaragua as well as leader of the Conservative party, General Carlos Pasos, another wealthy Nicaraguan who led the dissident wing of Somoza García's own Liberal party, and Pedro José Zepeda, a Nicaraguan intellectual and founding member of the Central American Democratic Union.¹³ These Nicaraguans proved deeply influential in determining the outcome of the anti-dictatorial struggle in Central America, leading and providing resources for democratic interventions.

The Caribbean democratic conspirators initially sought to remove Rafael Trujillo but, after a stillborn invasion in 1947, set its sights on the Costa Rican regime of Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia. The movement to oust the Calderón regime, or *calderonistas*, was led by José Figueres, an exiled Costa Rican landowner, and Rosendo Argüello, Jr., a Nicaraguan doctor living in exile in Mexico. The two Central American conspirators, who met in 1943 while in exile in Mexico City, initially considered joining the Central American Democratic Union. However, Figueres believed that the men who led it cared only for "theory and talk." They instead came to the conclusion that only military action could remedy the region's ills, and that the movement to free Central America and the Caribbean would begin with Costa Rica. Figueres argued that the revolutionaries should focus their attention on Costa Rica because its military was weak, and it would provide a natural base of operations against Somoza García. In order to finance their operation, Argüello petitioned Chamorro and Pasos for assistance in securing money and weaponry. Chamorro proved uncooperative, but Pasos provided \$12,000 and a group

¹³ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 62.

of his own men to help Argüello find weapons. Argüello, with the help of Pasos's men, began acquiring weapons in Mexico and testing them at the hacienda of Zepeda.¹⁴ However, Mexican authorities soon became aware of the Nicaraguan arms deals and began extracting bribes from Argüello and his associates, eventually seizing the entire cache of weapons and putting an end to the conspiratorial cells in Mexico.¹⁵

With their Mexican ventures ended, Argüello and Figueres moved to Guatemala, turning to the government of José Arévalo for both assistance and a safe haven. Arévalo, a democrat and a nationalist with visions beyond the borders of Guatemala, proved to be the most supportive ally of those seeking democratic change. Since coming to power in 1945, Arévalo made no secret of his distaste of the region's dictators, opening his country to democratic exiles and providing them with resources to carry out their insurrections. He purchased arms from Buenos Aires for the Cayo Confites invasion under the pretense that they were for the Guatemalan military.¹⁶ Following in the footsteps of José Santo Zelaya and other leaders, Arévalo also held visions of creating a Central American federation, and the largest roadblock to that goal were the region's despotic regimes. He dreamed of a "Greater Motherland of Central America" and lamented that "terrible enemies keep us apart. These enemies are our very own governments."¹⁷ In order to further this objective, Arévalo surrounded himself with democratically-minded, Central American exiles, such as the Nicaraguan Edelberto Torres Espinoza and the Costa Rican Roberto Brenes Mesen. Ideologically, Arévalo's Guatemala appeared the most accommodating location

¹⁴ Rosendo Argüello Jr., *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How* (No place: No publisher, 1955), 14, 19-20. One possible identity for the publisher of Argüello's publisher is Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo who sought to discredit Figueres.

¹⁵ Ameringer, *Don Pepe: A Political Biography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 31.

¹⁶ During his twenty years of exile in Argentina, Arévalo developed strong connections to members of the Peron government who were enemies of Trujillo. Nicolas Silfa, *Guerra, Tracción y Exilio* (Barcelona: No publisher, 1980), 180-182

¹⁷ Gleijeses, "Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion," 136-137.

for Figueres and Argüello. However, the failure of revolutionaries elsewhere in the Caribbean would create a unique opportunity for the two conspirators.

Argüello and Figueres' move also coincided with the relocation of many exiles to Guatemala after the failure of the Cayo Confites invasion. In 1947 a number of Caribbean exiles gathered on Cayo Confites, a small island located off the northern coast of Cuba, to prepare for an invasion of the Dominican Republic. Trujillo, however, exposed the plot, and with pressure from the United States, forced the Cuban government to withdraw support for the revolutionaries and remove them from their territory. In the wake of this setback, many Caribbean revolutionaries relocated to Guatemala and the Cuban government seized the weapons stockpiles on the tiny island, but ultimately released them to the Arévalo government.¹⁸ With the Cayo Confites weapons transferred to Guatemala, Arévalo became the main arbiter and guiding force for the democratic movement in Central America.

The movement of revolutionary activity to Guatemala resulted in fierce competition among the various exile factions over limited resources. Figueres and Argüello saw in Arévalo, and his weapons, an opportunity to make their revolutionary dreams a reality. However, they were not the only exiles vying for the approval of the Guatemalan president. Groups of Hondurans, Dominicans, and other Nicaraguans began petitioning Arévalo for his support. The Nicaraguans were a diverse and deeply divided group, with one of the few commonalities between them being their hatred of Somoza García. Emiliano Chamorro (Conservative) and General Carlos Pasos (Liberal) stood for Nicaragua's two dominant political parties, while Argüello and his father, who joined him in Guatemala in 1947, represented the Independent Liberals. They were joined by Toribio Tijerino, Pedro José Zepeda, and Juan Gregorio

¹⁸ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 60.

Colindres, all of whom fought for Sandino and dreamed of revenge against Somoza García.¹⁹ Each national group of exiles, and within the Nicaraguans each political faction, had its own plans for the weapons cache, and knew that the only way to realize those ideas was through Arévalo, which bred competition and animosity between the exiles.

The Guatemalan president held final authority on the use of the weapons stockpile, making him the foremost arbitrator of revolutionary activity. As the principal benefactor of the revolutionaries in the postwar years, Arévalo held the reigns of the movement in Guatemala and largely dictated where resources went. However, considerable autonomy still lay with the exiles who were largely left to decide where, when, and how they would carry out their invasions. Arévalo held the weapons, and whichever group convinced him that their plan was best would receive his support. This led to intense competition between the various exile factions. In the case of the Nicaraguans, Tijerino and Colindres sent “exquisite bouquets of flowers to the wives of influential people,” threw lavish parties, and attended all official functions. They even went so far as to create a “committee of propaganda and defamation” bent on swaying the opinions of Arévalo and other Guatemalan officials.²⁰ This squabbling between exile groups nearly proved their undoing, while also being the catalyst that brought them all together. In late 1947, the fighting between the competing factions became so intense that Arévalo threatened to not support any group. He informed them that their plans were “were known in all parts of the world” and that they were compromising his position in Guatemala. He therefore provided the exiles with an ultimatum: either create a pact that satisfied all of their objectives or lose his support.²¹ In response the exiles came together in December 1947 and negotiated the Caribbean Pact.

¹⁹ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 62.

²⁰ Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 30-31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

The Caribbean Pact was an alliance between Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, and Dominican exiles, with Honduran participation, to “overthrow the DICTATORSHIPS ruling in the aforesaid countries [Costa Rica, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic], and to reestablish liberty and democracy therein.” The signatories included Juan Rodríguez García of the Dominican Republic and José Figueres of Costa Rica, as well as the Nicaraguans: Emiliano Chamorro, Gustavo Mazanares, Pedro José Zepeda, ToribioTijerno, and Rosendo Argüello. Resembling the Supreme Allied Command of World War II, the Pact created a Supreme Committee to coordinate activities and named Rodríguez its president and “commander in chief of the allied armies.” The exiles also defined their objectives in the Caribbean. Following liberation they would create a “junta of government” in each participating government that had complete authority in its respective territory, but ultimately answered to the Supreme Committee. Highlighting the strength of Central American nationalism, once the region had been liberated, the signatories pledged themselves to the creation of a “Republic of Central America” and “Democratic Caribbean Alliance” predicated on the maintenance of democracy and the protection of regional sovereignty from outside intervention. To this regard the Pact stipulated the relinquishment of any European possessions in the Caribbean, and declared “themselves permanently allied in military affairs with the United States and Mexico for the common defense.” They also named Arévalo the arbiter of any disputes that might arise in the execution of the Pact.²² Under the aegis of Arévalo, the exiles, appeared to put their squabbling behind them and began debating where to begin their struggle.

However, the unity of the Caribbean Pact proved illusory, as the factions continued to jostle for Arévalo’s favor. In the months immediately before the Costa Rican civil war, one

²² Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 33-36.

faction of Nicaraguans appeared to have support for an insurrection against Somoza García. According to a rebel captured by the Guardia Nacional, Toribio Tijerino and Juan Colindres received a promise of men and weapons to launch an uprising against Somoza García from Nueva Segovia, the home department of Augusto Sandino. Calindres claimed that he could raise a force of 500 men in twenty-four hours and 5,000 men in eight days. Arévalo apparently agreed to release the weapons to Calindres and Tijerino under the instruction that they recruit former members of Sandino's force in order to give it greater legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Calindres returned to the Segovias and began planning his insurrection. However, he raised the suspicions of locals who alerted the Guardia Nacional. The Guardia attacked Calindres camp, capturing one insurgent as well as much of their equipment and intelligence. With the more direct route to ousting Somoza García blocked, Arévalo became more committed to Figueres and his Costa Rican plan.²³

The Costa Rican Civil War

With brutal dictatorships in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, it came as some surprise that Costa Rica became the place in which the fight against the dictators would begin. Although the government in power was to a degree autocratic, it was far more democratic than either Somoza García or Trujillo. However, the government was aligned with local communists, and most importantly, had no military to defend itself. Arévalo and the exiles recognized that a relatively small group could seize power in Costa Rica, and create a base for further invasion. After, some debate Arévalo agreed to release his weapons caches to Figueres and compatriots, but not without a few stipulations. First, Arévalo wanted to wait until the Costa Rican elections

²³ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 67-68.

in March of 1948 to see if Calderon would attempt to take power illegally. Second, the weapons cache would only be delivered to Costa Rica after the revolution had begun. Arévalo did not want to commit his resources before the struggle began. Second, Figueres agreed that once he had overthrown the Costa Rican government, he would turn the nation's limited resources towards ousting Somoza. Costa Rica was to be the springboard through which democracy would be brought to Nicaragua.²⁴

In February 1948, Costa Rica held presidential and legislative elections the results of which sparked upheaval across the country. Political tensions in the country had been high since 1940, when Rafael Angel Calderón came to power. In order to preserve his hold on power Calderón created a coalition between his own part, the National Republican Party, and the communist Popular Vanguard Party (Vanguard). This political alliance brought about a number of social reforms and greatly improved the lives of Costa Rica's poor, which alienated the nation's conservative elites: landowners, business owners, church officials, and the military officers. In 1944, Calderón's hand-picked replacement, Teodoro Picado, succeeded him as president of Costa Rica, infuriating the opposition and bringing about calls of foul play. They accused Calderón and his allies of using gangs of rural laborers, known as *mariachis*, to intimidate and suppress political opposition. However, these political practices were not new, and they were no more or less democratic than those practiced by the opposition. Before Calderón came to power, the opposition practiced similar tactics, and the cries of repression were largely exaggerated.²⁵ On the grounds of political repression there was little similarity between Somoza García, Trujillo, and the governments of Calderón and Picado; however that did not mean that there were not connections between those governments.

²⁴ Gleijeses, "Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion," 139-140.

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

Although the Nicaraguan despot was avowedly anticommunist by the late 1940s, that did not prevent Somoza García from developing close ties with Calderón and Picado. The global preoccupation with the Axis powers, and the subsequent easing of anticommunist tensions during World War II, facilitated relations between Somoza García and the Costa Rican leftists. In the late 1930s the two had become closer business partners, and in 1944 Costa Rica stopped Nicaraguan exiles from using Costa Rica as a base to launch incursions against Somoza García. In 1947 Somoza funneled arms to the *calderonistas*, and in return Picado recognized the puppet government of Ramón y Reyes.²⁶ If the enemy of your enemy was your friend, then the friend of your enemy was also your enemy. Although Calderón and Picado did not govern with the same level of oppression as the region's dictators, they associated with them, which was enough for many on the democratic left, who saw Costa Rica languishing under the dual evils of authoritarianism and communism.

Cold War considerations also influenced the Caribbean Legion decision to move against Picado. They were particularly emboldened by growing fears, particularly among U.S. officials, that Vanguard was moving Costa Rica closer to the communist camp.²⁷ The Costa Rican opposition heightened these fears through the Costa Rican League Against Communist Domination, which staged protests in front of the Soviet embassy in Washington D.C., utilized the U.S. press, as well as directly lobbying U.S. officials.²⁸ These actions, combined with the heightened Cold War atmosphere, paid off, and by 1948, the United States viewed the government in San José with suspicion and was amenable to regime change.

So it was that as the 1948 elections approached, the government of Costa Rica found

²⁶ Longley, "Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground: The United States and the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948," *The Americas*, 50, 2 (October 1993), 153, 158.

²⁷ Memorandum of William Tapley Bennett Jr., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, The Western Hemisphere* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 502-503.

²⁸ Longley, "Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground," 164.

itself largely isolated, with only the region's dictatorial regimes to rely on, and revolution simmering under the surface of society. Many exiles, including Figueres who returned to his hacienda in November 1947 to make preparations for a coup, expected the *calderonistas* to obstruct the elections and prevent an opposition victory. On February 8, the opposition candidate defeated Calderon in his reelection attempt. However, the *calderonistas* quickly called the results fraudulent and, after a period of investigation, the legislature annulled the election on March 1, 1948. Tensions mounted reached a breaking point as the mariachis seized key positions around the country. In response, the opposition threatened a general strike. With escalating quickly, Figueres began the revolution on March 11, receiving the much coveted weapons caches from Arévalo, as well as experienced fighters, a day later.²⁹ Among those who arrived with the weapons were Argüello and other Nicaraguan exiles, all of whom joined the Figueres camp.

Over the course of the forty-day war, the presence of Nicaraguans could be felt on both sides. Argüello joined Figueres general staff and participated in the surprise attack on Cartago. In his account of the war, Argüello highlighted the important roles played by other Nicaraguan exiles, who according to him, were the “real key men of each company” amongst the *figueristas*. These included Adolfo Báez Bone, José María Tercero, and José Castillo Santos.³⁰ Castillo, an expert machine gunner, proved decisive in the attack on and seizure of Cartago, while Tercero led a column of Figueres's army. Many of the individual Nicaraguans who fought for Figueres would later participate in attempts to oust Somoza García. For example, Báez Bone and Tercero later joined the disastrous 1954 attempt coup against Somoza García. The Costa Rican civil war of 1948 proved a training ground for many Nicaraguans involved in later operations.

Highlighting the blurred nationalist ties, not to mention the ideological fluidity, of the

²⁹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 66-70.

³⁰ Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 44.

struggle, Nicaraguans also fought for the government forces as well. In an ironic twist, one of the columns of government troops was led by Abelardo Cuadra, a Nicaraguan and former member of the *Guardia Nacional* who had participated in the murder of Augusto C. Sandino and would later attempt to assassinate Somoza García.³¹ Cuadra, who apparently wore many hats, initially joined the Caribbean Legion at Cayo Confites, but later traveled to Costa Rica, where he joined the government forces. Cuadra related that he was approached to join Figueres's band, but declined the invitation and instead allied with the government forces because he believed that Figueres's cause aided the wealthy and he preferred to help the *mariachis*. Recognizing the civil war's contradictions, Cuadra could not reconcile the fact that the forces "organized to fight against military dictatorships, such as Trujillo and Somoza, came to Costa Rica to overthrow a government that had authored many social programs" and done so much to help unions and the poor.³²

Arguably the most important Nicaraguan presence during the conflict was that of Anastasio Somoza García, who sought to intervene but was largely restrained by the United States. Before the conflict in Costa Rica was even a week old, Somoza García sought to assist his allies and destroy his Nicaraguan enemies. On March 16, he conferred with Costa Rican officials about providing assistance but U.S. officials reminded him that he had signed treaties in which he promised to respect the sovereignty of his neighbors.³³ Citing the continued tensions with the Nicaraguan dictator over the 1947 coup, U.S. officials seemed confident Somoza García's

³¹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 77. Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 41. Michael J. Schroeder, "The Sandino Rebellion Revisited: Civil War, Imperialism, Popular Nationalism, and State Formation Muddled Up Together in the Segovias of Nicaragua, 1926-1934" in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* ed. by Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 251.

³² Abelardo Cuadra, *Hombre del Caribe* (San Jose: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1977), 252.

³³ Secretary of State George Marshall to Embassy in Nicaragua, March 16, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 494-495.

compliance was “one of the benefits this far derived from non-recognition.”³⁴ However, that compliance had its limits and, on March 22, Somoza informed U.S. officials that he was sending one thousand troops to San José to prevent a communist coup, citing the Central American Anti-Communist Pact of 1947.³⁵ Again U.S. officials reminded Somoza García of his treaty obligations while also reaching out the international community for support.³⁶ The Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, called on the other states of the hemisphere to condemn Somoza García’s intervention, and received letters from Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama.³⁷ For a time it appeared that the Nicaraguan dictator was restrained.

Although U.S. pressure limited Somoza García, it failed to shut him out of the conflict. Despite the threats of U.S. officials, the Nicaraguan dictator covertly funneled men and material to the Costa Rican government. Highlighting the movement of Nicaraguan resources, the U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica, Nathaniel Davis, reported that “I know of my own knowledge that at least four Nicaraguan planes have been here at one time or another.”³⁸ On March 22, the *New York Times* reported that “Nicaraguan troops fighting for the Costa Rican Government and numbering several hundred” had joined the fight against Figueres.³⁹ Ultimately, the existential threat posed by Figueres and the Caribbean Legion proved too much for the Nicaraguan dictator who, according to U.S. officials, appeared “genuinely alarmed over threat to self from successful Costa Rican revolt’ and anxious to aid the [Costa Rican] Government.”⁴⁰ Despite the best efforts of U.S. officials, the Nicaraguan dictator intervened in the Costa Rican civil war.

Although U.S. officials sought to stymie Nicaraguan intervention in Costa Rica, Somoza

³⁴ Bernbaum to Secretary of State Marshall, March 3, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, Vol. IX, 107.

³⁵ Longley, “Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground,” 165.

³⁶ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 74.

³⁷ Marshall to Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics, March 22, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, Vol. IX, 499.

³⁸ Nathaniel Davis diary, March 20, 1948 cited in Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 74.

³⁹ “Costa Rican Fight Imperils Rebels,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1948, 17.

⁴⁰ Note two, *FRUS, 1948*, Vol. IX, 494.

García loomed over the crisis. By mid-April, Figueres had made significant gains and entered into negotiations with his opponents about ending the conflict. However, determined to prevent a Figueres victory, Somoza García continued to threaten an invasion of Costa Rica despite significant international opposition. During negotiations, Manuel Mora, the chief of the Costa Rican Communists, offered to ally his forces with Figueres in order to repulse what he believed was an impending Nicaraguan invasion.⁴¹ However, Figueres refused and Mora surrendered, preferring a *figuerista* victory to Nicaraguan rule. Mora's actions, however, failed to prevent a Nicaraguan intervention and, on April 17, as Figueres and Picado negotiated an end of the conflict, Somoza García moved to prevent a Figueres victory.⁴² Fearing an "advance from Costa Rica toward our [Nicaraguan] borders of revolutionary columns," Somoza García airlifted detachments of the *Guardia Nacional* deep into Costa Rica and occupied the border.⁴³

The intervention resulted in an immediate denunciation from the United States, who feared that the dictator's actions might derail negotiations between Figueres and Picado and lead to a broader Central American conflict. U.S. officials feared that Picado might be emboldened to leave the negotiating table if he knew that he had the support of Somoza García's superior military.⁴⁴ U.S. officials also feared that Somoza García's action might openly draw Guatemala into the conflict. Arévalo had apparently promised to declare war on Nicaragua if Somoza García attacked Figueres.⁴⁵ Somoza García again retreated in the face of U.S.-led international condemnation, but not without gaining concessions. On April 20 Somoza García, withdrew his troops from Costa Rica, and a month later the United States appointed a new ambassador to

⁴¹ U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica Nathaniel Davis to Marshall, April 17, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, Vol. IX, 516-517.

⁴² Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 61-62

⁴³ Bernbaum to Marshall, April 17, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, Vol. IX, 517-518.

⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Newbegin and Bernbaum, *ibid.*, April 19, 1948, 519-520.

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Davis Diary, April 16, 1948, cited in Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 81.

Nicaragua and reestablished full diplomatic relations.⁴⁶ Although he failed to dislodge Figueres, Somoza García succeeded in receiving U.S. recognition of his regime.

On April 19 Picado relinquished the presidency, and, along with Calderón, went into exile in Managua on April 21, but not before “taking with them the guns, typewriters, files, and furniture” of the Costa Rican government.⁴⁷ Figueres became the head of the Founding Junta of the Second Republic, which had an eighteen-month mandate to hold elections and create a new constitution. The junta also recognized the presidency of Otilio Ulate, Calderón’s opponent in the 1948 election. With victory in Costa Rica, many in the exile movement began plotting the invasion of Nicaragua. However, Figueres was reluctant to challenge his much more powerful neighbor and jeopardize his position in Costa Rica. Having won the civil war, Figueres stood in a precarious position. In the aftermath of the civil war, the Costa Rican people had neither the will nor the resources to fight their much stronger northern neighbor. Approximately two thousand Costa Ricans died during the war and much of the nation’s military resources traveled to Nicaragua with Calderón and Picado.⁴⁸ Figueres also faced pressure from the United States to curtail the activities of exiles within Costa Rica and withhold support for any plots against his neighbors, especially Nicaragua. Despite this pressure, Figueres remained committed to the movement, and particularly his Nicaraguan ally.

Figueres’s apparently unwavering support for Argüello became the source of much tension within the Caribbean Legion. In June 1948, Figueres decided that Argüello and his followers should lead the exile movement, providing them with 245,000 *colones* and a camp at Rio Conejo.⁴⁹ This move alienated many in of exiles who believed that General Juan Rodríguez,

⁴⁶ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 80-81.

⁴⁷ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 75.

⁴⁸ Marcia Orlander, “Costa Rica in 1948: Cold War or Local War,” *The Americas* 52, 4 (April 1996), 492-493.

⁴⁹ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 77. Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 113.

the Dominican millionaire, should be the chief. Many in the movement despised Argüello, who they viewed as an incompetent drunk who squandered their limited resources. Alberto Bayo, a Spanish Republican exile brought in to train the movement's air force, recounted that, when he arrived at Rio Conejo, there were no guns or airplanes, and that "the benders were constant and the wine ran profusely." In fact, the exiles had such little faith in Argüello that a number of Nicaraguan revolutionaries intended to abandon him once they crossed the Nicaraguan border.⁵⁰ Argüello himself stated that "there was a little drinking and carousing with girls," but he argued that these tensions began after he reported to Figueres about the murders and abuses of Costa Rican civilians at the hands of *figuerista* officers.⁵¹ Argüello believed that these officers were planning to assassinate him and that they were "out to get Nicaraguans."⁵² By the summer of 1948, it was apparent that the exile movement itself was coming apart.

Ironically, as the Caribbean Legion splintered, tensions between Costa Rica and Nicaragua escalated. Throughout the summer of 1948 the Nicaraguan dictator sent spies into Argüello's camp to gather intelligence and disrupt the exiles revolutionary efforts.⁵³ At the same time, the Somoza regime raised concerns about revolutionary invasions and instituted measures to protect itself from a possible invasion from Costa Rica and Guatemala.⁵⁴ In June, rumors circulated that Somoza García was training and arming a force of Costa Rican exiles with the goal of reinstalling Calderón as president.⁵⁵ In July Nicaraguan officials captured a major exile leader, Edelberto Torres, and produced a letter supposedly containing plans for exile attacks

⁵⁰ Alberto Bayo, *Tempestad en el Caribe* (Mexico: No Publisher Identified, 1950), 92-93.

⁵¹ Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 67

⁵³ Bayo, *Tempestad en el Caribe*, 114-115.

⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation between Nicaraguan ambassador Sevilla Sacasa and Newbegin, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 530-531.

⁵⁵ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 94.

against Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.⁵⁶ Somoza García's fears were further heightened on October 2 when two former Sandino officers, Juan Colindres and Ramón Reglas Raudales, launched an uprising in the rugged northern Nicaraguan region of Nueva Segovia. Guardia soldiers quickly quelled the uprising, killing Colindres, the former rival of Figueres and Argüello. A prisoner related that, in preparation for his uprising, Colindres had received support from the Arévalo government, whom Somoza García quickly denounced.⁵⁷ He called "upon the governments of the America to take note of the aggressive attitude being maintained against several Central American countries, and especially Nicaragua, by the Communist Governments of Guatemala, Cuba and Venezuela, with whom Costa Rica is cooperating."⁵⁸ The Colindres uprising, combined with information gathered by his intelligence service, convinced Somoza García that Figueres posed an immediate threat to his regime that needed to be addressed.

Again fearing an outbreak of regional violence, U.S. officials attempted to calm the situation. In a meeting with the Nicaraguan ambassador, Guillermo Sevilla, the chief of the State Department's Division on Panama and Central American Affairs, Robert Newbegin, warned that "it was thoroughly undesirable that action taken by one country outside its own frontiers should be disguised as defense measures" and urged "the greatest caution and patience" by the Nicaraguans.⁵⁹ U.S. officials also pressured Figueres to curtail his adventurism because they believed it inadvertently aided communists. They believed that tensions in Central America distracted from more pressing matters in Europe and Asia, and created opportunities for communists to exploit.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 92.

⁵⁷ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 84-85.

⁵⁸ "Somoza Sees Plot Against Nicaragua," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1948, 5.

⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation between Nicaraguan ambassador Sevilla Sacasa and Newbegin, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 531.

⁶⁰ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 93.

Facing U.S. pressure, mounting tensions with Nicaragua, and an increasingly divided Caribbean Legion, Figueres began distancing himself, and Costa Rica, from his obligations under the Caribbean Pact. On September 21, 1948, Figueres and Arévalo signed a statement that relinquished Figueres of his obligations under the Caribbean Pact.⁶¹ One week later, Costa Rican diplomats “promised Washington that no legion activities would originate in their country and assured U.S. officials that the exiles would leave the country in two weeks.”⁶² With Costa Rica closed as a base of operations, Rodríguez relocated much of the Caribbean Legion to Guatemala in late October.⁶³ A month later Figueres disbanded the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica in an effort to ease international tensions.⁶⁴ Argüello viewed these actions as a betrayal and Figueres later admitted that he lost faith in his closest ally because of his drinking.⁶⁵ By late November of 1948 the exile movement had largely relocated to Guatemala to plan another assault on the Trujillo regime, leaving a disgruntled Argüello and his small band of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica.

Somoza Garcia and the Specter of the Legion

Although the Caribbean Legion was in decline and its attention had moved from Nicaragua to the Dominican Republic, Somoza García still viewed Figueres and the remaining exiles in Costa Rica as a threat to be dealt with. Over the summer of 1948, Somoza García equipped and trained a force of Costa Rican exiles while the Nicaraguan Air Force made numerous flights over Costa Rica.⁶⁶ On December 9, one hundred to one hundred fifty *calderonistas*, armed and equipped by Somoza García, invaded Costa Rica. One day later, the

⁶¹ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 76-77.

⁶² Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 94.

⁶³ “Dominican Revolt Seen as Unlikely,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1948, 22.

⁶⁴ Davis to Marshall, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 535.

⁶⁵ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 80.

⁶⁶ Conversation between Bennett, Jr. and Costa Rican Ambassador Esquivel, August 10, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 533-534.

former Costa Rican President, Rafael Calderón, called upon his “fellow citizens” to follow him in order to “restore the state of things destroyed by a group of insensate men led by José Figueres.”⁶⁷ To Somoza García and the *calderonistas* the moment must have appeared perfect for an invasion: the Caribbean Legion was divided, Figueres faced stiff domestic opposition, and, most importantly, he had demobilized the Costa Rican military on December 1st. The U.S. policy of non-intervention and the diminished threat of non-recognition also emboldened the dictator, who some Latin American officials viewed as free to “carry out [his] schemes without interference.”⁶⁸ However, the force sent into Costa Rica was so small that many believed it simply a ruse on the part of Somoza García to instigate a fight with the Caribbean Legion, thus providing a pretext to invade with the Guardia Nacional.⁶⁹

Despite substantial evidence pointing to his involvement, Somoza García initially attempted to hide his complicity, but his true intentions eventually came to the surface. Two days after the invasion, government forces captured a group of *calderonistas*. The leader of this force “admitted receiving arms for Luis Somoza,” Somoza García’s oldest son, and later “declared that Somoza had promised the revolutionaries full support.”⁷⁰ In a meeting with the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, George Shaw, Somoza García initially denied aiding the *calderonistas* across the border with Costa Rica. However when Shaw pressed him on the issue, the Nicaraguan dictator admitted that the “Guardia Nacional had permitted this group to pass.” In regards to the invasion, Somoza García “expressed no regret that the incident had occurred and stated also that if this brought about an armed attack on Nicaragua that he would welcome it indicating that [he] felt able to cope with the situation by force of arms.” Clearly the dictator sought to instigate a fight

⁶⁷ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 97.

⁶⁸ Conversation between Bennett and Esquivel, July 20, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 532.

⁶⁹ “Draw is Foreseen in Costa Rica,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1948, 22.

⁷⁰ John D. Martz, *Central America: The Crisis and the Challenge* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 184.

with Figueres and the Caribbean Legion. Somoza García also seemed extremely confident in the security of his position, expressing his belief that the “situation would be brought to a head and that the US would bring pressure on Costa Rica as well as on him to the end that peace and quiet might prevail in the two countries.”⁷¹ Perhaps revealing his hubris, political cunning, or both, this comment of Somoza García’s proved to be prescient.

Despite Somoza García’s efforts to instigate a fight with the Caribbean Legion, Figueres avoided giving the Nicaraguan dictator the conflict he wanted. According to Davis, Figueres rejected an offer of six hundred men from the Caribbean Legion, but “stated individual volunteers acceptable.” Perhaps highlighting the split between Figueres and the Caribbean Legion or his desperation, on December 11 the Costa Rican president also demanded the “delivery [of] all Legion arms which would be taken forcibly if not given up by tonight.”⁷² That same day he instructed his ambassador in Washington D.C., Mario Esquivel, to invoke the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of the Organization of American States.⁷³ The OAS immediately convened a meeting and began an investigation of the events, sending a multinational team of investigators to Costa Rica and Nicaragua On December 16.⁷⁴

While the OAS took action, the *calderonista* invasion faltered. It proved too small for the task and crumbled as the hoped for popular support failed to materialize and the once divided Costa Rican factions united. Eventually a stalemate developed in which the *calderonistas*, unable rally Costa Ricans to their cause, remained close to the Nicaraguan border and the protection of the Guardia Nacional, and the Costa Ricans cordoned off the *calderonistas* and avoided the

⁷¹ Shaw to Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 539.

⁷² Davis to Secretary of State, *ibid.*, 536-537.

⁷³ Organization of American States (OAS), *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications*, Volume 1, 1948-1959 (Washington D.C.: Organization of American States, 1964), 27. Esquivel invoked Article VI of the Rio Treaty, which calls for an immediate meeting of the Organ of Consultation in instances in which the territorial integrity of member state is threatened.

⁷⁴ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. IX, 541.

Nicaraguan border out of fear of instigating a Guardia intervention. With the two forces largely avoiding each other, it appeared that the only way that Calderón would regain power was through direct intervention on the part of Somoza García. However, in the face of international scrutiny and U.S. pressure, the Nicaraguan dictator appeared to end his support for the invasion, having border patrols detain reinforcements trying to join the *calderonistas*. Despite his diminishing support for the Costa Rican rebels, Somoza García continued to call for the removal of the Caribbean Legion from Costa Rica.⁷⁵

With the *calderonistas* stymied, it was ultimately the OAS that pushed out the final Caribbean Legion members in Costa Rica, specifically Rosando Argüello. For one week the OAS investigating committee traveled between San José and Managua, interviewing prisoners and other combatants. On December 24 the committee found fault in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica. They concluded that “the revolutionary movement that erupted in Costa Rica was organized mainly in Nicaragua” and that there was “not the slightest doubt of the failure of the Nicaraguan government to take adequate measures to prevent revolutionary activity directed against a neighboring friendly country from being carried out.” They also found that “some members of the Nicaraguan military forces might perhaps, on their own initiative, have given technical aid to the groups that later crossed the border.” Although Nicaragua received much of the blame, Costa Rica and Figueres did not come out unscathed. The committee rightly highlighted the fact that the Caribbean Legion received “material and moral help from the Costa Rican government” and “enjoyed official sympathy and facilities for carrying out its programs and activities,” which “were designed to overthrow... the present regime in Nicaragua.” That same day the committee submitted a resolution to the Provisional Organ of Consultation of the

⁷⁵ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 98-99.

OAS, which called for an end to hostilities, chastised the Nicaraguan government for not taking proper action to restrain the revolutionaries, and advised Costa Rica to “take adequate measures to rid its territory” of the Caribbean Legion.⁷⁶

Although the committee criticized Somoza García for his involvement in the fracas, the OAS resolution ultimately worked in his favor and resulted in the removal of the Caribbean Legion from Costa Rica. Significant international pressure, specifically from the United States, combined with domestic displeasure with the continued presence of the Caribbean Legion forced Figueres to take action. Figueres expelled a number of high-profile members of the Caribbean Legion and confiscated their armaments but allowed a large number of Nicaraguans to remain out of an “out of the right of asylum and a feeling of gratitude.” These moves seemed to appease the OAS, which felt that Figueres had adequately “disarmed and dispersed” the exiles in Costa Rica, and that those who remained were “not carrying out any political or revolutionary activities.”⁷⁷ For his part, the OAS forced Somoza García to increase the number of border patrols and ensure that armed groups no longer crossed the frontier. However, it recognized that the effectiveness of these measures depended “upon the spirit in which they are applied by the authorities and troops responsible for putting them into effect.”⁷⁸ On February 21, 1949, the ambassadors of Costa Rica and Nicaragua signed the Pact of Amity, in which both parties pledged to not interfere in the affairs of the other and not allow the use of their territory for hostile revolutionary groups.⁷⁹

Despite his acquiescence to the OAS, Figueres saw it necessary to further distance himself from the Caribbean Legion. On March 18, 1949, he dissolved Argüello’s company and,

⁷⁶ OAS, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications*, 35-36.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁹ OAS, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications*, 56.

on May 26, advised the Nicaraguan to “take a vacation to Cuba or Mexico for a couple of months” in order to “stop rumors and clear the atmosphere which was surrounding his government.”⁸⁰ Argüello traveled to Mexico and on his last visit to Costa Rica in early April Figueres promised to “turn over to me [Argüello] those weapons which the rebels [*calderonistas*] had used, along with the fourteen planes which Costa Rica had obtained because of my work and efforts.”⁸¹ At the time, Figueres also apparently pledged “money and equipment” to Argüello upon his return. However, Argüello never returned to Costa Rica and the weaponry was never made available to him.⁸² Argüello remained in exile in Mexico for a number of years, becoming increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with Figueres. In 1951 he pushed *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, an exposé of the supposed duplicity of Figueres and the *figueristas*, which was later republished in 1953 by the Trujillo regime as a means of discrediting Figueres.⁸³ Despite his apparent betrayal of Figueres and consorting with Trujillo, Argüello continued to be involved in the democratic left, participating in democratic multinational organizations. With his militant days behind him the Nicaraguan doctor moved to political activism.

Although Argüello had left the militant branch of the democratic left, many exiled Nicaraguans still plotted the demise of Somoza García and participated in the Caribbean Legion. On June 18, the exiles launched an air and seaborne invasion of the Dominican Republic from Guatemala. Again, the force was multinational, consisting of Dominicans, Guatemalans, Costa Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, North Americans, Spaniards, and Nicaraguans.⁸⁴ Mutiny and poor weather prevented all but one plane from carrying out the invasion, which landed at Luperón Bay

⁸⁰ Argüello, *By Whom We Were Betrayed... And How*, 108-109.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 107.

⁸⁴ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 145-146.

in the Dominican Republic. The invaders, unaware that the invasion had been canceled, attempted to escape. However the Dominican military hunted them down, killing seven and capturing five. Trujillo paraded the captured exiles before the international community, extracting confessions and using them as propaganda tools against Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Cuba for engineering the invasion. Of those who landed at Luperón, three were Nicaraguans, two of whom died, and the third, José Félix Córdoba Boniche, would be released and later perish during the 1954 invasion of Nicaragua.⁸⁵

Ultimately the Luperón invasion marked the end of the Caribbean Legion. The United States, fearing that Caribbean adventurism might benefit the Soviet Union, became less sympathetic towards exile conspiracies. Moving away from the policy of non-intervention that had characterized U.S. action during the Costa Rican civil war, the United States viewed regional instability as an opportunity for Soviet intervention and became less sympathetic to groups seeking to change the status quo.⁸⁶ The OAS also called on the antagonistic governments of the Caribbean to quit plotting and supporting invasions of each other.⁸⁷ The changing political climate, combined with the fact that there were simply fewer democratic governments in the Caribbean by 1950, meant that the Legion was increasingly marginalized. At the same time, Somoza García ingratiated himself with the United States by highlighting his anti-communist credentials. In 1948, the Nicaraguan legislature, ostensibly under the control of Somoza García, outlawed the Communist party. In 1953 it passed another law that made it illegal for anyone who belonged to a political party with international connections from owning a print shop or newspaper. The intent of such a law was to limit the ability of any leftist group from speaking out against the regime, but Somoza García applied it to his opponents across the political

⁸⁵ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 137.

⁸⁶ Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 21-22.

⁸⁷ Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion*, 135.

spectrum. In 1955, an executive order prohibited the publishing of any print material that contained “communist propaganda.”⁸⁸ The dictator also expressed beliefs to U.S. officials, stating that communism was “a cancerous growth which had to be cut away” and pledging his support to a conflict between the United States and Soviet Union.⁸⁹

Two facts that becomes apparent when examining the struggle between Somoza García and the Caribbean Legion is the weakness of strong national and ideological identities. Figures on both sides of the conflict, particularly in the antidictatorial struggle, strove for regional integration and created transnational alliances. Also, ideology proved a relatively small factor in the decision making process of actors on both sides of the struggle. Individuals, such as Abelardo Cuadra, would join the democratic struggle, to only fight it shortly afterwards. The realpolitik of Somoza García provides the best example of ideologies relative weakness. Although openly anticommunist in order to curry U.S. favor, the dictator’s closest regional ally was a communist. Ultimately, the anticommunist tendencies of the Somoza regime would harden as the Cold War intensified in the 1950s. One of the most notable tests of this anticommunism would come in Guatemala, where Somoza García would eliminate a rival regime under the guise of eliminating a “communist inspired” threat.⁹⁰

Somoza García, Figueres, and the Guatemalan Coup

With unfriendly governments to his north and south, Somoza García saw his regime being encircled by enemies. With his attempt to unseat Figueres failing because of U.S. intervention, the Nicaraguan dictator understood that U.S. support was necessary in order to

⁸⁸ Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 227.

⁸⁹ Paul Coe Clark, Jr. *The United States and Somoza, 1933-1956: A Revisionist Look* (Westport: Praeger, 1992), 181.

⁹⁰ Clark, Jr. *The United States and Somoza*, 181-182.

institute any form of regime change. As he strengthened his anti-communist credentials, Somoza García continued to prod the United States into regime change in Guatemala. Although the Arbenz government, which came to power in 1951, had attempted to improve relations with Nicaragua, it still harbored a number of Nicaraguan exiles, including Edelberto Torres Espinoza, and supported exile groups like the Movement of Nicaraguan Partisans of Democracy, which sought the downfall of the Nicaraguan dictator.⁹¹ Somoza García was incensed by the presence of Nicaraguan exiles operating freely so close to home, and was determined to root out and eliminate foreign and domestic resistance to his rule. As demonstrated by his earlier forays into Costa Rica, the Nicaraguan dictator was not above achieving his objectives through direct or indirect intervention in the affairs of his neighbors.

The dictator's antagonism towards the government in Guatemala City grew out of old enmities. During the presidencies of Arévalo and Arbenz, significant tensions existed between Nicaragua and Guatemala, with diplomatic relations being regularly broken.⁹² The dictator was particularly resentful of Arévalo's support for the Caribbean Legion, which he viewed as an existential threat. As early as 1949, Somoza García told U.S. officials that he would remove Arévalo if given U.S. approval.⁹³ He simultaneously began conspiring with the United Fruit Company, who disliked Arévalo and Arbenz's unfavorable policies towards their company.⁹⁴ During a visit to Washington in April 1952, Somoza García told State Department officials "just give me the arms and I'll clean up Guatemala for you in no time."⁹⁵ President Truman, Secretary

⁹¹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 202, 204

⁹² State Department, "Policy Statement," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The United Nations, The Western Hemisphere*, Vol. II, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), 1517-1518.

⁹³ Clark, Jr. *The United States and Somoza*, 182.

⁹⁴ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 228. Interview with Welch, November 13, 1952, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Guatemala* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2003), 48-49.

⁹⁵ Herbert L. Matthews, *A World in Revolution: A Newspaperman's Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,

of State Dean Acheson, and other officials laughed the offer off as a joke. However, the dictator was dead serious and successfully convinced one of Truman's aides, who sold Somoza García's plan to Truman.⁹⁶ Thus was born OPERATION FORTUNE, Somoza García's first effort to remove the Arbenz government from power. Shortly after his trip to the United States, the dictator enlisted Trujillo and Marcos Pérez Jiménez, the Venezuelan strongman, who gladly provided financial backing to the operation.⁹⁷ Somoza García, the CIA, and United Fruit, were the main conspirators whose plan would be carried out by Carlos Castillo Armas, an exiled former officer in the Guatemalan military. Castillo Armas enjoyed the protection of Somoza García and claimed that once he entered the country "important officers in the Guatemalan army" would join him in revolt.⁹⁸ Over the course of the summer of 1952 Somoza García and United Fruit stockpiled weapons in the United States, which would then be shipped to Nicaragua in United Fruit freighters and made available to Castillo Armas.⁹⁹ Unfortunately for the conspirators, the State Department became aware of the plot and canceled it while the arms were in transport to Nicaragua.¹⁰⁰ The weapons instead traveled to Panama, bringing an end to Somoza García's coup.¹⁰¹ Despite the setback, events in Guatemala and Nicaragua would conspire to allow the Nicaraguan dictator to strike at his enemies in both Guatemala and Costa Rica.

Although U.S. officials initially doubted the threat posed by the Arbenz government, events in Guatemala and the election of the Eisenhower administration brought the United States

1971), 264.

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conference, July 21, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 23-24.

⁹⁷ Matthews, *A World in Revolution*, 263; Telegram from CIA station in [classified] to CIA, September 12, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 26-27.

⁹⁸ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 230.

⁹⁹ Nicholas Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1994), 19.

¹⁰⁰ Matthews, *A World in Revolution*, 263-264; Memorandum for the record, October 8, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 33-35

¹⁰¹ Memorandum for the record, October 9, 1952, *ibid.*, 36-37.

closer to Somoza García's point of view. On December 19, 1952, the Guatemalan Communist Party was legalized and later joined Arbenz's coalition for the coming congressional elections, which proved significant considering no other government had collaborated with communists since Picado in Costa Rica.¹⁰² At the same time, the Guatemalan government began a major system of land reform which involved the nationalization and distribution of lands held by elites and foreign businesses, such as United Fruit. Unfortunately for Arbenz, these changes coincided with the arrival of the Eisenhower administration in Washington. Fearing Soviet expansion, the Eisenhower administration took a more hawkish stance than its predecessor, arguing that containment was a failure and that they would "roll back" international communism's gains.¹⁰³ Wanting to avoid another communist revolution as in China, U.S. officials under Eisenhower saw the Arbenz government as an immediate threat and began planning its removal. In the late summer of 1953 high level officials in the White House, State Department, and Central Intelligence Agency put into motion PBSUCCESS, the covert operation to remove Arbenz.¹⁰⁴

Although Somoza García desperately wanted to lead the movement against the Arbenz government, there were those in the United States who hoped for a liberal solution. Ironically, this led some U.S. officials to initially approach José Figueres to lead the effort. Many officials believed that Somoza García was an "unsavory and discredited dictator" who would largely stymie the operation. Wishing to appease the United States and demonstrate his anti-communist credentials, Figueres agreed, revealing the Costa Rican's opportunism and lack of loyalty to many of the same people who had helped put him in power. However, the idea of Figueres

¹⁰² Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 231, 243.

¹⁰³ Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 1-5.

¹⁰⁴ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 234-236; Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS*, 22-23; Leddy to Cabot, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics*, Vol. IV, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983), 1071-1073.

leading the effort against Arbenz never had a chance of going forward. It would have required cooperation between Somoza García and Figueres, who viewed each other as mortal enemies. Despite Figueres's support for the coup, Somoza García would be the key to removing Arbenz.¹⁰⁵

Foreshadowing the later U.S. cover operations against the Sandinistas, the coup against Arbenz would work on two tracks. First, the United States would launch a campaign of psychological warfare intended to weaken the moral of the Guatemalan military.¹⁰⁶ Beginning in October 1953, U.S. officials initiated a campaign of public denunciations and the CIA wrote articles against the Arbenz government.¹⁰⁷ Recognizing that the Guatemalan military was key to the success of PBSUCCESS, U.S. officials hoped to shake the confidence of the Guatemalan officers and inspire them to turn on Arbenz, a military officer himself. After months of psychological warfare, Castillo Armas, who U.S. officials chose to lead the attack, would enter Guatemala with a small band of insurgents, confronting the Guatemalan military with the choice of either attacking Armas and facing a U.S. invasion, or turning on Arbenz and saving themselves. With significant support from Somoza García, Castillo Armas' small force would be trained and equipped in Nicaragua, and then move to Honduras where it would invade Guatemala.¹⁰⁸ With Somoza García's enthusiastic support, the CIA opened two training facilities in Nicaragua; one on the island of Momotombito in Lake Nicaragua and the other at Somoza García's El Tamarindo estate. They also purchased a number of P-47s and C-47s, which the CIA stationed the abandoned Nicaraguan airfield at Puerto Cabezas.¹⁰⁹ Besides being a base for military operations, the CIA operated *La Voz de la Liberación* (The Voice of Liberation), a

¹⁰⁵ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 240-242.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum for the Record, September 11, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 102-109.

¹⁰⁷ Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS*, 26-27.

¹⁰⁸ Castillo Armas to CIA, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 90-91.

¹⁰⁹ King to Dulles, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 87-89.

radio station that masqueraded as the voice of Guatemalan opposition from within Guatemala.¹¹⁰

By the early spring of 1954 Somoza García was deeply enmeshed in the plot to remove the Arbenz government. However, as he plotted against one of his enemies, other forces conspired against him.

In April of 1954, a group of exiles, including a number of former members of the Caribbean Legion, and opposition leaders in Nicaragua launched an effort to overthrow Somoza García. The group was led by Pablo Leal, a Nicaraguan exile living in Costa Rica, who recruited former Caribbean Legion members, including the Nicaraguans José María Tercero and Adolfo Báez Bone, as well as the Honduran Jorge Ribas Montes, a veteran of Cayo Confites, the Costa Rican civil war, and Luperón. Báez Bone, who had returned to Nicaragua, was a member of the Frente Interno, a group of prominent Nicaraguans aiding the insurrection from inside the country. The Frente Interno included Emiliano Chamorro, who had returned from exile in 1951, Julián Salaverry, a former officer under Figueres during the Costa Rican civil war, and Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the editor of *La Prensa* whose eventual assassination would spark the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1978.¹¹¹ The plan was for the exiles to infiltrate the country and then meet up with the Frente Interno for an attack on the Guardia headquarters, while at the same time ambushing and assassinating Somoza García, quickly removing the head of the Guardia Nacional.

The conspirators received support from the region's few remaining democratic governments, as well as from private benefactors. Because many of the conspirators were former members of the Caribbean Legion, it should come as no surprise that much of the funding came from governments and political leaders who were sympathetic to it. The ex-president of Cuba,

¹¹⁰ Gleijeses., *Shattered Hope*, 253, 292-295.

¹¹¹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 207.

Carlos Prío Socarrós, provided Leal and his conspirators with \$25,000 and connections to arms dealers in Mexico City.¹¹² Figueres, now the president of Costa Rica, again provided bases of operation for the Nicaraguan exiles and some government support in the form of transportation.¹¹³ Arbenz provided no direct support for the insurgents. However, he allowed them to freely recruit in his territory. Besides democratic leaders, Latin American benefactors, such as the Mexican comic Cantinflas who provided \$10,000, helped finance the invasion.¹¹⁴ Emiliano Chamorro, also used his own personal wealth to support the invasion as well as provided his *finca* outside of Managua as a base for launching the invasion.¹¹⁵ With the money and connections provided by their allies, the revolutionaries purchased weapons in Mexico, and shipped them to Costa Rica, before finally smuggling them into Nicaragua on April 2, 1954.

On April 4, the conspirators launched the plot against Somoza García, which quickly became a disaster. To begin with, the revolutionaries, numbering only 25, expected a force of 300 men to aid them in their struggle against the *Guardia Nacional*, but only 80 arrived at Chamorro's hacienda.¹¹⁶ Although they were severely undermanned, they decided to continue with the operation. Unfortunately, an unnerved member of the invasion leaked the plot to the *Guardia Nacional*, which attacked and brutally suppressed the conspirators. The *Guardia Nacional* arrested and executed many of the revolutionaries, including Leal, Tercero, Báez Bone, and Ribas Montes.¹¹⁷ Some of the more prominent members of Nicaraguan society who had conspired against Somoza García, such as Emiliano Chamorro, only faced a year of house arrest,

¹¹² Jesús Miguel Blandón, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador* (Managua: Centro de Publicaciones, Departamento de Propaganda y Educación Política de F.S.L.N., 1982). 44.

¹¹³ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 207.

¹¹⁴ Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 230-31.

¹¹⁵ Blandón, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹⁷ Whelan to Department of State, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 1380-1381.

while others, such as Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and Arturo Cruz, were imprisoned and tortured.¹¹⁸

The April 4 conspiracy failed spectacularly and, unfortunately for his opponents, provided Somoza García with political ammunition against his enemies. The April 4th coup held some propaganda value for Somoza García and the CIA in their efforts against the Arbenz government. As part of its psychological campaign, U.S. officials portrayed the April 4th coup as evidence of a broader communist plot carried out by Guatemalans to overthrow the governments of Nicaragua and Honduras.¹¹⁹ The House Select Committee on Communist Aggression viewed events in Guatemala as being related to a Soviet plot toward world domination, stating that “the Kremlin was seeking to expand its Guatemalan beachhead in a plan to control, first all of Central America; then all of Latin America, and ultimately all of the Western Hemisphere and the world.”¹²⁰ Building on the supposed Soviet conspiracy, Somoza García announced in early May that a large weapons cache had been discovered in Nicaragua and that all of the weapons “were stamped with a hammer and sickle.”¹²¹ He claimed that an unidentified submarine, which the dictator implied was Soviet, had left the weapons for the April 4th conspirators, and only his quick action had prevented a significant communist victory. Despite his claims, the weapons caches were actually planted by Somoza García and the CIA with the intention of further heightening fears of Guatemalan aggression in the wake of a May delivery of Czechoslovakian weapons to the Arbenz government.¹²² Although the April 4th conspirators had no ties to the CIA and only sought the removal of Somoza García, they unwittingly provided a significant

¹¹⁸ Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 232.

¹¹⁹ Secretary of State Smith to Embassy in Portugal, April 14, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 1098-1099.

¹²⁰ US Congress, Select Committee on Communist Aggression, *Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Communist Aggression in Latin America* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 11.

¹²¹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 294.

¹²² PBSUCCESS headquarters to Chief of CIA station in Guatemala, May 19, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Guatemala*, 155-156. Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 207. On May 13 the Swedish cargo ship the *Alfhem* docked at Puerto Barrios, Guatemala where it unloaded 4,112,145 pounds of military weapons.

propaganda boost to PBSUCCESS by giving credence to the idea of Guatemalan involvement in a Soviet conspiracy in Central America.

Following the April 4th coup attempt, the conspiracy against Arbenz escalated. On May 19 Somoza García broke diplomatic relations with Guatemala, and days later, at the behest of U.S. officials, called for a special meeting of the OAS to discuss the threat posed by Guatemala. Ironically, Figueres joined Somoza García in condemning Arbenz. By the end of the month, a group of commandos left Nicaragua and began operating in Guatemala, almost blowing up a train carrying munitions.¹²³ By the late May the effects of the propaganda campaign had succeeded in rattling the resolve of the Guatemalan military to stand by Arbenz, and on June 17 Castillo Armas launched his invasion of Guatemala from Honduras.¹²⁴ Ten days later Arbenz resigned and went into exile, and two months later Somoza García's protégé, Castillo Armas, became the president of Guatemala. With U.S. support Somoza García had removed the largest Central American threat to his regime and replaced it with a staunch ally. With the exile movement against him nearly crushed and one of his foes vanquished, it appeared that Somoza García had made Central America a much safer place for his regime: however, the dictator was not content.

The April 4th coup and his success in removing the Arbenz government convinced Somoza García that the time was ripe to move against Figueres. In the conspiracy against Figueres, Somoza García imitated the strategy that brought down Arbenz. However, unlike with PBSUCCESS, he did not have the support of the United States. Immediately following the April 4th coup, Somoza García again denounced Figueres, removed his ambassador, and demanded an official apology for the assassination attempt as well as the removal of exiles living in Costa

¹²³ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 308, 310

¹²⁴ Cullather, *Operation PBSUCCESS*, 64.

Rica.¹²⁵ Although, Figueres publicly refused Somoza García's demands, he began to secretly remove exiles.¹²⁶ Eager to avoid a conflict between Nicaragua and Costa Rica that might distract from PBSUCCESS, U.S. officials immediately stepped in and helped cool the situation, with U.S. Ambassador Whelan stressing to Somoza García the desire of U.S. officials to "adhere to the single topic of Communist influence in Guatemala."¹²⁷ After the removal of Arbenz U.S. officials continued to try to restrain Somoza García by providing arms to Costa Rica and making it known that the U.S. would not condone any attempt to remove Figueres.¹²⁸ Their largest fear was that a coup in Costa Rica on the heels of the Arbenz plot would significantly damage U.S. public opinion.¹²⁹ Despite the efforts of U.S. officials to reign in Somoza García, the dictator had his own agenda.

Despite Washington's best efforts, Somoza García began plotting against Costa Rica in earnest shortly after the ouster of Arbenz. In early July he sent the Guardia Nacional to the Costa Rican border and began arming and training a group of *calderonista* exiles for another invasion of Costa Rica.¹³⁰ Conspiring with his old ally Rafael Calderón Guardia, the former president of Costa Rica, Somoza García enlisted the help of the Venezuelan dictator Pérez Jiménez and Castillo Armas. Venezuelan officials petitioned the State Department for the removal of Figueres, and participated in the propaganda campaign against Costa Rica by dropping leaflets on San José that depicted Figueres and former Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt as lovers.¹³¹ The newly minted Guatemalan president, eager to help his mentor, trained three

¹²⁵ Whelan to Department of State, May 17, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 1382-1383.

¹²⁶ Note two, *ibid.*, 1388.

¹²⁷ Whelan to Department of State, June 1, 1954, *ibid.*, 1383-1384.

¹²⁸ Whelan to Holland, July 28, 1954, *ibid.*, 1387-1388.

¹²⁹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 139-140.

¹³⁰ Holland to Smith, July 13, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 1384-1385.

¹³¹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 140; Holland to Smith, July 13, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 1384-1385.

hundred *calderonistas* in Guatemala for the coming invasion of Costa Rica.¹³² Over the fall and winter of 1954 Somoza García prepared his force and continued to increase pressure on Figueres.

After months of tension, Somoza García unleashed the *calderonistas* on January 11, 1955. Hoping to avoid interference by the United States or OAS, Somoza García intended the intervention to be “purely domestic” in order to avoid U.S. or OAS interference. According to the dictator’s plan, the *calderonistas* would infiltrate Costa Rica, assassinate government officials, and attack military targets.¹³³ These actions would then inspire a popular revolt that would topple Figueres and return Calderon to power. However, much like the *calderonista* invasion of 1948, popular support failed to materialize and the insurgents were trapped along the border with Nicaragua. Figueres again appealed to the United States and the OAS for assistance, and an observation team traveled to Costa Rica. The OAS observers reported that *calderonista* aircraft, operating out of Nicaragua, had bombed and strafed targets in Costa Rica.¹³⁴ They also saw evidence of supply lines running from Nicaragua to the rebel camps. The OAS recommended immediate action, and on January 16 the United States sold Costa Rica four P-51 Mustangs for one dollar a piece.¹³⁵ The newly formed Costa Rican air force quickly grounded the rebel planes, again isolating the *calderonistas* on the ground. Seeing his proxy force falter, Somoza García sent the Guardia Nacional to the border. Fearing that the Nicaraguan dictator might create an incident and directly invade Costa Rica, the OAS created a neutral zone three miles wide on each side of the border.¹³⁶ They forbid either Costa Rican or Nicaraguan troops from entering the zone, and demanded that the *calderonistas* leave the area or face extermination

¹³² Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 211.

¹³³ Leddy to Holland, November 18, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. IV, 858-860.

¹³⁴ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 145-146.

¹³⁵ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 214.

¹³⁶ Memorandum of Conversation with Sevilla Sacasa, January 20, 1955, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, Vol. VII, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 197-198.

by Costa Rican forces. Most of the insurgents fled across the border and surrendered to Nicaraguan forces.¹³⁷ By the beginning of February fighting had largely ceased and the crisis was over.

Having just aided the United States in removing the Arbenz government, Somoza García's attempt to remove Figueres in the face of stiff U.S. opposition might appear puzzling. Why challenge your more powerful ally? Clearly the dictator would not have acted against the wishes of U.S. officials unless he was confident that they would not move to have him removed. In fact, there is some evidence that the CIA aided Somoza García's *calderonista* invasion of Costa Rica as a reward for helping the organization with the Arbenz coup. The threat of possible communist subversion in Costa Rica troubled many U.S. officials, who feared that the country's labor leaders might provide a Soviet inroad into the region.¹³⁸ Also, the operation against Figueres closely resembled PBSUCCESS.¹³⁹ Figueres himself believed that the CIA aided Somoza García, arguing that the CIA had placed at the Nicaraguan dictator's disposal the same planes and pilots that had flown sorties against Arbenz.¹⁴⁰ Regardless of whether or not he possessed overt CIA backing, Somoza García weighed the advantages and disadvantages of intervention and decided to proceed. Luckily for the dictator his gamble paid off. The April 4th coup marked the end of Figueres's adventurism. With international disapproval of his involvement in the coup and growing domestic opposition, Figueres reigned in adventurism emanating from Costa Rica and signed the Pact of Amity and the Treaty of Conciliation with Nicaragua, both of which created restraints on revolutionary groups and sought peaceful

¹³⁷ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 146-147.

¹³⁸ Woodward to Department of State, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol. VII, 3-10.

¹³⁹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 146.

¹⁴⁰ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 214. *Ibid.*, *Don Pepe*, 124-125.

resolutions to disputes.¹⁴¹ In less than a year, Somoza García, with and without the aid of the United States, had successfully removed one unfriendly regime and forced another to quit plotting against him.

Ironically, shortly after the dictator's moment of greatest triumph over the exile movement and its supports, an expatriate Nicaraguan named Rigoberto López Pérez assassinated Somoza García at a party in Leon on September 21, 1956. Somoza García's bodyguards gunned down López Pérez on the spot. The Nicaraguan dictator died one week later in the Panama Canal Zone after being operated on by President Eisenhower's personal doctor. Before the assassination, López Pérez had lived in El Salvador, where he had come into contact with Nicaraguan exiles. It was while there that he devised the plot to assassinate Somoza García, and perhaps fewer than ten people aided the young assassin.¹⁴² After the hundreds of lives and thousands of dollars spent by the exile movement to bring down Somoza García, it was a lone assassin with a revolver who ended the rule of Anastasio Somoza García. However, it did not bring an end to the Somoza regime. The dictator's sons, Luis and Anastasio Somoza Dayle, immediately seized the reins of power. Luis, the eldest son who served as a deputy in the National Congress, occupied his father's seat as president of Nicaragua. Anastasio Jr., having already become the Jefe Director of the Guardia, ensured that the military would remain loyal to his brother's rule. In the wake of their father's assassination, the Somoza brothers jailed and tortured thousands of political opponents, including those accused of involvement in the April 4th coup. Although he was gone, the legacy of brutality and suppression begun under Anastasio Somoza García would continue. In the end, the Nicaraguan exiles successfully removed Somoza García from power, but they failed to end the Somoza regime.

¹⁴¹ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 125; Memorandum of Conversation, March 30, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol. VII, 198-199.

¹⁴² Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 234.

International Organizations and the Anti-Somoza Movement

Similar in many ways to the North American organizations that aided Sandino during his struggle against the U.S. occupation, there existed a number of sympathetic groups in the United States and elsewhere who opposed the dictatorship of Somoza García and supported those who sought to bring it down. Democratic, labor, and journalistic organizations all spoke out against the Somoza regime and provided aid to those Nicaraguans who challenged it. These organizations included the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom (IADF), the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores, ORIT), and the Inter-American Press Agency (IAPA). Each of these organizations vocally opposed the Somoza regime and in some instances supported those seeking to remove it from power. Although they were unsuccessful in ousting the Somozas from power, these organizations did succeed in forcing the regime to make changes to its oppressive policies. They also helped guarantee the safety of Nicaraguan revolutionaries captured by the regime.

In many ways these organizations resembled those that supported Sandino's struggle against U.S. occupation. They provided monetary aid to those challenging the established order and pressured the United States to change its policies in the region. They also raised international awareness on the issue of totalitarianism in the Caribbean, and in some instances came directly to the aid of revolutionaries imprisoned by the region's dictatorial regimes. However, unlike their predecessors, these organizations tended to be anti-communist, barring communist members and groups from participating in their organizations. Much like the revolutionaries they supported, these organizations espoused the ideals of the democratic left, seeking a middle path between the ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although ideologically different than those groups that aided Sandino, they proved equally valuable in challenging U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean and proved aid to the region's revolutionaries.

One of the most vocal opponents of the Somoza regime was the Inter-American Associate for Democracy and Freedom (IADF), a nongovernmental organization opposed to totalitarianism in all forms and committed to promoting political and civil liberties. In championing democracy, the IADF was avowedly anti-communist and anti-dictatorial, criticizing the region's communist parties while at the same time challenging its autocrats. Founded in Havana from the 12th to the 15th of May 1950, the IADF aimed to "unite hemispheric forces in stemming the march of totalitarian movements in Latin America and in fortifying the principles of democracy and human rights on the Western Hemisphere."¹⁴³ At the IADF's founding conference over two hundred representatives attended from twenty countries. Some of the notable first guests included Eduardo Frei, José Figueres, Juan Bosch, Rómulo Betancourt, Roger Baldwin, Pearl Buck, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., and Charles M. LaFollete. The conference was also attended by four U.S. Congressmen and representatives from a number of U.S. organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). A small contingent of Nicaraguan exiles attended as well. The Nicaraguan delegation consisted of Dr. Guillermo Urbina Vazquez, a founding member of the Independent Liberal Party (PLI), Rosendo Argüello, and Octavio Pasos Montiel, a Conservative politician jailed by Somoza García in 1944.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom (IADF), *Report of the Havana Conference, Havana, Cuba - May 12-15, 1950*, (No publication information), 1.

¹⁴⁴ IADF, *Report of the Havana Conference*, 7. "En memoria de los fundadores del PLI y sus mártires," *El Nuevo Diario*, January 25, 2012. <http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/opinion/239662>, (Accessed November 19, 2014);

The IADF pledged itself to challenge the “ever increasing threats of totalitarianism both from the right and left.” The organization would act as a think tank in which delegates would “consider the democratic crisis in the Hemisphere, recommend required action and establish a permanent organization to promote democracy and freedom.”¹⁴⁵ Without specifically naming any regimes, the IADF made it clear that democratic reform and the removal of the region’s dictators was foremost among its policies. It was also highly critical of continued U.S. closeness with Somoza García and Trujillo, petitioning officials in Washington in an attempt to influence policy. However, challenging the hemisphere’s dictators created a degree of backlash. Although almost exclusively supported by democratic proponents, Latin America’s dictators called it a “Kremlin plot” while the communists labeled it a “puppet of the State Department.”¹⁴⁶ Born between the two poles of communism and right-wing dictatorship, the IADF would be a critic of both and a champion of democracy in Latin America.

Its main publication, *Hemispherica*, emphasized the abuses of the hemisphere’s dictators, focusing a substantial amount of attention on the Somoza regime. Although Argentine president Juan Perón received considerably more attention from the IADF, between 1951 and 1961 Perón’s name appears in *Hemispherica* 654 times, compared to Somoza’s 99 appearances, the organization was still highly critical of the Nicaraguan dictator. When discussing the Somoza regime, the IADF pulled few punches, once referring to Somoza García and Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo as “troglodytes” and “anthropoidal types” who “use their countries as personal property.”¹⁴⁷ Besides calling the dictator names, the IADF regularly spoke out against Somoza García’s limiting of personal and political freedoms in Nicaragua. The organization criticized his

Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*, 136.

¹⁴⁵ IADF, *Report of the Havana Conference*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁶ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 224.

¹⁴⁷ *Hemispherica*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May-June 1951, 1.

decision to close the University of Granada because it produced too many lawyers, which the dictator viewed as “a menace to law and justice.”¹⁴⁸ Both before and after the assassination of Somoza García, the IADF also challenged the authenticity of the elections being held in Nicaragua. The organization highlighted Somoza García’s attempts to “frighten all opposition into silence” before the 1954 election. The IADF claimed that Somoza García had “assassinated an unknown number of pretended opponents, imprisoned [Emiliano] Chamorro and others,” as well as “hounded” the editor of a local newspaper until “he was compelled to seek asylum in the Costa Rican Embassy.”¹⁴⁹

Apart from highlighting Somoza García’s abuses, the IADF pursued many paths in its efforts to make the Western Hemisphere more democratic. They sponsored lecture tours of Latin American democrats and organized courses meant to raise awareness amongst North Americans about the challenges facing democracy in the hemisphere. Lectures were given by such notable Latin American leaders as Romulo Betancourt and José Figueres, as well as prominent North American experts on the hemisphere. In 1958, the IADF, in cooperation with the New York State Board of Education, began a fifteen-week course entitled “Latin America in Crisis.” The course covered a range of topics related to the current conditions in Latin America, including discussions of Nicaragua and the Somoza regime.¹⁵⁰ Francis Grant, the Secretary General of the IADF, led the course with guest lectures from Latin American intellectuals and statesmen as well as North American academics. The course was extended for another fifteen-week session in 1959, which was to be its finale. However, the IADF continued to host lectures.¹⁵¹

Possibly the IADF’s most important function was in the realm of public opinion. IADF

¹⁴⁸ *Hemispherica*, Vol. 1, No. 6, July-August 1951, 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March-May 1954, 2.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, No. 5, August-September, 1958, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, No. 6, September, 1959, 3.

members, besides highlighting the dictator's abuses, challenged U.S. policies by petitioning policymakers to reevaluate the relationship of the United States with its dictatorial allies. In December of 1953 an IADF delegation visited with Assistant Secretary of State John M. Cabot about his upcoming trip to Venezuela for the Tenth Inter-American Conference. The IADF was particularly concerned that U.S. support for the region's dictators was pushing oppressed peoples into the hands of communists and undermining true efforts towards democracy. The IADF criticized U.S. policies as having "given the peoples, victimized by these dictatorships, the conviction that this country [the United States] is no less a potential enemy to their freedom than communism itself." Following up these criticisms, the IADF recommended that "no economic aid be extended to any government which today is violating the Bogota and Chapultepec codes of human rights."¹⁵² Although it disliked the Guatemalan Communist Party, the IADF also criticized U.S. involvement in the Guatemalan coup, becoming increasingly more critical of Castillo Armas.¹⁵³ In the fall of 1954 as tensions mounted between Somoza García and José Figueres, the IADF, along with the Post War World Council, sent a telegram to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, "protesting against the alleged attempt of President Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua to invade Costa Rica." The two organizations called on Dulles to restrain Somoza García, fearing that his actions "may set off a real conflict in the hemisphere where dictators have continuously resented every movement for freedom and democratic progress."¹⁵⁴

Following the assassination of Somoza García in 1956, the IADF initially believed that democracy might bloom in Nicaragua. However, the actions of the dictator's sons soon quashed those hopes. Although it is difficult to judge the impact of appeals to U.S. officials, the IADF

¹⁵² *Hemispherica*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January-February, 1954, 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January-February, 1954, 2,5; Vol. 3, No. 2, March-May, 1954, 2-4; Vol. 3, No. 3, June-July, 1954, 6.

¹⁵⁴ "Nicaragua is Criticized," *New York Times*, August 4, 1954, 2.

was one of the most vocal, and politically well connected, opponents aligned against Somoza García on the international stage. It raised the political consciousness of those unfamiliar with the region and provided a network for democratic opposition to the region's dictators. It also questioned U.S. policies and the nature of that nation's relations with totalitarian regimes. The organization would continue to be a vocal opponent of the Somoza regime until its fall in 1979. Ironically, like many of the exiles and organizations on the democratic left, the IADF became a critic of the Sandinistas until the folding of the organization in 1983.

Another organization voicing its opposition to Somoza García was the Inter-American Confederation of Workers (Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores, CIT), which later became Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores, ORIT). Begun in 1948, the CIT was a multinational organization of American labor unions founded by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), whose leaders criticized U.S. intervention in Nicaragua in the 1920s and 1930s, in order to provide a democratic counter to the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Union. Much like the IADF, the founders of the CIT feared the threats that both totalitarianism and communism posed to the hemisphere. In 1951 the CIT joined the anti-communist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), becoming the organization's regional branch and changing its name to ORIT-ICFTU.¹⁵⁵ Although it relinquished some of its autonomy, the move failed to deter the organization's focus. In fact the merger amplified its message by allowing the organization to voice its concerns on an international, as opposed to a regional, scale.

As both an independent organization and as a branch of the ICFTU, ORIT-ICFTU remained committed to the antidicatorial struggle. Revealing the antagonism between the

¹⁵⁵ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 235.

organization and the region's dictators from its founding, representatives from every country in the hemisphere attended the founding convention of the CIT, with the exception of Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.¹⁵⁶ During the Second Convention of the Inter-American Confederation of workers in 1949, the organization drew up a "Plan of Action for fighting" the hemisphere's dictatorships that involved educating member organizations on the threat posed by totalitarian regimes and sending a message to the OAS, "stating that it is the opinion of this Convention that the real menace to peace in the Caribbean are the presence of tyrannies such as those of the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua; and that it is the duty of the Organization of American States to find ways of ending these dictatorships."¹⁵⁷ Highlighting the need for outside assistance in bringing down Somoza García, the Secretary General of the CIT, Luis Alberto Monge, wrote that free trade unions did not exist under the dictator and that "the long struggle against the tyrant has been and remains the principal problem facing the Nicaraguan people."¹⁵⁸

The ICFTU shared the CIT's distaste towards dictatorships, pledging "its support for those living under the rule of police state, not only in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries but also in Franco Spain and in Latin America, particularly Peru, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Argentina."¹⁵⁹ In 1949 the ICFTU passed a resolution "on the Dictatorship Regimes in Latin America" in which it denounced "dictatorship regimes of any kind and offers fullest collaboration to the end that people at present under regimes imposed by force may recover their democratic freedom."¹⁶⁰ After CIT joined the ICFTU, becoming ORIT-ICFTU, it continued to denounce the regime. In the wake of the Guatemalan coup, Monge

¹⁵⁶ "AFL Counter-Move to WFTU Shaping," *New York Times*, December 7, 1947, 56.

¹⁵⁷ Inter-American Confederation of Workers (ORIT-ICFTU), *Inter-American Labor News*, October, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 2, 3-4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, December, 1949, Vol. 2, No. 14, 5.

¹⁵⁹ "New World Labor Body Denounces Totalitarian Regimes in Manifesto," *New York Times*, December 10, 1949, 3.

¹⁶⁰ ORIT-ICFTU, *Inter-American Labor News*, January 1950, Vol. 3, No. 2, 4.

lamented labor's position in Latin America, estimating that Somoza García and the region's other dictatorships had "enslaved" 30 million workers. Similar to the views of the IADF, Monge was also critical of the United States and Communists, condemning the U.S. intervention "in the destiny of the people of Guatemala in the same way we deny any moral authority to Communists to attribute themselves authorship of the economic and social reform of Guatemala."¹⁶¹

Much like the IADF, ORIT also attempted to influence U.S. policymakers. In response to Somoza García's assault on Costa Rica in early 1955, ORIT-ICFTU members were quick to condemn the intervention. The presidents of the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) both issued statements in support of Costa Rica's struggle against Somoza García. They also sent telegrams to the Secretary of States Dulles. Chairman of the CIO Latin American Affairs Committee, O.A. Knight, expressed his "deep concern" over reports of an invasion and expressed his belief that the Costa Rican people deserved "the full support of the U.S. against the unprovoked anti-democratic assault upon their sovereignty and institutions." In a letter to the U.S. Department of States, Matthew Woll, First Vice President of the AFL, detailed how his organization "made every effort to arouse our government to take decisive preventive measures. Since the outbreak of hostilities against the Costa Rican democracy, we have sought to impress upon our government that it must move with vigor and dispatch to halt the military aggression."¹⁶² Going beyond simply simple opposition to totalitarianism, the leaders of the AFL and CIO both petitioned U.S. officials to not provide armaments to dictators.¹⁶³ U.S. labor, for the time being, stood in opposition to the dictators of the Caribbean, but they were not alone.

Besides U.S. labor leaders, many Latin American members of ORIT-ICFTU sent

¹⁶¹ Marion Wilhelm, "Free Labor Rallies after Perón Fall," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 30, 1955, 7.

¹⁶² ORIT-ICFTU, *Inter-American Labor News*, Vol. 5, No. 2, February, 1955, 1-2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, *15 años de sindicalismo libre interamericano, enero 1948-enero 1963* (ORIT-ICFTU: Mexico, 1963), 39.

messages of solidarity to Costa Rican officials as well as telegrams to the OAS pressuring the organization to intervene. Those groups condemning the Somoza García's invasion of Costa Rica were the United Mine Workers of North America, the Canadian Congress of Labor, the Confederation of Workers of Mexico, the Trade Union Confederation of Uruguay, the Union of Colombian Workers, the Confederation of Labor of Cuba, The Confederation of Labor of Puerto Rico, the Democratic Labor Committee in Exile of the Dominican Republic, and the National Agricultural Confederation of Panama. This multinational outpouring of political pressure from ORIT and ICFTU member organizations helped spur the United States and OAS into action. Writing a decade later the organization saw its quick action as being one of the main motivators of the United States and OAS's quick response to end conflict.¹⁶⁴

In appreciation for the moral support shown his country, the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Rev. Benjamin Nunez, issued a statement of thanks to the "the working people of the Americas" who "plainly demonstrated their will to resist war-like aggression and the further establishment of dictatorships in this hemisphere." Recognizing the importance of the statements of solidarity, the Costa Rican ambassador to the United States, Antonio A. Facio, said that "such declarations bring to the people of Costa Rica great moral fortitude and encouragement to overcome the difficulties that my country faces."¹⁶⁵ Although public opinion alone did not stop Somoza García's invasion of Costa Rica, it surely comforted Costa Ricans to know that they were not alone in their struggle.

In the wake of the invasion of Costa Rica, the ORIT-ICFTU issued a much stronger statement against dictatorships at its Third Congress held in San José, Costa Rica. José Figueres hosted the congress, which lasted from April 13-17, 1955, and anti-dictatorial sentiments

¹⁶⁴ ORIT-ICFTU, *15 años de sindicalismo libre interamericano*, 108.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., *Inter-American..Labor News*, Vol. 5, No. 3, March, 1955, 2.

dominated the assemblies' discussions. In regards to totalitarianism, the most important act to come from the congress was "The Democratic Trade Union Movement and the Dictatorships of America." The document "indicted the military dictators for denying their people freedom and for conspiring against democratic governments."¹⁶⁶ It called for democratic governments in Latin America to "immediately cease all aid or economic and military assistance to the dictators."¹⁶⁷ As a result of the document, the Third Congress passed a number of resolutions that recommended members organizations: pursue "a campaign of solidarity with the democratic trade union movements in the countries oppressed by dictatorship" in order to preserve that country's labor movement and protect its leaders; bar the participation of communist elements in the anti-dictatorial campaign; petition their governments to support the ideals of the "Charter of the United Nations, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association, and the Charter of the Organization of American States"; "request the ICFTU to bring charges, before the proper international agencies, against those governments that violate" civil and labor rights; continue "opposition to any form of intervention on the part of the dictatorships in the internal affairs of other countries;" advocate for increased autonomy of "colonial possessions and non-self-governing territories;" support the position taken by the AFL and CIO in requesting that the U.S. government "immediately stop giving economic, military, and diplomatic assistance to Latin American dictators" ; demand that foreign businesses in Latin America not intervene in the domestic politics of their host country; and initiate boycotts "when totalitarian governments attempt to destroy the freedom and independence of other countries."¹⁶⁸

Following the Third Congress, ORIT-ICFTU moved aggressively against the region's

¹⁶⁶ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 246.

¹⁶⁷ ORIT-ICFTU, *15 años de sindicalismo libre interamericano*, 39.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., *Inter-American..Labor News*, Vol. 5, No. 5, May, 1955, 2-3.

dictatorships. ORIT and ICFTU played crucial roles in toppling the Pérez Jiménez regime in Venezuela in 1958 and continued to denounce the Trujillo regime and petition for the removal of the Dominican Republic from the OAS.¹⁶⁹ Although not as vocal in its opposition to Somoza García, ORIT-ICFTU continued to challenge the Nicaraguan strongman. It reported on the deplorable working conditions Nicaraguan laborers endured, and petitioned the Nicaraguan government to alleviate their suffering.¹⁷⁰ Despite the attention Somoza García garnered in 1955, ORIT-ICFTU interest in Nicaragua waned as the Somoza regime restrained its adventurism and other regional events received greater attention. Three months before the assassination of the Nicaraguan dictator, the AFL-CIO issued a statement on the region's dictatorships. However, this statement, unlike past ones, highlighted Nicaragua as a country where "favorable developments have taken place" and failed to single out Somoza García as a blight on the region.¹⁷¹ Much like the IADF, ORIT-ICFTU and its member organizations believed that the assassination of Somoza García would bring about democracy in Nicaragua. However, the Somoza regime persisted and ORIT-ICFTU continued its struggle for democracy, criticizing Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Another multinational organization involved in the anti-Somoza movement was the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), which promoted press freedom throughout the hemisphere. In response to Somoza García's efforts to limit his nation's press, the IAPA regularly chastised and criticized the Nicaraguan dictator's actions, placing international attention and pressure on the regime. In voicing its criticism of Somoza García, the IAPA was much like the ORIT-ICFTU and the IADF, in that it raised international awareness by directing attention towards press

¹⁶⁹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 247-251.

¹⁷⁰ ORIT-ICFTU, *Inter-American..Labor News*, Vol. 5, No. 6, June, 1955, 2.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, No. 7, July, 1956, 1.

censorship. However, unlike these two organizations, the IAPA proved more conservative and better capable of bringing about change in Nicaragua. On a number of occasions the organization intervened on behalf of Nicaraguan newspapermen, helping them escape the country or flee torture at the hands of the Guardia Nacional. The IAPA also succeeded in securing concessions from the Somoza regime, and greater press freedom in Nicaragua. Although ideologically dissimilar, the IAPA shared the concerns of the ORIT-ICFTU and the IADF and proved better capable at bringing about change.¹⁷²

Founded in 1926, the IAPA did not become a force for democracy in the hemisphere until it was restructured in 1950. The realignment undermined the ability of governments to interfere in the organization by banning state-run presses and making the anti-dictatorial struggle a central tenet.¹⁷³ Membership in the organization crossed the political spectrum and included presses from throughout the Western Hemisphere. Despite its diversity, the organization was united in its opposition to the region's dictators. However, many of its members were not keen on revolutionaries either. Compared to the IADF and ORIT-ICFTU, the IAPA was considerably more conservative. One of the organizations most doggedly anti-dictatorial members, Jules Dubois of the *Chicago Tribune*, attacked both Somoza García and the Caribbean Legion. He was avidly anti-communist and saw the Caribbean Legion as a front for communist infiltration of the hemisphere.¹⁷⁴ However, acting as the chairman of the IAPA's Freedom of the Press Committee, Dubois held a pulpit to voice his concerns about the region's dictators, and one of his favorite targets was Somoza García.

The Nicaraguan dictator first drew the ire of the IAPA in September 1953 following the

¹⁷² Mary A. Gardner, *The Inter American Press Association: Its Fight for Freedom of the Press, 1926-1960* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

¹⁷³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷⁴ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 252-253.

passage of the restrictive “Zurita Law.” The law threatened “foreign correspondents stationed in Nicaragua” and attempted “to muzzle correspondents abroad writing for Nicaraguan papers.”¹⁷⁵ In response, Dubois sent Somoza García a telegram, pointing out that the dictator’s actions limited the freedom of the press, and promised to bring the issue before the IAPA general assembly the following month. At the meeting Nicaragua was listed as one of ten “freedom foes” in the western hemisphere along with Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. In each country Dubois highlighted how public officials sought to “destroy the independent voices of editors and publishers and to show increasing intolerance to criticism.” In response, Dubois suggested that IAPA send a message to the “president of the congress of each offending country” and request that they remove any press restrictions.¹⁷⁶ Despite the efforts of Dubois and the IAPA, the Zurita Law would outlive its creator and not be abolished until 1957, when Somoza García’s son Luis, now the president of Nicaragua, eliminated the law in an effort to improve the image of his regime. Although it took the death of Somoza García, the regime ultimately acquiesced to the demands of the IAPA.

Besides defeating the Zurita Law, the IAPA succeeded in protecting newspapermen in Nicaragua. Dubois, and other members of the IAPA, paid particularly close attention to the Somoza regime because two of its biggest opponents were Nicaraguan publishers, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro of *La Prensa* and Hernán Robleto of *Flecha*. On two occasions the IAPA interceded on behalf of Chamorro and Robleto in order to secure their safety. Following the April 4th coup, Somoza García accused both men of involvement in the plot to assassinate him. The Guardia Nacional captured Chamorro, who was a member of Dubois’s Freedom of the Press Committee,

¹⁷⁵ “Nicaragua Curbs Press,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1953, 6.

¹⁷⁶ “10 Latin Countries Called Press Foes,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1953, 6.

and subjected him to intense torture.¹⁷⁷ Robleto escaped to the Costa Rican embassy, where he took asylum. Interceding on behalf of the Nicaraguan newspapermen, the president of the IAPA, Miguel Lanz Duret of Mexico, traveled to Nicaragua and ultimately secured a safe-conduct pass for Robleto.¹⁷⁸ Chamorro languished in the “Cuatro de Costura,” the notorious Somoza torture chamber in the Presidential Palace, for over a year. Ultimately Dubois secured his release after numerous visits to Nicaragua on his behalf.¹⁷⁹ He also obtained a pledge from Somoza García to end press censorship in the wake of the April 4th coup.¹⁸⁰ The IAPA again rescued Chamorro following the assassination of Somoza García in 1956. Chamorro was accused of complicity in the plot and tortured in order to extract a confession, this time for nearly six months. In March 1957, an IAPA member traveled to Managua and was able to convince the Somozas to allow Chamorro to go into exile in Costa Rica.¹⁸¹

Although the specific reasons why Somoza García and his son Luis cooperated with the IAPA remain unclear, it can be assumed that they recognized the importance of international public opinion in securing their regime. A keen observer of the importance of popular opinion, Somoza García hired a public relations firm to churn out news articles about Nicaragua and send them to major U.S. newspapers.¹⁸² Dependent on continued U.S. support, the Somoza García and his son Luis recognized the importance of maintaining good relations with the U.S. press. If the U.S. domestic press came out in opposition to their regime, the U.S. government would not be far behind. The more moderate position of the IAPA, in comparison to the IADF and the ORIT-ICFTU, would have also made the Somozas more malleable to pressure from that organization.

¹⁷⁷ Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, *Estirpe sangrieta: los Somoza* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Triángulo, 1959), 60.

¹⁷⁸ Gardner, *The Inter American Press Association*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Ameringer, *Democratic Left in Exile*, 254.

¹⁸⁰ “Nicaragua Pledges End of Press Curb,” *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1954, 3.

¹⁸¹ Chamorro, *Estirpe sangrieta*, 259, 257. Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 254-255.

¹⁸² Douglass Cater, *Power in Washington: A Critical Look at Today's Struggle to Govern in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Random House, 1964), 214-216.

Although the IAPA was critical of Somoza García, it was also critical of his enemies. The U.S. press would remain an important battleground between the Somoza regime and its opponents in the following decades.

The IAPA, IADF, and ORIT-ICFTU represent the part of the constellation of multinational organizations either aiding in the effort to remove the Somoza regime from power or attempting to modify it. Although their efforts often met with little success, these groups pressured the Somoza regime and were able to gain some concessions. With the assassination of Somoza García in 1956, all three organizations believed that Nicaragua was on the path towards reform and a democratic future, and the nation fell from their sight. However, Somoza García's sons proved to be as brutal and corrupt as their father. The IAPA, IADF, and ORIT-ICFTU would continue to monitor Nicaragua and cast a critical eye on Nicaragua for the next three decades, challenging both the Somoza regime and their successors.

Conclusion

By the late 1950s, the alignment of Caribbean exiles and democratic multinational organizations had failed to unseat the Somoza regime and bring democracy to Nicaragua. Luis Somoza Debayle enticed many Nicaraguan exiles back to the country with a limited amount of democratic reform. He also convinced many of the multinational organizations that he was a democrat. Building on their father's successes in the 1950s, Luis, and later his younger brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle, further ingratiated themselves with the United States, strengthening their family's hold on power. Although the plan to remove the Arbenz government was his brainchild, Somoza García's willingness to aid the United States in the Guatemalan coup demonstrated his regime's loyalty in the tense Cold War climate. The Nicaraguan dictator's

actions in the late 1940s and 1950s solidified Nicaragua as a U.S. ally and resolute counterrevolutionary. However, like their father, the younger Somozas pursued an independent foreign policy that was not entirely beholden to the United States, especially Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who resembled his father in both his brutality and independence. Although they were closely aligned with the United States, the Somozas continued to put the survival of the regime first.

Ultimately the success of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959, dramatically changed the climate of the Caribbean. It marked the death knell of the Democratic Left. The Cuban *foco* revolutionary model ultimately supplanted that of the democratic revolutionaries. Later insurrections against the Somoza regime more closely resembled the revolutionary model of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro than that of José Figueres and Rosendo Argüello. Carlos Fonseca Amador and the founders of the Sandinista National Liberation Front looked to Cuba, not the United States for guidance and assistance. For many Nicaraguan revolutionaries of the 1940s and 1950s, the Cuban Revolution proved an enticing alternative. Ironically, Castro, Guevara, and the other Cuban revolutionaries, who would supplant the Latin American democrats, had cut their teeth fighting in the antidictatorial struggle. In many ways the democratic struggle in the Caribbean birthed the Cuban Revolution that would ultimately supplant it. Finally, the Cuban Revolution pushed many out of the revolutionary movement and into the counterrevolutionary camp. Fearing the specter of communism, many Nicaraguan revolutionaries sided with the regime, viewing it as the lesser evil. This schism would not be repaired until the escalation of the revolution in the late 1970s.

It is this schism of the anti-dictatorial struggle of the 1940s and 1950s that birthed both the FSLN and the Contras who came to oppose the victorious FSLN. The exiled Nicaraguan and

adviser of José Arévalo, Edelberto Torres Espinoza, would become a mentor to Carlos Fonseca Amador in the 1960s. Through Torres and others exiles, the experiences of the anti-Somoza movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s would directly influence the development of the FSLN. Also, many of the Nicaraguan exiles of the 1950s proved to be valuable allies of the Sandinistas in the overthrow of the Somoza regime, but after the success of the revolution, many would become the largest critics and opponents of the FSLN. Those on the democratic left continued their opposition to the Somoza regime and collaborated, although reluctantly, with the Sandinistas to oust Somoza Debayle in 1979. However, the alliance between many of the democratic exiles and the FSLN ended shortly after the success of the revolution, with many, such as Arturo Cruz Jr., again going into exile and leading the Contras. Much as they had done against the Somozas, these exiled leaders propagandized against Nicaragua's ruling regime and sought its demise. Just as the struggle of the 1940s and 1950s included many of the same actors as that of the 1920s and 1930s, many of the same names would appear in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Whereas the Cuban Revolution altered the democratic revolutionary movement, it provided the Somoza regime with a greater opportunity to integrate itself into the international counterrevolutionary front. In the early 1960s the United States would again call on the Somozas to help remove an unfriendly regime, this time in Cuba. Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution became the bogeyman which the Somozas would use to justify their oppressive regime. The Cuban revolution also inspired the leaders of the FSLN and provided the model which would eventually bring down the Somoza regime. However, for the 1960s and 1970s it was the threat which justified the continued existence of the Somozas.

The IADF, ORIT-ICFTU, and IAPA continued to be vocal critics of the Somoza regime,

especially after the Luis death and the ascension to power of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. During the 1960s and 1970s these three organizations continued to be outspoken opponents of the Somoza regime and were soon joined by other organizations. Inspired by the anti-war and decolonization movements of the 1960s, this new wave of organizations abandoned the avowed anti-communism of earlier groups and espoused a wider range of political ideals. These included pacifist, student, leftist, and grassroots solidarity groups aligned with the ideals of the FSLN. These organizations cooperated closely with the older groups until the victory of the FSLN, at which point divisions between these multinational organizations emerged. Moving into the 1960s, Nicaragua's revolutionary current would broaden its scope and in the process lay the foundations for future success.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BIRTH OF THE FSLN AND THE GROWTH OF THE COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ALLIANCE

The 1960s proved a pivotal decade in the development of both Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents. Spurred in large part by the success of the Cuban Revolution, the decade saw a dramatic transformation of both currents. Nicaragua's revolutionary movement moved left politically, with the more moderate revolutionaries of the 1940s and 1950s being supplanted by those with socialist or communist affiliations. Foremost among these leftist organizations was the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Despite suffering a number of defeats at the hands of the Somoza regime, the period was one of significant growth for the Sandinistas, who developed international ties to other revolutionary movements, particularly with the Castro government in Cuba. Incidentally the Cuban Revolution and the expansion of leftist revolution bolstered the Somoza regime as well, pushing it closer to the United States and its counterrevolutionary allies. Strengthening its anticommunist credentials, and enriching itself at the same time, the Somoza regime aided the United States in its attempts to remove the Castro government by participating in the Bay of Pigs invasion and supporting anti-Castro Cuban exiles. In building their international alliances, the Somozas and the FSLN each relied on a network of personal relationships to forward their interests, relying on family members, friends, and other associates, while integrating outsiders into their personal and business networks. These personal relationships formed the foundations of international networks that strengthened both the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents.

The Cuban Revolution proved a dramatic catalyst for change in the Caribbean and Central America during the 1960s. The success of the revolution introduced a self-avowed communist regime into what U.S. officials had long viewed as the "backyard" of the United

States. With its anti-imperialist rhetoric and ties to the communist world, the Cuban Revolution proved to be a source of anxiety for U.S. policymakers. In Latin America, it marginalized more moderate revolutionaries, pushing many into alliances with less democratic, anticommunist regimes. In Nicaragua, former opponents of the Somoza regime began cooperating with the regime, fearing a repeat of the Cuban Revolution in Nicaragua. At the same time, Cuba demonstrated to many revolutionaries the impact of a more militant approach to regime change. Initially an advocate of reform through the traditional avenues of power, Carlos Fonseca became an advocate of violent change in Nicaragua following the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Revolution also provided Nicaraguan revolutionaries with a valuable ally in the region. Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and other Cuban revolutionaries made no secret of their distaste for the Somozas and other similarly despotic regimes in the Caribbean. They sought the removal of these regimes and aided those with comparable goals, as long as their ideologies aligned. Cuba proved to be a bastion of support for Nicaraguan rebels and an ally in a hostile region.

Through Cuba, Third World internationalism found expression in the Americas during the 1960s. Cuban revolutionaries sought to export their anti-imperialist struggle to neighboring countries including Nicaragua. Out of this milieu of Third World internationalism emerged the FSLN in 1961. Named in homage to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), the FSLN looked to Algeria, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China as revolutionary models, before settling on the *foco* strategy of the Cuban Revolution. Cuba proved invaluable to the early growth of the FSLN, providing its members with military training and aid as well as sanctuary following failed insurgencies. Cuba also proved a conduit for cooperation with national liberation struggles outside the Americas, with members of the FSLN training and participating in operations carried out by such organizations as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the People's

Army of Vietnam. Although this cooperation often did not exist on an official level until after the success of the revolution, these revolutionaries built connections that the FSLN would later prove invaluable.

In opposition to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries stood the Somoza regime, now headed by Somoza García's sons, Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The younger Somozas continued their father's process of seeking international allies and ingratiating the regime with the United States. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the Cuban Revolution helped cement ties between the Somozas and the United States. In the late 1950s, many U.S. officials disliked the Somoza regime and advocated distancing the U.S. from it. However, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, U.S. officials found themselves more accommodating to the Somozas. Fearing the expansion of revolution elsewhere in the hemisphere, the United States drew Nicaragua into its web of anticommunist alliances, providing the Somozas with increased military and economic support. The CIA in particular became a bastion of pro-Somoza sentiment in the United States government. Due in no small part to their own lobbying efforts with U.S. officials, the Somozas created networks with the United States and its allies that further strengthened their regime.

At the heart of both the Somoza regime and the Sandinista efforts to build networks of international support were personal relationships. Both entities relied on familial, friendly, and business relationships to forward their interests in Nicaragua and abroad. Never numbering more than 100 members over the course of the decade, the Sandinistas nonetheless built a strong international network largely based on family or personal ties. The Sandinistas often recruited their friends and family members to join the movement, and once outside of Nicaragua relied on those connections to facilitate the operation of the revolution. Mothers and fathers would support Sandinistas in exile, while cousins and siblings abroad would connect Sandinistas with like-

minded revolutionaries. The Somoza regime also built an international network of influence based on personal relationships, placing family members in positions of influence and integrating important people into business and familial relationships. The relatives of the Somozas often represented the regime's interests to U.S. officials, lobbying for increased U.S. support. The Somozas also excelled at integrating allies into their networks by developing close business or personal relations with those who might aid them. The efforts by both the Sandinistas and the Somoza regime represented the internationalization of the traditional patronage relationships that so characterized Nicaraguan social and political life.

Nicaragua and the Cuban Revolution

Nicaraguan author Jesús Miguel Blandón characterized 1959 as "the most violent year of the Somoza era, before 1978."¹ The year was marked by numerous invasions of Nicaragua from Costa Rica and Honduras, as well as student protests and worker strikes. Tensions within Nicaragua had been building since the assassination of Somoza García in 1956, and the assumption of the presidency by his son Luis Somoza shortly after. A major decline in the price of cotton also spurred unrest in Nicaragua as landowners cut the number of seasonal laborers. These two factors created an atmosphere increasingly ripe for revolution, and the success of the Cuban Revolution inspired many Nicaraguans to take up arms against the Somoza regime. Initially many of those who struck against the Somozas were former members of the Caribbean Legion, while others were members of either the Socialist or Communist camp. Although these two groupings of revolutionaries struggled against the Somoza regime, they also saw each other as potential enemies, only coming together in the late 1970s. Despite their divisions, these

¹ Jesús Miguel Blandón, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador* (Managua: Centro de Publicaciones, Departamento de Propaganda y Educación Política de F.S.L.N, 1982), 82.

movements did momentarily succeed in bringing about some political change in the Nicaraguan government. The uprisings of the late 1950s convinced the Somozas that they could not rule Nicaragua as their father had, and that they would need to institute some democratic reforms, or at least create the illusion of doing so. This movement towards reform was also due to pressure from the United States, which viewed the Caribbean's autocratic states as fertile grounds for unrest and possible communist infiltration. At the same time the United States also provided Nicaragua with substantial military aid and drew it into its regional alliances. In part the Cuban Revolution, with the ensuing unrest in Nicaragua, brought about nearly a decade of reform; however, it simultaneously drew the Somoza regime closer to the United States and its international system of counterrevolutionary support.

On January 1, 1959, Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic as Cuban revolutionaries advanced on Havana. With Batista's departure, Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement quickly filled the power vacuum in Cuba. In the coming years Cuba became a bastion for revolutionary activity, dramatically altering the political climate of the Caribbean. The Cuban government encouraged revolutionary activity in the Caribbean, providing financial, material, and moral support for those who sought to oust the region's less democratic governments. Revolutionaries flocked to the island in order to curry the favor of Castro's regime. Much like Costa Rica under Figueres, Cuba became a hub for revolutionary adventurism, attracting many Nicaraguans determined to bring down the Somozas. Among those revolutionaries attracted to Cuba were many young Nicaraguans who would found the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). For these young Nicaraguans, Cuba became a safe haven and base of operations. It also became a place to understand Nicaragua's revolutionary past, and for Carlos Fonseca Amador, the founder of the FSLN, to become acquainted with Augusto Sandino.

Beginning in early 1959, Cuba became a node for revolutionary activity, connecting Nicaraguans to a broader network of support, as well as their past.

Unsurprisingly, the Somoza regime saw the success of the Cuban Revolution, and its attraction of Nicaraguan revolutionaries, as a threat to its hold on power. The new Cuban government made no secret of its distaste for the Somoza regime and its desire to see it removed from power. Its active support for Nicaraguan revolutionaries drew the ire of the Somozas, who actively sought the destruction of the Cuban Revolution, participating in the Bay of Pigs invasion and other U.S. efforts to instigate regime change in Cuba. Nicaragua also joined various military and economic alliances, and participated in counterinsurgency activities, further strengthening ties between the United States and the Somozas. This was done to protect the Somoza regime from the existential threat that the Cuban Revolution posed; however, it was also a calculated assessment of the geopolitical climate, which the Somozas saw as benefitting a closer relationship with the United States. The Somozas knew that without U.S. assistance their regime would crumble to either insurrection or invasion. Only a close relationship with the United States, and the threat of U.S. retaliation, kept the Somoza regime safely afloat in the tumultuous Caribbean. This special relationship would serve the Somozas until the United States withdrew much of its support in the late 1970s, thus providing Nicaraguan revolutionaries the opportunity to topple the Somoza regime. Despite the collapse of the Somoza regime, Nicaragua's counterrevolutionaries would continue to utilize the connections between the United States and its allies that grew from the struggle against Cuba.

The success of the Cuban Revolution, in the short term, further splintered Nicaragua's already divided opposition to the Somoza regime. On the one hand, it marginalized democratic revolutionaries, pushing many into alliances with the despotic elements they sought to

overthrow. Conservative revolutionaries, such as Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, initially refused to cooperate with leftist groups; and leftist revolutionaries felt similarly, with Carlos Fonseca at one time calling Chamorro a “snake.”² Those on the left became more radicalized, traveling to Cuba in the hopes of gaining training and support for their revolutionary endeavors. Out of the revolutionary milieu birthed by the Cuban Revolution emerged the FSLN, a group of young Marxist revolutionaries with ideological and personal ties to Augusto Sandino. Much like Sandino, the members of the FSLN were internationally minded in their struggle against the Somoza regime, seeking solidarity with other national liberation struggles as well as organizations outside of Nicaragua. Over the course of the 1960s the FSLN would sharpen their tactics and solidify their connections to supportive organizations the world over.

Ironically, the Cuban Revolution, which birthed the organization that would eventually fell the Somoza dynasty, also strengthened relations between the Nicaraguan despots and the United States. Long accustomed to playing on U.S. fears of international communism, the Somozas played upon those apprehensions in order to garner increased economic and military aid. Although this aid failed to bolster the Nicaraguan economy, it did swell the pockets of the Somozas and lead to the growth of the *Guardia Nacional*, which became one of the largest militaries in the region by the mid-1970s. U.S. aid aside, the relationship with the United States also led to increased cooperation with like-minded governments. Nicaragua entered into overt and covert regional military alliances intended to counter Cuban-inspired revolutionaries, such as the Central American Defense Council and later Operation Condor. The Somozas, particularly Anastasio Somoza Debayle, also cultivated their ties with U.S. officials. These formal and informal ties strengthened the Somoza regime, bolstering Nicaragua’s counterrevolutionary

² Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 128.

current; however, changes in the international community would tip the balance in favor of the revolutionaries.

The Cuban Revolution held deep implications for the future of Nicaragua; however, its origins could be located in the past struggles for Caribbean independence. The Cuban Revolution in many ways grew out of and modeled itself after the Caribbean Legion and the other antidictatorial revolutionaries of the 1940s and 1950s. Many of those involved in ousting Batista had either cut their teeth in expeditions against Caribbean dictators or been trained by members of the Caribbean Legion. Before his fateful attack on the Moncada barracks, a young Fidel Castro was a member of the stillborn Cayo Confites invasion of the Dominican Republic.³ While in Guatemala prior to the coup against Arbenz, Ernesto "Che" Guevara gained military training from Rodolfo Romero, a Nicaraguan revolutionary who would later come to Che for assistance with an insurrection against the Somozas.⁴ Alberto Bayo, the former Spanish Loyalist and Caribbean legionnaire, helped train and eventually joined Castro's July 26th Movement before becoming a general in the Cuban military.⁵ Former leaders of the Caribbean Legion, such as Jose Figueres and Carlos Prío Socarras, lauded the Cuban revolutionaries and extended them support. Figueres's relationship with the Cubans, although at times tenuous, proved long lasting, and ultimately one of the most crucial for the survival and success of the Sandinistas as well. Eventually relations between the Cuba and the Caribbean Legion soured. However, Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries owed much to the antidictatorial struggle.

Because of their close ties to the Caribbean Legion, it should come as no surprise that Cuban revolutionaries aligned themselves with those seeking to oust the region's dictators. The

³ Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11.

⁴ Blandón, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 101.

⁵ Charles D. Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables: University of Florida Press, 1974), 177, 192.

new Cuban government made it known that it was an enemy of Latin America's autocrats. At a press conference shortly after the success of the revolution, Castro remarked that Nicaraguans should follow the example of Cubans and "take to the mountains and fight for their freedom" and that "relations between Cuba and the dictatorial governments would worsen."⁶ No revolutionary in the Cuban government embodied the desire to export the revolution abroad more than the Argentine Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who became the driving force for undermining the region's dictatorships. In a speech given on January 27, Che laid out a vision of continental revolution, claiming that "the Revolution has put the Latin American tyrants on guard because these are the enemies of popular regimes."⁷ In order to challenge these tyrants, the Cuban government made it clear that they would help those seeking to undermine the region's dictatorships. In an interview with "Meet the Press," Castro pledged to welcome those fleeing the region's dictatorships and provide them "every assistance" in their efforts to overthrow oppressive governments.⁸ With Castro's backing, Che began recruiting and cultivating revolutionaries to fight against the region's dictators. Heeding Che's call, Caribbean insurgents flocked to Cuba in late January, 1959, many of whom were Nicaraguan exiles and revolutionaries.⁹ This did not escape the attention of U.S. officials, who were concerned about Cuban, particularly Che's, contemplation and planning of "active support to revolutionary activities against Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay."¹⁰ The overriding fear of many U.S. officials was the expansion of communism. However, many of those traveling to Cuba in early 1959 shared these concerns, yet they wanted to remove the region's despots.

⁶ Daniel M. Braddock, "Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Cuba*, Vol. VI, 383.

⁷ John Lee Anderson, *Che: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 393.

⁸ R. Hart Phillips, "Castro Charges U.S. Interference," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1959, 8.

⁹ Phillips, "A Revolt in Haiti Urged From Cuba," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1959, 1.

¹⁰ "Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs' Special Assistant (Hill)" *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba*, Vol. VI, 396.

Cuba proved to be particularly attractive to former members of the Caribbean Legion or the more moderate antidictatorial struggle, in large part because of the Cuban Revolution's open opposition to the Caribbean's dictatorships, but also because the leftist and anti-U.S. rhetoric that would become the hallmark of Castro's regime was less pronounced in early 1959. In the months before and immediately after the ouster of Bautista, Castro and his supporters adhered to a more moderate rhetoric that sought to placate the United States and avoid arousing the ire of Cuba's northern neighbor. The Cuban government in early 1959 also appeared more moderate; its new president was a judge and the prime minister a lawyer. It also pledged itself to creating a "democratic bloc" in the Caribbean with the new government in Venezuela, which was led by antidictatorial leader and Caribbean Legion ally Rómulo Betancourt.¹¹ In early 1959 the island appeared no more radical than Jose Figueres' Costa Rica in 1948.

Despite its initial placid façade, Fidel Castro and his allies envisioned a more revolutionary path for Cuba, one which supported leftist movements and stood in opposition to the machinations of the Caribbean's more moderate and conservative elements. In the early months of 1959, Cuba walked a fine line between not antagonizing its northern neighbor, while staying true to its revolutionary mission. Stepping back from its initial inflammatory rhetoric, Castro claimed that Cuba "did not export revolution" and that "no armed expeditions could leave Cuban territory for other countries."¹² On April 18 the Cuban government even raided "a Nicaraguan rebel training camp" and arrested 100 guerrillas at Pinar del Rio as a sign of its commitment to maintaining peace in the Caribbean.¹³ However, these actions might be better understood as a means of deflecting attention from Cuba's continued support for revolutionary movements. Less than a month, later three major invasions with ties to Cuba would be launched,

¹¹ Domínguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, 16-20.

¹² Anderson, *Che*, 418.

¹³ Phillips, "Nicaragua Rebels Arrested in Cuba," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1959, 1.

two against Nicaragua and one against the Dominican Republic. All three would ultimately fail, but they showed that despite its best efforts to appear nonthreatening, the Cuban government continued to support efforts to topple the region's dictators.

The Nicaraguans who traveled to Cuba represented two political camps: one on the left and another on the right. There were those on the right, such as Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who represented Nicaragua's traditional Conservative party, long an opponent of the Somoza regime. Others, such as Rodolfo Romero, Rafael Somarriba, and Carlos Fonseca, embodied the youthful leftist movement of socialists and communists bent on not only removing the Somozas but dramatically altering Nicaraguan society as well. Although these two factions shared a desire to see the Somoza regime fall, they viewed each other as competition for the crown. Chamorro and his allies were staunchly anticommunist, while those on the left viewed the Conservatives and other members of Nicaragua's traditional political elite as little better than the Somozas. Ultimately, the leftists garnered Cuban support, while the Conservatives found only disappointment. However, that did not deter them from striking against the Somoza regime.

Conservative opposition to the Somoza regime remained strong in the late 1950s, and included many Nicaraguans who signed the Caribbean Pact and fought in the Caribbean Legion. These revolutionaries, most living in exile, continued to plot against the Somoza government and occasionally launch insurrections, which the *Guardia Nacional* quickly squashed. Like Rosando Argüello, these insurgents were less concerned with transforming Nicaraguan society, and more interested in removing the Somoza regime from power. By the late 1950s, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the owner and editor of the Nicaraguan opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, was one of the most prominent members of this movement and the leader of an exile organization known as the National Revolutionary Movement (MRN). Under the nominal leadership of Lacayo Farfan

and operated out of Costa Rica, the MRN received support from long-time Somoza adversary Jose Figueres and his political party, Liberación Nacional. Despite this Costa Rican aid, the MRN continued to look for allies who might support them in their efforts to remove the Somozas.

The MRN saw the Cuban Revolution as one such ally. In an effort to gain further support for their revolutionary movement, Chamorro traveled to Cuba in early 1959 in order to curry the favor of the new regime. However, he met stiff resistance from Cuban officials. Weary of supporting movements that did not share their ideology, Cuban officials discouraged or prevented some revolutionaries from operating in Cuba.¹⁴ The MRN represented one such revolutionary organization, and after meeting with Chamorro, Che instructed him to throw his support behind a group of Nicaraguan communists under the leadership of Rafael Somaribba.¹⁵ Because of his avowed anticommunism, the young Nicaraguan newspaperman declined the offer, to which Che responded: “Look, you guys, I agree with Fidel. I don’t think you are capable of making a revolution in Nicaragua, and in fact I tend to think we should throw our support to the more progressive group. But if you are set on organizing a movement, go ahead and do it, and if you do manage to get yourselves onto Nicaraguan territory and liberate a piece of it, then we would be jackasses if we didn’t support you.”¹⁶ With hesitant approval but no support, Chamorro returned to Costa Rica and pushed forward with the MRN’s invasion of Nicaragua.

Knowing that Cuban-backed groups of Nicaraguans were also moving against the Somozas, the MRN moved with a sense of urgency to remove the Somoza regime before “el Che

¹⁴ “Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State,” *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 479.

¹⁵ Organization of American States (OAS), *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications, Volume 1, 1948-1959* (Washington D.C.: Organization of American States, 1964), 380.

¹⁶ Blandón, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 86.

and the Communists.”¹⁷ The members of the MRN envisioned a quick invasion of Nicaragua by air, which would receive broad public support and topple the Somoza regime. With the aid of Costa Rican officials, and unbeknownst to the president of Costa Rica Mario Echandi, the Nicaraguan rebels flew two planes from Costa Rica into Nicaraguan territory on May 31 and June 1, landing at Mollejone and Olama. Both groups of rebels were immediately cut off by the *Guardia Nacional*, and the popular uprising that they had anticipated never materialized. Despite the best efforts of Figueres, Betancourt, and other members of the antidictatorial struggle to garner international support for the rebels, the movement collapsed on June 11 without having fired a shot.¹⁸ Weeks later Costa Rican forces found the MRN’s training camp at Punta Llorna and negotiated the surrender of the remaining revolutionaries in Costa Rica. In less than a month the conspiracy ended, and so too did that last military incursion by Nicaragua’s moderate opposition.

The MRN’s invasion at Olama and Mollejone marked the end of an era of noncommunist militant opposition to the Somoza regime. For his involvement in the plot, Chamorro spent the next nine years in prison, and upon his release he resumed editorship of *La Prensa* and remained critical of the Somozas. Although he continued to challenge the regime, Chamorro gave up armed insurrection and would not lead another coup. Anticommunist and antidictatorial revolutionaries would not mount another armed rebellion against the Somoza regime until they aligned themselves with the FSLN in the late 1970s. It also marked the end of efforts by the Caribbean’s democracies to actively remove their dictatorial neighbors. Recognizing that continued military ventures would only agitate the United States and threaten their positions, Latin American leaders restrained their antidictatorial rhetoric and support for revolutionary

¹⁷ "Cuba Said to Aid Nicaragua Reds" *New York Times*, August 23, 1959, 33.

¹⁸ OAS, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance Applications, Volume 1, 1948-1959*, 380.

organizations.¹⁹ Like the United States, these leaders feared that any unrest might be taken advantage of by the Cubans for their own ends. By the early 1960s the leftist revolutionaries supported by Cuba became the flag bearers for the movement against the Caribbean's dictators, and in the case of Nicaragua some of these revolutionaries held close ties to Sandino.

The Cuban Revolution inspired, and indirectly aided, revolutionary activity in Nicaragua before it even succeeded in ousting Batista. In the summer of 1958, Ramón Raudales planned his final invasion of Nicaragua from exile in Honduras. The efforts of the Cuban guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, which were "discussed with great interest and optimism in the Republic of Honduras," were one of the major inspirations for Raudales to take action.²⁰ A former general of Sandino's and conspirator in a failed 1948 invasion of Nicaragua, Raudales began plotting with exiled members of Nicaragua's Liberal and Conservative parties for a renewed offensive against the Somozas. In preparation for the invasion, the revolutionaries received a large number of arms hidden in refrigerators, including 25 "Veretta" Italian machine guns that were initially intended for Castro's guerrillas.²¹ They also attracted Nicaraguan exiles from throughout the region, as well as Mexicans, Cubans, and other Central Americans. Raudales's force, which numbered roughly twenty-five fighters and called itself the Revolutionary Army of Nicaragua, slipped into Nicaragua in early September. For one month Raudale's band evaded Somozas' forces, ambushing small groups of government soldiers, before being cornered and defeated by the *Guardia Nacional* in a skirmish in which Raudales' jaw was shot off. The old Sandinista ultimately succumbed to his wounds and his force disbanded, but it marked the beginning of an increased period of anti-Somoza activity inspired or supported by the Cuban Revolution.

¹⁹ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 297.

²⁰ Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

The survivors of Raudales' invasion retreated to Honduras and began regrouping for another assault on the Somoza regime. Eventually many in Raudales's band traveled to Cuba to join new ventures to Nicaragua. As discussed previously, they were not alone in their journey, as many Nicaraguans, particularly those on the left, sought Cuban assistance in 1959. In February 1959, the leftist Nicaraguans in Cuba formed an organization known as the Committee for the Liberation of Nicaragua, which published a call to arms against the Somoza regime known as the "Havana Letter." A revolutionary movement would arise from this organization, and would attempt and fail to remove the Somozas from power, but in the process lay the groundwork for the FSLN.

Initially, Nicaragua was one of the first targets for Che's revolutionary agenda, and in early 1959 he began recruiting Nicaraguans to carry it out. One of his earliest recruits was Rafael Somarriba, a former *Guardia Nacional* member and longtime opponent of the Somozas. Somarriba served as the presidential guard to Leonardo Arguello, and following the 1947 coup, accompanied him into exile in Mexico. It was there that Somarriba was first contacted by Nicaraguan exiles and other members of the Caribbean Legion. However, after one of Somozas agents discredited a member of the coup, Somarriba moved to the United States and remained there until 1959 when he traveled to Mexico and then Cuba.²² Somarriba arrived in Cuba in early January, nearly a month before the majority of Nicaraguan exiles, and therefore better able to gain the ear of Che Guevara, who chose Somarriba to lead the invasion of Nicaragua. According to Somarriba, he and Che became close friends, with Che often visiting Somarriba, and the Nicaraguan spending time with the family of the Commander of the Rebel Army of Cuba.²³ In

²² Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 102-103.

²³ Excerpts from Somarriba's memoir, which were published in a two-part editorial. Rafael Somarriba, "El Che y la guerrilla nicaragüense" *El Nuevo Diario*, October 27, 2007, <http://archivo.elnuevodiario.com.ni/especiales/223753->

the early spring of 1959, Somarriba, with the backing of Che, began training a group of Nicaraguan exiles and Cuban internationalists for an invasion of Nicaragua. However, he first needed to find a base of operations in Central America.

In preparation for the coming invasion of Nicaragua, Che instructed Somarriba to visit prominent political figures in Mexico and Central America in order to gain support for an assault against the Somoza regime. Somarriba garnered few pledges of assistance. However, he did meet with the president of Honduras, Ramon Villeda, who promised to help him create a base along the Nicaraguan border at a hacienda named Las Lomas.²⁴ Because of long standing territorial disputes between Nicaragua and Honduras, which had recently sharpened tensions between the two nations, Villeda was willing to aid the attempt to overthrow the Somozas. However, the guarantees of the Honduran president did not necessarily ensure the support of everyone in the Honduran government. Villeda did not have the allegiance of the military, which was strongly anticommunist and weary of supporting revolutions in Nicaragua. In order to support the Somarriba, Villeda bribed members of his own military and had to act with the utmost secrecy in order to avoid raising the ire of the military. Despite having the support of the Honduran president, Somarriba walked a dangerous line between the Honduran military, which would surely halt his efforts, and the Somoza regime, which would stop at nothing to thwart his invasion.

In the spring of 1959, Somarriba made a number of trips between Honduras and Cuba, funneling weapons and creating a shell company to hide his activity.²⁵ At the same time, Che utilized his personal connections to recruit experienced revolutionaries for the invasion. Because

che-guerrilla-nicaraguense/. "El Che y la guerrilla nicaragüense" *El Nuevo Diario*, November 3, 2007, <http://archivo.elnuevodiario.com.ni/especiales/224231-che-guerrilla-nicaraguense/>.

²⁴ Somarriba, "El Che y la guerrilla nicaragüense."

²⁵ Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 106.

he was unfamiliar with Nicaraguan politics and there were a number of Nicaraguan factions in Havana vying for his support, Che recruited Rodolfo Romero, a Nicaraguan revolutionary whom he had met during his time in Guatemala, to help him gauge the situation. During the 1954 coup against the Arbenz government, Che had joined a militia, the “Augusto Cèsar Sandino Brigade,” under the leadership of Romero. Although Che never saw combat with the brigade, Romero taught him how to use a rifle, creating a relationship that would prove fruitful years later. Following the success of the Cuban Revolution, Che contacted Romero and invited him to Cuba in order to give him an appraisal of the Nicaraguan situation and advise him on how best to remove the Somozas. Romero believed that the best option for removing the Somoza regime was the Cuban path, at which point Che revealed the existence of Somarriba’s camp and invited him to join.²⁶ Romero agreed, providing much needed expertise to a largely inexperienced band of revolutionaries.

In early June, Somarriba’s band began leaving Cuba, traveling individually for Honduras and the camp at Las Lomas. With the exception of the survivors of Raudales expedition and the few Cuban internationalists, the fighting force, which had renamed itself the “21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez Pèrez Brigade,” lacked the experience or training necessary to carry out a successful insurrection against the Somozas. One of the inexperienced, but enthusiastic, revolutionaries to join Somarriba’s brigade was a young student, and close friend of Romero, named Carlos Fonseca Amador. In early 1959, Fonseca had traveled to Cuba to join in the revolution. However, in late April he traveled back to Nicaragua, where he was immediately arrested and deported to Guatemala. Fonseca then traveled to Honduras where Romero, a friend from his time in the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), and Manuel Baldizòn, a childhood friend and member of Raudales’ band, were organizing with the 21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez

²⁶ Anderson, *Che*, 396-397.

Pèrez Brigade. Despite Romero and Baldizòn's support, Somarriba and many of the other leading revolutionaries doubted the capacity of the sickly Fonseca to handle the rigors of combat. However, the young guerrilla persevered and found a place in the fighting force.²⁷ Although his superiors doubted his fighting abilities, Fonseca would go on to prove himself in combat and become one of the most significant actors in shaping Nicaragua's revolutionary current.

In late June the 55 men of the brigade prepared their camp in order to embark on their journey towards the Nicaraguan border. However, a formidable counterrevolutionary alliance was well aware of their actions. As word of their operation spread throughout Central America, the details of Somarriba's plan reached the ears of the Somoza regime and the Honduran military. After entering Honduras, at no point were the details and whereabouts of the 21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez Pèrez Brigade a secret, particularly to the Somozas who had a complicated spy network throughout the region. As early as May 1959, the activities of the brigade were a well-known secret in Tegucigalpa, where the Honduran military and Nicaraguan embassy gathered information on the activities of the guerrilla band.²⁸ They were in part aided by the CIA, which was well aware of revolutionaries operating in the Honduran jungle.²⁹ Days before the brigade embarked for Nicaragua, Luis Somoza made public his knowledge of the invasion force in Honduras, revealing Somarriba as the leader and claiming that an invasion of Nicaragua was eminent.³⁰ He claimed that the source of his information was a joint Honduran and Nicaraguan military commission operating under the aegis of U.S. advisers. A Nicaraguan radio operator later claimed that he intercepted radio communication between Anastasio Somoza

²⁷ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 47, 53-54.

²⁸ Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 108.

²⁹ "Memorandum of Discussion at the 411th Meeting of the National Security Council," *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba*, Vol. VI, 541.

³⁰ "Nicaragua Reports new Invasion; Another Near," *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 1959, 6.

Debayle and the local Honduran commander coordinating their operations against the rebels.³¹ Officials from all three governments would later claim that the joint Honduran, Nicaraguan, and U.S. operation against the 21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez Pèrez Brigade fulfilled obligations under the Rio Treaty, which had been invoked during previous instances of armed invasion, to “not allow their soil to be used as a base for invasion.”³² Unfortunately for Somarriba and the members of brigade, the assurances of support from the Honduran president Villeda failed to deter the Honduran military from taking action. With the aid of their U.S. and Nicaraguan allies, Honduran troops prepared a trap for Somarriba’s revolutionaries.

In the early morning of June 24, 1959, as the brigade prepared their camp, Honduran troops, supposedly aided by members of the *Guardia Nacional*, ambushed the 21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez Pèrez Brigade from the surrounding hills. Six of the rebels died during the fighting, and the joint military forces of Honduras and Nicaragua executed another three after the fighting stopped. Fonseca suffered a nearly mortal wound to his chest, and his friend, Manuel Baldizòn, was “almost cut in half by enemy fire.”³³ After letting them languish for a day under the warm tropical sun, the Honduran military moved the survivors to Tegucigalpa, where they would be imprisoned and later extradited to Cuba. Because of his U.S. citizenship, Somarriba avoided imprisonment and simply returned to the United States.³⁴ For Fonseca, the experience of el Chaparral convinced him of the necessity of armed insurrection against the Somoza regime and the need for a radical revolutionary vanguard to lead that struggle. As he convalesced in Cuba following the failed invasion, Fonseca would construct a revolutionary ideology largely influenced by the Cuban Revolution and the works of Augusto Sandino, many of which Fonseca

³¹ Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 111.

³² “Honduras Quells Move to Invade Nicaragua,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 1959, 20.

³³ Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador*, 111.

³⁴ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 55.

encountered for the first time in Cuba. This new revolutionary path would become the basis of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, and come to define the next thirty years of armed struggle against the Somoza regime.

In Nicaragua, news of el Chaparral sparked a wave of unrest and repression, as students and opposition leaders marched for those held in Honduras, particularly Fonseca. On July 23, the *Guardia Nacional* fired into a peaceful march of over three thousand students, killing four students, two spectators, and wounding over one hundred individuals. In combination with el Chaparral, the 23 July Massacre, as it came to be known, proved a rallying cry for Nicaragua's radical revolutionaries. The Conservative and dissident Liberals who had dominated the struggle against the Somozas for the past three decades turned away from militant action against the regime, more concerned with the rise of Cuban-inspired leftist radicals. In their place, young revolutionaries, inspired by the Cuban Revolution and infused with the revolutionary zeal of Che Guevara, took up the banner of armed resistance to the regime, becoming the vanguard of the revolutionary movement against the Somozas.

El Chaparral also marked a period of growing cooperation among the hemisphere's counterrevolutionary forces. In the wake of the Cuban Revolution, the Somoza regime promoted its anticommunist credentials in order to further ingratiate itself with the United States, and secure a place in the region's web of counterrevolutionary alliances. Moving into the 1960s, the Somoza regime would continue to utilize its international connections to strengthen its hold on power, and in the process move to bring down those regimes which challenged its survival.

The Somoza Family and the Global Counterrevolution in the 1950s and 1960s

By the late 1950s, the Caribbean was again a dangerous place for the region's dictators. The Cuban Revolution inspired a new wave of militant antidictatorial struggle, which panicked the Caribbean autocrats and sent them scurrying to shore up their regimes. In 1959 alone, numerous attempts were made to overthrow the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic and the Somzas in Nicaragua. In the weeks before el Chaparral, another massacre occurred after a group of Dominican revolutionaries left Cuba in an attempt to overthrow the Trujillo regime; however their boats were shot out of the water by the Dominican Air Force before they had a chance to make it to shore.³⁵ Hundreds of revolutionaries joined bands and prepared for invasions of these two countries. However, they all failed in their efforts. In Nicaragua alone, as many as twenty-three uprisings occurred between 1959 and 1961, many of those carried out by the burgeoning FSLN.³⁶ The ability of the region's dictators to remain in power stemmed in large part from their ability to receive support from the United States and integrate themselves into a counterrevolutionary alliance. For Nicaragua, this entailed *Guardia Nacional* participation in U.S. training programs in both the United States and Central America, most notably at the infamous School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. The Somoza regime also actively sought the downfall of Castro in Cuba and cooperated with the United States in much the same manner as it had in its efforts to remove Arbenz in Guatemala. It also shored up its relationship with other friendly states, such as Israel and other Latin American military dictatorships. For two decades the Somoza regime maintained a complicated web of alliances, which provided them with the resources necessary to wage an effective counterinsurgency.

³⁵ Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile*, 279-283.

³⁶ Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 226.

Following their father's assassination in 1956, Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle continued largely in their father's footsteps. They continued to cultivate close ties with U.S. officials, with both brothers utilizing the connections they had made while attending school in the United States. They were also keen to highlight their anticommunist credentials, well aware of the anxieties of U.S. officials towards possible Soviet intervention of the hemisphere. With the possibility of similar revolutions occurring elsewhere in the hemisphere, the Cuban Revolution heightened these fears and forced U.S. officials to reassess hemispheric security. Clearly, as detailed above, these fears were not unfounded as numerous guerrilla forces sympathetic to Cuba popped up throughout Latin America. The result was a multifaceted program on the part of the United States of countering Cuba and limiting unrest in the region. One strategy, in which Nicaragua played a vital role, was removing Fidel Castro and the other Cuban revolutionaries from power and putting in place a more amicable government. This strategy closely resembled the one carried out against the Arbenz government in 1954. However, the results proved dramatically different.

Although the Somoza regime pledged its commitment to the cause of anticommunism and aided the United States in its efforts to undermine the Cuban Revolution, the younger Somozas exercised considerable autonomy. Beginning with the Eisenhower administration, the Somoza regime participated in military aid programs with the United States designed to provide regional security. However, they often failed to follow through on their commitments and often ignored the advice of U.S. advisers. They also continued purchasing and selling weaponry without the knowledge or consent of the United States, again working largely with the State of Israel and its multinational arms apparatus. Although they may have appeared to be loyal Cold War allies, the Somoza regime continued to exercise considerable agency, cooperating with the

United States when it suited them, and side-stepping them when it did not. Ultimately the survival of the regime dictated policy, and that did not always coincide with the wishes of the United States.

Nicaragua had long figured into the U.S. defense strategies regarding Central America and the Caribbean. During World War II, Nicaragua had joined in the anti-fascist Inter-American Defense Board, and shortly thereafter became a signatory of the anticommunist Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Pact). The objectives of both coalitions were to prevent outside intervention in the western hemisphere and in the process protect U.S. interests. During the 1950s, the Somoza regime created a number of unofficial alliances with Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela. In 1953 Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala proposed the Organization of Central American States (Organizacion de Estados Centroamericanos, or ODECA), which would promote anti-communism in the region. U.S. officials, fearing that the organization would largely be used to intervene in the affairs of other Central American countries, helped kill the plan. However, because of its strong anticommunist credentials, U.S. officials ultimately warmed to the Somoza regime, particularly during the Eisenhower administration.³⁷

Under Eisenhower the United States began shoring up its regional defenses in the Caribbean and Central America. The Eisenhower administration, fearing that communist sabotage or regional unrest might threaten strategic U.S. interests like the Panama Canal, began officially training and arming the *Guardia Nacional* and the Nicaraguan Air Force (Fuerza Aèreo de Nicaragua, or FAN) in April, 1954. The Military Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) called for the strengthening of the Nicaraguan Air Force for air patrols and defense of the Panama

³⁷ Michael D. Gambone, *Eisenhower, Somoza, and the Cold War in Nicaragua, 1953-1961* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 88-89.

Canal, as well as the creation of a combat infantry battalion within the *Guardia Nacional* designed for regional cooperation and counterinsurgency. The Somoza regime immediately augmented its air power with the aid of the United States. However, it dragged its feet on the creation and implementation of the MDAP infantry battalion. In large part this was due to the fact that the battalion could, in the future, challenge the Somoza regime's hold on power. The MDAP battalion would have been the largest and best trained unit in the *Guardia Nacional*, capable of easily defeating the poorly trained units of the much weaker *Guardia*. The battalion would also be part of a regional security force that, in times of crisis, would operate under U.S. command.³⁸ With their power residing in the *Guardia Nacional*, the Somozas could not risk creating a military entity that might challenge them, especially a unit that would have ties to an outside power. For most of the 1950s, U.S. officials working in Nicaragua fumed about the slow pace of development, especially irritated by the fact that the weaponry provided to build the MDAP battalion remained crated up in a Somoza warehouse.³⁹ In the wake of the assassination of Somoza García in 1956, the creation of the MDAP battalion languished further, ultimately never being completed.

In the state of siege that followed the assassination, the Somoza brothers began a major push to acquire arms abroad in order to shore up their regime. With internal and external threats looming, the Somozas looked to acquire the weaponry necessary to maintain power. However, the Nicaraguan economy was reeling from the cotton bust of 1955-1956 and U.S. weapons were relatively expensive. To solve this problem, and add to their own personal wealth, Luis and Anastasio looked to the international arms trade. In much the same fashion as their father, the younger Somozas bought a large quantity of weaponry, kept a portion for themselves, and sold

³⁸ Gambone, *Eisenhower, Somoza, and the Cold War in Nicaragua*, 94.

³⁹ "Letter From the Director of the Office of Middle American Affairs (Jack Neal) to the Ambassador of Nicaragua (Thomas Whelan)," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, American Republics*, Vol. VII, 232-233.

the remainder. In the wake of World War II, the international arms market was awash in material, and with large quantities of now obsolete U.S. weaponry from World War II, European states proved attractive partners in the arms trade. Under Anastasio Somoza García, Nicaragua purchased twenty five fighter aircraft from the government of Sweden, some of which were sold to the Trujillo regime and the rest used to make the Nicaraguan Air Force the largest in Central America.⁴⁰ These European connections provided the Somoza regime with the opportunity to augment their stockpiles on the cheap. However, the Somozas continued to search elsewhere for the weaponry necessary to equip their own forces and make a handsome return at the same time.

Utilizing personal relationships as the connections through which they built their trade networks, the Somoza regime turned to a network of friends, relatives, and acquaintances as the conduits through which they bought and sold weaponry. In the United States Luis and Anastasio relied on their brother-in-law, and Nicaraguan ambassador to the United States, Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, as well as their uncle Harry Goodfriend to lobby U.S. officials.⁴¹ They also turned to public relations consultants and other connected U.S. citizens. One of the most reliable Somoza lobbyists was I. Irving Davidson, who acted also acted as an arms merchant and business partner. During World War II Davidson worked as an expeditor of ammunition for the war Production Board, and after the war he helped surplus military equipment make its way to Israel, Nicaragua, and Indonesia. He also facilitated the movement of weaponry and equipment between Israel and Nicaragua, bringing Israeli machine guns to Nicaragua, and Nicaraguan planes to Israel.⁴² In conducting deals between the United States and Israel, Davidson facilitated agreements that U.S. officials disapproved of. In 1957, Davidson facilitated the Nicaraguan

⁴⁰ "Memorandum From John L. Ohmans of the Office of Middle American Affairs to the Director of the Office (Robert Newbegin)," *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol. VII, 195-196.

⁴¹ Gambone, *Eisenhower, Somoza, and the Cold War in Nicaragua*, 199.

⁴² "Behind the Schemes: Irv Davidson, D.C.'s Master Operator," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 1980, B1.

purchase of sixty-eight “Staghound” armored cars from the State of Israel.⁴³ U.S. officials had previously discouraged similar requests for weaponry from the U.S. and Canada, fearing the destabilizing impact the weapons would have in Central America. Despite these concerns, the Somozas purchased the armored vehicles without consulting officials in Washington. According to Davidson, Nicaragua intended to keep twenty-five of the vehicles for themselves and sell the remainder.⁴⁴ Nicaragua ultimately sold a number of the cars to the Batista government in 1958. However, they failed to prevent the July 26th Movement from taking power. In fact, the Cuban Revolutionaries captured the armored vehicles shortly after they arrived in Cuba, and Castro rode one of them into Havana when he captured the city.⁴⁵ Davidson represented the Somoza regime into the early 1960s, and continued to be a valuable connection for the Nicaraguan ruling family for decades thereafter.

The success of the Cuban Revolution accelerated Central American military integration led by the United States. With long histories of conflict and mutual antagonism, Central American military leaders rarely considered the idea of a regional alliance. However, Castro’s government provided a common enemy for Central America’s military leaders, which, combined with U.S. pressure, facilitated military cooperation. The United States again acted as the lead partner; however the Somozas also took the initiative by mending relations with its Central American neighbors in the early 1960s. Although the civilian governments were often hostile to the regime, the militaries of Central American states, particularly in Honduras, proved more willing to cooperate with the Somozas. As early as 1956, Central America’s military leaders

⁴³ “Nicaragua Tries Democratic Way After a Decade of Dictatorship,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1957, 12.

⁴⁴ “Memorandum From Richard B. Moon of the Office of Middle American Affairs to the Director of the Office (William A. Wieland),” *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol. VII, 235-237.

⁴⁵ “The Fantastic Deals of I. Irving Davidson,” *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1976, 12.

called for the creation of an alliance to coordinate the region's armed forces.⁴⁶ However, it was not until the success of the Cuban Revolution, and growing U.S. concerns, that Central American military cooperation began to materialize. In 1959 Nicaragua and Honduras formed a "mixed military commission"; the same organization that ambushed and destroyed the 21st of September Rigoberto Lòpez Pèrez Brigade.⁴⁷ On June 24, 1964, the states of El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama formally created the Central American Defense Council (Consejo de Defensa Centroamericana or CONDECA), a military alliance intended to limit conflict between member states and promote stability by countering left-wing movements.⁴⁸ Under U.S. aegis, CONDECA proved a successful avenue for coordinating training and resources for Central America's militaries.

Although operating under the auspices of the Central American governments, the United States played a central role in the creation and maintenance of CONDECA, supplying the majority of the arms and training to its Central American partners. CONDECA also worked closely with the U.S. military's Southern Command, and, because it possessed the largest and best trained military in the Central America, Nicaragua played a central role in the organization, participating in joint military maneuvers and exercises designed to enhance counterinsurgency tactics. *Guardia* officers also trained at the U.S.-operated School of the Americas (SOA) in the Panama Canal Zone, where they learned counterinsurgency tactics. Cadets of the Nicaraguan military academy would spend their senior year at the SOA, and many officers would receive

⁴⁶ "Defense Council Urged," *New York Times*, February 1, 1956, 5.

⁴⁷ "50 Reported in New Attack on Nicaragua," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 17, 1959, 3.

⁴⁸ Consejo de Defensa Centroamericana, *Órgano de informaciòn del consejo de defense centroamericana* (Guatemala City: Army of Guatemala, 1965), 9-10.

special training there. By 1979 4,318 Nicaraguans had attended the SOA, more than any other country.⁴⁹

Beyond CONDECA, Nicaragua found itself part of a much broader international alliance operating under the aegis of the United States. In 1961, Somoza Debayle embarked on a world tour, visiting a number of U.S.-allied counterrevolutionary stalwarts, such as Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan and the Shah of Iran.⁵⁰ During this trip the *jefe* visited Jerusalem, where he laid the groundwork for Israeli counterinsurgency training for members of the *Guardia Nacional* and cooperation between both countries' intelligence agencies. Israel also participated in the Alliance for Progress, providing development aid, as well as economic and agrarian specialists during Luis Somoza Debayle's tenure as president.⁵¹ Ultimately the areas of counterinsurgency and weapons procurements proved to be the strongest and most lasting aspects of the Israeli and Nicaraguan relationship. Between 1970 and 1974, Israel supplied 98% of the Somoza regime's weapon arms, stepping in for a United States bogged down by the war in Vietnam.⁵² Moving into the 1970s, as U.S. officials faced domestic constraints on their ability to procure and provide weaponry to some of their more despotic allies; Israel would assume an increasingly larger role as arms supplier for those in the counterrevolutionary alliance.

As a member of this growing international counterrevolutionary alliance, the Somoza regime was no stranger to asserting itself into the affairs of other countries, particularly of its neighbors. In 1965, Nicaraguan troops aided in the occupation of the Dominican Republic, and

⁴⁹ Richard Grossman, "The Blood of the People: The Guardia Nacional's Fifty-year War against the People of Nicaragua, 1927-1979," in *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror* ed. Cecilia Menjivar and Nestor Rodriguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 66.

⁵⁰ Anastasio Somoza Debayle, *Nicaragua Betrayed* (Boston: Western Islands, 1980), 173.

⁵¹ Ignacio Klich, "Israel, the PLO, and Nicaragua," in *Central America and the Middle East: The Internationalization of a Crisis*, ed. Damián J. Fernández (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), 44, 57.

⁵² Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *World Armaments and Disarmaments: SIPRI Yearbook 1980* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980), 96.

in 1972, they toppled a reformist government in El Salvador with the aid of Guatemala.⁵³

Somoza Debayle even offered to send *Guardia Nacional* troops to Vietnam in late 1967; an arrangement which few U.S. allies offered.⁵⁴ The largest, and perhaps most notorious, instance of Nicaraguan intervention occurred in 1961 with Somoza complicity in the Bay of Pigs invasion and subsequent support for Cuban exiles. The involvement of the Somoza regime, ever the opportunists, did not come without a price for the United States. The Somozas would help the United States take down the Castro regime, but it would be on terms amenable to them.

The Somoza Regime and Cuban Exiles

The success of the Cuban Revolution caused U.S. officials to dramatically reevaluate their hemispheric defense strategies, and proved a boon for the Somoza regime. The Somoza regime appeared to be on unstable ground in the early 1960s. The economic downturn of the mid-1950s caused Nicaragua's elites to become increasingly dissatisfied, and the regime's political opponents saw Luis Somoza's apparent move towards democracy as a series of cosmetic reforms that masked his family's continued hold on power. Despite the creation of CONDECA, the regime also faced continued tensions with its neighbors and, as discussed previously, further attempts to remove the Somozas by force of arms. The Somozas looked for a means of further cementing their relationship with the United States, which would quiet dissenting voices.

In the wake of the Cuba Revolution, U.S. officials moved to strengthen their regional defenses against communist intervention and insurrection. The willingness of the Somozas to participate in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion further solidified relations between the United

⁵³ John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 76.

⁵⁴ "Nicaragua Offers Troop Aid," *New York Times*, October 29, 1967, 83.

States and Nicaragua. By the early 1960s, substantial amounts of U.S. economic and military aid moved to Nicaragua as part of U.S. programs designed to counter the threat posed by the Cuban Revolution. With the full backing of U.S. officials, the Somoza regime solidified its position within Nicaragua and in the process created a powerful military presence capable of challenging any revolutionary threats. Although the political talents of the Somozas and their network of lobbyists in the United States helped them secure this position, they would have likely remained an outlier of U.S. policy in the region were it not for the Cuban Revolution.

The Somoza regime was a vocal enemy of Fidel Castro and the July 26th Movement well before they seized power in 1959. The anti-dictatorial rhetoric of the Cuban revolutionaries and their support for Nicaraguan insurgents unnerved the Somoza regime, resulting in increased regional tensions. Although less antagonistic than the Somozas, U.S. officials were also concerned with the threats emanating from Cuba. However, they were more concerned with the increasingly leftist policies of Castro's government. Castro's agrarian reform, which nationalized Cuba's largest estates, and the subsequent removal of more moderate politicians from his cabinet convinced U.S. officials that Castro conflicted with the interests of the United States. Beginning in late June and early July 1959, U.S. officials began plotting the removal of the Castro government; and a year later allocated \$13.1 million dollars to the CIA for its overthrow.⁵⁵ However, fearing censure from the United Nations and the Organization of American States, U.S. officials moved forward under the caveat of "plausible deniability," in which the role of the United States in the coup was difficult to discern and, therefore, easily deniable. To maintain the rouse of plausible deniability, the CIA turned to its Central American allies, particularly those contacts developed during the campaign against the Arbenz government in 1954. The Somoza

⁵⁵ William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 23-24.

regime again played a central role in the efforts to remove a neighboring government, and in the process, further strengthened its ties to the United States, particularly the CIA.

In the CIA's machinations for the downfall of the Castro government, Nicaragua and the Somozas proved integral from the beginning. On June 30, 1960, CIA personnel approached Luis Somoza Debayle about using the airfield at Puerto Cabezas to launch air activities against Castro. The CIA plan called for Cuban exiles to train and then pilot planes operating out of Nicaragua in support of the ground forces stationed in Guatemala. The airfield at Puerto Cabezas was the closest to Cuba outside of the continental United States and Puerto Rico, which fulfilled the needs of plausible deniability. Besides being the base for the invading air force, Nicaragua would also be the departure point for the ground forces. The Cuban exile forces, after training in Guatemala, would be transported to Nicaragua and from there depart for their invasion of Cuba.

One month after their initial meeting, the CIA again contacted Luis, this time informing him that the Democratic Revolutionary Front (Frente Revolucionario Democrático, FRD) was the Cuban exile organization to throw his support behind. Somoza agreed to meet with the FRD and make available the landing strip at Puerto Cabezas, as well as provide a training site for about 100 men and a shortwave radio station, which, incidentally, was the same facility which had been used during PBSUCCESS. In October, a CIA survey team visited Nicaragua and appraised the Puerto Cabeza airfield. Meeting with the survey team, the Nicaraguan president made further commitments to the operation against Castro's government, principally that his government would help guard and conceal the airfield, as well as aid in the supply and transportation of men and materials for the repair of the airfield. In order to maintain the secrecy of the operation, Luis also permitted the exile Cuban air force to use the Nicaraguan Air Force

insignia while in country.⁵⁶ In its operation against the Cuban government, the Somoza regime proved very accommodating to the CIA. However, that cooperation did not come without a price.

The primary concern for Luis Somoza Debayle was maintaining the wellbeing of his regime. Throughout the planning for the Bay of Pigs operation Luis pressured U.S. officials for strong statements of support in case of reprisals. The Nicaraguan president wanted guarantees from the CIA that the United States government would back Nicaragua in case the Castro government, or any other power, retaliated against Nicaragua. Although the operation was the brainchild of the CIA, and being carried out by Cuban exiles, Luis recognized that the Somoza government would face possible reprisals from Cuba, the OAS, and other Latin American countries for any actions against the Castro government, and wanted concrete assurances from high-ranking U.S. officials. As Somoza put it, “I need to meet a man who can say that he just left Mr. Kennedy, and Mr. Kennedy sends assurances that we are all in this together.”⁵⁷ Besides protection from his reprisals, Luis also sought to be shielded from his foes in Washington. Believing that there were “long-haired, Department of State liberals” who loathed the Somoza regime and “would welcome the chance” to embarrass the Nicaraguan government, Luis “wanted it understood and accepted by all levels of the U.S. government that Nicaragua was on the side of the angels and, therefore, no U.S. official should be allowed to attack Nicaragua.”⁵⁸ Despite the concerns of the Nicaraguan president, the various representatives of the CIA who spoke with Luis made it clear that although they could make some guarantees about their own agency, the same could not be said of officials in the State Department or other agencies.

⁵⁶ Jack B. Pfeiffer, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, Volume II: Participation in the Conduct of Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1979), http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/4186/bop-vol2-part1.pdf, 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 100-103.

Ultimately, Luis was unable to obtain a concrete commitment from any U.S. official. However, some members of the U.S. government made indications that the United States “would back them” if the Somoza regime was accused of intervention.⁵⁹

Despite the unequivocal response of the CIA operative, the president of Nicaragua pressed on with the plot. However, his continued perseverance may have had more to do with monetary gain than any strong anticommunist sentiments. In early 1961, Nicaragua applied for a series of loans, one from the United States for \$2 million and another from the World Bank for \$8 million. The Somoza government proposed a *quid pro quo* to the CIA, in which members of the agency pressured the State Department and the World Bank to accept the loans in exchange for utilization of Puerto Cabezas. In the months leading up to the invasion, Nicaraguan ambassador Sevilla-Sacasa hounded U.S. officials, particularly those in the CIA, about the status of the loans, while Luis Somoza Debayle held a number of meetings with the U.S. ambassador, Thomas Whelan. The Nicaraguan president was quick to point out that Nicaragua had sacrificed its own treasure for the U.S. cause and was in dire need of the development loans. Luis highlighted the fact that in order to help with the implementation of the invasion, his government had diverted funds intended for development of the nation’s transportation systems. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, at the time the head of the *Guardia Nacional*, also visited U.S. officials during the Kennedy inauguration. While in the United States he met with Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence, to further discuss the state of Nicaragua’s loan applications. Dulles deflected the younger Somoza’s request, informing him that he needed to take up the topic of the loans with the State Department and not the CIA.⁶⁰ The agency itself was extremely concerned

⁵⁹ “Memorandum for the Record: Meeting on Cuba,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Cuba, Volume X*, 84.

⁶⁰ Pfeiffer, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation*, 125-126.

that “none of the assurance to Nicaragua got put into writing.”⁶¹ Ultimately representatives of the CIA avoided any strong commitments to either aid in the passing of the loans or the defense of Nicaragua. However, U.S. officials eventually authorized a \$4.3 million in project loans for highway construction in 1961.⁶²

Despite whether or not U.S. officials and the Somoza regime reached an agreement on either the development loans or support, the invasion of Cuba moved forward with complete Nicaraguan support. On the morning of April 14, 1961, the *Blagar* and the *Barbara J*, two vessels bought by the CIA in Miami, departed Puerto Cabezas with the 2506 Assault Brigade, the military front of the FRD. As the ships left, Luis Somoza Debayle, wearing a white suit and holding an M-1, shouted to the departing invaders, “Bring me some hairs from Fidel’s beard!”⁶³ Unfortunately for the conspirators, the men of the 2506 Assault Brigade failed to make it within one hundred miles of Fidel’s famous beard. Alerted and prepared for an invasion, the Cuban military quickly contained and destroyed the invading force. The timely action of Cuban forces, combined with a number of missteps on the part of the invaders, primarily the failure of their air wing to destroy the Cuban Rebel Air Force on the ground on April 14, brought about rapid and overwhelming victory for the Cuban revolutionaries. In less than three days, Castro’s forces killed 141 of the 1,511-man brigade, captured another 1,179, including its leaders, and seized substantial amounts of weaponry.⁶⁴ The crushing defeat of the invasion forces proved to be a humiliating disaster for the United States, whose involvement was immediately apparent despite the best efforts to maintain “plausible deniability.” However, the failed invasion would prove to

⁶¹ Pfeiffer, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation*, 134.

⁶² See table 3.3 in Gambone, *Capturing the Revolution: The United States, Central America, and Nicaragua, 1961-1972* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 74.

⁶³ Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95-96.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

be a boon for the Somoza regime, further strengthening its anticommunist image and enhancing its counterrevolutionary network.

Although a complete tactical disaster, the Bay of Pigs invasion broadened the counterrevolutionary network of the Somoza regime. The Somozas continued to work with and benefit from a relationship with the CIA. The Somoza regime also developed relationships with Cuban exiles that would serve them for over twenty years. In the months immediately following the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Somoza regime continued to conspire against the Castro government with members of the Cuban exile community. With the backing of the Somozas and a handful of friendly voices in the U.S. government, Cuban exiles pressed U.S. officials to support another invasion of the Caribbean island.⁶⁵ Luis Somoza further urged the nations of Central America to “unite in an invasion of Cuba,” and in March 1962 he successfully created a Central American, anti-Castro coalition that included the governments of Costa Rica and Guatemala.⁶⁶ Officials in the Kennedy administration, reluctant to launch another invasion of Cuba but unable to tolerate Castro’s government, decided that the best course of action was the covert support of Cuban exiles whose persistent harassment would prove bothersome to the government in Havana.⁶⁷ They would therefore continue to arm and support the Cuban exile movement through the CIA, which by mid-1963 was working closely with the Somoza regime and a resurgent Cuban exile movement.

By 1963 Nicaragua was a mecca for Cuban counterrevolutionaries, in large part due to the recruiting efforts of the Somozas.⁶⁸ Carlos Prio Socarras, the former president of Cuba, and

⁶⁵ *FRUS, 1961-1963, Cuba*, Vol. X, 574, 618.

⁶⁶ “Nicaraguan President Meets Cuba Exile Chief,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1963, 2.

⁶⁷ Jonathon C. Brown, “Counterrevolution in the Caribbean: The CIA and Cuban Commandos in the 1960s,” in *Beyond the Eagle’s Shadow: New Histories of Latin America’s Cold War*, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence, and Julio E. Moreno (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 108-9.

⁶⁸ “Latin Split Seen on Cuban Exiles,” *New York Times*, 10.

ironically an avowed enemy of Anastasio Somoza García, traveled to Nicaragua in August, 1963, as did such influential Cubans as Manuel Antonio de Varona, Jose Bosch, and Dr. Jose Morell Romero.⁶⁹ Despite the presence of these prominent Cubans, Manuel Artime, a former officer in the Cuban Rebel Army who defected and political leader of the 2506 Assault Brigade, was the figurehead of the Cuban exiles in Nicaragua. After spending nearly two years in a Cuban prison, Artime traveled to Miami in early 1963 and founded the Movimiento Recuperación Revolucionaria (Movement for Revolutionary Recouperation or MRR), a Cuban paramilitary organization bent on removing the Castro government. Already familiar with both Luis and Anastasio Somoza from the Bay of Pigs invasion, Artime gained the support of the Somoza regime, as well as the president of Costa Rica, both of whom provided him with bases of operation. He also benefitted from a CIA program that aided his organization but provided little in the way of training or logistical support.⁷⁰ In December 1963, public pressure forced Artime and his men in Costa Rica to consolidate their forces at bases along the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The airfield at Puerto Cabezas once again became the location for a counterrevolutionary alliance plotting the overthrow of a Caribbean government. However, this time the Somoza regime provided much of the support necessary to carry out the attack.

In Nicaragua, Artime and the MRR received the full support of the Somoza regime and benefitted from a close relationship with the Nicaraguan ruling family. The Somozas not only provided the MRR with a base and landing strip at Puerto Cabezas but also opened facilities for the Cuban insurgents at Monkey Point on the southeast of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, which would serve as the MRR's base of naval operations. From Monkey Point, speed boats practiced coastal raids in anticipation of attacking Cuban coastal assets. The Somoza regime, particularly

⁶⁹ "Cuban Exile Leaders Drifting to Nicaragua," *Los Angeles Times*, August, 5, 1963, 5.

⁷⁰ "Memorandum of Meeting with President Johnson," *FRUS, 1961-1963, Cuba*, Vol. X, 907.

Anastasio, worked closely with Artime and the MRR in guaranteeing the security of their operation. In order to better shield the operations at Monkey Point, the Somozas bought the land in the vicinity of the MRR base and provided soldiers from the *Guardia Nacional* to serve as security. They also utilized their connections in Miami to expedite shipments of the supplies to the MRR and waived the usual customs requirements once the cargo reached Nicaragua.⁷¹ With the help of the Somozas and the CIA, the MRR had created a significant paramilitary presence along the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The only question was when they would move against Castro's government.

The MRR began its war against Castro with a raid on a sugar refinery at Puerto Pilon, Cuba on May 13, 1964.⁷² Artime's band followed in August with an assault on a Cuban radio station rumored to be tracking refugee boat movements.⁷³ Although Artime claimed that his band had gone ashore and caused significant damage to both facilities, Castro claimed that the attackers had simply shelled the refinery from the shore.⁷⁴ The CIA echoed Castro's assessment, stating that raid caused significantly less damage than Artime reported.⁷⁵ Ultimately many U.S. officials felt that Artime's raids were "a lot more excitement than action," and by the end of 1964 U.S. support for the exile movement was waning.⁷⁶

Although many U.S.-officials supported raids against Castro's Cuba, the MRR proved difficult to direct and control, leading many officials to view it as a liability. This became especially apparent on September 15, 1964, when the MRR attacked the Spanish freighter *Sierra Aranzazu* headed for Cuba, thinking that it was the *Sierra Maestra*, a Cuban vessel hauling sugar

⁷¹ Brown, "Counterrevolution in the Caribbean," 119.

⁷² "Exile Force Raids Cuba Port," *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1964, 1.

⁷³ "Raiders Said to Destroy A Cuban Radar Station," *New York Times*, September 1, 1964, 9.

⁷⁴ "Exiles Raid Port in Eastern Cuba," *New York Times*, May 14, 1964, 1.

⁷⁵ Brown, "Counterrevolution in the Caribbean," 119.

⁷⁶ "U.S. Officials Doubt New Cuban Exile Push Perils Castro Regime," *Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 1964, 1.

to China.⁷⁷ The attack created a fissure between the United States and Spain, with the Franco government believing that the attack could not have been carried out without the knowledge of the of U.S. officials.⁷⁸ In Madrid over 700 protestors marched in front of the U.S. embassy, protesting the attack and chanting “Cuba Si, Yankee No!” and “Yankee go home!”⁷⁹ Following so shortly after the Bay of Pigs invasion, the attack on the *Sierra Aranzazu* proved more than U.S. officials could bear.

In the months following the attack on the Spanish freighter, U.S. officials became increasingly concerned with Artime’s actions, fearing that the continued attacks would agitate relations between the United States and Cuba, as well as bring about international condemnation.⁸⁰ They also doubted the efficacy of MRR actions and believed Artime was “a firecracker in our midst,” citing Artime’s inability to respond to “persuasion or direction” and thus constituting “a persistent menace.”⁸¹ As if highlighting the assessments of U.S. officials, Artime carried out a raid on a Cuban fuel depot in February 1965 that caused little damage. He also attempted to extricate two informants from Cuba who were later captured by Cuban security agents.⁸² There were also rumors of an MRR led coup in Costa Rica aimed at installing a “neo-Nazi dictatorship.”⁸³ Exasperated by what National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy labeled the “Cecil B. DeMille” antics of Artime and the MRR, the CIA circulated a paper recommending that aid to Artime be cut off as early as the end of February 1965. However, believing that Artime would need time to disband his force, the CIA began phasing out support for the Cuban

⁷⁷ “Sugar Ship Attacked, Cuban Exiles Claim,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1964, 12.

⁷⁸ “U.S. Cuba Stand Brings Angry Reaction in Spain” *The Washington Post*, October 1, 1964, A30.

⁷⁹ “Spanish Marchers Denounce the U.S.,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1964, 33.

⁸⁰ “Minutes of Meeting of the 303 Committee, 3 December 1964,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1966, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guayana, Volume XXXII*, 696-697.

⁸¹ “Amplification of the Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 7 January 1965,” *Ibid.*, 704-705.

⁸² Brown, “Counterrevolution in the Caribbean,” 121-122.

⁸³ “Nicaragua Closing Cuban Camps After Costa Rica Coup Plot,” *The Washington Post*, March 17, 1965, A11.

exiles in March 1965.⁸⁴ By mid-March 1965 the MRR training camps in Nicaragua were being shut down in response to the cuts in U.S. aid.⁸⁵

The cut off of U.S. support, although lethal for the continuance of the camps in Nicaragua, did not signal the end of Artime's connections with either the CIA or the Somoza regime. Later in 1965, Artime participated in one of the CIA's many failed attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.⁸⁶ Afterwards, Artime became a business partner with Anastasio Somoza, running a meat import business in Miami.⁸⁷ Through Artime the Somozas would develop ties with the Cuban exile community in the United States, many of whom would prove loyal allies in the later struggle against the Sandinistas. Artime also maintained connections with the CIA as well as those Cuban exiles plotting against Castro. He raised a defense fund for the Watergate burglars, one of whom was E. Howard Hunt Jr., a close personal friend and CIA operative during the Bay of Pigs invasion, and developed ties with Orlando Bosch, a Cuban exile and terrorist whose organization, Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations, bombed a Cuban civilian airliner in 1976.⁸⁸ By the mid-1970s, Artime was proving to be a valuable connection in a growing network linking Latin America's counterrevolutionary governments and organizations. In 1977, Artime died of liver and pancreatic cancer, but not before helping create connections between the budding the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone and Central

⁸⁴ "Minutes of Meeting of the 303 Committee, 3 December 1964"; "Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Coordination of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Williams) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Adams)"; "Status of Termination of Manuel Artime's Autonomous Paramilitary Group," *FRUS, 1964-1966*, Vol. XXXII, 696-697, 706-707, 716.

⁸⁵ "Cuban Exile Ban May Signal U.S. Policy Shift," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1965.

⁸⁶ The CIA arranged a meeting between Artime and a Cuban official, Rolando Cubelo, to assassinate Castro. Artime was to provide a weapon, as well as an escape route for Cubelo. However, Cubelo failed to take action. "The Riddle of AMLASH," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1976, 29.

⁸⁷ "Cubans in Miami: A Dream Dies Hard," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1972, A35.

⁸⁸ "Anti-Castro Extremists Tolerated, if Not Encouraged, by Some Latin American Nations," *New York Times*, November 15, 1976, 10.

America with Cuban paramilitary organizations.⁸⁹ Although he did not live to see it, Arttime facilitated the creation and spread of Operation Condor, a counterrevolutionary alliance which would ruthlessly strike out against revolutionary activity across the hemisphere in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In 1967 Luis Somoza died of a heart attack, and (that same year) his brother Anastasio assumed the presidency. Despite the death of Luis, the Somoza regime appeared as secure as ever due in large part to a strong economy and military. Under high commodity prices for cotton and coffee, the Nicaraguan economy had grown substantially as unprecedented wealth poured into the country and employment grew. The superficial moves towards democracy also placated more moderate Nicaraguans, while the enhanced strength of the *Guardia Nacional* crushed any revolutionary opposition. The budding FSLN remained largely underground or in exile, unable to truly challenge the Somozas. However, as the organization struggled to create a viable revolutionary movement in Nicaragua, it utilized transnational networks of support, some linked to Cuba but others connected to the United States and elsewhere in Latin America. These networks, again largely built on personal relationships, would rally international support for their cause, dramatically challenging the Somoza regime in the process.

The Birth of the FSLN

Although the 1960s proved to be a period of counterrevolutionary consolidation in Nicaragua, the decade also birthed the organization that would bring-down the Somoza regime: the Sandinista National Liberation Front. The young FSLN, which during this time never numbered more than one hundred members, spent much of the 1960s and early 1970s either in hiding or in exile. With aid from its counterrevolutionary networks, the *Guardia Nacional* routed

⁸⁹ "Manuel Arttime Dies: Led Invasion of Cuba," *New York Times*, November 19, 1977, 24.

the FSLN militarily, destroying its bases in Nicaragua and, by 1970, leading Anastasio Somoza Debayle to believe that the organization no longer posed a threat. Because of these disastrous military defeats, the leaders of the FSLN, when they were not in safe houses or remote regions of Nicaragua, organized opposition to the Somoza regime from Cuba, Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, the United States, and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. Much like Sandino and their revolutionary forbearers of the 1940s and 1950s, the leaders of the FSLN organized their movement in exile, relying on transnational networks to support their efforts. Despite the setbacks of the 1960s, the FSLN persevered and by the middle decades of the 1970s posed a legitimate threat to the Somoza regime.

After the disaster at El Chapparal, Fonseca and other Nicaraguan revolutionaries forged a clandestine revolutionary network spanning much of the Caribbean. Moving between Cuba, Costa Rica, and Honduras, while occasionally slipping into Nicaragua, Fonseca met with student activists and others opposed to the Somoza regime, where he helped organization protests and demonstrations against the Somoza regime. The Caribbean Basin of the mid-twentieth-century was a relatively cosmopolitan space with peoples and ideas moving freely throughout the region. The founding members of the FSLN traveled extensively throughout not only the Western Hemisphere, but also visited Europe and Asia. As a student, Fonseca visited the Soviet Union in 1957 and upon his return wrote admiringly about the Soviet system.⁹⁰ Sergio Ramirez visited Canada and the United States as a student, and later lived in Germany and Austria.⁹¹ Other members of the movement that would become the FSLN attended student conferences in Iraq

⁹⁰ Carlos Fonseca Amador, *Un Nicaraguense en Moscu* (Managua: Department of Propaganda and Political Education of the FSLN, 1981), 5.

⁹¹ Stephen Henighan, *Sandino's Nation: Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramirez, Writing Nicaragua, 1940-2012* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 124, 127.

and North Korea.⁹² In the early years of the 1960s the roots of Nicaraguan revolutionary solidarity grew across the globe, building a robust network that would sustain the movement in the coming years.

During this period of movement, Cuba proved important in terms of the ideological development as well as the military training of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. Members of the embryonic FSLN received training from the Cuban Rebel Army. In 1960, Tomás Borge, along with a handful of other young Nicaraguans, traveled to Cuba in order to join the revolution and find a means of bringing change to their home country. Borge, Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Rodolfo Romero all received artillery training from Czechoslovakian advisers with the Cuban Rebel Army, while other Nicaraguans fought against counterrevolutionaries in the Escambray Mountains and aided in the defense of Havana during the Bay of Pigs invasion.⁹³

Perhaps most importantly, it was while in Cuba that Fonseca discovered the writings of Sandino. Outlawed and largely unavailable in Nicaragua under the Somoza regime, the only Sandino-related texts available to most Nicaraguans was *The True Sandino or the Cavalry of the Segovias*, a propaganda piece edited by Somoza García with the intention of discrediting the Nicaraguan revolutionary. Cuban hosts, who venerated Sandino and his anti-imperialist struggle, introduced Fonseca to his ideological forbearer, bringing the Nicaraguan revolutionary texts of his predecessor's writings. By 1961, members of the New Nicaragua Movement (MNN), an organization whose members would eventually found the FSLN, were clandestinely publishing copies of the *Ideas of Sandino* and distributing them throughout Nicaragua.⁹⁴ The Cuban connection, which introduced the Nicaraguan revolutionaries to their past and provided them with military knowhow, would continue to be a source of support for the fledgling FSLN.

⁹² Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 62

⁹³ Tomás Borge, *The Patient Impatience* (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1989), 124.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

By the early 1960s the organization that would become the Sandinista National Liberation Front was beginning to coalesce. Over the course of several years, and during meetings in at least four different countries, the FSLN grew out of a number of organizations, including the MNN, the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Youth, the Democratic Youth, and the armed movements for revolutionaries like Ramon Raudales. Utilizing the readings introduced to him while in Cuba, Fonseca began a detailed study of Sandino that would infuse the new movement with the ideological underpinnings of the hero of the Segovias. The experience of the Cuban Revolution also deeply impacted the young revolutionaries, who marveled at Cuba's "revolutionary effervescence" and felt inspired by the many popular demonstrations.⁹⁵ National liberation struggles outside of the Americas also captured the imagination of the young revolutionaries, who in late 1961 and early 1962 began calling their movement the National Liberation Front in homage to the organization that fought French colonial rule in Algeria.⁹⁶ One year later the organization would include Sandino in its title, officially becoming the FSLN.

The official creation of the FSLN coincided with its first major military venture at the intersections of the Coco and Bocay Rivers along the Honduran border in northeastern Nicaragua. As Manuel Artime and the Somozas plotted the downfall of the Castro government, the FSLN was moving against the regime. With growing international connections and the support of revolutionary Cuba, Fonseca, who over the course of 1962 became the undisputed leader of the FSLN, began plotting a Cuban-style *foco* insurrection in the hinterlands of the Nicaraguan department of Matagalpa. The Sandinistas intended to infiltrate from neighboring Honduras and incite a rural guerilla war, which, with peasant support and a mountain base camp, would spread to the rest of the country and eventually bring down the Somoza regime. From

⁹⁵ Borge, *The Patient Impatience*, 121.

⁹⁶ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 73.

May to August 1963, the revolutionaries labored through the dense forests of Matagalpa and struggled to get enough to eat, satiating their hunger with the meat of the occasional monkey or turkey. Unfortunately for the FSLN, their insurrection came to naught as the isolated location and the ambivalence of the region's Sumu and Miskitu peoples doused the hopes of a peasant uprising. After accidentally finding a *Guardia* outpost, resulting in a firefight that killed a number of the band, the revolutionaries voted to cut their losses and return to Honduras. Interestingly, one of those who died during the Coco y Bocay campaign was known as The Italian, a man who Borge recalled as being the "first international martyr of this new stage of the Nicaraguan revolution."⁹⁷ However, he would not be the last of the foreigners to shed their blood fighting against the tyranny of the Somoza regime.

After the failed insurrection at Coco y Bocay, the FSLN reevaluated its strategy for fomenting revolution. In part this was due to economic and democratic reforms taking place in Nicaragua in the mid-1960s. Booming under strong cotton and coffee prices, the Nicaraguan economy surged. There was also the appearance of democracy as Luis Somoza stepped down and Rene Schick became the Somoza regime's puppet president. Riding the wave of prosperity and feeling secure in their hold on power, the Somoza regime, through Schick, granted amnesty to many of those Nicaraguans living in exile. Some members of the FSLN took advantage of these factors and returned to Nicaragua, where most of the members of the FSLN pursued legal opposition to the Somoza regime by joining political parties in Nicaragua and operating within the law. Tomás Borge and Silvio Mayorga returned to Nicaragua and represented the FSLN in Movilizaciòn Republicana, a political coalition operating in opposition to the Somoza regime.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Borge, *The Patient Impatience*, 160.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

Believing that change might be pursued through the political process in Nicaragua, many members of the FSLN abandoned revolutionary violence in the middle years of the 1960s.

Carlos Fonseca, on the other hand, remained firm in his belief that only revolution could bring about change in Nicaragua. Following the failure at Coco y Bocay, he remained in Honduras for two months in order to continue studying Sandino and world history. In 1964, he returned to Nicaragua to participate in organizing the urban insurrection, but was almost immediately captured by *Guardia* troops. Partly because of his father's connections with the Somoza regime, Fonseca avoided dying at the hands of his captors. However, he was imprisoned and deported to Guatemala in January 1965. The Guatemalan government then quickly deported Fonseca to Mexico City, where he took refuge with Edelberto Torres, a communist and Nicaraguan exile. After a short period in Mexico, Fonseca traveled to Costa Rica and began plotting the FSLN's next moves against the Somoza regime.⁹⁹ Learning from the failures of the Coco y Bocay expedition, Fonseca and his compatriots crafted a new plan: an armed insurrection that he would lead himself.

The FSLN's desire for a renewed military struggle in part sprang from the Cuban organized Tricontinental Congress in January 1966. Delegates from Asia, Africa, and Latin America attended the nine-day conference in order to formulate a plan for "combatting imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism."¹⁰⁰ The conference birthed the short-lived Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which sought to unite those battling North American and European imperialism. Among those attending the conference was a delegation sent by the FSLN. Hearing Che's "Message to the Tricontinental" in which he called for "Two, Three, Many Vietnams," the Sandinistas must have thought of their

⁹⁹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 85-87.

¹⁰⁰ "Tone of Agenda is Anti-U.S." *New York Times*, January 4, 1966, 5.

own struggle and its place in the broader context of international revolution.¹⁰¹ Inspired by the message of the Tricontinental Congress, the revolutionaries began outlining a new course of action against the Somoza regime.

In preparation for their second insurrection, the FSLN received aid and support from the Cuban government, but apparently from the People's Republic of China (PRC) as well. According to Josè Obidio "Pepe" Puente Leòn, a dual Mexican/Nicaraguan citizen who helped develop ties between the Sandinistas, Cuba, and the Soviet Union, the PRC played a central role in both the planning of and logistics for the coming insurgency. Shortly after the failure of the Coco y Bocay operation, Chinese officials in Mexico City invited representatives of the FSLN to meet with them at their trade office in Mexico City. The FSLN members agreed and Punte Leòn and Pablo Úbeda (aka Rigoberto Cruz) visited the officials, bringing with them maps and plans for their operation. The Chinese decided to provide the Sandinistas with support and apparently did so "quickly," giving them "lots of money to buy arms and inviting us to China for training."¹⁰² The Chinese also recommended that the FSLN relocate their geographic focus to the mountainous region of Pancasàn. The FSLN took this recommendation into consideration, and along with their observations of the region, decided to that Pancasán would be the location of their next attempt at *foco* revolution.

With international support, the actions of the Somoza regime further pushed members of the FSLN towards action. After four years of puppet rule under Schick, Anastasio Somoza Debayle decided that it was time for another member of his family to be president of Nicaragua. In 1966 he ran for the presidency of Nicaragua, arguably against the wishes of his brother who

¹⁰¹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 94.

¹⁰² "Josè Obidio 'Pepe' Puente Leòn: The Living Link," *When the AK-47s Fall Silent: Revolutionaries, Guerrillas, and the Dangers of Peace*, ed. Timothy C. Brown (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 2000), 39-40.

wanted to continue running the country through pliable puppet presidents.¹⁰³ Anastasio's presidency was met with intense resistance from the people of Nicaragua, who protested in the thousands against continued Somoza rule. The tense election reached a breaking point on January 22, 1967, when *Guardia Nacional* troops fired on 50,000 opposition protestors in Managua, killing one hundred and wounding hundreds others.¹⁰⁴ In the wake of the riots the Somoza regime cracked down on its opponents, jailing many and forcing the closure of *La Prensa*.¹⁰⁵ With *Guardia* troops positioned at polling stations, Anastasio Somoza Debayle became the new president of Nicaragua on May 1, 1967.¹⁰⁶ That same month, members of the FSLN began their second attempt at removing his family's regime.

Again located in the remote Matagalpa region of northeastern Nicaragua, Pancasán, as the operation would be known, represented yet another failure by the FSLN to kindle a *foco* style insurrection. In January 1967, days before the *Guardia* troops fired on protestors in Managua, the FSLN began a series of bank robberies and holdups designed to raise funds for their coming insurrection.¹⁰⁷ By May, Fonseca felt that the movement was sufficiently equipped to begin the insurrection. The remoteness of Matagalpa, combined with a much stronger *Guardia* presence, made it extremely difficult for the FSLN to establish a foothold in the region. Over the course of the summer of 1967, the FSLN had a number of small clashes with the *Guardia*. However, by August the tide had turned against the revolutionaries as the *Guardia* ambushed and destroyed an entire column, killing roughly half of the forty insurgents in the region, including the FSLN leader Silvio Mayorga.¹⁰⁸ After continued clashes with *Guardia* troops, the remaining

¹⁰³ Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 230.

¹⁰⁴ "Regime's Enemies Riot in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ "Nicaragua Paper Closing Scored," *Los Angeles Times*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ "Nicaragua Swears in Somoza as President," *New York Times*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Borge, *The Patient Impatience*, 215.

¹⁰⁸ "Nicaraguan Guerrillas in Trouble," *Los Angeles Times*, 9.

revolutionaries decided to abandon the struggle in Matagalpa and return to Honduras. In October, Somoza claimed that “the guerrilla forces have been exterminated,” and, confident in the utter destruction of his opponents, offered to send “a small, troop-training detachment to Vietnam.”¹⁰⁹

Following Pancasán Latin America’s revolutionary outlook appeared very bleak. The same month as the beleaguered members of the FSLN staggered back to Honduras, security forces in Bolivia, with CIA assistance, captured and executed the patron of Nicaraguan revolution, Che Guevara. Felix Rodriguez, the CIA officer who interrogated Che in Bolivia, was a Cuban exile and former member of Artime’s 2506 Assault Brigade and would later serve with the Contras. The previous year, the leader of Guatemala’s Revolutionary Armed Forces died at the hands of his nation’s armed forces, and in Peru security forces captured that states two most notorious revolutionary leaders. The future of revolution in Latin America looked dim, and, to many outside observers, the specter of revolution in Nicaragua appeared diminished. However, the resilient members of the FSLN would begin the revolutionary process again, pursuing an urban movement while strengthening their international ties.

In the immediate aftermath of Pancasán, the members of the FSLN returned to their safe houses and places of exile, carrying out what Borge would term “a new retreat: the silent accumulation of forces.”¹¹⁰ However, the retreat would not be silent for long as the FSLN immediately began plotting its next course of action. In 1969, Costa Rican officials arrested Borge and Henry Ruiz for smuggling arms into Nicaragua, beginning a period of exile in which Borge traveled to Columbia, Cuba, Mexico, Switzerland, and Peru.¹¹¹ From safe houses in

¹⁰⁹ “Red Guerrillas Challenged,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6; “Nicaragua Offers to Send Unit to Vietnam,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11.

¹¹⁰ Borge, *The Patient Impatience*, 263.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 283-306.

Managua, other members of the FSLN carried out bank robberies and raids designed to hurt the Somoza regime in their pocketbooks, reportedly netting over \$600,000 for their cause.¹¹² The FSLN also carried out attacks on specific members of the Somoza regime, at one point assassinating Gonzalo Locayo, one of the Somoza regime's most notorious torturers.¹¹³ However, these raids brought a massive retaliation from the Somoza government, which struck with the full might of the *Guardia Nacional*. In July 1969, *Guardia* troops killed the leader of the FSLN's urban movement, Julio Buitrago, in a violent shootout, involving two tanks, an airplane, and two helicopters. Perhaps out of carelessness or over confidence, the *Guardia* allowed the gun fight with Buitrago to appear live on Nicaraguan national television, publicizing the FSLN's exploits and creating a revolutionary legend.¹¹⁴

With its urban and rural movements seemingly crushed, the FSLN looked outward, strengthening its ties to national liberation struggles elsewhere in the world. Many of these connections had existed for years, stretching back to the early 1960s and Cuba. The young revolutionaries developed their ideological underpinnings and military acumen under Cuban tutelage. While in Cuba the future members of the FSLN forged ties with like-minded revolutionaries from other Latin American countries. For example, following the defeat at Pancasán, Omar Turcios traveled to Guatemala to aid the revolutionaries there and garner valuable military knowledge. Cuba itself proved to be a bastion of support during this time period with many Nicaraguans traveling to the island after the failed Pancasán operation.

¹¹² Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 233.

¹¹³ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 100.

¹¹⁴ Omar Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985), 21-23.

Following his deportation from Costa Rica, Tomas Borge traveled to Cuba, where he received further military training from the Cuban Rebel Army.¹¹⁵

In part facilitated by the connections to the Cuban Revolution, the FSLN also developed ties with revolutionary governments and movements outside of the western hemisphere. Many of these connections had been built over the course of the 1960s as members of the FSLN looked to the socialist world for guidance and education. Central American students, including many Nicaraguans, attended Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow during the 1960s, where they mixed with students from the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Others went to school in Chile during the Allende years, viewing the successes and failures of a socialist Latin American government.¹¹⁶ These educational experiences introduced the Nicaraguan students to other students and revolutionary movements that would become valuable in the coming decades.

Although much of their need for military training and assistance was met by the Cuban government, other revolutionary governments and movements beyond the Americas also aided the FSLN. China proved a valuable ally in the buildup for the Pancasán operation. However, following the FSLN's defeat, and in response to increased tensions with Cuba and the Soviet Union, the Chinese withdrew their support. North Vietnam also appears to have aided the Sandinistas in the early 1970s. As early as 1971, Cuban revolutionaries received training in Vietnam from the the Sapper Branch, the North Vietnamese army's commando/special forces troops.¹¹⁷ At roughly the same time, Omar Cabezas recalled a group of FSLN revolutionaries moving through a safe house, having returned from Cuba and, Cabezas believed, Vietnam.¹¹⁸ It

¹¹⁵ Borge, *The Patient Impatience*, 272-273.

¹¹⁶ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 107.

¹¹⁷ "Excerpts from 'Calendar of Events in the History of the Sapper Branch of the People's Army of Vietnam (1967-1997)' *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP)*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113923> (Accessed 9/30/2015).

¹¹⁸ Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountain*, 34.

is likely that, under the auspices of the Cuban government, members of the FSLN received military training from the North Vietnamese. The likelihood of cooperation looks strong, especially when considering the fact that the Vietnamese would attempt to provide aid and training a decade later.¹¹⁹ A number of Sandinistas, including Fonseca and Humberto Ortega, also spent six months in North Korea in early 1970 where they received military training.¹²⁰

There is also evidence that the FSLN, or at least some of its members, developed ties with the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the late 1960s. The extent of the relations between the two organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s is unclear, and what has been written is not completely reliable.¹²¹ Ironically both the opponents and supporters of the PLO and FSLN tend to emphasize the late 1960s as a period in which close ties between the two organizations developed. According to the accounts of opponents, Cuba facilitated the growth and cooperation between the two movements following the Tricontinental Conference in 1966, with Tomas Borge being among the first contingent of what would become 50 to 70 Sandinistas to receive training from the PLO in Lebanon in 1969.¹²² Although this coincides with the time the FSLN leader spent in exile, Borge makes no reference to Lebanon in his autobiography, and the number of 50 to 70 Sandinistas training in Lebanon is a larger figure than the number of members in the entire movement at that time. The only “solid proof” of cooperation between the FSLN and the PLO during this time was the participation of Patrick Argüello Ryan, a dual

¹¹⁹ Merle Pribbenow, “Vietnam Covertly Supplied Weapons to Revolutionaries in Algeria and Latin America,” *CWIHP*, November 2, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/vietnam-covertly-supplied-weapons-to-revolutionaries-algeria-and-latin-america>, Accessed 9/30/2015.

¹²⁰ Roger Miranda, *The Civil War in Nicaragua: Inside the Sandinistas* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 210; Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 143.

¹²¹ During the 1980s a number of ideologically conservative research institutions (The Cuban-American National Foundation, The Heritage Foundation, and the Center for International Security) all released reports highlighting the ties between the PLO, FSLN, and international terrorism. These reports are: David J. Kapilow, *Castro, Israel, and the PLO*, The Cuban-American National Foundation, 1984; Center for International Security, “The Sandinista-PLO Axis: A Challenge to the Free World,” *Spotlight on the Americas*, February 1984; and Eileen Scully, “The PLO’s Growing Latin American Base,” *Backgrounders*, No. 281, The Heritage Foundation, August 2, 1983.

¹²² Bruce Hoffman, *The PLO and Israel in Central America: The Geopolitical Dimension* (Santa Monica: Rand Publication Series, 1988), 4-5.

Nicaraguan/U.S. citizen and member of the FSLN, in the attempted hijacking of an El Al flight by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).¹²³ On September 6, 1970, Argüello and Leila Khaled (a PFLP member and veteran of a previous hijacking) attempted to hijack an El Al flight from Amsterdam to New York City; however Israeli sky marshals and passengers foiled their plot, killing Argüello in the ensuing scuffle.¹²⁴ Although Argüello was a Sandinista, there is little evidence that Argüello acted as part of a concerted alliance between the PLO and FSLN; it is just as likely that he joined the PFLP as an individual dedicated to the international principles of national liberation. Other Sandinistas, such as Omar Cabezas, also mention connections between Sandinistas and the PLO during this time period, but there is little tangible evidence to these claims.¹²⁵ However, in the coming decades the FSLN would celebrate Argüello as a martyr of the revolution, referring to him as an *internationalist* and using his death as a means to cement ties with the PLO.¹²⁶

Although Argüello's motives are unclear, by the early 1970s the FSLN had adopted the tactics of "international terrorism" modeled by the PFLP, PLO, and other national liberation movements. These tactics became apparent during Fonseca's imprisonment in Costa Rica in 1969 and 1970. In 1969 Fonseca returned to Costa Rica and again turned to the study of Sandino, while simultaneously organizing armed resistance to the Somoza regime. In August, as Fonseca was finishing his work on the Historic Program of the FSLN, Costa Rican police arrested him for his involvement in a bank robbery. Fearing that the Costa Rican police, who had close ties to the FSLN, might attempt to extradite him to Nicaragua where he would certainly be murdered, the FSLN began an international campaign to prevent Fonseca's movement to Nicaragua. The

¹²³ Klich, "Israel, the PLO, and Nicaragua," 48-49.

¹²⁴ "Killing Described by Leila," *The Guardian*, October 15, 1970, 2.

¹²⁵ Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountain*, 77.

¹²⁶ Humberto Ortega Saaverda, *50 años de lucha Sandinista* (Managua: Ministerio del Interior, 1976), 118.

campaign received some international attention and garnered an influential following, with figures such as the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre appealing to the Costa Rican government for Fonseca to not be extradited.¹²⁷ The members of the FSLN also attempted to intimidate the Costa Rican government into releasing Fonseca. In September the FSLN threatened to kill the Costa Rican ambassador to Nicaragua unless Fonseca was released from prison.¹²⁸

Although Fonseca was never extradited, he faced a long prison sentence and many feared that the Somoza regime would make an attempt on his life while under incarceration. The members of the FSLN eventually decided to take more aggressive steps to ensure Fonseca's release. On December 23, 1969, members of the FSLN, including Humberto Ortega, attempted a raid on the prison holding Fonseca. The raiders encountered a number of obstacles, beginning with a gun fight with the prison guards, which killed one of the Costa Ricans, and ending with their surrender to the police following a forty-vehicle car chase.¹²⁹ Because of the death of the Costa Rican guard, the members of the FSLN received long, or extended in the case of Fonseca, jail sentences. However, the failure did not deter the FSLN, which planned a hijacking for October of 1970. One month after Patrick Argüello participated in the attempted hijacking of an El Al flight, members of the FSLN hijacked a Costa Rican flight to Cuba, threatening to execute four U.S. hostages, two of whom were executives of United Fruit Company, and destroy the plane in Havana if Costa Rica refused to release Fonseca and the other guerrillas. Unlike the previous attempts to secure Fonseca's release, the hijacking proved a success, and days later the Costa Rican government agreed to the revolutionaries' release.¹³⁰ After briefly stopping in

¹²⁷ "A Former Guerrilla Promotes Welfare," *The Guardian*, April 22, 1970, 3.

¹²⁸ Costa Rican Envoy Gets Death Threat," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1969, 18.

¹²⁹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 126

¹³⁰ "Deal Saves 4 Americans in Hijacking," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1970, A19; "Costa Rica Frees 4 Nicaraguan Guerrillas to Save U.S. Hostages," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 1970, A19.

Mexico City, Fonseca and the newly released members of the FSLN travelled to Cuba, where he remained for the next five years.

Conclusion

Despite numerous setbacks, the FSLN persevered and continued to challenge the Somoza regime. Utilizing its international networks of support, and Central America's porous borders, the FSLN harassed, evaded, and attacked the Somoza regime throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. By reaching out to other national liberation struggles and adopting the strategies of "international terrorism," the FSLN won small, yet valuable, victories against the Somoza regime and the global counterrevolutionary alliance that supported it. The 1960s were the decade in which the FSLN became a truly international organization, with a presence throughout the Western Hemisphere, Europe, East Asia, and possibly the Middle East. These connections, forged during this decade, benefitted the FSLN immensely in the years to come as their struggle against the Somoza regime reached its apex in the late 1970s. It was in the 1960s that much of the groundwork for future Sandinista success was laid, built largely on its international connections.

However, these connections would not have existed were it not for the aid and support of the Cuban Revolution. The Castro government, long an enemy of the Somoza regime, encouraged the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, providing them with military training and support. Cuba also served as a sanctuary for members of the FSLN, who often sought refuge on the island following the failures at Coco y Bocay and Pancasán. Besides being a patron and safe haven for members of the FSLN, Cuba proved the conduit through which the Nicaraguan revolutionaries connected to other national liberation struggles. Cuba's role in the Third World movement

introduced the FSLN to revolutionaries and movements that allowed them to create a multinational network of aid and support that would ultimately challenge Nicaragua's counterrevolutionaries.

Nicaragua's counterrevolutionary current appeared to be at its strongest in the 1960s, bolstered by a strong economy and ties to the United States. Over the course of the 1960s, the Somoza regime ingratiated itself with the United States by demonstrating its commitment to anticommunism, participating in the Bay of Pigs invasion and supporting the activities of anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Because of this the Somozas benefitted from an international counterrevolutionary alliance, bringing together the nations of Central America in CONDECA and cementing ties between the regime and the State of Israel. Although the Somozas generally kowtowed to U.S. hegemony in the region, the regime acted with its own best interests in mind, at times rebuking the requests of the United States. Nicaraguan support for U.S. endeavors enriched the Somoza regime, which was unafraid of making their allegiance conditional on U.S. dollars. Unfortunately for the Somozas, the era of unconditional U.S. support was waning by the early 1970s, as the human rights revolution spurred a change in U.S. policymaking, forcing the Somozas to strengthen or build new counterrevolutionary connections. The same human rights revolution would also facilitate the growth of transnational movements determined to reform or remove the Somoza regime from power. By the 1970s, the Somozas faced mounting resistance to their continued hold on power, resistance with deep and wide international connections.

In late 1970, as Carlos Fonseca landed in Cuba after his release from a Costa Rican jail, he proclaimed that "the war has just begun," and that the FSLN was "going to liberate Nicaragua, in spite of the militaristic regime and the imperialist intervention of the United

States.”¹³¹ True to his word, Fonseca did again take the war to Nicaragua, though it would not be for another five years. By the time Fonseca again “returned to the mountain,” the nation’s political landscape had been deeply transformed by a series of events that would facilitate the growth of Nicaragua’s revolutionary current, ultimately propelling the FSLN to victory in 1979.

¹³¹ “Terrorist Urges Nicaraguan War,” *The Washington Post*, October 24, 1970, A6.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION AND THE FALL OF THE SOMOZA DYNASTY

Entering the 1970s the Sandinista National Liberation Front existed largely in exile, with only small cells operating in both rural and urban Nicaragua. The brutal counterinsurgency of the Somoza regime had dramatically diminished the ability of the Sandinistas to wage a guerrilla war or mount an urban uprising. However, Anastasio Somoza Debayle had failed to completely defeat the FSLN, whose leaders, mostly from exile, continued to conspire against his rule. Over the coming decade the FSLN would grow to challenge the Somoza regime and, in 1979, topple his government. The Sandinista victory over the Somoza regime stemmed, in large part, from the organization's ability to create and cultivate strong networks of international aid and support. They also benefitted from the global human rights revolution, which not only inspired Nicaraguans, but moved North Americans and Europeans to challenge their government's relations with the Somoza regime and stand in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua.¹ For the Somoza regime the human rights revolution resulted in a sharp increase in condemnation and a decrease in support from former allies, specifically the United States. Despite close ties to U.S. officials, U.S. aid declined dramatically during the 1970s, ending completely during the administration of Jimmy Carter. This in turn forced the Somoza regime to forge new connections, building relationships with fellow counterrevolutionaries in the Southern Cone, and

¹ For discussions of the history of human rights see, Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I Hitchcock, ed. *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For human rights in the United States see Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); in Latin America, Edward L. Cleary, *The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1997); and Europe, James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008).

strengthen its ties with traditional allies, such as the State of Israel. Ultimately the loss of U.S. support proved debilitating for the Somoza regime, which was unable to survive the tumultuous year of 1979; however, the transnational networks that it developed would sustain counterrevolutionary resistance to Sandinista rule in the 1970s.

Perhaps the most important factor to shape the outcome of the struggle for power in Nicaragua was the international human rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. By mid-century, the international movement for increased acknowledgement and acceptance of human rights had made significant strides in many corners of the global. Multinational, international, national, and grassroots organizations all agitated and petitioned for increased recognition of human rights.² The United Nations promoted human rights at the global level, aided by other international organizations such as Amnesty International, while national governments, such as the Carter administration in the United States, began implementing human rights initiatives.³ Grassroots organizations, such as the North American Congress on Latin America in the United States and the *Latin American News* in Germany, highlighted the abuses of the Somoza regime and pressured their respective governments to encourage regime change in Nicaragua. The various human rights agendas forwarded by these organizations at the international, national, and grassroots levels all proved crucial to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries struggling against the Somoza regime. They helped shine a spotlight on the abuses of the Somozas and in the process

² Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 317-331.

³ Jimmy Carter, "Humane Purposes in Foreign Policy," News Release, May 22, 1977, Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, p. 2. For detailed accounts of the Carter's human rights policy from members of the administration see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of a National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983); Carter, *Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995); Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983). See also David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996); Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

undermined the legitimacy of the regime internationally and at home. Unlike Sandino who benefited from a robust but relatively uninfluential global network of solidarity organizations, the revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s benefited from a large and incredibly persuasive system of support, or at the least opposition to the Somoza regime.

Perhaps the most influential international body to be touched by the human rights revolution was the Catholic Church, which became an outspoken advocate for the poor and the oppressed following the Second Vatican Council in 1965.⁴ In Latin America the reforms of Vatican II were manifest in Liberation Theology, a message of social uplift in which members of the Catholic Church, long an ally of the region's repressive institutions, made social reform a cornerstone of their religious practice.⁵ The message of Liberation Theology proved particularly strong in Nicaragua, where members of the church hierarchy became advocates for the poor, and began challenging the Somoza regime. By the mid-1970s, many officials in the church, including the Nicaraguan Archbishop, Miguel Obando y Bravo, as well as Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann and Ernesto Cardenal, began agitating for the removal of the Somoza regime. D'Escoto and Cardenal themselves were members of "Los Doce" or The Twelve, a group of influential Nicaraguans organized in opposition to the Somoza regime. Besides high-profile Nicaraguans, many within the church also operated at the grassroots level, creating Christian BASE communities, which would become crucial centers of recruitment and organization for the

⁴ Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America – The Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (New York: Penguin Press, 1991), 31-36.

⁵ For a discussion of the tenets of liberation theology see, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012).

FSLN.⁶ Liberation Theology, birthed by the human rights revolution, would come to play a pivotal role in the revolution and the political system that would follow it.

The eventual success of the FSLN in overthrowing the Somoza regime was due in large part to their taking advantage of this growing international awareness concerning human rights. The Sandinistas pursued an aggressive campaign to garner international support for their cause, highlighting the injustices of the Somoza regime and the plight of the Nicaraguan people. Members of the FSLN, including those in the influential Los Doce, went on world tours, speaking against the Somoza regime and promoting a message of human rights and dignity for the people of Nicaragua. In response, solidarity organizations sprang up throughout Latin America, North America, and Europe. These organizations became important nodes in the FSLN's networks of aid and support, waging campaigns in their host countries to end support for the Somoza regime while providing aid to those seeking to bring it down. Latin American refugees, many fleeing persecution at the hands of despotic regimes, swelled the ranks of these organizations. Among those refugees were many Nicaraguans, fleeing their home country's poor economy, as well as the Somoza regime's oppression and the devastation of the 1972 earthquake. These Nicaraguan refugees, many of whom resided in the United States, threw their support behind the FSLN and, in the process, forged a vital link in the transnational network of opposition to the Somoza regime.

The FSLN also received significant support from its allies, such as Cuba, as well as the traditional enemies of the Somoza regime, including Jose Figueres and the National Liberation Party in Costa Rica. Although Cuban support for revolutionary movements in Latin America waned in the early years of the 1970s, the Cuban government persisted in its patronage of the

⁶ Michael Dodson and Laura Nuzzi O'Shaughnessy, *Nicaragua's Other Revolution: Religious Faith and Political Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 121-122.

Sandinistas as the island continued to be a safe-haven for the members of the FSLN. However, by the late 1970s, other states had joined the anti-Somoza struggle. The governments of José Figueres in Costa Rica and Omar Torrijos in Panama became the primary patrons of the FSLN in the years before the ouster of Somoza Debayle.⁷ Costa Rica again proved to be an important base of operations for Nicaraguan revolutionaries, with San José acting as a headquarters and outposts along the border serving as springboards for launching insurgencies.⁸ The ultimate success of the FSLN over the Somoza regime was due in large part to support of friendly governments.

As international support for their opponents grew, the Somoza regime found itself increasingly alone on the world stage. The human rights revolution, which had proven a boon for the FSLN, dramatically undermined the Somoza regime's international networks of support. Powerful regional players, such as Mexico, pressured Anastasio Somoza Debayle to step down and openly supported the FSLN.⁹ The largest blow to Somoza Debayle was his abandonment by the United States in the latter half of the 1970s. Exhausted from its defeat in Vietnam and facing public pressure to create a more transparent foreign policy based on human rights, many U.S. officials increasingly viewed the Somoza regime as a liability. Although not the first time U.S. officials had expressed concerns about the Managua regime, the 1970s marked the beginning of a brief policy move away from supporting anti-communist dictatorships, which found expression in the presidency of Jimmy Carter. The Carter administration sought to make human rights a cornerstone of its foreign policy agenda. Unfortunately for the Somoza regime this meant a dramatic curtailing of support; eventually resulting in the cutting of all U.S. military aid.

⁷ Harry E. Vanden, "Foreign Policy," *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, ed. Thomas W. Walker, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 314.

⁸ Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 124-128.

⁹ Charles A. Krause, "Nicaraguan War Polarizes Left, Right in Latin America," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 1979, A17.

Viewing the situation as increasingly unstable and anemic to U.S. interests in the region, Carter eventually called for the removal of Somoza and his replacement with a moderate government. With the threat of U.S. intervention removed, which had restrained many of the Somoza regime's enemies in the past, the Nicaraguan opposition moved quickly and forcefully against the regime. Perhaps no single factor did more to precipitate the fall of Somoza Debayle than the removal of U.S. support. However, in the absence of U.S. support, the regime would turn to other counterrevolutionary allies in its attempt to stay in power.

As his regime crumbled around him, Anastasio Somoza Debayle turned to his old allies for help, while a new crop of counterrevolutionaries came to his aid.¹⁰ With U.S. military support gone, Israel stood by the dictator and provided him with military assistance right until the very end. In the last years of his regime, Somoza received almost all of his military support from the State of Israel. Somoza Debayle also attempted to forestall U.S. cutting of military aid by turning to his network of lobbyists and supporters within the United States. The Nicaraguan strongman turned to friendly politicians in the United States, many of whom railed against the cutting of military aid and the call for Somoza to step down. Among his most loyal allies in the United States was the Cuban-American community, who protested the Carter administration's apparent weakness towards what they saw as the expansion of revolutionary communism from Castro's Cuba. Others traveled to Nicaragua and joined the *Guardia Nacional* in its last ditch fight against the FSLN. At the same time, the military juntas of the Southern Cone came to the aid of the Somoza regime, providing the dictator with intelligence and counterinsurgency training. Although this alliance would not be strong enough to preserve Somoza Debayle's hold on power, it did sow the seeds for the counterrevolutionary movement against the FSLN.

¹⁰ Karen DeYoung, "Somoza Reported Meeting Latin Allies: Somoza, Allies Meet as U.S. Talks Falter," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 1979, A1.

Although the military prowess of the FSLN defeated Somoza's *Guardia Nacional*, it was ultimately the dramatic changes in international attitudes concerning human rights that forced the collapse of the Somoza regime. Springing from the experiences of World War II, and in the United States the conflict in Vietnam, a powerful movement for the recognition of human rights permeated institutions of political and religious power. The human rights revolution brought about the Second Vatican Council, which enabled the Nicaraguan Catholic Church to break with years of accommodation and challenge the oppression of the Somoza regime. Equally important, it brought about a dramatic change in U.S. foreign policy, eventually ending years of U.S. support for the Somozas. Abandoned by the United States and challenged by Nicaragua's largest religious institution, the Somoza regime proved a victim of the human rights revolution.

The International Human Rights Revolution and the Nicaraguan Catholic Church

The mid-twentieth century human rights revolution proved a crucial factor in the contest between Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents. It undermined the Somoza regime while facilitating the creation of networks of aid and support utilized by the Sandinistas. Although the concept of human rights seemed to explode on the world scene in the late 1960s and 1970s, it was an idea that thinkers had wrestled with for centuries. The premise that all humans are accorded certain inalienable rights emerged out of the Enlightenment and the revolutionary milieu of the late eighteenth century. Following the horrors of the Holocaust, human rights became a codified and internationally accepted phenomenon capable of impacting world politics. Despite the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Genocide Convention (1948), and the Geneva Convention on Refugees (1951) under the umbrella of the United Nations, international human rights had a limited ability to impact global

affairs.¹¹ However, in the 1960s and early 1970s a confluence of historical events bolstered a renewed and strengthened emphasis on human rights. Aided by new satellites that "allowed nearly instant sharing of images around the world," the dissolution of European colonial empires, the end of formal racial inequality in the United States, the Soviet denunciation of Stalinism, and the onset of détente injected new energy into the global movement.¹² By the late 1960s and early 1970s the international human rights movement found expression in grassroots and non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, and multinational bodies, many of which decried the abuses of the Somoza regime.

In regards to Nicaragua, perhaps the most powerful entity impacted by the human rights revolution was the Catholic Church. In the early 1960s the Catholic Church, long a bastion of reactionary thought and conservatism, stressed the importance of human rights to the Christian faith. Latin American became the center for a new Catholic ideology steeped in the ideals of human rights. As a result of these reforms, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church became a vocal and powerful opponent of the Somoza regime in the early 1970s. Led by the Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, who publicly criticized the Somoza regime, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church became a powerful voice of opposition and, at times, ally of the FSLN. Utilizing the resources of the church internationally, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church succeeded in internationalizing their message of opposition and rallying fellow Catholics to their cause. Other members of the Catholic hierarchy, such as Ernesto Cardenal, became international figures speaking out against the injustice and brutality of the Somozas. Cardenal, along with his brother Fernando, eventually aligned himself with the FSLN, carrying out an international public

¹¹ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 126-133.

¹² Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2012), 180-181;

relations campaign against the Somoza regime while garnering support for the Sandinistas.

Stirred by changing attitudes concerning human rights, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church moved away from maintaining the status quo and, instead, fought for social justice and the end of the Somoza regime.

Although the Nicaraguan Catholic Church, like its coreligionists elsewhere in Latin America, historically aligned itself with conservatism and the ruling elites, that relationship began to change in the mid-twentieth century. The catalyst for this change was the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII between 1962 and 1965, which brought the Catholic Church's spiritual leaders to Rome to discuss the problems of increasing unrest and secularization. The council was a reaction to the problems represented by the increased economic and political inequality faced by those in majority Catholic countries, and the related threat of increased secularization embodied by the Cuban Revolution. Fearing that continued commitment to the status quo would fail to alleviate the depravations faced by many Catholics, particularly in Latin America, and strengthen the appeal of secular or atheistic ideologies, Pope John XXIII sought to revitalize the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council called for greater participation of the Catholic community in working for human rights and "challenged the faithful to search together for new sociopolitical solutions to the problems of mass poverty and deprivation."¹³ The Second Vatican Council unleashed a political sea-change in many Catholic countries, particularly in Latin America where the Church's message of human rights found welcoming converts.

Inspired by the message of the Second Vatican Council, Latin America's bishops convened a council at Medellín in 1968. The Medellín council wrestled further with the human

¹³ Debra Sabia, *Contradiction and Conflict: The Popular Church in Nicaragua* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 14.

rights questions raised by the Second Vatican Council examining the stance of the Church towards sociopolitical change. Deeply influenced by Marxist thought, the council blamed capitalism for Latin America's system of social injustice and agreed that the church should take "a preferential option for the poor." In what would later become known as Liberation Theology, the council reversed a centuries-old stance of the church and allowed for those living in deprivation to challenge the socioeconomic conditions that kept them impoverished.¹⁴ Instead of accepting the squalid conditions in which they lived, the poor could demand greater access to social programs and support services. Liberation Theology allowed the poor to challenge the conditions of their oppression and shake the social order. Priests and nuns no longer segregated themselves from those living in poverty, only visiting their communities once or twice a year, and instead went to live among the impoverished, forming Christian "base communities" in which they would educate the poor while teaching them the Bible.¹⁵ The Medellín council ushered in an era of radical change in Latin America as the Catholic Church, long a pillar of the region's conservatism, became an agent for social change.

The impact of Liberation Theology in Nicaragua was immediate and dramatic. The Nicaraguan Catholic Church had long been a staunch supporter of the Somoza regime; however that changed in the wake of the Medellín council. In a move that many saw as an attempt to instigate political change in Nicaragua, the Vatican appointed Miguel Obando y Bravo, a relatively young and inexperienced priest, the archbishop of Managua in 1970.¹⁶ Regardless of whether or not the Vatican intended for Obando y Bravo to challenge the existing political order, the new archbishop almost immediately became a thorn in the side of the Somoza regime. In

¹⁴ Dodson and O'Shaughnessy, *Nicaragua's Other Revolution*, 91-92.

¹⁵ Sabia, *Contradiction and Conflict*, 16-21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

fact, the first move of the new archbishop was to return Somoza Debayle's gift of a Mercedes (the Mercedes business was one of the many enterprises run by the Somoza regime), and subsequently received threats of a "car accident" for refusing to become indebted to the dictator.¹⁷ In September 1970, Nicaraguan students occupied the Managua Cathedral as well as churches in Leon and Granada, while other protestors participated in hunger strikes. Marking the first break between the Catholic Church and the Somoza regime, Obando y Bravo spoke out in support of the students, "condemning persecution and torture, calling on [the] government to permit a commission to visit prisoners and demanding prisoners be brought before a judge and either charged or released."¹⁸ Although insisting that his stance was apolitical, Obando y Bravo entered Nicaragua's political fray and infused the anti-Somoza struggle with the ideology of Liberation Theology.

During the early years of the 1970s Obando y Bravo became increasingly open in his opposition to the Somoza regime. In November 1971 the archbishop announced that he would "abstain" from voting in the upcoming 1972 general elections. Although he claimed to "not judge the acts of any person in particular," Obando y Bravo took aim at the Somoza regime when he expressed a desire that Nicaragua have "governors who know how to govern and who give liberty to the people so they can elect those who are qualified to direct the destiny of the state." In closing the archbishop added that he desired to express his "wish to elect other rulers that will interest themselves in the people, and that the people will be able to elect them."¹⁹ In the spring of 1972, Obando y Bravo refused to attend the inauguration of Nicaragua's new ruling

¹⁷ Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, 89.

¹⁸ "Telegram 1696 from the Embassy in Nicaragua to the Department of State, September 28, 1970, 1617Z," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-10, Documents on American Republics*, Document 497.

¹⁹ "Telegram 2682 from the Embassy in Nicaragua to the Department of State, November 20, 1971, 1713Z," *Ibid.*, Document 510.

triumvirate, which Somoza Debayle had chosen to succeed him as president. By early 1972 the Nicaraguan Catholic Church, or at least those associated with the archbishop, had clearly broken with the Somoza regime.

The language of Liberation Theology permeated the Obando y Bravo's anti-Somoza rhetoric. At the inaugural address to the new term of Nicaragua's National Autonomous University (UNAN) the archbishop again assailed the Somoza regime, describing Nicaragua as a place in which "a situation of violence is crushing the masses. This violence conceals itself in oppression caused by unjust or corrupt structures and situations." Although he discouraged the use of physical violence, Obando y Bravo called on the people of Nicaragua to follow the nonviolent examples of Ghandi and the U.S. civil rights movement to put "moral pressure" on the Somoza government. That fall Obando y Bravo bemoaned the Somoza regime's exploitation of Nicaragua's people and its natural resources, stating that the dictatorship's actions had left the country with "holes in the ground and in the lungs of its children."²⁰ In a conversation with U.S. ambassador Turner Shelton in October 1972, the archbishop expressed his opinion that above all the role of the Church was to act as the spokesman of the "little man," and "in many instances his only ally in obtaining redress of grievances or combating injustices which he suffered." Obando y Bravo admitted that in meeting those obligations the Church would at times come into conflict with the Somoza regime; however, he believed that it should not shirk from such responsibilities. Ultimately, he argued that the Nicaraguan Catholic Church had "opened its doors to modern influences and reforms," specifically Liberation Theology, and that "these were trends that could not be reversed." According to Obando y Bravo, the true problem facing Nicaragua was the Somoza regime, which "refused to accommodate these new forces at work in the world and

²⁰ "Airgram A-104 from the Embassy in Nicaragua to the Department of State, November 3, 1972," *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. E-10, Document 517.

resisted reforms of social, economic and political structures.”²¹ Preaching a message of compassion for those facing poverty and injustice in Nicaraguan society, Obando y Bravo became a vessel for the promotion of Liberation Theology in Nicaragua. However, he was not alone in promulgating the Catholic Church’s new theology.

The impact of Liberation Theology went beyond Obando y Bravo, impacting a number of influential Nicaraguans, including Miguel D’Escoto and the Fernando Cardenal. The son of a Nicaragua diplomat, D’Escoto was born in Los Angeles and later studied in the United States, becoming a Catholic priest of the Maryknoll mission. He spent much of the 1960s working with the poor in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile before returning to Nicaragua in the early 1970s.²² In the early 1970s D’Escoto clandestinely met with the FSLN and helped facilitate an alliance between progressive Catholic clergy and the Sandinistas. Fernando Cardenal, the cousin of anti-Somoza opponent Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, became a proponent of Liberation Theology after living in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Medellín, Colombia. The experience of Colombia’s extreme poverty, combined with the message of Liberation Theology that pervaded his Jesuit seminary, convinced Cardenal to take “an oath before God” that “from today until the day I die, I dedicate my life to the liberation of the poor in the struggle for justice.”²³ Upon returning to Nicaragua, Cardenal began working at the Nicaraguan Jesuit University, and later UNAN, where he became affiliated with the movement against Somoza. Both D’Escoto and Cardenal would become members of “Los Doce” and hold prominent positions in the Sandinista government following the fall of Somoza regime.

²¹ “Memorandum of Conversation, Managua, October 25, 1972,” *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. E-10, Document 516.

²² “Father Miguel D’Escoto’s Fast for Peace, In Defense of Life, and Against Terrorism,” *CHISPA: News of Nicaragua*, Casa de Amistad, Fall 1985, 26.

²³ “Nicaraguan Jesuit, Political Activist Captivates Boston College Audience,” *Jesuits: National Jesuit News*, <http://www.jesuit.org/blog/index.php/2011/11/nicaraguan-jesuit-political-activist-captivates-boston-college-audience/#more-4481>, (Accessed on 10/13/2015).

Despite the importance of D'Escoto and Fernando Cardenal to the promulgation of Liberation Theology to Nicaragua, perhaps the most visible and powerful conveyor of this message was Fernando's brother, the poet Ernesto Cardenal. In 1957, Cardenal traveled to the Gethsemani Monastery in Kentucky in order to study under the famed Catholic monk and mystic, Thomas Merton. Merton and Cardenal developed a close intellectual bond and made plans to develop a contemplative community in Nicaragua. In the early 1960s, Cardenal entered seminary in Antioquia, Colombia, at the time a hotbed for the ideals of Liberation Theology. The young priest soon became an adherent to the new theology and corresponded with one of its earliest and most vociferous proponents, Camilo Torres.²⁴ Although the two failed to meet in person, Cardenal left Colombia with a strong desire to serve the poor and, upon returning to Nicaragua, created one of the first Christian Base Communities on the small island of Solentiname.²⁵ At the same time, Cardenal began forging connections with members of the FSLN, including Tomas Borge and Carlos Fonseca, with whom a correspondence developed.²⁶ In the early 1970s, Cardenal developed international ties that proved ideologically transformative. In 1970 he traveled to Cuba and became a convert to the Cuban variant of socialism. He also traveled to Chile, where he met with President Salvador Allende, and Peru, where he attempted to organize a visit for Fidel Castro.²⁷ By the early 1970s, Cardenal was an international figure, known for his poetry and commitment to Liberation Theology. However, his fame would only grow in the coming decade as he became one of the most internationally visible figures in opposition to the Somoza regime.

²⁴ Stephen Henighan, *Sandino's Nation: Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramirez, Writing Nicaragua, 1940-2012* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 49-51.

²⁵ Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), xi-xv.

²⁶ Tomás Borge, *The Patient Impatience* (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1992), 262-267.

²⁷ Henighan, *Sandino's Nation*, 53.

By the early 1970s, the transformations unleashed by the Second Vatican Council had already deeply transformed the Nicaraguan Catholic Church. Many of its most prominent leaders stood in open opposition to the Somoza regime, while others conspired with the FSLN to bring about his downfall. Building on this growing mood of animosity towards the Somoza regime, in September of 1972, Obando y Bravo proposed a “National Pastoral Encounter.” Scheduled for January 1973, the conference was designed to bring together over 200 clergy and laity to discuss the social and political difficulties facing Nicaragua. Unfortunately, Obando y Bravo’s conference never materialized, as the Christmas earthquake destroyed much of Managua and threw the country into a state of emergency. Despite the terrible destructiveness of the quake, it proved a dramatic turning point in the struggle against the Somoza regime.

The Christmas Earthquake and the International Reaction

On December 23, 1972, a 6.2-magnitude earthquake shook Managua and the surrounding region. The quake killed or wounded tens of thousands, left over 250,000 people homeless, and caused millions of dollars in damage to the Nicaraguan capital. Many scholars of the Nicaraguan revolution rightfully cite the earthquake as a turning point in the struggle against the Somoza regime.²⁸ Largely complacent for much of the Somoza family’s reign, the Nicaraguan people were stirred into action by the earthquake, unleashing a wave of unrest that would crest in 1979 and the popular insurrection that would dethrone the Somozas.

Occurring in the milieu of the human rights revolution, the Christmas earthquake also proved a turning point in international attitudes towards Nicaragua’s political turmoil. As a result

²⁸ Nearly every major study on the Nicaraguan Revolution recognizes the Christmas earthquake as a major turning point in the struggle against the Somoza regime, including works written by John Booth, Matilde Zimmermann, and Thomas W. Walker.

of the quake, international attention to Nicaragua grew dramatically, drawing the notice of aid organizations and peace activists in the United States and beyond. Aiding the victims of the Christmas earthquake immediately became a globally popular cause, with relief aid flooding Nicaragua. For many outside of Nicaragua, the Christmas earthquake represented their first encounter with the intense poverty of the small nation as satellites broadcast images of Managua's destruction into their living rooms. The quake also brought increased international scrutiny of the Somoza regime. Unfortunately for most Nicaraguans, Somoza Debayle and his cronies pocketed many of the resources intended for the Nicaraguan people and failed to rebuild the majority of the destroyed capital, leaving much of it in rubble for years to come. The regime's wealth exploded, as the dictator consolidated political and economic control over the country. Between 1972 and 1974, Somoza Debayle's wealth grew from 300 million to 400 million dollars.²⁹ The obvious corruption of Somoza and his allies spurred widespread condemnation from Nicaraguan and international observers, further tarnishing the image of the Somoza regime.

The Christmas earthquake thrust Nicaragua into the international spotlight, with media agencies plastering articles about the quake on their front pages and broadcasting images of it into millions of living rooms. Between December and January 1972, the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* together published 386 articles about Nicaragua, more than they had been published in all of 1971.³⁰ News agencies such as the *Chicago Tribune*

²⁹ John Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 81; Walker and Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadows of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 31.

³⁰ Data collected from ProQuest Historical Newspaper database.

flew correspondents to Managua to document the destruction.³¹ Television and film crews also traveled to Managua, and, aided by new developments in satellite technology, broadcast images of the destruction into countless homes across the globe. Days after the quake, Mexican film crews were in Managua recording the destruction wrought by the quake. They quickly compiled their footage into a documentary that aired in Mexico, the United States, and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. Besides documenting the damage of the quake, the documentary also included appeals from various Latin American officials appealing for contributions to the people of the destroyed capital.³² The producers rushed the production of the documentary and it was airing in the United States within the following weeks.

Public figures and organizations from across the globe provided resources and raised funds for the relief efforts. U.S. President Richard Nixon pledged millions of dollars in aid and sent members of the U.S. armed forces to Managua to help with the crisis.³³ The British government coordinated with its own relief agencies, providing RAF Hercules aircraft to fly supplies to Managua.³⁴ Multinational organizations, including the Organization of American States, the International Red Cross, and the United Nations, provided monetary assistance as well as relief teams. Latin American, as well as European and North American, relief agencies sprang into action, with volunteers traveling from the United States, Canada, Britain, West Germany, France, Spain, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru.³⁵ Although government and nongovernmental agencies provided millions of dollars in relief, bearing much of the financial burden for relief, they were not alone in their efforts.

³¹ "Quake Story Easy to Tell, Hard to Relay to Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1978, 10.

³² "Weekend TV," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1972, A3.

³³ "U.S. Quake Aid put at \$10 million," *Chicago Tribune*, January 10, 1973, 3.

³⁴ "Britain Steps up Disaster Airlift," *The Guardian*, December 28, 1972, 18.

³⁵ "Rush Aid to Quake Victims," *Chicago Tribune*, December 26, 1972, 1; "U.S. Speeds Aid to Nicaragua Aboard Air Force Transports," *New York Times*, December 25, 1972, 11.

International celebrities also came to the aid of the people of Managua, raising the profile of Nicaragua. Roberto Clemente, a Puerto Rican and Hall of Fame baseball player with the Pittsburgh Pirates, spearheaded his home country's relief efforts. Through television appearances and pledge drives, Clemente successfully raised over \$150,000 for Nicaraguan relief, as well as tons of clothing and foodstuffs. Fearing that his contributions were falling into the hands of profiteers, Clemente personally traveled with the supplies destined for Managua and tragically died after the transport plane he was in crashed into the Caribbean.³⁶ It later came out that Clemente's fears of profiteering were not unfounded, and that the Somoza regime was in fact reselling much of the relief supplies.

Musicians also led efforts to raise funds for the people of Managua. The Rolling Stones organized in less than a week what, at the time, would become the world's largest benefit concert, grossing nearly \$500,000 for Managua relief. The concert, inspired by Mick Jagger's then-wife Bianca, a Nicaraguan national, was held in Inglewood, California, and featured appearances by Santana, as well as Cheech and Chong.³⁷ The Christmas earthquake benefit concert and Roberto Clemente's relief efforts epitomized the increasing importance of celebrity to raising awareness about and aid for international tragedy. Inspired by the human rights revolution, and aided by global systems of communication and transportation, celebrities became increasingly important vessels for raising awareness about and funds for various international causes. This trend of "rock and roll human rights" increased over the course of the 1970s, and proved particularly important during the anti-Contra War campaigns of the 1980s. It is, therefore, ironic that one of the first benefit concerts ever held was intended to aid the victims of the Managua earthquake, but largely enriched the Somoza regime.

³⁶ "Clemente, Pirates' Star, Dies in Crash of Plane Carrying Aid to Nicaragua," *New York Times*, January 2, 1973, 1.

³⁷ "The Rolling Stones Rock for Charity," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1973, B8.

In the wake of the earthquake, the Somoza regime looted Managua and extorted its residents. It was this blatant corruption that revealed to many the true nature of the regime and soured Nicaraguan and international opinion on the dictator. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, reports began leaving Managua that the Somoza regime was stockpiling the tons of food and other materials being sent to Nicaragua. Frank Blatchford, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, interviewed a Nicaraguan looter who claimed “none of the food is being given to the people. At the airport you can see army officers leaving with bags of sugar on their shoulders. That’s who gets the food. General Somoza takes care of his officers but he doesn’t care about the people.” Blatchford also interviewed a U.S. Air Force public affairs officer who supported the looters claims, stating that “there’s a lot of food here from other countries. These other countries have no means of distributing it, so it is sitting in the warehouse.”³⁸ These stockpiled goods, particularly construction supplies, largely strengthened the Somoza regime’s system of patronage within the *Guardia Nacional*, with officers receiving priority. As the rebuilding of Managua commenced, the *Guardia Nacional* extorted money from business owners and residents who sought protection of their property from looters. The Somoza regime also bought large tracts of destroyed land for a fraction of the price, typically from their political opponents, and then sold the land to the government, which used the monetary aid provided by other countries to pay for the purchase. At one point the Somoza regime held a monopoly on food in Managua, using their stockpiles to extort the people of the capital out of what little they had. The Somoza regime also held monopolies on building supplies, such as cement, and charged their political opponents exorbitant fees for their services.³⁹ With control of international relief aid flowing in to the

³⁸ “Managuans Say Food Sent as Aid is Stockpiled,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 26, 1972, 3.

³⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 33-34.

country, the Somoza regime took advantage of the devastation wrought by the Christmas earthquake to increase its own wealth and challenge those opposed to its hold on power.

The Christmas earthquake presented Somoza Debayle with the opportunity to further strengthen his hold on power. Facing growing domestic and international pressure to reform, in the early 1970s, Somoza Debayle entered into a political agreement with his main political opponents, the Conservative party, in which he would be a member of a ruling junta. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Somoza Debayle took advantage of the emergency to take power from the weak and largely ineffectual National Governing Council, using the *Guardia Nacional* to gradually assume full control over Nicaragua. Through the declaration of martial law and the establishment of a National Emergency Committee, with Somoza Debayle as its president, the Nicaraguan strongman assumed total control of the country.⁴⁰ Prior to the 1974 presidential election, Somoza Debayle engineered the creation of a new Nicaraguan constitution that forbade the *Jefe* of the *Guardia Nacional* from running for president. Looking to take advantage of a loophole in the constitution, Somoza Debayle simply resigned as the head of the *Guardia Nacional* and retained his title as the head of Nicaragua's armed forces, therefore, ensuring the letter of the law and the illusion of cooperation. With the full support of the *Guardia Nacional*, Somoza Debayle guaranteed his own presidential victory in 1974, receiving an unprecedented seven-year term.⁴¹

The Christmas earthquake proved a dramatic turning point in the international struggle against the Somoza regime. For many casual observers in North America and Europe, the Christmas earthquake was their first introduction to Nicaragua and its political order. Television

⁴⁰ "Telegram from the Embassy in Nicaragua to the Department of State," *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. E-10, Document 237.

⁴¹ Richard Millet, *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 240.

broadcasts and newspaper articles brought images of the quake's destruction into their homes, while celebrities and public officials organized relief supplies. Others traveled to Nicaragua as relief workers and saw firsthand the poverty and inequality so pervasive in Nicaraguan society. The blatant greed and corruption, coupled with the regime's clear disdain for democracy, convinced many outside observers that political reform needed to come to Nicaragua. Over the course of the 1970s those sentiments would grow, aiding those who sought to topple the Somoza regime.

The FSLN and the International Nicaraguan Revolution

Following the Managua earthquake, the political situation in Nicaragua deteriorated over the course of the 1970s as violence repeatedly rocked the country. The FSLN acted as the catalyst for much of this violence, garnering ever greater support and carrying out increasingly daring assaults on the Somoza regime. These actions on the part of the FSLN increased their prestige, not only in Nicaragua, but also on the international stage where their exploits were broadcast around the globe. The 1970s also saw the expansion of the FSLN's transnational networks of support, with the forging of ties, particularly in the United States, to grassroots solidarity organizations. Although many of these organizations arose spontaneously, many were created as part of an FSLN strategy to garner international sympathy for their cause and foment animosity towards the Somoza regime. Utilizing the rhetoric and ideals of the human rights revolution, the FSLN pursued an international offensive against the Somoza regime, which successfully undermined the dictator's global support networks, leaving Somoza Debayle with few avenues for aid and, ultimately, bringing about his downfall.

Over the course of the 1970s, the FSLN carried out a number of high-profile attacks on the Somoza regime that garnered them significant international attention and propelled them to the forefront of the militant Nicaraguan opposition. The most important of these assaults was a raid on a party honoring U.S. ambassador Turner B. Shelton and attended by important pro-Somoza Nicaraguans, on December 27, 1974. Dressed in formal wear, thirteen Sandinista commandos attacked and successfully held the entire party, capturing Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, the Nicaraguan ambassador to the U.S. and Somoza Debayle's brother-in-law, as well as other prominent Nicaraguans, and only missing the U.S. ambassador by minutes. After repelling an attack by the *Guardia Nacional*, the guerrillas demanded the release from prison of FSLN prisoners, a \$5 million ransom, and the publication of a communique from the Sandinistas to the Nicaraguan people. After tense days of negotiation, mediated by Miguel Obando y Bravo, Somoza Debayle acquiesced to the FSLN's demands, releasing eighteen prisoners and permitting the reading of the FSLN's communique to the Nicaraguan people. The Somoza regime provided an airliner to fly the guerillas and freed prisoners to Cuba, where they received a hero's welcome and reconnected with many of their compatriots.⁴²

The hostage-taking propelled the Sandinistas to international fame and brought significant attention to Nicaragua. In the United States, the hostage taking inspired the growth of solidarity organizations. Nicaraguan and Chicano activists in San Francisco quickly translated and published the FSLN's communique and distributed it throughout the city. They subsequently held a rally and march that became the first anti-Somoza protest in the United States.⁴³ Where the Managua earthquake two years earlier marked a growing North American awareness of the

⁴² Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, 142.

⁴³ Alejandro Murguía, *The Medicine of Memory: A Mexican Clan in California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 134.

issues facing Nicaragua, the New Year's raid marked a period of growing anti-Somoza activism in the United States.

Although the raid helped spur North American anti-Somoza activism, it was the violence unleashed by the Somoza regime in response to the assault that brought many into the FSLN camp. Following the raid, the Somoza regime declared martial law and unleashed a wave of repression against its opponents. In its efforts to root out opposition, the Somoza Debayle gave the *Guardia Nacional* greater liberty to intimidate or eliminate any opposition, escalating regime violence. Instead of cajoling the Nicaraguan people into docility, this increase in violence by the government pushed greater numbers of Nicaraguans into the opposition camp, particularly into the arms of the Sandinistas. Creating a feedback loop in which regime violence inspired popular violence which resulted in more regime violence, the situation in Nicaragua during the mid-1970s became dramatically more volatile in a short period of time.

This increase in violence coincided with a blatant power grab on the part of Somoza Debayle, who, through manipulation of the Nicaraguan political system, was elected president in 1974. For many Nicaraguan elites, the reelection signaled Somoza Debayle's abandonment of a political agreement in which he shared some power with the opposition, and a blatant attempt to further consolidate his hold on the reins of power. This, in turn, pushed many Nicaraguan elites, who may have tolerated the Somoza regime's monopoly on power in exchange for economic privileges, into the opposition camp. By the late 1970s, the Somoza regime found itself facing increased opposition from all sectors of Nicaraguan society. The regime's decades-old alliance with the United States was the only thing keeping it in power. However, that alliance was also slowly being undone by the FSLN and its own allies in the United States.

During the 1970s the FSLN pursued a policy of actively cultivating international solidarity by sending groups and individuals to North America, Europe, and elsewhere in Latin America to create solidarity committees, “foster support and raise money for the FSLN, and spread the story of the Sandinistas.”⁴⁴ Conscious of the deep impact of the human rights revolution and the necessity of garnering international support, the FSLN undertook a “hearts and minds” campaign, particularly in the United States, to sway international public opinion in their favor. This mission to develop international solidarity built upon existing networks of Nicaraguan immigration, as members of the FSLN contacted family members living in the United States, Mexico, and elsewhere in order to foster the growth of solidarity committees. Although the growth of these organizations, especially in the United States, is often viewed as organic and culminating in a grassroots opposition to the Somoza regime, they were, in fact, a direct result of FSLN planning.⁴⁵ The FSLN contacted existing groups of Nicaraguans expatriates and other accommodating assemblies, providing them with connections to the Sandinista underground and propaganda to use against the Somoza regime. The FSLN’s campaign, in many ways, proved successful: creating ally organizations in the United States that

⁴⁴ Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 154.

⁴⁵ There is very little literature concerning the anti-Somoza movement in the United States or elsewhere, and what exists is primarily a prelude of the anti-Contra War movement of the 1980s. See Van Gosse, “The North American Front: Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era,” *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s* ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 1988); Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peace, *A Call to Conscience*; Ibid., *A Just and Lasting Peace: The U.S. Peace Movement from the Cold War to Desert Storm* (Chicago: The Noble Press, 1991); Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a very brief discussion of the connections between the FSLN and the anti-Somoza movement in the United States see Hector Perla, Jr., “Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, 6 (November 2009); Ibid., “Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá” Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Research Review* 43, 2 (2008); Ibid., “The FSLN and International Solidarity,” *The Sandinistas and Nicaragua Since 1979* ed. David Close, Salvador Martí i Puig, and Shelley A. McConnell (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

provided monetary support and conducted, sometimes militant, activism designed to challenge U.S. support for the Somoza regime. The activities of these organizations ultimately helped bring about a change in U.S. policy and the elimination of support for the Somoza regime.

In part due to the failures of its urban and rural guerrilla campaigns, the FSLN began pursuing a campaign for the hearts and minds of North Americans, Europeans, and Latin Americans. The international attention afforded by the Christmas earthquake presented a unique opportunity to export their message to the world. In the immediate aftermath of the Managua earthquake, Carlos Fonseca sent off letters to groups around the world requesting donations and relief aid. He sent letters to various African American and Native American groups in the United States, as well as a letter to “Nicaraguans residing in the United States.” These letters tested the waters of international solidarity, and proved the initial correspondence of fruitful relationships. The FSLN even proposed organizing an international geological conference to study Nicaragua’s faults and find a new location for the capital.⁴⁶ Although these efforts failed to garner significant international support, they did, however, demonstrate a growing awareness of the need for international support in their struggle against the Somoza regime. They also helped place the FSLN in contact with Nicaraguan expatriates, many living in the United States, who would prove invaluable to the anti-Somoza struggle.

Often neglected in the narrative of United States solidarity with the FSLN is the importance of Nicaraguan exiles and refugees to the struggle. The Nicaraguan community in the United States, often aligned with those in the Chicano movement, proved the base upon which FSLN solidarity was built. FSLN affiliates contacted family members in the United States, many of whom had left Nicaragua following the 1972 earthquake, enlisting them in the effort to foment

⁴⁶ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 173.

anti-Somoza activism and garner monetary support for the Sandinista cause. Previous groups of Nicaraguan exiles had petitioned U.S. officials as early as the Truman administration; however, it was not until the early 1970s that these solidarity movements began to gain traction.⁴⁷ In the United States, opposition to the Somoza regime grew in large part due to its burgeoning Nicaraguan refugee population. Following the Managua earthquake in 1972, thousands of Nicaraguans traveled to the United States and by 1976, 17,000 were living in San Francisco alone.⁴⁸ California, and San Francisco in particular, became a hub for Nicaraguan exiles in the United States, with numerous solidarity organizations operating in the city. Many of these organizations maintained their ties with those in the Nicaraguan opposition, particularly the FSLN, becoming vocal advocates of revolutionary change.

In the mid-1970s, the Nicaraguan exile community in the United States proved pivotal in the struggle against the Somozas. Built on personal relationships, the Nicaraguan opposition constructed a transnational network linking exiles in the United States to the struggle in their home country. Extended family members operated in public solidarity organizations, as well as participated in clandestine networks, funneling information out of Nicaragua and publishing it for international consumption. They also held some of the first protests in the United States against the Somoza regime. These organizations were so successful in raising the profile of the conflict in Nicaragua, that the Non-Intervention in Nicaragua Committee (NIN), a Washington, D.C.-based solidarity group, helped arrange a hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House of Representatives. North American internationalists, many with ties

⁴⁷ In 1950 a group of Nicaraguan exiles living in Nicaragua corresponded with Major General Harry H. Vaughn, President Truman's military aide, through L.R. Weeks, a businessman from Salt Lake City. Ultimately the White House dismissed the concerns raised by the group of exiles. Truman Presidential Library, Official File 429, Box 1434, Documents 432.

⁴⁸ "As Its Troubles Mount, Nicaragua Looks Anxiously Northward," *The Washington Times*, November 27, 1977, I2.

to the Chicano movement and Nicaraguan solidarity organizations, traveled to Nicaragua in the late 1970s, swelling the ranks of the FSLN. Ultimately, Nicaraguan exiles and refugees in North America proved crucial to the success of the Nicaraguan opposition in ousting the Somoza regime.

One of the oldest of these organizations was the Comité Cívico Latinoamericano Pro-Nicaragua en los Estados Unidos (the Pro-Nicaragua Latin American Civic Committee in the United States or Comité Cívico). Created in the wake of the 1972 earthquake, the Comité Cívico operated out of the Mission district in San Francisco and pulled from the city's growing Nicaraguan community, as well as those involved in the Chicano movement. Publishing and distributing the magazine, *Gaceta Sandinista*, Comité Cívico operated as one of the main mouthpieces for Sandinista rhetoric and propaganda in the United States. The organization, which was founded by student activists, Nicaraguan refugees, and former members of both the *Guardia Nacional* and veterans of Sandino's army, protested against the Somoza regime, holding rallies and raising funds for the FSLN. The San Francisco-based organization would become a springboard for further activism in the United States, while simultaneously providing aid and monetary support for the FSLN.

Building upon familial relationships to construct solidarity, the Comité Cívico became one of the most important Nicaraguan solidarity organizations in the United States. The organization largely grew out of the activities of Roberto Vargas, a Nicaraguan immigrant and poet, who spearheaded the organization of some of the first anti-Somoza marches in the United States. He was aided by Chicano activists like Alejandro Murguía, who had cut their teeth in Los Siete, the Farmworkers Movement, and the Brown Berets before lending their support to the

struggle against the Somoza regime.⁴⁹ By 1974, recent Nicaraguan refugees joined them, such as Walter Ferreti and Casimilo Sotelo, who provided direct links to the Nicaraguan underground and the FSLN. With the help of Chicano activists like Murguía, FSLN solidarity organizations spread throughout California, with sister committees in Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Jose.⁵⁰

In the spring of 1976, the activists associated with the Comité Cívico began a campaign to create a national organization known as Non-Intervention in Nicaragua (NIN). The purpose of NIN was to “oppose U.S. Imperialism everywhere, and in particular, Nicaragua.” Working in coordination with solidarity organizations in Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States, the goals of the new organization were “to demand the immediate end to U.S. intervention and military aid, to demand the immediate withdrawal of economic aid to the corrupt Somoza regime,” to call for the freedom of political prisoners in Nicaragua, “to press for Congressional hearings on U.S. involvement in Nicaragua,” and to “publish and circulate essential information on the situation in Nicaragua to the American public in order to avoid another Vietnam.”⁵¹ Through these organizations the FSLN was able to voice its opposition to U.S. policies towards Nicaragua and strike against support for the Somoza regime.

As part of their national agenda, the FSLN activists of San Francisco area pursued a number of avenues towards raising awareness about the situation in Nicaragua. They held protests and hosted speakers and community events. Following the successful New Year’s Eve raid by FSLN commandos on the house of Chema Castillo in late 1974, Vargas and Murguía printed the Sandinista communique issued by the hostage takers. They also organized the first

⁴⁹ Transcript of interview with Alejandro Murguía by Chris Carlsson, November 3, 1999, Found SF: San Francisco’s Digital Archive, http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Managua_North:_San_Francisco%27s_Solidarity_Movement, (Accessed October 28, 2015).

⁵⁰ *Gaceta Sandinista*, Vol. 1, No. 7, March 1976, 2.

⁵¹ “Non-Intervention in Nicaragua,” *Gaceta Sandinista*, Vol. 1, No. 8, April 1976, 12.

protest against the Somoza regime in the United States, leading roughly 30 activists on a march in January 1975. The Nicaraguan community and its allies also brought in important speakers from Nicaragua, including Ernesto Cardenal who read his poetry and conducted a mass at San Francisco's Mission Cultural Center.⁵²

Comité Cívico developed strong ties to the FSLN largely based on familial relationships. For example, Chicano activist Alejandro Murguía recalled that during the early days of his involvement with the FSLN underground he met a contact in San Francisco known as Colonel Haslam. The elderly Nicaraguan, besides being a former member of the *Guardia Nacional*, was also the uncle of prominent FSLN member Doris Reyes Tijerino. Another important contact with the FSLN was Colonel Juan Ferreti, the uncle of Walter Ferreti and a former member of Sandino's general staff.⁵³ Walter Ferreti, who worked tirelessly for the cause of FSLN in San Francisco, also maintained close ties to the FSLN and was one of the first Bay Area activists to return to Nicaragua and fight against the Somoza regime. The brother of Casimiro Sotelo, the architect and first FSLN contact for the the San Francisco activists, suffered torture at the hands of the *Guardia Nacional* before being executed. Others, such as Vargas, remained in contact with the FSLN through regular phone calls to operatives in Costa Rica.⁵⁴ These connections not only joined the San Francisco activists with the FSLN and the Nicaraguan opposition, but also provided a direct link with the Somoza and Nicaragua's revolutionary heritage.

As the conflict in Nicaragua escalated, so did the activities of solidarity organizations in the United States. Following the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro on January 10, 1978, Murguía and others associated with Nicaraguan solidarity in the Bay area seized the Nicaraguan

⁵² Murguía, *The Medicine of Memory*, 136.

⁵³ Transcript of interview with Alejandro Murguía by Chris Carlsson, Found SF.

⁵⁴ Murguía, *The Medicine of Memory*, 132.

consulate, holding it for eight hours. A sister organization in Los Angeles followed suit, holding the LA consulate for four hours before leaving peacefully.⁵⁵ Both organizations successfully occupied the consulates without any bloodshed, and safely relinquished control after making statements to the authorities. While the activists held the consulates, protestors outside carried banners and placards reading, “Nicaragua, Concentration Camp of Somoza Regime” and “Solidaridad Sandinista Unida,”⁵⁶ According to Murguía, the actions “sent shockwaves through the Nicaraguan community,” and that “Somoza must have received the news in his bunker in Managua. What that old dictator thought of this is not recorded, but he must have figured he would swat us away like bothersome mosquitoes.”⁵⁷ However, the San Francisco activists would continue to raid the consulates, disrupting the work of its officials, distributing FSLN communiques, and rallying moral support for the cause.

By the mid-1970s, the Comité Cívico and San Francisco’s Nicaraguan community also funneled arms and militants to fight in Nicaragua. According to Murguía, the San Francisco community “contributed everything from rusty shotguns in the early days...to eventually some of the top *comandantes* of the Sandinista War.”⁵⁸ The young activists bought guns at pawnshops and smuggled them into Nicaragua with the help of Herty Levitez, an FSLN contact who was eventually arrested attempting to smuggle the guns across the Mexican border and spent six months in U.S. federal prison.⁵⁹ Those associated with the Comité Cívico also participated in

⁵⁵ “14 Die in Nicaragua Clash,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 4, 1978, 7.

⁵⁶ “FSLN in the Mission Late 1970s: Taking the Consulate,” Found SF, http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=FSLN_in_the_Mission_Late_1970s, (Accessed October 29, 2015).

⁵⁷ Murguía, “Poetry and Solidarity in the Mission,” *Ten Years that Shook the City: San Francisco, 1968-1978* ed. Chris Carlsson and Lisa Ruth Elliot (San Francisco: City Lights Foundation, 2011), 69.

⁵⁸ Video of interview with Alejandro Murguía, Mary Ellen Churchill and Chris Carlsson, Found SF, <https://archive.org/details/ssfsandnsta>, (Accessed October 28, 2015).

⁵⁹ Murguía, “Poetry and Solidarity in the Mission,” 66.

training for eventual combat in Nicaragua, running five miles around Bernal Heights in San Francisco.⁶⁰

This training proved valuable as many of the San Francisco activists traveled to Nicaragua in the late 1970s to participate in the military struggle against Somoza Debayle. Vargas and Murguía both traveled to Nicaragua in 1978 and 1979 and joined the militant opposition against the Somoza regime, participating in operations along the Costa Rican border. However, they were not alone in journeying to Nicaragua to join the fight against Somoza, as both Nicaraguan expatriates and Chicano activists left San Francisco to join the struggle.⁶¹ Among those with ties to the Comité Cívico joining the struggle against Somoza Debayle in the late 1970s was a U.S. citizen of Palestinian/Nicaraguan descent who fought under the nom-de-guerre “Armando.” After having worked with Vargas and Murguía in La Mission, Armando travelled to Nicaragua in October 1977 and, like the majority of the foreign fighters in Nicaragua, joined an FSLN unit fighting along the Costa Rican border before losing his foot to a grenade explosion.⁶²

Between solidarity activism and military involvement in FSLN, the San Francisco Sandinistas of the 1970s deeply impacted the course of events in Nicaragua. As part of a concerted FSLN strategy to cultivate solidarity in the United States, the FSLN activists in San Francisco jump-started the anti-Somoza movement in the United States, leading the first protests and creating some of the first pro-FSLN publications. Their grassroots activism introduced the politics of the small Central American state to many in the United States, and elsewhere, who could not find Nicaragua on a map. They also funneled weapons and money to their compatriots

⁶⁰ Interview with Murguía, <https://archive.org/details/ssfsandnsta>

⁶¹ Murguía, *The Medicine of Memory*, 138.

⁶² “Rebel is Yank Legally, Nicaraguan at Heart,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1978, 6.

fighting in the mountains and cities of Nicaragua, and their expertise would later prove invaluable during the struggle against the Somoza regime. These grassroots organizations in the United States acted as the vanguard for Sandinista efforts in the heart of the Somoza support network. However, they were not the only avenue that the FSLN pursued in its international struggle against the Somoza regime. As the FSLN activists in the United States protested and agitated against U.S. support for the Somoza regime, the FSLN cultivated another group of sympathetic Nicaraguans to carry their message to the wider world.

By the late 1970s, the FSLN found Nicaragua's elites more open to the idea of cooperating in the anti-Somoza campaign. Disillusioned by the obvious graft and political corruption of the Somoza regime, many in Nicaragua's upper echelons began to view Somoza Debayle, not as an ally in running the country, but instead as a liability to their business interests. In response, a group of Nicaraguan religious, business, and intellectual leaders allied themselves with the FSLN and began speaking out against the Somoza regime in 1977. This group became known as Los Doce (The Twelve, or the Group of Twelve), and consisted of such prominent Nicaraguans as Miguel d'Escoto, Fernando Cardenal, and Sergio Ramírez.⁶³ Although openly allied with the Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio Opositor, FAO), a coalition of moderate Nicaraguans that nominally represented the nation's business class, Los Doce was sympathetic to the FSLN. In fact, unbeknownst to some of the more conservative members of Los Doce, the idea for forming the organization had actually originated during a secret meeting between Sergio

⁶³ The other members of Los Doce were Felipe Mántica Abaunza (Businessman), Joaquín Cuadra Chamorro (Lawyer), Ricardo Coronel Kautz (Agricultural Engineer), Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim (Educator), Emilio Baltodano Pallais (Businessman), Arturo Cruz (Economist), Carlo Gutiérrez Sotelo (Dental Surgeon), Ernesto Castillo Matínez (Lawyer), and Casimiro Sotelo Rodríguez (Architect).

Ramírez and Humberto and Daniel Ortega.⁶⁴ Intended as another voice challenging the Somoza regime on the front of international public relations, Los Doce fit seamlessly into the FSLN's global anti-Somoza strategy.

Sergio Ramírez, a writer and intellectual, was the main organizer of Los Doce and the point of connection between the organization and the FSLN. For much of the 1960s and 1970s, Ramírez resided in Europe, spending many years writing in West Berlin. Inspired by the death of a student at the hands of the *Guardia Nacional*, Ramírez decided to leave Europe for the Americas in early 1975. However, before he left Europe, Ramírez penned a letter detailing all of the Somoza regime's properties, which he sent to well-known Somoza opponents such as Miguel d'Escoto, who forwarded it to the head of the U.S. Latin American activist organization the Washington Office on Latin America, and Carlos Tünnermann. He also sent a copy of "Somoza from A to Z," as it was known, to Jack Anderson, who was one of the most well-known U.S. journalists at the time. Anderson, in turn, utilized the essay to write a scathing series of articles about the abuses of the Somoza regime, eventually sending a team to Nicaragua to investigate Ramírez's claims. The letter would become a major public relations win for the anti-Somoza camp, with over 300 syndicated newspapers, not to mention activist presses, publishing it.⁶⁵

In early 1975, Ramírez moved to Costa Rica, establishing himself in San Jose and immediately immersing himself in the Sandinista struggle. Later that same year he met with Humberto and Daniel Ortega but kept his allegiance to the FSLN a secret.⁶⁶ Over the course of the late 1970s, Ramírez traveled to Europe and Latin America, speaking out against the Somoza

⁶⁴ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars "Central America: An Isthmus of Opposition," *The Wilson Quarterly* 12, 1 (New Year's 1988), p. 116.

⁶⁵ Sergio Ramírez, *Adios Muchachos: A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 55-56.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

regime and convincing world leaders that the FSLN fought for democracy and free expression.⁶⁷

At the same time, Ramírez cultivated support among Nicaragua's elites, pulling together the leaders that would become the members of Los Doce.

In May 1977, Los Doce held their first meeting in a suburb of the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. Reflecting the diaspora of the past forty years, many of the men attending lived outside of Nicaragua. Although a majority resided in Nicaragua, many of the members of Los Doce lived elsewhere in the western hemisphere. Ramírez and Tito Castillo lived in Costa Rica, while Carlos Gutierrez had established a successful dentistry business in Mexico. A quarter of the members lived in the United States. Arturo Cruz resided in Washington, D.C., and Miguel d'Escoto in New York. Casimiro Sotelo had established himself as an architect in San Francisco, becoming an important connection for the FSLN activists in San Francisco.⁶⁸ In July 1977, Los Doce traveled to Cuernavaca, Mexico, and constituted the revolutionary government that would largely remain unchanged until the group and their allies seized power two years later. Like the Nicaraguan revolutionaries and exiles who had plotted against the Somoza regime in the past, many members of Los Doce found themselves living and conspiring outside the national borders of Nicaragua.

In much the same way that the foundations of the FSLN's international networks were personal connections, the members of Los Doce joined because of their family's close connections to the Sandinistas. Because of Nicaragua's small population, nearly everyone in the country had, in some way, been touched by the escalating violence. They joined not only from a shared revulsion towards the actions of the Somoza regime, but also because many of their children, or close relatives, had joined the Sandinistas in their fight against the Somoza regime.

⁶⁷ Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 66.

⁶⁸ Ramírez, *Adios Muchachos*, 60-61.

Three of Dr. Joaquín Cuadra Chamorro's children had joined the FSLN, as did the son of Emilio Baltodano.⁶⁹ Following the FSLN attack on the Masaya barracks, which was so close to Managua that the battle could be heard in the capital, Los Doce issued a public declaration on October 18, 1977, in which they threw their support behind the Sandinistas, arguing that they represented "the guarantee of a permanent and effective peace."⁷⁰ Los Doce's statement, combined with the impact of the October offensive, emboldened the opponents of the regime and brought many moderates into the revolutionary camp.⁷¹ In response to the group's declaration of support for the FSLN, the Somoza government issued an arrest warrant for the members of Los Doce, forcing them to flee the country. The majority traveled to nearby Costa Rica where they continued to agitate against the Somoza regime and cultivate international sympathy from San Jose.⁷²

Los Doce and the San Francisco activists ultimately proved successful in their efforts to undermine the Somoza regime. Those associated with the Comité Cívico would, in the following years, join together with other solidarity organizations and pressure the U.S. government to end its support for the Somoza regime. The members of Los Doce would continue their anti-Somoza agitation, eventually returning to Nicaragua in July 1978 following the Somoza government's acquiescence to U.S. demands for reform. Following the ouster of Somoza Debayle, members of both groups of transnational activists found themselves working in positions of influence in the new Nicaraguan government. The members of Los Doce would become officials in the interim government that followed Somoza Debayle's departure. In 1984, Sergio Ramirez would be

⁶⁹ Ramírez, *Adios Muchachos*, 61-62.

⁷⁰ "Documentos del grupo del los doce," North American Congress on Latin America, Nicaragua microfilm collection, roll 1.

⁷¹ Ramírez, *Adios Muchachos*, 85.

⁷² Mitchell A Seligson and William J. Carroll III, "The Costa Rican Role in the Sandinista Victory," in *The Nicaraguan Revolution*, ed. Thomas W. Walker, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 334.

elected the vice president of Nicaragua. Walter “Chombo” Ferreti, who traveled to San Francisco to study psychology and was the first of the Nicaraguans to return to his home country to fight the Somoza regime, would become the head of the Policía Sandinista and later the head of the Special Forces for the Ministry of the Interior.⁷³ Casimiro Sotelo became the Nicaraguan ambassador to Canada and Roberto Vargas became the cultural attaché to the United States.⁷⁴

Los Doce and the San Francisco Sandinistas presented a significant challenge to the Somoza regime on the international stage, successfully waging transnational anti-Somoza campaigns in coordination with the FSLN. Their activities inspired North Americans and Europeans to join the campaign and stand in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. North American, European, and Nicaraguan activism ultimately helped bring about a transformation in U.S. policymaking that undermined the Somoza regime’s network of international support and eventually helped topple the dictator.

International Opposition to the Somoza Regime

Inspired by the activities of Nicaraguan activists, international opposition to the Somoza regime grew steadily over the course of the 1970s. This was due in part to the same set of circumstances that brought about the human rights revolution. Technological innovations including satellite communication and jet transportation ensured that events in Nicaragua could be quickly and easily transmitted to the rest of the world. This was coupled with a renewed emphasis on human rights, which brought greater scrutiny as public figures and grassroots organizations began speaking out against the abuses perpetrated by the regime. The U.S.-sponsored coup against the Allende regime in 1973 also brought greater international awareness

⁷³ Murguía, *The Medicine of Memory*, 141-142.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

of events in Latin America.⁷⁵ Activists across the globe deplored the putsch against the Socialist government of Salvador Allende, and a wave of solidarity organizations sprang up in response. The ascension of Pinochet in Chile, combined with a renewed offensive on the part of the FSLN and its allies as well as the increasingly brutality of the Somoza regime, propelled international anti-Somoza sentiment and inspired movements that proved a powerful forces for change.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a wave of grassroots solidarity organizations sprang up in opposition to the anti-democratic forces sweeping Latin America. Although organizations such as the IADF and the IAPA had opposed the Somozas and similar regimes in the 1950s and 1960s, a new, largely grassroots, international, anti-Somoza movement grew out of the human rights revolution. In large part it developed as a reaction to the corruption evinced by the Somoza regime following the Managua earthquake. Although some solidarity organizations existed as a direct result of Sandinista activism, the origins of others could be found in the international peace and protest movements of the 1960s. Birthed in response to the Vietnam War, continued European colonialism, and various forms of racial discrimination, these grassroots movements, often consisting of students and other young people, vocally challenged the global status quo. They would ultimately prove to be valuable allies of the FSLN in its attempts to topple the Somoza regime.

The North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) in the United States, and the combined forces of the *Latin American News* (Lateinamerika Nachrichten, LN) and the Center for Research and Documentation Chile-Latin America (Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika, FDCL) in Germany represented two such organizations. All of these organizations formed out of the

⁷⁵ Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue*, 148-151; Peace, *A Call to Conscience*, 58-61.

student protest movement of the 1960s and represented reactions to U.S. hegemony in Latin America. They would also play a vital role as conduits for the dissemination of anti-Somoza and pro-Sandinista materials, printing newsletters, books, and other materials about the political situation in Nicaragua. Although other organizations would follow in the late 1970s, NACLA, WOLA, and LN-FDCL represented some of the earliest and most influential grassroots organizations to challenge the power of the Somoza regime and U.S. hegemony in Latin America.

The North American Congress on Latin America proved to be one of the longest-lived and most influential organizations to protest against the Somoza regime. The founding of NACLA over the course of late 1966 and early 1967 embodied the ideals of the New Left movement and brought together young people inspired by the message of Liberation Theology and the example of the U.S. civil rights movement. The founders of NACLA included members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the University Christian Movement, as well as Peace Corps volunteers and labor leaders.⁷⁶ Believing that U.S. scholars and news media failed to grasp the “overall problem” facing Latin America, the founders of NACLA created “a ‘non-academic’ magazine that will report what is now absent from U.S. news media, and that will carry interpretative articles by North and Latin Americans.”⁷⁷ In February 1967, the first issue of the *NACLA Newsletter*, later renamed *NACLA’s Latin America and Empire Report* and finally *NACLA Report on the Americas*, appeared, which would become the mouthpiece for the organization’s reappraisal of U.S./Latin American relations.

⁷⁶ “NACLA Turns 30,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 30, 5 (March/April 1997), 5.

⁷⁷ Brady Tyson, “NACLA as Coalition,” *NACLA Newsletter* 1, 2 (March 1967).

Like many other Latin American solidarity organizations, NACLA grew out of the international furor over the 1973 coup against the Allende government in Chile. Deeply troubled by the U.S. interventions in Guatemala (1954), Cuba (1961), and the Dominican Republic (1965), NACLA welcomed the election of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity coalition. In fact, Allende himself had read NACLA's analysis of U.S. efforts to bring down his government, remarking to reporters that "if you want to know how the U.S. has affected Chile, just read *New Chile* by NACLA."⁷⁸ NACLA's coverage of the U.S.-supported coup against Allende on September 11, 1973, garnered it significant international attention. Countering the Chilean junta's claims of a calm and peaceful victory, NACLA utilized its connections with Chilean socialists and reported widespread violence throughout the country.⁷⁹ In 1975, NACLA made headlines again when it worked with a burgeoning group of computer developers to shed light on CIA activities in Latin America.⁸⁰ By the early 1970s, NACLA had cemented itself as a significant voice of opposition to U.S. hegemony in Latin America and a critical opponent of the hemisphere's dictators.

Much like NACLA, the Washington Office on Latin America founded in response to the rise of Pinochet in Chile. Consisting of members with experience living and working in Latin America, WOLA sought to expose the truth about repressive regimes in Latin America. Its role was to act as a conduit through which Latin Americans could access United States policy makers and provide "first-hand knowledge of thousands of deaths, disappearances, cases of torture,

⁷⁸ "History," North American Congress on Latin America, <https://nacla.org/history>, (Accessed 10/17/2015).

⁷⁹ "Junta: Chile is 'Normal': Others Report Many Arrests, Casualties," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1973, A1.

⁸⁰ "LEAA: \$20 Million for Reports," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1975, C36.

unjust imprisonment that was happening under the dictatorships.”⁸¹ The organization collaborated with activists from throughout Latin America and the United States, eventually broadening its political reach to include European politicians and organizations by the 1980s. WOLA also held connections with members of the Nicaraguan opposition, including Miguel d’Escoto. WOLA would prove a highly influential organization in the anti-Somoza contest in the United States, influencing the political discourse around U.S. support for the Somoza regime and.

Perhaps the most important activity of the Washington Office on Latin America was its role in the 1976 Congressional hearings on human rights in Nicaragua. In the mid-1970s solidarity organizations across the United States began a major campaign to pressure the United States government to eliminate aid to the Somoza regime. In 1976, the political pressure created by activists of NIN, NACLA, WOLA, and other solidarity organizations successfully brought about a two-day hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House of Representatives. Briefed by Sergio Ramirez and other members of the FSLN prior to the hearing, Fernando Cardenal spoke before the committee and provided testimony on the abuses of Nicaraguans at the hands of the Somoza regime.⁸² The opponents of Somoza also presented letters from Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, Miguel Obando y Bravo, and Edelberto Torres that called for an end to U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and the elimination of support for the Somozas.⁸³

⁸¹ “History of WOLA,” Washington Office on Latin America, http://www.wola.org/history_of_wola, (Accessed October 30, 2015).

⁸² Ramirez, *Adios Muchachos*, 57.

⁸³ United States House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Organizations, *Human Rights in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador: Implications for U.S. Policy: hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Ninety-fourth Congress, second session, June 8 and 9, 1976* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), 10-30, 139-154, 163, 164-166.

The hearings proved to be a pivotal moment in the transnational struggle against the Somoza regime, and convinced many North Americans of the necessity of removing the dictator.

Along with the Nicaraguan speakers and documents, representatives of North American religious organizations, including the Reverend William L. Wipfler of the Caribbean and Latin American Department of the National Council of Churches, spoke out against the human rights abuses of the Somozas. Citing a list of prisoners held by the Somoza government and the details of the torture that they endured, Wipfler argued that human rights violations in Nicaragua stemmed from the fact that “the official party of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the Partido Liberal Nacionalista, utterly dominates the political scene of Nicaragua.”⁸⁴ He went on to highlight the abuses carried out by the *Guardia Nacional* against Nicaraguan *campesinos* and opponents of the regime.

Although the opponents of the regime largely dominated the hearings, Somoza Debayle’s U.S. allies also made their presence known. John M. Murphy, a Representative from New York and a longtime friend of Somoza Debayle, challenged the intentions of the Washington Office on Latin America, arguing that the organizations comments about the dictator were “totally biased, anti-United States, and in this case, anti-Nicaraguan Government.”⁸⁵ He also denied the claims that Somoza Debayle was a dictator and that his regime committed human rights abuses. Citing evaluations by U.S. officials, Murphy claimed that there was “not a shred of evidence” to support any charges of human rights abuses.⁸⁶ Despite Murphy’s best efforts, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, ultimately hoped that the hearings would “prompt

⁸⁴ *Human Rights in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador*, 80.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

the Department of States to review its policy of uncritical support for these governments.”⁸⁷ The immediate impact of the hearings was so strong that during the talks Sevilla Sacasa, the Nicaraguan ambassador, called Somoza Debayle in his Managua bunker to inform him that the hearings were going against them and that there was little they could do about it.⁸⁸ The hearings ultimately helped end U.S. military aid for the Somoza regime, representing a significant victory for those in the anti-Somoza movement; however, it did not signal the end or the tempering of activism against the regime.

North American organizations were not alone in challenging the Somoza regime as European organizations joined the growing anti-Somoza chorus. One such organization was the journal *Latin American News* and its archive, the Center for Research and Documentation Chile Latin America. Originally named “Chile Nachrichten” or “Chile News,” the LN began in the months before the 1973 Pinochet coup against the Allende regime, and served as a means of distributing information to those interested in the Chilean political situation. The following year members of LN found the FDCL to act as an archive and non-profit organization dedicated to collecting and disseminating the organization’s substantial holdings on Chile and Latin America. In 1977, both the LN and the FDLC abandoned their limited Chilean focus and began emphasizing the entirety of Latin America’s social and political situation. In the mid-1970s, LN reached “a monthly circulation of up to 8,000 copies,” while the FDCL became one of “West Germany’s most important Latin American solidarity-projects.”⁸⁹

Organizations, such as LN-FDCL, NACLA, and WOLA persisted in challenging U.S. policies in Latin America over the course of the decade. NACLA proved to be a particularly

⁸⁷ *Human Rights in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador*, ix.

⁸⁸ Ramírez, *Adios Muchachos*, 57.

⁸⁹ “LN and FDCL: Nuestra Historia,” Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika, <http://fdcl-berlin.de/en/ln/>, (Accessed 10/19/2015).

vocal opponent of the Somoza regime, regularly publishing about the small Central American state. In its May/June 1973 edition, NACLA examined the role of the United States in Central America, paying particular attention to CONDECA and the emerging Central American Common Market.⁹⁰ In February 1976, the organization ran its first, of many, issues dedicated to documenting the Somoza regime and the struggle against it.⁹¹ By the late 1970s, NACLA was entrenched in the political struggle to distance the United States from the Somoza regime, placing it in the crosshairs of the regime's spokesmen. Some NACLA members found themselves in positions of influence within the new government of Jimmy Carter, helping spearhead the president's human rights agenda. For example Brady Tyson, a founding member of NACLA, became the Latin American advisor for Andrew Young, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Carter administration.⁹²

The increasingly raised profile of NACLA did not go unnoticed, as the Somoza regime and its allies in the United States challenged the organization's agenda. One voice of opposition to NACLA was as Ian R. MacKenzie, the director of the Nicaraguan Government Information Office, who portrayed the organization as having ties to "Cuban and Soviet-backed terrorism and subversion."⁹³ In the United States, NACLA was one of only a handful of national organizations rallying against U.S. support for, and the human rights abuses of, the Somoza regime. However, by the end of the decade they would be joined by others who would lend their voices to the call of protest against the continuing violence in Nicaragua.

⁹⁰ "Integrating the Big Guns: The Central American Defense Council," and "Masterminding the Mini-Market: U.S. Aid to the Central American Common Market," *NACLA's Latin America & Empire Report* 7, 5 (May/June 1973).

⁹¹ "Nicaragua," *NACLA's Latin America and Empire Report* 9, 2 (February, 1976).

⁹² "Brady Tyson-Chapter II," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1977, A21.

⁹³ Ian R. MacKenzie, "A 'Distorted' Media View of Somoza's Nicaragua," *ibid.*, November 22, 1977, A19.

In the United States opposition against the Somoza regime grew over the course of the 1970s as prominent U.S. citizens spoke out against the regime and its ties to the U.S. government. In the United States, columnist Jack Anderson took aim at Somoza Debayle in a series of articles published in the *Washington Post*. Inspired by the anonymous letter from Sergio Ramírez entitled “Somoza from A to Z,” Anderson detailed the vast holdings of the Somoza family. Beginning in the fall of 1975, Anderson wrote a series of articles that described the pervasiveness of Somoza’s greed, not only in Nicaragua but in the United States as well. Printing articles with titles such as “Nicaragua Ruler is World’s Greediest” and “Nicaragua Run for Somoza’s Benefit,” the columnist exposed U.S. readers to the monopoly with which the Somoza family ran Nicaragua. Referring to Somoza as a “pot-bellied potentate,” he highlighted how the Somoza regime owned over 50 percent of private property in Nicaragua, and 30 percent of its farmland. Anderson also discussed the various business ventures in which Somoza Debayle and his associates received a percentage, revealing his hold on all of Nicaragua’s commodity production as well as its imports.⁹⁴ He laid bare the nepotism of the Somoza regime, discussing the ways in which Somoza family members and loyal patrons received government jobs and benefits.⁹⁵

The situation so infuriated Somoza Debayle that the dictator dedicated a chapter in his autobiography to discussing the Jack Anderson and the impact of the U.S. media. Believing that an international conspiracy between Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and the President of Venezuela was behind the initial information given to Anderson, Somoza Debayle failed to recognize Sergio Ramírez and the future members of Los Doce as the true author of the attack on his

⁹⁴ “Nicaragua Ruler is World’s Greediest,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1975, C23.

⁹⁵ “Somoza Family’s Power is Pervasive,” *ibid.*, August 19, 1975, B13.

image.⁹⁶ The dictator also threatened to sue the journalist for \$100 million, but he was talked out of doing so by Guillermo Sveilla-Sacassa, the Nicaraguan ambassador to the United States and Somoza Debayle's brother-in-law.⁹⁷ However, the *Washington Post's* attack on the Somoza regime did provoke a war of words between Anderson and various Nicaraguan officials. In a letter to the editor, Sevilla-Sacassa deflected and denied many of the claims against his brother-in-law's government, claiming that Anderson's comments were "a litany of distortions and his gratuitous personal comments are not only in the poorest of taste but are unworthy and slanderous."⁹⁸ Sevilla-Sacassa was joined by Ian R. McKenzie, the Argentinian-born director of the Nicaraguan Government Information Office in Washington, D.C., in defending the Somoza regime in the U.S. press. From late 1976 until the collapse of the Somoza regime in the summer of 1979, McKenzie published ten letters to the editor of the *Washington Post*, challenging any articles that cast the Somoza regime in a disparaging light. In his attempt to positively portray Somoza Debayle, McKenzie went so far as to depict slain editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro as "a friend of the President of Nicaragua and not an opponent of the government."⁹⁹

Despite Sevilla-Sacassa and McKenzie's best attempts at damage control, criticism of the Somoza regime persisted, with over 300 syndicated newspapers, as well as solidarity organizations, publishing the articles. The San Francisco-based *Gaceta Sandinista* published a three-part series based on Anderson's findings titled "Archive of Somoza Corruption," which reiterated many of the points highlighted by Anderson.¹⁰⁰ Newspapers outside of the United States even picked up the story, with the Costa Rican English newspaper *The Tico Times* running

⁹⁶ Anastasio Somoza Debayle, *Nicaragua Betrayed* (Boston: Western Islands, 1980), 201-202.

⁹⁷ Ramírez, *Adíos Muchachos*, 56.

⁹⁸ "Nicaragua: The Ambassador Replies," *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1975, A29.

⁹⁹ Ian R. McKenzie, "Nicaragua: The President's Slain Friend," *ibid.*, May 22, 1978, A20.

¹⁰⁰ "Archivo de la Corrupcion Somocista," *Gaceta Sandinista*, November 1975, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2,11; Archivo de La Corrupcion Somocista, Parte II," *Ibid.*, December 1975, Vol.1 No. 4, 7. "Arcivo de la Corrupcion Somocista," *Ibid.*, January 1976, Vol. 1, No. 5, 2,11.

a short story on the war of words between Anderson and the Somoza regime.¹⁰¹ Anderson's campaign against the Somoza regime represented the growing anti-Somoza sentiment in the United States and elsewhere. *The Washington Post* journalist was not alone in his criticisms of the Somoza regime, being joined by solidarity organizations, such as *Gaceta Sandinista*, as well as international human rights NGOs.

International non-governmental organizations began a concerted assault against the Somoza regime by the mid-1970s. In the spring of 1976, Amnesty International, one of the first transnational NGOs to emerge from the human rights revolution, sent a mission to Nicaragua to assess the Somoza regime. Concerned with the regime's curbing of constitutional guarantees following the New Year's Eve raid, Amnesty International began focusing on Nicaragua in 1974. From the 10th to 15th of May 1976, an Amnesty International mission, consisting of a delegate from West Germany and another from the United Kingdom, traveled to Nicaragua and requested meetings with Somoza Debayle and other high-ranking Nicaraguan officials, as well as permission to interview prisoners held in the Model Prison in Tipitapa. The Somoza regime only allowed the delegates to meet with one official and denied their request to speak with prisoners. The delegates did, however, meet with various Nicaraguans, many in the opposition, obtaining personal accounts of abuse and mistreatment at the hands of the *Guardia Nacional* and government officials.¹⁰²

In its assessment, Amnesty International found significant evidence of human rights abuses by the Somoza regime and issued a number of recommendations to the government of Nicaragua. The mission found that the majority of the human rights abuses occurring in

¹⁰¹ "Jack Anderson in Another Row with Nicaraguan Strongman Somoza over Supposed Graft," *The Tico Times*, March 26, 1976, 13.

¹⁰² Amnesty International, *The Republic of Nicaragua: An Amnesty International Report Including the Findings of a Mission to Nicaragua, 10-15 May 1976* (Amnesty International, 1976), 5.

Nicaragua were a direct result of the suspension of political rights by the Somoza regime. The government's military courts offered no protections and there was "considerable evidence supporting allegations of the torture of prisoners in the custody of the National Guard, prior to the indictment by the military courts." The mission was particularly concerned with the plight of the *campesinos* detained by the *Guardia Nacional*, many of whom disappeared and were believed to "have been shot in cold blood by military forces."¹⁰³ In its recommendations, Amnesty International called for the end of martial law and for the release of all political prisoners, particularly *campesinos* held by the *Guardia Nacional*. Foreshadowing a trend of international observation, the report also highlighted the need for greater international oversight and stressed the importance of having human rights observers in Nicaragua.

Although Amnesty International's report was a scathing condemnation of the Somoza regime, there was little the organization could do to actually enforce its recommendations. However, the report proved a powerful weapon in the hands of solidarity organizations and anti-Somoza activists. The activities of organizations such as NACLA, WOLA, and LN-FDCL embodied the growing number of activist organizations internationally committed to promoting human rights and challenging governmental abuse, wherever it occurred. These organizations produced publications that were some of the most fiercest critiques of the Somoza regime and worked in coordination with Nicaraguans to better pursue their agendas. Journalists, such as Jack Anderson, joined the popular international movement against the Somoza regime, lending their voices to challenging U.S. support for the dictator. Utilizing the rhetoric of the human rights revolution, the anti-Somoza opposition undermined the image constructed by the Somoza

¹⁰³ Amnesty International, *The Republic of Nicaragua*, 38-39.

regime's public relations experts, and in the process slowly destroyed the dictator's international networks of support.

As international opposition grew, it became increasingly more difficult for the Somoza regime to maintain the international alliances that supported it. The inauguration of Jimmy Carter in 1977 represented a seeming break from the cordial relationship between the Somoza regime and the United States government. However, the break between the Carter administration and the Somoza regime would prove a painful one, with the U.S. stuck between its human rights agenda and the pressures of Cold War politics. In the process, the Somoza regime would turn to traditional as well as new allies in its struggle to remain in power. In the late 1970s, as the United States would distance itself from the Somoza regime, new networks of support would come to aid the Nicaraguan dictatorship, in the process fueling one of the most violent periods in the history of the small Central American country.

The Collapse of the Somoza Regime

The fortunes of the Somoza regime following the Managua earthquake changed dramatically over the last half of the 1970s. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Somoza Debayle cemented his hold on power in Nicaragua, and in 1974 he engineered an election in which he was named president for a seven-year term. Following the New Year's party raid in December 1974, the institution of martial law in 1974 allowed the *Guardia Nacional* the unfettered opportunity to brutalize the Nicaraguan opposition and peasantry. The regime also handed the FSLN a number of military setbacks. In 1976, the *Guardia Nacional*, as part of a CONDECA anti-insurgency campaign, killed Carlos Fonseca, eliminating the leader of the FSLN. Somoza Debayle also enjoyed the continued support of the United States government,

which persisted in offering moral as well as material support for the regime. Few in the Nicaraguan opposition dared to challenge Somoza Debayle as long as the threat of U.S. reprisal lingered. In the mid-1970s the Somoza regime appeared to be as firmly cemented at the top of Nicaragua's political order as it had been at any other time.

However, as the dictator's grip on Nicaragua appeared to be at its tightest, domestic and international forces conspired to undo his regime. By the late 1970s, the international anti-Somoza campaign inspired dramatic policy changes in the United States and elsewhere that undermined the Somoza regime's hold on power in Nicaragua. A growing number of Latin American countries also began to speak out against the Somoza regime. Costa Rica and Panama, in coordination with Cuba, spoke out against the Somoza regime and provided various forms of aid for the FSLN. In the United States, government officials also challenged the relationship their country held with the Somoza regime. In 1976, the U.S. House of Representatives held hearings to discuss human rights violations in Central America, with many representatives arguing for the termination of U.S. support for the Somoza regime. Perhaps the single most important factor in the downfall of the Somoza regime was the termination of unconditional U.S. support by the Carter Administration. Inspired by the human rights revolution, the Carter administration sought to revitalize U.S. foreign policy by emphasizing human rights and distancing the United States from the less savory practices of previous administrations.¹⁰⁴ This entailed an attempt to reform the Somoza government, followed by an attempt to replace it. By the late 1970s, the regime faced a largely hostile international community dedicated to Somoza Debayle's removal from power.

¹⁰⁴ Carter, "Humane Purposes in Foreign Policy"; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 147; David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), p. 28.

Despite growing international opposition, the Somoza regime still enjoyed significant support from allies in the United States as well as members of its counterrevolutionary alliance. Like his father who had conducted clandestine dealings with Israeli arms merchants in the 1940s, Somoza Debayle strengthened his ties with the State of Israel in order to import large caches of weapons. In the months before his fall, Somoza Debayle imported the majority of the weaponry for the *Guardia Nacional* from Israel; however, this was not his only source of aid. The Argentine junta, which came to power in 1976, also provided material support, but more importantly aided the Somoza regime's counterinsurgency and intelligence efforts. Looking to snuff out communists not only in Argentina and the Southern Cone but throughout Latin America, the Argentine junta facilitated the growth of a regional anticommunist alliance known as Operation Condor. Operation Condor hunted the supposed communist enemies of the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, terrorizing three continents with a series of assassinations and bombings.¹⁰⁵ Operating with U.S. support, the organization operated throughout Latin America and came to the aid of Somoza Debayle. Ultimately, the counterrevolutionary alliance that Somoza Debayle built for himself crumbled under the popular revolt of the Nicaraguan people. However, it birthed the counterrevolutionary organizations and networks that would eventually challenge the FSLN.

In the United States, Somoza still enjoyed the support of many politicians and officials in the U.S. government. Utilizing his vast network of alliances built on personal relationships, the Somoza regime sought to challenge the agendas of the anti-Somoza opposition. Many of these

¹⁰⁵ For a broad history of Operation Condor see John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2005). For the impact of Operation Condor on Central America see Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997); *ibid.*, "Transnationalizing the Dirty War: Argentina in Central America," in *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

figures, such as Representative John Murphy of New York, were lifelong friends of Somoza. Many in the United States, particularly those who feared increased Soviet intervention in the hemisphere, saw Somoza Debayle as a staunch Cold War ally. Somoza Debayle integrated others, such as Manuel Artime and the members of the Cuban exile community, into his international network by sharing his wealth and forming business relations, operating a transnational system of patronage. In the United States, the allies of the regime pursued a stringent campaign to preserve support for Somoza Debayle. That campaign would ultimately fail to preserve the power of the Somoza regime. However, it did lay the foundations for the networks of support that aided the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary guerrillas of the 1980s.

Following the Managua earthquake, the Somoza regime continued to receive largely unconditional support from the United States. Over the course of the early 1970s, the United States increased aid to the Somozas even while it cut aid to other Latin American governments. Somoza Debayle found a staunch ally in U.S. President Richard Nixon and his administration. It was under Nixon that Somoza enjoyed his last official state visit to the White House in 1971.¹⁰⁶ Under the Nixon and Ford administrations the *Guardia Nacional* benefitted from continued material and financial support, while guardsmen attended the School of the Americas, learning counterinsurgency under the tutelage of U.S. advisors. The *Guardia* also continued to participate in U.S.-led counterinsurgency operations, which by the middle years of the 1970s were successfully eliminating the Sandinista hierarchy. In early November 1976, the *Guardia* killed two leaders of the FSLN's urban underground, and days later, ambushed Carlos Fonseca in the Zinica region of north-central Nicaragua as part of Aguila VI (Aguila Sexta), a CONDECA

¹⁰⁶ "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, June 2, 1971, 7:30 p.m." *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. E-10, Document 504.

counterinsurgency operation.¹⁰⁷ By 1977, the FSLN appeared defeated and the threat of leftist revolution in Nicaragua contained.

While providing the appearance of stability for the Somoza regime, the deaths of Fonseca and other high-level FSLN members in late 1976 convinced many U.S. officials, particularly those in the recently elected Carter administration, that a human rights agenda could be pursued in Nicaragua without the threat of leftist interference. Inspired by the human rights revolution and the deep trauma of the Vietnam War, U.S. officials began navigating a new policy towards the Somoza regime in 1977. Although the Ford administration had privately pushed the Somoza regime to reform its human rights record, the Carter administration was the first to publicly criticize the actions of the Somoza regime.¹⁰⁸ What Carter and other U.S. officials sought to promote was a foreign policy that emphasized human rights, while avoiding infringement on the sovereignty of Latin American nations.¹⁰⁹ For officials in the Carter administration, Nicaragua appeared to be the perfect location to test this new human rights agenda. The apparent defeat of the FSLN in late 1976 convinced many U.S. officials that the Somoza regime could be reformed or replaced without inadvertently aiding a leftist victory.

Hoping to head off the threat posed by the Carter administration, Somoza Debayle attempted to reform his government in the fall of 1977. On September 30, 1977, the Somoza regime lifted the state of siege that had been in place since the New Year's party raid three years earlier. He also promised to implement greater oversight of the *Guardia Nacional* in an effort to

¹⁰⁷ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 203,

¹⁰⁸ Morris H. Morley, *Washington, Somoza, and the Sandinistas: State and Regime in U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1969-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 84-85.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. National Security Council, "Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-28," May 22, 1977, 10, The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/prmemorandums/prm28.pdf>.

limit human rights abuses.¹¹⁰ The move created the impression of reform; however, following the FSLN offensive the following month, the *Guardia Nacional* continued terrorizing the people of Nicaragua.

The situation in Nicaragua became even more volatile and further deteriorated for the Somoza regime over the course of 1978. In January 1978, the political situation dramatically escalated when assassins gunned down Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the editor of *La Prensa* and outspoken opponent of the Somoza regime. Chamorro's death unleashed a wave of popular unrest in Nicaragua, with riots and violent protests engulfing the capital and other major cities. Although never proven, many believed that members of the Somoza regime killed Chamorro, with the principal suspects being Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, the dictator's son, or Pedro Ramos, a Cuban exile who ran the regime's blood-trafficking operations.¹¹¹ Because of its supposed involvement, crowds of angry Nicaraguans lashed out against the regime, destroying businesses owned by the dictator's family.¹¹² The Somoza regime suffered another serious blow in August 1978, when Eden Pastora, better known as "Comandante Cero," and a small group of FSLN commandos assaulted the National Palace and held 1,500 people hostage, including most of the National Congress. The Sandinistas released the hostages after Somoza agreed to the safe passage of the hostage takers out of the country, a ransom payment and the freedom of a significant number of political prisoners, among them Tomás Borge, a top Sandinista guerrilla. Days later, the Nicaraguan opposition called for a general strike that was estimated to be between 80 to 90 percent successful.

¹¹⁰ Morley, *Washington, Somoza, and the Sandinistas*, 101.

¹¹¹ The Somoza regime notoriously sold donated blood on the international market. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 37.

¹¹² "Violent Riots Rock Managua; Somoza Denies any Connection to the Tragedy," *The Tico Times*, January 13, 1978, 4.

The Somoza regime also faced renewed guerrilla activity by the FSLN, which launched a series of attacks in Nicaragua's major urban centers in September 1978. The FSLN, which had recently cemented ties with Nicaragua's moderate opposition, inspired mass uprisings across Nicaragua. In response, the Somoza regime, in what became known as "Operation Mop-Up," unleashed the *Guardia Nacional* who proceeded to kill several thousand civilians through the indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombings of urban areas. During Operation Mop-Up, the *Guardia Nacional*, and in particular Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, perpetrated significant human rights abuses that brought the condemnation of international human rights organizations. In an investigation conducted after the fall of the Somoza regime, the International Commission of Jurists found that during the operation, Somoza Portocarrero "chose four prisoners at random, and slowly slid his knife between their fingers and toes... He then sprinkled them with gasoline and set them on fire, alive, saying : 'this is what should be done with these sons of bitches. He climbed into his helicopter and left...'"¹¹³

International human rights organizations decried the violent actions of the Somoza regime. The Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called the *Guardia* attacks "excessive and disproportionate." It accused the Nicaraguan air force of indiscriminately bombing guerrilla-held towns without evacuating the civilian population. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also accused the *Guardia Nacional* of regular and significant human rights violations, citing the execution of numerous civilians "for the mere reason of living in the neighborhoods or districts where there had been activity by the Frente

¹¹³ Heleno Claudio Frago and Alejandro Artucio, *Human Rights in Nicaragua: Yesterday and Today: Report of a Mission for the International Commission of Jurists* (International Commission of Jurists, 1980), 19.

Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN); and young people and defenseless children were killed.”¹¹⁴

This escalation in violence, and the following international condemnation of it, spurred a dramatic change in U.S. policy. Over the course of 1977 and 1978 a struggle ensued between U.S. officials over how best to address the deteriorating situation in Nicaragua. Human rights advocates who called for tougher measures against the Somoza regime clashed with Cold warriors who viewed the Somoza regime as a staunch Cold War ally and feared a Sandinista victory. In this political scrap, Somoza Debayle’s staunchest allies in the United States government came to his aid. Among those standing by the dictator were a group of U.S. congressmen known as “the Dirty Thirty.” The leader of this group of pro-Somoza legislators was John Murphy, a childhood friend who had attended La Salle Military Academy and West Point with the dictator. Murphy, a New York Democrat and chair of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, was known to call Somoza multiple times a week and proved a dogged defender of the regime until the very end. Murphy held a number of meetings with President Jimmy Carter over the course of 1978 in an attempt to maintain U.S. support for Somoza Debayle.¹¹⁵

Another ally of the Somoza regime was Texas Democrat and avid anti-communist Charles “Charlie” Wilson, who threatened to block Carter’s international aid package following the administration’s cutting of military aid to Somoza Debayle.¹¹⁶ Wilson ultimately succeeded in securing a relatively small amount of military assistance for the Somoza regime, receiving the dictator’s appreciation. Somoza Debayle also gave “credit” for the victory to the Cuban-

¹¹⁴ Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Nicaragua*, 1978, 76.

¹¹⁵ Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 198-199.

¹¹⁶ “Somoza’s Friends in Congress Seen Threatening Aid Bill,” *The Washington Post*, July 26, 1978, A19.

American community, who “understood what this battle was about.”¹¹⁷ Although Manuel Artime had died, Somoza Debayle had continued to maintain strong connections to the anti-Castro Cuban community, attending parties in his honor in Miami and incorporating Cuban exiles, such as Pedro Ramos, into his business dealings.¹¹⁸ By the time of the revolution the Cuban exile community constituted a significant source of support in the United States, often lobbying on the dictator’s behalf.

Despite the best efforts of the Dirty Thirty and various members of the Cuban-American community, the Carter administration continued to distance itself from the Somoza regime. Following the popular uprisings in the fall of 1978 and the *Guardia*’s violent response to them, many officials in Washington believed that the time for reforming the Somoza regime was over and that the only solution was the dictator’s removal. Unwilling to openly call for the dictator to step down, U.S. officials organized a plebiscite through the OAS. However, Somoza Debayle refused to participate in any election that he could not control and successfully killed the OAS efforts at mediation.¹¹⁹ Demonstrating his claim to “take care of Carter,” for three months the dictator successfully stalled U.S. efforts to bring a democratic and moderate transition in Nicaragua, giving Somoza Debayle ample time to strengthen the *Guardia Nacional* and stymie his enemies.¹²⁰ By early 1979, the ability of the United States to manipulate and cajole Somoza Debayle appeared severely limited. However, an international anti-Somoza alliance, containing a number of traditional enemies of the regime, would continue to aid the FSLN and call for the removal of Somoza Debayle.

¹¹⁷ Somoza, *Nicaragua Betrayed*, 69.

¹¹⁸ “Telegram 896 From the Embassy in Nicaragua to the Department of State, May 31, 1970, 1913Z,” *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E–10, Document 495.

¹¹⁹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 22.

¹²⁰ Cited in Lake, *Somoza Falling*, 21.

By 1979, a number of Latin American countries had expressed their desire for the removal of the Somoza regime and began collaborating with the dictator's enemies. Leading the international charge of anti-Somoza states was the regime's traditional enemy, Costa Rica. For much of the 1970s, the governments of José Figueres and Daniel Oduber allowed the FSLN a relatively free run with the exception of the occasional arrest to limit tensions with the Somoza regime.¹²¹ Although Rodrigo Carazo Odio, elected president of Costa Rica in 1978, pledged his government to remain neutral and not aid the FSLN, the Sandinistas openly recruited on the streets of San Jose and the Costa Rican capital became a base of operations for Los Doce. In fact, by early 1979, Costa Rica was the international hub for anti-Somoza organization, which a Sandinista guerrilla described as a "bulwark" of opposition to the Somoza regime.¹²² Costa Rica was the point of departure for international fighters looking to join the Sandinistas, as well as the main avenue for Cuban and Panamanian weaponry destined for the FSLN.

Because of its collaboration with the FSLN, tension ran high along the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border as members of the *Guardia Nacional* regularly crossed the border to attack Sandinista hideouts.¹²³ Tensions escalated as the Somoza regime accused Costa Rica of supporting the FSLN, bolstering the *Guardia* presence along the border. As violence along the border escalated, Panama and Venezuela stepped up military support to Costa Rica in order to deter a *Guardia* invasion.¹²⁴ The two governments also secretly provided arms to the FSLN and aided in the smuggling of limited amounts of Cuban weaponry to Nicaragua. In response to increasing *Guardia* activity, the Costa Rican government broke diplomatic relations with

¹²¹ Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, 130-131.

¹²² "Sandinista Claims Costa Rica is 'Training Ground,'" *The Tico Times*, April 21, 1978, 14.

¹²³ "New Fighting in Nicaragua Near Border," *ibid.*, December 15, 1978, 1; "Nicaraguan Troops Captured," *Ibid.*, December 22, 1978, 1; "National Guard Patrol Kills Two in Costa Rica," *Ibid.*, March 2, 1979, 5.

¹²⁴ "Venezuela and Panama Send War Planes," *Ibid.*, September 14, 1978, 1.

Nicaragua in late 1978.¹²⁵ By the spring of 1979, conflict between Costa Rica and the Somoza regime appeared imminent as both sides militarized their borders.¹²⁶

Other Latin American nations joined the anti-Somoza struggle, denouncing the Somoza regime or pledging support to the FSLN. Venezuela and Mexico also assailed the Somoza regime in the OAS, challenging the human rights record of the regime and calling for OAS actions against Nicaragua. Paralleling the activities of Sandinista activists in the United States, Nicaraguan exiles in Mexico and Venezuela created anti-Somoza solidarity organizations that pressured their government to change its policies towards the regime. In Venezuela, activists formed the Venezuelan Committee of Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua (Comite Venezolano de Solidaridad con el Pueblo de Nicaragua) and published its own version of *Gaceta Sandinista*. These Venezuelan Sandinista activists hosted Ernesto Cardenal, who spoke to university students, journalists, and workers about the evils of the Somoza regime.¹²⁷ In Mexico, a similar organization, the Mexican Committee of Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua (Comite Mexican de Solidaridad con el Pueblo de Nicaragua), also published its own version of *Gaceta Sandinista* in 1976.¹²⁸ In 1978, Mexican activists created a coordinating committee, the Coordinator of Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Nicaragua (Coordinador de Solidaridad con la Lucha del Pueblo de Nicaragua), to bring together the various organizations supporting the struggle of the FSLN.¹²⁹ In part because of popular support for the FSLN and animosity towards the Somoza regime, the Mexican government proved to be exceptionally

¹²⁵ "Cost Rica breaks with Nicaragua," *The Tico Times*, November 24, 1978, 1.

¹²⁶ "Costa Rica Mobilizes Defense Forces," *Ibid.*, June 8, 1979, 1.

¹²⁷ "Ernesto Cardenal en Venezuela," *Gaceta Sandinista* 4, 3 (April/May 1977): 7-12.

¹²⁸ "Editorial," *ibid.* 1, (Special Edition): 1.

¹²⁹ "Nuevo Organismo de Solidaridad," *ibid.* 3, 3 (September-December 1978): 18-19.

vocal in its condemnation of the Somoza regime in 1979, breaking relations with Nicaragua in May 1979 and calling for the international recognition of the governing junta.¹³⁰

As the Somoza regime faced an increasingly hostile international political climate in the spring and early summer of 1978, it turned to its counterrevolutionary networks of aid and support to help to bolster its declining hold on power. Foremost among those continuing to support the Somoza regime was the State of Israel, which persisted in arming the regime in the face of international condemnation. Between November 1978 and July 1979, Israel supplied the majority of the the Somoza regime's weaponry, delivering helicopters, heavy combat tanks, patrol vehicles, mortars, Galil rifles, Uzi submachine guns, and missiles. Under the supervision of Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, Israeli planes unloaded military supplies under the cover of darkness.¹³¹ Israeli weaponry became so ubiquitous on the Nicaraguan battlefields that they became synonymous with the Somoza regime, and, following the FSLN's victory, Sandinista guerrillas brandished captured Galil rifles as a symbol of their triumph over the dictatorship. Despite Israeli pledges to maintain their "debt-of-gratitude" to the Somoza family for their assistance in the birth of the State of Israel, international pressure ultimately forced Israel to terminate its support for Somoza Debayle weeks before the regime crumbled.¹³² Although it would symbolize the culmination of cooperation between the State of Israel and the Somoza regime, it did not mark the cessation of Nicaraguan and Israeli counterrevolutionary collaboration.

Although Israel provided the majority of the military aid to the Somoza regime, it was not alone in supporting the dictatorship as a number of Latin American governments threw their

¹³⁰ Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, 133.

¹³¹ Alan Riding, "Taking Aim: Both Sides Prepare for Bloodletting in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, November 19, 1978, E1.

¹³² Bishara Bahbah, *Israel and Latin America: The Military Connection* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 149.

weight behind the Nicaraguan dictatorship. Following the seizure of power by a military junta in 1976, Argentina viewed the Somoza regime as a valuable ally in the international anti-communist struggle. In 1977, the junta secretly promised the Somoza regime extensive counterinsurgency support, providing military hardware and anti-guerrilla training. In an effort to eliminate members of the Monteneros, an Argentine urban guerrilla organization, who had joined the Nicaraguan insurgency, Argentine advisors served with the Basic Infantry Training School (Escuela Entrenamiento Básico de Infantería, EEBI), Somoza regime's elite counterinsurgency force led by the dictator's son, and provided light arms and munitions to the regime until its demise.¹³³ Argentina was joined by Brazil, El Salvador, and Guatemala in its support for the Somoza regime, with the El Salvador and Guatemala supplying small detachments of soldiers to fighting alongside the *Guardia* in Nicaragua.¹³⁴ In the coming years, these Latin American governments would form the support networks of the Somoza regime's counterrevolutionary successors.

Despite the best efforts of its counterrevolutionary allies, international support for the Somoza regime continued to crumble. A major blow to the regime came on June 20, 1979, with the televised execution of ABC News correspondent Bill Stewart at the hands of the *Guardia Nacional*. Stewart, who was covering the conflict, came upon a *Guardia* outpost and when he approached was ordered to place his hands behind his head and lie down on the ground. With his camera crew rolling, Stewart lay on the ground while a *Guardia* troop shot him in the head at point-blank range. The images of the murder were immediately televised across the globe, overnight eliminating the few vestiges of popular support the Somoza regime still enjoyed.¹³⁵

¹³³ Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America*, 77-78.

¹³⁴ Riding, "Taking Aim: Both Sides Prepare for Bloodletting in Nicaragua."

¹³⁵ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 24.

With domestic and international support on their side, the FSLN launched the “final offensive” in May 1979, seizing control of much of the Nicaraguan countryside and half of Managua. Bolstered by internationalists from the United States, Argentina, and elsewhere in the Americas, the Sandinistas pushed the Somoza regime back into Nicaragua’s major urban centers. Fearing a total Sandinista victory, the Carter administration attempted to negotiate a settlement to the conflict that would remove Somoza Debayle but preserve the hated *Guardia Nacional* as a political counterweight to the leftist guerrillas. On June 28, 1979, with the Sandinistas advancing and increasing U.S. pressure to step down, Somoza Debayle told U.S. ambassador Lawrence Pezzullo that he would relinquish power. On July 17, 1979, Anastasio Somoza Debayle fled Nicaragua for Miami and, shortly after, the remnants of the *Guardia Nacional* disintegrated. One day later the FSLN captured Managua and instituted a Provisional Government consisting of members of Los Doce, the FSLN, and other members of the Nicaraguan opposition. After nearly 44 years of Somoza family rule, Nicaragua enjoyed a respite from the brutalities of the dictatorship. The peaceful respite would be brief, however, as continued violence loomed on the horizon.

Conclusion

The ultimate Sandinista victory in July 1979 was a result of successful strategic planning on the part of the FSLN and changing international attitudes towards human rights in the late 1970s. In response to continued defeats at the hands of the *Guardia Nacional*, the FSLN formed international networks of support out of the Nicaraguan diaspora following the 1972 Managua earthquake. Building on personal relationships, the FSLN facilitated the growth of solidarity organizations in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela and elsewhere in the Americas that

pressured their governments to terminate support for the Somoza regime. These solidarity organizations also coordinated with local activist groups to create broad networks of solidarity, significantly magnifying their message and influence. Utilizing the rhetoric of human rights, these organizations successfully undermined the Somoza regime's international networks of aid, which proved vital to the dictator's eventual downfall.

The international strategy of the FSLN and its allies in the 1970s succeeded where previous Nicaraguan revolutionaries failed because of major changes in international attitudes concerning human rights. Whereas Sandino and the democratic exiles of the 1940s and 1950s failed in their efforts to transform Nicaragua, the alliance of revolutionaries and international grassroots solidarity organizations succeeded in ousting the Somoza regime, ushering in a wave of change. The efforts of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church to promote Liberation Theology undermined the Somoza regime at home, while activists challenged the dictatorship's image abroad. The FSLN and their allies benefitted from the success of the human rights revolution, which not only spurred the creation of the grassroots organizations that supported them, but also transformed international opinion, and perhaps more importantly, brought about a transition in U.S. foreign policy. The human rights policy of the Carter administration, a significant departure from the policies of his predecessors, represented the deep impact of the human rights revolution, and, although the Carter administration attempted to stymie the efforts of the FSLN to seize power, its termination of support for the Somoza regime inspired the momentous growth of the Nicaraguan opposition in the late 1970s.

In the face of the international alliance posed against it, the efforts of the Somoza regime's counterrevolutionary network proved futile. Despite the best efforts of the regime's allies to protect its image, international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and

the International Commission of Jurists, chipped away at the veneer of the dictatorship's carefully crafted international persona. These international organizations were joined by transnational solidarity organizations, such as the Washington Office on Latin America, the North American Congress on Latin America, and the *Latin American News*, who worked in conjunction with the FSLN extraterritorial activists to challenge the regime. As international opposition mounted, the Nicaraguan dictator's spokesmen in the United States faced the increasingly difficult task of countering negative public perception and, in the process, preserving the dictatorship's lifelines.

Although the Somoza regime ultimately succumbed to the FSLN and the international alliance posed against it, the demise of the dictator planted the roots of a counterrevolutionary insurgency that would challenge the FSLN and define Nicaraguan history for another decade. In the 1980s, the U.S. administration of Ronald Reagan would spearhead an international anti-communist campaign that would seek to destroy the young Sandinista regime. However, the grassroots international alliances that brought about the demise of the Somoza regime would turn to the struggle of preserving the Sandinista government and bring about a new international struggle over the fate of Nicaragua.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE TRANSNATIONAL CONTRA WAR

In the wake of Somoza Debayle's departure, a new day appeared to dawn for the Nicaraguan people. Both parties in the victorious coalition, Nicaraguan elites and the FSLN, pledged to commit themselves to continued cooperation and the creation of a just and democratic society. However, tensions between the two groups emerged almost immediately, undoing much of the solidarity built over the previous years. Despite their efforts to maintain a united front, the victorious coalition could not overcome their inherently oppositional ideologies. Nicaragua's elites, particularly its businessmen, adhered to market liberalism, which valued democratic principles and the rationality of market capitalism. The Sandinistas, on the other hand, looked to the Cuban model of social revolution, advocating greater centralization of the economy and increased social welfare. Although not completely antithetical, these two ideologies proved incompatible in Nicaragua's volatile political climate following the ouster of the Somoza regime. Without Somoza Debayle to unite them, there appeared to be little common ground for Nicaragua's elites and the FSLN.

By 1980, the Nicaraguan coalition that overthrew the Somoza regime began to crumble. Although the Junta of Government, the governing coalition consisting of Sandinistas as well as elite Nicaraguans, nominally governed Nicaragua, the National Directorate of the FSLN held the true reins of power. The FSLN controlled the Nicaraguan military and possessed overwhelming popular support, which the Sandinistas viewed as a mandate to govern Nicaragua as they pleased.¹ After nearly two decades of waging an international guerrilla war against the Somoza regime, the leaders of the FSLN had achieved their main objective and were determined to mold Nicaragua in their own image. The National Directorate almost immediately began marginalizing

¹ Andrew W. Reding, "The Evolution of Governmental Institutions," *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 16-18.

the non-FSLN members in the Junta of Government, leaving them with little political recourse. Their promotion of social reforms, designed to alleviate the suffering of Nicaragua's poor, also alienated many of the nation's businessmen who saw the FSLN encroaching on their bottom line.² By the first anniversary of the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty, a split had emerged between the FSLN and Nicaragua's elites, precipitating a decade of violence that would again spill beyond the nation's borders and draw in participants from across the globe.

The growth of the anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan opposition over the course of the 1970s was due in large part to the development of international support networks facilitated by a changing cast of regional players. In the early 1980s, those opposed to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua initially turned to Latin America's military juntas for aid. The government in Argentina proved particularly supportive, providing training and aid from bases in Honduras. Following his victory in the U.S. presidential election in 1980, the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who viewed the Sandinistas as part of a larger Soviet offensive against the capitalist world, threw its weight behind the Nicaraguan opposition. By 1982, the specter of violence again loomed in Nicaragua, as the Reagan administration began actively conspiring against the Sandinistas. An ardent anticommunist, Ronald Reagan held a dichotomous understanding of global politics, believing that the global competition between the Soviet Union and the United States was a zero-sum game in which the success of one party negatively impacted the other.³ Furthermore, Reagan sought to roll back supposed Soviet global advances, conspiring to undermine "communist" regimes. This policy of global contestation with the Soviet Union came to be known as the Reagan Doctrine and would define U.S. foreign policy for much

² Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 148-154.

³ Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 269-70.

of the 1980s.⁴ Among those governments that the Reagan administration sought to "rollback" was that of the FSLN in Nicaragua. In March of 1982, it began to maneuver against the Sandinista government, organizing the Contras, shorthand for counterrevolutionaries, and rallying Central American allies.

In its attempt to undermine the Sandinistas, the Reagan administration pursued a two pronged offensive against the FSLN, which resembled the Nixon administration's campaign against Allende nine years earlier. This strategy included a long-term "strangling" of the Nicaraguan economy through the termination of U.S. aid and the creation of impediments on the international market to keep the Sandinistas from obtaining credit. This long-term approach was to be supplemented by a short-term strategy of covert support for guerrilla warfare in Nicaragua designed to further destabilize the Sandinista government.⁵ In its efforts to fund this military campaign, the U.S. provided covert military assistance to the Contras, and when that funding was blocked by the U.S. Congress, it organized a broad group of transnational players, including the governments of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Honduras, as well as members of the Cuban exile community in the United States, to support the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries. In part, this network was built on the remains of the Somoza regime's own transnational network and included many of the same members. The Reagan administration's patronage of the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries culminated in the Iran-Contra affair, a political scandal, in which the president and other U.S. officials engaged in illegal activities in their efforts to arm the Contras. Iran-Contra became the largest U.S. political scandal since the Watergate break-ins of the Nixon administration, and nearly destroyed the Reagan administration. Although the Reagan administration's strategy failed to remove the Sandinistas through a coup, the economic pressure

⁴ James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 40.

⁵⁵ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 200-203.

placed by the United States did create popular unrest and, ultimately, brought about the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990.

For its part, the FSLN pursued a foreign policy of non-alignment that often put it at odds with the United States. In the Historic Program of the FSLN, the Sandinistas outlined a foreign policy that distanced Nicaragua from U.S. imperialism, stood in solidarity with other national liberation struggles, and pursued a path of non-alignment between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁶ In the spirit of Third World solidarity, the FSLN joined the Non-Aligned Movement and pursued relationships with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and other national liberation struggles. The Sandinista leadership also maintained close ties with Cuba, which would send thousands of doctors to Nicaragua and aid the FSLN's national literacy campaign. Over the course of the 1980s, Cuba would also be an important nexus for military aid to Nicaragua, operating as an actual and figurative island of support in the face of a U.S. embargo in the 1980s. In its efforts to cultivate international support, the FSLN also aided other national liberation struggles, particularly in Central America where it developed close ties to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador. Although the Sandinistas initially limited their relations with the Soviet Union, by the mid-1980s the FSLN was also developing closer ties with the Soviets in response to U.S. economic and military aggression.⁷ The FSLN's policy trajectory ultimately concerned many U.S. policy makers who viewed Sandinista actions on the world stage as justification for increased hostility towards Nicaragua.

In response to increased U.S. aggression, the Sandinistas also cultivated transnational grassroots solidarity. The FSLN developed close ties to U.S. solidarity organizations, many of whose origins could be traced to the previous decade's anti-Somoza movement, creating

⁶ Harry Vanden, in "Foreign Policy," *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, ed. Walker, 295-298.

⁷ Danuta Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-1990: Case Studies on Nicaragua, El Salvador & Guatemala* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 43.

programs that would attempt to counter the anti-Sandinista message emanating from Washington. Among the most prominent organizations working with the FSLN during the 1980s was the Nicaraguan Network, a consortium of North American solidarity organizations. However, the Nicaraguan Network was not alone, as solidarity organizations from across the globe joined the anti-Contra War movement.⁸ In the United Kingdom, the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign was a national grouping of solidarity organizations, similar in many ways to the Nicaraguan Network. In Germany, the Green Party proved a particularly vocal opponent of the Reagan administration's foreign policy and helped raise funds for Nicaraguan support. Municipalities in North America also joined the anti-Contra War movement, developing sister city, or twinning, relationships with cities in Nicaragua. Women proved particularly prominent in this transnational solidarity movement, with Sandinista women traveling the globe on behalf of the FSLN and female activists and politicians, such as Gabi Gottvald in West Germany and the Colectif Femmes/Nicaragua in Paris, playing prominent roles in the international protest movement. Although not all of these activists and organizations openly aligned themselves with the FSLN, many did, and those that did not were in some fashion sympathetic with the FSLN and willing to cooperate with it. What ultimately developed out of this conglomeration was an international movement, which funneled thousands of people and millions of dollars through Nicaragua, all in an effort to challenge the policies of the Reagan administration.

In many ways the conflict that followed resembled the anti-Somoza struggle of the previous decades: revolutionary and counterrevolutionary factions, supported by transnational support networks, battling for control of Nicaragua. The United States again acted as the main patron of the counterrevolutionary faction, while the Sandinistas cultivated Third World support

⁸ Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 171-176.

and grassroots solidarity in order counter the role of the United States. However, unlike in previous decades of conflict, the guerrillas of the 1980s were the counterrevolutionaries and the revolutionaries held the reins of power. Although the Sandinistas held power, they faced the daunting task of combating the stifling economic pressure of the United States as well as the persistent military pressure of the Contras. Unfortunately for the Sandinistas, the Reagan administration's two-pronged strategy successfully eroded popular support for the FSLN, who were voted out of power on February 26, 1990, ironically disproving U.S. claims that the Sandinistas were anti-democratic. The Nicaraguan opposition, led by Violeta Barrios Chamorro, the former member of the Junta of Government and widow of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, won the presidential race and captured the National Assembly, effectively ending Sandinista rule in Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan Anti-Sandinista Movement

The domestic opposition to the Sandinistas, much like the resistance to the Somoza regime, was heterogeneous and touched nearly every sector of Nicaraguan society. Those leading the struggle against the FSLN initially included former members of the *Guardia Nacional* and other Somoza loyalists who fled to neighboring countries following the ouster of their chief. Disillusioned peasants, who felt that the new government in Managua failed to address their concerns, and Nicaraguan business elites, who felt marginalized by the Sandinistas, soon joined the guardsmen and dramatically altered the trajectory of the movement. Indigenous and African Nicaraguans also entered the opposition after the forced relocation of the Miskito Indians and government policies limiting the autonomy of peoples living on the Atlantic Coast. Finally, Roman Catholics began voicing their opposition to the government in Managua following

perceived mistreatment of Church hierarchy and slights against Pope John Paul II following his visit to Nicaragua in 1983. Over the course of the 1980s, these various opposition blocs often held disparate and oppositional goals from one another, with unity proving elusive. However, by the end of the decade they would come together in a political coalition that would bring the end of Sandinista rule in Nicaragua.

The ultimate success of the Nicaraguan opposition, which was due in large part to the persistence and determination of its members, also benefitted from significant foreign intervention. The United States, in particular, played a central role in aiding the Nicaraguan opposition and bringing about a political climate conducive to their victory. The United States was not alone in supporting the anti-Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, as a number of state and non-state actors contributed to undermining the FSLN. Initially Argentina played a central role in the struggle, building the anti-Sandinista military front with aid from Honduras and Guatemala. This movement was later augmented by assistance from a transnational anticommunist movement, with political organizations from across the globe providing financial support to the FSLN. The international networks of the anti-Sandinista movement proved invaluable to the struggle, providing military, financial, and propaganda support to the Nicaraguan opposition.

Initially, the anti-Sandinista movement consisted mostly of former Somocistas and members of the *Guardia Nacional*. Following the abdication of Somoza Debayle, former members of the *Guardia Nacional* and other Somocistas fled to nearby Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador where friendly governments sheltered them. Among the guardsmen, the principal leader of the anti-Sandinista movement was Enrique Bermúdez, Somoza Debayle's military attaché to the United States at the time of the revolution. Utilizing his connections made in Washington, Bermúdez began coordinating an anti-Sandinista resistance immediately

following the defeat of Somoza, first from Guatemala and then Honduras, consisting of former *Guardia* members. Although the United States gradually threw became more supportive of Bermúdez, in the early 1980s, the majority of his groups support came from Argentina and other supportive regimes in Latin America. Bermúdez, and those around him, would become the nexus of the militant anti-Sandinista movement and eventually adopt the label of “Contras,” Spanish shorthand for counterrevolutionaries.⁹

By the mid-1980s, Bermúdez and his guardsmen were joined by a much larger and more diverse wave of opponents to the Sandinistas.¹⁰ Spurred by the FSLN’s increasingly leftist policies and the desire of the United States for a moderate face to the Nicaraguan opposition, figures, such as Arturo Cruz and Eden Pastora, as well as many Nicaraguan peasants, turned against the Sandinista government. Fearing that former *Guardia* members and Somocistas would prove too polarizing and diminish the movement’s appeal, U.S. officials began recruiting Nicaraguan moderates in the early 1980s. At the same time, the FSLN began drifting further to the left, alienating many of its more moderate allies. The result was the dramatic growth of the anti-Sandinista opposition that changed the movement’s ideological and demographic composition.¹¹

Disillusioned with the social and economic policies of the Sandinistas, a coalition between Nicaragua’s elites and sectors of the peasantry began fomenting armed insurrection. In the rural stretches of Nicaragua’s northern and southern borders, the same backwater locations from which the FSLN launched attacks against the Somoza regime, members of the Nicaraguan

⁹ R. Pardo-Mauer, *The Contras, 1980-1989* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 2-3.

¹⁰ For accounts of Contra actions see Arturo Cruz, Jr., *Memoirs of a Counterrevolutionary: Life With the Contras, the Sandinistas, and the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 1989); Christopher Dickey, *With the Contras: A Reporter in the Wilds of Nicaragua* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1985); Dieter Eich and Carlos Rincón, *The Contras: Interviews with Anti-Sandinistas* (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1984); Glenn Garvin, *Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA and the Contras* (New York: Brassey’s, 1992).

¹¹ Peter Korbbbluh, “The Covert War,” *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua* ed. Thomas W. Walker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 22-23.

peasantry launched an insurgency in November 1979. Calling themselves the People's Anti-Sandinista Militias (MILPAS), a play on the People's Anti-Somocista Militias that had fought against the Somoza regime, these organizations would prove the foundation for the popular insurrection against the Sandinistas that would grow over the course of the 1980s.¹²

Although the sacrifices of life and property would fall largely on the peasantry, the Nicaraguan elites largely shaped the goals of the counterrevolutionary insurrection. These elites provided the face of the movement and dictated its agenda. Their goal was not to reinstate the Somoza regime or the *Guardia Nacional*, but to regain their pre-revolution social status and privileges. Because of their background, the U.S. officials recruited anti-Somocista members of Nicaragua's elite opposition, particularly members of the business class, to be the face of the anti-Sandinista opposition.¹³ By playing to their dissatisfaction with the economic policies of the Sandinistas, as well as their anticommunist and religious sentiments, the Nicaraguan elites raised international support and channeled popular unrest into a guerrilla movement that sought to remove the Sandinistas from power, and, ironically, worked against the interests of the peasants. Therefore, in the 1990 electoral victory, the elites marginalized the popular wing of the Contra struggle, ignoring calls for land reform and support services.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the Nicaraguan peasantry provided the popular base of the Contra insurrection, it was largely the elites who directed the struggle, and whose interests it served.

Prominent figures such as Arturo Cruz and Eden Pastora, who had played important roles in the anti-Somoza struggle, broke with the FSLN in the early 1980s and immediately began rallying international support to their cause. Eden Pastora, the guerrilla hero who led the

¹² Timothy C. Brown, *The Real Contra War: Highlander Peasant Resistance in Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 13-14.

¹³ Kornbluh, "The Covert War," 26.

¹⁴ Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 292-305.

commando raid on the National Palace in 1978, was one of the first moderate Nicaraguans to break with the FSLN, leaving Nicaragua for Costa Rica in mid-1981. Disillusioned with what he saw as the extremism of the FSLN, he chastised the Sandinista leadership, excoriating them for following the Cuban model of revolution and antagonizing the United States by buying Soviet tanks. Many of Nicaragua's businessmen left Nicaragua at the same time, including Alfonso Robelo and Arturo Cruz. After his break with the Sandinistas in April 1981, Robelo founded the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN) and went into exile in neighboring Costa Rica, where he joined his organization with Pastora's Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE). Cruz, a member of the Group of Twelve, representative of the Junta of National Reconstruction, and later ambassador to the United States, broke with the FSLN in November 1981 and returned to the United States where he had spent much of his exile during the Somoza era.¹⁵

The indigenous peoples of Nicaragua's highlands and Eastern Coast, as well as the minority English-speaking African-descended communities along the Atlantic Coast, moved into the opposition camp in the early 1980s in response to the government in Managua's encroachment on regional autonomy. Historically, the minority peoples of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, the indigenous Miskito, Sumu, and Rama of the north coast and the English-speaking black Creoles at Bluefields on the south coast, enjoyed significant local autonomy because of the remoteness of their homelands. The Somoza regime's anti-Castro insurgency operated out of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast because of the remoteness and inhospitable nature of the region. Once in power, the Sandinistas, in an effort to centralize government control, moved to incorporate these ethnic minorities into Nicaraguan society, instituting land reform and government structures that undermined indigenous landholding and community structures. The

¹⁵ John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 199-200.

undermining of traditional social structures soon spurred conflict with the ethnic minorities of the Atlantic Coast, with local leaders aligning to create MISURASATA (Mískito, Sumu, Rama, and Sandinistas Working Together). Suspicious that the MISURASATA leaders were planning an insurrection against the government, the Sandinistas arrested Steadman Fagoth, the organization's leader, in February 1981.¹⁶ In May, the government released Fagoth, who immediately traveled to Honduras and joined Bermúdez's anti-Sandinista front. The result was a U.S.-funded anti-Sandinista movement known as MISURA, which worked in cooperation with the Contras and harassed government forces in northeastern Nicaragua. In response, the FSLN moved over 8,000 Mískito to relocation camps, causing further indigenous animosity towards the Sandinista government.¹⁷ Although the Sandinista government would ultimately move to repair the damage done to the relationship with the Atlantic Coast peoples through a program of increased autonomy, tensions persisted as the region's inhabitants continued to support anti-Sandinista efforts.

Perhaps the most influential domestic opponent of the Sandinistas was the hierarchy of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church. Following the defeat of the Somoza regime, the Nicaraguan Church found itself at odds with the Sandinistas, who threatened the Church's traditional hierarchy. Fearing a loss of power and influence in Nicaraguan society, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church sought to restrain its involvement in the revolution. Influenced by Pope John Paul II, who viewed liberation theology and the growth of the popular church in Latin America as a threat to traditional Church structures, the Nicaraguan Church sought to reign in those closely aligned with the FSLN and limit the growth of Christian base communities in Nicaragua.¹⁸ The

¹⁶ "Atlantic Coast: Miskitu Crisis and Counterrevolution," *Nicaragua*, May-June 1982, 4-5.

¹⁷ Andrew W. Redding, "The Evolution of Governmental Institutions," in *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, 32-35.

¹⁸ "Pope John Paul II in Nicaragua," *Nicaragua*, May 1983, 1,4.

result was a split in the Nicaraguan Church between the traditional hierarchy, led by Miguel Obando y Bravo, and those priests and clergy aligned with the FSLN, such as Ernesto Cardenal and Miguel d'Escoto. Tensions between the Church hierarchy and the FSLN escalated between 1984 and 1986 as Obando y Bravo and other Church leaders, with the support of the United States, increasingly aligned themselves with Contra leaders. A complete break occurred on July 4, 1986, when the FSLN expelled Obando y Bravo for his open support of the Contras. A rapprochement between the FSLN and the Nicaraguan Church followed the Esquipulas Peace Accords in 1987, in which the Sandinistas asked Obando y Bravo to chair the efforts towards national reconciliation that would result in the 1990 elections.¹⁹

Each of these various anti-Sandinista factions would receive external support during the course of the 1980s. Although a majority of this aid would come from the United States, other transnational actors also interjected themselves into Nicaraguan politics during this time period. Among the first, and perhaps among the most influential, of these international players was the Argentine military junta, which spearheaded a global alliance bent on eradicating communism from Central America. It was the Argentine military that ultimately paved the way for increased U.S. involvement in the region, providing much of the groundwork for future U.S. intervention.

Argentina and the Origins of the Transnational Contra War

The anti-Sandinista movement in Central America began directly following the downfall of the Somoza regime. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, former members of the *Guardia Nacional* fled to Honduras and Guatemala and began conspiring against the Governing Junta in Managua. In going into exile, these guardsmen maintained close relationships with those

¹⁹ Michael Dodson, "Religion and Revolution," in *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, ed. Walker, 170-183.

Latin American governments that had supported the Somoza regime. In the early 1980s, Argentina was the most important patron of the budding Contra movement, aided by the military governments of Honduras, Guatemala, Paraguay, and Chile. Through the support of these states, the anti-Sandinistas also benefitted from a transnational anticommunist alliance that included state as well non-state actors from across the globe. At the same time, the United States, which had restrained its foreign policy towards Nicaragua following the revolution, began slowly reinserting itself into regional politics. As early as the last two years of the Carter administration, the United States began covert operations against the Sandinista government in Managua. With the election of the Reagan administration in 1980, the United States became a full partner in the transnational anti-Sandinista campaign, coordinating its resources with those of the military junta in Argentina and other counterrevolutionary states and organizations.

In U.S. popular memory, the Contra War of the 1980s is associated almost solely with the Reagan administration and its support for the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries or Contras, as they would come to be called. Much of what has been written about the Contras over the previous decades focuses almost exclusively on the role of the Reagan administration, paying particular attention to the Iran-Contra scandal.²⁰ Although the Reagan administration deeply impacted Nicaragua in the 1980s, the emphasis on the role of the United States, and the specific attention paid to the Iran-Contra Scandal, denies the origins of the Contra War as an inherently Latin American contest. Argentina raised and organized the anti-Sandinistas in the aftermath of

²⁰ There is a rather large literature on the Iran-Contra Scandal, with some of the most notable works being Leslie Cockburn, *Out of Control: The Story of the Reagan Administration's Secret War in Nicaragua, the Illegal Arms Pipeline, and the Contra Drug Connection* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987); Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus, *Landslide: The Unmaking of the President, 1984-1988* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988); Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991); Larence Walsh, *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-Up* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998); Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014); Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014).

the Nicaraguan Revolution, providing the majority of the training for the Nicaraguan militants who would become the Contras. Following the U.S. assumption of Contra aid in the wake of the Falklands War, U.S. officials and advisers would largely follow the insurgency training and tactics of the Argentines. In fact, the Argentine withdrawal following the Falklands War forced the United States to take a greater role in supporting the Contras, which ultimately resulted in the Iran-Contra Scandal. Without the fall of the military junta in Argentina, it is possible that the United States would have continued as a distant partner of the Contras and avoided the political imbroglio of Iran-Contra. It is, therefore, important to begin with an examination of Argentina, arguing that the origins of the Contra War can be located in the hemispheric expansion of Argentina's Dirty War and the transnational anticommunist crusade of the nations of the Southern Cone.

Because of the Carter administration's adherence to a policy of nonintervention in Latin America, a void existed in the hemispheric anticommunist crusade. Out of the emptiness left by the United States a new transnational alliance emerged, uniting the anticommunist governments of the hemisphere with a broader transnational anticommunist movement. Authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Honduras, Guatemala, and elsewhere in Latin America conspired with international organizations such as the World Anticommunist League (WACL) and the Unification Church, to arm and train a counterrevolutionary insurgency against the Sandinista government. Between 1979 and 1981, Argentina led this movement independently, arming and training former members of the *Guardia Nacional* until the U.S. officials bought into the program. Zealously committed to the anticommunist struggle, Argentina facilitated the growth of an armed insurrection that would later become the Contras and grow dramatically under the patronage of the United States.

Although the United States would become the largest patron of the Contras, Argentina played a vital role in the initial development of the anti-Sandinista movement. Taking power in 1976, the military junta that would rule Argentina until 1983 viewed the global anticommunist struggle in apocalyptic terms. Inspired by economic liberalism and Catholic nationalism, Argentina's ruling junta believed that their struggle was a defense of Western civilization against the atheistic terrorism and the expansion of the Soviet Union and its allies.²¹ They, therefore, came to the conclusion that any means, in both the domestic and foreign spheres, could be justified in the struggle against communism. Domestically, the result of this ideology was the *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War) between 1976 and 1983, in which thousands of Argentines died or disappeared at the hands of the military junta. Internationally, the Argentine military pursued an offensive strategy of anti-communism. This entailed the formation and participation in Operation Condor, a clandestine alliance of right-wing dictatorships in South America bent on eradicating Soviet or communist influence from the hemisphere, and stamping out any resistance to member regimes. In pursuit of this goal, the Condor nations pursued a strategy of state terrorism that extended beyond the borders of their own countries, conducting assassinations and disappearances elsewhere in Latin America, as well as in North America and Europe.²² This alliance would facilitate the growth of a transnational anticommunist coalition that would come to support the Somoza regime and challenge the Sandinistas.

The Argentine presence in Central America began in the late 1970s, as the region's military regimes found the Carter administration less amenable to anticommunist ventures. In Nicaragua, Argentine military advisers worked closely with the Somoza regime, providing

²¹ Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina's "Dirty War": An Intellectual Biography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 146.

²² See John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 12-13. Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

training and military aid to the *Guardia Nacional*. In 1978, Argentina sent a number of military operatives to Nicaragua to help support the Somoza regime's anticommunist fight against the Sandinistas. These commandos provided intelligence, as well as military support, to the Somozas. They also pursued Argentine insurgents, namely members of the Montoneros, who continued Ché Guevara's legacy of leftist internationalism by collaborating with the Sandinistas. Eager to stymie a budding transnational revolutionary alliance between the FSLN and Argentine leftists, the commando team pursued internationalists fighting for the Sandinistas. They eventually succeeded in capturing at least one Argentine guerrilla, who was shipped back to his home country and disappeared in the infamous Navy Mechanics School, or ESMA.²³

Argentine involvement in Nicaragua can be seen as an extension of its own "dirty war," an urban counterinsurgency conducted by the military against its own citizens between 1974 and 1978. In fact, the same command structure that led the dirty war directed Argentine efforts in Central America. The head of Argentine involvement in Central America, Gen. Alberto Valín, was among the military directors of the dirty war and had been an advisor to the Somoza regime. In 1981 he ran Argentina's anti-Sandinista program and in 1982 was appointed ambassador to Panama in order to better coordinate the Nicaragua opposition. Valín also led negotiations with former *Guardia* member and leader of the largest Contra army, Enrique Bermúdez. It was ultimately under Valín's guidance that the Argentinians brokered an agreement between Bermúdez's Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and the Nicaraguan Democratic Union.²⁴ With Argentine guidance, the Contras would pursue a campaign of extraterritorial terror, attacking targets in both enemy and friendly states.

²³ Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anticommunist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997), 83.

²⁴ Ibid., "Argentina and the Origins of Nicaragua's Contras," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 2, 3 (1993), 437-438.

Argentine assistance to the anti-Sandinistas included military aid and training, as well as ideological indoctrination. In early 1981, the Argentine military flew 60 Nicaraguans, including Bermúdez, to a suburb of Buenos Aires in order to receive training in intelligence, counterintelligence, psychological operations, leadership, camouflage, demolition, explosives, sabotage, kidnapping, and interrogation techniques. Besides military training, the Argentinians also inculcated the Nicaraguans with their distinctive anticommunist ideology, which blended anticommunism with nationalistic Catholicism and justified any methods to ensure victory. After their training in Buenos Aires, the Nicaraguans received assignments in Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, and Miami, where they received further training in Cuban-American paramilitary camps with the assistance of Argentinian officers.²⁵ From their bases in the United States and Central America, these insurgents would become the most notorious anti-Sandinista fighters in the region.

In Latin America, Argentina had little trouble finding allies to help its anti-Sandinista crusade. The governments of Honduras and Guatemala also participated in the growth and development of Contra forces. Following the coup against the Arbenz government in 1954, Guatemala became a bastion of anticommunist sentiment in the hemisphere. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Somoza regime, the government of Guatemala proved a haven for former members of the *Guardia Nacional*, with government officials as well as members of the neo-fascist National Liberation Movement providing support for the Contras. In the spring of 1981, Argentine commandos, with U.S. assistance, oversaw the movement of the FDN to Honduras, where they worked closely with Col. Gustavo Alvarez Martínez, the head of the Honduran Public Security Force (Fuerza de Seguridad Pública, FUSEP). Alvarez, who was trained at the Argentine National Military College and an avid anticommunist, agreed to provide

²⁵ Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anticommunist Crusade in Central America*, 125-128.

bases for the Contras along the Nicaraguan border and help to train the counterrevolutionaries.²⁶

In the following years, Honduras would become the international hub for anti-Sandinista activity in the region, facilitating the growth of Nicaragua's counterrevolutionary movement.

Besides Argentine training and aid, the Contras benefitted from the support of an international cast of players. Among those who continued to work closely with the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries was the State of Israel, which cooperated with the Argentine military government in aiding the Contras. Following the ascension of the military junta in 1976, the Argentine government began coordinating its intelligence services with those of the State of Israel and allowed Mossad to carry out training missions in Argentina. By the early 1980s, Israeli and Argentine advisers were training Guatemalan security forces as well as providing insurgency training to the Contras in Honduras.²⁷ A number of factors explain Israel's motives for involvement in with, including the desire to open and maintain global markets for Israeli arms, protect Argentina's Jewish community from persecution during the Dirty War, promote global alliances, and act as a proxy for the United States.²⁸ Over the course of the 1980s, Israeli involvement in Central America would continue to increase, as the small Middle Eastern country would again play a pivotal role in the transnational counterrevolutionary network.

Working in tandem with the state actors opposed to the FSLN was a number of non-governmental organizations committed to anti-communism. Among the most prominent of these groups was the World Anticommunist League (WACL), a right-wing transnational organization based out of Taiwan, which supported the Contras through its Latin American chapter, the Latin American Anticommunist Confederation (Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana, CAL).

²⁶ Donald E. Schulz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz, *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 64-66.

²⁷ Bishara Bahbah, *Israel and Latin America: the Military Connection* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 133.

²⁸ Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach: Arms Sales as Diplomacy* (Washington D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985), 156-157.

Founded by Chinese nationalists during the 1950s, the WACL expanded to become a transnational organization with ties to various government officials and intelligence services, with Latin America proving a fertile ground for right-wing anti-communism. CAL, founded in 1972, quickly moved against any subversive threats in the hemisphere, notably attacking the proponents of liberation theology. Because many of its members were military or intelligence officers, CAL became an important source of support for Operation Condor, with many of the organization's members participating in various state-sponsored death squads and the assassinations of political opponents.²⁹ The WACL and CAL also introduced right-wing political groups in the United States to the broader movement against the FSLN. By the early 1980s, CAL connected anticommunist officials from the military juntas of the Southern Cone with like-minded individuals from elsewhere in the hemisphere, facilitating the growth of the anti-Sandinista movement.

One organization that proved to be particularly interested in aiding the Contras in the early 1980s was Syung Myung Moon's Unification Church and its political arm, the Confederation of Associations for the Unity of the Societies of America (CAUSA). A religious movement begun in South Korea in 1954 and deriving its belief system from the Christian Bible, the Unification Church believed Moon to be the Messiah and Korea the new Israelites. As part of its religious convictions, the Church and Moon also endorsed a strong anticommunist agenda and participated in the WACL. Although Moon officially broke with the WACL, other Church members continued to participate in the WACL. Despite the *de facto* participation of the Unification Church in the WACL, in 1980, Moon founded CAUSA in order to forward his movement's anticommunist agenda. Over the following years, CAUSA would funnel millions of

²⁹ Pierre Abramovici, "The World Anticommunist League: Origins, Structures, and Activities," in *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activists, and Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 123-124.

dollars to South American military regimes and develop close ties with the region's anticommunist leaders, including leading members of the Argentine military establishment as well as Gustavo Alvarez Martínez.³⁰

In its anticommunist struggle, CAUSA would develop close ties with the leadership of Central America's counterrevolutionary movement, providing moral and financial support. Forwarding the agenda of the Unification Church, CAUSA moved to support and consolidate the anti-Sandinista movement. In 1982, CAUSA contacted Contra leader Fernando Chamorro about uniting the disparate anti-Sandinista factions operating in Central America into a united front. According to Chamorro, CAUSA flew him to the United States where he met with officials of the Unification Church and other Contra leaders. He ultimately declined CAUSA support, fearing that the money might entail certain obligation to the Unification Church. Other Contra leaders were less scrupulous. Stedman Fagoth, the leader of the MISURA guerrilla force of the Atlantic Coast, acknowledged accepting aid from CAUSA. It was even reported that MISURA rebels wore red t-shirts emblazoned with the CAUSA logo. CAUSA also conducted a propaganda campaign on behalf of the Contras, facilitating the growth of the American-Nicaraguan Association (ANA) in 1984. The new organization sought to conduct a state-by-state publicity campaign designed to raise funds for the Contras, attracting famous anti-Sandinista leaders like Alfonso Robelo. There was even evidence that CAUSA members, aside from financially supporting the Contras, were joining the anti-Sandinista insurgency. There were reports from Contra camps in Honduras of a North American insurgent, known as "Killer Rat," who was also a member of the Unification Church. Although it is unclear as to whether the insurgent joined with Church support or acted without the organization's consent, the Unification

³⁰ Scott Anderson and John Lee Anderson, *Inside the League: The Shocking Exposé of How Terrorists, Nazis, and Latin American Death Squads Have Infiltrated the World Anticommunist League* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1986), 64, 106.

Church clearly lent financial and moral support to the burgeoning Contra movement in Central America.³¹

In the absence of significant U.S. participation in the anti-Sandinista movement in the early 1980s, the onus of supporting the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries fell on the shoulders of state and non-state actors like the Unification Church and the Argentine military. This transnational network provided the groundwork for a burgeoning anti-Sandinista movement. Although the U.S. presence appeared small, U.S. officials began moving towards the opposition camp during the Carter administration. As early as 1978, Argentinian agents operated in and were conducting anticommunist intelligence gathering in Florida with the assistance and consent of the CIA.³² However, because of tense relations between the Carter administration and the Argentine military junta over human rights issues, it is doubtful that President Carter sanctioned these early connections. Despite tensions with Argentina, the Carter administration began a covert campaign against the FSLN in 1980. In the fall of that year, the United States began contributing to the covert transnational war against the Sandinistas through the creation of three small programs designed to check the spread of Sandinista socialism through the promotion of pro-U.S. sentiments in Central American political parties, church groups, farmer's co-ops, and unions.³³ The Carter administration intended these small-scale covert actions to check FSLN expansion, especially in neighboring El Salvador, where U.S. officials rightly suspected Sandinista support for the FMLN.³⁴ Duane "Dewey" Clarridge, the chief of the CIA's Latin American division between 1981 and 1984, later credited the Carter administration's covert

³¹ Anderson, *Inside the League*, 233-234.

³² Armony, "Argentina and the Origins of Nicaragua's Contras," 441-442.

³³ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 380.

³⁴ Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Jimmy Carter, September 9, 1980, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/sso/148878/176/SSO_148878_176_05.pdf, Accessed 12/4/2015.

policies in Central America for successfully laying the groundwork for the program that he would pursue less than a year later.³⁵

Following the election of Ronald Reagan, U.S. officials intensified their campaign against the Sandinistas and strengthened U.S. ties with Argentina. Aware of Reagan's avowed anti-communism and distrust of the Sandinistas, Argentine officials reached out to Reagan's Latin American advisers in late 1980 in an attempt to build a partnership, and found receptive ears among officials of the incoming administration. William Casey, the new director of the CIA, sought to improve on Carter's defensive campaign by going on the offensive and building a "backfire" by "taking the war to Nicaragua" in order to force the Sandinistas to "become preoccupied with an internal problem" and, therefore, eliminate support for Central American revolutionaries, particularly the FMLN, and bring the FSLN to the negotiating table with its opponents.³⁶ After reviewing the reports of Clarridge and others in the CIA, President Reagan became convinced that "Nicaragua is an armed camp supplied by Cuba and threatening a communist takeover of all of Central America,"³⁷ On December 1, 1981, President Reagan signed a "Finding" that authorized the CIA's paramilitary operations against the Sandinistas.³⁸ In January 1982, Reagan approved National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 17, which sought to defeat the FMLN in El Salvador and prevent Cuban or Nicaraguan expansion in the region. To that end, Reagan authorized the provision of "military training for indigenous units and leaders both in and out of country," particularly a 500-man force to supplement the 1,000 Contras being

³⁵ Interview with Duane Clarridge, National Security Archive (NSA), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/episode-18/clarridge1.html>, Accessed 12/5/2015.

³⁶ Interview with Duane Clarridge, NSA.

³⁷ Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 44.

³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Scope of CIA Activities Under the Nicaragua Finding," NSA, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1a-Reagan%20Finding%201983%20scope%20note%20\(IC%2000204\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1a-Reagan%20Finding%201983%20scope%20note%20(IC%2000204).pdf), Accessed December 16, 2015.

trained by the Argentines.³⁹ That same year Clarridge traveled to Buenos Aires to begin talks on U.S.-Argentinian cooperation in Central America.⁴⁰

The result of these talks was the beginning of U.S. and Argentine cooperation in Central America. With the United States providing intelligence and limited resources through the CIA, Argentine advisers trained and guided Contra forces in Honduras and Guatemala. This alliance became known as “La Tripartita” after Contra forces relocated to Honduras.⁴¹ In exchange for training, the Contras aided the Guatemalan military and Argentinian commandos in the extortion and assassination of those deemed enemies of either state, including Argentine exiles, Latin American leftists, and even Guatemalan peasants. Once relocated to Honduras, the Contras aided the Honduran government in tracking down and assassinating Sandinista agents aiding the FMLN. The role of the Contras as assassins for the Honduran military grew between 1981 and 1984, as the anti-Sandinistas began targeting dissident Hondurans and other supposed enemies of the state. In December 1980, while the Carter administration still occupied the White House, the Nicaraguans and Argentines, with the assistance of U.S. intelligence, extended their reign of terror beyond Guatemala to nearby Costa Rica, launching an assault on a radio station on the outskirts of San Jose that was believed to have ties to the Montoneros.⁴² Although the attack failed, it represented the first instance of cooperation between the United States, Argentina, and Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries in their anticommunist crusade in Central America.

By early 1982, the Contras had grown significantly with Argentine aid and began the first tentative actions against the Sandinistas. At this point, the apex of Argentine involvement in Central America, military advisers had trained over 2,000 Nicaraguan combatants, including

³⁹ National Security Decision Directive Number 17, January 4, 1982, The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDs/NSDD17.pdf>, Accessed, 12/4/2015.

⁴⁰ Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anticommunist Crusade in Central America*, 61

⁴¹ Kornbluh, “The Covert War,” 25.

⁴² Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anticommunist Crusade in Central America*, 102.

many of the top officers in the anti-Sandinista movement. By one account, the Argentinians trained as many as one third of the anti-Sandinista military forces operating in Central America. In March 1982, Argentine advisers led the first major Contra sabotage operation with the destruction of the bridges at Río Negro and Ocotol. Revealing the high degree of foreign influence, a Contra commander recalled that “the Argentine advisers trained the commandos, supervised the preparations, and led the infiltration missions.”⁴³ In fact, Argentine influence proved so pervasive that following the U.S. assumption of Contra patronage in 1983-1984, U.S. advisers continued using the methods begun by their predecessors.

It was at the pinnacle of its support for the anti-Sandinista movement that Argentina dramatically withdrew from Central America. The decline, and eventual termination, of Argentine support for the Contras began in 1982 following the disastrous Falklands War with the United Kingdom. Hoping to alleviate domestic unrest towards the military junta and dissipate unease about Argentina’s faltering economy, military planners hoped to divert public attention through the mobilization of patriotic feelings. The Argentine military leadership believed that these nationalist feelings would be inspired through the successful invasion of the Falkland Islands (or las Malvinas), which were under British control but claimed by both Argentina and the United Kingdom. Falsely believing that their close cooperation with the Reagan administration in the Central American anticommunist struggle would make the United States amenable to their seizure of the islands, the Argentine military invaded the islands on April 2, 1982.⁴⁴ In response the British government dispatched a naval task force, which recaptured the islands on June 14, 1982, following the surrender of Argentine forces. Although momentarily

⁴³ Interview with Contra leader in Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anticommunist Crusade in Central America*, 140.

⁴⁴ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 291-294.

uniting the Argentine people, the disastrous defeat led to greater popular unrest and ultimately pushed the military government out of power. The military masterminds behind the war resigned and, on October 30, 1983, popular elections were held to form a new Argentine government.⁴⁵ By 1984, Argentina's military junta was no more, and the regime's military ventures abroad soon followed suit.

The Falklands War effectively ended Argentine participation in the Central American anticommunist crusade. Resentful of the fact that the United States had stood by the United Kingdom during the conflict, the Argentine military immediately began curbing its support for the Contras.⁴⁶ This cut was deepened by the civilian government, which took office in 1984 and did not share the military junta's anticommunist zeal. Argentina also hoped to continue cultivating the support of Latin American nationalists. Ironically, the most vocal supporters of Argentina's claim to the Falklands were Nicaragua and Cuba. Fearing that continued covert anticommunist activity might jeopardize the diplomatic support, the new government in Buenos Aires moved to terminate its covert campaign in Central America.⁴⁷ At the time of the Falklands War, Argentina had roughly twenty-five military advisers in Honduras. In the spring of 1983, that number had dropped to one.⁴⁸

Seeking to pursue a new foreign policy, Argentina would join Mexico and many other states in Latin America opposed to the Reagan administration's covert war in Central America. In January 1984, the newly elected president of Argentina, Raul Alfonsin, sent a message to the Reagan administration that he would halt his country's involvement in Central America. Instead,

⁴⁵ Hodges, *Argentina's "Dirty War,"* 253-254.

⁴⁶ Peter Dale Scott, "Contragate: Reagan, Foreign Money, and the Contra Deal," *Crime and Social Justice*, No. 27/28, 122.

⁴⁷ Socialist International Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Declaration on Latin America and the Caribbean," *Socialist Affairs*, 2 (1986): 21.

⁴⁸ John Maclean and George de Lama, "Argentina cuts ties to Nicaraguan rebels," *Chicago Tribune*, April 3, 1983, 14.

the Argentine president made clear that his administration would only support a negotiated settlement for the region's conflicts.⁴⁹ In March 1985, Alfonsín met with President Reagan at the White House where he reaffirmed his commitment to a peaceful settlement in Central America, stating that "dialogue" and the "longstanding principle of international law in Latin America of nonintervention" were the keys to regional peace.⁵⁰ Between 1982 and 1984, Argentina would cease a policy of transnational anticommunist intervention and strongly adopt a position of nonintervention, abandoning the counterrevolutionary alliance it had helped forge.

Crippled by debt incurred under the military junta, Argentina would play a nominal role in Central America over the remainder of the decade. Continued animosity with Great Britain over possession of the Falkland Islands, an 800 percent annual inflation rate, and the continuing legacy of the Dirty War forced Argentine leaders to emphasize domestic, or regional, issues in the following years.⁵¹ Without its principal partner in the anti-Sandinista campaign, the Reagan administration bore a greater burden for supporting the Contras. Facing domestic opposition to the U.S.-sponsored covert war against the Sandinista government, the Reagan administration augmented the counterrevolutionary alliance created by the Argentines, greatly expanding the scope of the network and its ability to supply the Contras. It further developed its ties to the WACL and sought aid from the Contra countries. However, in its continuing support for the Contras, the Reagan administration would go against the U.S. Congress and, in the process, break U.S. law. The consequences of the Reagan administration's actions would have a profound impact on the course of the Nicaraguan civil war.

⁴⁹ John M. Goshko, "Argentina Ends 'Contra' Aid," *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1984, A1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., "Reagan, Alfonsín Differ on Region," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 1985, A18.

⁵¹ Ibid., "Argentine Leader Says Latin Solution Must be Based on Nonintervention," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1985, A24.

Iran-Contra and the Global Anti-Sandinista Movement

Much has been written about the Iran-Contra scandal in the nearly three decades since it occurred. In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous works, such as Jane Mayer and Doyle McMannus's *Landslide*, Leslie Cockburn's *Out of Control*, and Theodore Draper's *A Very Thin Line*, all attempted to provide a more detailed examination of the scandal, often looking at the Reagan administration's actions through a legal or political lens. However, because of their proximity to events, these authors did not have access to many declassified documents. Modern scholars, on the other hand, have benefitted from the declassification of many documents related to the scandal, both in the United States and elsewhere. Among the most recent scholarship is *Iran-Contra* written by Malcolm Byrne, the Deputy Director and Research Director of the National Security Archive. Byrne's work, which incorporates recently declassified documents, examines the Iran-Contra scandal through an international lens, examining the various international players involved in the anti-Sandinista movement of the mid-1980s. Because of the dearth of published sources on the Iran-Contra scandal, this section will attempt to summarize the event, demonstrating its impact on the transnational anti-Sandinista movement. Coincidentally, the scandal undermined efforts to arm the Contras, while, simultaneously, fueling the explosive growth of the Anti-Contra War Movement.

By 1983, with Argentina no longer willing to carry the burden of supporting the Contras, the Reagan administration faced a daunting challenge in arming Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries. Due to the lingering legacy of the Vietnam War, the atrocities committed by counterrevolutionary death squads in Central America, including the Contras, and the escalation of U.S. aggression towards the Sandinistas, intervention in Nicaragua proved a particularly unpopular option for the Reagan administration. In fact, most U.S. citizens were so

unfamiliar with the region and its politics that they could not differentiate between the leftist Sandinistas and the rightist Salvadorans, resulting in general public apathy and a reluctance in Congress towards funding the Contras.⁵² This antipathy, combined with news of increased U.S. aggression towards Nicaragua, particularly the CIA's mining of Nicaraguan harbors in January 1984, resulted in significant public pushback against the Reagan administration's campaign against the Sandinistas.⁵³ The result was the passage of the Boland Amendments in 1982 and 1984, which made it illegal for U.S. officials in the CIA or the Department of Defense to fund the Contra rebels.⁵⁴ With funding for the Contras terminating on October 12, 1984, the Reagan administration began exploring other means of aiding the Nicaraguan Revolutionaries.

In its efforts to continue supporting the Contras, the Reagan administration pursued a number of strategies. The most notorious example was operation "Enterprise," in which U.S. officials side-stepped Congress and clandestinely provided aid to the Contras through the support of third parties, eventually leading to the selling of military equipment to Iran. Initially intended as a transfer of U.S. weapons in exchange for hostages held by Hezbollah, Enterprise quickly became a means for U.S. officials to skirt the Boland Amendment by selling weapons to Iran and using the proceeds to support the Contras.⁵⁵ Israel, which saw Enterprise as an opportunity to simultaneously weaken Iran and Iraq, two of its regional opponents, operated as a middleman in the weapons transfers. The Reagan administration also reached out to sympathetic governments and organizations from around the world for aid in the anti-Sandinista movement. Because the actions of the Reagan administration broke a number of U.S. laws, the Iran-Contra dealings had to be carried out covertly in order to avoid detection. Because of this secrecy and the need for

⁵² Joseph C. Harsch, "Escalation in Central America," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 1983, 22.

⁵³ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 330-333.

⁵⁴ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 243-245, 321-322.

⁵⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 49.

outside funding, Enterprise became one of the broadest and most complex transnational networks of Nicaraguan support during the twentieth century, spanning multiple continents and included players in North and South America, as well as the Middle East and East Asia.

Operation Enterprise grew out of the Reagan administration's desire to continue supporting the anti-Sandinista movement in the face of growing Congressional opposition. Hoping to highlight the need for continued support, President Reagan signed a second "Finding" to the intelligence committees of Congress that outlined the need for CIA support and training of Contra rebels, as well as continued cooperation with other nations in Central America and elsewhere.⁵⁶ The operation to arm the Contras benefitted from a concurrent plan to free U.S. hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon, which began in 1985. Through Israeli middlemen, the United States made a number of weapons transactions with Iran, which was the principal ally of Hezbollah, including a controversial shipment of 18 HAWK (Homing-All-the-Way-Killer) antiaircraft missiles as well as TOW anti-tank missiles.⁵⁷ For their part, the Israelis saw the arms deals as an opportunity to prevent the further radicalization of Iran, while simultaneously weakening both Iran and Iraq.⁵⁸ However, after a series of mishaps, U.S. officials decided to conduct direct arms sales to Iran in early 1986, violating President Reagan's own pledge to never negotiate with terrorists. U.S. officials hoped that these covert weapons shipments would help improve relations with Tehran, and replenish Israeli supplies. However, the residuals from the arms deal would primarily benefit U.S. interests in Central America.

⁵⁶ White House, "Presidential Finding on Covert Operations in Nicaragua," September 19, 1983, NSA, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1-Reagan%20Finding%209-19-83%20\(IC%2000203\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1-Reagan%20Finding%209-19-83%20(IC%2000203).pdf), accessed December 16, 2015.

⁵⁷ CIA, "Scope: Hostage Rescue – Middle East," November 26, 1985, NSA, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/13-Reagan%20Finding%2011-26-85%20\(IC%2001903\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/13-Reagan%20Finding%2011-26-85%20(IC%2001903).pdf), accessed 12/16/2015.

⁵⁸ John M. Poindexter to President Reagan, White House, "Covert Action Finding Regarding Iran," January 17, 1986, NSA, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/15-Reagan%20Finding%201-17-86%20\(IC%2002181\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/15-Reagan%20Finding%201-17-86%20(IC%2002181).pdf), accessed December 16, 2015.

The principal beneficiaries of the U.S. arms deals with Iran were the Contras, who received the lion's share of the residuals from the covert weapons deals. By early 1986, North had wed his efforts to support the Contras with the Iranian arms trading. In a top secret National Security Council memo, North explained the goals and implementation of the Iranian arms deals. Working with Israeli officials, North and other U.S. officials would travel to Tehran in order to negotiate a deal the Iranian government. In the memo, North highlighted how \$12 million of the \$14 million received from the arms trafficking would be used to "purchase critically needed supplies for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance Forces," and, in a phrase that makes clear North's intention of violating the Boland Amendment, "bridge' the period between now and when Congressionally approved lethal assistance can be delivered."⁵⁹ The funds would then be funneled through a number of shell companies and accounts, created by North, before ultimately finding its way to the Contras.

U.S. officials also hoped to utilize their new leverage with the government in Tehran to undermine Iran's budding relationship with the Sandinistas. As part of its policy of non-alignment, the Sandinistas cultivated relations with a number of states, including many which the United States deemed an enemy. Among those states was the Islamic Republic of Iran, which the Sandinistas began official relations with in 1981. Between 1984 and 1985, the two nations entered into discussion about increased commercial relations, with Iran extending a loan for Nicaraguan oil purchases. The two nations later discussed an exchange of Iranian oil for Nicaraguan sugar.⁶⁰ Fearful of growing Third World solidarity, U.S. officials pressed the

⁵⁹ Oliver North, National Security Council, "Release of American Hostages in Beirut," April 4, 1984, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/16-Diversion%20Memo%204-4-86%20\(IC%2002614\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/16-Diversion%20Memo%204-4-86%20(IC%2002614).pdf), accessed December 16, 2015.

⁶⁰ Joann Fagot Aviel, "The Enemy of My Enemy': The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Central America," in *Central America and the Middle East: The Internationalization of the Crises*, ed. Damián J. Fernandez (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), 27.

Iranians to terminate their assistance to the Sandinistas. In North's NSC memo detailing arms shipments to Iran, he states that "the Iranians have been told that their provision of assistance to Nicaragua is unacceptable to us and they agreed to discuss this matter in Tehran."⁶¹ Despite U.S. protestations, relations between Iran and Nicaragua persisted. Ironically, Iran's subsequent purchase of weapons from the United States, the proceeds of which were used to aid the Contras, placed the government in Tehran on both sides of the global Contra War.

Although the Iran-Contra operation represented the most complicated attempt to fund the anti-Sandinistas, North pursued multiple avenues in his attempts to aid the Contras, including contacting like-minded third parties. North turned to a series of international patrons in executing Enterprise. Aware that financial support for the Contras was going to terminate in the fall of 1984, the Reagan administration began searching for solutions to the problem of Contra aid. In answering this problem, U.S. officials attempted to enter into a series of quid-pro-quo agreements with a number of sympathetic regimes, including the Saudi royal family, the State of Israel, South Korea, South Africa, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Brunei.⁶² A number of these contacts failed to result in Contra aid, but a number proved successful, providing the Contras with millions of dollars to continue their war against the Sandinistas.

The Middle East proved a particularly fruitful region for cultivating aid. In his early assessment of third party patronage, North recognized Saudi Arabia as a possible source of support for anti-Sandinista operations.⁶³ In May 1984, Saudi Arabia's ambassador, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, contacted U.S. officials about the threat posed to oil shipments moving

⁶¹ North, "Release of American Hostages in Beirut."

⁶² National Security Planning Group (NSPG), Record of meeting, June 25, 1984, NSA, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB483/docs/1984-06-25%20NSPG%20-%20Central%20America.pdf>, accessed December 15, 2015.

⁶³ Oliver North to Robert McFarlane, National Security Council (NSC), "Fallback Plan for Nicaraguan Resistance," March 16, 1985, NSA, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/4-North%20Fallback%20memo%203-16-85%20\(IC%2000952\).pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/4-North%20Fallback%20memo%203-16-85%20(IC%2000952).pdf), accessed December 15, 2015.

through the Strait of Hormuz by the Iran-Iraq War.⁶⁴ At the same time, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane initiated talks with Bandar about supporting the Contras. The meeting proved productive for McFarlane as the Saudis agreed to provide the Contras with \$1 million a month for eight months. Ultimately, the Saudis provided \$32 million for Contra aid.⁶⁵ The timing of the two meetings implies a quid-pro-quo between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, in which the Saudis provided Contra aid and, in turn, the United States would help secure shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf. With Saudi support, North and his associates turned to the global grey market, purchasing weaponry from China and a number of Eastern European countries. Although it might seem ironic that Communist states would sell arms to U.S. buyers, their need for hard currency, which international arms trafficking provided, outweighed any ideological concerns.⁶⁶ With Saudi money and communist weaponry, North began patching together support for the Contras.

By late 1984 and early 1985, North had begun to successfully court global donors and obtained weaponry on the global arms market in order to covertly arm the Contras. The State of Israel provided further support, proving a willing patron of the Contras. Israeli advisers had worked closely with the Argentine military before its exit from Central America, providing training and limited military assistance. The Israelis had even secretly supplied the Argentinians with weapons during the Falkland War.⁶⁷ By the early 1980s, Israel had become a significant

⁶⁴ NSPG, "Escalation of the Gulf War," May 17, 1984, NSA, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB483/docs/1984-05-17%20NSPG%20-%20Escalation%20in%20the%20Gulf%20War.pdf>, accessed December 17, 2015.

⁶⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁶⁷ Robin Yapp, "Israel supplied arms to Argentina during the Falklands War," *The Telegraph*, September 20, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/falklandislands/8463934/Israel-supplied-arms-to-Argentina-during-Falklands-War.html>, accessed December 24, 2015.

global arms merchant.⁶⁸ With almost 25 percent of its domestic industrial labor force involved in military production, in early 1984, Israel supplied weapons to Guatemala, Argentina, Zaire, Liberia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Taiwan, and China.⁶⁹ Following its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israel, with CIA support, supplied the militaries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador with captured PLO weapons in 1983 and 1984.⁷⁰ As part of a CIA operation known as Tipped Kettle, many former PLO weapons would ultimately make it into the hands of the Contras. Israel's compliant role in arming the Contras, and its familiarity with the regional arms trade, ultimately helped it secure its role as the middleman of the Iran-Contra dealings.

Not all of the U.S. overtures for Contra aid proved successful. Although the staunchly anticommunist South Koreans appeared willing to help the Contras, they balked at a U.S. request to aid in the seizure or destruction of a Sandinista weapons shipment in Asian waters.⁷¹ The Sultan of Brunei pledged \$10 million to the Contras. However, the funds were lost and never reached the Contras.⁷² U.S. officials also reached out to the apartheid regime in South Africa. However, that request was quickly withdrawn following the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and a fear among officials in the Reagan administration that associating the troublesome human rights record of the Contras with that of the South African ruling regime might be problematic.⁷³ With the monetary support of Saudi Arabia, North and his associates sought to purchase weapons for the Contras in late 1984. Through Nicaraguan contacts, North approached the military regime of

⁶⁸ There is little recent scholarship on Israel's role in the global arms trade during this time period. However, there are a handful of studies written in the late 1970s and 1980s that shed some light on Israel's role in the global weapons trade. On Israeli arms to Latin America, see Bahbah, *Israel and Latin America*; Fernández, *Central America and the Middle East*; Jane Hunter, *Israeli Foreign Policy: South Africa and Central America* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Edy Kaufman, Yoram Shapira, Joel Barromi, *Israel-Latin American Relations* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979); and Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach*.

⁶⁹ Eric Margolis, "Israel: Global Arms Merchant," *The Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1984, 11.

⁷⁰ Ignacio Klich, "Friendship that Foments Hatred," *The Guardian*, December 9, 1983, 12.

⁷¹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 56.

⁷² NSA, U.S. Embassy Brunei, Cables, "Brunei Project," August 2, 1986, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/8-Elliot%20Abrams%20Cable%208-2-86.pdf>, accessed December 15, 2015.

⁷³ "U.S. Planned in '84 for South Africa to Help Contras," *New York Times*, August 20, 1987, A1.

Gen. Augusto Pinochet in Chile and, at the time, received a promise of British-made Blowpipe missiles and other weaponry. However, the Chileans did not want to part with the military hardware and North was never able to secure the missiles.⁷⁴ Despite these setbacks, North and his associates continued to pursue possible Contra supporters.

In the United States a coalition of individuals and private organizations came to the aid of the Reagan administration following Congressional cancellation of aid to the Contras. Foremost among these were anticommunist organizations, including the U.S. Council on World Freedom, a chapter of the WACL, and Civilian Military Assistance (CMA), a private organization that provided aid and advisers to the Contras. Cuban-American exiles also joined the anti-Sandinista movement, with Cuban-Americans participating in CIA operations in Central America as well as independent groups fighting with the Contras. The WACL, led by former Maj. Gen. John Singlaub, often worked in cooperation with U.S. officials, coordinating aid for the Contras, while the CMA held ties to many officials in the U.S. government. Cuban-Americans, on the other hand, worked in both government and nongovernment roles. Despite their shared goals, these groups at time undermined the efforts of North and his colleagues in Enterprise. However, they also constituted a significant source of support and expertise for the Contras.

Perhaps the most influential North American outside the U.S. government to throw their weight and resources behind the Contras was John Singlaub, the former chief of staff of U.S. armed forces in South Korea. Singlaub, who President Carter forced to step down after disparaging the president's plan to withdraw troops from South Korea, was an ardent anticommunist and founder of the U.S. Council on World Freedom. In January 1984, Singlaub contacted Oliver North in order to make himself and his organization available to aid the Contras. He initially offered to provide retired U.S. servicemen to act as advisers and raise funds

⁷⁴ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 55.

for the Contras. Utilizing his contacts made while serving in East Asia, Singlaub also contacted South Korean and Taiwanese military officials in order to enlist their services in supporting the Contras. The South Koreans balked at the offer and, despite offering Nicaraguan recognition of Taiwan following a Contra victory, Taiwan also declined to aid the anti-Sandinistas. Singlaub persisted in his efforts, eventually cooperating with a Swiss arms merchant to move Eastern European weapons into Honduras, where officials would turn the weapons over to the Contras. Unlike Oliver North and other U.S. officials who took a cut of the proceeds, Singlaub did not mark-up the price of the weapons he sold to the Contras, in turn making his products more attractive to his buyers. By mid-1985, North and his associations saw their bottom line shrink, and attempted to undermine the competition by digging up dirt on Singlaub's Swiss associate. However, these efforts failed and the competing U.S. gun trafficking operation persisted.⁷⁵

Another U.S. group that undermined North's operation was Civilian Military Assistance, a grassroots organization of former U.S. military officers who provided assistance and training to the Contras. Formed in 1983, CMA consisted of roughly 1,000 members, mostly in the southern U.S., who sent 15 to 20 Americans to Nicaragua between 1983 and 1984.⁷⁶ CMA members quickly ingratiated themselves with Enrique Bermúdez, finding themselves in the Contra leader's circle of advisers. However, their presence would prove problematic to North, as they would convince Bermúdez to launch an air attack that would undermine U.S. operations. In September 1985, Bermúdez's forces attacked a Sandinista military school, killing four children and one adult. During the attack Sandinista anti-aircraft shot down a Contra helicopter, killing two CMA advisers. News of the death of two North Americans fighting with the Contras resulted in questions about covert operations in Central America, with many speculating that the CMA

⁷⁵ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 89-90, 125-127.

⁷⁶ Philip Taubman, "2 Nicaragua Dead Identified as U.S. Veterans," *The New York Times*, September 5, 1984, A12.

members were part of a covert U.S. operation.⁷⁷ The incident deeply hurt the Contras, who lost half of their helicopter force, and further soured the U.S. Congress and public towards covert ventures in Latin America.⁷⁸ North and his associates in Enterprise, who had no connections to the helicopter attack, ultimately convinced Bermúdez to remove the CMA members from his inner circle. Perhaps adding insult to injury for North, John Singlaub succeeded in convincing a wealthy Texan named Ellen Garwood to donate \$65,000 to the Contras for the purchase of a new helicopter, which the rebels christened “Lady Ellen.”⁷⁹

Continuing their anticommunist crusade in Central America and the Caribbean, many Cuban-Americans participated in the anti-Sandinista struggle. Among the CIA operatives in Central America was Cuban born Felix I. Rodriguez, a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Vietnam War, who was involved in counterinsurgency training in El Salvador and helped coordinate air supply for the Contras.⁸⁰ Other Cuban-Americans operated as Unilaterally Controlled Latino Assets (UCLAS), a CIA term for Latino operatives who spoke Spanish and could navigate the social and cultural waters of Central America. UCLAS notably carried out the mining of Nicaraguan harbors in early 1984.⁸¹ North also integrated Rodriguez and other Cuban-Americans into Enterprise, with Rodriguez coordinating covert efforts to supply the Contras by air from El Salvador.⁸²

⁷⁷ Norman Kempster, “U.S. Questioning Survivors of Raid on Nicaragua,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1984, B6; Taubman, “2 Americans Assert U.S. Assisted Private Effort Against Latin Left,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 1984, A10; Howard Kurtz, “U.S. Officer Aided Group’s Shipments to Salvador,” *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1984, A1.

⁷⁸ George C. Wilson, “Curb is Sought on Guardsmen in Covert Wars,” *The Washington Post*, September 11, 1984, A1; Martin Tolchin, “Democrats Oppose Private Latin Aid,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 1984, A10.

⁷⁹ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 54.

⁸⁰ Felix I. Rodriguez and John Weisman, *Shadow Warrior: The CIA Hero of a Hundred Unknown Battles* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989), 244.

⁸¹ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 330.

⁸² Julia Preston and Joe Pichirallo, “Phone Calls Suggest Exile Tied to Resupplying Contras,” *The Washington Post*, A1.

Beyond covert action with the CIA, other Cuban-Americans traveled to Central America of the own accord and joined up with the Contras. In many ways similar to CMA, these fighters participated in grassroots organizations that sent members to train and fight alongside anti-Sandinista forces. The 2506 Brigade, which consisted of veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion, sponsored twenty four Cuban-American combatants in Central America and raised over one million dollars for the Contras. The Cuban-American community also developed close ties to anti-Sandinista politicians, including then Miami politician Jeb Bush, and utilized their significant lobby power to influence U.S. politics.⁸³ Because of these political ties, the Cuban-American community represented one of the largest anti-Sandinista interest groups in the United States.

Between 1984 and 1986, the Reagan administration also sought the support of various political interest groups to help support the anti-Sandinista movement. With Contra aid limited, the Reagan administration turned to private organizations, such as the Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America (PRODEMCA), which was an outgrowth of the neoconservative anticommunist think-tank, Committee for the Free World. Working closely with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a federal body designed to foster democracy, PRODEMCA discretely funded anti-Sandinista activity. Through grants from the NED, the organization, which included such notable members as former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington, funneled millions of dollars into the coffers of the anti-Sandinista front, including the Catholic Church and the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*.⁸⁴

⁸³ Julia Preston and Joe Pichirallo, "Bay of Pigs Survivors Find Common Cause with Contras," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 1986, A1; "Clandestine Group Achieved Reagan Goal," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 1986, A1.

⁸⁴ Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America (PRODEMCA), "Democracy is the Issue in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, June 2, 1985, E24; Sidney Blumenthal, "Grantee of U.S. Endowment Funds Sandinista Opponents," *The Washington Post*, March 19, 1986, A1; Ibid., "Nicaraguan Opposition Newspaper Worried About Source of U.S. Funds," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1986, A8; Michael Dodson and Laura Nuzzi

PRODEMCA also organized tours of a Contra camp, giving visitors a carefully controlled “dog-and-pony show” designed to allay fears of anti-Sandinista human rights abuses.⁸⁵ Following the discovery of the Iran-Contra dealings in November 1986, PRODEMCA promptly disappeared from the national eye.

In late 1986, the Reagan administration’s covert operation to supply the Contras came to a dramatic halt. On October 5, 1986, a Sandinista soldier patrolling the jungle near Costa Rica downed a small aircraft with a shoulder-fired anti-aircraft rocket. Unbeknownst to the soldier, he had shot down one of the Oliver North’s small prop planes used to funnel weapons to Contras. The sole survivor of the crashed airplane was a U.S. citizen named Eugene Hasenfus who was flying missions for the CIA. One month later, an obscure newspaper in Lebanon published an article about a secretive U.S. mission to Iran to negotiate an arms deal.⁸⁶ Ironically, the news of these events occurred at the same time that Congress had agreed for new funds for the Contra War.⁸⁷ Both incidents exposed Enterprise and the Iran-Contra dealings, generating a global condemnation and placing the Reagan administration in a dangerous situation. The cover-up and scandal that followed nearly derailed the Reagan administration, as government hearings were held to understand the breadth and scope of White House involvement. Despite his involvement in and knowledge of Enterprise, President Reagan avoided impeachment or criminal charges stemming from the incident. However, many of his aides, who attempted to hide the details of

O’Shaughnessy, *Nicaragua’s Other Revolution: Religious Faith and Political Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 195.

⁸⁵ Blumenthal, “Pro-Contra Group Gives Tour of Bases,” *The Washington Times*, August 8, 1986, A19; Ibid., “Conservatives Send Pilgrims to Contras,” August 17, 1986, A22.

⁸⁶ Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 1.

⁸⁷ James LeMoyne, “Ortega, Faulting Reagan, Warns of Coming War,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/10/19/world/ortega-faulting-reagan-warns-of-coming-war.html>, Accessed December 18, 2015.

the dealings from congressional investigators, were convicted of perjury, withholding evidence, and other related charges, but later pardoned by President George H. Bush.⁸⁸

The Iran-Contra affair demonstrated the truly global character of the Contra War in the 1980s. Building off of the Argentine anti-Sandinista strategy, the Reagan administration contacted a diverse array of state and non-state actors from around the world to aid the Contras. Although their overtures to South Korea, Taiwan, South Africa, and Chile failed, they did succeed in gaining the support of Saudi Arabia and Israel, both of whom viewed the alliance as benefitting their own regional concerns rather than demonstrating a commitment to anti-communism. Non-state actors also played an increasingly important role in the affair. Because of its covert nature, the Reagan administration relied on organizations like the WACL, PRODEMCA, CMA, and the Cuban-American community to forward their agenda. However, at times, these groups conflicted with Washington's agenda. Although various partners often participated out of self-interest as opposed to a selfless commitment to anti-communism, Iran-Contra demonstrated the persistence and longevity of the global counterrevolutionary alliance.

The scandal deeply undermined the Reagan administration's anti-Sandinista policy in Central America. The president's closest allies in the region, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, began negotiations with the Sandinistas in early 1987, eventually signing the Central American Peace Accord or the Esquipulas Accord.⁸⁹ One year later, the Sandinistas entered into direct negotiations with the Contras. It appeared that the Sandinistas had weathered the storm of U.S. aggression. However, the psychological and economic impact of the Contra War had taken its toll on the Nicaraguan people, who voted the Sandinistas out of power in the popular elections of 1990.

⁸⁸ For a detailed examination of the cover-up and the subsequent investigation see Draper, *A Very Thin Line*.

⁸⁹ Thomas Walker and Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 210-211.

At the time, however, the Sandinistas benefitted from a robust transnational solidarity campaign that saw its ranks swell following the revelation of the Iran-Contra dealings. Although this movement had existed before the exposure of Iran-Contra, the scandal spurred the dramatic growth of the movement. Working in concert with FSLN foreign policy, the transnational Nicaraguan solidarity movement would prove to be one of the most valuable sources of Sandinista support during the Contra War.

The FSLN and the International Anti-Contra War Movement

The Sandinistas faced a daunting task on taking power in 1979. The Nicaraguan economy was in shambles after decades of Somoza rule, with much of the country destroyed and roughly one third of the population unemployed. Nearly 800,000 people, or one quarter of the population, depended on government food assistance.⁹⁰ The Somoza regime had also severely depleted the national reserves and dramatically increased foreign debt, leaving the Sandinistas with \$1.6 billion owed to foreign creditors.⁹¹ Simultaneously, the Sandinistas faced increasing unrest among certain segments of Nicaraguan society, including the elites, Church, and ethnic minorities of the Atlantic coast, and a budding anti-Sandinista exile movement on its border with ties to the United States. In meeting these challenges the Sandinista government followed a pragmatic foreign policy of non-alignment, cultivating relations with numerous states of varying ideologies. The Sandinistas also benefited from a grassroots network of support, largely born out of the anti-Somoza movement of the late 1970s, which would prove a valuable ally in the struggle against increased U.S. covert intervention under the Reagan administration. Although

⁹⁰ Susanne Jonas, "The Nicaraguan Revolution and the Reemerging Cold War," *Nicaraguan in Revolution*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger, 1982), 379.

⁹¹ Walker, *Nicaragua*, 100; Michael E. Conroy, "Economic Legacy and Policies: Performance and Critique," *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger, 1985), 227.

the Sandinistas succeeded in preventing an anti-Sandinista popular uprising, they ultimately failed to prevent a counterrevolutionary political victory in the popular election of 1990. The ability of the Sandinistas to hold onto power for a decade in the face of overwhelming U.S. pressure reveals the strength of its transnational networks of support.

Following the defeat of the Somoza regime, the Sandinistas already possessed a delineated foreign policy and a familiarity with foreign affairs. After decades of living in exile and negotiating with foreign governments in order to receive assistance, the FSLN had cultivated significant connections with various states and international organizations (see Chapter 4). The Sandinistas also entered Managua with a well-defined international agenda. *The Historic Program of the FSLN*, largely written by Carlos Fonseca in 1969, provided the blueprint for Sandinista foreign policy in the 1980s. The document called for an “independent foreign policy” free of U.S. influence and intervention, the “union of the Central American peoples in a single country,” and increased “military solidarity with fraternal peoples fighting for their liberation.”⁹² These objectives would lead the Sandinistas to pursue a policy of non-alignment and strengthen their ties with revolutionary governments and movements elsewhere. However, it would also result in friction with neighboring regimes and, subsequently, the United States.

Continuing the long history of anti-dictatorial and anti-oligarchical activism in Central America, the Sandinista government viewed the military juntas in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala as inimical and a possible threat to their regime. During the struggle against the Somoza regime, the FSLN had enjoyed the support of Central American revolutionary organizations and sought to return the favor by aiding movements in their efforts to oust the

⁹² “Historic Program of the FSLN,” *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua’s Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986), 20-21.

ruling military juntas.⁹³ To this end, in the early 1980s the FSLN began sending weaponry and other military aid to neighboring revolutionary movements, in particular the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in nearby El Salvador.⁹⁴ Although a majority of Latin American governments applauded the downfall of the Somoza regime, they were less enthusiastic about the Sandinista patronage of revolutionary movements that might inflame violence in Central America and increase regional instability. The same could be said of the United States, which, under the Carter administration, cut-off aid to the Sandinistas because of their support for the Salvadoran guerrillas.⁹⁵ Ultimately, the Sandinista support for the FMLN convinced the Reagan administration to attempt to remove the Sandinistas from power, with the president believing that the FSLN was “an armed camp supplied by Cuba” that threatened “a communist takeover of all of Central America.”⁹⁶

Besides supporting revolutionary movements in Central America, the FSLN cultivated relationships with various governments and national liberation fronts that the United States viewed with a jaundiced eye. In an effort to stand in solidarity with revolutionary movements around the globe, and perhaps to repay Israel’s closeness to the Somoza regime, the Sandinistas pursued a close relationship with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).⁹⁷ The PLO-FSLN connection elicited a strong response from Jewish-American groups, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which, in 1984, was quick to label both parties “terrorists” and highlight supposed “Sandinista anti-Semitism.”⁹⁸ The FSLN also developed relations with the government of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, receiving military and financial aid from the enemy

⁹³ Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 47, 100, 119.

⁹⁴ Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 256.

⁹⁵ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 68.

⁹⁶ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 44.

⁹⁷ Klich, “Israel, the PLO, and Nicaragua: The Kernel and the Shell,” *Central America and the Middle East*, 68-69.

⁹⁸ “Furor Rages Over Anti-Semitism Claims Made Against Sandinistas,” *The Washington Post*, July 7, 1984, D11.

of the United States.⁹⁹ These Middle Eastern ties troubled U.S. officials, and provided them with a public relations angle with which to attack the FSLN.

For the Reagan administration, these relationships raised the specter of the growth and unification of transnational terrorism, which they played up in the media. In the fall of 1985, the State Department published what it considered damning evidence that the FSLN was turning Nicaragua into a “haven for subversives” and that Sandinista ties to the PLO and Libya posed an “increasing danger of violence for the Western Hemisphere.”¹⁰⁰ At the same time, U.S. officials, including Reagan’s ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, began a concerted campaign to highlight the “terrorist” connections of the FSLN. Between 1983 and 1986, Kirkpatrick wrote a number of editorials highlighting the FSLN’s close relationship with Gaddafi, arguing that the apparent closeness between the two countries aided the Soviet bloc and spread violence in Latin America.¹⁰¹

Although the FSLN’s relations with the PLO and Libya concerned the Reagan administration, U.S. officials primarily feared Soviet penetration into the hemisphere. Over the course of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Soviet Union appeared to be distancing itself from the tenets of détente and following a more active foreign policy, supporting communist movements in Ethiopia, Angola, and elsewhere. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, convinced many U.S. officials that the Soviet Union sought to grow its global influence.¹⁰² The result of this perceived Soviet expansion was the Reagan administration’s assertion of a more aggressive foreign policy and an emphasis on “rolling-back” communist

⁹⁹ Aviel, “Enemy of My Enemy,” 24.

¹⁰⁰ United States Department of States, “The Sandinistas and Middle Eastern Radicals,” August 1985, 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Nicaragua and Libya: Brothers in Blood,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1985, D5; “The Threat America Cannot Ignore,” *The Guardian*, April 25, 1983, 9.

¹⁰² Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 334-339.

gains. This, of course, led to the Reagan administration's aggressive policies against the Sandinistas. However, it also had the unintended consequence of pushing the FSLN closer to the Soviets, mirroring the results of similar policies towards Cuba in 1959-1961. As the United States escalated its actions towards Nicaragua, the Soviets increased its shipments of arms to Nicaragua.¹⁰³ The threat of a U.S. invasion pushed the Sandinistas towards increasing their military stockpiles, and, in the process, they turned to Cuba, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union.

As the United States increased its military pressure on Nicaragua in the first half of the 1980s, the Sandinistas turned to the Soviet Union for aid, which the Soviets obliged. However, despite increased military aid between 1981 and 1983, the Soviets were hesitant to develop close ties to FSLN, fearing that meddling in the United States' "backyard" might elicit a strong response.¹⁰⁴ The ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 marked the decline of Soviet support. At the time, the cost of the war in Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's faltering economy also placed serious limitations on aid to the Sandinistas. As part of Gorbachev's reformist policies of glasnost and perestroika, in 1987, the Soviets cut oil shipments to Nicaragua and, in 1988, they cut all arms transfers to the Sandinistas.¹⁰⁵ Although Eastern bloc weapons had helped check Contra incursions, Soviet aid to the Sandinistas was largely reactive and limited. The Soviet presence in Central America remained miniscule and only grew in reaction to U.S. aggression.

Despite Soviet trepidation, Cuba continued to be a staunch ally of the Sandinistas, providing substantial support to the government in Managua. In the early years of Sandinista

¹⁰³ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-1990*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Marc Edelman, "Soviet-Nicaragua Relations and the Contra War," *International Journal of World Peace* 5, 3 (July-September 1988), 55-56.

¹⁰⁵ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-1990*, 80-83.

rule, Fidel Castro advised the Sandinistas to move cautiously in regards to accepting Eastern bloc aid, fearing that it might provoke a U.S. response.¹⁰⁶ To this extent, Cuba became one of the principal suppliers of military hardware to the Sandinistas, funneling Eastern European and Vietnamese (mostly former U.S.) weaponry to the Sandinistas.¹⁰⁷ Besides military assistance, the Cubans also provided volunteers for Nicaraguan literacy campaign, as well as 1,200 teachers to train Nicaraguan craftsmen and professionals.¹⁰⁸ Cuban medical workers also travelled to Nicaragua, with one third of all health personnel being Cuban.¹⁰⁹ With thousands of teachers, doctors, and specialists working in Nicaragua, not to mention military support, and millions of dollars in aid, Cuba proved to be one of the largest patrons of the Sandinista government.

Cuban support for the FSLN would be joined by that of transnational solidarity organizations blossoming in the mid-1980s. In response to the Reagan administration's aggression against the Sandinista government, a grassroots campaign in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua grew over the course of the 1980s. Although it developed in response to the actions of the Reagan administration, the origins of the anti-Contra War movement can be found in the anti-Somoza and anti-imperialist campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the cultivation of international solidarity was a central tenet of the FSLN's foreign policy in the 1980s. The North American Congress on Latin American, the Washington Office on Latin America, and the LN-FDCL continued to speak out against the Reagan administration's actions, and, by the 1980s, they were joined by a host of new grassroots organizations.¹¹⁰ Many of these new organizations

¹⁰⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 343.

¹⁰⁷ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-1990*, 39-55.

¹⁰⁸ Harvey Williams, "The Social Programs," *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, 199.

¹⁰⁹ For a more detailed account of Cuban aid to Nicaragua see Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make A World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 176-178.

¹¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the U.S. Anti-Contra War Movement, see Van Gosse, "The North American Front: Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era," *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s* (New York: Verso, 1988); Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and*

shared resources and amplified their message through the creation of national coordinating councils. Examples of such councils were the Nicaraguan Network (Nicanet) in the United States, the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign in the United Kingdom, and Informationsbüro Nicaragua (Nicaragua Information Bureau) in West Germany. Among those groups that joined the coordinating councils were various religious and pacifist organizations, as well as a number of feminist organizations inspired by the relatively progressive gender policies of the FSLN. Municipalities in North America and Europe also joined the anti-Contra War movement, providing material aid to the people of Nicaragua and protesting the actions of the Reagan administration. Often working in cooperation with the Sandinista government, these organizations protested the Reagan administration's policies and, in the process, created a transnational movement in solidarity with Nicaragua.

The anti-Contra War movement grew out of the solidarity organizations of the anti-Somoza and anti-imperialist struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. Organizations, such as NACLA, WOLA, and LN-FDCL continued to publish critiques of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and, by the early 1980s, a new wave of activist organizations joined them in their struggle. In the United States, religious organizations played an increasingly important role in the anti-Contra War campaign, with Witness for Peace and the Sanctuary movement being two of the most visible groups. The Sanctuary movement sought to provide a safe haven for undocumented refugees fleeing political violence in Central America but denied political asylum in the United

Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peace, *A Call to Conscience*; *ibid.*, *A Just and Lasting Peace: The U.S. Peace Movement from the Cold War to Desert Storm* (Chicago: The Noble Press, 1991); Héctor J. Perla, "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, 6 (November 2009); *ibid.*, "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá" Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Research Review* 43, 2 (2008); *Ibid.*, "The FSLN and International Solidarity," *The Sandinistas and Nicaragua Since 1979*, ed. David Close, Salvador Martí i Puig, and Shelley A. McConnell (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012); Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Clare Weber, *Visions of Solidarity: U.S. Peace Activists in Nicaragua from War to Women's Activism and Globalization* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006).

States. Organized by churches, religious groups, activists, the Sanctuary Movement operated throughout the United States and benefitted from the support of North and Central American supporters.¹¹¹ Witness for Peace, on-the-other-hand, represented North American anti-Reagan activism operating in Nicaragua. Recognizing that Contra forces were less likely to attack villages with North American activists in them, Witness for Peace activists traveled to communities along the Honduran and Costa Rican border where they would, in essence, act as human shields.¹¹² After visiting Nicaragua, activists would then return to the United States where they would “live, work, and witness in their communities to increase public awareness and activism around local connections to U.S. policy towards Nicaragua.”¹¹³ In the United States, Witness for Peace and the Sanctuary movement proved to be two of the most influential groups protesting the Reagan administration’s Central American policies. However, they were not alone.

Among those newly formed groups standing in solidarity with Nicaragua was a conglomeration of North American solidarity organizations known as the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, which later became Nicaragua Network or Nicanet. Organized in the final months of the Somoza regime, Nicaragua Network emerged out of a call for cooperation amongst North American solidarity organizations. Citing the “appeals of many in Nicaragua for international efforts to stop aid to the [Somoza] dictatorship,” a number of U.S. organizations planned a national conference on Nicaragua in the spring of 1979. The conference, which began on February 24, 1979, facilitated the growth of “a network of solidarity groups and religious organizations involved in Nicaragua support work to be coordinated through a National

¹¹¹ Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, “The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, 6 (November 2009), 102.

¹¹² Virginia S. Williams, “Grassroots Movements and Witness for Peace: Challenging U.S. Policies in Latin America in the Post-Cold War Era,” *Peace and Change* 29, 3&4 (July 2004), 421.

¹¹³ “Long Term Team-USA Begins Work,” *Witness for Peace Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July/August 1985, 4. For a more detailed account of Witness for Peace see Ed Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

Center.”¹¹⁴ A number of national organizations helped plan the founding conference, including the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the National Council of Churches, the United Auto Workers, and the U.S. Catholic Conference, while others, such as NACLA and WOLA, provided speakers logistical support. Although Nicaragua Network only joined the anti-Somoza struggle in the waning months of the regime, the organization would, in the coming years, develop close ties to the Sandinistas and prove a central player in the transnational anti-Contra War movement.

Following the defeat of Somoza in 1979, protest movements in the United States and elsewhere declined as the Sandinistas took power. Nicaraguan exiles, who had been so crucial to the movement abroad, returned to Nicaragua, with many finding positions in the new Sandinista government. With the Somoza regime destroyed and U.S. imperialism apparently checked, many Latin American solidarity organizations turned to other issues, such as the increasing government repression in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Those groups dedicated to solidarity with the people of Nicaragua aided in rebuilding the small Central American nation. The years between 1979 and 1981 were relatively peaceful, as the threat of U.S. intervention appeared low and the FSLN cultivated support for its reform program. However, as the Reagan administration began nurturing the Contras, the anti-Contra War movement steadily grew.¹¹⁵ This trend applied to organizations such as Nicaragua Network, which saw an increase in the mid-1980s following the Reagan administration’s intensification of the anti-Sandinista campaign.

In response to the Reagan administration’s aggression, the FSLN sought to strengthen its connections to North American solidarity groups. From its inception Nicaragua Network held

¹¹⁴ Katherine Hoyt, “Nicanet Celebrates 25 Years of Solidarity,” *Nicaragua Monitor*, December 2003-January 2004, No. 122, 1, 7.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Resisting Reagan*, 59-60.

close ties to the FSLN, often working in conjunction with the Sandinista government. During the organization's second national conference in November 1979, Nicaragua Network hosted a number of Sandinista representatives, including Moisés Hasan, a member of the Junta; Rafael Solís, ambassador to the United States; Victor Hugo Tinoco, ambassador to the UN; and Sandinistas Mónica Baltodano and Hilda Voldt. That following spring Nicaragua Network brought Noel González of the Ministry of Foreign Relations and Sayda Hernandez of Lisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE) to speak at the organizations national solidarity week.¹¹⁶ Sandinista activists in the United States, such as Roberto Vargas in San Francisco and Saul Arana of the Washington Area Nicaragua Solidarity Organization (WANSO), also played important roles in the creation and support of Nicaragua Network.

In order to better utilize and coordinate transnational solidarity, the FSLN created the Committee in Solidarity with the Peoples (CNSP) in 1979, which would operate as the main government contact for internationalists looking to support the revolution. Initially the CNSP concerned itself with educating Nicaraguans about the wider world, producing information about racism and apartheid and promoting solidarity with the peoples of El Salvador, Chile, Puerto Rico, Palestine, and Namibia. In its efforts to educate Nicaraguans, the organization also regularly brought in international speakers, many with ties to national liberation movements, to speak about their anti-imperialist experiences.¹¹⁷ However, in 1983, following the Reagan administration's invasion of Grenada and intimations that Nicaragua might be next, the objectives of the CNSP changed as it worked to establish "direct working ties with solidarity committees in other countries."¹¹⁸ This activity initially entailed organizing speaking tours for Sandinista officials and dignitaries. Through the efforts of the CNSP and its ties to North

¹¹⁶ Peace, *A Call to Conscience*, 67-68.

¹¹⁷ "Agenda," *Barricada Internacional* 6, 219 (September 4, 1986), 1.

¹¹⁸ "Building Worldwide Solidarity," *Barricada Internacional* 6, 226 (October 30, 1986), 13.

American and European solidarity organizations, the FSLN hoped to blunt U.S. aggression by facilitating the growth of transnational political opposition. More importantly, it signaled the creation of the *brigadista*, or brigade movement, which would significantly increase transnational solidarity for the Sandinistas.¹¹⁹

Beginning in 1983, the *brigadista* movement was an effort towards transnational cooperation between the FSLN and North American and European solidarity organizations. The goal of the program was to bring foreign visitors to Nicaragua who would return to their home countries and lobby for the Sandinistas. By 1986, the brigade program brought over 10,000 North Americans and Europeans to “work during the coffee harvest and on technical construction projects,”¹²⁰ The impetus for solidarity increased on May 1, 1985, after the United States announced that it would be imposing a full trade embargo against Nicaragua, citing the Sandinistas as an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.”¹²¹ The embargo, which received general international condemnation, inspired the CNSP to further solidify its relations with transnational solidarity organizations. However, it also made it difficult for the Sandinistas to support the *brigadistas*, forcing the FSLN to ask internationalists to self-fund their trips to Nicaragua. The brigades, which needed to be self-financed, composed of between 15-20 individuals, and include at least one fluent Spanish speaker and one medical professional, both acted as a propaganda tool for the Sandinistas, and helped the ailing Nicaraguan economy. The program funneled thousands of dollars into Nicaragua and provided a free source of labor. One of the principal solidarity organizations working with the CNSP was the Nicaragua Network, which acted as a middle party, connecting

¹¹⁹ “Brigades Represent International Solidarity,” *Barricada Internacional* 7, 243 (May 7, 1987), 7.

¹²⁰ “Building Worldwide Solidarity,” *Barricada Internacional*.

¹²¹ “LeoGrande, “Making the Economy Scream: U.S. Economic Sanction against Sandinista Nicaragua,” *Third World Quarterly* 17, 2 (June 1996): 337-338.

interested brigades with the CNSP in Nicaragua. Those interested in working in Nicaragua would organize a work brigade and send their application to Nicaragua Network, who would then forward it to the CNSP for evaluation.¹²² In North America, Nicaragua Network operated as the lynchpin between activists and the Nicaraguan government through its coordination with the CNSP.

The international brigades proved to be a valuable tool for cultivating transnational solidarity, bringing thousands of workers, mostly from North America and Europe, to Nicaragua. Initially, North Americans represented a significant population of *brigadistas*, with roughly half of all international workers coming from the United States.¹²³ In 1983-1984, the first year of the brigades, 1,500 internationalists traveled to Nicaragua, with 655 citizens of the United States volunteering for work in Nicaragua and the remaining 845 *brigadistas* originating from Holland, Sweden, West Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Canada, Austria, Australia, Norway, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, Finland, Switzerland, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Iran, and Britain.¹²⁴ Because of the inability of the FSLN to support foreign laborers, by 1986, the number had shrunk to between 800 and 900, with only 300 North Americans traveling to Nicaragua.¹²⁵ In part, efforts by the Reagan administration also explain the dip in participation. In 1983, U.S. officials closed six Nicaraguan consulates, making it more difficult for U.S. citizens to obtain visas.¹²⁶ The Reagan administration also stepped up

¹²² Nicaragua Network, Newsletter, October 1985.

¹²³ For accounts of North American *brigadistas* see Melissa Evertt, *Bearing Witness, Building Bridges: Interviews with North Americans Living & Working in Nicaragua* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986); Jeffrey Jones, *Brigadista: Harvest and War in Nicaragua* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

¹²⁴ Nicaragua Exchange, "News From the Brigades," *Brigadista Bulletin*, March 13, 1984, 1.

¹²⁵ Ibid., *Brigadista Bulletin*, No. 23, March 1986, 1.

¹²⁶ Peace, *A Call to Conscience*, 148.

harassment of activists in the United States, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation pestering active and prospective brigadistas.¹²⁷

Although North Americans played a significant role in organizing transnational solidarity with Nicaragua through the *brigadista* movement, other internationalists, particularly Europeans, also played an important part. British brigades, organized through the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign (NSC), sent workers as well as medical professionals.¹²⁸ Founded in 1978, the NSC grew to prominence in the 1980s, playing a key role in “counteracting the intense media campaign” of the “Thatcher-Reagan cold war era” that “depicted Nicaragua as a communist totalitarian dungeon with troops poised to storm the Texan border.”¹²⁹ In the 1980s, the NSC consisted of sixty-five solidarity groups, representing organizations from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Over the course of the decade, the organization carried out high profile political and cultural events that, in calling back to the celebrity activism of the Managua earthquake in 1972, included actors, writers, and musicians.¹³⁰ The British activists also organized among local trade unions, building solidarity with Nicaragua’s burgeoning labor movement.¹³¹ The NSC also sent over 1,000 activists to Nicaragua to serve in work brigades, including coffee harvesting and reforestation, and as participants in political delegations and study tours.¹³² It was among the largest contingents of European solidarity organizations. However, organizations on the continent played a significant role as well.

¹²⁷ Nicaragua Exchange, “FBI Alert,” *Brigadista Bulletin*, No. 13, February 1985, 4.

¹²⁸ Author’s interview with Nigel Wild, November 27, 2013. Mr. Wild’s wife travelled to Nicaragua in the 1980s to serve as a doctor in a field hospital. Both Mr. Wild and his wife participated in the British grassroots solidarity movement, holding meetings and events in their bakery in Newcastle upon Tyne.

¹²⁹ Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign (NSC), “Our History,” <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>, (Accessed 12/21/2015).

¹³⁰ NSC, “27 June 1987: 1st Anniversary of the World Court Ruling” and “Merseyside Celebrates 8 Years of the Nicaraguan Revolution,” *Nicaragua Today*, No. 28, Autumn 1987, 15.

¹³¹ NSC, “In Britain,” *Nicaragua Today*, No. 9, Summer 1982, 5.

¹³² NSC, “UK-Nicaragua Solidarity: Past and Present,” *Nicaragua Now*, No. 1, Autumn 2013, 10-11; “Around the Country,” *Nicaragua Today*, No. 36, Autumn 1989, 18.

European solidarity with Nicaragua included a wide swath of the continent's political and social landscape. Nearly every state in Western Europe sent a work brigade to Nicaragua in the 1980s. Italians and Dutch *brigadistas* traveled to Nicaragua in 1987, sending craftsmen and industrial workers.¹³³ West Germans, who represented one of the largest contingents of European activists, organized through the Nicaragua Information Bureau.¹³⁴ Over 1,000 West Germans volunteered for the coffee harvests between 1983 and 1986.¹³⁵ Besides participating in the coffee harvests, small numbers of West German *brigadistas* were believed to have served in Sandinista militias in order to protect themselves from Contra attacks.¹³⁶ These fears were not unfounded. In the summer of 1986, the Contras captured eight West German activists, sending a message to foreign activists that they would be targeted.¹³⁷ After nearly a month of captivity, the Contras released the activists to the West German government.¹³⁸ Despite the threat of Contra violence, Europeans continued to travel to Nicaragua.

Amongst those joining work brigades were many activists associated with communities in solidarity with Nicaragua. A significant area for international aid and support with Nicaragua came from various municipalities in Europe and North America. Sister-cities and twinning relationships blossomed in the 1980s, as communities in Europe and the United States sponsored work brigades, schools, cooperatives, and clinics in Nicaragua. Between 1979 and 1988, 209 European municipalities in 15 countries, and another 93 U.S. metropolises, founded sister-city

¹³³ "Solidarity in the Coffee Fields," *Barricada Internacional* 7, 238 (February 26, 1987), 11.

¹³⁴ For a history of West German solidarity see Erika Harzer and Willi Volks, *Aufbruch nach Nicaragua: Deutsche Solidarität im Systemwettstreit* (Berlin, Ch. Links, 2008).

¹³⁵ James M. Markham, "Young Germans Hear the Sandinista's Drummer," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1986, A2.

¹³⁶ John Tagliabue, "Germans, Welcoming Release of 8 by Contras," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1986, A16.

¹³⁷ George Volsyk, "Contras Pledge to Free Germans," *New York Times*, May 21, 1986, A4.

¹³⁸ Stephen Kinzer, "Contras Release 8 West German Held for 24 Days," *New York Times*, June 11, 1986, A1.

relationships with Nicaraguan cities.¹³⁹ Besides aiding their Nicaraguan counterparts, many European and North American municipalities published newsletters to raise awareness about U.S. policies in Central America and to coordinate support for their cause. For example, The New Haven/Leon Sister City Project published a bimonthly newsletter, *Sister City Update*, detailing the activities of the organizations representatives in Nicaragua.¹⁴⁰ Although the majority of these groups were grassroots in origin, most of these North American and European programs operated with the official approval of their respective local governments.¹⁴¹ Along with many of the larger solidarity organizations, the sister-city relationships have proven some of the longest lasting, with many partnerships continuing today.¹⁴²

Beyond the activities of various municipalities, transnational political solidarity with Nicaragua united a diverse array of parties and organizations. International solidarity ranged from U.S. liberals to Leninists and Maoists. According to one European diplomat, the West Germans traveling to Nicaragua indicated a “mixed group” of political beliefs, representing the Greens, Social Democrats, and Communists.¹⁴³ The German Green party proved particularly invested in Nicaraguan solidarity, with its parliamentary representative, Gabi Gottwald, leading the discourse on Central America. Gottwald, the youngest representative in the West German Parliament, was an outspoken critic of the Reagan administration’s intervention in Nicaragua, labeling the Contras “fascists and mercenaries.”¹⁴⁴ Having studied in El Salvador and traveled to Nicaragua, Gottwald led the Green’s anti-Contra campaign.

¹³⁹ Liz Chilsen and Seldon Rampton, *Friends in Deed: The Story of U.S.-Nicaragua Sister Cities* (Madison: The Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua, 1988), 125-139.

¹⁴⁰ The New Haven/Leon Sister City Project, *Sister City Update*, January 1987, 1.

¹⁴¹ Peace, “The Anti-Contra War Campaign: Organizational Dynamics of a Decentralized Movement,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 13, 1 (Spring/Summer 2008), 77.

¹⁴² NSC, “UK Twinning Links with Towns, Communities, Schools and University in Nicaragua,” <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns/>, accessed December 22, 2015.

¹⁴³ Kinzer, “Help for Sandinistas: Young People from Abroad,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 1986, 12.

¹⁴⁴ “Una crítica verde,” *Hoy*, May-June 1985, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (AGG), Gabi Gottwald Box, File 52.

Gottwald's activities exemplify the transnational nature of Nicaraguan solidarity. She worked in cooperation with the Nicaragua Information Bureau and received the organizations newsletters.¹⁴⁵ Gottwald also corresponded with various transnational solidarity organizations, which solicited the young representative's assistance. Among the various organizations that reached out to Gottwald were the Washington Office on Latin America, Peace Brigades International, Medico International, the Christic Institute, the Center for International Policy, and the Transnational Institute. As discussed previously, the Washington Office on Latin America was a North American activist organization intent on challenging U.S. imperialism. As part of their effort to challenge the propaganda of the Reagan administration, WOLA sent world leaders, including Gottwald, packets of newspaper clippings and other information about the situation in Nicaragua.¹⁴⁶ The Christic Institute, a U.S.-based organization involved in exposing the Iran-Contra dealings, forwarded Gottwald its findings concerning covert U.S. activities in Central America.¹⁴⁷ Peace Brigades International operated out of the United States and, as its name might imply, worked to organize worker brigades in Central America and elsewhere.¹⁴⁸ Medico International was a transnational national organization committed to providing medical care to Third World peoples.¹⁴⁹ Finally, the Transnational Institute, headquartered in Amsterdam, was a "network of scholar-activists" intent on persuading North American and European politicians to support social justice and ecological issues.¹⁵⁰

Although it is difficult to gauge the political impact of these various letters and information packets on Gottwald, it is clear that she engaged with the material. Gottwald read

¹⁴⁵ Informationbüro Nicaragua, Newsletter to Gottwald, July 7, 1985, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

¹⁴⁶ Washington Office on Latin America, Correspondence to Gottwald, October 31, 1986, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

¹⁴⁷ Kathleen Hendrix, "Arms Scandal Brings Christic Institute New Visibility," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1987, F1; The Christic Institute, "Contragate: The Key to Peace," AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

¹⁴⁸ Peace Brigades International, Correspondence with Gottwald, May 1, 1985, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

¹⁴⁹ Medico International, Letter to Gottwald, February 2, 1985, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

¹⁵⁰ Transnational Institute, Letter to Gottwald, May 1, 1985, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 159.

much of the material sent to her, as evinced by highlighting and notes in the margins. She also operated in the anti-Contra and anti-Reagan milieu of her day, writing and speaking out against the transnational anti-Sandinista movement.¹⁵¹ She also remained committed to Sandinista solidarity after leaving the Bundestag. Prior to the 1990 Nicaraguan presidential election, Gottwald justified the Greens donation of 300,000 Deutsche Marks to the FSLN's campaign efforts, stating that it was necessary to counter the "direct and covert" aid of the United States.¹⁵²

Gottwald also represented the increasing visibility of women in transnational anti-Contra War movement of the 1980s. Emboldened by the second-wave feminism of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, women occupied influential positions in North American and European solidarity organizations. Initially these groups worked closely with the Nicaraguan Association of Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza (Asociation de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinozo, AMNLAE), a feminist organization with strong ties to the FSLN, while other groups worked closely with the CNSP.¹⁵³ Many of the largest groups, including the Nicaragua Network and Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, had women on their board of directors or in important positions in the organization.¹⁵⁴ Besides increased women's representation in upper echelons of the movement, feminist organizations from across the globe stood in solidarity with Nicaraguan women. In the United States, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) and the Women's

¹⁵¹ Seminar Program, "Hintergründe und Strategien der Desinformationskampagne über Nicaragua" January 16-18, 1987, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 145; Gabi Gottwald, "Der Menschenrechtsdiskurs," *Aufbruch nach Nicaragua*, 44-50.

¹⁵² "Campaña de 'Los Verdes' alemanes por sandinistas," *Prensa Grafica*, October 10, 1989, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 145.

¹⁵³ "Achieving Equality for Women: A Challenge for All," *Barricada Internacional*, Vol. 7, No. 238, February 26, 1987, 8. For a more detailed discussion of AMNLAE see Karen Kampwirth, "Women in the Armed Struggles in Nicaragua: Sandinistas and Contras Compared," and María Teresa Blandón, "The Coalición Nacional de Mujeres: An Alliance of Left-Wing Women, Right-Wing Women, and Radical Feminists in Nicaragua," *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Margaret Randall, *Sandinista Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Kampwirth, *Women in Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ Katherine Hoyt operated as coordinator of Nicaragua Network in the 1980s, Peace, *A Call to Conscience*, 240.

International Resource Exchange (WIRE) sought to build connections with Central American feminists. For its part, ALFA hosted speakers and events in an attempt to raise awareness about U.S. policies towards Nicaragua.¹⁵⁵ In France, the Feminist Collective-Nicaragua (Collectif Femmes-Nicaragua) also sought to raise awareness of U.S. policies in Central America, publishing pamphlets and booklets on the situation in Nicaragua. Working in conjunction with other French feminist organizations, the Feminist Collective also sought to raise funds for Nicaraguan women.¹⁵⁶

Gabi Gottwald, Nicaragua Network, the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign, and other solidarity organizations continued their anti-Contra War campaigning through the late 1980s. Combined with the Iran-Contra revelations, these movements helped bring about the steady demise of the Contras. Their activism created a counter-narrative to the one being espoused by the Reagan administration. Combined with Third World and socialist support, these organizations proved invaluable in helping the Sandinistas weather the Contra storm. However, they were unable to counteract the Reagan administration's efforts to destabilize the Nicaraguan economy, gradually building popular dissatisfaction with the FSLN. The result was a victory for anti-Sandinista candidates in the 1990 elections that unseated the Sandinistas from power.

Conclusion

By the late 1980s, the transnational network supporting the Contras began to fray. The exposure of the Iran-Contra dealings in the fall of 1986, proved a boon for the transnational anti-Contra War campaign. The future of the U.S. support for the Contras appeared murky as Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador moved to negotiate a settlement with the

¹⁵⁵ Lindsey Churchill, "Transnational Alliances: Radical U.S. Feminist Solidarity and Contention with Latin America, 1970-1989," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, 6 (November 2009): 15.

¹⁵⁶ Collectif Femmes-Nicaragua, *Femmes Nicaragua* (Paris: Les Imprimeurs Libres, 1980), 6.

Sandinistas, ultimately signing the Esquipulas Peace Accords on August 7, 1987.¹⁵⁷ In 1987 and 1988, the Contras suffered a series of military defeats at the hands of the Sandinistas, and the leadership of the movement splintered as the counterrevolutionary coalition fell apart. U.S. financial support for the anti-Sandinistas also trickled to a halt as U.S. domestic opposition prevented the passage of further aid.¹⁵⁸ In the face of diminishing support, in 1988 the Contras entered into negotiations with the Sandinistas that would ultimately pave the way for the disbanding and reintegration of anti-Sandinista forces.¹⁵⁹ By 1989, the anti-Sandinista forces united behind Violeta Chamorro and the National Opposition Union (Unión Nacional Opositor, UNO), seeking to remove the Sandinistas through popular elections.

In part, the demise of the Contras was the result of transnational anti-Contra War movement, which, through formal and informal networks of transnational support, helped the FSLN persevere for over a decade in the face of U.S. aggression. International opposition to its foreign policy made it difficult for Reagan administration to undermine the Sandinista government. Often working in coordination with the FSLN, activist groups from North America and Europe highlighted the destruction of the Contra War. In Nicaragua, the war left 30,000 dead (in terms of relative population this was more than the United States lost in the Civil War, the two world wars, and the Korean and Vietnam wars combined), and devastated the Nicaraguan economy.¹⁶⁰ Increased popular awareness of these facts resulted in greater pressure on U.S. officials to bring about an end to Contra War, resulting in Congressional restrictions on the Reagan administration's ability to fund the Contras.

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion of the Esquipulas peace accords see LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 505-525.

¹⁵⁸ Pardo-Mauer, *The Contras, 1980-1989*, 123.

¹⁵⁹ Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 359-375.

¹⁶⁰ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 347.

However, the Reagan administration's campaign of funding political opposition in Nicaragua did succeed. Through organizations such as PRODEMCA, the Reagan administration funded opposition voices in Nicaragua, including the Miguel Obando y Bravo and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as the writers and editors of *La Prensa*. With the support of the United States, these voices of internal dissent, more than the millions of dollars funneled in to arming the Contras, proved decisive in removing the Sandinistas from power. In 1990, the Nicaraguan opposition threw its weight behind Violeta Chamorro, the wife of Somoza-foe Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, during the national elections agreed upon during the Esquipulas Peace Accords. In the election, which occurred under the watchful eye of over two thousand observers from the Organization of American States, The United Nations, and former President Jimmy Carter's Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, over 86 percent of Nicaraguan voters turned out to cast their vote. To the surprise of nearly everyone, including the Sandinistas, the Bush administration, and outside observers, UNO won a stunning victory. Chamorro received 54.7 percent of the popular vote, to Daniel Ortega's 40.8, and UNO won fifty-one seats in the ninety-three member National Assembly.¹⁶¹ Although many international observers expected the Sandinistas to not honor the results of the election, the FSLN accepted the results of the election, maneuvering to become UNO's loyal opposition.

Chamorro and UNO's electoral victory over the Sandinistas represented a milestone in Nicaraguan history. The elections marked the termination of over a half-century of internal and extraterritorial violence in Nicaragua. Following the elections, efforts were made to reintegrate the Contras into society, and the FSLN became the main opposition party in Nicaragua. Insurrectionary violence, both from exiles and insurgents, ceased to be a common theme in Nicaraguan politics. In part, this was due to the international climate of the late Cold War. The

¹⁶¹ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 562-563.

decline and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a unipolar world in which the United States could exert itself on the international stage with limited repercussions. In the global communist/anticommunist struggle the ally of the FSLN had lost and the patron of UNO had won. The end of the Cold War and UNO's victory marked the end of large scale revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence in Nicaragua. Although political friction persisted in Nicaragua, it was channeled through the avenue of political contest.

EPILOGUE: The 1990 Election and Beyond

The 1990 elections were a watershed moment in modern Nicaraguan history. They represented the first instance of a peaceful transition of political power in over fifty years. For the first time since the United States intervention in 1912, the reins of power transitioned from one party to another without significant corruption or violence. Considering the internationally high profile of Nicaraguan politics in the preceding years, it might be easy to assume that the elections received significant global attention. However, global events overshadowed the elections, and in the following years Nicaraguan politics faded into relative obscurity. This, however, did not mark a Nicaraguan retrenchment from global politics or the cessation of U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan politics. As Nicaragua entered the twenty-first century, it again found itself at odds with the United States and in need of allies to counter-balance its stronger northern neighbor.

Nicaragua: 1990-2015

The defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections marked the end of significant violence against the Nicaraguan government. Although armed bands of former Contras and Sandinistas challenged the legitimacy of the new Nicaraguan government sporadically in the 1990s, they failed to meet the level of violence witnessed in previous decades.¹ In large part, the decrease in violence in Nicaragua was due to the peacemaking nature of the new Chamorro government, which sought a path of national reconciliation. The new administration, instead of acquiescing to the demands of U.S. officials and conservative Nicaraguans for a “desandinization” campaign, cultivated a series of political pacts with the Sandinistas that maintained a degree of political

¹ Many of the poor and minority Contra fighters failed to receive the benefits promised them during the Nicaraguan civil war and, subsequently, periodically took up arms against the new government in Managua. For a comprehensive study of Nicaragua in the 1990s, see Thomas W. Walker, ed., *Nicaragua without Illusions: Regime Transition and Structural Adjustment in the 1990s* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997).

power for the FSLN. For example, the Chamorro administration allowed Humberto Ortega to remain the head of the Nicaraguan armed forces, facilitating the peaceful demobilization of the army from 80,000 to 15,000 troops.² With assurances against repression and reprisals, the Sandinista leadership assumed the role of loyal opposition, providing a political counterbalance to Chamorro, UNO, and their predecessors.

Coincidentally, UNO's electoral victory was overshadowed by significant international events that seized public attention in the new decade, the most important of which was the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Coupled with the an ailing economy, the reformatory forces unleashed by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* unintentionally brought about the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union and its client states in Eastern Europe.³ Between the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, world attention focused on Eastern Europe as the region's Communist heads of state relinquished power to governments with popular mandates.⁴ For many observers, the termination of Sandinista rule paled in comparison to the monumental events transpiring in the Soviet Union.

The decline of the Soviet Union sent shockwaves around the globe, unleashing a wave of change that would further obscure the Nicaraguan transition. In the spring of 1989, as the Sandinistas implemented a settlement with the Contras, Chinese students, dissatisfied with the Communist Party and inspired by events in Eastern Europe, demonstrated for political reform.⁵ After a month of hunger strikes and protests in Tiananmen Square, Chinese officials called in the

² Thomas W. Walker and Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadows of the Eagle* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 66.

³ Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 305-311.

⁴ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 427-439.

⁵ Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 332-333.

People's Liberation Army (PLA) to forcibly suppress the student movement, killing hundreds in the process, images of which received unprecedented international media coverage.⁶ In early February 1990, days before Nicaraguans headed to the polls, world attention shifted to South Africa where the new president, F.W. de Klerk, announced the repeal of apartheid laws and on February 11, 1990 secured the release from prison of anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment.⁷ Finally in late 1990 and early 1991, as the Chamorro government settled into office, the Iraqi invasion and annexation of neighboring Kuwait, as well as the subsequent U.S.-led military operation to liberate the small, but oil-rich, Arab state, dominated global headlines and received 24-hour media coverage.⁸ These events, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, pulled international attention away from the Nicaraguan transition, ending the decade-long global fascination with events in the small Central American state.

Because of the attention given these developments, global interest in Nicaragua, particularly in the United States, plummeted. For example, in April 1991, when Chamorro came to the United States to address a joint session of Congress, so few officials showed up that the legislative leadership was forced to "scour the halls for staff members and pages to fill the empty seats."⁹ Senator Christopher Dodd later lamented Nicaragua's fall from the national consciousness, comparing popular interest in Nicaragua to "Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of fame," stating that "issues seem to suffer the same plague. A few months ago, Nicaragua was the hot

⁶ University of Southern California, "Assignment: China – Tiananmen Square," *USC U.S.-China Institute*, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-tiananmen-square>, (Accessed January 12, 2016).

⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 393.

⁸ The documentarian Ken Burns wrote of the unique nature of the media's coverage of the First Gulf War, describing the television's "distracting theatrics" and "breathless hyperbole." Ken Burns, "The Painful, Essential Images of War," *The New York Times*, January 27, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/27/arts/the-painful-essential-images-of-war.html>, (Accessed January 12, 2016).

⁹ William LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 564.

international issue. Now it's been forgotten.”¹⁰ With global attention elsewhere, and U.S. objectives seemingly met, Nicaragua quickly faded from the international spotlight.

The decline of popular interest in Nicaragua, however, did not spell the cessation of global activism in the small Central American state. Many of the individuals and organizations who had challenged the Reagan administration's Contra War continued to advocate for Nicaragua-related issues. Although she relinquished her seat in the Bundestag in 1986, Gabi Gottwald continued to be a vocal advocate for social justice in Central America.¹¹ Expanding beyond Nicaragua, Witness for Peace continued its mission of supporting delegations to Latin America and the Caribbean.¹² The Washington Office on Latin America, the North American Congress on Latin America, Nicaragua Network, and the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign also persisted in their efforts to improve the economic and political situation in Nicaragua, with many organizations taking a stronger interest in regional environmental issues.¹³ Other groups, particularly among the twinning or sister-city organizations, transitioned away from political activism in the 1990s and instead emphasized alleviating Nicaragua's extreme poverty.¹⁴ For example, the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN) began working in other Latin American countries and renamed itself Working Capital for Community Needs, becoming a nonprofit that promotes “microfinance, services and markets to improve the lives and

¹⁰ Guy Gugliotta, “Criticism Muted as Nicaraguans Visit,” *The Washington Post*, April 17, 1991, A14.

¹¹ “Campaña de ‘Los Verdes’ alemanes por sandinistas,” *Prensa Grafica*, October 10, 1989, AGG, Gabi Gottwald Box, File 145

¹² Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 44.

¹³ NicaNet, <http://www.nicanet.org/about-nicanet.php>; Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, “What We Do,” <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/> (Accessed December 23, 2015).

¹⁴ Dion van den Berg, “City Diplomacy Campaigns in the Netherlands,” in *City Diplomacy*, ed. Arne Musch, Chris van der Valk, Alexandra Sizoo, Kian Tajbakhsh (The Hague: VNG International, 2008); NSC “UK Twinning Links with Towns, Communities, Schools and Universities in Nicaragua,” <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns/>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

communities of the working poor in Latin America.”¹⁵ Although the political agendas of many transnational activist organizations became less overt than they had been in the 1980s, North American and European solidarity continue to play important roles in Nicaraguan society.

Chamorro’s electoral victory also did not signal the end of U.S. meddling in Nicaraguan affairs. During the 1990 election, the administration of George H. W. Bush, who had served as President Reagan’s vice-president, continued many of the policies of his predecessor. In an effort to ensure a Chamorro victory, the Bush administration channeled millions of dollars to UNO through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Republican Party, and the CIA. The NED alone spent \$7 for every Nicaraguan voter, or the “equivalent of spending \$800 million in a U.S. election.”¹⁶ Officials and sympathetic groups in the United States continued to insert themselves in Nicaraguan politics in the 1990s and 2000s. In the 1996 election, Cuban and Nicaraguan exiles in Miami provided significant funds for the presidential campaign of Arnaldo Alemán of the resurgent Liberal party who was running against Daniel Ortega on the FSLN ticket.¹⁷ U.S. officials again intervened in Nicaraguan politics to prevent a Sandinista victory in the 2001 election, linking Ortega and the FSLN to international terrorism.¹⁸ Again, in the 2006 election, U.S. officials attempted to prevent a Sandinista victory through donations to the opposition campaigns and political intimidation.¹⁹ However, after a decade and a half of being stymied by U.S. intervention, Ortega successfully captured the presidency, beginning a new era of FSLN rule.

¹⁵ Working Capital for Community Needs, “About Us,” <http://www.wccn.org/about/>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

¹⁶ LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 560-561.

¹⁷ Walker and Wade, *Nicaragua*, 68.

¹⁸ “The Road to Elections Was Paved with Fraud,” *Envio*, vol. 20, nos. 244-245, November-December 2001, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1548>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

¹⁹ “From ‘Governing from Below’ to Governing Right Up at the Top,” *Ibid.*, no. 304, November 2006, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3438>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

Although the Ortega administration of the early 2000s differed dramatically from the Sandinista regime of the 1980s, it did mirror its predecessor by distancing itself from the colossus of the north, aligning itself with opponents and rivals of the United States.²⁰ The primary ally of the Ortega government was Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, who had developed ties with Ortega before the election. Chávez, promoting a message of Latin American nationalism, sought to check U.S. influence in the region and in doing so underwrote the Ortega government. According to Wikileaks documents, in the first three years of his presidency, Ortega received a staggering one billion dollars in “assistance” from Chávez.²¹ Ortega also moved towards U.S. global rivals, with overtures towards Russian president Vladimir Putin and an agreement with Chinese officials on a proposed transisthmian canal in Nicaragua.²² Mirroring both the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century period of great power politics that facilitated initial U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, as well as the late Cold War tensions that resulted in the Contra War, in early years of the twenty-first century, the Ortega administration sought the assistance of other states and global powers to counteract the United States. At the beginning of the new millennium, the small state of Nicaragua again finds itself at the center of international politics.

²⁰ Many former allies of Ortega, including Sergio Ramirez, have disowned Daniel Ortega, with others highlighting how his regime is Sandinista in name only. Sergio Ramirez, *Adios Muchachos: A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), xi-xviii; Stephen Kinzer, “Daniel Ortega is a Sandinista in Name Only,” *Al Jazeera America*, April 6, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/daniel-ortega-is-a-sandinista-in-name-only.html>, (Accessed January 18, 2016).

²¹ “Cable Sobre la financiación de los proyectos sociales en Nicaragua con dinero venezolano,” *El Pais*, December 6, 2010, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/12/06/actualidad/1291590039_850215.html, (Accessed January 14, 2016); Tim Rogers, “WikiLeaks: Ortega is Chávez’s Mini Me,” *The Tico Times*, December 5, 2010, <http://www.ticotimes.net/2010/12/06/wikileaks-ortega-is-chavez-s-mini-me>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

²² Ivan Nechepurenko, “Ortega Celebrates Putin’s Nicaragua Visit as a ‘Ray of Light,’” *The Moscow Times*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-a-ray-of-light-on-latin-america-tour/503358.html>, (Accessed January 14, 2016); Mary Anastasia O’Grady, “China Wants to Dig the Nicaragua Canal,” *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-wants-to-dig-the-nicaragua-canal-1439159390>, August 9, 2015, (Accessed January 14, 2016). Development of the Nicaraguan canal was put on hold following the downturn in the Chinese economy in late 2015, Carrie Kahn, “Nicaragua Canal Project Put on Hold As Chinese Investor Suffers Financially,” *National Public Radio*, December 18, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/18/460312284/nicaragua-canal-project-put-on-hold-as-chinese-investor-suffers-financially>, (Accessed January 14, 2016).

Conclusion

From José Santos Zelaya's struggle with the United States to the conflict between the Sandinistas and the Contras nearly a century later, Nicaraguan politics in the twentieth-century have had an outsized influence on world history. Although relatively poor and sparsely populated, Nicaraguan actors were regularly at the center of global politics and able to influence the course of twentieth century history. In order to address this history, this dissertation has undertaken a number of novel approaches in regards to modern Nicaraguan history. By taking an international lens, it is the first transnational history of modern Nicaragua that places local actors at the heart of the narrative. Instead of examining Nicaraguan actors as pawns or victims in the machinations of the United States and other great powers, this dissertation tells a story of Nicaraguan agency in resisting and accommodating the United States. It also uniquely tells a unified history of modern Nicaragua that is sorely missing from the literature. Instead of understanding modern Nicaraguan history as a series of unconnected events erupting seemingly out of nowhere, this narrative is a chronologically cohesive history that demonstrates the perseverance of local actors in response to U.S. imperialism. Finally, the dissertation brings Nicaragua's competing factions into dialogue, highlighting the fluidity of local politics and the areas of international contestation between competing factions. In the process, it highlights the growing importance of global media and international public opinion in deciding local contests.

Although indebted to the work of historians of foreign relations, particularly Paul Chamberlain, this dissertation makes two other contributions to the field. Including Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries in the discussion broadens the scope of the field by addressing the agency of actors traditionally viewed as puppets of the United States. In fact, Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries not only pursued their own foreign policies but at times impacted U.S.

policy. The Somoza regime proved particularly adept at manipulating U.S. officials to pursue policies that achieved the family's goals. The extended chronology also highlights the fact that Nicaragua's revolutionaries were one of the first global insurgencies of the modern era. Since the early years of the twentieth-century, Nicaraguan actors waged a global campaign against U.S. intervention. This is highlighted by August Sandino, who, in his struggle against the Marines between 1927 and 1933, created networks to Third World internationalism that would aid Nicaraguan revolutionaries in the following decades.

By expanding the chronology of the narrative and examining modern Nicaragua through a transnational lens, this dissertation provides insights into not only that nation's history, but also the broader narratives of the United States and Latin America in the global Cold War. First, it demonstrates the ability of a relatively small nation to have an oversized impact on global politics. Second, Nicaraguans exercised considerable agency on the global stage, with both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries pursuing policies independent of larger regional or international players. Third, those involved in Nicaragua's revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents relied heavily on personal relationships to construct their international networks of aid and support, calling on friends and family abroad to aid them in their struggle. Fourth, it highlights the impact of the human rights revolution on global politics and the power of grassroots movements in the second half of the century. Finally, it reveals the paucity of national boundaries in the Caribbean Basin, where revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries moved with relative ease from country to country.

To begin with, for a country with a population roughly the same size as that of the U.S. state of Iowa in 1980, Nicaragua exerted a significant presence on international politics during

the twentieth century.¹ This was due, in part, to geography and a view among U.S. officials of Nicaragua's regional importance. Because of its close proximity to the Panama Canal, Nicaragua received increased attention from the United States. Fearing that instability in Nicaragua might spill over into Panama and threaten the canal, U.S. policy makers were quick to intervene. The U.S. occupation of Nicaragua between 1912 and 1933 was, in part, a result of U.S. fears of foreign intervention and the maintenance of the canal. Following the Cuban Revolution, Nicaragua continued as an important place in U.S. machinations, as the nation became a base for anti-Castro activities. The Somoza family proved particularly adroit at capitalizing on Nicaragua's unique relationship with the United States in order to become a regional player. Ideology and the global Cold War also played an important role. With the downfall of Somoza Debayle in 1979, U.S. interest in Nicaragua grew considerably as the Reagan administration expended significant energy and money trying to undermine the Marxist Sandinistas. This increased U.S. attention raised the profile of Nicaragua, making the defense of the Sandinistas a global *cause celebre*, which the FSLN used to its own advantage.

Although U.S. concerns about Nicaragua and its strategic importance helped magnify regional unrest, Nicaraguans often pursued policies independent of their benefactors or allies. Although it is often depicted as a supplicant of the United States, willing to do the bidding of its much more powerful neighbor, the Somoza regime exercised considerable agency in its foreign policy. Both generations of Somoza leaders challenged U.S. officials and, at times, pursued policies that proved antithetical to the goals of the United States. The survival of the regime was

¹ The World Bank, "Population Totals," <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>, (Accessed January 15, 2016); Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century: Census 2000 Special Reports*, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4, (Washington D.C.:U.S. Government Print Office, 2002), <https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>, A-1, (Accessed January 18, 2016).

the main priority of the Somoza family, which often required going against the wishes of the United States. In fact, the Somozas ingratiated themselves with U.S. politicians and officials in order to affect U.S. policies towards Nicaragua. Similarly, the Sandinistas pursued policies that relied heavily on Castro's Cuba but, unlike the claims made by many of their opponents, were not crafted by masterminds in Havana and Moscow. Instead, the Sandinistas pursued a nonaligned policy that placed Nicaragua with Third World national liberation struggles. Far from being beholden to either superpower in the global Cold War, Nicaraguans pursued policies that ultimately aligned with their goals.

The human rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s proved particularly important to the eventual success of the Sandinistas. Unlike Augusto Sandino and the revolutionaries of the 1940s and 1950s, the Sandinistas benefitted from a global climate that was more attuned to demands for upholding human rights. Through a perceptive understanding of this climate, the Sandinistas were able to successfully wage a global public relations campaign that highlighted the abuses of the Somoza regime and, in the process, undermined its support abroad. The Sandinistas later utilized these same networks in their struggle against the Reagan administration during the Contra War. In the United States and elsewhere, the grassroots movements inspired by the human rights revolution proved a valuable ally in the struggle against the Somoza regime and U.S. intervention.

In the creation of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary transnational support networks, Nicaraguans relied heavily on personal relationships as connections to allies and aid. Operating as exiles and outcasts, Nicaragua's revolutionaries turned to informal networks of family and friends outside of their home country to provide safe havens for organizing actions against their opponents. Family members in the United States proved vital to the creation of grassroots

solidarity during the Nicaraguan Revolution and aided in the downfall of the Somoza regime. For its part, the Somozas placed family members, such as son/brother in-law Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, in positions where they could influence foreign governments, particularly that of the United States. The Somoza regime also incorporated its allies into an informal system of patronage in which those who helped the family enjoyed economic support from the regime. Following the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Somozas provided influential government and business positions to Cuban exiles, while maintaining close ties with the Cuban-American community in Miami. Through Sevilla-Sacasa, as well as a network of U.S.-lobbyists and friendly politicians, the Somozas exerted significant influence on U.S. policymaking, strengthening their position at home and abroad.

Finally, the international history of Nicaragua's violent twentieth century also breaks down conceptual and physical boundaries in the Caribbean Basin. Conceptually, the idea of a unified Central American republic proved alluring to both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary Nicaraguans and, combined with a shared language and cultural background, undermined a strict sense of Nicaraguan nationalism. Particularly among Nicaragua's revolutionaries, the idea of Central American, or even Latin American, unity proved a central tenet of their struggles. Because of this, many of the militant movements that invaded Nicaragua over the course of the century were multinational in nature, promoting regional unity and including foreign members.

Besides proving conceptually weak, in actuality, the region's borders proved quite fluid, facilitating the movement of revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. In part, Central America's rugged and inhospitable terrain facilitated this trend, with hundreds of miles of jungles, mountains, and coast masking movement along various frontiers. Also, for much of the

century, Nicaraguan opposition operated from exile in neighboring countries, often moving repeatedly based on the stance of the local government. Those in power in Nicaragua were, therefore, forced to deal with not only an extraterritorial threat but also the governments of the states that housed them, inevitably leading to regular interventions and breaches of the sovereignty of its neighbors. In fact, the various Nicaraguan opposition movements often operated from multiple states at the same time, with few agents operating in their home country, making its history almost exclusively transnational.

Ultimately, the history of Nicaragua's violent twentieth century was inherently transnational. The nation's revolutionary struggles were fought by exiles operating in various locations in Central America and the Caribbean Basin who relied on international networks of support. For their part, Nicaragua's counterrevolutionaries also relied on a truly global network of state and non-state actors, often operating in cooperation with the United States. To examine modern Nicaraguan history through a transnational lens reveals how such a relatively small state could capture global attention and so deeply impact the course of the twentieth century.

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