

**The United States
and Somoza, 1933-1956**

A Revisionist Look

Paul Coe Clark, Jr.

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Paul Coe Clark, Jr.



MARIO CAJINA-VEGA
Masaya, Nicaragua

Te dedico este libro y agradezco que me lo prestaras. Agosto 30 94

For Enrique Bolaños Geyer.

I give permission for
Ing. Bolaños to use this
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Enrique Bolaños -

Paul C Clarke
3 March, 2012

The United States
and Somoza, 1933-1956

To Enrique and Lita Bolaños
and Nick and Barbara Bolaños

With much appreciation
for our long and warm
friendship

Con todo mi cariño.

Paul

25 October, 1992

Hampton, Virginia

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FOR MARY LYNN

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Preface

The disintegration of the brutal Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua in 1979, its replacement by the Marxist Sandinista regime, and subsequent efforts to overthrow that regime occupied U.S. government officials for over a decade. The Nicaraguan *Oncenio*, or eleven-year period from 1979 to 1990 that witnessed these events, including the Sandinista's electoral defeat by Violeta Chamorro in 1990, resulted also in enormous literary attention on this previously seldom discussed country and especially on past U.S. involvement in its internal politics.

Few aspects of past U.S. policies toward Nicaragua emerge unblemished from this overwhelmingly critical literature. Journalists and academicians alike began to repeat old critiques. Most condemned anew the policies that originally brought U.S. Marines to Nicaragua in 1909 to protect American economic and security interests, policies they liked to argue continually supported repressive regimes that inevitably stifled chances for more just and democratic governments. The cornerstone argument of these critics holds that after 1933 the United States established and supported the regime of Anastasio Somoza García as a surrogate to serve American policy ends.

The popularly held notion that Washington favored the Somoza regime, and indeed engineered its emplacement and nurtured its continuance in power, came to symbolize for many the larger idea that U.S. foreign policy after World War II was predicated upon backing

dictatorships worldwide as long as they supported American interests, particularly anti-communism.

Condemnation of Washington's policy toward Nicaragua comes from a broad range of critics in Latin America and the United States—only a few of which will be mentioned here. Over twenty years ago one of the founders of the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, Carlos Fonseca Amador, set the theme that would be followed by numerous Latin Americans when he charged that the people of Nicaragua had been suffering under the "yoke of a reactionary clique imposed by Yankee imperialism virtually since 1932." Colombian Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez echoed Fonseca, claiming that the United States was solely responsible for first creating and then sustaining the Somoza dictatorship for over forty years. In the early 1980s two Nicaraguan writers declared that the Somoza regime was "made in the U.S.A.," repeating the popular assertion that the regime drew continual support from the United States.¹

North American critics often made similar charges. Writer Patricia Flynn contends that despite its anti-democratic rule, the Somoza regime won "unflagging support" from Washington for maintaining stability in Nicaragua. Noted diplomatic historian Walter LaFeber believes that during the 1930s and 1940s Washington officials clearly preferred repressive dictatorship in Central America to what he labels "indigenous radicalism." LaFeber argues that modern Nicaragua was formed by American military occupation and by the "U.S. created and supported Somoza family dynasty." The dynasty's founder, Anastasio Somoza García, LaFeber notes with asperity, was the United States' "most important and lasting gift to Nicaragua." "As every president after Hoover knew," he writes, "the Somozas did as they were told." Another distinguished historian and Latin Americanist, Professor Charles Ameringer, refers to the "widespread belief" that the Somoza regime was created in the United States. Political scientist Martin Needler, one of the leading students of Latin American politics in the United States, supports the American surrogate thesis, applying his "indirect-rule model of imperialism" to U.S. support of Somoza rule. Another U.S. critic and adherent to the surrogate theme refers to Washington's "Somoza solution" to the problem of protecting its interests in Central America. A recent, impassioned study claims that Washington "unleashed Somoza" on his homeland. Many others enthusiastically support the thesis that dictators—and especially Somoza García of Nicaragua—were the type of leaders that the United States preferred in Central America.²

As a Latin Americanist influenced by these critics, I began research on this book expecting to largely support their school of thought. Since this book was approached from a U.S. policy perspective, research consisted primarily of an extensive examination of diplomatic records at the National Archives in Washington, although the National Archives

of Nicaragua and other sources in that country were also used. Other research included a review of letters and documents at the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower libraries; an examination of the Arthur Bliss Lane collection at the Sterling Library at Yale; and interviews with former participants in and observers of policymaking in both the United States and Nicaragua. It included as well two years of work from an office at the Library of Congress, which allowed access to its vast resources. Exhaustive research eventually forced me to abandon earlier notions and preconceptions and to align my views with a limited number of scholars who have—in tangential assertions in studies that primarily deal with other topics—taken the first steps to question the popularly held theories that the United States placed Anastasio Somoza García in power and sustained him there as Washington's man in Managua. These individuals include professors Robert Pastor and Anthony Lake, and the writer and scholar Mark Falcoff.

Pastor, a political scientist with extensive experience in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations during the Carter administration, sees two overriding myths dominating perceptions of the relationship between the United States and the original Somoza. The first is that Somoza existed *because* of the United States; the second is that the United States preferred, in Pastor's words, "vassals and right-wing dictators." He strongly refutes these notions, claiming that Washington never wanted Anastasio Somoza García in power but could do little to prevent his rise in the non-interventionist atmosphere of the 1930s.³

Anthony Lake argues that while Somoza exploited his relationship with officials in Washington for his own gain, he sees their attitude toward Somoza as one of "vague contempt." Mark Falcoff writes persuasively that the United States never intended the ends to which Nicaragua arrived under the Somoza regime; he agrees that all of the Somozas cleverly used every chance to make their countrymen and the outside world believe they had the undying support of Washington. Falcoff refutes those many indictments by the casual observer of past U.S. policy toward Nicaragua, and argues that most recent critiques were made, not based on the record, but in the service of current (1980s) political agendas.⁴

These assertions are perhaps the genesis of a new examination of the theories of those who have so readily condemned the entire history of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. It should be noted that most previous studies of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations largely concentrate on Washington's relations with the youngest of Somoza García's sons, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, heir to the dynasty and the man fixed in the American mind as the Nicaraguan dictator during the regime's dramatic fall in 1979. This book, however, is the first to extensively examine the long record of U.S. relations with the first Somoza, and it draws conclusions that clearly depart from the heretofore common understanding.

Notes

1. Carlos Fonseca Amador, "Nicaragua: Zero Hour," in Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer, editors, *The Nicaragua Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 126; Gabriel García Márquez, "To the People of the United States," *New York Times*, 17 April 1983, 15; Edmundo Jarquin C. and Pablo Emilio Barreto, "A Dictatorship Made in the U.S.A.," in *Nicaragua: A People's Revolution* (Washington: EPICA Task Force, 1980), 1.

2. Patricia Flynn, "Central America: The Roots of Revolt," in Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, editors, *The Politics of Intervention: The United States in Central America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 34; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 11, 68, 74, 230; Charles D. Ameringer, "Nicaragua: The Rock that Crumbled," in Robert Wesson, editor, *U.S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 141; Martin C. Needler, "United States Security Perceptions," in Peter Calvert, editor, *The Central American Security System: North-South or East-West?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 125; Jenny Pearce, "The Eagle Rises," in Rosset and Vandermeer, eds., *The Nicaragua Reader*, 107; Karl Bermann, *Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States Since 1848* (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 222.

3. Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3-4, 187, 266. Pastor also argues that a widely repeated statement Roosevelt supposedly made about Somoza—"he's a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch"—was myth as well. His search of the records at the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park revealed no such comment by Roosevelt, a finding that my own research at Hyde Park confirmed. Pastor notes that Roosevelt scholar Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and former Roosevelt library archivist Donald Schewe contend that FDR never made the statement. The quote has been used hundreds of times by historians and journalists because it symbolized the essence of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations as they perceived that relationship. Apparently they saw no reason to check the statement's accuracy. See pages 5 and 6, and notes 1 and 2 on page 321, in *Condemned to Repetition*.

4. Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling, The Nicaraguan Dilemma: A Portrait of Washington at Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 13-14. Mark Falcoff, "Somoza, Sandino and the United States: What the Past Teaches—and Doesn't," in *Nicaragua—Centuries of Torment: II*, special edition of *This World*, 1983 (6), 51-70.

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invaluable support during every step of this book's journey to publication. I will always be grateful for the encouragement towards scholarship given to me by my mother, Lorrie Ingram Clark. To my wife, Mary Lynn Clark, I owe much—first for many helpful suggestions with the manuscript and for the use of the administrative facilities in her law office—and always for her continuing support and love. Finally, I thank my son, the journalist Paul Coe Clark, III, who understands the trials of writing, for his interest in this book.

Introduction

U.S. interest in Nicaragua during the last half of the nineteenth century concentrated on commercial investment and on the possibility of constructing an isthmian canal as a transportation link between the east and west coasts of the United States. U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, and in Latin America as a whole, during this period, was generally minimal. Involvement intensified, however, during the three decades following the Spanish-American War when the United States policed the Caribbean republics and participated in a series of conflicts and occupations which historian Lester Langley and others have labeled the "Banana Wars."¹ Marines and "bluejackets" (Navy ground troops) attempted to enforce peace and bring stability to the Caribbean, and sought to keep European powers from threatening U.S. security interests, which after 1903 centered on the American-owned Panama Canal. In their police function, Marines also supervised elections, established native constabularies, and carried out counterinsurgency campaigns against indigenous elements that often violently resisted U.S. presence. Marine presence in Nicaragua began in 1909 and continued sporadically until 1933. Most of this time it consisted of a symbolic 100-man legion guard assigned to the capital, Managua; this guard represented American power and protected U.S. interests in the country. From 1927 to 1933, however, this small contingent was reinforced by several thousand Marines who were invited by the Nicaraguan government to

end an ongoing and bloody civil war. Early in this period President Calvin Coolidge sent former Secretary of War Henry Stimson to Nicaragua as a peacemaker to negotiate a treaty among warring factions.²

To the Marines, the Nicaraguan conflict was another Banana War, but some of their actions proved long-lasting. One of the mandates of Stimson's treaty required the Marines to train a native constabulary—the *Guardia Nacional*—to maintain order in the country. The Marines also conducted a campaign to subdue a major guerrilla force led by Augusto César Sandino, who held out in the mountains after other insurgents signed the peace settlement. This counterinsurgency campaign against the original Sandinistas proved to be a dilemma for the United States in Nicaragua. For six years, Sandino conducted brilliant guerrilla warfare against the U.S. Marines and the new constabulary. The Marines fought bravely, but were unable to break the Sandino movement or to eliminate its leader.³

After 1930, officials in the Hoover administration—and especially Henry Stimson, who was by then Secretary of State—became disillusioned with the war in Nicaragua. Stimson orchestrated a major change to Washington's interventionist policy when it became obvious to him that victory was not in sight. Discouraged by the entire affair and under pressure in the United States to end U.S. military involvement, Stimson decided to "Nicaraguanize" the conflict, withdrawing all Marines from the country and leaving the counterinsurgency program in the hands of the *Guardia Nacional*. In April 1931, he instructed the American legation in Managua that the United States could no longer even provide for the general protection of U.S. civilians in Nicaragua because it would lead to "difficulties and commitments which this Government did not propose to undertake." Realizing the hopelessness of U.S. troop operations in an alien jungle environment, Stimson announced that the unsolved Sandino problem was one "for the sovereign government of Nicaragua." The Secretary of State had clearly tired of the U.S. role in Nicaragua.⁴

The Hoover administration withdrew all forces from Nicaragua in January 1933. At that time the Marine-organized *Guardia Nacional* under its first Nicaraguan chief, Anastasio Somoza García, assumed responsibility for all military functions in the country.⁵ Upon departure of the Marines, the State Department issued a strongly worded statement disclaiming, in the clearest language, any further U.S. responsibility for the *Guardia* following U.S. disengagement. After 1933, the lack of positive results from American military and political operations in Nicaragua and the disenchantment it spawned among U.S. policymakers encouraged Washington to take a wholly new direction in its Latin American policy.⁶

Two central topics of this book are Washington's new non-interventionist policy direction after 1933 and the impact of this policy change on U.S. relations with Nicaragua during the Franklin Roosevelt era. The enduring legacy of interventionism in Nicaragua is neither minimalized nor discounted. Many critics, however, have blended pre-1933 interventionism with post-1933 U.S. policy. This has led to confusion over these two truly distinct eras and the policies related to them, with the latter viewed by many through a perception inordinately influenced by the former. From a policy perspective, the U.S. position after 1933 was distinct in a number of crucial aspects and must be seen, therefore, in light of a wholly different set of circumstances influencing U.S. relations with Nicaragua in that era.

This book treats the post-1933 era in three separate periods, each relating to different U.S. policy objectives. During the first period, from 1933 to 1944, Washington's primary goals were to improve its image in Latin America and to take the first steps toward aligning the American republics with the United States. Policymakers set out to accomplish this by maintaining a strict non-interventionist position. This did not mean that Washington supported either dictatorship in Latin America, or Somoza García in Nicaragua. In fact, the opposite was true, as the first six chapters of this book illustrate. Eventually during this first period, as the United States found itself being drawn into a world war, the overriding motivation became the need for allies in the coming struggle: presenting a united inter-American front and curbing Axis influence in Latin America became the *raison d'être* for U.S. wartime policy.

The second period was from 1944 to 1948 when the United States—the leading nation in a war fought for freedom—tried mightily to promote democracy in the region. Many Washington officials felt that the United States had a mission literally to save the world for democracy. At a time when memory of the war against fascism was fresh, their initial post-war objective was to continue the struggle against dictatorship. This goal led to a sustained effort to oppose the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, an effort recounted from the diplomatic record in Chapters 7 through 9.

During the third period—which covers the last eight years of the era of the first Somoza, 1948 to 1956—the Cold War brought about a change in priorities regarding U.S. relations with Latin America. Washington now sought allies in the hemisphere in the new struggle to contain communism. As argued in the book's closing chapter, this important policy change removed pressure from the U.S. on the anti-communist Somoza. This did not, however, result in fawning support at the national level from Washington, nor special treatment for the Nicaraguan dictator, charges frequently made by policy critics. This book establishes from the outset that while U.S. policy may have at

times inadvertently assisted Somoza's ambitions and some American officials in the field were favorably influenced by the flamboyant general, over time the majority of officials in policymaking positions supported democracy in Nicaragua, fought vigorously against Somoza's continuance in power, and worked at least until 1948 to bring an end to his dictatorship. Although Somoza's long rule was partially the result of world events, it was more the product of his innate qualities, including his own dark political brilliance, and of a cultural legacy in a country that has rarely known anything but tyranny in its political life.

Notes

1. Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900-1934* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1983).

2. Stimson's plan was called the Peace of Tipitapa. By signing it, the adversaries agreed to a three-point program of disarmament, U.S.-supervised elections in 1928, and the establishment of a nonpartisan constabulary, or *Guardia Nacional*. See Marvin Goldwert, *The Constabulary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), 29; José María Moncada, *Estados Unidos in Nicaragua* (Managua: Tipografía Atenas, 1942), 6-39; Henry L. Stimson, *American Policy in Nicaragua* (New York: Scribners, 1927), 75-77.

3. Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 161-185.

4. For developments in the Sandino campaign in the 1928-1930 period, see Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 206-215, and Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), 41-47. Public opposition to U.S. policy in Nicaragua in this period is discussed in Isaac Joslin Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States, 1909-1927* (Boston: World Peace Foundation Pamphlets, 1927), 787; Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 112-114; Dexter Perkins, *The United States and the Caribbean* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 148-150; Rosset and Vandermeer, eds., *The Nicaragua Reader*, 117. For a sample of congressional opposition, see "Wheeler Demands We Quit Nicaragua," *New York Times*, 4 January 1927, 1, 3. Senator Borah's opposition and Secretary Stimson's admission of a lack of support for policy is in William Kamman, *A Search for Stability: United States Diplomacy Toward Nicaragua, 1925-1933* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 196-97. Also see Rogelio García, "Opposition within the Senate to American Military Intervention in Nicaragua, 1926-1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1973), 201-203. Stimson's instructions to the legation are in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1931* (Washington, 1931), 2:808, 814-816 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*).

5. For Hoover's Nicaraguan policy see Alexander DeConde, *Herbert Hoover's Latin American Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951), 83. Critics of U.S. policy in Nicaragua often claim Washington was solely responsible for naming Anastasio Somoza García as the first Nicaraguan head

of the *Guardia Nacional*. Although some U.S. officers in Nicaragua at the time favored Somoza, records generally do not support the argument. Outgoing President José María Moncada recommended Somoza—who had been a senior official in his administration—to President-Elect Juan Bautista Sacasa for the job. Somoza was married to Sacasa's favorite niece. In the words of one Nicaraguan observer, the new president, "in typical [Nicaraguan] fashion wanted a relative in control of the weapons." For material relating to the appointment of Somoza, see Williard L. Beaulac, *The Fractured Continent* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), 210; Hanna to White, 28 October 1932, U.S. National Archives, Diplomatic Records, 817.1051/701 1/2. (Hereafter NA, followed by a file number, refers to diplomatic records of the National Archives, Washington, D.C. Unless otherwise indicated, Record Group (RG) 59 applies to these citations. RG 59 will be listed only when no decimal file numbers are included in material from that record group). See also Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 25, 26; Julian Smith, Oral History, U.S. Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, Navy Yard, Washington, D.C., 134-137. The quote by the "observer" is in Arturo Cruz, Jr., "One Hundred Years of Turpitude," *The New Republic*, November 16, 1987, 36.

6. "Disclaimer by the Department of State of Further Responsibility Regarding the *Guardia Nacional* following the Evacuation of Nicaragua by the U.S. Marines," press release issued by the State Department, 1 January 1933, *FRUS: 1933*, 5: 848-849.

The United States and Somoza, 1933–1956

A U.S. Policy Dilemma: Conflict Between Non-Intervention and Constitutional Government

The Good Neighbor Policy and the Rise of Anastasio Somoza García

The first year after U.S. Marines departed Nicaragua in January 1933 set the tone for future U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. In Washington it was a year of bold new directions for policy toward Latin America. From the start of their dealings with Nicaragua, U.S. officials demonstrated a determination to stay out of the internal affairs of that country in order to erase an image long fixed on many there and elsewhere in the hemisphere of the United States as an interventionist power. To the misfortune of both countries, however, events during 1933 would illustrate that despite intentions to the contrary, U.S. policy would inadvertently assist the political ambitions of the new commander of the *Guardia Nacional*, General Anastasio Somoza García.

The Good Neighbor Policy—the most important foreign policy initiative of the first administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt—was designed to improve U.S. relations with the republics of Latin America. A determination to reverse the policy of intervention by the United States

in the region was the principal motivation for policymakers. The Hoover administration built the foundation for this policy reversal by withdrawing the last Marines from Nicaragua and initiating their removal from Haiti. Although the Good Neighbor Policy in its largest sense dealt with many issues and applied to all of Latin America, the policy of non-intervention related principally to the small countries in the Caribbean, including those in Central America. It was in the Caribbean that intervention had been concentrated in the first decades of the century, and establishment of a separate policy for the region was not new. During the Coolidge administration, Secretary of State Hughes referred to a special "Caribbean Policy," and Hoover's secretary of state, Henry L. Stimson, to an "Isthmian Policy of the United States."¹

The desire to improve relations with the nations of the Caribbean basin, where strong feelings against U.S. intervention understandably existed, took priority in the first years of the new Roosevelt era. A key factor influencing decisionmakers in establishing the new policy was the record of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. Five years before his inauguration, Roosevelt wrote of his concern regarding Latin American sentiment against the use of U.S. troops on their soil. Roosevelt noted that the other republics of the Americas almost unanimously disapproved of past interventions, and that they disdained all U.S. actions that rested solely on the "right of main force." He charged that the result of U.S. interventions—including, in his view, "the far less justified intervention in Nicaragua"—was that the United States had never in its history had fewer friends in the Western Hemisphere. Roosevelt argued that the Coolidge administration had "bungled" Nicaraguan policy and that this policy had crippled U.S. relations with all of Latin America.²

Secretary of State Cordell Hull and his assistant, Sumner Welles, were enthusiastic proponents of the new policy. The devout Hull felt a near religious need to adhere to the principle of non-intervention. Welles was unquestionably the Latin Americanist of the two, and with Roosevelt's confidence he became the primary architect of the Good Neighbor Policy. He was quick to denounce the Coolidge administration's interventionist policy, once referring to the period as the "unhappy four years."³

Welles argued that U.S. military occupations in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua had produced a tragic legacy of bitterness and hostility throughout Latin America. Referring specifically to Nicaragua, Welles thought that the new approach should strive to end the "special significance" that had long marked U.S.-Nicaraguan relations.⁴ Welles's first concern was to create good will in the Americas. This policy course would dispel the notion—one he stringently denied—that the United States was bent on imperialism in the region.⁵

Concern for Latin American impressions of the United States was central to the policy of the Roosevelt administration. To bring to a close the overwhelming U.S. political and military predominance in the Caribbean and Central America, the new administration promised to end all interference in the domestic political affairs of these countries. Latin Americanists in the State Department, led by Welles, knew that this would be a complex task in Nicaragua, where native politicians had come to rely on the American Minister on the scene to arbitrate in times of crisis.

Although U.S.-supervised elections in Nicaragua in 1928 and 1932 at first produced optimism, events soon illustrated that political stability would not last. Soon after the Marine withdrawal, antagonism arose between the new president, Juan Bautista Sacasa, and General Somoza over civilian control of the military and the latter's political ambitions. This power struggle spanned three years and proved critical to both subsequent political events in Nicaragua and U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. It was important first because it involved key officials from both countries in a test of U.S. resolve to sustain the Good Neighbor Policy, and second because it resulted in the establishment of the Somoza regime. The central players in this struggle were Juan Sacasa, Somoza García, Sumner Welles, and the new U.S. minister in Managua, Arthur Bliss Lane.

The Sacasa-Somoza Rivalry

Juan Sacasa was not directly involved with the Stimson peace plan which resulted from the Tipitapa Conference in 1927. He strongly rejected its results and remained untainted in the public view by collaboration in the Washington-imposed agreements.⁶ Sacasa emerged as the intellectual leader of the nationalist wing of the Liberal Party. He was a member of the oligarchy from León, the provincial center of the Liberal Party, and had studied in the United States, earning a medical degree at Columbia University. Although he was from the elite, Sacasa gave medical treatment to the common people in the León area and had a strong reputation among the lower classes. Although Sacasa believed in the legality of the Liberal revolution which had fought against the U.S.-supported Conservatives in the 1920s, his arguments against the use of force to settle political disputes were unusual in a country with a history of militarism in politics.⁷

In 1926, after General Emiliano Chamorro forced President Carlos Solórzano to resign, Sacasa, then vice president, fled into exile and led the Liberal movement against the new government. This strengthened his national reputation and made him a political hero to a large number of Nicaraguans. Though not by inclination anti-American, he

questioned U.S. policy in Nicaragua and resented Washington's refusal to recognize his government-in-exile. Later in 1926, the U.S. assisted in the formation of a friendly government under a former American protégé, the Conservative Adolfo Díaz, and quickly extended recognition.

In December, Sacasa returned to Nicaragua and established his "constitutional" government in the northeast town of Puerto Cabezas. Washington again ignored his request for recognition. When Díaz offered Sacasa and his party cabinet positions, Sacasa turned him down.⁸ During this time, Secretary of State Frank Kellogg distrusted Sacasa because of his support from the Mexican government, which Kellogg considered a "semi-bolshevik" regime.⁹ The secretary cabled the U.S. legation that Sacasa was no more than a "revolutionist."¹⁰ Thereafter, the Liberals revolted against the U.S.-sponsored Díaz government, the Marines entered the fray, and Sandino began his protracted struggle against their presence.

In the 1932 election campaign, Sacasa retained the image as the nationalist candidate although both he and his opponent, former President Díaz, called for postponement of the Marine withdrawal. Sacasa believed this would allow the new president time to take firm control of the government machinery before the *Guardia* was turned over completely to Nicaraguan officers.¹¹ His victory in the U.S.-supervised elections demonstrated not only his own popularity but proved again, as in 1928, the preponderance of support for the Liberal Party throughout the country.

Sacasa's first priority as the new president was to settle the Sandino question. Since Sandino had promised to end his rebellion upon U.S. retreat, the president began negotiations with the rebel chieftain immediately after the Marine departure in January 1933. Despite the six-year campaign against him by the Marines and the *Guardia*, in early 1933 the Sandino movement remained strong.¹² Sacasa befriended Sandino, treated him and his officers with respect, and during the negotiations provided liberal concessions to the former revolutionaries. These included the grant of a vast tract of agricultural land in northern Nicaragua, employment in public works projects for the rebel army, and the right for Sandino to retain for one year sufficient arms to protect his men and furnish the police force for the assigned territory.¹³

Anastasio Somoza García assumed the position of chief director of the *Guardia Nacional* on January 2, 1933, the day the Marines departed. Somoza was from a small landowning family in San Marcos, where his father had a coffee farm. In his teens, a relative arranged for him to go to the United States, where he took a business course and learned English. While there, he met Salvadora Debayle, a member of one of the aristocratic Liberal families of León. They married after returning to Nicaragua in 1919, and in the next few years Somoza tried

a number of ordinary jobs with only modest success. In 1926, through pure accident, he found his vocation in politics. In an effort to join in the Liberal revolution that year, he led an abortive attack against the Conservatives in his hometown of San Marcos. Although he became a self-appointed "General" from this episode, it would remain his sole military experience prior to taking command of the *Guardia*.¹⁴

Somoza's first chance for recognition came during the Stimson peace mission in 1927. He came to Stimson's attention due to his friendliness and command of English, favorably impressing the U.S. diplomat and according to some reports serving as his interpreter.¹⁵ During the years of intense Marine involvement in Nicaragua, 1927 to 1932, Somoza demonstrated an intelligence and ambition that attracted the attention of the Americans. The Marine officers liked the gregarious young Nicaraguan and used him as a go-between in their relations with the Nicaraguan government. Somoza was also popular among Nicaraguan officials. He was a natural politician and soon worked his way up in Liberal Party circles. He eventually became the party chief in León and subsequently President Moncada made him an aide and undersecretary of foreign relations. In late 1932, therefore, despite a lack of military experience, Somoza emerged as the choice of key officials for the job as the first native head of the *Guardia Nacional*.¹⁶

Arthur Bliss Lane arrived in Managua as the U.S. minister in the fall of 1933. Lane came from a wealthy background, attended private secondary schools, and graduated from Yale in 1916. After joining the Foreign Service in 1917 and spending his initial years in Europe, Lane gained his first Latin American experience as first secretary and later counselor and chargé d'affaires under Josephus Daniels in the U.S. embassy in Mexico. Lane was bright, and his promotions came quickly. With his Managua posting, he became the youngest U.S. minister in the Foreign Service at 39 years of age. Lane was a fervent supporter of the Good Neighbor Policy and especially believed in the new administration's goal to break away from military intervention in Nicaragua. Although certainly not a radical, Lane, like Welles, was sensitive to the issue of U.S. interventions in Latin America; he was also sympathetic toward democratic elements in the region. He was an enthusiastic adherent, for example, of the liberal ideals of the Mexican Revolution. Upon arriving in Nicaragua, Lane claimed Roosevelt's and Hull's approval to conduct direct negotiations with Sandino and appeared eager to do so, provided Sandino requested it.¹⁷

In Managua, Lane soon discovered that the determination of Washington to follow a course of strict non-interference would have a more profound impact on U.S.-Nicaraguan relations than did the act of withdrawing the Marines. He immediately recognized the developing political struggle between the ambitious and aggressive Somoza and the reserved Sacasa and believed there was a legitimate need to arbitrate to

preserve the constitutional system that the United States had established.¹⁸ Even at that early date, it was clear that Somoza was attempting to politicize the U.S.-created *Guardia Nacional*—a move the State Department had been warned about two years earlier by one of its young officers, Lawrence Duggan.¹⁹ President Sacasa was clearly unable to bring Somoza and the *Guardia* under his control. Fearing a Somoza attempt to use the new military force to effect a coup d'état, Lane began lobbying Washington to preempt this course of action.

The Policy on Coups d'état

The minister argued that an official statement by the administration implying the withholding of recognition in the event of a coup d'état would be a warning to Somoza and would reinforce Sacasa's democratically elected government. A statement of this nature would have been consistent with U.S. policy in Central America prior to 1933. Based on treaties signed by the Central American republics in 1907 and 1923, the United States, although not a signatory to these agreements, adhered to the Central Americans' policy of non-recognition of governments gaining power by coups d'état.²⁰ In 1932, however, the policy proved unsuccessful in El Salvador, where non-recognition failed to bring down the autocratic government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez after he reached power by force of arms. After Hernández Martínez's unconstitutional government demonstrated stability, the Central American countries extended recognition, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of the treaties. In line with these actions, the United States quietly recognized the San Salvador regime.²¹

Apart from these events, the United States reevaluated its policy of using non-recognition as a policy tool. State Department officials came to view non-recognition itself as a form of intervention, a position that would over time influence policy toward Nicaragua and Lane's ability to control events there.²²

The official behind this change and the person who assumed primary responsibility for articulating the administration's Nicaraguan policy was Sumner Welles.²³ While Welles's natural inclination was always toward non-intervention, he had at one time in his career supported a policy of preserving constitutional government in Latin America by withholding recognition to governments that took power through unconstitutional means. Field experience in Cuba, where Welles served as ambassador during the first months of the Roosevelt administration, demonstrated to the diplomat the difficulties of non-recognition as a policy tool. Frustration over his inability to control events in Havana after the fall of the dictator Machado reinforced Welles's earlier thoughts on the value of non-intervention. From his Cuban experience,

he came to firmly believe that the withholding of recognition was not an effective means of pressuring a government to change its internal policies.²⁴ When Welles, as assistant secretary of state, turned his attention to Nicaragua, he worked for a policy that would break that country from its past dependence on the United States. Such a course would follow narrow "hands off" guidelines; would preclude passing judgement on the nature of the government; and would even preclude the traditional U.S. practice of giving political advice to Nicaraguan officials which might be interpreted by some as interference in their internal affairs.²⁵

The U.S. Position on the *Guardia Nacional*

The policy of the administration became clear after a series of events in early 1934 forced it to react. Through his foreign minister, President Sacasa queried Secretary of State Cordell Hull about the possibility of U.S. support to revise the original plan that established the *Guardia*.²⁶ Sacasa knew that Somoza had taken advantage of the non-partisan features of the plan to use the force as a political entity apart from the government. Somoza was using the organization, Sacasa charged, to further his personal ambitions. During talks to the military in different parts of the country, Somoza made political speeches that publicized his presidential plans. He also placed his supporters in key *Guardia* positions. The general's actions were illegal on two counts, according to Sacasa. The Nicaraguan Constitution prohibited both military men from running for political office and relatives of the president, by marriage or blood, from succeeding to the presidency. Somoza's wife was a niece of President Sacasa.²⁷ Sacasa's goal was to reorganize the *Guardia* to make it function as the United States had originally intended, and in the process to diminish Somoza's power or preferably to eliminate him entirely from the organization.²⁸

The president thought he lacked sufficient political support to make a move against Somoza and therefore tried to gain Washington's "moral and friendly" cooperation before taking action.²⁹ Although he was respected as a well-intended and honorable man, after a year in office Sacasa proved to be a weak politician.³⁰ General Somoza easily intimidated the president.³¹ Sacasa encountered problems not only in controlling the *Guardia* but in influencing the Nicaraguan Congress. Confronting military and political threats to his position, he thus sought U.S. support as the key to his government's survival.

In response to the query by Sacasa's government, Welles reminded Lane of Washington's proclamation upon withdrawal of the Marines the previous January. This statement renounced future responsibility on the part of the United States for the *Guardia Nacional*. On December 28,

1933, the assistant secretary cabled Lane a warning to steer clear of any role in regard to the *Guardia*. Welles did not believe that the Department was in a position to comment officially on the proposed reorganization of the Nicaraguan *Guardia* "any more than it could on the reorganization of the military forces of any other independent, sovereign nation." He relayed the Department's unofficial opinion that the *Guardia Nacional* should not be reorganized because its non-partisanship was Nicaragua's best guarantee of continued peace. Welles advised the U.S. minister that the Department had "no objection to your expressing its opinion in this connection, orally or informally, to President Sacasa."³²

The basis for the Department's position was the assumption that the *Guardia* was functioning as the United States had originally intended—as a non-partisan force. As such, its mission was not to sustain a weak though constitutional president, but to maintain law and order to allow for the normal process of government. For his part, President Sacasa was attempting to convince the Roosevelt administration, through Minister Lane, that Somoza was subverting the normal process of government and endangering the results of two decades of U.S. effort in Nicaragua. He was saying, in effect, that the *Guardia* was not functioning as Washington had originally planned.

It was clear that maintaining constitutional governments was not part of the administration's strategy in Latin America. President Roosevelt, in a speech on the day of Welles's cable to Lane, stated that "the maintenance of constitutional government in other nations is not, after all, a sacred obligation devolving upon the United States alone." The maintenance of law and order and the normal functioning of government in Latin America was the "concern of each individual nation within its own borders first of all."³³

Lane, fully recognizing Somoza's threat and the fact that he was using the *Guardia* to further his political ambitions, supported Sacasa's position. "I have grave doubts," Lane reported, "as to the efficiency and discipline of the organization as a whole and as to whether Somoza really controls his men."³⁴ In a personal letter to a friend in the Department, Lane complained that the original plan for the *Guardia* was not working out; that it was not evolving as the type of non-political organization on which Washington had placed its hopes. He was not comfortable with what he believed was inconsistency in Welles's instructions since they prohibited him from taking an official position on *Guardia* reorganization while directing that he informally express objections to the maneuver.³⁵ Lane believed that even an informal expression of disapproval would have the effect of encouraging Somoza, and this was not the impression that he wanted to make.

Lane attempted to get Welles to reconsider the position outlined in the December cable. He wrote the assistant secretary defending Sacasa's

position. The Department's policy in essence strengthened the *Guardia*, supporting "a permanent military caste" that defied "the constitutionally constituted government" of Sacasa. Lane questioned the value of maintaining the *Guardia* since it would be at the expense of programs for health care, education, and road building.³⁶ When Welles refused to change the Department's instructions, Lane knew he would be handicapped in his efforts to reinforce Sacasa in the president's struggle with Somoza and the military. The young American diplomat nonetheless continued his efforts to thwart the political rise of Anastasio Somoza.

Settlement with Sandino

Frustrated at his inability to control Somoza, Sacasa at this point turned his attention to reaching a final solution with the rebel leader Sandino. The president knew that Somoza considered Sandino's forces a threat to the autonomous power of the *Guardia*. Indications were that Sandino had maintained more than a hundred men under arms—in violation of an agreement he made with Sacasa in early 1933—and armed incidents between the guerrilla forces and the *Guardia* continued during the year 1933.³⁷ Although Sandino had given a pledge to "morally support" the president, he contended that he remained "independent of the government," a position that continued to concern Sacasa.³⁸ Sacasa knew a more conclusive settlement had to be worked out for the disarmament of the guerrilla chieftain and his men. He wanted them to continue to live together in the northern Segovia mountains, however, as a counterweight to Somoza's power in the capital. At the president's request, therefore, Sandino came to Managua for a series of peace talks to work on such an arrangement in early February of 1934.³⁹

Sandino met with Sacasa and his advisors on several occasions to discuss the future of the Sandinistas and, in Sandino's view, the "illegal" and "unconstitutional" *Guardia Nacional*.⁴⁰ Another purpose of the talks was to establish terms for the final disarmament of Sandino's force. The rebel leader presented his formal proposal to Sacasa in a letter on February 19. He promised to remain loyal to Sacasa's government, providing that the president guarantee the lives and property of all of the men under his command who had fought against the Marines. He also reminded the president that in his view the *Guardia* was unconstitutional and insisted that Sacasa take action to legalize it.⁴¹

Sacasa, desperate to reach an agreement with Sandino, responded the following day, agreeing to take steps to constitutionalize the *Guardia* within the next six months. He announced the appointment of General Horacio Portocarrero, a Sandino ally, as the *Guardia* commander in

charge of the former rebel zone of operations in the north. His mission would be the total disarmament and protection of Sandino's troops.⁴²

The agreement infuriated Somoza. He correctly interpreted Sacasa's promise to constitutionalize the *Guardia* as a scheme to undermine his own power. Somoza complained that Portocarrero's appointment insulted the *Guardia* as an institution and placed *Guardia* troops in the northern departments under the effective control of Sandino.⁴³ In conversations with Lane, he indicated that he would arrest and jail Sandino to settle the matter if the minister would only "wink" his approval, a plan the minister quickly denounced.⁴⁴

The Sandino Assassination and Its Aftermath

On the night of February 21, Sacasa invited Sandino to the president's house for talks to work out details of the agreement. It was also a farewell dinner for the rebel general and his staff prior to their departure the next day for their mountain headquarters in the Segovias. When Sandino and his entourage left the presidential compound after the dinner, a *Guardia* patrol stopped their vehicle and transported Sandino and the others to the airfield on the outskirts of the capital. Under truck lights, Somoza's men murdered Sandino and two of his generals in cold blood. Another patrol at approximately the same time killed Sandino's brother at a different location in the city.⁴⁵ The next morning a *Guardia* unit made a surprise assault on a concentration of Sandino's remaining followers in the north, killing—depending on the source—up to three hundred Sandinistas and dependents.⁴⁶ Although this night and day of killings effectively brought the first Sandinista era to an end, its legacy would eventually have a profound political impact on Nicaragua. The elimination of Sandino removed from the scene an important obstacle to Somoza's quest for power, greatly strengthening his position relative to President Sacasa. The murder of Sandino was a defeat for both the president and the U.S. minister, demonstrating their failure to influence the actions of Somoza. The event did not affect the policy of the United States, however. One year after the Marines' withdrawal, the course of U.S. policy in Nicaragua remained on a determined path of non-intervention. That course would not alter because of local events in Nicaragua, irrespective of their brutality and outrageousness, nor because of the well-intended efforts of the administration's envoy in Managua.

Arthur Bliss Lane realized more than ever after the Sandino murder that the administration desired to remain apart from Nicaraguan internal affairs, but he nevertheless continued to believe he could have a positive influence on developments. He recognized the events of late February as a setback for constitutionalism in Nicaragua, yet he retained hopes

of preserving what be believed were valuable legacies of U.S. involvement in the country.

From January 1933 until the murder of Sandino in February 1934, the Roosevelt administration displayed a firm resolve to let Nicaraguans manage their own political affairs, a policy that played perfectly into Somoza's hands. He acted to eliminate Sandino, knowing that the United States would not block him despite the opposition of Lane. After the Sandino affair, Somoza sensed that Washington's new policy would also keep Lane from interfering with his challenge to Sacasa for national power. This was not due to a desire by U.S. officials to support Somoza in his conspiracy against the president. There is no evidence during this period that any Washington official wanted Somoza in power, while there is much to indicate that the top U.S. representative in Nicaragua opposed Somoza. Events did illustrate that Somoza well-understood the significance of the Good Neighbor Policy, and it was this understanding, and certainly not the encouragement of the Roosevelt administration, that led Somoza to take bolder actions against Sacasa in the following two years.

Notes

1. Anna Powell, "Relations Between the United States and Nicaragua, 1898-1916," *The Hispanic American Historical Review (HAHR)* 8 (February 1928), 43; Stimson, *American Policy in Nicaragua*, 111, 113.

2. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View," *Foreign Affairs* 6 (July 1928):583-584. For an indication of Roosevelt's desire to change the Coolidge policy of intervention, see Memorandum of Conversation with Henry Stimson, 28 March 1933, Henry L. Stimson Papers. Manuscript Division (hereafter MS Division), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Further references to Stimson Papers are in Library of Congress unless cited as located in the Yale University Library.

3. DeConde, *Herbert Hoover's Latin American Policy*, 7; Robert H. Ferrell, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), vol. 12: *Cordell Hull, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2*, by Julius W. Pratt, 1:141-142. Cordell Hull, *Memoirs*, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1948), 1:310; Sumner Welles, *A Time for Decision* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 188.

4. Sumner Welles, "Good Neighbor Policy in the Caribbean," *Department of State Latin American Series*, No. 12, 13; Sumner Welles, *Where Are We Heading?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946), 227. For Welles's general views on non-interventionism, also see *ibid.*, 118, 184-185, 218.

5. Welles, *A Time for Decision*, 185-86; Welles, "Intervention and Interventions," *Foreign Affairs* 26 (October 1947):119-122. Welles's effectiveness regarding Latin American policy was to a large degree based on his close relationship with Roosevelt. School, regional, and family ties bound him to the president, and he always had free access to Roosevelt. Roosevelt had complete

confidence in Welles regarding questions of policy for Latin America. On the eve of the inauguration, Welles wrote the president-elect a long letter outlining U.S. interests in Latin America, some of which became priorities for the new administration. Welles to Roosevelt, 19 December 1932, Official File (hereafter OF) 470, "Sumner Welles File," Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers (hereafter Roosevelt Papers), Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Also see Charles C. Griffin, "Welles to Roosevelt: A Memorandum on Inter-American Relations," *HAHR*, 34 (May 1954):190-192.

6. Harold Norman Denny, *Dollars for Bullets* (New York: Dial Press, 1929), 303, 306.

7. Carlton Beals, "With Sandino, Part III," *The Nation*, 7 March 1928, p. 157; Denny, *Dollars for Bullets*, 175, 195; Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States*, 803-804. After leaving office in 1936, Sacasa admitted his disdain for the violence in Nicaraguan politics, stating, "I was not the man for the situation because of my repugnance and horror of violence and bloodshed." *La Prensa* (Managua), 4 June 1936. One scholar refers to Sacasa as "a proud and scholarly gentleman." Thomas J. Dodd, Jr., "The United States in Nicaraguan Politics: Supervised Elections, 1927-1932" (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1966), 324. The gentle character of Juan Bautista Sacasa was evident from an interview with a member of his family, former Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Dr. Oscar Sevilla Sacasa; interview 22 May 1986, Miami, Florida.

8. *The United States and Nicaragua: A Survey of the Relations from 1909 to 1932* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 81. For Sacasa's observations on U.S. policy, see Denny, *Dollars for Bullets*, 247-248.

9. Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States*, 788; Dana G. Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 216; Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 20; *New York Times*, 4 January 1927, 3.

10. Kellogg to Dennis, 6 November 1926, NA 817.00/4016. Although Sacasa was not himself anti-American, the Liberal Party, due to long U.S. support for the Conservatives, had a reputation in some quarters for strong anti-Americanism. See U.S. Marine Report, NA 817.00/3038, 6-8.

11. DeConde, *Herbert Hoover's Latin American Policy*, 83; Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty* (Marynoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 130-132.

12. U.S. minister to Stimson, 4 November 1932, NA 817.00/7614.

13. Lejune Cummins, *Quijote on a Burro: Sandino and the Marines, A Study in the Formulation of Foreign Policy* (Mexico City: La Impresora Azteca, 1958), 95-103; Woodward, *Central America*, 200; *New York Times*, 3 and 4 February 1933. Anastasio Somoza García, *El Verdadero Sandino o el Calvario de las Segovias* (Managua: Tipografía Robelo, 1936), 451-457.

14. Bernard Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 10-15; Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 48-49; "Vida de General de División Anastasio Somoza García," *La Noticia* (Managua), 30 September 1956, 1. Gratus Halftermeyer, *El General Anastasio Somoza, su Vida y su Obra* (Managua: [n.p.], 1957), 1-10; Richard Millett, "A Brief History of Nicaragua's Enduring Dictator," *Revista Interamericana* (Fall 1977), 487; "Portrait of General Anastasio Somoza García," *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* (May 1939):249-250; "Síntesis Biográfica del

General Anastasio Somoza García," *Corona Funebre* (Managua: [n.p.], 1957), 511; "Síntesis Biográfica del General Anastasio Somoza García," *Somoza: El Líder de Nicaragua* (Managua: [n.p.], 1971), 5-7; Francisco Urcuyo Maliaño, *Solos: Los Últimos 43 Horas en el Bunker de Somoza* (Guatemala City: Editorial Académica Centro Americana, 1979), 173-175; "Confidential Biographic Data on President Anastasio Somoza and Members of his Staff," President's Secretary's File (hereafter PSF), Box 62, "Nicaragua," Roosevelt Papers. For an account of Somoza's attack on his hometown of San Marcos, see *La Prensa* (Managua), 2 March 1986, 17. Some of these reports indicate that Somoza's friends called him a "General" after the ludicrous San Marcos incident. If this is true, he would also have been called by detractors a *general del dedo*, a native Nicaraguan expression, or *modismo*, meaning a general designated such by the point of the finger. Many were in this era in Nicaragua.

15. Stimson reported that "Somoza is a very frank, friendly, likable young liberal and his attitude impresses me more favorably than almost any other." The Diary of Henry L. Stimson, vol. VII, p. 101, Reel I, 3 May 1927, Henry L. Stimson Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

16. The U.S. minister in Nicaragua, Matthew E. Hanna, favored Somoza for the job as the first native chief of the *Guardia*. Hanna to White, Oct. 28, 1932, NA 817.1051/701 1/2. Also see interview with Ambassador Willard L. Beaulac, 1 December 1966, cited in Charles Henry Rannels, "The Legacy of Intervention: The United States and the Rise to Power of Dictator Anastasio Somoza, 1933-36" (Masters thesis, Georgetown University, 1968), 50; and John D. Martz, *Central America: The Crisis and the Challenge* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 166-167. The announcement of Somoza García's appointment is in *New York Times*, 16 November 1932, 4; and Arthur Bliss Lane unpublished autobiography, Box 97, Series V, p. 11, Arthur Bliss Lane Papers (hereafter Lane Papers), Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

17. Vladimir Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy, The Story of Arthur Bliss Lane* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1971), 1-10; Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 31; Lane to Wilson, 3 February 1934, Series I, Box 8, Lane Papers; Lane to Daniels, 4 March 1934, Box 661, Josephus Daniels Papers (hereafter Daniels Papers), MS Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Folder "Arthur Bliss Lane, 1933-1944," OF 617, Roosevelt Papers.

18. Lane despatches to Hull, December 1933 to February 1934, Series I, Boxes 6 and 7, Lane Papers; Lane to Daniels, 16 and 21 December 1933, Box 661, Daniels Papers.

19. Duggan to Wilson, 16 November 1931, NA 711.17/253 and 23 March 1932, NA 817.1051/613 1/2.

20. Carlos R. Tobar, an Ecuadorian diplomat, first suggested the policy in a 1907 letter to the Bolivian consul in Brussels. The Tobar Doctrine, accepted by the American republics, held that nations should refuse to recognize de facto governments that took power by revolution. President Woodrow Wilson adopted the policy as part of his doctrine of constitutionalism in U.S. relations with Latin America. The Central American countries incorporated the doctrine into their diplomacy as a result of agreements reached at the 1907 and 1923 conferences. See *Conferences on Central American Affairs, Washington,*

December 4, 1922-February 7, 1923 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1923); Laurence Duggan, *The Americas: The Search for Hemispheric Security* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949), 56, 65; Federico G. Gil, *Latin American-United States Relations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 75-76, 163-164; Dana G. Munro, "The Establishment of Peace in Nicaragua," *Foreign Affairs* 11 (July 1933): 696-705; Beaulac to Wilson, 1 October 1935, NA 814.00/1225. For a treatment of the recognition issue for the United States in Central America, see Lawrence Dennis, "Revolution, Recognition and Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 9 (January 1931): 204-221.

21. Green Haywood Hackworth, *Digest of International Law*, vol. 1 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940): 186-188, 190-191.

22. The return by the United States to the Jeffersonian policy of recognizing de facto governments was consistent with the history of U.S. policy prior to the Wilson administration. J. Lloyd Mecham, *The United States and Inter-American Security, 1889-1960* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 116-117.

23. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 30-31. Gellman refers to Welles's diplomacy toward the Central American republics as a separate policy, emphasizing his influence on and authorship of the Good Neighbor Policy as it applied to Central America.

24. In September 1933, when the Cuban revolt leader Batista first talked to Ambassador Welles about recognition, Welles refused to discuss it, displaying obvious antagonism toward the new government. He changed his position when he realized that even the United States could not control the events in Cuba during that period. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 18-23; and Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Cuba, 1933-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 45-54; Gordon Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 81-91; Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 137.

25. Welles to Lane, 12 April 1934, Series I, Box 8, Lane Papers.

26. Welles to Lane, 28 December 1933, NA 817.1051/808.

27. Juan Bautista Sacasa, *Cómo y por qué caí del poder* (San Salvador, El Salvador: [n.p.] 1936), 6-7.

28. *Ibid.*, 24-25; Welles to Lane, 28 December 1933, NA 817.1051/808; Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 29-30; Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 139.

29. Sacasa, *Cómo y por qué caí del poder*, 25.

30. Rannells, "The Legacy of Intervention," 46-50.

31. Domingo Ibarra Grijalva, *The Last Night of Augusto C. Sandino* (New York: Vantage Press, 1973), 204.

32. Welles to Lane, 28 December 1933, NA 817.1051/808.

33. *New York Times*, 29 December 1933, 1.

34. Lane to Hull, 14 February 1934, NA 817.00/7935.

35. Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 30-31; Lane to Wilson, 3 February 1934, Series II, Box 60, Lane Papers.

36. Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 31-32; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 31.

37. Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino*, 467-68; Grijalva, *The Last Night of General Augusto C. Sandino*, 189; U.S. minister to Hull, 18 March 1933, NA

817.00/7790; 13 May 1933, NA 817.00/7812; 2 January 1934, NA 817.00/7919; U.S. Military Attaché Report, Costa Rica, 29 November 1933, NA 817.00/7920.

38. Augusto C. Sandino, *Manifiesto a los pueblos de la tierra y en particular al de Nicaragua* (Managua: La Prensa, 1933) 21-23.

39. Lane to Hull, 5 February 1934, NA 817.00/7932 and 16 February 1934, NA 817.00/7936.

40. Lane to Hull, 5 February 1934, NA 817.00/7932 and 20 February 1934, NA 817.00/7968; Gregorio Selser, *Sandino* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 171-172.

41. *Ibid.*, 172; Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino*, 558-559.

42. Sofonias Salvatierra, *Sandino: O la tragedia de un pueblo* (Madrid: Europa, 1934), 240-244; Selser, *Sandino*, 173; Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino*, 561. Complete texts of both Sandino's and Sacasa's positions are in Jorge Eduardo Arellano, editor, *Sandino: Free Country or Death* (Managua: Biblioteca Nacional de Nicaragua, 1984), 34-37.

43. Macaulay, *Sandino Affair*, 252; Lane to Hull, 22 February 1934 (5:00 a.m.), NA 817.00/7939; Lane to Daniels, 4 March 1934, Box 661, Daniels Papers; Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino*, 562-563.

44. Lane to Daniels, 4 March 1934, Box 661, Daniels Papers.

45. Grijalva, *The Last Night of General Augusto C. Sandino*, 231-247; Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 156-159; Lane to Hull, 22 February 1934 (4:00 p.m.), NA 817.00/7940; Selser, *Sandino*, 175-177. Also see Lane to Daniels, 4 March 1934, Box 661, Daniels Papers; and Salvador Calderón Ramírez, *Últimos Días de Sandino* (Mexico City: Imprenta Manuel León Sánchez, 1934), 93-156. Sandino's father's account of the night of 21 February 1934 is in Jorge Eduardo Arellano, editor, *Sandino: Free Country or Death*, 24-27. An account by another Foreign Service officer is in Paul C. Daniels Oral History, p. 11, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

46. William Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1984) 171; Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 40; Selser, *Sandino*, 178; Thomas W. Walker, *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 26.

The Struggle for Constitutionalism on the Eve of the Somoza Regime

Arthur Bliss Lane: The Diplomacy of Frustration

Despite orders from the State Department to refrain as much as possible from involvement in Nicaraguan internal affairs, Lane became increasingly involved in Nicaraguan politics in the period leading to the murder of Sandino. His actions led local officials to believe that even under the new Washington policy of non-intervention, the American legation was not removing itself as an arbitrator of events. Lane had reservations about the wisdom of complete non-involvement on his part; he remained hopeful that he could assist the Nicaraguans in protecting the nascent democracy that Washington had been supporting since the administration supervised the elections of 1928. Lane continued, therefore, to converse with President Sacasa and General Somoza regarding the status of the *Guardia*, the condition of the remaining rebel forces of Sandino, and other political subjects.¹

After the assassination of Sandino, Lane immediately suspected Somoza of complicity. He had become suspicious of Somoza's

intentions in the weeks prior to the murder. During this time, Somoza had energetically courted the minister's favor, frequently going to Lane with requests for encouragement or approval regarding a course of action.² Despite his opposition to Somoza's activities, Lane nevertheless developed close ties with the General while at the same time urging Washington to back the democratically elected Sacasa. He exchanged informal visits, dined, and attended sporting events with the outgoing Nicaraguan military chief. After he had received several requests from Somoza for his acquiescence in an unspecified action against Sandino, Lane feared for the rebel chief's life and insisted that Somoza promise to protect him. Somoza later gave his "word of honor" not to do anything without first consulting Lane.³

Events after the Sandino murder gave Lane reason to distrust Somoza's integrity as well as his actions. On the night of the assassinations, Somoza denied any knowledge of the act to the minister and even promised President Sacasa he would conduct a thorough investigation to determine the identity of the guilty parties. Several days later, Somoza admitted to Lane that the *Guardia* had been involved,⁴ and eventually he accepted personal responsibility for the killing of Sandino.⁵ While Sacasa vigorously denounced the incident, he was powerless to take any action against Somoza. Somoza had the *cañones huecos*, the Nicaraguan expression meaning the arms necessary to hold power in that country. The whole episode was abhorrent to Lane and strengthened his belief that Somoza and the military threatened U.S. interests in Nicaragua. Lane now believed that Somoza himself was pursuing an inexorable quest for power. The minister feared that his close association with Somoza would implicate the United States in the murder of Sandino. He believed it imperative to have the State Department publicly announce a position that would reinforce Sacasa, discourage Somoza, and create the impression in Nicaragua and Central America that the United States favored democracy and the Sacasa government over Somoza and the *Guardia*.

To accomplish this, Lane again recommended to the Department that the administration expressly reaffirm in a public statement its support of the policy of non-recognition of revolutionary governments as a method of letting Somoza know that the United States would not recognize his seizing power by force.⁶ Secretary of State Hull authorized Lane to inform Somoza that the administration still adhered to the policy, but he informed the diplomat that the Department would not issue a public statement.⁷

Lane insisted to Department officials that he had repeatedly told Somoza that the United States would not support a military government, but that Somoza stubbornly refused to believe this was official U.S. policy. The minister contended that Washington had to play a

more forceful role since it was not discouraging Somoza from his political intrigues. The continuation of a policy not clearly designed to preempt a Somoza takeover would, in Lane's view, create the impression that the United States—due to its role in establishing the *Guardia*—might favor the assumption of power by its leader. Lane frankly believed that the present policy of the administration was "inviting a military dictatorship."⁸

Secretary Hull admitted the possibility of a change in the policy of non-recognition of regimes coming to power by force, one the U.S. had followed since the Central American countries had agreed to this principle at a conference in 1923. There were plans for another conference to reconsider the 1923 treaty, and Costa Rica and El Salvador were reportedly leaning against continuation of the non-recognition policy. Hull informed Lane that if the Department publicly reaffirmed its support of the treaty, it would be interpreted in Central America as an effort to influence the proceedings of the planned conference; the United States was thus maintaining a "hands off policy" regarding the subject. The secretary reminded Lane that the United States had been accused for years of imposing its views on Central America, charges that had been made particularly with regard to Nicaragua. Under the Good Neighbor Policy, the United States wanted to make a clean break with the practice of interference and even, Hull stressed, with any act that might give the "appearance of such interference." Hull was clearly using Nicaragua to more sharply define Roosevelt's new Latin American policy.⁹

U.S. officials in both Washington and Managua realized that the reaction to the murder of Sandino in the spring of 1934 diminished the reputation of the United States in Nicaragua and in the Latin American region, and complicated implementation of that policy. Anti-American sentiment, which had long existed in some quarters in Nicaragua because of U.S. interventions, emerged anew. The impression of involvement by the United States in Sandino's death or in other internal developments in Nicaragua was plainly the opposite from that which the administration wanted to project. Lane, on the scene and more subjectively involved, believed that Washington had an obligation to create a public image of opposition to Somoza. He took a more anxious view of the rumors of U.S. complicity in the Sandino killing than did officials in Washington. Officials in the Department, while concerned about suspicions in some quarters of American involvement, reacted calmly to the Sandino affair. They remained determined to hold firm on a course of absolute non-intervention in Nicaragua, and had no intention of allowing politics there to interfere with the larger policy goals of the Good Neighbor Policy.¹⁰

The actions by Somoza and the *Guardia* during the February crisis continued to plague Lane and reinforce his desire to shore up Sacasa's

government. Lane reported that he had been informed by a Nicaraguan official that the *Guardia* had circulated a rumor that the minister was "the intellectual author of the killing of Sandino." The Mexican minister told the U.S. diplomat that there was strong sentiment throughout Central America against the United States because of Lane's "alleged complicity in the killing."¹¹ One of his officers in the legation stated that his contacts in both Colombia and Panama reported strong suspicions in those countries that Lane conspired to effect Sandino's assassination and that the United States supported the *Guardia* over the elected government.¹²

The American legation in Costa Rica provided the State Department reinforcement for these charges. In April 1934, the legation cabled that a former top Sandino aide, a Colonel Ferretti, announced during an interview in San José that "the American Minister is the true Chief of the *Guardia Nacional* of Nicaragua and with [former President] Moncada the principal person responsible for the cowardly assassination of my unforgettable chief."¹³ Newspapers throughout the hemisphere published this report.

In private correspondence, Lane indicated some bitterness about these accusations and revealed a sensitivity to Nicaraguan resentment of past U.S. intervention. To his former chief in Mexico City, Ambassador Josephus Daniels, Lane complained that "I have been accused of the murder and even people who should have more sense indicate that they think I had some connection therewith." The minister believed that the Sandino affair uncovered a larger issue for U.S. policy by rekindling anti-Americanism in Nicaragua. For Lane, the deeper problem was that U.S. intervention was still resented, and he thought it would take years for this legacy to disappear. Criticism in Nicaragua of the United States or its representatives, Lane wrote, "is a popular and legitimate sport."¹⁴ The diplomat recognized that to some degree much of this was inevitable due to the past aggressive role of the United States in Nicaragua: "When unfortunate happenings beset the country," he reported to Washington, "the finger of blame is invariably pointed at the United States."¹⁵

Despite his belief in the Good Neighbor Policy, Lane remained convinced that strict adherence to the administration's policy of non-interference in internal affairs would lead to military government under Somoza. The minister believed it was necessary to reconcile an absolute "hands off" approach with what he considered the responsibility of a true "good neighbor." In his communications with the State Department, he reported that it would not be inconsistent with the Good Neighbor Policy to control the ambitions of people like Somoza, men whose actions, he argued, could have a "disastrous effect on the well being of the country."¹⁶ Although he agreed with the intent of a

policy of non-interference, Lane nonetheless sought Washington's approval to interject his services as a "good neighbor" when such action would serve to maintain the peace and prevent "bloodshed and disorder."¹⁷

Sumner Welles did send Lane the Department's blessing to continue in a mediatory role in Managua.¹⁸ In informal communication with the minister, Welles admitted that the line was thin between "meddling in Nicaraguan affairs" and operating "behind the scenes . . . with tact and discretion" to promote U.S. interests. The assistant secretary recognized that due to past U.S. involvement, the role of the American minister in Nicaragua was the most challenging of any in Central America. In reference to Lane's actions under the duress of the Sandino affair, Welles praised the diplomat for his performance in Managua under "a very trying situation."¹⁹ These comments were apparently aimed at calming the minister, who was still frustrated because of the rumors of complicity in the Sandino murder. The administration's continuing refusal to reissue a statement supporting the non-recognition policy and to take an unequivocal position in support of the constitutional government remained reasons for the diplomat's dissatisfaction, notwithstanding Welles's support.

Despite Lane's denials to his associates in Managua, he was unable to belie the impression in Nicaragua and Central America of U.S. influence in the political ascendancy of Somoza. In June 1934, Lane, reporting to the State Department about the prevalence of this impression, gave several reasons for its continued existence. Among those were the knowledge that the United States created the *Guardia*; the fact that he had associated frequently with General Somoza; U.S. silence regarding the policy of non-recognition of governments coming to power as a result of a military coup d'état; and the belief that the elimination of Sandino, against whom American forces had fought for so long, had the approval of the United States.²⁰

The administration finally authorized Lane to make a public statement denying any connection with "certain acts committed in Nicaragua in February." To rebut rumors that the minister supported Somoza's political activities, the State Department also allowed Lane to deny that he or his government favored "the political activities of certain elements" in the country.²¹ Due to the weak wording of these and other denials authorized by the Department, they were largely ineffective, however, and the rumors forwarded in Lane's June cable continued to be associated with U.S. policy in Nicaragua. All of this had a demoralizing effect on Lane; he became totally exhausted and discouraged after only seven months in country. Recognizing this, in August the State Department recalled the minister for five months of home leave. Officials in Washington trusted that this move would help allay suspicions of U.S. interference.

The Political Emergence of Somoza García

After the Sandino affair, Somoza García proved skillful at strengthening his power base within the *Guardia* and among Nicaraguan politicians. The demise of the Sandinista forces removed an important obstacle to these activities since the *Guardia Nacional* was now the only organized military force in the republic. General Somoza proved masterful at winning the support of important political leaders, such as former president and Conservative Party leader Emiliano Chamorro, and he began to place his associates in key *Guardia* positions throughout the country.²² He continued to create the impression within Nicaragua that he had U.S. support for his political maneuvers. At one point, he made statements that minister Lane was furnishing the "motive power" for his ambition.²³ This claim had begun even before Sandino's assassination when he told his officers that Lane "has assured me that the government in Washington supports and recommends the elimination of Sandino."²⁴ Before he was recalled, Lane became infuriated by Somoza's activities and insisted that he stop making the totally false assertions. Although Somoza readily promised to comply, he had no scruples about continuing the same activities. Before departing on home leave, Lane reported that the General continued making outrageous claims, "particularly under the influence of liquor."²⁵ President Sacasa, impaired by the lack of strong U.S. support and by his own inherent weaknesses in leadership, was unable to restrain Somoza. The absence of Lane after August 1934 temporarily removed another key restraint to Somoza's ambitions.

Somoza learned how to use the *Guardia* for his political purposes. He traveled with a *Guardia* entourage and made political speeches in the countryside. At one point, when Sacasa was away from the capital, he used the military to organize a "spontaneous demonstration" in honor of himself, using troops and official funds to support it.²⁶ Somoza was adept at using the press to his benefit. He subsidized an anti-Sacasa newspaper, *La Nueva Prensa*, which lauded the general as "a man of iron." He bribed and coerced the Congress to support him. To demonstrate his influence with the legislators, he had Congress pass bills embarrassing to the administration, including one providing amnesty to the *Guardia* soldiers directly responsible for Sandino's murder.²⁷

From 1934 until his ascent to the presidency in 1936, Somoza continued to gain the support of key members of the Nicaraguan oligarchy from all political factions. He had a charismatic personality and the rare ability to convince even known adversaries to endorse his personal plans—or at least to not openly oppose them.²⁸ During the depression in Nicaragua in the early 1930s, Somoza created the image, according to one observer, "of the man to whom everybody had to turn

for everything."²⁹ He thought it was to his advantage for the public to believe he had U.S. backing. He was careful, therefore, to continue to court official American favor and to claim it even when, as was usually the case, it was not present. Irrespective of U.S. policy and the treatment he received from American officials, Somoza was effusively pro-American at all times, a stance that led people to believe that Washington reciprocated, notwithstanding the reality. He recognized early that a non-interventionist policy by the United States could work in his favor and eventually allow him to take power—even through force—without Washington's interference. And Somoza astutely sensed a change in the policy of non-recognition long before the Roosevelt administration publicly announced the new position.³⁰

Lane's Last Efforts to Save Constitutional Government

After a long rest and a round of briefings in Washington, Lane returned to Managua in early 1935. From his talks at the State Department, he now had a deeper understanding of the administration's policy. He remained frustrated, however, with official guidance that restricted his efforts to fight for democracy and constitutional government—and the general situation in Managua continued to distress him. If "the American conscience had been strongly exercised in respect to the problem of Nicaragua," as one scholar of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations surmised, Arthur Bliss Lane could have well represented that conscience.³¹ He was a moral man, deeply troubled by the petty bickering of Nicaraguan politicians and the gross corruption of its government officials. Above all, the possibility of a return to traditional militarism in Nicaragua disillusioned the minister; it went against what he believed was the thrust of U.S. policy in Nicaragua since the Stimson peace of 1927. After his return, Lane made some last efforts to prevent it.

In an obvious attempt to gain support for his effort to block Somoza, Lane queried the diplomatic representatives from three of the Central American republics and Mexico to obtain their views regarding Somoza's political activities. The diplomats from Costa Rica and Guatemala reported that their instructions were to not become involved in local Nicaraguan politics, although the Guatemalan minister confirmed that his government still supported the Central American treaty of 1923 and would not recognize a Somoza government brought to power by a coup d'état. The Salvadorean and Mexican representatives, however, were outspoken in denouncing any move that might be taken by Somoza to seize power in Nicaragua.

The minister from El Salvador strongly advised Lane that as dean of the diplomatic corps in Managua, he should convoke that group in

support of the Sacasa government and that El Salvador would frankly "look with favor" upon Somoza's elimination from his position as chief of the *Guardia*.³² The Mexican chargé also opposed Somoza's political plans, although Lane was uncertain if his views represented those of Mexico City. The chargé warned Lane of the potential embarrassment for the United States if Somoza were to become the president of Nicaragua. He cautioned that it would "be most unfortunate for the prestige of the United States in Latin America if Somoza, known to have been responsible for the death of Sandino—a hero in Latin America, yet a mortal enemy of the United States—was to become president." The Mexican diplomat argued that many would charge that Washington had put Somoza in power as a reward for having killed Sandino.³³

Although now furnished with positions that supported those he had repeatedly relayed to the State Department, Lane curiously retreated. In a report forwarding the opinions of his subordinates in the legation, he admitted that "United States prestige may suffer in Latin America temporarily should Somoza become president." He had apparently come to believe, however, that the situation was beyond U.S. control and that perhaps the prudent course was for the legation to maintain a "hands off" approach in all areas of Nicaraguan political infighting. Lane did contradict this by stating that he reserved the right to offer advice and serve as a mediator, should the local situation demand it, in order to save constitutionalism if it were actually threatened by military action.³⁴ Lane appeared to be indicating that he had not given up all hope of preserving the sovereignty of Sacasa's government if Somoza moved against it.

In the latter half of 1935, disillusionment with local conditions and with the inability of Nicaraguans to change long-held political traditions had obviously taken their toll on Lane. His personal correspondence revealed this exasperation and his obsession with the historical failures in the Nicaraguan policy of the United States.

Perhaps believing it would be worthwhile to have his opinions—subjective and even emotional as they were—circulated informally within the State Department, Lane wrote to a friend in the Latin American Division. He returned to the theme of militarism, lamenting the creation by his predecessors of "the major headache" of a *Guardia Nacional*, a force that he felt was establishing a military caste in the country (a charge that he had made earlier to Sumner Welles). Lane viewed Nicaragua's expenditure of half of its revenue on the *Guardia* as totally incongruous when there was no apparent military threat from outside the country. By establishing the *Guardia*, the United States had bequeathed to Nicaragua a force to "blast constitutional procedure off the map." Lane argued that its creation was "one

of the sorriest examples on our part of our inability to understand that we should not meddle in other people's affairs." He directed his complaints of the Department's policy management at Welles, obliquely criticizing "the Oracle," as he referred to the powerful and often-described brilliant assistant secretary, for restricting his freedom of action in implementing administration policy. Lane distrusted Welles's commitment to democracy in the region and to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means. He knew that, when Welles was a special presidential envoy to Cuba in 1933, he succumbed to the crisis environment of Havana and called for the landing of Marines, a request immediately denied by Roosevelt and Hull because of its obvious contradiction of the Good Neighbor Policy.³⁵

Although Lane chafed at instructions that he believed limited his role as a mediator in Managua, during the last months of his tour he continued the practice of functioning in that precise capacity. When the foreign minister reported that Somoza was still claiming U.S support for his candidacy, Lane reproached the General once again, obtaining from Somoza yet another promise to terminate these outrageous boasts. President Sacasa, concerned that Somoza was violating soldiers' rights in the *Guardia*, requested that Lane persuade Somoza to cancel a court martial order to execute a rebellious lieutenant, a request that Lane successfully met. At one point, Lane reported that unless he were instructed to the contrary, he would intervene personally to prevent Somoza from destroying the peace in Nicaragua. In early 1936, the minister mediated another crisis between Sacasa and Somoza resulting from a labor strike in the capital. In all cases, while Somoza was acquiescent in conversations with Lane, he later acted entirely in his own interests, therefore giving Lane more reason to distrust him.³⁶

The American minister's actions were plainly not in strict accord with a non-interference policy, but they were largely within State Department guidelines since he did not openly support either faction in the political struggle. Lane enjoyed a good reputation within the Department, and this high standing allowed him some freedom of action. He remained troubled, however, regarding the wisdom of a sterile policy of non-interference and the possible abandonment of the 1923 Central American Treaty, if this policy permitted the destruction of years of U.S. efforts to build civil government in Nicaragua.³⁷ Officials in Washington, aware of these doubts and impressed by Lane's ability to express them, did not press the issue of the envoy's involvement in local affairs until the last part of his tour in Managua. At this time, reacting to both U.S. and Nicaraguan officials, the State Department moved to clarify the Good Neighbor Policy as it applied to Central America and Nicaragua. During this period, Lane came to realize that his own efforts had failed, and that despite Somoza's many promises to the contrary, there was

every indication that the Nicaraguan general would eventually, through raw force, achieve political power.³⁸

President Sacasa, unable to obtain assistance from a sympathetic but hamstrung U.S. minister, sent officials to Washington in October 1935 to make a direct appeal to the State Department for support in the growing crisis with Somoza. Federico Sacasa, the president's brother and a supreme court justice, and Dr. Henri Debayle, the Nicaraguan chargé in Washington, called on Willard L. Beaulac in the Latin American Division. Sacasa only asked for advice from Beaulac regarding Nicaragua's problems. He did argue that the Marines' withdrawal had been premature in view of subsequent actions of Somoza and the *Guardia* and that the United States had responsibility for these actions because it had created the force. Sacasa queried Beaulac regarding the administration's position on the 1923 treaty in the event General Somoza carried out a coup d'état.³⁹

Beaulac's responses to these and to subsequent questions clarified the administration's view of the Good Neighbor Policy for Nicaragua. Under the policy of non-intervention, he told the Nicaraguans, he was not even allowed to provide "advice" that might later be interpreted as intervention. He denied any residual U.S. responsibility for the *Guardia*, reminding the visitors that the withdrawal had been announced two years in advance. He also reminded them of the State Department's disclaimer released when the Marines departed in January 1933.⁴⁰ Beaulac refused comment on the 1923 treaty, claiming that the administration was in no position to make a commitment regarding its policy in a purely hypothetical situation.⁴¹

Later in the month, the two Nicaraguan envoys called on Welles, relaying President Sacasa's desire to have "the friendly moral assistance" of the United States in his struggle to preserve legitimate government. Welles warmly received the Nicaraguans, assuring them that the U.S. government had the friendliest intentions toward their government and the most "earnest hopes" that Nicaragua would be able to work out its political problems in a proper manner. The assistant secretary was emphatic, however, that the era of U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan affairs had definitely ended. The United States had withdrawn its military forces from Nicaragua in January 1933, and its relations with that country were exactly the same as those with any other sovereign and independent nation. To elaborate on this key point, Welles told his visitors that any interference by the United States in the domestic internal problems of Nicaragua was "out of the question and utterly impossible."⁴²

The Clarification of Policy, 1936

Officials of the Roosevelt administration continued to define policy for Nicaragua and the Central America region in the first half of 1936. The U.S. minister in El Salvador, Frank P. Corrigan, precipitated the most important clarification. In January, he cabled the Department with the observation that non-intervention was a negative doctrine favoring dictators in Latin America who understood that the United States would not oppose their continuation in power. Corrigan, like Bliss Lane in his vehement opposition to dictatorships, argued that failure of the United States to be more constructive "may become a sin of omission with consequences fully as grievous as the former sins of commission." He believed that a totally negative policy was unlikely to be accepted by most Central Americans and that it would surely be misinterpreted by the liberal elements of the region. He thought they would welcome a policy of cooperation, but that they would also want a constructive policy that supported progress and prevented bloodshed and autocratic regimes. The minister requested that the Department issue new instructions to its officers in the field stressing the positive side of the Good Neighbor Policy.⁴³

The cable produced extensive policy discussion within the State Department among Secretary Hull, Assistant Secretary Welles, and officials in the Latin American Division. The debate left policy unchanged: The Department reaffirmed non-interference as a key provision of the Good Neighbor Policy for Central America and made a decision on the 1923 treaty. Welles directed his subordinates to prepare a policy statement for all legations in Central America reaffirming these points and calling for officials to abstain from offering advice on any domestic question. If legation officials were requested to give such advice by host country officials, they were to refuse to take any action except upon precise instructions from the Department. The assistant secretary wanted the instructions worded in a manner that would not create the impression that the administration was assuming "a sterile policy of aloofness." Welles was determined to project an image, in his words, of "constructive but effective friendship."⁴⁴

The formal instructions signed by Hull in April followed Welles's guidance. The secretary directed the American ministers in Central America to

conduct themselves in their relations with the Governments to which they are accredited, and with the people of the countries, in exactly the same manner they would if they were accredited to one of the large republics of South America or with any non-American power; that is to say, they should abstain from offering advice on any domestic question, and if requested to give such advice they should decline to do so.⁴⁵

The secretary also informed the legations that the United States would no longer be guided by the 1923 treaty in extending or denying recognition to governments of Central America.⁴⁶ This decision was one that Arthur Bliss Lane—who had departed Nicaragua in March—suspected (and feared) two years earlier when he failed to get the Department to reaffirm support for the treaty. Officials in the Latin American Division used several factors to justify this decision. In 1934, the Central American nations, followed by the United States, recognized the *de facto* military rule of Hernández Martínez in El Salvador. Two of the republics—Costa Rica and El Salvador—later repudiated the treaty in the conference of Central American nations in 1934. Honduras and Guatemala, while continuing support for the treaty officially, violated it in practice by allowing their presidents to remain in power through unconstitutional means. There was a strong belief also that withholding recognition to certain governments would be regarded within those countries as a form of intervention, thereby counteracting the intent of policy.⁴⁷ Although the decision to change recognition policy had now been made, the Department decided to delay public announcement until events required its application.

Sumner Welles suspected that the first test would likely come in Nicaragua, where a new minister, Boaz Long, had replaced Lane in March 1936. Long, a businessman and former diplomat who had been out of the Foreign Service for fifteen years, brought a more conservative view to the Managua post, one less likely to lead him to interfere in support of a weak constitutional government threatened by the military. Notwithstanding this assumption, Welles anticipated that officials of the Sacasa government would attempt to gain Long's support in local political issues.⁴⁸ The assistant secretary therefore cautioned his subordinates to prohibit Long from becoming involved in the Nicaraguan imbroglio.

Despite the forewarning by Welles, circumstances soon drew Long into Managua politics. Secretary Hull, although appreciative of Long's "helpful and informative" first reports, also recognized a continuation of the situation existing under Bliss Lane.⁴⁹ To ensure that the new minister acted in compliance with policy, the secretary sent detailed instructions that included a review of U.S. relations with Nicaragua. Years of deep U.S. involvement, he reminded Long, had resulted in continual interference in and often domination of Nicaragua's internal affairs, a situation that the 1933 troop withdrawal and the administration's new policy terminated. Hull repeated his directive that relations with Nicaragua were now on the same basis as with all nations and that Long must refrain from interference in local affairs even when "such interference is requested or suggested by Nicaraguans."⁵⁰

In May, as the Nicaraguan crisis between Sacasa and Somoza intensified, Secretary Hull had to personally apply these instructions. The Nicaraguan chargé, Henri Debayle, called on the secretary, informing him of an imminent coup by General Somoza against the government. Debayle relayed a letter from Sacasa requesting from Hull a statement on political affairs in Nicaragua that might help to preclude the suspected coup. Hull insisted that he could not offer even "a single word" for or against the situation, nor would he offer any personal advice when Debayle asked for his private opinion. Hull refused to comment when Debayle asked him about current Washington policy regarding recognition of governments taking power through questionable means,⁵¹ since the new policy that Hull announced confidentially to all Central American ministers in April had not been made public.

Despite this lack of encouragement from Hull, the Nicaraguan government continued to appeal directly to the State Department throughout May, repeating its hope for U.S. assistance. Welles wrote to Long in Managua reminding him that Nicaragua was a test of the new policy; officials in the Department would continue to decline to offer even "advice or comment" and especially to take any kind of action to influence Nicaraguan internal affairs.⁵² In late May, the administration underscored this by refusing a request from President Sacasa to send a naval vessel to the east coast as a show of support for his government.⁵³

Lane's Departure Frees Somoza

The departure of Bliss Lane removed an important obstacle to Somoza's quest for power. The clear signals of non-intervention sent by Washington during the same period—which Somoza must have been aware of—further encouraged the General to take action against Sacasa. From March through May 1936, Somoza replaced most of the remaining *Guardia* commanders from the Sacasa faction of the Liberal Party with his own supporters.⁵⁴ He organized and sent to the streets of Managua a force of young fascists called *camisasazules*, or blue shirts, which demonstrated throughout the capital in support of Somoza's candidacy. At one point, this undisciplined group of youths—reportedly supported by the *Guardia*—destroyed a newspaper plant that had opposed Somoza.⁵⁵

When Somoza attempted to remove the commander of the key Acosasco garrison in León, a cousin of the president, the indecisive Sacasa at last moved against him. He ordered the León commander to resist to protect "the national honor and legality" of his government.⁵⁶ The decision caused Somoza to mass troops around the León fort and the presidential palace in Managua, actions that placed both locations

under siege. These were the first actions precipitating Sacasa's fall from power.⁵⁷

In late May, Sacasa sent a desperate appeal to Secretary of State Hull—with copies to Mexico and the Central American nations—listing Somoza's many usurpations and charging him with sedition against the government. He renewed the charge of U.S. responsibility for the American-created *Guardia* and called for joint action by the United States and the other republics. Sacasa warned that without outside aid "anarchy will reign in the country and latent communism . . . will find a favorable field in which to develop with all facility, imperilling not only this Nation but others of Central America."⁵⁸ Although there was some support from third countries to come to Sacasa's rescue, they were largely reluctant to act without U.S. participation.⁵⁹

In reaction to this plea, Secretary Hull held firm with the Department's position, although he did allude to earlier policy when he informed Long that the administration would hold the Nicaraguan government responsible for the "adequate protection to the life and property of United States citizens." The secretary would not allow Long to add his name to an appeal to Somoza by the diplomatic corps in Managua to refrain from using force against the government. Hull indicated the improbability of U.S. action by offering good offices only if requested by all political factions.⁶⁰

The Fall of Juan Bautista Sacasa

This state of affairs dictated a swift end to the Sacasa government. On June 2 the Sacasa loyalists abandoned the Acosasco fort and Somoza's forces occupied it. The General then announced that the *Guardia Nacional* had complete control of the country.⁶¹ His forces would respect law and order and would permit Sacasa to continue in office until the end of his term. Somoza made it clear that the arrangement included assurances of his elevation to the presidency by January 1, 1937.⁶² The proud Sacasa wanted no part of this—he was determined not to be a Somoza surrogate. He and his vice president thus resigned on June 6 and departed Nicaragua for exile.⁶³ The Nicaraguan congress, under directions from Somoza, named Dr. Carlos Brenes Jarquín as interim president for the remainder of 1936, the scheduled end of Sacasa's term.⁶⁴

The Roosevelt administration reacted in a matter-of-fact manner to these events. Minister Long reported that Brenes's accession was legal "unless we wish to go into the causes which impelled the president and vice president to resign."⁶⁵ The minister requested instructions regarding how he should reply to the new government's diplomatic notes. In

response, Secretary Hull authorized normal diplomatic relations since the new government seemed to be in control of the country and since the government machinery was functioning in a normal manner.⁶⁶ The next day, at a press conference, a reporter commented to Hull that Brenes appeared to be "technically the legal successor to Sacasa." He asked the secretary if special recognition was necessary or if the United States would carry on as before Somoza's coup. Hull replied that the administration would continue relations as before the coup. Although Hull saw no reason for a formal act of recognition, his statements left little doubt that the administration had returned to a policy of de facto recognition.⁶⁷

The U.S. legation continued to conduct normal relations with the Nicaraguan government after Somoza's coup. Two days after Sacasa resigned, Long had an extensive conversation with the *Guardia* chief. Somoza assured the minister of his friendly feeling toward the United States, requested Washington's "moral backing," and promised to form an honest government. He then asked Long if the United States would advise him as to which course of action he should follow, among two under consideration, to reach the presidency. The first was to have Congress call a constitutional convention, which would, in turn appoint Somoza president. The second method would be by direct election.⁶⁸

The minister reminded Somoza of the policy of non-interference, informing him that he could not possibly give advice on a purely internal question. Long nevertheless forwarded the inquiry to the State Department, noting several reasons why Somoza favored the first alternative, a constitutional convention. The convention would remove the articles in the constitution prohibiting Somoza from being president. It would not require a direct vote of the people and would be more economical and possibly more peaceful. Long added that Somoza thought this procedure would also avoid disturbing the public at that time over "electoral matters."⁶⁹ The Department returned instructions with the now standard refrain that the United States could not give advice to Somoza on the alternatives he presented to the minister. The tone of the message was clearly neutral. Several days later Long cabled Somoza's decision: the General had decided to reach power by an election to be held in December.⁷⁰

These events in Nicaragua caused little discussion in the State Department. After years of U.S. effort to establish constitutionalism and democracy in Nicaragua, there was no talk of defeat when they vanished. Prior to 1933, intervention inflated U.S.-Nicaraguan relations in a manner disproportionate to their real importance to Washington. After Somoza's coup it was apparent that priorities had changed and that there would be a normalization of relations.

Nicaragua in 1936 was diminishing as a point of interest for the United States. The attention of the Roosevelt administration was

moving toward larger concerns in the hemisphere aimed at drawing the Latin American nations closer to the United States. In the Inter-American conference at Montevideo in 1933, Secretary Hull signed a resolution that "no state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another," an act unanimously applauded by the Latin Americans.⁷¹ Three years later, President Roosevelt traveled to Argentina to open the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace. An enormously warm reception greeted the president as he declared U.S. solidarity with Latin America for "our mutual safety and our mutual good" in the event of a threat from outside aggression against the Americas.⁷² Welles and Hull gave high priority to economic cooperation with Latin America, with Hull pushing for reciprocal trade agreements as a means to eliminate "economic resentment" in the region.⁷³

These efforts were part of a massive and eventually successful public relations campaign by the administration to strengthen inter-American relations, leaving Nicaragua no more than a minor target in a larger scenario.⁷⁴ Washington did sign a reciprocal trade agreement with Managua, but trade between the two countries remained insignificant, even in the context of Central America.⁷⁵ The estimated value of U.S. private investment in Nicaragua in 1936 was \$5 million dollars, approximately four percent of American investment in Central America and by far the smallest amount invested in any one country.⁷⁶ The number of Americans in Managua in 1936 confirmed a low U.S. profile in the country. The estimated number of foreigners in the capital that year was 400: of these, 250 were German and only 50 were American.⁷⁷

The subdued reaction by Washington to the events in Nicaragua of June 1936 represented the administration's high degree of commitment to avoid involvement in the internal affairs of the Central American republics. It did not mean that the administration condoned Somoza's coup. The reaction merely indicated that Washington now placed Nicaragua in a perspective more appropriate to its unquestionably minor importance to the United States. The change was long needed but difficult to realize, especially by some officials in the State Department working closely with the problems in Nicaragua.

In the early 1930s, Arthur Bliss Lane was a bright and ambitious diplomat—truly a rising star in the Foreign Service—and his talents would soon earn him much more prestigious assignments for the Roosevelt administration. Confident of his value to the State Department and the prestige of his first ministerial position, he never accepted the possibility that his posting in Managua was anything but important. After his nomination, he wrote Roosevelt that the past Latin American policy of the United States had been "judged by our attitude towards Nicaragua." He believed that if the United States were to be a "good

neighbor," the policy could, in few places, be more successfully practiced than in Nicaragua.⁷⁸ He maintained this belief despite advice such as that of one official in the Latin American Division that conditions in Nicaragua were simply "not worth worrying about."⁷⁹

Secretary Hull gave some indication of the administration's priorities at a press conference during the week of the Somoza coup. When queried about rumors that some Latin American countries had expressed concern to the Department that Washington would intervene in Nicaragua, Hull answered "I haven't looked into the report you raise—I have been busy on these more urgent things."⁸⁰

The more urgent questions occupying the secretary's attention on that day included the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and Japanese maneuvers in North China, events representative of ones that increasingly in the 1930s drew Washington's focus away from small countries like Nicaragua. Along with other foreign events of that period, they would become, more than the initial altruistic reasons given by the administration, the central motivation behind the Good Neighbor Policy. Although there was no immediate threat to the security of the United States or the Western Hemisphere in 1936, there was a growing realization in Washington that, in the future, the need for close allies in Latin America would be paramount. As this need increased, the Wilsonian concern among policymakers regarding the nature of governments in Latin America diminished.

By the mid-1930s, autocratic governments in Latin America by necessity became less objectionable to the U.S. government in an era of economic depression, a fact not overlooked by Somoza. He knew that, in Central America, Washington had already recognized strongman governments in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. As he moved after 1936 to consolidate power internally, Somoza promoted in his own way and for his own purposes a closeness with the Roosevelt administration. The U.S. presence in Nicaragua in 1936 was minimal and the record of Washington's relations with Managua for this period—especially the record of Arthur Bliss Lane—does not support the theory that Washington officials favored Somoza's rise to power. There is evidence that, after the coup, the administration routinely accepted Somoza's friendship, as it did the friendship of strongmen of other similar governments in the region. In the political atmosphere of the 1930s, Hull, Welles, and others directing Latin American policy were beginning to sense the advantages that would accrue to the United States from the stability that his type of government could bring to Nicaragua. Somoza, however, was incidental to their long-range plans. Their larger intent was to re-establish relations on a more realistic basis, one conclusively changed from the distorted relationship that had been the legacy of the interventionist years.

Notes

1. *FRUS: 1934*, 5:526-535; Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 24-37.
2. *Ibid.*, 24-39.
3. Lane to Hull, 23 February 1934 (midnight), NA 817.00/7946; *FRUS: 1935*, 4:866. The State Department placed no restrictions on Lane's contact with Somoza, even after the Sandino murder. This contrasted with the Mexican government's instructions forbidding its minister in Managua separate contact with Somoza. Lane to Hull, 1 March 1934, NA 817.1051/819.
4. Lane to Hull, 23 February 1934, NA 817.00/7946. Somoza had earlier indicated his attitude when he told a Marine officer that the United States was wasting its time chasing Sandino in a counterinsurgency war. If it were up to him, Somoza boasted, "I would declare an armistice, I would invite Sandino in, and we'd have some drinks, a good dinner, and when he went out one of my men would shoot him." Graves Erskine, Oral History, 95, U.S. Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.
5. Lane to Hull, 19 June 1934, NA 817.00/8066. For accusations of Somoza's direct responsibility for the Sandino murder, also see Barrett to Whelan, 28 April 1952, Managua Post Reports, 1950-54, NND 822 406, National Archives.
6. Lane to Hull, 22 February 1934 (8:00 p.m.), NA 817.00/7941.
7. Hull to Lane, 23 February 1934 (11:00 a.m.), NA 817.00/7941.
8. Transcript of telephone conversation, Wilson to Lane, 24 February 1934, Series I, Box 8, Lane Papers.
9. Hull to Lane, 26 February 1934, NA 817.00/7953. The Stimson Doctrine, unilaterally announced by Washington in January 1932 as a result of Japanese aggression in Manchuria, had also declared that the U.S. would not recognize governments established by force. See Howard Jones, *The Course of American Diplomacy* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988), 2nd edition, 2:382-385.
10. *FRUS: 1934*, 5:529-542; Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 140-142.
11. Lane to Hull, 27 February 1934 (6:00 p.m.), Sections I and II, Series II, Box 60, and Blocker to Lane, 6 March 1934, Series I, Box 8, Lane Papers.
12. Lane to Hull, 14 June 1934, NA 817.00/8073.
13. The minister in Costa Rica to Hull, 12 April 1934, NA 817.00/8020.
14. Lane to Daniels, 4 March 1934, Box 661, Daniels Papers.
15. Lane to Hull, 23 July 1934, NA 611.1731/57.
16. Lane to Hull, 26 March 1934, NA 817.1051/834.
17. Lane to Hull, 4 May 1934, NA 817.00/8037.
18. Hull to Lane, 21 May 1934, NA 817.00/8037.
19. Welles to Lane, 22 May 1934, Series I, Box 9, Lane Papers.
20. Lane to Hull, 14 June 1934, NA 817.00/8073.
21. *FRUS: 1934*, 5:556-558.
22. *FRUS: 1934*, 5:537; Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators Never Die: A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 87, 88.

23. Lane to Hull, 22 June 1934, NA 817.00/8070 and 23 June 1934, NA 817.00/8076.

24. Selser, *Sandino*, 174. An account of Somoza's claim of Lane's approval, based on an interview by the author with a participant in the Sandino murder, is in Augusto Enrique Rodríguez Loeche, "Cómo fue asesinado el General Augusto César Sandino," *Bohemia* (Havana, Cuba), 13 February 1949, 20.

25. Lane to Hull, 23 June 1934, NA 817.00/8076. Earlier, Lane suspected Somoza of lying to him. Immediately after Sandino's murder, when Somoza assured the minister that he would be loyal to the government, Lane, apparently in understatement, admitted "less confidence in his assurances than formerly." Lane to Hull, 22 February 1934 (4:00 p.m.), NA 817.00/7940.

26. Dawson to Hull, 17 November 1934, NA 817.1051/890 and 20 November 1934, NA 817.00/8168.

27. Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 169.

28. Interviews by the author with former officials in the Somoza García government in Miami, Florida, and Managua and León, Nicaragua, in April and May 1986; also, interviews with a range of Nicaraguan civilians during the period 1978-86. Invariably, these individuals claimed that Somoza's enemies would try to avoid being put in a position where he could cajole them, knowing his personality often won over his most staunch opponents.

29. Mariano Fiallos Oyanguren, "The Nicaraguan Political System: The Flow of Demands and the Reactions of the Regime" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1968), 36.

30. For Somoza's early understanding and use of the policy of non-intervention, see Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 57-82, and Whitney T. Perkins, *Constraint of Empire* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 188-189.

31. Rev. William O. Russell, "Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Nicaragua, 1920-1933," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1953), vi.

32. Lane to Hull, 14 May 1935, NA 817.00/8225.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Irwin F. Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista*, 47-48; Lane to Beaulac, 27 July 1935, Series II, Box 61, Lane Papers; Robert H. Ferrell, editor, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), vol. 12: *Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 and vol. 2 by Julius W. Pratt, 1:146-147.

36. *FRUS*: 1935, 4:851-853, 864-866, 872-873; *FRUS*: 1936, 5:816-817.

37. *FRUS*: 1935, 4:842-846, 848-849, 862-866, 874; Perkins, *Constraint of Empire*, 188-189; Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 143. The strong reputation of Lane among his superiors and fellow officers within the State Department in 1934 is evident from correspondence in the Lane Papers. Sumner Welles was particularly laudatory of Lane's performance, despite an apparent lack of personal closeness between the two and some resentment of Welles by his subordinates. Welles to Lane, 23 January 1934, 22 May 1934, and 9 January 1936, Series II, Boxes 8, 9, and 12, Lane Papers.

38. Lane to Hull, 16 July 1935, NA 817.00/8247; Lane to Welles, 15 August 1935, Series II, Box 62, Lane Papers.

39. Memorandum by Assistant Chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, 1 October 1935, NA 817.00/8298.
40. *FRUS: 1933*, 5:848-849; Williard L. Beaulac, *The Fractured Continent*, 68.
41. Memorandum by Assistant Chief of Division of Latin American Affairs, 1 October 1935, NA 817.00/8310.
42. Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, 16 October 1935, NA 817.00/8310; Juan Bautista Sacasa, *Cómo y por qué caí del poder* (San Salvador, El Salvador: [n.p.], 1936), 25.
43. U.S. minister in El Salvador to Hull, 26 January 1936, NA 815.00 Revolutions/465.
44. Memorandum by the assistant secretary of state to the chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, 26 March 1936, NA 710.11/2026.
45. Hull to the ministers in all of the Central American legations, 30 April 1936, NA 710.11/2026.
46. *Ibid.*; Edward O. Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1950), 23-31; Letter from Hull to Roosevelt, 23 January 1934, NA 816.01/412.
47. *Ibid.*; *FRUS: 1936*, 5:132-133, 136-148.
48. Memorandum by the assistant secretary of state, 26 March 1936, NA 710.11/2026.
49. Hull to the minister in Nicaragua, 28 March 1936, NA 817.00/8386.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Memorandum by the secretary of state, 5 May 1936, Folder 240, "Nicaragua 1933-34," Reel 31, Cordell Hull Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
52. The assistant secretary of state to the minister in Nicaragua, 19 May 1936, NA 817.00/8417a.
53. The minister in Nicaragua to Hull, 28 May 1936; Hull to the minister in Nicaragua, 29 May 1936, NA 817.00/8427.
54. Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 176-179.
55. Lane to Hull, 8 May 1936, NA 817.00/8408 and 28 May 1936, NA 817.00/8425; *New York Times*, 1 June 1937, 6; John J. Tierney, Jr., *Somozas and Sandinistas: The United States and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Council for Inter-American Security and Council for Inter-American Security Educational Institute, 1982), 43. The role of the *camisas azules* in Somoza's rise to power is part of an analysis of Nicaraguan politics in the twentieth century by Nicaraguan radio and print journalist Ignacio Briones-Torres. Author's interview with Briones-Torres in Managua, 11 May 1986.
56. Sacasa, *Comó y por qué caí del poder*, 86.
57. *New York Times*, 1 June 1936, 1, 6.
58. Sacasa to Hull, 29 May 1936, NA 817.00/8500.
59. Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, 31 May 1936, NA 817.00/8504.
60. Memorandum of Conversation, 1 June 1936, Reel 31, Hull Papers; *New York Times*, 2 June 1936, 11.
61. *New York Times*, 3 June 1936, 11.

62. Long to Hull, 2 June 1936, NA 817.00/8452 and 4 June 1936, NA 817.00/8459; record of conversation between Long and Duggan, 3 June 1936, RG 84, Box 51, Folder "Nicaragua," Files of the Office of the Division of Latin American Affairs, NA.
63. *New York Times*, 7 June 1936, 30; Sacasa, *Comó y por qué caí del poder*, 93; Long to Hull, 8 June 1936, NA 817.00/8473.
64. Long to Hull, 9 June 1936, NA 817.00/8485.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Hull to Long, 11 June 1936, NA 817.01/54a.
67. Hull Press Conference, 12 June 1936, Hull Papers, Reel 88.
68. *FRUS: 1936*, 5:838-839.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *FRUS: 1936*, 5:840, 842.
71. *Report of the Delegation of the United States of America to the Seventh International Conference of American States*, Montevideo, Uruguay, December 3-26, 1933 (Washington: Pan American Union, 1934), 109; *New York Times*, 24 December 1933, 8; The Montevideo Conference, Reel 47, Hull Papers.
72. *New York Times*, 2 December 1936, 1; *Report of Delegation of the United States to the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937).
73. Hull, *Memoirs*, 1:308.
74. For an indication of the wide approval in Latin America of the administration's results with The Good Neighbor Policy at this stage, see Donald Marquand Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1959), 27-33.
75. The reciprocal trade agreement with Nicaragua, signed 11 March 1936, had little effect on bilateral trade since most of Nicaragua's products going to the United States were already on the free list. Nicaragua was fourth in Central America, out of five countries, in the administration's priority order for obtaining trade agreements. Reciprocal Trade Agreement, 11 March 1936, OF 432, "Nicaragua, 1933-1940," Roosevelt Papers; Lane to Hull, 23 July 1934, NA 611.1731/57 and *FRUS: 1936*, 5:810. The text of the agreement is in "Reciprocal Trade Agreement Between the United States of America and Nicaragua," *Executive Agreement Series No. 95* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936).
76. Donald Castillo Rivas, "Acumulación de Capital y Empresas Transnacionales en Centroamérica" (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1980), as cited in Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 26.
77. *New York Times*, 1 June 1936, 1.
78. Lane to Roosevelt, 14 August 1933, OF 617, "Arthur Bliss Lane, 1933-1944," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.
79. Petrov, *A Study in Diplomacy*, 66. While Lane appeared to have been disappointed in his own accomplishments in Nicaragua, there is no indication that his record suffered from his time there. His subsequent key ministerial assignments for the Roosevelt administration demonstrated continued confidence in his professionalism. Series I, Box 1, Lane Papers; OF 617, "Arthur Bliss Lane, 1933-1944," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

80. Hull Press Conference, 4 June 1936, Reel 88, Hull Papers. The report referred to notes sent to the administration by Chile and Peru on June 2 and 4, respectively, expressing opposition to U.S. intervention. See *FRUS: 1936*, 5:832, 835.

Somoza and Roosevelt, Part I

Prelude to Power: Politics and Relations from the Coup to the Inauguration

During the period immediately following Somoza's June coup, U.S. diplomatic relations with Nicaragua enjoyed more stability than at any time since the withdrawal of the Marines. Somoza continued as head of the *Guardia Nacional* from his de facto assumption of power in June until November, one month before the election, and officials from the American legation dealt with him on a routine basis. Due primarily to Somoza's openness and friendliness to Americans and his ability to speak colloquial English, he was able to develop a good working relationship with officials in the Roosevelt administration. From the outset the Nicaraguan leader sought to claim that this closeness extended personally to Roosevelt, and he built upon this notion to strengthen his regime. Although there were strong indications of an authoritarian regime from the beginning, Washington officials refrained from public criticism of Somoza's actions during this time. Communications from

the U.S. minister, Boaz Long, set the tone for the official attitude toward Somoza. Two weeks after the coup, Long relayed the impression to Washington that ex-President Sacasa was weak because he did not use his commanding position in the presidential palace on "La Loma," the hill dominating the center of Managua, to defeat Somoza's forces located on lower ground in the capital. In his analysis Long held that Sacasa's lack of aggressiveness was inexcusable in the view of many Nicaraguans who believed that his display of weakness damaged the prestige of the presidency and caused his downfall.¹ The minister omitted any favorable comment regarding Sacasa's refusal to use force or his effort—until the last day—to preserve constitutional government by using only the moral influence of his office. This contrasted sharply with the thrust of Lane's efforts and the insistence by U.S. officials in Washington and Managua over the previous three years that the overriding concern of the United States was that Managua politics not degenerate into violence.

While maintaining good relations with Washington, Somoza combined campaigning for the presidency with efforts toward consolidating his power during the last half of 1936. He wanted his candidacy and election to appear legal and democratic, and he worked toward those ends. Somoza postponed the elections from November to December, allowing six months from Sacasa's resignation to his election; this met provisions in the Nicaraguan constitution requiring that period to elapse between the occupancy of the presidency by relatives. He resigned from the *Guardia* in November, a month before the elections, thereby circumventing another constitutional provision prohibiting the candidacy of uniformed persons. Somoza arranged for Liberal Party leaders to nominate him for president and Francisco Navarro for vice president.²

In his conversations with U.S. officials, Somoza was confident to the point of arrogance about his actions in gaining power and plans to consolidate it. The legation reported that Somoza, in "a private conversation," expressed the belief that the opposing candidate for president, Leonardo Arguello, in exile since the coup in June, had no intention of returning to Nicaragua for the elections. Somoza was "practically certain" that the vice presidential candidate, Rodolfo Espinosa, would not return, and while outside the country the opposition would have "no chance of polling more than a very small number of votes." Although he charged Espinosa with corruption during his term as vice president, he admitted that he paid him a bribe to resign during the June coup. While contending that the election process would be fair, Somoza nonetheless boasted that "if Espinosa returns to Managua—which I do not think he will—he will be immediately placed in jail."³

In a visit to the legation in November, Somoza plainly contradicted statements he had made to Arthur Bliss Lane two years earlier to the effect that he had done his best to prevent Sandino's assassination. He told the U.S. naval attaché that the question in 1934 was whether Sandino or the *Guardia Nacional* would be the only military force in Nicaragua. Sandino "had to be put out of the way," and his killing was a patriotic duty of those involved. The chargé reported that even though Somoza conveyed the impression that he did not personally take part in the killing, he made it clear that he had been responsible for the act.⁴

Somoza's June request to the U.S. minister for advice regarding the method he should use to reach office reflected the ingratiating manner he used in communicating with the U.S. government. Although he knew that Washington would refuse to give advice because of the policy of non-interference in Nicaraguan affairs, he seemed to be aware that American diplomats would be flattered by his attention.

This relationship applied as well to the formation of the regime's foreign policy. An issue that arose in November, before Somoza García's formal assumption of power in January 1937, revealed both the method he would use to deal with the U.S. government and one of the tenets of the foreign policy he would adopt—a strong anti-communist position. The foreign minister of the caretaker Brenes Jarquín government informed the legation that the new regime desired to form a Central American alliance to oppose communism in the region. One mission of this alliance would be to make a formal protest to Mexico against that country's "communistic propaganda" in the Central American republics. Referring to Mexico, the minister queried the legation about the position of the U.S. government in the event "some large country on this continent should attack Nicaragua" as a result of its taking a strong anti-communist stance.⁵

Officials in the Roosevelt administration had no desire to get involved. Secretary of State Hull, who was outside the United States for a conference at the time, cabled the Department that the official reply should stress that although Washington had no advice, the Nicaraguan government should fully realize the danger of the action being considered.⁶ The official communiqué stated that the United States hoped that such a hypothetical situation would never arise, and it recommended that disputes of this nature be settled through peaceful negotiation between the parties involved. "The Government of the United States," it continued, "is happily at peace with and has the most friendly relations with every one of the other American republics, and will direct its efforts to continuing and strengthening those friendly relations with all."⁷

Although the absurdity of the idea makes it unlikely that Somoza was serious about it in the first place, the incident did symbolize the

methods he used in dealing with the U.S. government. His confiding in U.S. officials and asking policy guidance from Washington rarely caused the United States to offer concrete advice. Such actions often prompted the U.S. government to reveal policy options, however, and American diplomats in Nicaragua probably felt closer to the General than they would have had he not made the overtures.

An incident in August 1936 revealed another element that would be a part of U.S. relations with Somoza during the two decades of his regime: The generally favorable attitude of many U.S. military officers toward Somoza. A private citizen in Los Angeles, California, Ward Phillips, sent President Roosevelt a copy of a letter that he claimed a U.S. rear admiral had sent to Somoza. In the letter, Admiral G. J. Mayers extravagantly thanked Somoza for his attentions to himself and his officers during a courtesy visit to Nicaragua. Mayers sent Somoza his congratulations "for the brilliant future" that would soon be his. Although he had seen presidential candidates received by their electorates in other countries, he "had never seen anything like the sincere and heartfelt applause as that which the people expressed in your favor." Mayers, assuming Somoza's victory at least four months before the election, closed by sending his best wishes for a successful presidential term.⁸

When the State Department confirmed the authenticity of the admiral's letter, it moved quickly to disassociate Mayers's comments from official policy. Laurence Duggan, chief of the Latin American Division, informed Phillips that Mayers was "in no sense" authorized to speak for the U.S. government, and that in the Department's view the admiral's letter was "merely a personal expression of appreciation."⁹ Secretary Hull feared the letter would be interpreted in Nicaragua as U.S. support for Somoza and moved quickly to dispel the idea. He cabled Managua instructing the U.S. minister to remind Nicaraguan officials of the administration's commitment to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of all countries. Hull insisted that the administration had been scrupulous in adhering to the policy in the case of Nicaragua, and that the U.S. government would continue to avoid influencing in any way the political events in Nicaragua. The contents of Admiral Mayers's letter, Hull cautioned, "insofar as they appear to constitute an endorsement of a presidential candidate in Nicaragua, are disavowed."¹⁰

The Mayers letter prompted the secretary to point out the relationship of U.S. policy in Nicaragua to the administration's overall policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. In a letter to the secretary of the Navy reprimanding Admiral Mayers for his praise of Somoza, Hull noted that the Mayers letter went beyond a friendly expression of appreciation for hospitality rendered. Secretary

Hull thought that it was simply "unfortunate in every respect." He gave two reasons why the letter could damage U.S. foreign relations:

In the first place because it comes at a time when the Nicaraguan people are coming to the realization that this Government has no intention of interfering or intervening in their domestic affairs; in the second place because of the effect it may have outside of Nicaragua, and particularly in the other American republics. You are doubtless aware that the conduct of our relations with Nicaragua is considered by the peoples of other countries as a test of our policies.¹¹

Hull's statement was one of the clearest announcements of Washington's intentions in Nicaragua of those prepared in the period after Somoza took power in June 1936. It admitted that the relevance of the administration's Nicaraguan policy was that it symbolized the Good Neighbor Policy of non-intervention, the purpose of which was to undo an unfavorable image from the past. Since in Hull's view previous U.S. actions in Nicaragua had been central to creating that image, he believed that the value of the "hands-off" policy there was to serve as a test case for the Roosevelt administration. The State Department's reaction to the Mayers incident clearly illustrated its sensitivity in 1936 to charges that the administration in any manner supported Anastasio Somoza in his political conspiracies in Nicaragua. The administration's course of action was not one that would have been pursued had it intended to establish Somoza in power as a U.S. surrogate, as has been so widely charged. The signal that Hull was sending to U.S. officials was clearly the opposite: The administration had no intention of interfering in Nicaragua's politics, and it did not want to give the impression of supporting Somoza García, nor of attempting to establish him as Washington's man in Managua.

The incident had no effect on Somoza's campaign. His statements against the return of the opposition to the country, along with his continued control of governmental machinery through the *Guardia*, limited chances for a democratic process and pointed toward his victory in the election. The legation reported that the General's use of the *Guardia* during the campaign intimidated the population and that Somoza had bragged privately that he would be the "only real candidate for the Presidency."¹²

The activities of Somoza and the atmosphere he created in Nicaragua limited effective campaigning by the opposition and prompted former President Sacasa to seek out Sumner Welles in the State Department. Sacasa reminded Welles that the United States government had organized the *Guardia Nacional* as a non-partisan force and that it was no longer functioning as such. He argued that due to this background the United States continued to have responsibility for Nicaragua's

welfare. U.S. political intervention was important to correct a situation that was on the verge of disintegration.¹³ Welles's response was that while the administration hoped to work closely with Nicaragua, its efforts would be in strengthening that country's economy and providing assistance in fields such as road building and education. Confirming the position of Hull, he stated that political interference was out of the question. Welles reminded Sacasa that twenty years of political assistance and attempts to construct a certain type of government structure had benefited neither Nicaragua nor the United States. He reiterated the U.S. position that with the withdrawal of the Marines on January 2, 1933, "any special relationship which the United States Government may have had with Nicaragua terminated."¹⁴

The remarks of Sumner Welles were disheartening for the former president and for other leaders opposing Somoza. A month later the opposition parties, discouraged by Somoza's control of events in Nicaragua, decided to abstain from the presidential elections. This removed the Arguello-Espinosa slate as a realistic alternative in the race. Somoza was now virtually the sole candidate.¹⁵

In a final attempt to obtain U.S. assistance in preventing Somoza's election as president, Sacasa and two other former presidents of Nicaragua, Emiliano Chamorro and Adolfo Diaz, sent a desperate appeal by letter to Hull in November, a week before the vote. They reviewed Sacasa's futile efforts to control Somoza during the last months of his administration, and they reminded Hull that the General's actions had destroyed the constitutional process the United States had put in motion before withdrawing the Marines in 1933. The three former presidents requested official U.S. presence at the upcoming elections and sought as well the "moral support" of the United States in their opposition to Somoza. They commended the Good Neighbor Policy and the principle of non-intervention as "dear to all Latin American peoples," but they still pleaded that the administration not be indifferent to "the struggles and misfortunes of a friendly or sister nation."¹⁶ The exiled Nicaraguan political leaders must have realized that at that time—only one week before the elections—only military intervention by the United States would prevent Somoza's formal assumption of power. Despite this, they persisted in the belief that Hull and perhaps President Roosevelt would finally understand the logic of their argument, accept a continuing U.S. responsibility for Nicaragua, and exert pressure to move that country toward democracy.

The Department's reply came from Francis B. Sayre, an assistant secretary of state. Sayre, in his letter to Chamorro and Diaz, firmly denied their request for intervention in the internal politics of Nicaragua.¹⁷ The date of Sayre's reply was December 22, 1936. That this was two weeks after the Nicaraguan elections meant that officials

felt no urgency to act on the request. It also demonstrated that pleas to stop Somoza, even by former presidents who had been close allies of the United States, would not alter the administration's commitment to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. The administration did not, however, at any time during this period indicate a preference for Somoza or anyone else to be president of Nicaragua.

The national elections held in Nicaragua on December 8, 1936, resulted in the anticipated landslide victory for the General. On December 14, the first returns reported by the American legation gave Somoza and Navarro 79,433 votes and the opposition slate of Arguello and Espinosa, whose parties had announced a boycott of the vote, only 1,200 votes. In his cable, Minister Long noted that Somoza supporters claimed that their final total would be 110,000. Four days later the legation reported more complete returns, which had 107,201 for the Somoza slate and only 169 for the opposition. Reporting results of the congressional elections, Long wrote that practically all senators and deputies elected were supporters of Somoza and that the General would be able to dictate to the Congress as he desired.¹⁸

Long and other U.S. officials realized that the circumstances of Somoza's election were far from democratic and that Somoza would be able to dictate not only to Congress but to the people at large. At that juncture neither Long nor other officials had much to say about the electoral process that brought Somoza to power. There may have been a sense of relief among some U.S. officials over the return of a strong government in Managua that overcame misgivings about the nature of the Somoza regime in its early stages of development. A stable government that was pro-American would facilitate implementation of the Roosevelt administration's policy of non-intervention; and as Hull and Welles indicated, staying out of electoral matters was crucial to that policy.

The administration made it clear, however, that it did not want to give an appearance of excessive support for the new government. Minister Long cabled the Department suggesting Washington send a telegram of congratulations to General Somoza on his election. Long mentioned that it would be appropriate since Somoza cabled President Roosevelt after his reelection. He thought the gesture "would go far towards increasing Nicaragua's feeling of friendship toward us."¹⁹ The Department replied that it was not customary for the president to send congratulatory telegrams to presidents-elect and that "it is not believed that an exception should be made in this case."²⁰

The department also recommended against President Roosevelt appointing a special representative from outside the legation to attend Somoza's inauguration; such a diplomatic gesture would have signalled unqualified support for the incoming government. Instead, at Welles's

urging, Roosevelt followed the more routine practice of appointing the minister in country, Boaz Long, as the administration's representative at the inauguration.²¹ The inauguration of Somoza occurred without incident on January 1, 1937, a date marking the official beginning of the long era of the Somozas in Nicaragua.²²

Consolidation of Power, 1937-1938

After his inauguration, Somoza moved quickly to cement ties to the United States and the Roosevelt administration as part of a plan to consolidate the power of his regime. From the outset he made it clear that his government would support the United States and that he would seek the friendship of President Roosevelt. In Somoza's first correspondence to Roosevelt only twelve days after taking office, his language was unusually exaggerated and eulogistic, even by diplomatic standards, and it set the tone for the regime's subsequent communications with various U.S. administrations. In the first of many requests for assistance, Somoza asked President Roosevelt for U.S. aid to construct the Nicaraguan section of the Inter-American Highway. "If our petitions deserve the approval of the illustrious Government [over which] Your Excellency so worthily presides," he wrote, Nicaragua would immediately begin work on its section of the highway. Somoza was sure that Roosevelt would "bring many new and favorable benefits" to Roosevelt's "great country." He praised Roosevelt in anticipation that his administration would "contribute to the reign of peace, reciprocal trust and [to the] development of cooperation in international relations."²³

Roosevelt's reply of February 8, 1937, much less effusive in wording, demonstrated an even tone of friendliness and indicated that the administration did plan to offer some assistance to Nicaragua. The president promised that the administration was looking favorably at the request for assistance for highway construction, thus confirming the statement that Welles made to Sacasa the previous fall that the administration wanted to cooperate in these kinds of ventures. The letter noted the long friendship that had existed between Nicaragua and the United States. Roosevelt commented that historical ties between the two countries were closer in 1937 than "at any other time in the history of our mutual relations."²⁴

Praise of the U.S. government and its officials and outspoken support for its positions also came from other officials of Somoza's government. His brother-in-law, Luis Manuel Debayle, who became one of his important lieutenants, took every opportunity to pay tribute to Roosevelt and members of his administration.²⁵ Although U.S. officials remained

reserved in their reaction to this flattery, there were indications that this attention may have benefitted the Somoza regime.

One evidence that it did was Roosevelt's February letter to Somoza. In it the president singled out Debayle and his diplomatic efforts at the Buenos Aires conference in December 1936, where the Nicaraguan favorably impressed the U.S. delegation.²⁶ At the conference and at other meetings during this period, Debayle sought the favor of U.S. officials and assured them that the Somoza government would be a wholehearted supporter of the United States.²⁷

Another indication that enthusiastic support of the United States from Somoza's officials may have influenced Washington's attitude toward them came in August 1937. Welles relayed to Roosevelt a request from Debayle to see the president. Welles explained that Debayle would state that Somoza was extremely interested in the canalization of the San Juan River in southern Nicaragua in order to open up the river for barge traffic from the Caribbean to Lake Nicaragua. The proposed project would follow the route of the long-debated Nicaraguan canal. Somoza would request several million dollars for this project or an alternative project for a highway to connect the two coasts of Nicaragua. Because recent studies had virtually ruled out a Nicaraguan canal due to costs, Welles recommended against the project. He did, however, favorably present Somoza's "somewhat ambitious highway project," a recommendation that must have influenced Roosevelt's eventual decision to support it.²⁸

At this time and for the next several years, Welles took the lead in guiding policy toward Nicaragua, a period in which policy remained one of non-interference and emphasis on correct diplomatic relations. Welles's total dedication to the non-interference aspects of the Good Neighbor Policy led him to believe that the United States should support all de facto governments in the hemisphere, notwithstanding the manner in which their leaders achieved power. Although Welles never publicly addressed this thesis, it became an important part of Washington's policy for Latin America, and in so doing it favored strongmen like Somoza.²⁹ Welles was never overly supportive of the Somoza government, however, although occasionally he would make decisions, such as the one to aid Somoza's highway project, which demonstrated some interest by the administration in assisting Nicaragua.

Roosevelt had little direct involvement during this period in Washington's treatment of Somoza, although periodically he became personally involved in other details of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. On one occasion, he approved the temporary assignment of a Coast Guard enlisted man to Nicaragua to serve as an advisor to Somoza's one-boat "Navy." On another occasion three years later, Roosevelt approved the detail of two civilian engineers to Nicaragua for the purpose of conducting road surveys.³⁰

Welles had almost unlimited access to his friend Roosevelt, frequently writing directly to him by official memorandum or personal letter. In April 1937, Roosevelt promoted him to undersecretary of state, the number-two position in the Department. Despite this broader purview, Welles retained responsibilities for Latin America, thereby continuing his involvement in policy for Nicaragua.³¹

Welles and other Latin Americanists in the State Department stayed abreast of developments in Nicaragua during the first year of the Somoza regime primarily through reports from the U.S. legation. In the spring, Minister Boaz Long reported to the Department that a deterioration of the Nicaraguan economy was threatening the Somoza government's hold on power. According to Long, the ineptness of "mediocre" officials appointed to key posts also undermined the government. Former President Moncada was critical of Somoza and predicted that the General could not remain in power past the summer.³² Somoza suppressed an opposition political rally and had the *Guardia Nacional* arrest a number of Conservative Party members in attendance. After a few days, Somoza determined they were no longer a threat and released them.³³

A thirteen-page analysis from the U.S. legation later in the year assessed the "Political Situation in Nicaragua After Six Months of the Somoza Government" and gave the regime a better chance for survival. Somoza had now become firmly entrenched in office, according to the report; there was a lack of open opposition, and there were no "frictions or public scandals." Moncada was now supporting Somoza, reportedly because of bribes that Somoza had paid to the former president. The legation reported that Somoza allowed the defeated presidential candidate, Leonardo Arguello, to return to Nicaragua and even to participate in his government. He also allowed the return to Nicaragua of Juan Ferretti, one of Sandino's key lieutenants. These actions demonstrated a practice of tolerance that Somoza would continue as a means of winning over political opponents. The legation admitted there was suffering and unrest among the poorer classes, which constituted by far the bulk of the population.³⁴

The report emphasized the emerging importance of the *Guardia Nacional* to the stability of the Somoza government. The lower classes had almost no chance to organize because such efforts would meet with harsh suppression by the *Guardia*, which was increasingly becoming the prop keeping Somoza in power. According to legation officials, there was significant involvement of *Guardia* officers in the affairs of state, especially in key positions in the secret service, the internal revenue service, the government railway, the postal and telegraph services, the public radio, and in Managua's water works and city administration.³⁵

A border crisis in late 1937 gave Somoza the opportunity to employ the *Guardia* on a purely military mission and tested U.S. resolve to stay out of Central American affairs. The long-disputed area was in the rugged Nueva Segovia mountains along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. After the Nicaraguan government released a stamp depicting an area previously awarded to Honduras by arbitration as disputed territory, both countries sent troops to the border. When Somoza's foreign minister asked assistance from Washington in resolving the dispute, Welles insisted within the State Department that the United States not play the lead role in any settlement. Welles argued that "on general principles, we should give up having Central American controversies settled in the United States."³⁶ Honduras and Nicaragua maintained troops on the border for months; eventually a commission in Costa Rica settled the matter, thus avoiding the outbreak of armed conflict. During the crisis, Somoza did not appear eager to test the *Guardia* against Honduran troops, and he withdrew his forces quietly after announcement of the settlement.³⁷

Somoza did employ the military effectively to suppress armed rebellion in the countryside. Minister Long cabled in December that the *Guardia* had killed Pedro Altamirano, the last of Sandino's guerrilla chieftains still actively fighting the government. The minister reported matter-of-factly to the Department that the *Guardia* detachment that ambushed Altamirano, decapitated him, and brought his head to Managua to substantiate their act. Although during this incident there were no protests to the Nicaraguan government from the legation, Long's report and other official correspondence increasingly indicated that administration officials were aware of the cruelty of Somoza's troops even during its first year in power.³⁸

U.S. officials recognized that dire economic conditions in Nicaragua in 1938 could threaten political stability in the republic. The legation forwarded gloomy reports about the effects of the depression on Nicaragua. Competition caused by the increase in Brazilian coffee production depressed Nicaraguan earnings for its prime export commodity. Prices of imported goods had skyrocketed and the basic wage for labor was becoming insufficient for subsistence, according to one report. Long judged that "in its most spectacular endeavors and plans the Government has met with little success." Agricultural laborers were refusing to work for the wages offered them, business had lost confidence in the government, and "a general distrust of the future existed among all classes."³⁹

Hull moved to alleviate one major economic problem in Nicaragua by recommending to President Roosevelt a revision of the Reciprocal Trade Agreement that Arthur Bliss Lane had negotiated two years earlier. One provision of that agreement had fixed the exchange rate between the Nicaraguan córdoba and the dollar for the purpose of

paying customs duties. Hull informed Roosevelt that Nicaragua had been forced to devalue its currency, an act that resulted in an abrupt decrease in customs revenues, the primary source of income for the government. The secretary supported Nicaragua's request to establish a new conversion rate for customs transactions that would increase government revenue.⁴⁰ Roosevelt approved Nicaragua's request and the two countries modified the trade agreement on February 8, 1938.⁴¹

The action was a symbolic setback for Hull's reciprocal trade program for Latin America. It recognized that the agreement with Nicaragua had in practice raised the prices of U.S. goods exported to that country, thereby restricting their entry—a result not intended by the agreement. A major intention of the agreement had also been to establish preferential treatment for both countries' goods in their bilateral trade. This had been of little advantage to Nicaragua from the beginning because 70 percent of its exports to the United States—largely bananas and coffee—had already been on the duty-free list.⁴²

Long, who was usually generous to Somoza in his reporting from Managua, nonetheless recognized that the General's actions were contributing to the deteriorating situation in the country. He criticized the long weekends Somoza spent at one of his newly acquired country estates, Montelimar. Long also criticized the large official expenditures Somoza made developing the estate in view of the poor economic condition of the country at large. There was an unfavorable public reaction to Somoza's money-making schemes. Nicaraguans were traditionally lenient toward a president "making something from his office," in the minister's view, but there was a general feeling in the country that Somoza had gone overboard in this respect.⁴³

The minister also reported rumors of discontent in the *Guardia* due to low pay and Somoza's favoring of officers with political and social talents over those more professionally inclined. Although Long thought that these complaints could have validity, he hesitated to give too much credit to allegations of disloyalty within the organization. He believed that it was significant that *Guardia* loyalty was being called into question, even if in rumors, although he did not see a serious threat to Somoza within the military.⁴⁴

Officials in the State Department interpreted Long's comments within the context of generally poor economic conditions at that time throughout Central America. One believed that the situation in Nicaragua was "relatively quiet considering the violent fluctuations in the exchange rate." He recognized, however, that the failure of the Government of Nicaragua to solve its financial problems was destroying public confidence and contended that if the economic situation did not improve there could be political disturbances in the country.⁴⁵

Somoza Extends His Presidency

Despite Nicaragua's desperate economic state in the 1930s, Somoza recognized that his power rested not on economics but on political and military control. The poor of Nicaragua had always lived at a subsistence level, and this fact had never caused the overthrow of governments. There was no notion among the masses during this period that conditions would improve, therefore no expectation on their part that could serve to foment revolution were it frustrated. To retain control and consolidate his power, Somoza continued to concentrate on assuring the support of elements in the country that had been traditionally important for those purposes. These included influential factions within Nicaraguan society, such as the military and the oligarchy, and the outside support of the United States.

Somoza did make a practice during the depression years of projecting concern for the masses in his speeches and public statements. He did this primarily for political purposes and to create an image that would assist in gaining U.S. support. The General issued statements insisting that the costs of basic necessities be kept within reason so that all Nicaraguans could be adequately clothed and fed. He announced that the "first duty of the Executive is the welfare of the people."⁶⁶ In his public pronouncement Somoza stressed that social justice should be the purpose of the economic development of the nation.⁶⁷

Somoza used the economic situation as justification for imposing greater political control. He would not allow public criticism of his government if he thought it endangered his regime. "I will not tolerate either political or religious discussions in the newspapers or in the pulpits," he announced, justifying his actions because of the problems of the depression. Although Somoza maintained that he believed in freedom of speech and a free press, he would not permit "the energies of the people to be wasted in fruitless arguments." He would allow these freedoms, he explained, only if their existence did not threaten the welfare of the masses.⁶⁸

After less than two years in office, Somoza was sufficiently confident to extend his term of office. In late 1938, upon calling for elections for an assembly to draft a new constitution, he declared that the new document was to be "in harmony with the needs of a nation desiring peace, progress, justice, and liberty."⁶⁹ Realizing there was no chance for democratic proceedings, the opposition again boycotted the election and Somoza forces dominated the assembly. The most significant provision in the resulting "Constitution of 1939" was a change in the length of the presidential term from four to six years. The document reiterated earlier provisions against reelection to the presidency and succession to the office by relatives of the incumbent. At the termination of the session, Somoza converted the assembly into a Congress

that was to serve for eight years. This legislative body exempted Somoza from the restrictions of the new constitution and elected him to a term corresponding to the eight-year period of its incumbency.³⁰ His new term would expire on May 1, 1947.

The extension of a president's term by arbitrary means was not an unusual occurrence in Central America during the late 1930s. As with many countries in Latin America during the depression years, Central America was dominated by political strongmen. By the time Somoza forced legislation through Congress allowing him to remain in power, three other presidents in the region had arranged similar extensions of their regimes. These were Jorge Ubico in Guatemala, Tiburcio Carías Andino in Honduras, and Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador.³¹

The Canal Issue Reopened

Dictatorial maneuvers by Somoza did not divert the General from his plans to develop close ties with the Roosevelt administration. He continued to heap praise on the United States at every turn. In an interview with an American correspondent in early 1939, Somoza stressed the necessity of continuing U.S. protection to preserve Nicaraguan sovereignty against threats from "European or Asiatic powers." He scorned those who charged the United States with past aggression in Nicaragua, contending that the Marines "never came here except at the request of Nicaraguan governments unable to keep order."³²

Somoza used the interview to publicize his belief that the United States should build a canal across Nicaragua under the provisions of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. He based his argument on the potential strategic value to the United States of a Nicaraguan canal. Alluding to the possibility of an attack against the United States, he announced that a second isthmian canal was necessary to "double the U.S. defenses." A second set of locks at Panama would not help because one enemy air attack would destroy both sets, Somoza argued, a reference to one alternative being discussed in the United States at the time.³³ Referring to Japan three years before Pearl Harbor, he predicted that a potential U.S. enemy may be "little brown men" ready to "dive-bomb to death and glory." Lake Nicaragua, the hundred-mile long lake that would be part of the proposed canal, would be "a marvelous harbor for the U.S. fleet" where it could disperse and avoid being an easy target, as were the ships passing through the Panama Canal.³⁴

Somoza took advantage of the interview to issue the type of exaggerated pro-American statement he enjoyed making in order to

impress officials in Washington. He contended that even if the U.S. government did not follow his advice on a canal, Nicaragua was "behind the United States 100 per cent, in peace or war." Washington could count on every soldier in Nicaragua for the defense of the continent. "Your defense is our defense," Somoza told the reporter.⁵⁶

In his attempts to gain U.S. support, Somoza on occasion initiated policies that appeared to Washington officials to be against the interests of both countries. To build closer ties with the Roosevelt administration and to reinforce his argument for a canal, Somoza offered to incorporate the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty into the new Nicaraguan constitution. The canal rights reserved for the United States under the treaty would be extended to perpetuity under this arrangement.⁵⁶ In presenting Somoza's proposal, his foreign minister, Manuel Cordero Reyes, detailed charges Nicaraguan critics had long made that the treaty was a one-sided arrangement that inadequately reimbursed Nicaragua for the potentially enormous benefits it extended to the United States. The legality of the treaty had been questioned by some, according to Cordero, because it violated Article 2 of the old constitution. That article stated that "sovereignty was inalienable and imprescriptible and resided in the people from whom were derived the powers and functions established by the constitution."⁵⁷ Incorporation of the treaty into the new constitution, the minister implied, would undermine this complaint against the treaty.

Despite having raised old criticisms of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty, the foreign minister stressed that the Nicaraguan government did not desire to reopen the question of its validity. It was clear, nonetheless, that Cordero's intent was to inform Washington that Somoza would use the issue to obtain assistance. Somoza may have thought that a threat to alter the treaty would rekindle U.S. interest in building a canal, or, in lieu of this, that the Roosevelt administration would see fit to offer other aid to Nicaragua.

State Department officials, recognizing that to agree with Somoza's position could alter the original rights provided the U.S. government in the treaty, moved to discourage the idea. Although both Hull and Welles admitted that changing the constitution was Nicaragua's responsibility,⁵⁸ the secretary instructed the U.S. minister to caution Somoza against such a maneuver. The position of the administration was that the 1914 treaty remained in full force and would continue as sufficient legal authority until the time the U.S. Congress authorized a canal.⁵⁹ The secretary was also fearful that raising the issue, then dormant for twenty-five years, would create difficulties with Costa Rica and El Salvador, both of which had originally opposed the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty because of possible infringements on their territorial rights if a canal were built across Nicaragua.

Events Preceding the Somoza Visit to Washington

Based at least in part on Washington's opposition to his idea for a canal, Somoza made an alternate request to the administration. His new proposal was for the United States to undertake the canalization of the San Juan River from the east coast to Lake Nicaragua in order to open up the center of the country to Atlantic sea trade.⁶⁰ As a first step in this project, Somoza's minister in Washington, Leon Debayle, sent a letter to Hull asking for a survey of the San Juan to determine the possibility of making it navigable for vessels of "ordinary draft." Somoza proposed that if the U.S. government approved a visit, he would go to Washington to discuss Nicaragua's request with President Roosevelt.⁶¹

The latter proposal, although unusual at a time when the presidents of small countries did not request official visits to the United States, was consistent with Somoza's courting of U.S. favor. In Managua and Washington, through the press and contacts by Nicaraguan officials with members of the Roosevelt administration, Somoza began to build up the significance of an official visit as well as U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. He announced that since the beginning of his political life he had appreciated the importance to Nicaragua of cultivating cordial relations with the United States. He claimed that he had always wanted to make a trip to Washington to visit the president and exchange views on questions of mutual interest. Undaunted by the differences in the size and importance of the two countries, Somoza was confident that even Nicaragua could contribute its views to "the great ideals of democracy," which in his view were being tested by the totalitarian powers of Europe.⁶² Somoza shrewdly never failed to publicly associate himself with democracy and oppose dictatorship, although his regime was, from the start, more analogous to the latter.

In Washington, Debayle went to see Welles to discuss the various Nicaraguan requests. In their meeting, Welles vigorously disagreed with any action on the part of Nicaragua that would alter the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. Using a historical argument, the undersecretary defended the U.S. position at the time of treaty ratification, insisting that the provisions agreed upon were regarded by Nicaragua as "satisfactory and complete compensation for the rights accorded the United States." Putting the matter to rest, Welles considered it "wise and expedient" from the point of view of both governments to completely terminate discussions of the subject.⁶³

Debayle next moved to the question of canalization of the San Juan River. Demonstrating his authority in policy matters relating to Nicaragua, Welles informed Debayle that the Department would probably concentrate for the time being on that part of the Nicaraguan

request regarding the study of the technical problems of canalization; he stressed that he would give it his personal and "most sympathetic consideration."⁶⁴

Two weeks after his conversation with Debayle, on December 12, 1938, Welles wrote Roosevelt summarizing Somoza's requests and the Department's responses to that time. Referring to the request for a study of the feasibility of canalizing the San Juan River, Welles reported that he was having inquiries made to determine if the administration could provide the requested assistance. Welles thought that a visit to Washington by Somoza might be appropriate in early 1939. Roosevelt approved Welles's recommendation with the routine notation, "S.W., visit ok, FDR."⁶⁵

Several weeks after the Welles-Debayle conversation and Welles's letter to Roosevelt, there had apparently been little discussion of these subjects. Key members of the administration involved in Nicaraguan affairs were still unaware of the pending visit. Minister Meredith Nicholson wrote Welles from Managua on January 14, 1939, informing the undersecretary of interest on the part of both the press and local government officials regarding the possibility of Somoza visiting Washington and the renewal of canal discussions. Referring to both subjects, the minister believed that they had assumed such an importance with Nicaragua and its government that President Somoza would not be diverted from his desire to see them through.⁶⁶

Ellis O. Briggs, acting chief of the American Republics Division in the State Department, expressed concern about the timing of the proposed Somoza visit. Briggs reminded the undersecretary that the constituent assembly in Nicaragua was still in session and that one of its purposes was to vote on a special provision extending Somoza's term of office. He cautioned Welles that if Somoza visited the United States immediately after his government adopted such a provision, the impression would be that Washington was giving its official approval to Somoza's extension in office. Briggs also suggested that the Department inform Nicholson that the visit should be deferred until the administration had time to study the entire Nicaraguan canal situation and to determine specific actions that would be practical regarding the canalization of the San Juan River.⁶⁷ Briggs was clearly taking a position of caution regarding association of the United States with the Somoza regime.

The decisive Welles did not appear concerned with the cautions raised by his subordinates. The question of Somoza's visit had been settled by obtaining Roosevelt's approval the previous month. In December Welles wrote to the War Department about a canalization survey of the San Juan River, explaining Somoza's interest to the secretary of war and stressing that the administration would assist the General in obtaining engineering advice and assistance.⁶⁸ The War Department's

reply stated that although a survey could not be made without additional funding, data on the San Juan from previous canal surveys might satisfy the needs of the Managua government.⁶⁹

On January 25, Welles informed Nicholson of Roosevelt's approval of a Somoza visit to Washington; the president would receive Somoza at the White House on May 5, 1939. The undersecretary commented that, although the canal question was still an active issue in the U.S. Congress, he understood that Somoza was now interested in obtaining assistance for the canalization of the San Juan River. In view of the uncertainties surrounding the issue, Welles thought that the Nicaraguan government should avoid interpreting approval of the visit of Somoza as an indication of favorable action on either the construction of a canal or the canalization of the San Juan River. He instructed Nicholson that in his informal discussions with Somoza he should caution the General to be reserved in his comments on these questions during his discussions with Roosevelt.⁷⁰

The Legation's Assessment of Somoza

Nicholson, after replacing Long as the administration's top official in Managua in June 1938, made contacts over a wider spectrum in Nicaragua. His reports therefore reflected a broader sampling of opinion and a more critical view of Somoza than that of the legation under Long. By early spring of 1939, he had formed definite ideas about the regime. After being informed of Roosevelt's approval of the Somoza visit to Washington, Nicholson, realizing the potential risk involved if Washington too closely associated with Somoza, prepared a long analysis of the regime and its leader. The minister dispatched the assessment to the State Department on April 11, less than a month before the scheduled visit.

Nicholson warned that Somoza's extension of the presidency by the constituent assembly should not be interpreted by the Department as evidence of public confidence or even of "sincere admiration on the part of the great body of the people." Although Somoza wanted it to appear that his departure for the United States so soon after his reelection reflected his "sense of security," the actual reason he could do this, Nicholson wrote, was that the *Guardia Nacional* had firm control of the country. The failure of any real opposition from the Conservative Party or any other political group was not attributable to any concurrence on their part, but rather to suppression by the *Guardia*.⁷¹

The minister relayed the report of one Conservative leader whom he considered both a credible and "courageous" person, that intimidation

by the *Guardia* was widespread and violence-ridden. The informant described the government in the bitter language that would become common among oppositionists as the Somoza regime grew in power. Although prominent Conservatives were not murdered, they were "apprised of the Executive's displeasure" by the murder of their ranch employees. Nicholson's contact estimated the number of political deaths at a thousand a month. Such figures were not published because of censorship of the press. Somoza's denials regarding political prisoners were beside the point, the Conservative charged, because the "country as a whole is one great political prison."⁷²

Nicholson's source contended that any revolution against Somoza would be a non-partisan affair consisting of a combination of the "forces of decency" from both traditional parties. The chief of the Conservative Party, General Emiliano Chamorro, would support an exiled Liberal leader, Dr. Rosendo Arguello, as the provisional president in the event of a revolution. The informant admitted, however, that a successful rebellion was unlikely as long as Somoza retained control of the *Guardia*. Although he believed that military officers were loyal to Somoza, he remarked to Nicholson that the General was reluctant to give them too much freedom of action. One method Somoza used to control the *Guardia* was to maintain all ammunition in the cellars of the president's house and issue each soldier only two rounds at a time. The Conservative leader informed the minister that Somoza was using military personnel to operate his many business enterprises and that a *Guardia* captain functioned as Somoza's business secretary with an office in downtown Managua. Nicholson noted in his report that the legation had received information from other sources confirming that Somoza frequently used the *Guardia* for private purposes.⁷³

The analysis provided other evidence of the growing corruption within the regime, a situation that was enriching Somoza at the expense of the country at large and its average citizens. Nicholson reported the General's practice of taking bribes from companies that he allowed to conduct business in Nicaragua. The minister referred to Somoza's strong-arm methods of acquiring property as "Hitleresque" and compared his rapacity to that of the former dictator of Venezuela, Juan Vicente Gómez.⁷⁴

To prepare those administration officials with whom Somoza would come in contact, Nicholson included in his assessment of the regime a frank and detailed portrait of the "character, ability and demeanor" of the Nicaraguan strongman. Somoza was "unfailingly affable, ingratiating and persuasive." His English was "colloquial but fluent"; he was a "ready speaker in either Spanish or English." The minister described Somoza as a "shrewd trader" who could pass for a prosperous ranchman in the American West, a "good fellow" and a raconteur with an affinity for smutty stories. Somoza was consistently pro-American

and would assure all American visitors of his affection for their country, which he looked upon as a "second home."⁷⁵ On the negative side, Nicholson's description of Somoza was sufficient to give pause to Sumner Welles and other officials involved in the upcoming state visit. Besides his references to a dark underside of violence and corruption in the regime, Somoza was, according to the minister, personally crude and a cultural "cipher" clever enough to conceal his deficiencies. Somoza saw democracy only as a device for the domination of his country "with abundant opportunities for plunder to the strains of the national anthem." In Nicholson's view, the General was untrustworthy and insincere, and he provided examples of Somoza's dishonesty in dealings with the legation.⁷⁶

The assessment by Nicholson drew a picture of an emerging tyrant parading as a democrat whose primary advantage to the United States was his staunchly pro-American stance. Despite its often harsh criticism, the assessment caused no noticeable debate in the State Department, nor did it alter plans within the administration for Somoza's state visit. The government's decision to allow the visit was consistent with the Roosevelt administration's practice of applying the Good Neighbor Policy equitably to all of Latin America. The prevailing uneasiness in Washington over the international situation in 1939 made officials especially aware of the requirement to follow a policy of friendship toward all nations to the south. The Somoza visit was evidence that at that time the form of Latin American governments and the character of their leaders would not affect the administration's efforts to implement this policy.

Notes

1. Long to Hull, 15 June 1936, NA 817.00/8532.
2. Long to Hull, 18 June 1936, NA 817.00/8537.
3. Ray to Hull, 12 November 1936, NA 817.00/8611.
4. Ray to Hull, 15 November 1936, NA 817.00/8613.
5. Ray to Hull, 26 November 1936, NA 810.00B/108. During this period, the *New York Times* reported that Somoza's secret service agents arrested twelve communists in a campaign "to drive out communism" from Nicaragua. The article stated that foreign communists were being deported and that Nicaraguans were being held on Corn Island, located forty miles off Nicaragua's east coast. *New York Times*, 13 August 1936, 9.
6. Hull to Sayre, 5 December 1936, NA 810.00B/109.
7. Moore to Long, 8 December 1936, NA 810.00B/122.
8. Phillips to Roosevelt, 18 August 1936; Mayers to Somoza, (undated) NA 817.00/8558.
9. Duggan to Phillips, 8 September 1936, NA 817.00/8558.

10. Hull to Long, 27 August 1936, NA 817.00/8558.
11. Hull to Swanson, 29 August 1936, NA 817.00/8561.
12. Long to Hull, 3 September 1936, NA 817.00/8571; Ray to Hull, 12 November 1936, NA 817.00/8611.
13. Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Latin American Affairs, 22 October 1936, NA 817.00/8604.
14. *Ibid.*; Welles to Lane, 27 October 1936, Series I, Box 14, Lane Papers. During this period, Welles repeated these sentiments to another distinguished Nicaraguan, former Foreign Minister Máximo H. Zepeda. Zepeda wrote requesting U.S. mediation to avoid the turmoil that a Somoza regime would bring to Nicaragua. Welles wrote that past U.S. policy in Nicaragua had been mistaken and had "never constituted any solid foundation acceptable to the Nicaraguan people." "Under these circumstances," Welles continued, "it would seem to me very much wiser for the United States scrupulously to refrain from any action with regard to Nicaragua which would avoid any form of mediation." Welles to Máximo H. Zepeda, 3 February 1937. A copy of this letter was furnished to the author by Máximo Navas Zepeda.
15. Ray to Hull, 24 November 1936, NA 817.00/8612.
16. Sacasa, Chamorro, and Díaz to Hull, 30 November 1936, NA 817.00/8618.
17. Sayre to Sacasa, 22 December 1936, NA 817.00/8618.
18. Long to Hull, 14 December 1936, NA 817.00/8625; Ray to Hull, 18 December 1936, NA 817.00/8629.
19. Long to Hull, 15 December 1936, NA 817.001 Somoza, Anastasio/2.
20. Sayre to Long, 19 December 1936, NA 817.001 Somoza, Anastasio/2.
21. Moore to Roosevelt, 19 December 1936, OF 432, Box 1 "Nicaragua 1933-40," Roosevelt Papers.
22. *FRUS: 1936*, 5:851.
23. Somoza to Roosevelt, 12 January 1937, OF 432, "Nicaragua 1933-40," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.
24. Roosevelt to Somoza, 8 February 1937, Anastasio Somoza García Papers, Box 194, *Archivos Nacionales*, Managua, Nicaragua.
25. Luis Manuel Debayle was the Somoza regime's first foreign minister. For an example of his flattering comments about Roosevelt and his administration, see Debayle to Daniels, 4 November 1936, Reel 52, Daniels Papers.
26. Roosevelt to Somoza, 8 February 1937, Somoza Papers.
27. *Report of the Delegation of the United States of America to the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 1-23, 1936* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 127, 128, 730; Memorandum of Conversation, Luis Manuel Debayle visit with Laurence Duggan, 10 October 1936, NA 817.20/26. According to State Department official and Roosevelt confidant Adolf A. Berle, Debayle assisted Berle at the Buenos Aires conference in drafting the primary resolution of that meeting, which declared inadmissible the intervention by any American nation in the internal and external affairs of all other American nations. Adolf A. Berle, *Latin America: Diplomacy and Reality* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), 87-88.

28. Welles to Roosevelt, 7 August 1937, OF 432, "Nicaragua 1933-1940," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

29. By 1937, Sumner Welles had decided that a strict policy of de facto recognition of all governments was the only means for the United States to achieve absolute non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. His disillusionment with the Good Neighbor Policy after his retirement evolved due to his belief that the U.S. government had discontinued this practice. In 1946, three years after leaving the State Department, Welles wrote that one of the greatest failures of the Good Neighbor Policy was its opposition to the Perón government in Argentina due to Washington's disapproval of the policies of that government. This attempt at interference in Argentina's internal affairs failed, according to Welles, and resulted in resentment against the United States in Argentina and other countries. Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 186-208. Also see Bryce Wood, *The Dismantling of the Good Neighbor Policy*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 6, 21-22.

30. Berle to Roosevelt, 7 September 1938 and 5 March 1940, OF 432, Box 1, "Nicaragua, 1933-1940," Roosevelt Papers. In the case of the engineers, Berle thought it was necessary to explain to Roosevelt that one of the men would receive \$6 per diem and one \$5 due to a difference in "family expenses." This explanation indicates that Roosevelt became involved in details of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations in the pre-war years.

31. After Welles's appointment as undersecretary, a Department reorganization created the Division of American Republics, a combination of the old Mexican and Latin American sections. Officials in these offices reported directly to the new undersecretary. Welles to Corrigan, 29 May 1937, Box 10, Frank Corrigan Papers, Roosevelt Library.

32. Long to Hull, 7 April 1937, NA 817.00/8644.

33. Long to Hull, 14 May 1937, NA 817.00/8653.

34. Long to Hull, 2 May 1937, NA 817.00/8648 and 19 July 1937, NA 817.00/8657; Nicholson to Hull, 9 November 1938, NA 817.00/8700.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Welles to Daniels, 8 November 1937, Box 106, Daniels Papers.

37. Ellis O. Briggs, "Latin America," speech delivered 12 January 1939 to the Army War College, copy in the files of the Navy Historical Center, Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 32; Castleman to Hull, 26 September 1937, NA 817.00/8661.

38. Long to Hull, 6 December 1937, NA 817.00/8666; Long to Hull, 14 December 1937, NA 817.00/8667; Tierney, Jr., *Somozas and Sandinistas*, 47.

39. Long to Hull, 7 January 1938, NA 817.00/8669.

40. Hull to Roosevelt, 5 February 1938, OF 432, Box 1, "Nicaragua, 1933-1940," Roosevelt Papers.

41. *FRUS: 1938*, 5:785-787.

42. The modification of the trade agreement between the United States and Nicaragua was, argued one expert, "a defeat for Hull of the first degree. Reciprocity had not brought an iota of prosperity to an oligarchic nation (Nicaragua) racked with corruption." Dick Steward, *Trade and Hemisphere: The Good Neighbor Policy and Reciprocal Trade* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1975), 219. The trade agreement revision was one of many that

took place as a result of pressure from Latin American nations. Most observers believe that, by 1940, Hull's economic reciprocity program for Latin America had failed because it had reduced customs income in Latin America (by the raising the prices of U.S. goods, thus impeding their import) and had not increased the volume of trade for the products specified under the provisions of the agreements. Also see Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, 93.

43. Long to Hull, 7 January 1938, NA 817.00/8669.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Memorandum to Briggs and Duggan, 19 January 1938, NA 817.00/8669.
46. *New York Times*, 23 January 1938, 27, 36.
47. *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, 73 (May 1939):250.
48. *New York Times*, 23 January 1938, 36.
49. *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, 73 (May 1939):249; Nicholson to Hull, "Electoral Machinery Favors Somocista Domination of the Constituent Assembly," 23 August 1938, NA 817.00/8688.
50. *Ibid.*; Nicholson to Hull, 18 November 1938, NA 817.00/8701 and 11 April 1939, NA 817.001, Somoza, Anastasio/50.
51. *New York Times*, 5 January 1939, 1.
52. Nicholson to Hull, 8 March 1939, article by H. R. Knickerbocker, International News Service, 25 February 1939, NA 817.812/782.
53. U.S. Congress, House, *Report of Interocceanic Canal Board*, House Doc. 139, 72d Cong., 1st sess., 1932, 253-254; "Memorandum for the President," 17 February 1938, Box 1, OF 1305, Roosevelt Papers.
54. Nicholson to Hull, 8 March 1939, NA 817.812/782.
55. *Ibid.* Somoza made it a practice to announce his support of the Roosevelt administration's foreign policy, even in areas unrelated to Nicaragua or Latin America. An example of this is Somoza's 15 April 1939 message in support of Roosevelt's appeal to the German chancellor and the head of the Italian government. President's Personal File (hereafter PPF), folder "Anastasio Somoza," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.
56. Nicholson to Hull, 3 November 1938, NA 817.812/736.
57. Nicholson to Hull, 10 November 1938, NA 817.812/739.
58. Hull to Nicholson, 7 November 1938, NA 817.812/736; Welles to Nicholson, 30 November 1938, NA 817.812/743.
59. Hull to Nicholson, 7 November 1938, NA 817.812/736.
60. Nicholson to Hull, 10 November 1938; Nicholson to Hull, 19 November 1938, NA 817.812/744.
61. Debayle to Hull, 30 November 1938, NA 817.812/748; Memorandum of Conversation by George H. Butler of the Division of the American Republics, 30 December 1938, NA 817.812/776.
62. *New York Times*, 20 November 1938, 31.
63. Memorandum of Conversation by Welles, 1 December 1938, Box 1, OF 432, Roosevelt Papers.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Welles to Roosevelt, 12 December 1938, Box 1, OF 432, Roosevelt Papers.
66. Nicholson to Welles, 14 January 1939, Box 1, OF 432, Roosevelt Papers.

67. Briggs to Welles, 18 January 1939, NA 817.00/8707 1/2. The election of Somoza to an additional term by the constituent assembly took place at the end of March, five weeks before Somoza's visit to Washington. The assembly voted 46 to 7 for Somoza over the Conservative candidate, Fernando Guzmán, for the new term that would expire in 1947. *New York Times*, 25 March 1939, 7.
68. Welles to Woodring, 15 December 1938, NA 817.812/748.
69. Woodring to Welles, 29 December 1938, NA 817.812/753.
70. Welles to Nicholson, 25 January 1939, NA 817.812/771.
71. Nicholson to Hull, 11 April 1939, NA 817.001/Somoza, Anastasio/50, 2.
72. *Ibid.*, 4.
73. *Ibid.*, 5.
74. *Ibid.*, 6.
75. *Ibid.*, 8, 9.
76. *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

Somoza and Roosevelt, Part II

Somoza in Washington

The Roosevelt administration's preparations for Somoza's visit were elaborate for a chief of state of a country as small as Nicaragua. The government issued a press release about the visit two weeks before Somoza's arrival.¹ Plans called for Roosevelt, for the first time since entering office in 1933, to leave the White House to greet a foreign chief of state. The vice president, the full cabinet, and the principal leaders of Congress and the judiciary were all scheduled to be present at Union Station for the arrival of Somoza's train. A large military honor guard, a twenty-one-gun salute, a presidential motorcade down Pennsylvania Avenue, a state dinner, and an overnight stay at the White House were all part of the official itinerary.²

White House correspondence during this period indicates a special reason for the pomp and ceremony for Somoza: His reception and entertainment were planned as a dress rehearsal for the visit of the king and queen of England to Washington later in the summer of 1939.³ The rehearsal occurred as planned—Somoza received full military

honors from over five thousand soldiers, sailors, and Marines lining the streets and fifty aircraft flying overhead. Government employees released from work for the occasion swelled the crowds along the procession's route. The General stayed at the White House and later would boast that he and Mrs. Somoza developed a personal relationship with Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.⁴

In official talks with Roosevelt, Somoza presented a paper relating to the broad issues of the Nicaraguan canal and the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. As background, Somoza restated the position of his government favoring the construction of an inter-oceanic canal across its territory. He stressed—as he and his ministers often had the previous year—that in negotiating the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty twenty-five years earlier Nicaragua had acted on the assumption that a canal would be constructed in the near future. The indefinite postponement of this project meant the "frustration" for Nicaragua of its most valuable natural resource, and Somoza argued that the exploitation of this resource was critical to Nicaragua's progress and development.⁵

Somoza reaffirmed his government's previous position that it would not call for a revision of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. He again presented the idea, however, that if the United States continued to defer construction of a canal, Nicaragua considered it only just that Washington assist in the canalization of the San Juan River, a course of action that would eliminate "injuries" his country would suffer from an indefinite canal postponement.⁶

In presenting his proposal, Somoza demonstrated an astute awareness of the growing concern in Washington regarding potential defense requirements of the United States. In listing the advantages of a waterway from the heart of Nicaragua to the Atlantic coast, Somoza contended that the route would "contribute also to objectives related to military defense." The General suggested the negotiation of a new treaty for the canalization project and promised that Nicaragua would permit the inclusion of any provisions necessary for the defense purposes of both countries.⁷

Somoza closed his proposal for canalization by stating that the project would have the "double advantage" of correcting the most objectionable aspects of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty and reinforcing confidence in the Good Neighbor Policy. He next suggested to Roosevelt—certainly improper for the occasion—that the president should overcome opposition in the U.S. Senate to these requests by using his personal influence with the legislators.⁸

Although no transcript exists of the official Somoza-Roosevelt talks, a discussion paper for Roosevelt prepared by officials in the State Department—probably under Welles's guidance—gives the Department's positions on the issues it anticipated Somoza would advance during the sessions. In regard to the canal question, the Department considered

the Panama Canal facilities—both those in operation and those planned at the time for construction—adequate for anticipated commercial and naval traffic requirements of the United States. There was accordingly no reason for the United States to construct a new interoceanic canal until at least the year 2000 A.D. Canalization of the San Juan would be costly—between \$6 million and \$9 million—and the project would not save on the construction of a future canal. The Department believed that the economic advantages of canalization would not warrant the investment due to the largely degenerated condition of the Atlantic region of Nicaragua. Potential problems involving Costa Rican territorial rights were also a consideration. Protests by that country inevitably would require mediation by the United States—the outcome was uncertain. The Department recommended that the executive not take favorable action on the canal or canalization issues, nor even on any request from the General for assistance for the construction of a highway from Managua and other central cities of Nicaragua to the Atlantic coast. All of this indicated that the Department was not now in favor of major assistance to the Somoza government, despite Welles's previous comments.⁹

The Department did recommend, however, that the administration take favorable action on several less important issues. These included providing assistance to complete the Nicaraguan section of the Inter-American Highway, giving Export-Import Bank credits for public works other than roads, encouraging the National Bank of Nicaragua to stabilize the monetary system, furnishing technical assistance to establish an agricultural experiment station, and providing a U.S. officer to re-establish the Nicaraguan Military Academy. Of these, the Inter-American Highway was the most important to U.S. interests, although the Department noted that Somoza had not indicated special interest in its completion. Department officials believed that the administration should encourage completion of the highway from Mexico to the Panama Canal Zone by offers of technical assistance and construction funds to all of the Central American republics.¹⁰

The paper emphasized the Department's position that the visit should be kept in perspective and that there were "no important specific matters" in which the United States desired special action by Nicaragua. It stressed that disproportionately large or unique support might imply an admission that, due to the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty or to other historical occurrences, the United States had a special obligation to Nicaragua. It made a general recommendation to Roosevelt to extend appropriate assistance only where both the United States and Nicaragua would benefit, and there were clear indications that security issues drove the Department's position in this regard.¹¹

Somoza's discussions with Roosevelt and with other administration officials took place on May 5 and 6. On May 8, at the invitations of

the vice president and the speaker of the House, Somoza addressed each chamber of Congress. The General designed both speeches to flatter U.S. officialdom and gain support for his regime. Their content indicated that the earlier sessions with top Washington officials had not intimidated the Nicaraguan president. Displaying his normal effusiveness and optimism, Somoza associated his government with U.S. democracy, noting that the foundation of all government institutions of the United States and Nicaragua was a "common devotion to the democratic ideals which we have been able to preserve." He praised Roosevelt as an "illustrious President," and the Good Neighbor Policy as a "prudent, wise, and sagacious" course that had united the whole continent in "one sole spiritual and moral entity."¹²

The previous talks with Roosevelt also had not deterred Somoza from his desire for a canal. He reminded the legislators that Nicaraguan territory was a logical route for the construction of an interoceanic canal, and he asked that this "gift of nature not be left hidden indefinitely in our native forests." Rather than suggesting a change in the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty, Somoza promised that Nicaragua would remain loyal to its terms in realizing this "mighty undertaking." Nicaragua had joined its destiny with that of the United States, and the general pledged his "wholehearted" efforts to maintain close association of the two countries.¹³

Other visits, speeches, and press conferences assisted Somoza's public relations effort to praise the United States and adulate President Roosevelt. At a meeting with the Washington press corps at the Nicaraguan legation, Somoza invited capital from the United States to assist Nicaraguan development, assuring U.S. business that it would receive his government's full support. Again, he strongly commended the Good Neighbor Policy.¹⁴

As guest of the Pan American Society at a dinner in the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, Somoza, in his characteristically high-flown style of speech, lauded Roosevelt as having "in his heart and his brain the Good Neighbor policy."¹⁵ The interest in the United States for Latin America was a direct result of "the wise doctrines and wise neighborliness initiated, sustained and strengthened by that great democrat at the White House."¹⁶ Somoza claimed that the visits of Roosevelt and Hull to South America had "done very much to make us . . . one man." Speaking of the security requirements of the Western Hemisphere in the face of a potential threat from Europe, he offered Nicaragua for the "defense of the United States, which is the defense of the continent."¹⁷

The Nicaraguan leader took pleasure in the visit and obviously relished the opportunity to associate himself and his government with Roosevelt and the United States. After returning to Nicaragua, he continued his praise of the U.S. president as a good friend and

reminded his countrymen of the great success of his trip and the many benefits it would bring the nation.¹⁸

The Administration's Aid Program after the Somoza Visit

Somoza's claims of success were partially true. Although the aid to Nicaragua that resulted from the visit was substantial for a small country, it did not stand out among the administration's other aid initiatives in Latin America at the time. The Export-Import Bank approved credits of \$500,000 for Nicaraguan currency stabilization and \$2 million for the purchase of U.S. equipment and technical services for Pan American Highway construction and other projects.¹⁹ The administration promised agricultural advisory assistance to Nicaragua. In answer to one of Somoza's most insistent requests, officials informed him that the War Department would provide an Army officer to re-establish the Nicaraguan Military Academy and to serve as its commandant. The officer would also be responsible for studying the possibility of establishing a military aviation school.²⁰

The most surprising result of Somoza's visit—in view of the earlier opposition from the State Department—was an offer by President Roosevelt to send Army engineers to Nicaragua to study both the feasibility of the canalization of the San Juan River and the construction of an east-west highway. Elaborating only on the canalization issue, Roosevelt wrote to Somoza that he was pleased with the idea that such a project would greatly facilitate and expedite communications between the two nations. But Roosevelt also mentioned the military potential of the project, claiming that the waterway could have an important bearing on the defense of the hemisphere.²¹ At the time, no explanation was made of why Roosevelt's letter mentioned an east-west highway, but the issue later played a large part in U.S. assistance to Nicaragua.

With his engaging personality and persuasiveness, Somoza could have succeeded in convincing Roosevelt during their private talks—contrary to the strong recommendations of the State Department against it—to back his favorite project for the San Juan River. After the May visit, Roosevelt and others in the executive branch appeared for a time to maintain interest in canalization of the San Juan. Although some had doubts, State Department and other government officials now changed to positions supporting the idea. Laurence Duggan, chief of the American Republics Division in the Department, informed Nicholson in Managua that President Roosevelt, on his own initiative, agreed with the request for a canalization survey. Duggan expressed doubts that, irrespective of the outcome of the survey, the project would receive Congress's blessing. He instructed Nicholson, however, in the event of

approval by Congress, to insist during his talks with Somoza that Nicaragua arrange a separate treaty with Costa Rica to satisfy that country's territorial concerns prior to construction.²²

By July, the administration's request for \$200,000 to finance the San Juan survey was in trouble. Hull stressed to Congressman Clifton A. Woodrum, chairman of the House committee responsible for the appropriation, the importance of a barge canal to the development of Nicaragua. Hull informed the congressman that he was for the project and reminded him of the president's support.²³ Hull also directed Duggan to seek White House assistance in lobbying Congress for the funds. Duggan, now having to back the idea, prepared a memorandum for the executive branch suggesting that Congress be informed of White House interest in the appropriation. He recommended that the White House remind the congressional committee that failure to fund the survey would have "an unfavorable effect on the present friendly relations with Nicaragua."²⁴ Roosevelt sent Woodrum the memorandum from Duggan with a personal note expressing his desire that the "appropriation of \$200,000 can be made."²⁵

Despite correspondence referring to its importance and despite Hull's expression of interest, the offer of a canalization survey appears to have been primarily a gesture by Roosevelt to placate Somoza—one that was made on the spur of the moment during their meeting in May. Somoza had evidently pleaded the case personally with the president, and Roosevelt had given in to the compelling Nicaraguan. Support for the idea developed because of this spontaneous presidential gesture, not because officials had made a rational change in their opinion as to the value of the project. The offer could be interpreted as one designed to gain Somoza's support or to build up the strongman politically, but there is no indication that this was the intention of those officials involved, including Roosevelt. U.S. officials had no reason to question Somoza's vigorous pro-American stance, nor his nation's—or any other Central American nation's—support of the United States. The Good Neighbor Policy had already produced enormous good will for Washington throughout the hemisphere, and officials in the administration were not compelled to "bribe" small countries in the region with trivial offers of foreign aid. As expected, however, the survey promise delighted Somoza, and soon he and his officials were exaggerating its intentions for their own political gain. After returning home, Somoza announced through the Foreign Ministry that Roosevelt promised Nicaragua a barge canal—an obvious fabrication.²⁶ In treaty negotiations with Costa Rica, Somoza's officials misled their counterparts by stating that canalization would definitely take place, irrespective of survey results.²⁷ Welles was not happy with this, and he instructed Nicholson to remind the Nicaraguan government that the canalization project was merely under study. The undersecretary emphasized that

actual construction was dependent on results of an engineering study, on the negotiation of a new treaty between Nicaragua and the United States, and on necessary appropriations from Congress.²⁸

Canalization of the San Juan became the most discussed issue among those resulting from the Somoza-Roosevelt talks of May 1939. Although the project was a small item on President Roosevelt's foreign policy agenda in that increasingly critical period, it was important to Somoza, mostly for political reasons. After the administration sent a barge canal survey team to Nicaragua, Somoza, besides his support for that project, continued lobbying efforts for a blue-water canal, like the one in Panama, as if the subject had not been closed during his visit to Washington. In mid-1940, he wrote to Roosevelt alluding to the potential dangers to the Western Hemisphere from the war in Europe. He reminded the president that a canal would significantly assist in the defense of the continent.²⁹ Restricting his reply to the barge canal survey then in progress, Roosevelt promised Somoza that he would get the engineer in charge to expedite completion of the report. Although he was aware of initial conclusions, he could not reveal them to Somoza until the final report was available.³⁰

The survey team's report in late 1940 estimated that construction of a barge canal on the San Juan River would cost approximately \$30 million—over six times the 1939 estimate. The chief engineer later stated that he recommended against the project not only because of the high cost, but because of the "nebulous" commerce it would develop in Nicaragua. He suggested, as an alternative, that the United States construct an east-west highway in the center of Nicaragua—another project the State Department had recommended against in its paper to Roosevelt before the May 1939 talks.³¹ After Roosevelt received the survey results at a cabinet meeting in December 1940, the barge canal project was indefinitely postponed.³² No decision was made at the time on the engineer's recommendation for an east-west highway, although this project would return as an issue in U.S. relations with Nicaragua.

The Effect of Press Coverage of the Washington Visit

Somoza and regime officials shrewdly turned his visit to Washington and talks with Roosevelt into political and personal gain at home. Understanding the value of good public relations, they used the radio and press in Managua—most of which Somoza controlled—to capitalize on the trip. Newspapers covered every detail of Somoza's journey to and from Washington. Photos appeared on front pages showing the Somozas with President and Mrs. Roosevelt, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, Vice President John Nance Garner, and other top U.S. officials.

Editorials praised the visit as a historic event for Central America, beneficial for the region as well as Nicaragua.³³

Public speculation on topics discussed by the two heads of state—probably leaked by Somoza or his officials—reflected those actually addressed in confidential talks in Washington. They also included the exaggerated assertion in one newspaper that the talks concerned the question of "an entirely new economic order for Nicaraguan life."³⁴ Referring to potential loans from the U.S. government, a report speculated that their amount could reach \$15 million, aid that could end Nicaragua's crisis and guarantee internal peace.³⁵

Writers from the Somoza-controlled newspapers took advantage of the occasion to write glowing accounts of the General and his government. The government, they asserted, had brought peace to Nicaragua and replaced the "passion of hatred" that marked the nation's history with a new "social tranquility." They praised Somoza as a president loved by all, a national leader going to Washington as "Governor of an entire people." One editorialist, calling Somoza a statesman and nationalist, declared that all political groups supported the president during his visit to Washington and that hatred against Somoza did not exist.³⁶

Nicaraguan press reports of the Washington visit created an image of Somoza as an indispensable man for Nicaragua. They portrayed him as an important—even respected—figure outside Nicaragua simply because Roosevelt invited him for a state visit. By unrealistically inflating the amount of aid to Nicaragua the visit would generate, the reports left in the minds of Nicaraguans an enduring impression, however false, of Somoza's ability to gain the support of the United States.

Although treatment by U.S. journalists was not as complimentary as that of the Somoza-controlled press, much of the coverage was still the type that Somoza could use to strengthen his image in Nicaragua.³⁷ Whereas most of these reports were neutral or favorable, usually headlining Somoza's pro-Americanism, some were critical.

Roosevelt's public comments were not such that Somoza could twist them to his advantage; they did not in any manner reflect a special esteem of the president for the General. In a session President Roosevelt held with the press the week before Somoza's visit, the subject drew scant attention. When Roosevelt raised the subject of Somoza's pending arrival, he referred to the General only as "the Nicaraguan." The benign reaction from White House reporters amounted to only one question to the president asking if he would "turn the town upside down for that military parade and go down to the station." Roosevelt replied that this was the plan and that the reason for special treatment was because it was the first time his administration had entertained a Latin American head of state in Washington. The president chose not

to mention that it was a dress rehearsal for the British royal family, although he surely knew this was the reason for the special welcoming ceremonies. When another question prompted a change of subject, the attending newsmen did not protest.³⁸

Time magazine made the event its lead story. While recognizing Somoza's pro-Americanism, it gave a frank assessment of his political past. The article noted that Somoza came to power three years earlier when he overthrew President Juan Bautista Sacasa and "ran him out of the country." It referred to the Nicaraguan as "Dictator Somoza" who had extended his term in office only months before the visit by a constitutional maneuver. It quoted one congressman's denunciation of Somoza as "a South American dictator," a view he had expressed during Somoza's visit to Capitol Hill.³⁹

Somoza's effectiveness at promoting his identification with the United States elsewhere in Central America was illustrated by his visit to El Salvador. A *New York Times* reporter wrote from San Salvador that when Somoza passed through that city on his return home, most people there unfortunately "took him as a sort of an American agent" on an errand in Central America. Observers thought he appeared to act as President Roosevelt's "mouthpiece" when he told reporters he was making arrangements with Presidents Ubico of Guatemala and Hernández Martínez of El Salvador for the prompt union of Central America, a subject that, despite the obvious impression he wanted to make, was never discussed in Washington. Although the reporter judged these comments—and much other "foolishness" of Somoza in San Salvador—to be "nonsense" and the General to be a "fool," his account reveals that Somoza left the impression there of a close relationship with Roosevelt and the United States, the exact impression that he had intended to leave.⁴⁰

Somoza gained notoriety in Nicaragua from the publicity his visit generated in the press of both countries. Reports from the U.S. legation and other sources in Managua confirmed that publicity from the visit temporarily strengthened his political position throughout the country.⁴¹ The most important result was that it impressed Nicaraguans—both supporters and enemies of Somoza. It was an impression that endured mostly to the benefit of the General and his regime for decades.⁴² If Somoza appeared to some U.S. observers as a publicity-seeking buffoon, his image improved after the visit in the view of some Americans who were not close to the situation in Nicaragua. Yet in the aftermath of the trip, Somoza's self-seeking actions did not distract Washington officials from the larger concerns of policy in the region.

The Visit and Administration Goals

However large the visit loomed in Somoza's mind or in the consciousness of the Nicaraguan people, the Roosevelt administration did not look on it as a momentous event. U.S. officials thought of the visit as part of an emerging reorientation of the administration's Latin American policy in response to threatening actions by the totalitarian powers. As the requirement for solidarity with the Latin American nations became more apparent, the Good Neighbor Policy moved away from one focused primarily on friendly relations and non-intervention and toward one designed to ensure stability and secure political alliances.⁴³

Roosevelt and other officials viewed the Somoza visit as one of a series of actions that would be necessary to secure the support of Latin American nations in the event of war. It was logical that the administration would make the first overtures to the nations of the Caribbean and Central American region where past association and involvement had been great. Despite the relative unimportance of the individual countries, the region remained strategically important due to its key sea lanes and the Panama Canal.

The administration's agreements to assist Nicaragua were modest and proportionate to that nation's relative lack of economic and strategic importance to the United States. Other Latin American nations received significantly more U.S. assistance at that time. An agreement with Brazil had already been formulated that provided \$45 million of credit from the Export-Import Bank, and Chile was receiving credits of \$20 million. In the 1939-41 pre-war period, credits to sixteen Latin American countries exceeded \$220 million—a figure giving perspective to the \$2.5 million allotted to Nicaragua. Also in that period, the administration supported a direct loan to Cuba of \$25 million, indicating the higher priority Washington gave to that small Caribbean nation in comparison to Nicaragua. Direct investment from the United States in Nicaragua at that time was but \$8 million, only 5 percent of the total private U.S. investment in Central America and by far the least invested in any one of the five countries of that region. Total U.S. trade with Nicaragua in 1939 remained insignificant, amounting to approximately one-tenth of one percent of all U.S. foreign trade.⁴⁴

With some exceptions, there was general agreement from members of Congress, and from observers on the outside of government, with the administration's decision to invite Somoza. Some members of Congress did criticize the administration's hosting of Somoza, but most of them simply described the visitor as a dictator.⁴⁵ In defense of Somoza and the actions of the administration in receiving him, Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn called the General a "benevolent ruler" and argued that he hoped the time would never come when all of the rulers of the

Western Hemisphere were not on the same friendly terms with Washington as they were at that time.⁴⁶ The *New York Times* saw the agreements with Nicaragua and the treatment of Somoza as "another step in our efforts to establish more positive relations with our Latin American neighbors." The pomp and ceremony with which the administration received Somoza, according to the *Times*, indicated "that the United States Government is striving actively to give real substance to inter-American solidarity." The *Washington Post*, in an uncritical vein, called the reception of Somoza "dazzling" and referred to him as the "leader of a democratic nation."⁴⁷

Recognition of the Dark Side of Somoza's Nicaragua: Effect on Policy after the 1939 Visit

Warnings to the U.S. government of the growing harshness and corruption of the Somoza regime and the potential for instability in Nicaragua continued during and after the General's visit to Washington. Reports from various sources close to the scene in Nicaragua, especially the U.S. legation, portrayed a situation that should have alarmed officials in the administration who were involved with policy for Nicaragua and Somoza's May reception in Washington.

The acting chargé in Managua, LaVerne Baldwin, sent a message to the State Department warning of the deepening tyranny of the Somoza regime. Although Somoza had advertised his government as democratic during his visit to Washington, Baldwin labeled it a plain "military dictatorship." The *Guardia's* primary function was to keep Somoza in power, and it was allowed to operate outside of the law to carry out this mission. Baldwin noted problems in that organization, however. He thought that low pay and the General's rapaciousness lowered morale and that the force could be a threat to Somoza in the future.⁴⁸

One method used by the regime to control the population was to demand "statements of employment." The government accused every man unable to produce this statement of "vagabondage" and jailed or impressed him into forced labor, often harvesting coffee on the haciendas of Somoza or his cronies. The chargé, admitting that the regulation requiring the statement would not be consistently enforced, nevertheless feared it was a tool that could be used when the government decided to increase repression of the population.⁴⁹

According to the report, Somoza had embarked on his own "New Deal," aimed at "shamelessly" exploiting the Washington visit by representing it as a signal of direct support from the U.S. government. He was using prestige gained from the trip to greatly increase his wealth by obtaining special levies or "contributions" from U.S. companies operating under his sponsorship in Nicaragua and by convincing owners

to sell him prime properties throughout the country. In a six-month period following the visit, Somoza purchased tens of thousands of acres of farmland and ranches, some with government money or funds drawn on accounts of the Liberal Party. For his expenses during his trip to the United States, Somoza took \$185 thousand in cash from the coffers of the state, an outrageous sum for that purpose in 1939. Although he began his presidency as "a relatively poor man," the chargé declared that Somoza's greed had increased his worth to between \$3 million and \$4 million in three years. In addition, the General's example encouraged others toward rapacity. Government officials forced owners to sell them their property, and the *Guardia* soldier in the street would threaten citizens with arrest if they did not pay him a small "fine."⁵⁰

Baldwin contended that the Somoza government was "riddled from top to bottom with graft." He saw a regime wasting the resources of a nation that needed "every centavo" in the face of the extreme poverty, a national socio-economic condition simply "beyond the comprehension of an American who has not seen it." He predicted that a continuation of these conditions under the Somoza regime would cause increasing resentment and internal conflict and could result in armed rebellion against the government. Somoza's actions would lead to his "hanging himself by a noose placed by his own hands" if allowed to continue. Baldwin's report clearly indicated that he had not been instructed from Washington to favor Somoza or to gloss over the faults of his regime.⁵¹

In view of all this, the legation presented two options for U.S. policy in Nicaragua. Washington could let Somoza fall for lack of support from the administration. If this were done, Export-Import credits would be lost and "upheaval" and "revolutionary destruction" would occur in the country; the legation therefore recommended against this course of action. The second, preferred option was to continue some degree of financial support for Somoza. The legation repeated a warning it had forwarded earlier: Somoza would try to divert U.S. funds for his own use, and safeguards had to be devised to ensure their proper use. This recommendation was justified with the argument that the lip service that Somoza had constantly voiced favoring U.S. interests in Nicaragua made it probable that if the General fell, a new government would not take a favorable view toward Washington. Although such a government might not be radical on the surface, it was argued, it could eventually assume an anti-American policy diametrically opposed to U.S. interests.⁵² Administration officials received other warnings about the Somoza regime during that time that were sufficient to justify reservations they might have had regarding Somoza's close identification with the United States. A report from a military attaché in the legation pointed to the continuance of corrupt government as the cause for the existence of radicals or communists in Nicaragua. One radical group consisted of dissatisfied Liberals and Conservatives who had little interest in

communism but supported any movement against the government because of pure "hatred for the Somoza regime."⁵⁵

A group of Nicaraguan exiles based in Mexico protested to Roosevelt against the manner in which he received Somoza, charging that a "divorce" existed between the dictator and the people of their nation.⁵⁶ Another protest to Roosevelt came in a letter sent the week he was hosting Somoza. It was from an exile organization in San Francisco, the so-called "Nicaraguan Patriotic Committee" and it charged that the *Guardia Nacional* had tortured students from the National University who had protested Somoza's dictatorial government. The letter forwarded a statement listing names of students held by the *Guardia* and detailing gruesome methods of torture by the military. The letter also accused the Somoza government of using Little Corn Island in the Caribbean—to which the United States had perpetual rights under the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty—as a prison for political dissidents.⁵⁷ Numerous other charges of regime atrocities during this period, although not available to Washington officials at the time, paralleled these accounts.⁵⁸

After returning to Nicaragua from home leave in the United States in early 1940, Minister Nicholson forwarded reports to the State Department similar in tone to analyses dispatched during his absence. They indicated the heightened concern of the diplomat regarding conditions in Nicaragua and especially his quandary over how the administration should deal with Somoza. Despite Somoza's visit to Washington and ensuing promises of aid, he felt there was a high potential for upheaval in the country. Nicholson relayed the warning of an important opposition leader that, if the United States supported Somoza solely because he was capable of keeping order in the country, it would encourage dictatorship. The political leader confirmed Nicholson's impression of prevailing discontent in Nicaragua, and of distrust of Somoza throughout society.⁵⁷ Nicholson repeated his earlier view of widespread corruption in the government and concern over financial management of U.S. aid, and he recommended that the department consider the assignment of an American official as manager of the Nicaraguan National Bank.⁵⁸

The minister agreed with other officials' assessments of corruption in the *Guardia* and its coercion of the population. Due to a distrust of some *Guardia* personnel, Somoza used the military academy, headed by an American officer since the May 1939 agreements, as a political counterbalance to elements suspected of disloyalty. The strongman requested, through Nicholson, the assignment of another U.S. officer to command an aviation school as a means to ensure loyalty within the *Guardia*. Nicholson, along with the head of the military academy, Colonel Charles Mullins, realized the dangerous political involvement that fulfilling this request would entail, and he recommended against it.⁵⁹

When Somoza became briefly ill early in 1940, however, Nicholson grew apprehensive over the potential for chaos if the *Guardia* turned against the General. If Somoza lost *Guardia* support, his government would fall, he now reported, and a period of "revolutionary chaos" would follow pending the arrival of another tyrant. To avoid this, Nicholson thought that Washington might soon have to send a military officer for the purpose of "tightening up" the *Guardia*. He queried the Department as to its position in the event that Somoza, "secure in his confidence that we wish him to remain in office," requested aid to strengthen the *Guardia*.⁶⁰

The two senior American diplomats in Managua—Nicholson and Baldwin—were equally alarmed about the situation in Nicaragua in 1940. Less than a year after Somoza's triumphal visit to Washington, they held few illusions about his regime. It was clearly riddled with corruption and faced increasingly bitter opposition to Somoza's harsh, personalistic rule. Somoza stayed in power by military oppression maintained by an organization of questionable loyalty. However critical the legation officials were of a government they now described as a military dictatorship, their overriding concern was the potential for instability in Nicaragua, or worse, they feared "revolutionary chaos." Their concern was not unlike that of U.S. diplomats in Nicaragua in previous years, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. Although troubled by corruption in the Somoza regime, they were more concerned with maintaining stability and preventing revolution. Their recommendations reflected a conflict: While disapproving of many aspects of the Somoza regime, their suggestions to Washington, if implemented, would have had the effect of bolstering it through deeper U.S. involvement.

Officials in the State Department were fully aware of the situation in Nicaragua and refused to allow legation reports to move them in a policy direction contrary to the long range goals of the administration's Latin American policy. Welles took advantage of queries from officials in the legation to reiterate the Department's guidelines for diplomacy in Managua as well as to clarify anew U.S. policy in Nicaragua. Fearful that conversations between Nicholson and Somoza had been too familiar, he told the minister to avoid making the impression that there was even the "slightest desire" on the part of the administration to intervene in the internal affairs of Nicaragua. In a subtle reprimand, Welles "trusted" that Nicholson had not made any suggestion or recommendation to Somoza in regard to sending U.S. officials to supervise Nicaraguan finances or take a command in the *Guardia*. Nicholson should carefully avoid insinuating that such action would be approved by the United States.⁶¹

The broad policy goals of the administration regarding Latin America had not changed, Welles reminded his subordinate. He restated Hull's 1936 guidance to all ministers in Central America, reminding Nicholson

of the policy of absolute non-intervention and the imperative to avoid offering advice on domestic issues as well as giving advice even if requested. In a reference to assisting Somoza, Welles instructed the minister to steer clear of action that would "enable any particular individual or faction to . . . maintain control of the government."⁶² Welles's caution was an example in which this top policy-maker for Latin America came down clearly on the side of opposing official support for Somoza.

Welles's intent was to ensure that Washington's representatives in Managua not allow the volatile political situation there to divert them from the more important policy goals of the administration. Despite declaring to former President Chamorro, prior to Somoza's visit, that Nicaraguan history did not point toward irresponsible government, Welles, as a historian of Latin America, knew otherwise.⁶³ In an inter-departmental memorandum at the time of the Somoza visit, he wrote that "there is probably no country with such a record of political irresponsibility and economic and financial mismanagement as Nicaragua."⁶⁴ He was thus aware of the pitfalls of involvement in Nicaragua's continuing imbroglio, and he realized that the greater need in 1940 was to focus policy in Nicaragua on the mission of gaining that nation's cooperation in the administration's drive for solidarity in the hemisphere.⁶⁵

There is no evidence that U.S. policy in Nicaragua during 1939-40 was designed to build up Somoza. As in all of Latin America in that critical pre-war period, however, the carefully designed goal was to gain support for U.S. policies. Somoza's invitation to visit Washington—at least partially self-initiated—happened to come at an advantageous time for him. President Roosevelt was eager to gain allies in the region and expressed the hope at the time to get "on a social footing with our Latin American neighbors."⁶⁶ Somoza astutely recognized this change in the administration's requirements in Latin America. As he had consolidated power without fear of U.S. intervention due to Washington's policy in the mid-1930s, he benefited equally from a turn in that policy in 1939 and 1940 to reinforce that power. Administration policy-makers were certainly aware of Somoza's actions in Nicaragua. Working under policy guidelines that prohibited interference in Nicaraguan internal affairs, however, and occupied with other priorities, they made no serious attempts to reverse the trend in Nicaragua. Somoza's pro-Americanism overshadowed efforts of those U.S. officials such as Lane, Nicholson, and Baldwin, who distrusted him and warned of the dangers of his regime to U.S. interests. The comparative stability of Nicaragua under Somoza, as well as the General's foreign policy in support of Washington, satisfied the larger goals the administration set for Latin America in 1940.

Notes

1. Memorandum for Secretary Early, 18 April 1939, OF 432, "Nicaragua, 1933-1940," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.
2. Department of State Memorandum, 17 March 1939, NA 817.001/Somoza, Anastasio; Memorandum on presidential dinner for Anastasio Somoza, 5 May 1939, PSF, Box 62, Roosevelt Papers.
3. Memorandum for Secretary Early, 18 April 1939; *Time*, 15 May 1939, p. 15.
4. *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 5 May 1939, 1, 3; *New York Times*, 6 May 1939, 1; *Time*, 15 May 1939, p. 15; *Washington Post*, 5 May 1939, 1, 8; *Washington Post*, 6 May 1939, 1. The *New York Times* compared the ceremonies for Somoza to the Washington reception for King Albert of Belgium after World War I; *Time* referred to the event as the "swankiest military state reception in Washington history." The *Washington Post*, claiming that the U.S. government "ascended to new heights of splendor as a host," called the event the "most dazzling welcome ever for a foreign visitor."
5. Somoza to Roosevelt, 22 May 1939, Fondo Salvadora de Somoza, No. 6, Somoza Papers. This paper related to several topics discussed between Somoza and Roosevelt. Copies of the memorandum are also located in the Roosevelt Papers, Box 62. Also see OF 1305, folder "Nicaraguan Canal, 1934-42," Roosevelt Papers and *FRUS: 1939*, 5:731-732.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. "Discussions to be held with President Somoza of Nicaragua," 1 May 1939, PSF, "Nicaragua," Box 62, Roosevelt Papers.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. For a report of these speeches in the Nicaraguan press, see *La Prensa* (Managua), 14 May 1939, 1; 16 May 1939, 1. Also see U.S. Congress, Senate, "Address of His Excellency, General Anastasio Somoza, President of the Republic of Nicaragua," S. Doc. 73, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1939, 1-3.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *New York Times*, 7 May 1939, 30.
15. *New York Times*, 13 May 1939, 5.
16. *New York Times*, 19 May 1939, 2.
17. *New York Times*, 13 May 1939, 5.
18. Chargé in Nicaragua to Hull, 2 December 1939, NA 817.00/8736; Nicholson to Hull, 19 May 1939, NA 817.00/8722; Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America*, 21-22; Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 197. To publicize the Washington trip, in early 1940 Somoza had postage stamps issued commemorating the event. *New York Times*, 11 February 1940, 6.
19. The president of the Export-Import Bank of Washington to Somoza, 22 May 1939, NA 817.51/2608. Inter-American Highway funding for Nicaragua was part of the appropriations for the entire Mexican-Central American project.
20. Roosevelt to Somoza, 22 May 1939, NA 817.51/2608; U.S. Statutes at Large, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1939, vol. 53, part 3, 2435-2436. The agreement

was for an officer to serve as director of the academy for a two-year assignment. It was extended in 1941 for two additional years. Memorandum of Conversation between Debayle and Hull, 25 August 1941, reel 31, volume 60, folder 240, Hull Papers.

21. Roosevelt to Somoza, 22 May 1939.

22. Duggan to Nicholson, 26 May 1939, NA 817.516/369a. Although Duggan appeared in this letter to take a negative position on aid to Somoza, in a memorandum two months earlier he recognized that "it would be literally impossible for him to return to Nicaragua empty handed without losing great prestige." Duggan suggested alternatives that, in addition to the canalization survey, became part of the approved aid program. Memorandum by Laurence Duggan, 1 April 1939, NA 817.001.

23. Hull to Woodrum, 13 July 1939, OF 1305, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

24. Memorandum by Duggan, 17 July 1939, OF 1305, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

25. Rowe to Roosevelt, 19 July 1939, and Roosevelt to Woodrum, 24 July 1939, OF 1305, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers; U.S. Congress, House, H. Doc. 351, 76th Cong., 1st session. Roosevelt demonstrated his personal interest earlier when he penned a note, "ask Congress for \$200,000," on a letter sent to Hull from the Secretary of War, Harry H. Woodring. See Woodring to Hull, 15 May 1939, OF 25N, "War Department, Chief Engineer, 1939," Box 29, Roosevelt Papers.

26. *La Prensa* (Managua), 2 July 1939, 1.

27. Nicholson to Hull, 3 August 1939, NA 817.812/851.

28. Welles to Nicholson, 10 August 1939, NA 817.812/851.

29. Somoza to Roosevelt, 17 July 1940, PPF 5913, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

30. Roosevelt to Somoza, 7 August 1940, PPF 5913, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

31. Craig L. Dozier, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore: The Years of British and American Presence* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 217-218; U.S. Congress, Senate, Special Committee for the Investigation of the National Defense Program, 4 September 1946, 80th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 21363-21365.

32. Stimson to Welles, 31 January 1941, NA 817.812/993; Welles to Roosevelt, 3 April 1942, OF 432, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers; Welles to Arguello, 8 April 1942, NA 810.154/1768a. There is no record that the United States informed Nicaragua of this decision.

33. Nicholson to Hull, Enclosure No. 2 to Dispatch No. 481, 19 May 1939, NA 817.00/8722. This letter forwarded Nicaraguan newspaper articles—from *Noticia*, *Novedades*, and *Nueva Prensa*—that were laudatory of the Somoza visit. These periodicals were either controlled directly through ownership or indirectly through bribes by Somoza and regime officials. *La Prensa*, a newspaper owned by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Zelaya, followed an independent policy often critical of the regime. Its coverage of the Somoza visit to Washington, while not sycophantic, was generally favorable. See *La Prensa* for 1939 (all page 1) on the following dates: 15, 18, 19, 20, and 26 April; 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 24 May; 8, 21, and 30 June; and 2 July.

34. *Novedades* (Managua), 2 May 1939, 1.

35. Nicholson to Hull, 19 May 1939; *Nueva Prensa* (Managua), 12 May 1939, 1.

36. Gabry Rivas, "Bon Voyage, President Somoza," *Nueva Prensa* (Managua), 27 April 1939, 1. Rivas, in 1939 an ardent Somoza supporter, in the 1940s became a bitter opponent and wrote against the regime from exile. See G. Alemán Bolaños, *Un Lombrosiano: Somoza* (Guatemala City: Editorial Hispania, 1945), 125.

37. *New York Times*, 25 March 1939, 7; *New York Times*, 6 May 1939, 1, 3; *New York Times*, 7 May 1939, 1, 30; *New York Times*, 13 May 1939, 5; *New York Times*, 14 May 1939, 37; *New York Times*, 26 May 1939, 22; *Time*, 15 May 1939, pp. 15-16; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Washington Times Herald* editorial, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 13 July 1939, *Congressional Record*, 3216; *Evening Star*, 5 May 1939, 1, 3; *Washington Post*, 5 May 1939, 1, 8; *Washington Post*, 6 May 1939, 1.

38. Press conference No. 543, 2 May 1939. Downplaying the importance of the visit, Roosevelt commented later in the news conference that he expected a "quiet week. I don't think we have anything much except the President of Nicaragua." He did indicate to one reporter, when questioned about the pronunciation of Somoza's name, that he knew how to pronounce it. *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972) 13:346-347.

39. *Time*, 15 May 1939, pp. 15-16.

40. Letter from Calhoun to Early, 21 July 1939, OF 432, "Nicaragua 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers. Calhoun was with the *New York Times* in the Panama Canal Zone. His letter to Presidential Secretary Early in the White House included extracts of the *New York Times* report from El Salvador.

41. Nicholson to Hull, 19 May 1939, NA 817.00/8722; Baldwin to Hull, 2 December 1939, NA 817.00/8736. One indication of a rise in Somoza's political standing after the visit was a unanimously passed resolution in the Nicaraguan Senate naming him "Benefactor of the Nation." The independent *La Prensa* ridiculed the idea, however, and noted that leading opposition senators were absent at the vote. *La Prensa* (Managua, Nicaragua), 28 July 1939, 1. Commenting on the significance of Somoza's trip to Washington, a former speaker of Nicaragua's House of Representatives and for years a key figure in Somoza's government, Juan José Morales, claimed that the 1939 visit came to have a great political impact in Nicaragua. Interview, 2 May 1986, Miami, Florida.

42. The visit assumed folkloric proportions in Nicaragua over the years. This impression comes from talks, in the United States and in Nicaragua (1971, 1972, 1978, and 1986), with Nicaraguans from different walks of life and from interviews regarding the subject in Miami, Florida, on 2 and 22 May, 1986, with former top officials in the Somoza García government.

43. G. Pope Atkins, *Latin America in the International Political System* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1977), 98-99; John J. Finan, "Latin America and World War II," in *Latin American Diplomatic History*, eds. Harold Eugene Davis, John J. Finan, and F. Taylor Peck (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 222; Mecham, *The United States and Inter-American Security*, 135-136; Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Pan American Day Address," 15 April 1940, in *The Evolution of Our Latin American Policy: A Documentary Record*, ed. James W. Gantenbein (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 202-206. Professor Wood observed that the change was one from a

negative policy of non-intervention to a positive one of collaboration. Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 358.

44. Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 75-76; Export-Import Bank of Washington, *Statement of Loans and Commitments* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), 5; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 57; *New York Times*, 26 May 1939, 22; Castillo Rivas, *Acumulacion de Capital y Empresas Transnaciones en Centroamérica*, cited in Pearce, *Under the Eagle*, 26; *FRUS: 1942*, 6:290-295; Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 168.

45. U.S. Congress, House, Speeches by Representatives Harold Knutson and Sam Rayburn, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 5 May 1939, *Congressional Record*, vol. 84, part 5, p. 5193.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *New York Times*, 7 May 1939, 1, 30; *New York Times*, 26 May 1939, 22; *Washington Post*, 6 May 1939, 1.

48. Baldwin to Hull, 2 December 1949, NA 817.00/8736.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*; Nicholson to Hull, 19 May 1939, NA 817.00/8722.

53. Attaché's Report by 1st Sgt. Hardy, U.S.M.C., 14 March 1940, NA 817.00/8753 1/2.

54. Letter from Carlos Odiaga to Roosevelt (n.d.), OF 432a, Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

55. Guillermo Doña to Roosevelt, 9 May 1939, NA 817.00/8717. Accounts of Somoza's use of Little Corn Island for political purposes during this period are also in Bolaños, *Un Lombrosiano: Somoza*, 147, and Hull to Stewart, 25 July 1944, NA 817.00/72544. In Hull's communication, he instructed Ambassador Stewart to ask Somoza not to use the Corn Islands as a place to detain political prisoners.

56. One account from that period came from a Conservative Party opponent of the regime, Pedro Hurtado Cárdenas. Cárdenas wrote that in 1940 the *Guardia Nacional* arrested him and his family and held them incommunicado for three weeks without charges ever having been brought against them. The *Guardia* repeatedly threatened to kill him, and they tortured him by applying electrical shocks to his genitals. They released him after the three-week period. Pedro Hurtado Cárdenas, *Las Torturas Como Sistema* (Managua: Editorial Asel, 1946), 8-18. Cárdenas's book is located in the Biblioteca Nacional, Managua. Other accounts of Somoza regime cruelty in the early years are in Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal, *Estirpe Sangrienta: Los Somoza* (Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, S.A., 1979); Juan Colindres, *Anastasio Somoza: Fin de una Estirpe de Ladrones y Asesinos* (Tizapan, San Angel, Mexico: Editorial Posada, S.A., 1979), 59-60; Bolaños, *Un Lombrosiano: Somoza*; Manuel Cordero Reyes, *Nicaragua Bajo Somoza* (San Salvador: Imprenta Funes, 1944), 23.

57. Nicholson to Hull, 19 April 1940, NA 817.00/8762.

58. Nicholson to Hull, 6 March 1940, NA 817.00/8749.

59. Nicholson to Hull, 15 February 1940, NA 817.60/8762.

60. Nicholson to Hull, 15 March 1940, NA 817.00/8753.

61. Welles to Nicholson, 16 April 1940, NA 817.5151/519.

62. Ibid.

63. Welles to Chamorro, 10 November 1938, NA 817.00/8600.

64. Memorandum by Welles, 27 April 1939, NA 817.001, Somoza/Anastasio, 151.

65. As early as 1935, Welles predicted that "loyal cooperation" of the Latin American countries would be "the surest security" for the United States, an idea set forth years before it became a policy concern of other administration officials. Sumner Welles, "Good Neighbor Policy in the Caribbean," 5.

66. Press Conference No. 667, 6 August 1940, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 16:97.

Somoza and Washington: The War Years

In the last two years of United States neutrality before Pearl Harbor, Washington increasingly focused its Latin American policy on security measures to protect the Western Hemisphere from the Axis threat. These included controlling fifth-column movements in the region, meeting special economic needs, and securing military cooperation and base rights. Strategic priorities included defensive measures to secure the Panama Canal and the "bulge" of Brazil. These missions affected Central America because of its proximity both to the United States and to the Canal, and because an important north-south air corridor to eastern Brazil passed over the region.¹

Nicaragua played a role in this strategy. To the extent of its capabilities, the Somoza regime cooperated with the United States both in the period of build-up to war and in the years of belligerency after December 1941. During these periods, the Roosevelt administration signed various cooperative agreements with Nicaragua and furnished both economic and military aid. Somoza continued his excessive demonstrations of allegiance to U.S. policy goals, and continued at every turn to ingratiate himself with Washington officials. Despite the

opposition of some of these officials to Somoza, at the end of the war the Nicaraguan General remained firmly in control of an increasingly harsh regime.

Preparation for War: Fifth-Column Movements in Nicaragua

The activity of German sympathizers in Central America comprised the primary fifth-column threat during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The threat in Central America was never as great as elsewhere in Latin America, especially as it was in the nations of the "southern cone" of South America.² It did exist to a lesser degree in the region, however, including in Nicaragua.³

German nationals had participated in the Nicaraguan economy since the late nineteenth century. They had been active in agriculture after 1880, especially in coffee cultivation, and in the twentieth century they expanded into retail trade and export-import enterprises in Managua. Germans also became involved—albeit to a lesser degree—in Nicaraguan cultural and political life.⁴

After 1940, reports surfaced of espionage activities by German agents operating in Managua and by pro-German sympathizers in the *Guardia Nacional*, the Foreign Office, and the Ministry of Interior.⁵ Being aware that some Latin American republics planned to closely control the activities of Nazi operators in the Americas, German agents attempted to intimidate the Nicaraguan government, and others in Central America, to boycott the Havana Conference in July 1940.⁶ While this effort failed, some Nazi sentiment was evident. The American legation, noting Nazi support within the military, reported that a source in the *Guardia Nacional* believed that "only through a German victory could Nicaragua win freedom from servitude to the United States."⁷ In late 1940, the legation relayed a report of an extensive plot by German sympathizers to overthrow the Somoza government. The plan called for an operation by German agents and Nicaraguan dissidents to neutralize all communications and public services; to initiate mob violence to disrupt the social order; and to assassinate Somoza, his family, leading members of the government, and important foreigners living in Nicaragua.⁸ While he was aware of the report, Somoza remained confident his government could meet the threat. Minister Nicholson, however, questioned whether the General could survive this type of subversion.⁹

The threat of Nazi Germany transcended all problems of U.S. officials in Central America at that time. Nicholson demonstrated this priority by turning from criticism of the regime to concern over its survival. Despite Somoza's confidence, Nicholson feared that the local

political and military organizations were incapable of dealing with such a threat. He proposed an emergency plan of action involving the participation of key U.S. and foreign personnel and requested several types of assistance for Nicaragua. Included were items that Somoza, recognizing the advantage of applying for aid during a period of concern over the German threat, had again submitted to the legation. Somoza requested that military officers be sent as training advisors, that a radio station with U.S. operators be set up in the presidential palace, and that technical assistance be provided to establish a Nicaraguan intelligence service. Although it became unclear if the threat was real or a fabrication of espionage agents trying to profit by passing false information, Nicholson considered it sufficiently serious to request that the Department immediately respond. He argued that it was to the "government of General Somoza, backed by his *Guardia*, that we must look for the maintenance of peace and order should any subversive activities reach the point of force."¹⁰

State Department officials, perhaps involved at the time with threats more serious than those described by Nicholson, were not at all alarmed by his reports, and they feared the minister's plan would get the legation too deeply involved in Nicaraguan internal affairs. In several analyses prepared in the Division of American Republics, officials admitted to some new German activity in Managua, but indicated that they believed that the "Nazi scare" in Nicaragua could result in Somoza accusing anyone who opposed him of being a German sympathizer. Although Somoza had been pro-American throughout his career, U.S. officials knew that he had consistently maintained close relations with the Germans and seemed to be playing both sides in the event Germany came out on top. They cautioned against acceding to all of Somoza's requests, but recommended that the Department give some attention to Nicholson's concerns.¹¹

Until late 1940, many observers interpreted various Somoza actions as pro-fascist. As discussed above, he used a self-styled fascist organization, the *camisasazules*, in his rise to power in the 1930s. One report claimed that Somoza appointed the organization's leader as his first minister of education.¹² Several critics charged that he associated with known Nazis, admired Hitler and Mussolini, and kept pictures of the two dictators in his office.¹³ Although admiration for European dictators, particularly Spain's Franco, was not unusual at that time among Central American strongmen like Jorge Ubico in Guatemala and Hernández Martínez in El Salvador, Somoza denied the charges of pro-Axis sympathies. As early as June 1940, he announced that "no person from any side in Europe will upset peace in Nicaragua."¹⁴ He claimed that he was not a Nazi sympathizer and that he did not support the fascist cause. Like Ubico and Hernández, he was quick to move

against any threat to his government and did not wait on encouragement from the United States to take firm action.¹⁵

In this critical period prior to Pearl Harbor, U.S. officials working with the Nicaraguan government were in the paradoxical position of needing to support Somoza to ensure his cooperation and stability in his country while maintaining some distance from a regime many now considered despicable. Somoza well-understood this dilemma. When there were indications he might not get the support he believed he deserved, he appeared hurt and presented himself to Nicholson as the "best friend" of the United States in Latin America, and he lamented that he had received little recognition from Washington for his efforts.¹⁶

Officials in Washington recognized more quickly than did Nicholson the ulterior motives in Somoza's actions. Suspecting that the General would cooperate fully in the campaign against Nazi subversion regardless of the flow of aid, and perhaps believing that Somoza had even encouraged reports of a Nazi threat to facilitate sympathy for his regime, they continued to oppose unlimited support. Some of their reluctance came from alarm over the enormous graft of the General and members of his regime. Some remained skeptical of aiding a government like Somoza's where there was a possibility that support would curb normal political activity and buttress an unpopular dictatorship. Although these reservations did not disappear, contingencies soon overrode them. The Roosevelt administration eventually met some of Somoza's requests to insure his cooperation in its mission to control subversive elements and gain solidarity with Latin America.¹⁷

Wartime Economic Cooperation

U.S. dominance of Central America's foreign trade became more pronounced by the eve of World War II. One reason for this was that, by the close of the 1930s, the administration's reciprocal trade program had made Central America more dependent on U.S. markets for its agricultural products and had increased the percentage of manufactures that the United States shipped to the region. Traditional markets were closed as a result of the war in Europe, and by early 1942, the breaking of diplomatic relations between the Central American republics and the Axis powers further altered trade patterns.¹⁸

Nicaragua's foreign trade, the smallest in volume in Central America, thus became more closely tied to the United States after Pearl Harbor. The loss of German markets partially explained this. In 1939, Germany came after the United States as the second most important trade partner of Nicaragua. After 1941 trade between Nicaragua and Germany was negligible.¹⁹ By this time, U.S. dominance was such that it received 95 percent of Nicaragua's exports and furnished 85 percent of its imports,

compared to figures of 67 percent and 59 percent, respectively, for 1938. The amount of bilateral trade remained low, however, in comparison to U.S. trade with other countries in Central America.²⁰

During the war, the administration signed several agreements with Nicaragua—as it did with most of the Latin American countries—for the dual purpose of stabilizing the Nicaraguan economy and providing the United States with strategic raw materials for its war industry.²¹ These provided for an additional \$500,000 credit from the Export-Import Bank for currency stabilization; the purchase of Nicaraguan crude rubber and gold; loans and grants to Nicaragua for social development projects; and funds for road construction.²² In the agreement for rubber purchases, signed January 11, 1941, the United States contracted to buy the entire Nicaraguan production of crude rubber, minus the country's domestic needs.²³ Although rubber was needed for war materials, it appears that the administration agreed to purchase Nicaraguan gold primarily as a means of subsidizing that country's gold mining industry. This agreement included permits for foreign companies in Nicaragua to import from the United States the necessary materials for mine operations. Gold mining was critical to Nicaragua in the early 1940s: In 1941 it accounted for 61 percent of total Nicaraguan exports and employed approximately seven thousand workers. During the war, the United States also assisted Nicaragua in establishing an agricultural experiment station and provided a \$500,000 grant for the improvement of health and sanitation facilities, which included plans for the construction of water and sewer systems in the cities.²⁴

The largest amount of U.S. economic aid of one type provided to Nicaragua in the war years, as well as in the entire Somoza García era, went for road construction. The 1939 talks resulted in \$2 million of Export-Import Bank loans for construction of the Nicaraguan section of the Inter-American Highway. These loans were not an exception by the administration, but were part of the program for financing work on that portion of the route from Mexico to Panama. During the 1942-43 period, this route was called the pioneer road, and it received high priority from Washington because of its strategic importance as the sole transportation link overland between the United States and the Panama Canal. The administration eventually arranged for loans of over \$50 million to cover two-thirds of the cost and for U.S. Army Engineer support for this road during the war years. Mexico, Panama, and the Central American countries were expected to provide funding for the remaining one-third of construction costs. Nicaragua's share of these funds reached \$5 million in 1942.²⁵

Military-Economic Aid: The Rama Road

A U.S.-sponsored project in Nicaragua that was an exception among wartime aid programs in Central America was one for the construction of an east-west road through the center of Nicaragua. Its justification was both military and economic. The project, called the Rama Road, originated with the barge canal issue that Somoza had raised in the 1939 talks. The barge canal disappeared as a topic in bilateral discussions for over a year after an engineer study recommended against the canalization of the San Juan River.²⁶ At the time of the recommendation, however, Nicaraguan officials were not formally apprised of its results.²⁷

Somoza had not forgotten the request. In late February 1942, he again raised the canal issue in a long letter to Roosevelt. He reminded the president of the dire need to unite western Nicaragua with the eastern region and of his request in 1939 for U.S. support in accomplishing this by the canalization of the San Juan. Although he must have been aware of the canal survey team's recommendation, he excused Washington's lack of compliance due to exigencies of the war. As if to soften Roosevelt for his next request, Somoza pledged the Nicaraguan people's total support of the United States in the war effort, reminding the president that his countrymen were always united behind the "ideal of democracy," which he knew Roosevelt sustained with "great courage." Somoza then asked for assistance in the construction of a "first class highway" as the only solution for connecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. He stressed the political and economic importance of such a road, and its "great strategic importance for the Continental defense . . . and the defense of the Panama Canal." The road would be a valuable contribution by Nicaragua to the common task of ending the war. He also reminded the president that he would consider it an appropriate substitute for a barge canal, and he was careful to tie his new request—as he had his earlier one—to indemnities that he argued were due Nicaragua as a result of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty.²⁸

The request arrived in Washington less than three months after Pearl Harbor, at a time when the administration had good reason to avoid disappointing its Latin American allies. Sumner Welles, at that time acting secretary of state and still the administration's principal spokesman for Latin American policy, viewed early 1942 as a period in which hemisphere solidarity was more imperative than at any point in the Good Neighbor era. He stressed this attitude only weeks before at a conference of foreign ministers in Rio de Janeiro, where he reminded the diplomats that they lived in an "hour of peril" and that the Americas must unite against the common enemy.²⁹ Welles was thus not likely to risk losing the favor of any Latin American

leader—especially one as supportive as Somoza—at the time he reviewed the General's request to Roosevelt for aid to build a highway.

After studying previous correspondence between Roosevelt and Somoza, and after reviewing the Nicaraguan position on the canal issue, Welles decided that the United States had a commitment to cooperate in a practical manner to establish communications between eastern and western Nicaragua. On March 9, he wrote Roosevelt a memorandum to prepare him for a visit of the Nicaraguan foreign minister. Welles reminded the president that, although the barge canal project had been shelved because it was impractical and too expensive, the United States had an ongoing program with Nicaragua for highway construction. The State Department supported an additional credit of \$1 million for Nicaragua from the Export-Import Bank for highway construction, and Welles believed that part of it should go toward construction of the intercoastal road to open eastern Nicaragua.³⁰

Welles, realizing he would need broader support for Somoza's project, instructed an assistant to obtain from the War Department an opinion as to the military potential of the proposed highway. The official briefed Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower of the War Plans Division, explaining to Eisenhower the background of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations, including the canal issue. In mid-March he informed Welles that he believed Eisenhower would agree to the allocation of funds for the Rama Road. On April 2, Eisenhower reported that the Rama Road would increase the stability of Nicaragua and minimize the possibility of revolutionary activity. Its tactical value, according to Eisenhower, would be to facilitate the movement of U.S. troops were they deployed because of an internal uprising or an attack from outside.³¹

The next day Welles—still acting secretary—wrote a long letter to Roosevelt explaining in detail the State Department's reasons for supporting the recent request from Somoza for funding for the Rama Road. Welles mentioned the War Department's support and enclosed General Eisenhower's report, which stated the road would have "a very definite military value." Welles recommended that Roosevelt release \$2 million from his wartime emergency fund for survey and construction of the road. Welles thought approval of these funds would entirely free the United States of any further obligation to the Nicaraguan government. Roosevelt's "ok," signed without comment, indicated the total confidence the President continued to have in his friend Welles in policy matters for small countries like Nicaragua.³²

A letter the State Department prepared for Roosevelt's signature informed Somoza that an exchange of notes regarding completion of the Rama Road would be "a practical and complete solution" of the problem discussed in 1939. It also stressed that the road would have special value for the defense of the hemisphere. After touching on

other subjects, the letter expressed appreciation to Somoza and his fellow citizens for the full cooperation and support that they had "unstintedly afforded" to the United States in the war effort.³³

Welles wrote the Nicaraguan foreign minister, Mariano Arguello, informing the Managua government for the first time in formal communication that canalization of the San Juan River was "economically impracticable." The acting secretary, again attempting to end all discussion of canalization while at the same time limiting Washington's obligations to Somoza, stated bluntly that he considered the project "to be one which the two Governments will wish to give no further consideration." He informed the minister that it had been agreed that the Rama Road was the most promising method of linking the two coasts of Nicaragua, and that its completion would terminate any obligation Washington had resulting from the Roosevelt-Somoza discussions of 1939.³⁴

If Somoza's minister—or the General himself—was to any degree offended by Welles's tone, his reply did not indicate it. Arguello accepted for his government the "valued offer" made by the United States as a gesture that again revealed U.S. good will and cooperation with his country. He informed Welles that the Rama Road would have great strategic importance and that the Nicaraguan government was immediately offering it for the use of the "defense of the United States of America."³⁵ In six weeks Welles had arranged assistance for Nicaragua that he hoped would be a reasonable and economical solution to Somoza's requests and to the commitments Roosevelt had made in 1939. It was soon apparent, however, that Welles had acted precipitately without conducting a proper study of the proposed highway project; indeed, he had committed the United States to a much more costly undertaking than had at first been apparent.

The White House, to obtain approval of the project from the Budget Office, sent all relevant correspondence to its director, Harold Smith.³⁶ In an accompanying memorandum to Smith, Roosevelt requested the director's approval of a letter Welles intended to send to the Nicaraguan foreign minister. Smith replied that he knew Roosevelt had already sent a letter to Somoza stating the United States would assume all costs of the highway and that he was therefore in no position to object to Welles's letter since it contained the same information.³⁷ The date on Welles's letter to the foreign minister was the same as that of Smith's return memorandum to Roosevelt, indicating that the acting secretary had sent it prior to the president's receipt of the budget director's reply. Smith was piqued because he had been left out of the matter while Welles obtained the president's approval and was brought into the process only after decisions had been made. He told Roosevelt that he believed the proposed construction "has been very hastily prepared" and

recommended that, before a definite allotment of monies occurred, a more detailed and accurate estimate of cost be forwarded to his office.³⁸

Subsequent analyses by the State Department and the Public Roads Administration revealed that the commitment made to Somoza would involve significantly more funding than had been determined originally. In late May 1942, the State Department wrote Smith to request, based on new engineer estimates, \$4.5 million for the Rama Road. Although the road had at first been envisioned to be constructed to normal Nicaraguan standards, the Department now recommended a higher quality road built on the order of the Inter-American Highway. The State Department advised Smith that from a political point of view it would be undesirable to build the road to lower standards. Facets such as terrain, rainfall, and non-military usage required the better quality of construction. By the time Roosevelt instructed the Treasury Department in August 1942 to release the necessary funds, the standards for the Rama Road had been slightly downgraded and the costs adjusted to \$4 million, the amount made available from Roosevelt's "Emergency Fund for the President, National Defense, 1942 and 1943."³⁹

The Rama Road project became the most difficult assistance effort that the United States would initiate in Nicaragua. It also proved to be one of the most costly and controversial; it is one that many observers often use in criticizing Washington for giving special treatment to Somoza. Plans called for a road to be constructed from San Benito, located 22 miles north of Managua, to the east for approximately 150 miles to the town of Rama on the Escondido River. At that point the river was navigable to the Caribbean Sea, a distance of approximately 60 miles. The terrain was rugged over the entire route, especially the last 50 to 70 miles before Rama. This section consisted of a tropical rain forest flooded much of the year by torrential rains, terrain extremely difficult for road building. The costs of the road eventually exceeded four times the original \$4 million authorized by Roosevelt from his emergency defense funds in 1942. When Congress had to appropriate monies for construction after the war, lively debates then and in the early 1950s delayed the project as senators questioned the value of the road both from military and economic viewpoints and because it began as a "private agreement" between Roosevelt and Somoza. Construction on the Rama Road was completed in the late 1960s.⁴⁰

The road, therefore, was not available for use during World War II. If it had been completed during this time there is no reason to believe that it would have contributed to the allied effort in the war, despite Eisenhower's judgement regarding its potential value. Although Somoza took great pride in the Rama Road—and probably profited from graft associated with its construction—there is no indication that its disapproval by Washington would have lessened his support for the United States. The administration's offer of the project as a means to keep his

favor appears to have been unnecessary. Welles's actions in the matter in the early 1940s were part of a wider policy, however, which was designed to take few chances with the favor of the leaders of the small countries in the vicinity of the Panama Canal. He recognized at least a potential for anti-Americanism in Nicaragua as a result of past intervention and resentment of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty, and apparently he decided that the safer course was to please Somoza. For his part, Somoza was sufficiently resourceful to appreciate how to turn these attitudes to his and Nicaragua's advantage.

Military Cooperation in World War II

More than a year before entering World War II, the Roosevelt administration established the basis for the wartime cooperation of armed forces by conducting a series of bilateral talks with Latin American countries.⁴¹ In Central America, the Caribbean, and northern South America, these talks concerned various topics but concentrated primarily on contingency plans for establishing air corridors to patrol and secure approaches to the Panama Canal.⁴²

As part of these efforts, U.S. Army officers held a series of staff conversations with Somoza in August 1940. Agreements signed during these discussions obligated the Nicaraguan government to take certain defense measures, in conjunction with the United States, to reinforce regional security. These included pre-war procedures for the surveillance of aliens, the protection of key facilities, and the exchange of intelligence relating to continental security. Nicaragua also agreed, prior to the outbreak of war, to permit photography missions by U.S. aircraft and surveys by U.S. Army medical, engineer, and signal teams of facilities in that country.⁴³ In the event of a real or threatened attack by a non-American power, Somoza committed Nicaragua to several actions: Nicaragua would delay and harass enemy operations; request U.S. military assistance; facilitate the entry of U.S. armed forces into Nicaraguan territory; and take the necessary precautions to insure that the existing government remained in office and continued to exercise authority. Somoza also made a general commitment to make available to U.S. armed forces Nicaragua's "vital facilities," although these were not named.⁴⁴

U.S. military officials promised Somoza that the United States would, within its capabilities at the time, employ "land, sea, and air forces" to assist Nicaragua to repel attacks by a non-American nation or by fifth-column elements from within its territory. The United States would also facilitate the acquisition by Nicaragua of necessary armaments and provide advisors for the training of *Guardia* personnel.⁴⁵

As the possibility for U.S. entry into the war increased in the spring of 1941, the War Department prepared a separate joint Army and Navy plan for assistance to the countries nearest the Panama Canal. Approved by President Roosevelt in late April, the so-called Rainbow Defense Plan applied to Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. In May, the War Department directed the Caribbean Defense Command in the Panama Canal Zone to prepare specific plans for each country.⁴⁶ The command submitted a "Plan for Support of Nicaragua" to the War Department in September of 1941.⁴⁷ This contingency plan called for the deployment to Nicaragua of a U.S. infantry battalion and one parachute company from the Canal Zone with the mission of securing key locations. The parachute company would jump in at the Managua airport to secure airfield facilities, a radio station, oil and gas stores of the U.S.-owned Pan American Airways, and to cover the introduction by land of the infantry battalion. Subsequent deployments of military and naval forces from the Canal Zone would secure the principal Pacific ports of Corinto and San Juan del Sur and the two railroads running inland from these ports. Reinforcements for these forces would come from both the Canal Zone and the United States.⁴⁸

A week after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. minister to Nicaragua obtained additional rights from the Nicaraguan government. These included permission for U.S. military aircraft to fly over and land on Nicaraguan territory without providing advanced notification; the use of airports for refueling and maintenance; the establishment of communications stations; and the right to station uniformed, armed personnel in Nicaragua to facilitate the movement of aircraft.⁴⁹

During the war years, these agreements allowed the United States to carry out various activities. The Army constructed or improved airfields in the capital, as well as in Puerto Cabezas on Nicaragua's northeastern coast for use as stopover stations by U.S. crews enroute to the Canal Zone and South America. The Navy used the main Pacific port at Corinto as a seaplane and PT boat operating base and established a base in the Gulf of Fonseca on the northwest coast, the latter requiring coordination with Honduras and El Salvador. The United States stationed 15-man detachments of air corps personnel at each airfield and a 185-man coastal artillery detachment at Corinto.⁵⁰

The Lend-Lease program, authorized by Congress in March 1941, provided defense matériel to Nicaragua during the war. It allowed the United States to furnish military and naval arms, equipment, and munitions to allied countries on a reduced cost basis.⁵¹ Although the original intent of the legislation was to assist Great Britain, the United States soon applied its provisions worldwide.⁵² Between August 1941 and March 1943, the administration negotiated Lend-Lease agreements

with eighteen Latin American countries, providing matériel to a value of \$425 million.⁵³

Nicaragua and the other Central American republics had all signed Lend-Lease agreements with the United States by the fall of 1942. The October 1941 agreement with the Somoza government was the first of these, and the only one signed that year. Under its provisions the United States promised matériel of a total value of \$1.3 million. Nicaragua agreed to a deferred repayment of 70 percent of the cost of the aid.⁵⁴ The agreement with Nicaragua was not special in comparison with those made with the other countries in the region. The dollar amount was proportionate to amounts in those agreements, while the percentage of value for basing repayment was slightly higher, indicating that Somoza received a less favorable arrangement.⁵⁵

The Politics of Pro-Americanism: Somoza's Continuing Quest for Favor in Washington

A number of other strongmen in Latin America cooperated with the United States during the 1940s, but none did so as bombastically as Somoza. He announced at one point that he considered "every Nicaraguan aviator and soldier as a potential fighting man for the United States," and he subsequently reiterated this by confiding to a U.S. official that he thought of the *Guardia Nacional* as a small part of the Army of the United States.⁵⁶ On numerous occasions Somoza boasted that Nicaragua was ready to contribute an Army of forty thousand men to the U.S. war effort.⁵⁷ On the night of Pearl Harbor he offered to the U.S. minister the "use of the national territory of Nicaragua, its land, water, and air, to United States forces . . . so long as the present armed conflict . . . exists."⁵⁸ He told a U.S. Army officer that he and his government were at the disposal of the U.S. government and that he would promptly honor any request made by Washington that would be to the mutual defense of the two countries.⁵⁹

In efforts to closely identify with the United States, Somoza and his representatives went beyond normal diplomatic practice in their praise and flattery of U.S. officials. The General frequently displayed his admiration for Roosevelt through flamboyant, headline-producing gestures. He dedicated to Roosevelt a large monument in the center of Managua and a park in Granada, and he named the capital's principal avenue and the international school for the U.S. president.⁶⁰ The Nicaraguan government issued a Franklin D. Roosevelt stamp, and the legislature passed a resolution declaring him "Benefactor of the Americas."⁶¹ Other gestures by Somoza included making Roosevelt's birthday a Nicaraguan national holiday, and staging parades and dedications on the Fourth of July, Roosevelt's reelection in 1940, and the

anniversary of his decade as president in March 1943.⁶² Somoza's speeches at these events often evoked democracy and freedom, thereby identifying his government not only with the United States but indirectly with these concepts. He praised Roosevelt as the "great defender of world democracy" and "champion of human rights" and often said that he represented the universal desire for freedom. One of Roosevelt's reelections meant that he had "triumphed over capitalism." Somoza reminded one audience of his admiration for Washington and Lincoln, leaders who to him served as the "spiritual foundation for the greatness of the democratic institutions of the powerful American people."⁶³

Somoza sent messages to Roosevelt with sympathy at the death of Speaker of the House Bankhead, with gratitude for his "apostolic leadership" during the war, with congratulations on the invasion of Europe, and with greetings—always overflowing with outrageous praise—on each birthday of the president, on New Year's Day, and on Christmas. In thanking Roosevelt for relief aid after a hurricane, Somoza wrote that the gesture displayed "the altruistic and elevated sentiments of humaneness which have always inspired your great people in all the generous acts which it performs time and again." He congratulated President Truman upon the surrender of Japan and five years later on the fifth anniversary of the surrender. He sent Truman a letter conveying his concern when the president was away from his office temporarily with a "mild virus."⁶⁴

Somoza's diplomats sent an enormous number of congratulatory letters, messages of sympathy, and other notes to Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and other administration officials. They dealt with diverse topics, some important, many trivial. Although many of these conformed to the usual practices of protocol, their number, subject matter, and flattering tone created an effect that was abnormal in the traditions of diplomatic protocol. The Nicaraguan foreign minister, in a letter thanking Roosevelt for a photograph, praised the president in eulogistic terms. He wrote of his admiration for Roosevelt due to his "brilliant personality" and because he was judged by many as one of the most illustrious chiefs of government in the world, a leader who had "striven to accomplish and consolidate the noblest tasks for the benefit of your fellow-citizens."⁶⁵

Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, Somoza's son-in-law and ambassador to Washington after May 1943, made seemingly superfluous visits to Secretary of State Hull in 1943 and 1944 during the period when Hull was deeply occupied with the war. On one visit in 1943, the ambassador congratulated the secretary on his "remarkable accomplishments at Moscow;" expressed the "great admiration with which his President, government, and people regarded President Roosevelt and the Secretary;" and conveyed the "warm regards of his wife and mother-in-law." In the spring of 1944, he paid his respects to

Hull again as he departed for home leave in Nicaragua; he repeated the gesture still again upon his return to Washington. Several months later he called on Hull to assure him that the Nicaraguan government had been supporting the United States "in every possible way" in the war. Hull tolerated the ambassador's effusiveness, although his correspondence did reveal some impatience with the extravagant and ridiculous attention. In one letter, he mentioned that, while he appreciated Sevilla-Sacasa's support, it was unnecessary for the ambassador to continue to "tell me this since I know it full well."⁶⁶

Somoza's identification with the United States and efforts to impress its officials, while appearing frivolous at the time, may have in the long term affected U.S. policy and the course of Nicaraguan political development. This was not clearly discernible, however, from Washington's policy toward Nicaragua during the war. With the exception of the support by Roosevelt and Welles for the Rama Road, there is no evidence that these actions achieved special treatment for Somoza in wartime Washington. A major reason for this was that, despite the bombast and flamboyance—even absurdity—of his claims of allegiance to the United States, the amount of support and the degree of cooperation Somoza provided for the war were not unique, even among the small countries of Central America.

Officials recognized the hollowness of most of Somoza's overstated offers of assistance in the war effort. Although he boasted of sending 40,000 troops, *Guardia* strength stood at 3,000 poorly equipped active troops, and 10,000 reserves, a hollow force with virtually no equipment. When Somoza offered to provide soldiers to guard a naval base, War Department officials turned him down due to their lack of confidence in the *Guardia*. Officials contended that Nicaraguan troops were not trained for combat and that their presence would result in a minimum increase in security of the base. Some feared that differences in language would create difficulties and that their lack of sanitation "might result in disease infection of American troops." In general, the War Department did not consider that Nicaragua possessed a serious capability to contribute to the war effort.⁶⁷

All of the Central American nations declared war on Japan the day after Pearl Harbor. Nicaragua's declaration of war on Germany and Italy came on December 11, 1941, the same day Costa Rica and Guatemala acted against the Axis powers and only two days before the governments of El Salvador and Honduras thus acted.⁶⁸ Each of these nations granted basing rights to the United States, and between 1940 and 1945, each allowed the establishment of both air and naval installations in its territory.⁶⁹ In truth, therefore, Somoza did not support the United States any more than did the other governments in the region.

Among the five Central American nations, the Guatemalan government actually provided the largest number of defense concessions to the United States during the war. The Guatemalan strongman Jorge Ubico was as cooperative with Washington as was Somoza, albeit in a less pretentious manner.⁷⁰ Guatemala allowed the United States to station a bomber squadron of seven hundred airmen and ten aircraft at San José, Guatemala. This unit and smaller ones stationed in Guatemala City comprised the majority of U.S. military personnel in Central America during World War II.⁷¹ When a U.S. senator recommended a decoration for Somoza in 1944 for his services to the United States, the commanding general of the Caribbean Defense Command advised the War Department against the idea. Although Somoza had been "most cooperative" with the United States, the General believed the same statement applied to Ubico "to an even greater extent" and that this type of recognition for either would require the same for the president of Panama due to his cooperation in the war.⁷²

Due to higher priorities elsewhere, most of the matériel assistance promised to Nicaragua under the Lend-Lease agreement did not arrive in Managua until the last part of the war. Of the \$1.3 million of aid provided for in the 1941 agreement, the United States eventually delivered matériel with a value of \$890 thousand.⁷³ Over one-half of this amount went for aircraft and aeronautical material, one-seventh for tanks and other vehicles, and less than one-tenth for ordnance and ordnance stores.⁷⁴ Somoza especially sought the latter, and he became frustrated when Washington refused to approve a request he made in 1944 for ten thousand Springfield rifles and an order of small arms ammunition.⁷⁵

Although this refusal reflected a broader policy to reduce military aid to Latin America after the threat of direct Axis aggression had passed, there were more pointed reasons for administration officials to limit aid to Somoza toward the end of the war. Somoza had become increasingly corrupt by the anniversary of his ninth year in power in 1945. Although most Nicaraguans had not profited from the war, the General took advantage of economic opportunities provided by the war to grossly enrich himself. Administration officials were aware of specific cases of Somoza's graft and suspected many others. A major source of income for Somoza was the gold mining industry, the country's primary foreign exchange producer during the war. Vice President Henry Wallace, recording a meeting with Roosevelt and other officials, wrote that they debated with "considerable heat" the merits of subsidizing Nicaraguan gold mining by purchasing unneeded gold when Somoza personally received 15 percent of the \$7 million that gold sales earned for Nicaragua annually. Various estimates of these payments—bribes made by the companies to gain Somoza's approval to mine in Nicaragua—all reached hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.⁷⁶ U.S.

officials were also aware that Somoza received similar payments, or *mordidas*, as they were known in Nicaragua, from rubber purchases that the United States was making under wartime agreements.⁷⁷

Profits Somoza made from U.S. procurement of land for bases also concerned officials. The airfield established in Managua by the War Department was located on the General's land with the agreement that all buildings erected by the United States would revert after the war to the Nicaraguan government. The United States established a naval base at Corinto on the west coast with the understanding that the Nicaraguan government would have an option to purchase all equipment not removed by U.S. forces upon their withdrawal. After the war, the United States valued the items to be left at \$106,000. Published reports accused Somoza of obtaining the equipment by arranging to trade to the U.S. government a tract of land the State Department wanted for a new embassy. The Nicaraguan government had recently appraised the land at \$106,000; soon after that, Somoza purchased the property from an unsuspecting owner for one-seventh the appraised value.⁷⁸

More alarming reports at the end of the war made U.S. officials even more hesitant to continue aid to the Somoza government. Some alleged that Somoza was stealing huge sums of money directly from the national treasury. Information from a "reliable" embassy source relayed charges made by prominent Nicaraguan officials that Somoza had taken 17 million córdobas, the equivalent of \$3.5 million, from the treasury over several years.⁷⁹ Officials from the Nicaraguan National Bank, "when in their cups," according to an embassy report, informed U.S. officers that the bank, already burdened with bad loans, continued to make personal loans to officials representing Somoza. They were secured only by the initials "A.S."⁸⁰

The manner in which the Somoza government maintained highway construction funds particularly concerned U.S. officials. Funds for the Inter-American Highway, a jointly financed project, were mixed in Nicaraguan accounts with funds for the Rama Road, a project financed separately by the United States. The situation produced confusion and plainly opened the opportunity for graft.⁸¹ Although charges of Somoza's corruption were difficult for U.S. officials to prove, they nevertheless provided good reason for apprehension when the General presented new requests for assistance.

An additional reason to disapprove arms for Somoza was his failure to begin payments on Nicaragua's Lend-Lease account. In 1945, his government was four years in arrears with Lend-Lease payments. Officials prepared Secretary of State James F. Byrnes for one of Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa's frequent "courtesy" visits by informing the secretary that Nicaragua was one of the few countries that had not made any Lend-Lease payments and that the Managua government

owed the United States almost \$600,000. Although this was an enormous amount for Nicaragua in that year, it was not large in comparison to Somoza's yearly income in that period, and less even than he reportedly received from the gold mining companies in the war years, facts known to Washington officials.³²

By 1944, the larger question of continuing support for non-democratic allies in Latin America for the first time began to complicate Washington's relationship with the Somoza regime. At a point when some State Department officials began to oppose military aid for Nicaragua and to question continuing the wartime closeness with the regime, other U.S. officials, some civilian but most military, retained a more favorable view of Somoza. A particularly sharp division over policy developed regarding military assistance to Somoza—as it did to other non-democratic governments in Latin America—a debate that set military officials against civilian. In its afteraction report, the War Department was entirely positive in judging U.S.-Nicaraguan relations during the war. The war years "found Nicaragua comparatively peaceful, its government friendly to the United States, and cooperative in the war effort in general and to hemisphere solidarity of defense in particular."³³ Military officials supported supplying arms to Somoza in the 1944-45 period, and few agonized—as did State Department officials—over the thought that arms would be used for internal suppression.³⁴

U.S. defense officials believed that the most important goal of the United States in Latin America during the war had been to achieve solidarity, a belief in accord with the strategy first defined by Sumner Welles in 1941. With the War Department's assistance, Welles had convinced Roosevelt to extend the Lend Lease program to Latin America for essentially political purposes.³⁵ War Department strategists did not expect countries like Nicaragua to be able to assist in repelling an attack from an external power on their territory, and they never pretended confidence in the real combat capabilities of forces like the *Guardia Nacional*.³⁶ They did expect, however, that aid to Somoza would assist him in maintaining internal stability, and in this respect they argued that military aid fulfilled its purpose.³⁷

World War II brought deep changes to U.S.-Nicaraguan relations, as it did to American diplomacy throughout the hemisphere. In the first years of the war, security demands far overshadowed officials' concerns regarding support for the Somoza dictatorship. Somoza and his retinue went to great extremes to allay concerns and to gain the favor and approval of U.S. officials. Sometimes this took the form of exaggerated offers of assistance in the war effort. At other times, it consisted of sycophantic statements of admiration and support for the United States and its leaders, often ridiculous pronouncements offensive to accepted diplomatic custom. Although this practice may have influenced some

officials, others retained misgivings about a continued close relationship. These misgivings caused an ambiguity that came to mark relations between the United States and the Somoza regime: Officials were torn between conflicting desires to back Somoza because of the stability he offered and to distance themselves from him because of their contempt for his increasingly unpopular dictatorship, one they sensed could eventually be counterproductive to U.S. interests.

A lasting result of the war on U.S.-Latin American relations was the rise of military issues to a prominent position in Washington's policy determinations for the region, a change that directly affected policy for Nicaragua. Despite periodic and uneven opposition to military support for Somoza for several years beginning in 1944, in the long term the war established military aid as a central element of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua, as it did for policy toward so many of the post-war allies of the United States. To the disquiet of State Department officials, it also increased the role of military officers in bilateral relations.

Strong and consistent opposition to the Somoza government did come from one group of State Department officials at the end of the war. These officials became increasingly aware of the non-democratic nature of the regime and sensitive to criticism that it was immoral for the United States to support dictators like Somoza in Latin America after fighting a war to rid them from the rest of the world. Knowledge of bitter internal opposition to Somoza encouraged their efforts to get the General to leave power when his term expired in 1947.

In the years 1944-48, several factors would influence U.S. policy toward the Somoza regime: the nature of the regime and its internal opposition; the question of military aid and the effect it had on the relationship between Somoza and U.S. military and civilian officials during this period; U.S. officials' efforts to implement a policy of support for democracy in Latin America; and the aftermath of elections and a coup d'état, both Nicaraguan events of 1947.

Notes

1. John J. Finian, "Latin America and World War II," 222; Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, *The Western Hemisphere: Guarding the United States and Its Outposts* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1964), 3-9; Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *United States Army in World War II: The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1960), 3-6, 238, 261-264, 311-312; Mecham, *The United States and Inter-American Security*, 217-221; Richard Arnold Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration Between the United States and Latin America: The Record, 1826-1951" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1955), p. 5.

2. Treatments of German influence in South America at the start of World War II are Hugo Fernández Artucio, *The Nazi Underground in South America* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1942); Alton Frye, *Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere, 1933-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); N. P. MacDonald, *Hitler over Latin America* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1940); William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid: The Secret War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 297-298; Robert Strausz-Hupé, *Axis America* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941); Dick Steward, *Money, Marines, and Mission: Recent U.S.-Latin American Policy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), 47. For an analysis of the Axis influence in the "Southern Cone" of South America, see article by Edward Tomlinson in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 July 1940, 1, and Vera Micheles Dean, *Latin America and the War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 39-49.

3. Of the five Central American countries on the eve of World War II, stronger German or Nazi influence existed in Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. This was due primarily to the number of Germans in key economic (and to a lesser extent, political) positions in these countries. It was also due, in Guatemala and El Salvador, to the political philosophies of Presidents Ubico and Martínez. See Frye, *Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere*, 114; Laurence Martin and Sylvia Martin, "Nazi Intrigues in Central America," *American Mercury* 53 (July 1941):66-73; *New York Times*, 5 January 1939, 1; Lane to Hull, 15 November 1941, NA 715:1715/1581; Lester D. Langley, *The United States and the Caribbean, 1900-1970* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 164-165; Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration," 266-267.

4. John Gunther, *Inside Latin America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 141-142; MacDonald, *Hitler over Latin America*, 211-12; Woodward, *Central America*, 157.

5. Nicholson to Hull, 26 October 1940, NA 817.00N/33; 2 and 4 November 1940, NA 817.00/8877; 27 December 1940 (two dispatches) NA 862.20210/380; and 31 December 1940, NA 862.20210/379. Also see Department of State, Division of American Republics, Memoranda of 3 January 1941, NA 862.20210/381 and 7 February 1941, NA 817.00/8925 1/2; Gunther, *Inside Latin America*, 141-142.

6. *New York Times*, 11 July 1940, 8.

7. Report from legation official John T. Muccio describing comments by *Guardia* officer Captain Francisco Alegria, in Nicholson to Hull, 26 October 1940.

8. Nicholson to Hull, 23 December 1940, NA 862.20210/378 and 27 December 1940, NA 862.20210/381. Although discussion of this plot disappeared from diplomatic correspondence, in 1942 the *New York Times* reported that a plot by Axis agents and some of Somoza's political opponents to assassinate the General had been frustrated. Somoza declared at the time that "everything is now under control." *New York Times*, 15 September 1942, 3.

9. Nicholson to Hull, 21 December 1940, NA 862.20210/377.

10. *Ibid.*; Nicholson to Hull, 16 December 1940, NA 817.00/8888. Nicholson's concern even reached the point of requesting that a U.S. destroyer touch port on the west coast of Nicaragua to show support for Somoza. Undersecretary Welles, against the idea, denied the request because he did not

want to revert "to the old policy of sending destroyers as a means of impressing public opinion in the other American Republics." Nicholson to Hull, 2 November 1940 and Hull to Nicholson, 4 November 1940, NA 817.00/8877; Welles to Wilson, 11 November 1940, NA 817.00/8885.

11. Department of State, Division of American Republics, Memoranda of 3 January and 7 February 1941.

12. Crawley, *Dictators Never Die*, 99.

13. Nicaraguan law professor Emilio Borge González made these charges in a bitter article about the Somoza regime, "Nicaragua por dentro," *Combate* 4 (January and February 1979):33-34; see also Bolaños's work on the first period of the regime, *Un Lombrosiano: Somoza*, 182; and *Time* magazine reporter William Krehm in *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean*, 119. Somoza's opponents routinely accused him of pro-Nazism during this period. Former President Emiliano Chamorro claimed Somoza fabricated stories of Nazi plots for his own purposes. Chamorro, referring to charges of Nazism in Nicaragua at the time, contended that "*si hay alguno que tenga vinculaciones nazis, ese alguno es Somoza*" (If there is anyone that has Nazi tendencies, that person is Somoza). Letter from Chamorro to Solórzano, 29 September 1942, copy obtained by the U.S. legation in San José, Costa Rica, and forwarded in a dispatch dated 9 October 1942, NA 817.00/8945. Somoza later vehemently denied that he was ever a Nazi sympathizer or that he displayed pictures of Hitler and Mussolini. See Warren to Marshall, 23 April 1947, NA 817.00/4-2347.

14. *New York Times*, 16 June 1940, 26.

15. MacDonald, *Hitler over Latin America*, 212. Reports after World War II indicated Somoza did associate with known Nazis during the early 1940s. See Warren to Marshall, 23 April 1947.

16. Nicholson to Hull, 27 December 1940.

17. Memorandum, Division of American Republics, 7 February 1941.

18. Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1943), 306-312; Harold Bierck, *The United States and Latin America, 1933-1968: From the Good Neighbor to the Alliance for Progress* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 20; Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 120-22; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 156-69; David Green, *The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 95; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 88-91; Langley, *The United States and the Caribbean*, 176-80; William Manger, *The United States and Latin America: A Survey of Recent Changes in the Relations between the United States and Other American Republics* (Washington: Pan American Union, 1946), 26; Gordon S. Watkins, "The Impact of the War on the Economic Relations of the United States and Latin America," in Malbone W. Graham, ed., *The Meaning of War to the Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 64-65; Welles, *A Time for Decision*, 210-19; Woodward, *Central America*, 201.

19. A. Randle Elliott, "The Resources and Trade of Central America," *Foreign Policy Reports* 17 (1 September 1941), 150-60.

20. For a discussion of the effect of the war on trade patterns in Latin America, see Duggan, *The Americas*, 97-100, and Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 96-97. For changes in U.S.-Nicaragua trade after 1939, see Elliott, "The Resources and Trade of Central America", 150-160; MacDonald, *Hitler over Latin America*, 212; *New York Times*, 2 January 1941, 41; Charles Morrow Wilson, *Middle America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1944), 289. Although the United States dominated Nicaraguan foreign trade in the war years, Nicaragua remained one of Washington's least important trading partners in Latin America. At the close of the war, Nicaragua ranked last in Central America in terms of total volume of trade with the United States and nineteenth out of twenty Latin American countries. Arthur P. Whitaker, ed., *Inter-American Affairs*, 1945, 5 vols. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1946), 5:260; *Countries of Central America: A Financial and Economic Review* (New York: The Chase National Bank, 1944), 10-11; Philip Leonard Green, "Nicaragua: Lake Country of Central America," *Agriculture in the Americas*, 3 (July 1943): 128-30.

21. These agreements, resulting from the Havana Conference in 1940, are discussed in Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 152-53; Mecham, *The United States and Inter-American Security*, 189-90; and William Manger, *The War and the Americas: Specific Application of the Principles of Inter-American Solidarity; Measures for the Defense of the Continent* (Washington: The Pan American Union, 1944), 33-57.

22. Department of State, *Executive Agreement Series, No. 357*, 11 January 1941, 1212, and No. 368, 18 May 1942, 1307-1308; "Economic Collaboration with Nicaragua," *Department of State Bulletin*, 25 April 1942, 368-369; *FRUS: 1942*, 6:568-570; Somoza to Roosevelt (26 February 1942), Roosevelt to Somoza (7 April 1942), and Welles to Roosevelt (9 March 1942) with attached four-page memorandum entitled "Matters of Interest to the Nicaraguan Government," which are located in OF 432, "Nicaragua, 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers; Memorandum for Rockefeller, n.d., 1944, Historical Manuscript Collection, Office of the Chief of Military History (hereafter OCMH), Washington, D.C.

23. Hull to Stewart, 8 May 1942, NA 810.6176/265.

24. Somoza to Roosevelt, 26 February 1942; John Morton Blum, ed., *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942-1946* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 165-66; *Executive Agreement Series No. 368*, 1307; *The Countries of Central America: A Financial and Economic Review*, 10.

25. Whitaker, *Inter-American Affairs: 1943*, 3:153-156; Manger, *The War and the Americas*, 56-57; *FRUS: 1942*, 5:46-47.

26. Stimson to Welles, 31 January 1941.

27. Memorandum attached to Welles to Roosevelt, 9 March 1942.

28. Somoza to Roosevelt, 28 February 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua, 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

29. Sumner Welles, Address at the Opening Session of the Third Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, 15 January 1942, in Gantenbein, *The Evolution of Our Latin American Policy: A Documentary Record*, 231-244.

30. Memorandum attached to Welles to Roosevelt, 9 March 1942.

31. Bonsal to Welles, 14 March 1942, NA 817.154/228 and Eisenhower to Welles, 2 April 1942, NA 817.154/231A.

32. Welles to Roosevelt, 3 April 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers. Roosevelt's special fund, established by Congress, was called the "Emergency Fund for the President, National Defense, 1942 and 1943." In 1942, the fund initially contained \$50 million. U.S. Congress, Senate, Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, *Inter-American Highway*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1942, pp. 21, 212-15.

33. Roosevelt to Somoza, 7 April 1942, NA 810.154/1776a. Somoza's reply, a long letter dated 10 June 1942, not only thanked the president elaborately but reviewed in detail the strategic and economic importance of the project. In December 1942, he again wrote to Roosevelt, thanking him for the Rama Road and forwarding a published pamphlet on the project which included Roosevelt's picture and a chronological listing of the dates of the agreements resulting from the 1939 visit.

34. Welles to Arguello, 8 April 1942, NA 810.154/1768a.

35. Arguello to Welles, 18 April 1942, NA 817.154/236.

36. Roosevelt to the Director of the Budget, 6 April 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

37. Smith to Roosevelt, 8 April 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

38. *Ibid.*

39. G. Howland Shaw to Harold D. Smith, 28 May 1942, Hearings on the Inter-American Highway, 21775-78; Smith to Roosevelt, 6 June 1942 and Smith to the secretary of the treasury, 18 August 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

40. For a discussion of the controversy surrounding the Rama Road, see J. Fred Rippy, "State Department Operations: The Rama Road," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 9 (Summer 1955):17-31. The 1952 Senate debates are in U.S. Congress, Senate, 82d Cong., 2d sess., 3 June 1952, *Congressional Record*, 6432-35. Also see U.S. Congress, Senate, *A Review of United States Government Operations in Latin America*, Sen. Doc. 13, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, 107-108; Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 75; Dozier, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore*, 217-218, 227, 236, 238.

41. Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 180.

42. *Ibid.*, 261-262.

43. Caribbean Defense Command (hereafter CDC), "Nicaragua and the War Effort," Document No. 8-2.8, p. 3, Historical Manuscript Collection, OCMH, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CDC 8-2.8); *New York Times* 4, 29 August 1940, 2:8; Flournoy to Welles, 7 August 1940, NA 810.20/114.

44. CDC 8-2.8, p. 4.

45. *Ibid.*, 5.

46. War Department letter dated 20 May 1941, subject "Preparation of Plans for the Effective Support of Latin American Republics," File 381, CDC 8-2.8, p. 6.

47. This plan, dated 27 September 1941, is in CDC file 301, Army and Navy, Nicaragua, in CDC 8-2.8, p. 6.

48. Due to the isolation of eastern Nicaragua from Managua and the Pacific region, initial plans did not include provisions for repelling an attack on the Caribbean coast. It was understood that forces from the United States would protect that region. During the war, however, the United States

improved the airfield at Puerto Cabezas on Nicaragua's northeast coast for use as a servicing station for aircraft patrolling the Caribbean area. CDC 8-2.8, pp. 6, 7, 10.

49. Note No. B-208, Ministry of Foreign Relations, 17 December 1941, CDC file 686, Nicaragua, cited in CDC 8-2.8, p. 8.

50. CDC 8-2.8, pp. 10, 13-17, 20, 21; Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 264; Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration," 234.

51. U.S. Congress, Senate, "Message from the President of the United States," 10 June 1941, S. Doc. 112, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1941, iii, v, 25-36.

52. Sumner Welles was instrumental in convincing Roosevelt to provide Lend-Lease aid for Latin America as another means to insure solidarity. Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 221; Welles to Roosevelt, 28 June 1941, NA 810.20/1240a and 24 December 1941, NA 810.20/1862a.

53. Of the total Lend-Lease disbursements, only 1 percent went to Latin America. Brazil received approximately 75 percent of this amount. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 137-38; Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 233-34; Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration," 188-189.

54. The text of the Lend-Lease Agreement with Nicaragua is in *FRUS: 1941*, 7:410-413.

55. The Lend-Lease agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica are in *FRUS: 1941*, vol. 7, and *FRUS: 1942*, vol. 6. A compilation of data on all of the agreements is in *Thirty-Seventh Report to Congress on Lend-Lease Operations for the Year Ending December 31, 1955* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 16-21.

56. *Time*, 15 May 1939, p. 15; U.S. ambassador to Stettinius, 16 January 1945, NA 800/710/Nicaragua-Mexico.

57. Nicholson to Hull, 6 June 1940, NA 810.20/30/4.11; *New York Times*, 23 November 1939, 20.

58. CDC 8-2.8, p. 2.

59. Montesinos to Commanding General, Caribbean Defense Command, 2 June 1942, File 686, in CDC 8-2.8, p. 14.

60. Memorandum from McIntyre, secretary to the president, to the Department of State (18 September 1942), Somoza to Roosevelt (24 December 1942), and Hull to Roosevelt (28 August 1943), in OF 432, "Nicaragua 1941-1945," Roosevelt Papers; Somoza to Roosevelt, 19 February 1942, PPF 5912, Roosevelt Papers; Somoza to Truman, 6 February 1946, NA 817.001/Somoza, A/2-146; *New York Times*, 26 May 1943, 10 and 13 October 1943, 17.

61. Sevilla Sacasa to Truman, 16 July 1946 and Messersmith to Stettinius, 8 June 1945, OF 1286, Folder 432, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

62. Somoza to Roosevelt, 20 January 1941, 1 January 1942, 30 January 1942, 9 July 1942, and 4 March 1943, in OF 432, "Nicaragua 1933-1940" and "Nicaragua 1941-1945," Roosevelt Papers; Nicholson to Hull, 11 February 1941, NA 817.00/8893; *New York Times*, 17 January 1942, 5.

63. Somoza to Roosevelt, 24 December 1942, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," and Memorandum, Roosevelt to Welles, 14 February 1942, PPF 5913, Roosevelt Papers; Somoza to Truman, 6 February 1941, NA 817.001/Somoza, A/2-146. The "capitalism" quote is from Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 89.

64. Somoza to Roosevelt, 17 September 1940, 1 January 1941, 20 January 1941, 30 January 1941, and 7 June 1944, in OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1933-1940" and "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Roosevelt Papers; Somoza to Roosevelt, 24 October 1941, PSF, "Nicaragua," Box 62, Roosevelt Papers; Somoza to Truman, 15 August 1945, 14 August 1950, and 7 July 1952, OF 1286, Folder 432, Truman Papers.

65. Cordero Reyes to Roosevelt, 20 May 1939, PSF, "Nicaragua," Box 62, Roosevelt Papers.

66. Memoranda of Conversation, 29 November 1943; and 3 April, 19 June, and 28 August 1944; vol. 60, reel 31, Hull Papers.

67. CDC 8-2.8, pp. 9-11; Intelligence Review No. 16, 29 May 1946, Military Intelligence Division, War Department, pp. 6-7 and Intelligence Review No. 21, 5 July 1946, Military Intelligence Division, War Department, p. 8, both located in Naval Aide Files, Truman Papers.

68. *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, Washington, D.C., 1 July 1945, 406.

69. Intelligence Review No. 16, 29 May 1946, p. 7.

70. Although some critics accused Ubico of being sympathetic to pro-Nazi elements in Guatemala before World War II, his wartime cooperation with the United States was later unquestioned. An Ubico scholar, Professor Kenneth J. Grieb, claims that the Guatemalan president prided himself on being the strongest ally of the United States in Central America. Grieb contends that Ubico "pursued pro-American policies throughout his tenure as president of Guatemala." Kenneth J. Grieb, "The United States and General Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power," *Revista de Historia de América* 71 (June-January 1971):119-135. Ubico's foreign minister, Carlos Salazar, made an offer of troops similar to that of Somoza. He promised that Guatemala could furnish up to sixty thousand trained soldiers. Guatemala's active military strength at the end of the war was 8,602, which indicated that Salazar, like Somoza, had probably exaggerated his nation's capabilities. Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration," 256, and Intelligence Review No. 16, 29 May 1946, p. 3.

71. Conn, Engleman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and its Outposts*, 343; Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 254, 264; CDC 8-2.81, 9-10; Intelligence Review No. 16, 29 May 1946, pp. 6-7.

72. Caribbean Defense Command file 201, Anastasio Somoza, in CDC 8-2.8, p. 22; for Central American cooperation in the war effort, see Geisler, "Measures for Military Collaboration," 216, 217, 232, 234, 237, 239, 256-58, 266-67.

73. Nicaragua did not receive appreciable Lend Lease aid after 1945, although matériel under the program continued to be delivered to Latin America through the 1950s. See *Thirty-Seventh Report to Congress on Lend Lease Operations*, 16-21, appendices I(b) and I(c).

74. *Ibid.*, appendix I(b).

75. Somoza to Roosevelt, 23 December 1944, NA 817.24/4-745; Roosevelt to Summerlin, 7 April 1945, OF 432, "Nicaragua: 1941-1945," Box 1, Roosevelt Papers.

76. Wallace indicated that the approval to buy Nicaraguan gold was sustained at the meeting due to the commitment made by Roosevelt in his April

7, 1942 letter to Somoza. Blum, *The Price of Vision*, 165-66. For other estimates of payments to Somoza, also see John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 67, and Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean*, 113. Proof of direct payments to Somoza from U.S. companies operating in Nicaragua in a later period is in letters in the *Archivos Nacionales* in Managua. These letters reported monthly payments of thousands of dollars. The letters usually stated "for your dividend," "in accordance with our agreement," or words to this effect. See letter from Clifford A. Greeman to Somoza, 6 February 1952; letters from S. G. Robinson to Somoza, 13 July and 11 October 1954; letter from J. A. Willey to Somoza, 23 August 1956—all of which are located in Savadora Files 1, 7, and 12, *Archivos Nacionales*, Managua. Somoza admitted to having a connection with the mining companies, even mentioning in a letter to Roosevelt that "the mining companies have closely cooperated with me in the development of our mineral resources." Somoza to Roosevelt, 26 February 1942.

77. Cochran to Rockefeller, 25 July 1945, NA 817.00/7-2545; Memorandum for Record by Cochran, 11 October 1945, NA 817.00/10-1145.

78. CDC 8-2.8, pp. 19-20; *New York Times*, 26 August 1946, 10. Ambassador Fletcher Warren forwarded rumors to the State Department that Somoza was obtaining the property left by the United States at Corinto for his personal use. *FRUS: 1946*, 2:1079.

79. Warren to secretary of state, 22 April 1947, Post Records, Managua, Folder "800-State of Finances of Nicaraguan Government-Somoza," Record Group (hereafter RG) 84, Box 12, National Archives.

80. Topping to secretary of state, 13 July 1949, NA 817.00/7-1349.

81. Memorandum of Conversation by Cochran, 27 February 1946, NA 810.154/2.2746.

82. Cochran to Byrnes, 30 August 1945, NA 817.24/8-3045. While reports of Somoza's yearly income during the 1940s vary, most place it in the range of hundreds of thousands of dollars. An estimate from one of the most respected sources, included in a book by Somoza's former foreign minister, Cordero Reyes, fixed his yearly income during this period at \$1 million. Cordero Reyes, *Nicaragua Bajo Somoza*, 13. The Somoza government completed its Lend-Lease payments in September of 1951, the thirty-ninth country—of forty-three receiving Lend-Lease aid worldwide—to clear its account. See *Thirty-Seventh Report to Congress on Lend-Lease Operations*, 19.

83. CDC 8-2.8, p. 1.

84. *Ibid.*, 22-27; Warren to Department of State, 5 June 1945, NA 817.24/6.545.

85. Welles to Roosevelt, 28 June 1941, NA 810/1240a and 24 December 1941, files of the Joint Advisory Board on the American Republics, Operations Division, War Department cited in Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 232-33.

86. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy*, 201; Duggan, *The Americas*, 95-96. Gardner argues that "the United States did not want, or even encourage, troop contributions from Latin America."

87. Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 213.

Discord in Relations

The First Signs of Policy Change, 1943

Washington's dissatisfaction with Somoza began during the tenure in Managua of the wartime American ambassador, James B. Stewart. Stewart's reports in 1943 and 1944, and the reaction they caused in the Department, signalled a change in Washington's priorities in Nicaragua. The ambassador's initial reporting, in late 1942 and early 1943, reflected satisfaction with the internal order and economic stability that existed in Nicaragua. He thought the Roosevelt administration was pleased with conditions and would look with concern on any threats to peace and order in the country.¹ His instructions from the State Department implied no uneasiness with Somoza, but instead they focused on the need to maintain stable relations throughout the war.²

In late 1943, while Stewart's view of conditions in Nicaragua continued to be generally positive, his reports started to reveal serious doubts about Somoza and less confidence in the stability that had marked his rule. The ambassador began to recognize that opposition

to Somoza now existed in all sectors. The General's avarice and the corruption that permeated his government had made enemies among business and labor groups, as well as among the politicians, including many in Somoza's own Liberal Party. The majority in the Liberal Party now opposed the regime. While the *Guardia Nacional* still backed Somoza, there were signs of possible defection. Stewart based this on his judgement that the masses had turned against Somoza and that the *Guardia*, recruited from the working class, could be influenced by this change of attitude.³

A major factor in Somoza's political strength and in government stability was the close identification of the regime with the United States. This intimidated opposition leaders, many of whom had the impression that the United States wanted Somoza to stay in power at all costs and that Washington would use its military forces against a revolution to overthrow him. Besides crediting the United States with a prominent influence on Nicaraguan politics, Stewart also believed that the relative economic prosperity in the country—a condition he admitted only benefited the elite—resulted from U.S. aid and the special circumstances of the war. Somoza constantly used his association with the United States to his political advantage, and Stewart surmised that no Nicaraguan government could survive without U.S. recognition and support. Somoza remained tireless in efforts to identify with the United States, and one method he used was to associate frequently with the American ambassador.⁴ It was obvious from his reports that Stewart found Somoza's attentions hard to resist.

The first indications that Somoza planned to stay in power after his term expired in 1947 caused Stewart great concern. A movement in the Nicaraguan Congress to change the constitution to allow Somoza's reelection had initiated the most "serious and acrimonious" opposition yet and had resulted in rumors of an attempt to assassinate the General. The reelection plan, still unofficial, came at an unfortunate time; the regime was beset with serious problems and Somoza's image was more tarnished than at any time in the past. Although the ambassador did not think the General's downfall was imminent, he believed that the end of the war could bring further instability to Nicaragua. Sensing that Washington would move toward a policy of active opposition to non-democratic regimes, Stewart predicted that Somoza's strength, founded primarily on U.S. support, could be undermined, thereby increasing the possibility of a revolution. This would mark the beginning of "a long, destructive period" for the nation.⁵

Although reports from the embassy during this period warned of potential instability, their tone was not yet one of opposition to the regime. Officials recognized that Somoza had brought years of peace and prosperity to Nicaragua. Ambassador Stewart continued to travel

with Somoza and to appear with him at political functions. In one report, the ambassador appeared pleased that Somoza was responsive to requests made by the embassy and that the General often consulted him on a personal basis. In selecting Nicaraguans to study in the United States, Stewart reported that care had to be taken to avoid favoring elements opposed to the "constituted government" of Somoza. He worried that Somoza would look with disfavor upon any association between members of the U.S. embassy staff and the opposition.⁶

The first solid evidence of policy change came when Stewart's identification with Somoza came under sharp criticism in the State Department. The chief of the Central American office within the American Republics Division, John M. Cabot, reacted angrily to a report that Stewart had attended "an avowedly political" banquet in honor of Somoza. Indicating that this had occurred numerous times, Cabot commented that this was the "last straw," remarking that it was "bad enough for him to run around the countryside with Somoza on his junkets." Department officers did not attend local political meetings with government officials, he reminded an associate. Cabot suggested that instructions be sent to all Central American posts informing them that they should not permit the prestige of the United States to be used as political support for dictatorship.⁷

The resulting directive, signed by Under Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., reviewed the recent increase of political strife in Central America and the possibility that it could lead to instability in the region at a critical time during the war. Apparently referring to Somoza's actions, it noted that political factions more than ever were attempting to win U.S. support, severely testing the administration's non-intervention policy. In a reference to Stewart's association with Somoza, Stettinius instructed the chiefs of mission to avoid "excessive public friendliness" toward the governments in power. Attendance at pro-government functions would in all situations be unacceptable. In another reference to Nicaragua, the letter reminded the mission chiefs that the practice of non-involvement in internal politics applied as well to "those regimes which, in seeking to perpetuate themselves in power, have gone out of their way to emphasize their friendship for the United States." The directive made note of the difficulty officials would have in defining the line between friendliness toward an allied American republic and a particular political regime.⁸

Cabot knew this distinction was especially difficult for Stewart. He directed that separate instructions be sent to Managua prohibiting the ambassador from appearing with Somoza at political rallies since it would give the impression of U.S. approval of the dictatorship. A subordinate, Philip Bonsal, sent the ambassador a personal letter relaying the Department's judgement that Somoza was using his friendship for Stewart to demonstrate to the Nicaraguan people that Washington

supported his attempt to change the constitution and keep himself in power.⁹

Pressure on the State Department to distance itself from Somoza increased in 1944. Former Presidents Juan Sacasa and Emiliano Chamorro called on officials in the American Republics Division in the spring to denounce the Somoza regime and convince them that Washington's support for Somoza had given the Good Neighbor Policy a bad name in Nicaragua. Sacasa repeated his plea of 1936 by asking for the United States to intervene with its "moral influence" to remedy the situation in Nicaragua. Laurence Duggan, the division chief, reiterated the administration's policy of non-intervention. Duggan did not initially respond to Chamorro, however, when the latter claimed that Stewart continued to favor Somoza by accompanying him on political journeys within Nicaragua. When Duggan queried Cabot about the charge, Cabot admitted it but did state that the ambassador had been going on fewer trips with Somoza to avoid the appearance of favoritism.¹⁰

A complaint similar to that of the former presidents came from Somoza's former consul-general in New York, Luis Mena Solórzano. In a conversation with one of Duggan's subordinates, Mena argued that the United States, still fighting for freedom overseas, should take action to assist Latin Americans suffering from oppression in their own countries. He confirmed other reports that the common belief in Nicaragua was that the United States backed Somoza and had agreed to his reelection and continuance in power.¹¹

This pressure undoubtedly influenced Department officials who were already concerned about the impression in Nicaragua that Washington supported the dictator. Cabot, charged with the direct responsibility for Nicaraguan policy, used the occasion of the death of a prominent Nicaraguan, Manuel Cordero Reyes, to distance the administration, however subtly, from the Somoza regime. The respected Cordero Reyes had enjoyed a long career in government and for years had been Nicaragua's foreign minister. He broke with Somoza in 1943 over the reelection issue; at the time of his death in early 1944, he was an outspoken and articulate voice for the dissident Liberal Party faction in opposition to the regime. Although he thought it would be offensive to Somoza, Cabot insisted on an official letter of condolence noting Cordero Reyes's death to demonstrate that the policy of non-intervention did not mean "backing up the existing regimes to the last ditch." He trusted that paying respects to a well-known opposition leader would be a clear signal to those opposing Somoza that this was not Washington's policy. Referring to the behavior of Stewart, Cabot contended that the gesture was necessary because of recent activities that had "lent color" to a belief that the United States favored Somoza.¹²

Threats Against the Somoza Regime: U.S. Reaction, 1944

Political unrest elsewhere in Central America in mid-1944 encouraged opposition to Somoza. In May, riots and a general strike in El Salvador deposed the dictator Hernández Martínez after thirteen years in power. Turbulence in Guatemala in the summer forced the resignation of the strongman, Jorge Ubico, also after thirteen years as dictator of his country. Similar although less effective protests occurred in Honduras where the strongman, Carias Andino, faced demonstrations against his eleven-year-old regime.¹³

In April, the Somoza-controlled legislature passed the Constitutional Reform Bill, which allowed the General to run for reelection. This infuriated the opposition, which began a strenuous effort to incite rebellion. In late June and early July, anti-Somoza demonstrations by students, businessmen, and political opponents brought havoc to Managua. The *Guardia* fired on the crowds, killed several persons, and arrested and imprisoned scores of demonstrators. The regime also sent several prominent opposition leaders into exile.¹⁴

In the midst of these disturbances, Somoza planned a military parade and a march to the U.S. embassy in honor of the United States on the Fourth of July. Stewart, despite clear instructions from Washington to avoid a close public identification with Somoza, approved the General's request to address the celebrants from the embassy balcony. In a cable informing Washington of these plans, Stewart reported that he did not think it was prudent to suggest to Somoza that he not come to the embassy since he was sure the General would be offended. Hull replied that in view of the political situation in Nicaragua it would definitely be inappropriate for Stewart to permit Somoza to use the embassy for a speech. The secretary of state informed the ambassador that the embassy's position toward Somoza's activities on the Fourth of July should be "one of cordial but circumspect cooperation."¹⁵

Stewart continued to have difficulty complying with the Department's instructions.¹⁶ While the parade was in progress, Somoza again sent a request to Stewart to speak from the embassy balcony. Despite Hull's instructions—which Stewart had earlier relayed to the *Casa Presidencial*—the ambassador again acceded, sending word to Somoza that he could use the embassy. Possibly not receiving the message in time, Somoza delivered an expansive address from a platform across the street from the embassy, extolling President Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Walt Whitman. Afterwards, Stewart—perhaps unable to resist such high praise for his country on the Fourth of July—invited the General and his cabinet inside the embassy for refreshments.¹⁷

The ambassador was more circumspect regarding another incident involving the celebration. During the parade, members of the

opposition carried a large American flag and at one point attempted to use it to block the passage of Somoza's cavalry. The *Guardia* forcefully "rescued" the flag and the parade continued. Somoza later requested that Stewart issue an official statement deploring the "unauthorized" use of the American flag for political purposes, a request the ambassador refused because he recognized that Somoza would use the statement to persuade the public that the embassy supported him and the *Guardia* during the disturbances.¹⁸

Despite Stewart's solicitous efforts to please Somoza, the General recognized that the administration was in the process of establishing distance between itself and the regime. Four days after the celebration, Stewart reported that, although Somoza remained friendly, it was evident that he had been offended. The General complained that he had been "let down" by U.S. officials and cited to the ambassador the "unsympathetic attitude" of the embassy and the fact that Washington had been unconcerned about his situation during the recent disturbances. He indicated, however, that he would react to the administration's new attitude and to opposition pressure when he told Stewart that he would veto the reelection bill. His complaints revealed that Stewart may have relayed to Somoza during personal conversations the Department's desire to identify less with the regime.¹⁹

Somoza's statement that he would veto the reelection bill, his announcement that political exiles could return to Nicaragua, and his promise to labor that he would support social security legislation, destroyed the momentum of the opposition. He thus thwarted a planned general strike similar to the one in El Salvador that precipitated the fall of Hernández Martínez. He would now, Stewart reported, weather the political storm if the *Guardia* remained loyal.²⁰

The ambassador's assessment that the General had proven he could "keep relative peace without bloodshed" was not entirely accurate in view of other reports and rumors of violence. It also belied the ambassador's reassurance to Secretary of State Hull that "the attitude of this Embassy has been one of complete neutrality."²¹ To the contrary, his own reports indicated that Stewart was unable during this period to strictly adhere to the Department's guidance to separate friendliness toward Somoza from that toward the Nicaraguan government. While Washington was moving toward opposition to Somoza, the General's magnetism was still having a positive effect on Ambassador Stewart in Managua.

Military Assistance for Somoza: The State Department-War Department Dispute

Related to the question of furnishing military aid to Somoza was the broad issue of military relations with the Somoza regime near the end of the war, a subject that raised basic differences between the State and War Departments over the administration's priorities in Nicaragua. Since he assumed command of the *Guardia Nacional* in 1933—a position he retained as president—Somoza had maintained close, personal relations with U.S. military officers assigned to or visiting in Nicaragua. He always allowed them direct access to his office, an arrangement that the State Department invariably opposed.

The director of the military academy, who also carried the title of chief of the U.S. military mission, was the U.S. officer who had the closest relationship with Somoza. The first director was Colonel Charles L. Mullins, who served in Nicaragua for three years after the re-establishment of the Academy in 1939. Somoza made Mullins a brigadier general in the *Guardia Nacional* and in 1941 requested that his contract be renewed for an additional two-year term.²² Mullins expressed to the Managua press his warm "personal regard" for Somoza. He praised Somoza as a "great soldier" who was "truly prepared to defend the nation," and he attributed Nicaraguan development to Somoza's leadership of the nation.²³

A successor to Mullins, Colonel LeRoy Bartlett, followed Mullins's practice of going directly to Somoza with policy questions without informing the embassy. An example of this occurred in December 1944 when Bartlett forwarded to Somoza a detailed plan for the Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington to use in negotiations with the U.S. government for the purpose of extending the mission's contract. The plan recommended increasing the number of mission members from one to seven. Bartlett also recommended to Somoza that his ambassador include provisions allowing the mission chief to continue dealing directly with the General on policy matters. Bartlett remarked that "this is a privilege which I have enjoyed and appreciated in my present position."²⁴ Bartlett was flattered by the treatment given the U.S. military by the Somoza government. Earlier he had written that Nicaragua "will always be one of the easiest fields in which to show results by a military mission and to further the post-war expansion of U.S. influence."²⁵

The State Department, upon receiving information about Bartlett's communication with Somoza, instructed the embassy to inform the colonel that he should obtain Department approval before approaching Somoza on policy matters. The Department considered the increase of the Military Mission more than a military issue because it involved "the foreign policy of the United States."²⁶

Harold Finley, who became chargé of the embassy after the departure of Ambassador Stewart in early 1944, recognized the increasing independence and influence of the U.S. military in Nicaragua and worked to bring its activities under embassy control. Upon forwarding to the Department Bartlett's plans to increase the military mission, Finley reported that he had cautioned the colonel about communicating directly with Somoza on policy issues and not seeking embassy approval of his plans.²⁷

Bartlett objected to having to obtain embassy approval of each of his projects prior to making detailed plans. He insisted that he needed to see Somoza directly because only the General could approve the "extraordinary disbursement of Nicaraguan Government funds" that he needed to operate the academy.²⁸ Bartlett sensed that Finley was resisting the establishment of a modern army in Nicaragua, an assumption Finley admitted was correct.²⁹ Despite these exchanges the Department did not at this time definitively resolve the question of U.S. military officers' access to Somoza.

Debate over the type of military relationship the United States would have with Nicaragua after the war heightened after two events of February 1945, both involving visits by U.S. officers to Managua. Finley explained to one group the reliance Somoza placed on the *Guardia Nacional* and emphasized that Somoza would surely be amenable to improving the *Guardia* by any means available. The chargé reminded the officers, however, of the socio-economic assistance programs already in place. He hoped that the War Department would not burden the country with expensive arms purchases to the prejudice of infrastructure development programs. The officers were evasive. They replied that their purpose was to inventory the military arms and equipment in the hands of the *Guardia*, determine what Somoza desired in additional material, and finally decide what he should receive in view of Nicaraguan budget limitations.³⁰

Repercussions from a second event illustrated that the U.S. military command in the Panama Canal Zone believed that the U.S. embassy in Managua—or at least the chargé—was plainly against its efforts in Nicaragua. The episode began when Brigadier General Luther Smith from the command visited Nicaragua for one day, and Somoza, as was his custom, decorated the officer with the Presidential Medal of Merit. Finley stressed to General Smith his concern over the danger of "misuse" of modern U.S. arms by Somoza, considering the country's revolutionary past. Smith stated that the War Department's aim was to prevent other nations from establishing military missions in the Americas; he mentioned Russia, Great Britain, and France as likely countries to fill the void should the United States vacate the area. The War Department wanted to modernize the *Guardia*, according to Smith, so that in an emergency it could be deployed with U.S. forces.³¹

Smith complained to his superior in the Canal Zone, General George Brett, that Finley was uncooperative during the visit. Brett in turn informed the War Department that Finley's treatment of Smith contrasted sharply with the extremely cordial attitude of Somoza and his officials. He charged that Finley thought the U.S. Army wanted to modernize the Nicaraguan military at the expense of raising the standard of living and that the chargé gave the impression of resenting the activities of the U.S. military in Nicaragua. Brett argued that it was difficult to present a united position in a foreign country when one agency worked against common goals.³²

Finley was unable to convince U.S. military officers that there should be programs of higher priority than those the War Department supported in Nicaragua. He thought the U.S. military was unconcerned with issues other than those involving modernization of the *Guardia*. He recommended that the Department carefully study the question of military aid in view of Somoza's likelihood "to approve anything which will build up and strengthen" the *Guardia* and, in turn, his hold on the country.³³

Somoza and General Brett

The relationship that developed between General George Brett and Somoza demonstrated the difficulty the State Department had in controlling U.S.-Nicaraguan relations at the end of the war. Brett communicated directly with Somoza, visited Nicaragua, and became a close friend of the Nicaraguan strongman.³⁴

An event that highlighted this relationship concerned a request for military training. After Colonel Bartlett had been unsuccessful in obtaining State Department approval for a training visit of Nicaraguan cadets to the Canal Zone, Somoza wrote to Brett requesting his assistance.³⁵ Brett promptly extended to Somoza an invitation for the cadets to come to Panama, commenting that the visit of Somoza's "splendidly trained cadets" would further solidify the "comradeship and understanding that exists between the armies of Nicaragua and the United States." Brett's admission to Somoza that he had not yet received the permission of the U.S. ambassador in Managua indicated his lack of concern regarding State Department approval of the training.³⁶

The embassy's deep reservations about the cadet trip had already been passed to the State Department. Finley knew that this type of visit would "greatly please" Somoza but argued that a goodwill effort of such magnitude was superfluous. Cooperation from Somoza at that time was "wholehearted, friendly, and sincere" and needed no such gesture to improve it. The incoming ambassador, Fletcher Warren, wrote Brett that he had reservations about the proposed visit. Warren

stated, however, that since Bartlett had discussed the visit with Nicaraguan officials before he could voice his opposition, it would be inappropriate for him to cancel the trip. Warren relayed to Brett the State Department's "reluctant approval" of the project.³⁷

The Brett-Somoza relationship demonstrated naiveté on Brett's part about Latin American affairs and insensitivity to signals that Washington wanted less identification with the dictatorship. After staying at Somoza's home during a visit to Nicaragua, Brett, as the senior U.S. military officer in Latin America, sent a secret memorandum to the chief of staff of the Army reporting his private talks with Somoza. Regarding Mexico, Brett reported that Somoza thought that country was "completely" controlled by the communists, was "directly" responsible for the overthrow of Ubico in Guatemala, was "definitely" involved in the Costa Rican elections, and was trying to form a union of the Central American nations to oppose the interests of the United States, all strong opinions not commonly accepted at the time. The tone of Brett's memorandum indicated that he agreed with Somoza and thought that the administration would benefit from the dictator's counsel.³⁸

Although he must have been aware of previous decisions laying to rest the issue of a Nicaraguan canal, Brett nonetheless reported in detail Somoza's arguments favoring the waterway. He next mentioned that he had confidentially told Warren during his visit of rumors in Panama about making the Panama Canal a sea level route. Brett illustrated Somoza's influence when he then told the chief of staff that, although from a military viewpoint a sea level canal was more defensible, "would it not be better to have two canals in Central America than just one."³⁹

General Brett invited Somoza to the Canal Zone to attend the graduation of the Nicaraguan cadets, a gesture that the State Department managed to cancel. On another occasion, the Department disapproved of Brett's plans to honor Somoza by presenting him with a special carbine rifle. The nature of the Somoza regime did not alter Brett's admiration for Somoza. He praised him "despite any reputation which President Somoza may have resulting from his dictatorship." After nine years of acquaintance with the strongman and numerous visits to Nicaragua, Brett concluded that Somoza was "sincerely friendly" to the United States and commended his understanding of the necessity to adhere to Washington policies.⁴⁰

The Issue of Small Arms and Ammunition for Somoza, 1944-1945

The employment of the *Guardia Nacional* to quell disturbances increased the State Department's concern about military aid to the Somoza regime, especially small arms and ammunition of the type that

the *Guardia* used to subdue the population. Ammunition kept at the military academy under the control of the American director focused attention on the issue. Although Somoza had stated that the cadets were non-political and would not be used to put down a rebellion, he also told an academy instructor that they were his *Guardia de Choque*, or shock troops. Prior to the July events, the ambassador queried the State Department regarding the proper action for the U.S. officer directing the academy, the role of the cadets under his charge, and the use of the U.S.-controlled ammunition in the event of a revolution.⁴¹

During the July 1944 unrest, the Department informed the ambassador that in the event of revolution the director should resign, turn over the military academy to the highest-ranking Nicaraguan officer, and relocate to the embassy. These actions would avoid embarrassment to the U.S. government and keep it out of Nicaraguan political affairs.⁴² The reply did not address the use of the cadets or the ammunition.

The request by Somoza for Springfield rifles and an accompanying supply of ammunition resulted in another strong disagreement between officials of the State and War Departments. Somoza began requesting the rifles in conversations with U.S. military officers in 1944, and in December of that year he sent a long letter to President Roosevelt informing him that a request for ten thousands Springfields and ammunition for them was pending approval in the State Department.⁴³

In the last letter Somoza would write Roosevelt, he reminded his "esteemed friend" that Nicaragua was unique in Central America because it had continued to enjoy internal peace. He recalled for Roosevelt Nicaragua's cooperation with the United States during the war and reminded him of the advantages to Washington of continued close collaboration between the countries. Somoza contrasted Mexico's anti-Americanism with the friendly stance of Nicaragua, insisting that Nicaragua was a "stronghold and breakwater" against communism, a movement he predicted would threaten Central America. He believed that eventually the continent would have to confront the influence of the Soviet Union and that in this confrontation the United States would need well-armed allies in Latin America. Somoza assured the president that arms in the possession of the *Guardia*—a force established by officers of the U.S. Army—were in friendly hands and would "do honor to the cause of democracy." He informed Roosevelt that both General Brett and Colonel Bartlett favored his request.⁴⁴

Before sending his letter to Roosevelt, and based on the first indications that Washington would not approve the sale of rifles to his government, Somoza complained bitterly to Colonel Barlett and to the U.S. military attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Judson, about Washington not appreciating him. He remarked that he had been more friendly to the United States than any other Nicaraguan president, and

that if Washington "thought another president here would do better, I'll get out tomorrow." Since his presidency was legal, however, he could not understand the opposition of the United States to "giving him a few rifles." Somoza compared the peace of Nicaragua to the recent turmoil in El Salvador and Guatemala and hinted that without arms from the United States he would be unable to control potential unrest in Nicaragua, where "anybody can walk in here today with 50 men and start trouble." At one point, Somoza threatened to go to a more friendly country if the United States would not supply his regime with arms.⁴⁵

His conversations with the colonels revealed Somoza's informality and frankness in private sessions with U.S. military officers. More important, however, they illustrated the overstated speech he used with military officers in describing his problems or needs, a tactic he surely used knowing that his ideas would be included in the officers' reports and read by their superiors in the Canal Zone and Washington.

Although the complaints Somoza made to Ambassador Warren were less bombastic, they demonstrated equal bitterness. Warren reported that Somoza thought he was the victim of "cavalier" treatment by the United States. Somoza told the ambassador that the War Department supported him while the State Department was against him. Warren attempted to assuage Somoza by telling him that only the State Department could express the official policy of the United States; and once it did so, individual views of military officers were no longer valid. The ambassador informed the General that in the future the suggestions of General Brett or of other officers should not be taken seriously unless they first had the approval of the embassy.⁴⁶

Warren thought that Somoza's attitude resulted from the confusion of too many high-ranking U.S. officers passing through Nicaragua promising the General military aid that they could not deliver. Although he recognized a need for military advisory missions in Nicaragua, he recommended to the State Department that fewer military visitors come to Managua and that the ones who did come should avoid obligating the administration. Warren would have a "heart-to-heart talk" with Colonel Bartlett's replacement to ensure that he restricted his activities to those within his purview.⁴⁷

Despite this attitude regarding the role of the U.S. military in Nicaragua, it was evident that Somoza had already favorably impressed the new ambassador. Agreeing with some members of his staff, Warren reminded the Department that Somoza prided himself on his friendship with the United States. Warren appeared to admire the assumption that Somoza would "do anything decent, and some things indecent, if we were to ask him." Demonstrating Somoza's influence on him, the ambassador bluntly reported that Somoza "should have the arms and ammunition and I hope that he can get them quickly."⁴⁸

An important reason for the State Department's opposition to arms for Somoza was his announcement that he intended to run for reelection despite constitutional prohibitions and his declarations to the contrary. The Department, sensitive to unrest in other Central American countries, held that arms sent to Somoza at that time would signal to the people of those nations, and those of Nicaragua, that the United States supported the dictator remaining in power. The Department informed Warren that this impression would be clearly "erroneous" and "extremely embarrassing." To a complaint Warren relayed from Somoza that the United States was unfriendly toward him, the Department assured the ambassador that, although the administration had Nicaragua's "best interests very much at heart," it did not agree that Somoza's best interests were those of Nicaragua.⁵⁰ The Department was again plainly stating its opposition to Somoza staying in power.

Efforts by the State Department to limit military aid to Somoza were successful in the immediate post-war period. In May 1945, a month after Roosevelt's sudden death, President Truman answered Somoza's letter to the former president. He reviewed the development of U.S. military aid to Latin America in the early 1940s, stressing that its original justification—to provide arms to counter a possible attack on the hemisphere—could no longer be used due to the success of the war effort. Truman postponed a decision on the requested arms, informing Somoza that Nicaragua's needs would be studied during an overall review of security requirements in Latin America.⁵⁰

Opposition in Washington to supplying military aid to the Somoza regime grew after the war when pressure mounted to oppose his regime. In 1946, the State Department made six Latin American countries ineligible to receive aid in one of three categories: naval vessels, aircraft, and general military equipment. A clear indication of Washington's attitude toward Somoza was the fact that Nicaragua was the only country of the six to appear on all three lists.⁵¹

While U.S. officials sent numerous signals to Somoza in the closing months of the war that a substantive policy change—one unfavorable to his regime—was forthcoming, a major change was not publicly announced. The direction that policy would take, however, was included in a memorandum John Cabot sent to his superiors in the State Department. In reference to the U.S. military's relationship with Somoza, Cabot sharply disagreed with General Brett's methods in dealing with Somoza. He criticized Brett for corresponding directly with the Nicaraguan General, for leading Somoza to believe that he could receive arms from Brett's command in Panama, and for Brett's failure "to pay due regard to political considerations." Cabot did not think the War Department could justify arms for Somoza because of a military threat at that time, and he argued that Somoza wanted arms to "suppress the rising opposition in Nicaragua." Cabot, expressing an idea

that would guide future policy, wrote that the United States should not supply arms for such purposes, especially when Washington's "alleged support" of Latin American dictators was under fire.³² In a postscript to Cabot's forecast, one of the Department's senior officers noted in August 1945 that "Nicaragua may be one country where we will want to go particularly slow on providing arms."³³

Washington's wartime programs in Latin America, designed to ensure allies in the region, created the impression that the United States supported dictators such as Somoza. The policy of strict non-intervention reinforced this impression. Key State Department officials, however, did not support the General and, beginning in 1943, made strenuous efforts to make this clear. John Cabot in Washington and Harold Finley in Managua worked toward distancing the United States from the regime and countering the influence of the War Department in Nicaragua. They fought for civilian supremacy in policy-making against politically naive military officers who saw little danger in a close association with Somoza.

Somoza was particularly effective in gaining the support of his U.S. comrades-in-arms. To a lesser degree, he won the support of Ambassadors Stewart and Warren, although they on occasion realized that the United States should keep its distance from Somoza and so informed the Department.

At the end of the war, Somoza faced strong internal opposition and realized the importance of maintaining the perception within the country that he still enjoyed Washington's favor. Despite his efforts to maintain this perception, events in Washington overshadowed his actions in Managua. Somoza's courting of U.S. officials, praise of the United States, and democratic rhetoric had less effect at a time of the first major change in U.S. policy toward Latin America since 1933. It was to be a brief but shining moment for the U.S. government at the end of a war fought to end tyranny in the world. It was a historical moment when officials were free to oppose dictators like Somoza even though they were strongly anti-communist—a time just before the start of the Cold War made this type of policy increasingly difficult.

Notes

1. Stewart to Hull, 24 August 1942, NA 817.001/246; 19 September 1942, NA 817.00/8935; and 19 February 1943, NA 817.00/8959.
2. Bonsal to Stewart, 4 September 1942, NA 817.00/7-2142.
3. James B. Stewart, "Some Important Political Developments in the Somoza Administration (1937-1943) and an Evaluation of the President's Position Today," report forwarded to the State Department, 13 October 1943, NA 817.00/9007. Three months before Stewart prepared this 23-page assessment, an internal memorandum in the Division of American Republics relayed a military

attaché's report that concluded that Somoza's only supporters were those connected to the regime who benefited from the spoils of office. Tomlinson to Cabot, 13 July 1943, NA 817.00/8995.

4. Stewart to Hull, 13 October 1943.

5. Ibid; Stewart to Hull, 22 June 1943, NA 817.00/8991.

6. Stewart to Hull, 19 February 1943, NA 817.00/8959 and 5 August 1943, NA 817.00/8997; Cabot to Bonsal, 10 January 1944, NA 817.00/9016.

7. Ibid.

8. Stettinius to all Missions in Central America, 2 February 1944, NA 813.00/1340a.

9. Bonsal to Stewart, 12 January 1944, NA 817.00/9016.

10. Memorandum of Conversation by Cabot, 10 May 1944, NA 817.00/9055. In November 1944, officials in the State Department remained uneasy with Stewart's close association with Somoza. A. A. Berle, writing for the secretary of state, sent Stewart a cable noting charges of U.S. support for dictatorships and reminding the ambassador that the maintenance of friendly relations did not imply approval of governments. He authorized Stewart to inform local officials that the United States had a "greater affinity" for democratically elected governments. Berle to Stewart, 1 November 1944, NA 710.11/11-144.

11. Bonsal to Duggan, 17 March 1944, NA 817.00/9040.

12. Cabot to Bonsal, 14 January 1944, NA 817.00/9019. Manuel Cordero Reyes wrote a bitter yet intellectual, critique of the Somoza regime, *Nicaragua under Somoza*, which appeared after his death in 1944. An explanation of the Liberal Party movement against Somoza is in Leandro Marin Abaunza, "The Constitutionalist Party of Nicaragua," n.d., an unpublished paper (copy in possession of author).

13. Thomas M. Leonard, *The United States and Central America, 1944-1949* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 47-53, 75-79, 107-113; *New York Times*, 6 June 1944, 5; 30 June 1944, 8; 5 July 1944, 15; 10 July 1944, 5; 16 July 1944, 4.

14. *New York Times*, 22 May 1944, 9; 6 June 1944, 5; 29 June 1944, 6; 30 June 1944, 4; 5 July 1944, 15; 10 July 1944, 5; 16 July 1944, 5.

15. Stewart to Hull, 29 June 1944 and Hull to Stewart, 30 June 1944, NA 817.415/6-2944.

16. *Time* magazine correspondent William Krehm, who reported from Central America in the mid-1940s and knew Stewart, wrote that Stewart was a "pleasant, mild-mannered person" but simply did not have "the strength of character to withstand the seductive Tacho." (Tacho was Somoza's nickname.) Krehm, *Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean*, 120.

17. Stewart to Hull, 5 July 1944, NA 817.00/7-544 and 10 July 1944, NA 817.00/7-1044.

18. Hull to Stewart, 8 July 1944, NA 817.00/7-844; Stewart to Hull, 9 July 1944, NA 817.00/7-944.

19. Stewart to Hull, 10 July 1944.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. *New York Times*, 21 January 1941, 6; Welles to Roosevelt, 19 June 1942, NA 817.20/128 1/2.

23. An example of Mullins's praise of Somoza is in "*La Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua es un Ejército de la Democracia*," *Novedades* (Managua), 27 May 1941, 3. Somoza had a special affinity for U.S. military officers, but he expected their constant loyalty. Colonel Mullins, a year after his flattery of Somoza appeared in *Novedades*, and by then aware of the extent of Somoza's corruption, sent a check made out personally to Somoza in payment for a military academy electric bill. Somoza, insulted because of Mullins's implication that he would keep the money, insisted on the colonel's immediate relief. In 1945, the U.S. military attaché to Nicaragua, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Judson, whom Ambassador Fletcher Warren called "consistently pro-Somoza," told a group of younger Nicaraguan officers that the *Guardia* should be non-political and that political appointees should be expelled. When Somoza heard this, he demanded that the ambassador have Washington immediately remove Judson from the country. Cochran to Hull, 1 June 1942, NA 817.20/100, NA 817.20/114; Warren to Byrnes, 12 November 1945, Military Intelligence Files 210.681, Nicaragua, Suitland Branch, NA.

24. Bartlett to Somoza, 16 December 1944, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

25. LeRoy Bartlett, Memorandum of 26 June 1944, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

26. Stettinius to Finley, 29 January 1945, NA 817.20 Mission/11-1744.

27. Finley to Stettinius, 13 February 1945, NA 817.20 Mission/2-1345.

28. Bartlett to Finley, 6 April 1945, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

29. Finley to Stettinius, 6 April 1945, NA 817.20/4-645.

30. Finley to Stettinius, 26 February 1945, NA 810.20 Defense/2-2645.

31. *Ibid.*; Finley to Stettinius, 27 February 1946, NA 817.20111/2-2745.

32. Commanding General, Caribbean Defense Command, to War Department, February 1945, RG 165, OPD File 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA. The War Department relayed Brett's complaint to the State Department, which, in turn, in a mild rebuke required Finley to explain his actions during Smith's visit. See Cochran to Finley, 5 March 1945, NA 817.20111/2-2745 and Finley to Cochran, 12 March 1945, NA 817.20111/3-1245.

33. Finley to Stettinius, 26 February 1945. Finley thought that Nicaragua did not need a regular military establishment and opposed War Department plans for a small, modern Army for the country. He recommended to the State Department that the *Guardia* be developed along the lines of a "small, well-trained police force." He reminded the Department that Costa Rica, the Central American country with the least revolutionary tradition, had an insignificant Army. Finley to Stettinius, 26 January 1945, NA 817.20 Mission/1-2645.

34. Ambassador Spruille Braden complained of Brett's affinity for dictators in Latin America and his lack of coordination with the State Department on his official visits. Especially in the Caribbean countries, according to Braden, Brett "thought he should be able to fly in . . . , see the President, and make any arrangement that suited him." Braden argued that Brett was "very friendly" to the Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, and that during a visit to Argentina he had spent his time "making ardent love to Perón." Spruille Braden, *Diplomats and Demagogues: The Memoirs of Spruille Braden* (New Rochelle,

NY: Arlington House, 1971), 278-279, 320-321. For Brett's affection for Trujillo and his support of military aid for the Generalísimo, see also Robert D. Crassweller, *Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 215.

35. Bartlett had originally circumvented the embassy in attempting to arrange the training, communicating with Brett and the Nicaraguan ambassador to Panama. Bartlett to Finley, 6 April 1945; Finley to Stettinius, 6 April 1945; Somoza to Brett, 14 July 1945, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

36. Brett to Somoza, 2 August 1945, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

37. Finley to Stettinius, 6 April 1945; Bartlett to Finley, 6 April 1945; Lockwood to Warren, 30 June 1945, NA 817.20/4-645; Warren to Byrnes, 9 August 1945, NA 817.20/8-945; Warren to Brett, 9 August 1945, RG 165, OPD 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

38. Brett to chief of staff, U.S. Army, 30 May 1945, RG 165, OPD File 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Memorandum of Conversation by Cochran, 21 September 1945 and Memorandum of Conversation by Barber, 24 September 1945, NA 817.001/9-2145; letter, War Department to State Department, 5 October 1945, and Anderson to Newbegin, 23 October 1945, NA 817.001/10-545; Brett to Chief of Staff, 30 May 1945.

41. Stewart to Hull, 20 May 1944, NA 817.00/9058. Colonel Bartlett, military academy director, separately relayed to General Brett his concern about Somoza using academy arms and ammunition. Bartlett to Brett, 10 July 1944, CDC File 410.145, Lend-Lease, Nicaragua.

42. Duggan to Stewart, 5 July 1944, NA 817.00/9058; Brett to War Department, 31 July 1944, CDC File 400.145, Lend Lease, Nicaragua. Somoza later moved arms and equipment, which were supplied by the United States for training, to the presidential barracks for use by forces directly under his control. Warren to Byrnes, 5 June 1945, NA 817.24/6-545.

43. Somoza to Brett, 30 June 1944, CDC File 400.145, Lend Lease, Nicaragua; Somoza to Roosevelt, 23 December 1944; Brett to War Department, 31 July 1944.

44. Somoza to Roosevelt, 23 December 1944.

45. Bartlett to Brett, 10 November 1944, CDC File 334, U.S. Mission, Nicaragua; Lt. Col. Frederick B. Judson (Military Attaché) to Military Intelligence, Washington, D.C., 9 November 1944, RG 165, OPD File 336, "Nicaragua," Modern Military Branch, NA.

46. Fletcher Warren to Avra Warren, 18 July 1945, NA 817.20/7-1845.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*; Warren later opposed plans to sell aircraft to Somoza, contending that most Nicaraguans would consider the sale a means of permitting Somoza "to suppress his own people." Warren to Byrnes, NA 817.796/11-1545.

49. Avra Warren to Fletcher Warren, 20 August 1945, NA 817.20/7-1845.

50. Truman to Somoza, 3 May 1945, PSF "Nicaragua," Box 183, Truman Library.

51. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:86-98.

52. Cabot to Johnson, McGurk, and Armour, 14 October 1944, NA 817.113/10-1444; Cabot to McGurk and Butler, 23 February 1945, NA 817.20/Mission/1-2645.

53. John C. Dreier, Memorandum, 9 August 1945, NA 817.20/7-1845.

From Welles to Braden: A New Direction

Latin American Policy at the End of the Wellesian Period

Sumner Welles remained the principal architect of the administration's Latin American policy until his resignation from the State Department in mid-1943.¹ For a decade his influence had been critical to the successful efforts of Roosevelt to build inter-American understanding. After the failure of his brief attempt to control political events in Cuba during the first year of the Roosevelt presidency, Welles became the prophet of the new policy, a visionary who was able to look ahead with a strategic understanding of the long-range goals of the United States in Latin America. He could see as well how Latin American policy fit within the broader context of the U.S.'s relations with the rest of the world. While Welles firmly believed that non-interference in the internal affairs of the republics would in the long view support the strategic interests of the United States, he realized that strict adherence to this policy would on occasion mean that events in Latin America

would run counter to Washington's immediate interests.² Respect for Latin American sovereignty was key to his beliefs. He argued that even the smallest Latin American country was the "sovereign equal of the others" and that interference in the internal affairs of one nation by another, in any form, was "inconceivable."³

World War II gave increased impetus to the attainment of the administration's goal of gaining the friendship and support of the countries to the south. During this period, Welles came to believe that the United States should not permit the nature of Latin American political systems to interfere with the pursuit of its ultimate mission in the region.⁴ In implementing this policy, Welles retained the full support of his mentor, President Roosevelt, as well as that of Hull, although the secretary's support came despite the personal differences that existed between them and his resentment of Welles's direct access to the president.⁵

The departure of the undersecretary from government service, and that of his protégé, Laurence Duggan, a year later; the diminished Axis threat to the Americas after June 1944; and Roosevelt's death in the spring of the following year all contributed to policy changes. Another important factor in the change of direction was the new group of officials that assumed key positions in the State Department. After Welles left the Department, the principle of non-intervention ceased to be the first consideration of officials charged with formulating Washington's Latin American strategy, while at the same time the promotion of democratic government in the region emerged as an important determinant. The United States also returned for a brief period to the non-traditional policy of withholding recognition to regimes coming to power through force. These changes from Wellesian policy especially influenced the U.S. position vis-à-vis dictatorial governments in Latin America and directly affected relations with the Somoza regime in the immediate post-war period.

Welles and Latin American Strongmen

A more complete examination of Welles's position regarding authoritarian or strongman governments in Latin America assists in understanding the evolution of these changes and how they affected policy toward Nicaragua after his departure from office. In practice, his policy had always been tolerant of—but not necessarily sympathetic with—authoritarian governments in the region. In 1935, he reprimanded the U.S. minister in Guatemala for insinuating publicly that the United States opposed efforts by President Ubico to alter the constitution to legalize his continuance in power. He instructed the minister to inform officials of the local government that Washington had "no attitude,

either of sympathy or lack of sympathy," toward the actions of the Guatemalan caudillo.⁶

Welles had praised the progress of Brazil under the civilian strongman, Getúlio Vargas. Welles admitted that Vargas had suspended constitutional government, yet he complimented him as "shrewd" and commented on his great capacity to judge men, his instinct for public relations, and his dedication to his fellow countrymen. Welles's view of Vargas and other strong leaders was not based solely on admiration of their political success but was tempered by a belief that in Latin America forceful, nationalistic leaders could provide real benefits to the people. The Vargas regime would be remembered, he believed, for the benefits the strongman brought to the Brazilian masses.⁷

Welles had favored continuing relations with the military regime in Argentina in the early 1940s. Although later the undersecretary was less admiring of the strongman Colonel Juan Domingo Perón, he recognized Perón as a nationalist leader independently elected by his people. He spoke favorably of the "New Deal" and "social revolution" Perón offered the Argentine people. Welles understood and accepted *Peronismo* within the context of Argentine history and the political traditions of Latin America. After his resignation, Welles continued to criticize those officials in Washington who in his view disrupted inter-American unanimity by seeking to isolate the Perón regime because of its fascist tendencies.⁸

Welles never professed admiration for Somoza. He did refuse, however, to allow interference by U.S. diplomats in 1936 when the General employed the *Guardia* to overthrow Sacasa. To uphold the Good Neighbor Policy, the undersecretary restricted Arthur Bliss Lane in the minister's struggle to block Somoza's rise and to preserve constitutional government in Nicaragua.⁹ Three years after Somoza seized power and ordered Sandino murdered, Welles recommended to Roosevelt that he approve Somoza's state visit, a decision that unfortunately provided the Nicaraguan dictator the opportunity to identify with the United States and to consolidate his power. Welles's actions regarding Nicaragua, however, cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of Somoza. There is no evidence in historical documents that Welles ever spoke or wrote favorably of the Nicaraguan dictator, as he did of other strongmen in the region.¹⁰

In summary, Wellesian thought underlying the Good Neighbor policy held that the United States had no choice but to accept all forms of government in Latin America and not interfere internally in those republics. Welles always focused on the end purpose of policy: for example, in the 1930s, the regaining of friendship and the establishment of economic cooperation; in the war years, the creation of inter-American solidarity for the security of the hemisphere. His was the pure *realpolitik* philosophy of a professional policy strategist and

diplomat. Welles never allowed distractions—such as concern over the type of governments with which Washington had to cooperate—to interfere with the attainment of policy goals. It was a philosophy of self-restraint, one opposed to efforts to dictate to the Latin Americans the form of government they should have or to the imposition on them of democracy as practiced in the United States. Implementation of this policy frequently resulted in a diplomacy of close alliances with strongman governments, as well as with the military and ruling classes, and while it addressed economic needs, it did not promote reformist institutions.¹¹

Background to Policy Changes: New Men in Charge

Personnel changes in the State Department interrupted continuity in the conduct of U.S.-Latin American relations at the end of the war. Hull resigned as secretary of state after the elections in 1944. Roosevelt replaced him with Edward Stettinius, who served until June of the following year when President Truman placed James F. Byrnes at the head of the Department. After Welles resigned in 1943, Hull directed Latin American policy for a brief period. Stettinius, totally inexperienced in Latin America, appointed Nelson Rockefeller as his primary assistant for Latin America, a position he held for part of 1945 before Ambassador Spruille Braden assumed that position under Byrnes. Besides disrupting continuity, these changes resulted in what Laurence Duggan later described in his memoirs as "confusion" in the development of Washington's policy for Latin America.¹²

An examination of statements of four officials in the State Department involved with Latin America after Hull's departure indicates, however, that these men shared a common philosophy, one that turned Latin American policy toward a new direction that was clearly divergent from the path followed by Welles. State Department officials whose statements on the new policy appeared in public, besides Byrnes, were Ellis Briggs, chief of the Office of American Republics; George H. Butler, a deputy of Briggs; and Ambassador Spruille Braden, after September 1945 assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs.

Byrnes rarely spoke on Latin American problems, did not pretend expertise in the region, and did not consider Latin America to be critical to U.S. interests at the close of the war.¹³ He did express ideas—though probably not his own—that gave an early indication of a new policy. In an October 1945 speech on inter-American affairs, entitled "Neighboring Nations in One World," Byrnes, while reconfirming the policy of non-intervention, issued an important caveat by declaring that "non-intervention in internal affairs does not mean the approval of local tyranny." He established new priorities for Latin American policy

by stressing the importance of democracy and human rights to the American republics. Byrnes emphasized the belief of Americans in governments that rested on the consent of the people and especially condemned the policy of press censorship by recalling that Nazi plans for external aggression started with such abuses. Byrnes hinted at the possibility of collective intervention in the event that local tyranny threatened the security of the Americas.¹⁴

The following month Ellis Briggs was more pointed when he told a university audience that "collective action taken to correct situations threatening the general welfare of the Americas is the normal and democratic way of handling our affairs." He reinforced Byrnes's position by declaring that the doctrine of non-intervention did not preclude speaking out for the historic principles of the United States, nor did it mean that the government would ignore pleas for liberty made by other peoples. The policy of the United States would be to counsel other nations about undemocratic practices and to ask them to correct these practices for the welfare of the hemisphere. Briggs did not consider this type of action to be intervention, referring to it rather as the "legitimate exercise of collective initiative." While confessing that such a course would not be compatible with unanimity in the Americas, Briggs argued that the hemispheric system had never functioned by unanimous action and that the "essential basis of the inter-American relationship is a common interest in democratic ideals [as they affected] internal political development."¹⁵

Briggs noted that although some governments in the Americas had come to power through non-democratic processes, the policy of the Truman administration was not to intervene to establish democracies; the people themselves were responsible for these tasks. In continuing, however, Briggs announced a position—subsequently stressed by other officials—that became a guiding principle for the new administration's immediate post-war Latin American policy. The U.S. government, he asserted, would "obviously feel a warmer friendship for and greater desire to cooperate with those governments that rest on the periodically and freely expressed endorsement of the governed." Referring to people living under dictatorships in the region, Briggs stated that the United States would always extend sympathy to those struggling against tyranny.¹⁶

Three months after these announcements, when Briggs tied the unanimity issue to specific regimes, it became evident that the Somoza regime would become a target of the new policy. Briggs wrote that the unanimity "behind which the Peróns, Somozas, Trujillos, etc., can take indefinite shelter" was not one the administration should support, nor, he argued, one "wherein any real unanimity among the people of the new world—as distinct from their governments—can long endure."¹⁷

George H. Butler, in an article written for the State Department's *Inter-American Series* in July 1945, made the most clearly defined break with the policy of the Roosevelt administration. In addressing political problems in the Americas, Butler proposed a post-war policy to eliminate totalitarian governments, particularly those patterned after fascist military dictatorships. He argued that unanimity in inter-American cooperation was not practical and that, based on majority decisions, the American republics should band together in opposition to dictatorship.¹⁸

In the sharpest disagreement with Wellesian policy by a government official to that point, Butler criticized the doctrine of national sovereignty and the American republics' insistence on absolute non-intervention in their relations with other states. These positions allowed totalitarian governments to exist in the hemisphere. He proposed acceptance by the American nations of a doctrine of multilateral intervention—arrived at by majority vote—to maintain peace and security and to protect democratic government. Echoing the ideals of the war by giving a higher priority to political freedom and human rights than to economic issues, Butler wrote that democratic countries had an inherent obligation to fight dictatorship. The American republics could not afford to handicap themselves in that fight by being excessively concerned with sovereignty and non-intervention. The "old cry of Yankee imperialism" must not deter the United States in its battle against tyranny, Butler argued, a thesis purely Wilsonian in its call to promote democracy abroad. He admitted his goals would be difficult to obtain and were perhaps only "a fine dream," but his theories represented the idealism of the new group of officials who had taken charge of Latin American policy by the end of the war.¹⁹

The Braden Corollary

The leader and most fervent spokesman for these new policy-makers was Spruille Braden. A former businessman fluent in Spanish, he had worked in Chile, married a native of that country, and served the Roosevelt administration as ambassador to Cuba, Colombia, and Argentina. Braden was an aggressive personality, frank in his views and at times undiplomatic in his conduct of diplomacy.²⁰ As ambassador to Argentina in the summer of 1945, he initiated a vigorous campaign against Peronism and the fascist methods the Argentine leader used in his drive for power. Braden followed the unorthodox practice for a U.S. ambassador at that time of openly opposing—through speeches and statements—a government leader in the country to which he had been accredited. In one Buenos Aires press conference in June 1945, the ambassador announced that the United States had fought a war in

defense of democracy and would continue to defend the principles of representative government by expecting that freedoms of speech, press, and assembly were "practiced widely, especially throughout the Americas."²¹ In a public address there in August, Braden directly criticized the Peronist movement, condemning its uses of intimidation, premeditated violence, and subversion for the purposes of fomenting unrest. Braden declared that failure to denounce Perón's activities would be an admission that the United States had morally lost a war that had been won with so much sacrifice on the battlefield.²²

After Braden had been in Argentina only four months, President Truman appointed him assistant secretary of state for Latin America. Braden's remarks in Buenos Aires had been controversial in the United States, yet Secretary of State Byrnes made it clear that the administration fully supported his strong stand against dictatorship. Byrnes stressed that Braden's promotion came because of his outstanding service in the past and because his statements represented an accurate interpretation of government policy. He called for Braden to pursue this policy with the same enthusiasm he displayed in Argentina.²³

After returning to the United States, Braden continued to speak in public on the new Latin American policy. He told an audience at Rutgers University that the administration's policy was consistent with the morality of Wilsonian goals and that it continued the Good Neighbor Policy in its respect for the common aspiration of Latin Americans for liberty and democracy. Alluding to the possibility of promoting democracy abroad, Braden claimed that the application of a democratic policy in foreign relations was the ideal of the inter-American system.²⁴

In December 1945, the assistant secretary, joined by Ellis Briggs, presented in a national radio broadcast his most vigorous defense of the new approach. Braden argued that, although the Roosevelt policy of non-intervention would continue to guide strategy for Latin America, and the United States would not act alone, it would not stand idle as dictatorial governments entrenched themselves in the region. Reinforcing Butler's earlier statements, Braden assured the audience that the new policy would be implemented jointly with the other republics for the security of the entire hemisphere.²⁵

During the broadcast, the diplomats gave enthusiastic support to a Uruguayan initiative of the previous month—one probably encouraged by earlier statements of Butler and Braden, and already endorsed by Byrnes²⁶—that called for multilateral action in the Americas against totalitarian nations that violated human rights and the four freedoms. Known also as the Larreta Proposal, after Alberto Rodríguez Larreta, the Uruguayan foreign minister, the motivation for it came from that nation's concern about the Perón-dominated government in Buenos Aires and Uruguay's traditional fear of aggression from Argentina. Larreta

could make this type of proposal because he knew it would not be used against Uruguay, one of the most democratic countries in Latin America. Braden supported Larreta's call for a modification of the policy of non-intervention to prevent its continued use by dictators as a shield to protect their regimes. In answering critics who claimed that implementation of the proposal would destroy the validity of the policy of non-intervention, Briggs argued that it would not permit intervention by any one nation but would allow for majority intervention to preserve the rights of the democratic nations. Braden closed by reasserting the commitment of the United States to the protection of justice and freedom in the hemisphere.²⁷

Braden strengthened his policy against Perón and dictatorship in Latin America by arranging, with the support of President Truman and Secretary Byrnes, for the publication by the State Department of an 86-page paper, the "Blue Book," which critiqued the political situation in Argentina. The paper was a detailed review of the Argentine military government's cooperation with the Nazis during the war as well as a denunciation of Perón's continued adherence to fascist methods. Publication of the paper in February 1946 came two weeks before the Argentine national elections in which Colonel Perón was to win the presidency.²⁸

Some observers describe Washington's policy toward Latin America in this period as the "Braden Corollary" to the Good Neighbor Policy, and Braden and his colleagues in the State Department as "neo-interventionists," "reformers," or exponents of "missionary imperialism."²⁹ Braden's activities in Argentina, his public statements after returning to the United States, the publication of the Blue Book, and his support for the Larreta proposal aroused different reactions from leaders throughout the hemisphere. The majority of government officials in Latin America criticized the new approach as a return by the United States to interventionism. The Blue Book and the Larreta proposal, therefore, drew little official support.³⁰ Opposition forces in nations under authoritarian regimes, however—forces that for years had charged that the Good Neighbor Policy protected dictatorships in Latin America—favored Washington's new initiatives.³¹

The Braden policies became a guide for efforts within the State Department at the end of the war to increase distance between the United States and Latin American dictatorships. The Somoza regime became a prime target because of several factors that arose after 1943. The first was Somoza's announcement that he intended to extend his term of office, opening the possibility that he would remain in power indefinitely. The increasing harshness and unpopularity of his regime, and the increase of reports to U.S. officials of these circumstances by embittered opposition leaders, also provided reason to the Braden group to bring more pressure on Somoza.³² Although the change in

Washington's relations with Managua was gradual and lacked the vitriolic nature of the administration's attacks on the Argentine dictatorship, it was nonetheless indisputable by 1945 that key U.S. officials were determined to change the impression that Washington favored Somoza. The next three years marked a period of sustained effort by these officials to set a clear policy of opposition to the General's continuance in power.

Notes

1. Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, 128; Duggan, *The Americas*, 102-103; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 179; Robert Freeman Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence, Volume 2, Era of Good Neighbors, Cold Warriors, and Hairshirts: 1930-1982*, 2 vols. (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1983), 2:25.

2. *Department of State Bulletin* (17 January 1942), 66, and 21 February 1942, 167; Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista*, 1-83.

3. Political scientist Larman Wilson contends that the majority of Latin American republics adhere to "absolute non-intervention" as a "corollary of absolute state sovereignty." Larman C. Wilson, "The Principle of Non-Intervention in Recent Inter-American Relations: The Challenge of Anti-Democratic Regimes" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1964), 419. For an explanation of Welles's view of the importance of respecting Latin American sovereignty, see Ellis Briggs, *Farewell to Foggy Bottom: The Reflections of a Career Diplomat* (New York: David McKay Company, 1964), 293, and Joseph M. Jones, "Good Neighbor, New Style," *Harper's* 192 (April 1946):315-316.

4. Welles, *A Time for Decision*, 193-200; Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 182-241.

5. See Chapter 5.

6. Welles to Hanna, 24 May 1935, NA 814.00/1197.

7. Welles, *A Time for Decision*, 222-223.

8. Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 226-237.

9. See Chapter 4.

10. See Chapter 5.

11. Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 110-111, 211. Adolf Berle, a member of Roosevelt's inner cabinet and the original "brain trust" of the 1930s, contended that stability was an important goal of the Good Neighbor Policy and that the administration opposed revolutionary and reformist movements in Latin America. Memorandum, 10 October 1941, Diary of Adolf Berle, Box 213, Adolph Berle Papers, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

12. Duggan, *The Americas*, 101-104.

13. Welles, who sustained a continuous critique of State Department officials and Latin American policy in writings after his resignation in 1943, charged that Secretary Byrnes "was neither able nor inclined to undertake any personal direction of inter-American policy." He held that Byrnes had no previous Latin American experience and demonstrated no understanding of the

region's intrinsic importance to the United States. *Where Are We Heading?*, 215. Gellman, in *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, makes similar judgments of Byrnes's knowledge of Latin America (p. 225). In his autobiography, Byrnes did not mention Latin America, and in his account of U.S. foreign relations during the immediate post-war period, he wrote that "there is little reason to discuss our relations either with the South American governments or the Canadian government." James F. Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958); Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), xi.

14. James F. Byrnes, "Neighboring Nations in One World," *Department of State Bulletin* (4 November 1945), 250.

15. Ellis O. Briggs, "Pan America, a Post-War Estimate," *Department of State Bulletin* (25 November 1945), 867-869.

16. *Ibid.*, 869. Briggs may not have originated the statement regarding the policy of maintaining warmer friendships for and greater cooperation with democracies. In July 1945, William Cochran, in charge of Nicaraguan policy in the State Department, wrote to Assistant Secretary of State Rockefeller, in a memorandum about the Somoza regime, that "the United States cannot but feel a closer friendship and a warmer sympathy for those Governments which rest upon the periodically and freely-expressed consent of the governed." In November 1944, Adolf Berle wrote that, although the United States did not have the right to overthrow dictators, it maintained a "greater affinity and a warmer friendship for those governments which rest upon the periodically and freely expressed consent of the governed." Cochran to Rockefeller, 25 July 1945, NA 817.00/7-2545, and Memorandum by Berle, 1 November 1944, NA 710.11/11-144.

17. Ellis Briggs, "Memorandum on Nicaragua," 12 February 1946, vol. III, Box 52, Office of American Republics, 1918-1947, RG 59.

18. George H. Butler, "Inter-American Relations after World War II," Department of State, *Inter-American Series* 26 (1945):1-29.

19. *Ibid.*

20. "Democracy's Bull," *Time*, 5 November 1945, pp. 42-47.

21. Spruille Braden, *Diplomats and Demagogues*, 322.

22. Jones, "Good Neighbor, New Style," 313.

23. *Ibid.*, 314; *New York Times*, 15 April 1947, 2.

24. Spruille Braden, "The Inter-American System," *Department of State Bulletin* (28 October 1945), 693-695.

25. Spruille Braden and Ellis O. Briggs, "Our Inter-American Policy," Department of State, *Inter-American Series* 28 (1946):1-4.

26. Byrnes's endorsement of the Larreta Proposal is in Memorandum No. 76, 28 November 1945, RG84, Box 6, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949.

27. Braden and Briggs, "Our Inter-American Policy," 4-17; James F. Byrnes, "U.S. Adherence to Principles Opposing Oppressive Regimes Among American Republics," *Department of State Bulletin* (2 December 1945), 892; Guerrant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*, 19-22; Larreta, "Inter-American Solidarity: Safeguarding the Democratic Ideal," *Department of State Bulletin* (25 November 1945), 864-866.

28. Gary Frank, *Juan Perón vs. Spruille Braden: The Story behind the Blue Book* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), 95-108; Harold

F. Peterson, *Argentina and the United States, 1810-1960* (New York: State University of New York, 1964), 452-453; Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence*, Vol. 2, 34-35; Steward, *Money, Marines and Mission*, 96-99.

29. These terms are used by Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 213-217; Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy*, 204-205; and Steward, *Money, Marines and Mission*, 78. Atkins refers to the Braden policy as a "temporary departure" from the non-interventionism of the Good Neighbor Policy. G. Pope Atkins, *Latin America in the International Political System*, 108-109, 228-229.

30. Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 211-223, gives the best account of both support and opposition in Latin America to the new policy. For Latin American reaction, also see Peterson, *Argentina and the United States*, 447-453, and Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 217-218. U.S. Senate opposition to Braden's activities is in Frank, *Juan Perón vs. Spruille Braden*, 96-97, and Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 225. Welles and Laurence Duggan, both political liberals, criticized Bradenism as a return to interventionist policy. Former Vice President Henry Wallace, a leading liberal, praised Braden for his forceful stand against Perón, Trujillo, and Somoza. Blum, *The Price of Vision*, 442. Smith claims that for a brief time "the American left did extol the virtues of such officials as Spruille Braden." Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence*, 2:34.

31. The Peruvian reformist leader, Haya de la Torre, had long criticized U.S. support of dictatorship. Haya called for "*buena intervencion*" (good intervention) to overthrow dictators and facilitate democracy. See Dozer, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 50-51; G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The United States and the Trujillo Regime* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972), 59-60; and Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, "Toward a Real Inter-Americanism," *Mexican Life* (October 1942), 17, 24. Former Costa Rican President José Figueres argued that the "worst sin" of the U.S. in Latin America was its support of corrupt dictatorships. He charged the U.S. military and intelligence agencies with "all favoring Somoza and Batista and Trujillo." Interview, 8 July 1940, José Figueres Ferrer Oral History, pp. 32, 33, 36, Truman Library. The Brazilian leader, Helio Lobo, is another prominent Latin American who criticized Wellesian policy as a return to benevolence toward strongmen in the region. He charged that during the war Brazilians heard nothing but "fulsome praise" from officials in Washington for an internal political situation that humiliated them. Cited in Lewis Hanke, "Friendship Now with Latin America," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 22 (Autumn 1946):509. For further criticism of Welles's policies, also see William Alex, "Are We Really Good Neighbors?" *Pan American* 5 (March 1945):32-33.

32. James B. Stewart, "Some Important Political Developments in the Somoza Administration (1937-1943) and an Evaluation of the President's Position Today," Stewart to Hull, 13 October 1943, NA 817.00/9007.

Washington Moves Against the Regime

The Cochran Paper

In the spring and summer of 1945, prior to the return of Ambassador Spruille Braden from Argentina, deliberations began in the State Department to develop a policy to keep Somoza from remaining in power. The key officials in these deliberations were William P. Cochran, who replaced John Cabot as the official in charge of Nicaraguan and Central American affairs; Nelson Rockefeller, assistant secretary of state for Latin America from late 1944 until Braden assumed that position in September 1945; and Fletcher Warren, the American ambassador to Nicaragua.

Cochran, who had a thorough understanding of the Somoza regime from service as first secretary and chargé in the embassy in Managua in the early 1940s, took the lead in opposing Somoza. Perhaps assuming that Rockefeller, whose extensive experience in Latin America had been primarily in South America, did not have a background in Nicaraguan affairs, Cochran prepared an analysis for the assistant secretary of the political situation in Nicaragua.

The significance of the analysis went far beyond that of a routine inter-office memorandum among Department officers. One reason for this was the credibility Cochran enjoyed because of his first-hand knowledge of Nicaragua gained as second-in-command of the American embassy. Another was that the author, in an impassioned and eloquent form, presented the Nicaraguan situation as one wherein the United States could prove its commitment to the ideals of freedom and democracy that had been renewed by victory in the war. The analysis stood out also because it concluded with the most singularly anti-Somoza judgments of any prepared to that date by a senior U.S. official in a policy-making position. Last, the report had special significance because it made a firm recommendation that a U.S. official should approach Somoza directly to inform him, simply, that his days were numbered.

Cochran reviewed for Rockefeller the means Somoza had used to seize power in 1936 and to extend his term in 1939. Somoza, again through devious means, intended to disregard the constitution and run for reelection. There were two motivations for Somoza's ambitions. The first was that the General suffered from a "Messiah complex," an idea, encouraged by his sycophants, that he alone was capable of leading the nation. The second was his obsession with staying in power as a means to protect his vast properties. In arguing against the theory that Somoza was the only man who could keep order in Nicaragua, Cochran felt that it would only lead to *continuismo*, the phenomenon of endless tenure in power that had been the reason for most revolutions in Latin America.¹

The alternative to Somoza might be instability, Cochran warned, but the United States could not ignore the plight of Central Americans who were kept in a state of economic and political peonage. Although leftists might influence politics after Somoza departed, the United States could not fight "real Communism" with a passive approach to Somoza, despite the fact that some would charge that Washington was interfering in Nicaragua's internal affairs. In Cochran's view, these charges could not be avoided. Somoza had managed to identify his government with the United States to such an extreme degree that inaction on the part of the administration would be considered "negative intervention."²

In the event of elections, there was absolutely no evidence in Somoza's record to warrant his promise that they would be free. The General's popularity had disintegrated and serious talk of revolution had arisen among the opposition. These forces believed that fair elections were improbable based on Somoza's record, his control of Congress, and his closing of *La Prensa* and other opposition press. The *Guardia Nacional*, whose loyalty Somoza still enjoyed, would ultimately ensure the General's reelection.³

Heavily interspersed in the assessment were pleas for democracy, an approach that would increasingly mark Department policy statements. It argued that Somoza was an anachronism; his reelection plans were ill-timed from the view of current Nicaraguan reality and from an historical view since a "clean democratic wind was sweeping the world." Cochran reminded Rockefeller that the United States wore "the mantle of greatness," and he urged a policy of standing "forth in the world proudly and positively for the principles which made it great."⁴

The report concluded that Anastasio Somoza García's time was up:

In the interests of democracy as a prime tenet of our political faith, in the interest of President Somoza himself, in the interest of our relations with the Nicaraguan people and in the ultimate best interests of the United States, it is recommended that you address a letter to Ambassador Warren requesting him orally and informally to tell President Somoza that the Department views with concern and regret his apparent decision to seek reelection in direct violation of the clear intent of the Nicaraguan Constitution; that it feels that this decision is contrary to the spirit of democracy and that it can only react disastrously upon his administration and upon his own interests. . . . It might also be added that the United States cannot but feel a closer friendship and a warmer sympathy for those governments which rest upon the periodically and freely-expressed consent of the governed.⁵

Cochran's concluding sentence was to be the touchstone policy of the administration on the question of democracy versus dictatorship. It was a statement that Brynes, Braden, and Briggs would use repeatedly over the next two years as the essential explanation of U.S. policy on that subject.

Nelson Rockefeller and the Somoza Regime

Assistant Secretary Rockefeller had been, from the beginning, a controversial figure in the State Department. He came to the Department with years of experience in Latin America, first as a businessman in charge of his family's vast enterprises in the region in the 1930s, and from 1941 through 1944 as chief of Roosevelt's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a separate entity that managed a wide range of commercial and cultural programs in the Americas. As coordinator, Rockefeller enjoyed direct access to Roosevelt; and while operating largely independent of the State Department, he frequently clashed with its officials.⁶

In the months prior to the receipt of Cochran's report, Rockefeller became embroiled in a dispute over policy toward the military dictatorship in Argentina. By early 1945, the Latin American nations were ready to recognize the Argentine government, despite its pro-Nazi

policies during the war. Rockefeller, anxious to add Argentina to the solid bloc of allied nations in the hemisphere, decided to support them when the issue came up at an inter-American conference in Mexico City in March. Before Roosevelt died the following month, Rockefeller obtained his approval of a plan developed in Mexico City that would readmit Argentina to the inter-American community provided it pledged loyalty to the Allied cause.⁷

At the United Nations conference in San Francisco in May and June, the Latin American delegations unanimously favored admission of Argentina to the new organization. Rockefeller, desiring to preserve inter-American unanimity, again supported their view and in turn received Latin American votes for the United States on key issues at the conference. Although his efforts apparently enjoyed the support of Secretary of State Stettinius, some Department officials thought that the conference results were an appeasement of the pro-Nazi Argentine government. Spruille Braden, who had taken a consistently hard line against Perón, was among these.⁸

Rockefeller's record did not justify these suspicions. He had been a staunch promoter of democracy in Latin America and was equally anti-fascist. As Argentina appeared to be renegeing on its promises to change its policies, Rockefeller began to take a tougher stand against Perón and dictatorship in Latin America. Cochran's memorandum probably encouraged him in this direction, although Cochran wrote it only one month before the new secretary of state, James F. Byrnes, forced Rockefeller to resign from the Department. The day before his resignation, he made a strong speech confirming that he had hardened his position on dictatorship. He condemned the pro-Nazi policies of the Argentine government and even praised Braden's tough positions against Perón in Buenos Aires.⁹

The inclination of the assistant secretary at the time of his departure from office, therefore, was to take a firm position against the Somoza regime. Impressed with Cochran's recommendations of July 25, 1945, the following week Rockefeller called in Somoza's son-in-law, Nicaraguan Ambassador Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa. He relayed to Sevilla Sacasa his personal view that a decision by Somoza to run for reelection would seriously affect U.S.-Nicaraguan relations and would result in a loss of faith by the people of the United States in the development of democracy throughout Latin America. Sevilla Sacasa was appreciative of Rockefeller's "friendly interest and frankness" and promised to transmit the message to President Somoza. Rockefeller then cabled Ambassador Warren suggesting that the same message be given directly to Somoza in Managua.¹⁰

In a conversation with Somoza two days later, Warren learned that the General had already received Rockefeller's message from Sevilla Sacasa. Somoza appeared to have been "hurt by a very good friend"

but was nonetheless receptive to Warren. He surprised the ambassador by saying that he had no intention of running for reelection. He had allowed efforts in support of his candidacy to continue as a means of controlling the *Guardia*. Somoza believed that if the military thought he was leaving power, there would be a chance for rebellion. Although not giving Warren a specific date for announcing his plans to the public, the General remarked to Warren that he was tired of the responsibility of office and looked forward to being a private citizen.¹¹ Upon his departure from the State Department during the last week in August, Rockefeller seemed satisfied with Somoza's promise and asked Warren to relay to Somoza his "sincere admiration for his great patriotism" and to remind the General that his support for the United States during the war would never be forgotten.¹² Somoza had convinced both Rockefeller and Warren that he was voluntarily leaving power, although, as had so often been true, his promises were deceiving and plainly misled U.S. officials.

Ambassador Fletcher Warren: Implementing Unfriendly Policy with a Friendly Dictator

Fletcher Warren had previously served in Managua as second secretary during Somoza's coup d'état in 1936 and considered himself a friend of Somoza when he returned as ambassador in early 1945.¹³ Throughout his two-year tenure in Managua, he was thus confronted with the dilemma of carrying out policy essentially designed to thwart the ambitions of a man with whom he maintained a close friendship. In his words, he found himself "accredited to a government headed by a man whom I liked very much, who was clearly a dictator . . . to whom, doubtless, I would have to convey some unfavorable messages."¹⁴

Warren's relationship with Somoza did affect realization of administration goals. As did his predecessor James Stewart, Warren had trouble following State Department guidelines requiring less identification of the United States with dictators in Central America.¹⁵ In his analyses, Warren too easily disassociated his friend Somoza from the darker aspects of the *Guardia* and the regime. He revealed in conversations with Somoza a naiveté regarding Nicaraguan political reality. Somoza usually convinced Warren to accept his views, and often the General appeared to flatter the ambassador by requesting his advice when his only purpose was to have Warren report the conversation to Washington. Despite pretensions to the contrary, Somoza always kept his own counsel.

Warren, like Stewart, traveled frequently with Somoza and appeared with him publicly at political and social events. At a time when the State Department wanted Warren to encourage Somoza to leave power,

the ambassador went on a trip with the General to the provincial capital of Masaya. During the visit he attended a political luncheon where speeches called for the General's reelection, and he stayed at the home of the powerful local caudillo, Alejandro Abaunza Espinosa, a prominent Liberal Party leader and Somoza minister.¹⁶ A week after this event Warren reported that he would not attend a meeting called by students to condemn the Perón government because he feared that it might develop into an "anti-Somoza" demonstration.¹⁷ Warren and his wife spent many weekends with the Somozas at the General's country estates. On one occasion he admitted to Washington that he went to the mountains with Somoza for several days because he had "no valid reason" for refusing the warm invitation.¹⁸ Somoza's attentions clearly had their effect on the U.S. diplomat.

The ambassador did realize that Somoza's domination of the *Guardia* was the key to his remaining in power. Although he knew it was a repressive organization—one whose brutality he had personally witnessed—he did not realize that his close association with Somoza identified the United States with the repressive side of the regime.¹⁹ Even after reporting that Somoza's rule had left a "backlog of hatred and dissatisfaction," Warren stated that he did not believe that the cause of democracy would be advanced should the opposition to Somoza take power. Somoza remained, in the ambassador's view, "the most capable, the most intelligent, and the most personable man in sight." Despite many indications of discontent in Nicaragua, Warren reported paradoxically that "quiet has continued thus far in Nicaragua because of the president's standing with the people and with the *Guardia Nacional*."²⁰

Since Somoza did not formally renounce his candidacy—despite his pledge to do so after the Rockefeller message—many officials in the Department suspected that he planned to remain in office. The General began to confide more often in Warren and to reaffirm his friendship for the United States. In one conversation with the ambassador, he again used the ploy of associating Nicaragua with freedom, telling Warren that, as long as the United States "continues the great power she is today, the liberty of Nicaragua will be insured." He asked for Warren's advice on a successor—a request the ambassador promptly passed on to the Department—and informed Warren that he would not continue in office beyond 1947. The trusting ambassador appeared to believe this promise, as he did an improbable explanation of Somoza's plans to prepare for a visit to the United States in the summer of 1946. Somoza claimed that he would relinquish power, turn over the presidency and the command of the *Guardia* to others, and move to the United States until after the February 1947 elections. Somoza added that he would return only if the State Department wanted him to be

a candidate, indicating that Warren had been totally unconvincing in relaying the message that Washington had other plans.²¹

Secretary of State Byrnes instructed Warren to inform Somoza that, although the Department appreciated the invitation to join him in selecting the next president, this was strictly an internal decision for Nicaragua. When Warren relayed the secretary's answer to Somoza, the General assured him that he would nonetheless keep the Department "fully informed" of the selection process. The response from the Department to Somoza's offer demonstrated that the principle of non-intervention remained an important factor in policy for Nicaragua, even while officials were making new efforts to oppose the regime.²²

Braden Policy and the Nicaraguan Presidential Campaign

Notwithstanding the policy of non-intervention, William Cochran remained convinced that a direct and forceful approach was necessary to get Somoza out of power. When Spruille Braden assumed the position of assistant secretary of state for Latin America in the early fall of 1945, Cochran informed him that despite Rockefeller's message to Somoza the General continued his efforts to remain in office or to place in the presidency a loyalist whom he could control. Cochran urged Braden to tell Somoza that his reelection would have dire consequences for U.S.-Nicaraguan relations and that Somoza should leave government entirely, including his position as commander of the *Guardia Nacional*. Cochran admitted that the United States might not be able to oust Somoza but he believed that it would be better for the Department to go on record with that position. He added that Washington would be accused of intervention "no matter what we do or do not do."²³

At the time of Cochran's briefing, the Department called Warren to Washington for consultations on Nicaraguan policy. After the ambassador returned to Managua, Secretary of State Byrnes forwarded new policy instructions. The statement, approved by Braden, blended the doctrine of non-intervention with the policy to support freely elected governments in Latin America. The statement recognized that some governments in the hemisphere had come to power unconstitutionally and emphasized that the United States would not intervene to impose democracy. Byrnes instructed Warren to relay to Somoza that, although the United States would not intervene, it would maintain a warmer friendship and cooperate more readily with a democratic government. The policy of non-intervention, the secretary stressed, did not mean approval of dictatorship.²⁴

Pressure on Somoza from Washington and from internal opposition mounted after Braden became assistant secretary. State Department officials took the administration's message to the public in an effort to gain support both domestically and throughout the hemisphere for the new policy of opposing dictatorships. During the latter part of 1945, Braden, Byrnes, and Ellis Briggs all made speeches vigorously condemning tyranny abroad. A *Time* magazine cover story on Braden publicized his and the administration's new policy, as did the three officials' endorsement of the Uruguayan initiative against fascism.²⁵

U.S. officials became more suspicious of Somoza's plans after the General asked Warren to relay to Washington that he was no longer bound to his pledge to Rockefeller since the latter had left the State Department.²⁶ Desiring to assure that Somoza clearly understood that recent policy announcements applied to him, the Department directed Warren personally to review each of these with the General. In November and December, the ambassador—albeit reluctantly—delivered to Somoza copies of speeches by Byrnes, Braden, and Briggs; a copy of Byrnes's statement supporting the Uruguayan initiative; the *Time* article; and excerpts from Department cables to Warren explaining the new policy. Some of the papers had actually been underlined for additional emphasis, and Warren was specifically instructed to bring these to Somoza's attention. After reviewing the material with Somoza, the unsuspecting Warren discovered that Somoza had not, after all, understood the message that Washington had been trying to convey to him about leaving power. After he requested Warren's opinion as to what the statements meant, the ambassador answered that "they are telling you that this means you. Your Government is considered to be that of a dictator and the Department is trying to indicate to you its position." Somoza appeared "hurt," according to Warren, and wrote out a statement in pencil after one conversation, which he asked the ambassador to give to the Department. In it the General promised that he would soon publicly renounce his candidacy for president. Again, the ambassador apparently believed that Somoza was sincere.²⁷

At the time of these conversations Warren also talked separately to the Nicaraguan ambassador to Washington, Sevilla Sacasa, who was visiting Managua at the time. Sevilla Sacasa understood what the United States was trying to do but did not think the new policy should apply to Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan diplomat assured Warren that upon returning to Washington he would inform Byrnes that Nicaragua was an undeveloped country whose people needed a strong leader. Somoza, according to his son-in-law, was the "indispensable man in Nicaragua," a leader who knew how to govern and a man capable of giving the people the type of government they needed. Rather than apologize for the dictator, Sevilla Sacasa argued why he was good for Nicaragua.²⁸

When Sevilla Sacasa returned to Washington, his meeting was with Braden, not Byrnes, and his approach was much less assertive and confident than it had been with Warren. The Nicaraguan ambassador now contended that "Somoza had no ambitions to continue in the presidency." He cautioned Braden, however, about potential problems in controlling the *Guardia* and about the threat from "leftist elements" or other groups unfriendly to the United States after Somoza left power. Braden assured him that if leftist groups became active in Nicaragua, that was part of the "difficult progress toward the democratic goal." Braden was sure that Somoza, as the "elder statesman" on the scene who had spoken so often of freedom and democracy, would be able to influence the future democratic development of the nation.²⁹

This pressure produced results within two months when Somoza formally announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection and that he would lift restrictions on personal freedoms, release political prisoners, and allow a free press. At this time, he also attempted to persuade U.S. officials to extend an invitation for him to visit Washington. Such an official visit would be his first since 1939.³⁰

Somoza had first told Warren that he wanted to visit the United States in June 1946 to attend his son's graduation from West Point.³¹ He later indicated his desire to visit Washington and discuss with President Truman and Secretary Byrnes the communist threat to Nicaragua.³² After receiving indications from Ambassador Warren that the State Department might oppose a visit to Washington, in April 1946 Somoza accepted an invitation from the mayor of New Orleans to attend his inauguration.³³

Officials in the State Department realized that Somoza would try to turn a visit to any location in the United States into a political event to strengthen his position in Nicaragua. The occasion gave Braden, on March 5, 1946, an opportunity to review for Byrnes the history of the Somoza regime. His analysis bluntly condemned Somoza as a dictator who had stayed in power by "repression and trickery" and through the pretension of U.S. support and friendship with Roosevelt. Braden recommended that Somoza be discouraged from coming to the United States and, if he did come, he should be denied an official invitation to Washington. In any event, Braden argued, Somoza should not be received by Truman.³⁴

In April, after further attempts to prevent a Somoza visit, Briggs informed Braden that despite "our best efforts" it now appeared that Somoza would visit the United States for three months. Understanding that Somoza had communicated with U.S. senators from the South for assistance with the Washington visit, he recommended that Braden talk to them about administration policy. He told Braden that Somoza would misrepresent the visit to persuade the Nicaraguan people that "we are 100% behind him" and argued that since this was directly counter

to policy, the Department had to stop letting Somoza use the United States for the "continuance of dictatorship and shameless exploitation." The United States must not give the impression of supporting "such tyrants and grafters as Somoza."³⁵

Briggs recommended that Cochran go to New Orleans to brief the mayor on the administration's policy and to persuade him to avoid elaborate entertainment for Somoza. Braden vetoed the suggestion, fearing charges of State Department meddling in local politics. Briggs presented a vigorous argument against a Washington visit. He insisted that Braden see President Truman and convince him to avoid offering any official entertainment for the visit. Briggs argued that if Truman did receive Somoza it should be for only a few minutes and "under no circumstances" should there be entertainment at the White House. If this transpired, Briggs believed that the Department's policy would be "wholly undermined and rendered ineffective."³⁶

Cochran reinforced Briggs's position in a separate communication to Braden. In a passionate denunciation of Somoza, Cochran reminded Braden that the regime held power through violence and trickery. Somoza had thrown his opponents in jail or sent them into exile, perverted the constitution of Nicaragua, stolen from the country, done nothing for the ordinary citizen, and accomplished all of this without "the slightest effort to consult the popular will." Cochran fully agreed with Briggs's position, telling Braden that the U.S. government had to do everything within its power to avoid even the appearance of supporting Somoza lest he try to retain power.³⁷

When Somoza did come to the United States later in 1946, it was for medical treatment. The War Department furnished a plane to transport him to New Orleans for this purpose.³⁸ While he was there, Byrnes sent Truman the briefing paper Braden had prepared in March. Upon forwarding the paper, Byrnes's deputy cautioned Truman that while the Department hoped that Somoza would not come to Washington, he might attempt the trip to give the false impression in Nicaragua of the "official support" of the United States. If the visit did take place, the deputy "strongly" recommended that Truman not receive Somoza. This unremitting opposition from several key officials in the State Department finally had its intended effect: Somoza did not get to repeat his 1939 triumph by making an official visit to Washington under the Truman administration in 1946.³⁹

Activities of the Nicaraguan Opposition During Braden's Tenure as Assistant Secretary

Spruille Braden's speeches and his appointment as the administration's top official for Latin American affairs gave encouragement to the Nicaraguan opposition's fight against the Somoza regime. A former Nicaraguan congressman and general wrote to Braden, praising his actions in Buenos Aires to "liberate the Argentine people," and mentioning an article Braden wrote against dictatorship in Latin America. Ambassador Warren forwarded to Braden a letter from a noted opposition journalist, Ulises Terán of León, which supported the assistant secretary's declarations in favor of freedom and democracy in the "universal and noble spirit of Thomas Jefferson." Warren also forwarded to the Department an article from an opposition newspaper, *El Liberal Independiente*, entitled "Spruille Braden a Rampart Against the Dictatorships of Latin America." The author extolled Braden for his campaign against tyranny, stating that he had "captivated the call of the democracy-loving peoples" and claiming that, in his new position, Braden carried on his shoulders the "destiny of America."⁴⁰

The political opposition remained skeptical of Somoza's intentions after his announcement that he would leave office in 1947. It argued that Somoza would remain in power, in or out of the office of president, as long as he was chief of the *Guardia* and controlled the election machinery. After Braden became assistant secretary, opposition leaders had high expectations that he would support their efforts to change these conditions prior to the February 1947 elections.⁴¹

In June 1946, a delegation led by former Conservative President Emiliano Chamorro; another former president, Adolfo Díaz; and Gerónimo Ramírez Brown from the Independent Liberals called on Braden at the State Department. After complaining that Somoza had full control of the military and therefore dominated the electoral process, the delegation requested U.S. supervision of the 1947 presidential elections and temporary assumption of command of the *Guardia* by a U.S. officer. To convince Somoza to allow U.S. supervision, the Nicaraguans suggested that the administration inform the General that if he did not grant the request, Washington would not recognize the new government.⁴²

Braden replied by reviewing U.S. commitment to the Atlantic Charter, to the United Nations resolutions on human rights, and to the Uruguayan initiative against tyranny and abuse of individual rights. He stressed the administration's "particularly friendly feeling" for and "closer relationship" with freely elected governments, and he reminded the Nicaraguans of his actions against Perón in Argentina. His actions and the support for the Uruguayan proposal—despite their international nature and connection with Nazism and the war—had drawn wide

criticism and charges of intervention throughout Latin America. Braden, although sympathizing with his visitors' dilemma, informed them that unilateral supervision or a change in command of the *Guardia* were internal matters in which the United States could not become involved. To take such actions would be clear intervention in Nicaraguan affairs and counter to Washington's inter-American commitments. The assistant secretary did not rule out the possibility of non-recognition but felt that this policy option would have to be implemented in conjunction with the other American republics.⁴³

Braden's inability to assist the primary opposition group in Nicaragua and his use of the Rooseveltian doctrine of non-intervention as justification created political turmoil in Managua. Warren reported that the news was received with "dismay" by those opposed to Somoza and with "jubilation" by the General himself. The Somoza-controlled newspapers hailed the decision, praising the State Department for reaffirming its commitment to the Good Neighbor Policy. At the same time, they criticized the opposition leaders as unpatriotic for requesting U.S. intervention.⁴⁴

Distinct but not contradictory reactions came from *La Prensa*, the independent newspaper largely supportive of the Conservative Party, and the Socialist Party newspaper, *Trabajo*. *La Prensa* contended that the failure of Chamorro's mission would make Nicaraguans realize that expecting outside assistance was a false hope and that they must solve their own electoral problems. *Trabajo*, after recalling the years of "prostration" in Nicaragua resulting from North American imperialism, argued that Chamorro did not have a right to ask that freedom be delivered "in a fancy box, sent with a convoy of Uncle Sam's bombers." The leftist newspaper held that despite the oppression of Somoza's dictatorship—an oppression suffered equally in the past under Conservative Party regimes—freedom had no value if it arrived as a "merciful gift" from a foreign power, but could be enjoyed only if "torn from the hands of tyrants by an entire nation, fighting in the streets."⁴⁵

Reports from observers not connected to politics or the press also reached the embassy. A prominent professional reported to the embassy that the sentiment in one provincial capital was that the U.S. government was still grateful to Somoza for assassinating Sandino, that it favored the Somoza regime, and that Washington had done nothing to assist the opposition. The informant, while claiming he was pro-American, stated that his fellow townsmen thought that, if the United States continued its policy, that policy would come under attack the same as Somoza's.⁴⁶

Warren noted that the news from Washington brought out stringent anti-U.S. sentiment among the rank and file of the opposition, and, surprisingly, he reported, among a large portion of the secondary leaders. A member of the opposition Independent Liberal directorate,

Salvador Buitrago Aja, his "tongue loosened by drink," according to an embassy report, protested to an official about the "weak policy" of Washington and claimed that the great majority of Nicaraguans were anti-American because they considered the policy of non-intervention as support for Somoza.⁴⁷ Warren thought that the failure of Chamorro's mission had on balance been favorable for Somoza. It confirmed to the people of Nicaragua that Somoza would continue to enjoy complete control of the country, including the upcoming elections, without fear of opposition from the United States.⁴⁸

Somoza's Response to Post-War Policy

Prior to the failed Chamorro mission, Warren reported at different times that Somoza appeared to be "hurt," "moved," or "shaken" by news from Washington.⁴⁹ Somoza's actions during this time were not, however, those of a crippled or intimidated leader, but rather those of a consummate conspirator determined to survive. He understood the United States and the methods of its government, and his actions indicated that he thought the new policy opposing his regime might be temporary—or in any event a policy he could eventually overcome. Although the ambassador warned Somoza that the new policy applied to his government, Somoza continued to act as if it did not. He also continued the practice of identifying his government with democracy and freedom, despite glaring evidence to the contrary; and he was careful to never publicly denounce U.S. policy, even when confronted with clear indications that it was designed to remove him from power.

Somoza's reaction to the publication of the Blue Book denouncing the Argentine government's ties to Nazism and fascist methods demonstrated his tactics in countering U.S. opposition. After its publication, the State Department queried the Latin American republics for their reaction. While some governments gave mild approval, most, especially the important countries of South America—even democracies such as Colombia—opposed the Blue Book as interventionary. Warren cabled that Somoza officials, while dismayed at the Argentine government's involvement with Nazis, displayed "dimly concealed" admiration for Perón and wondered whether pressure from Washington would be applied to other dictatorships. The ambassador reported that the Nicaraguan public praised the publication, however, because of its direct attack on the Perón dictatorship.⁵⁰

The Nicaraguan government's reaction to the Blue Book was, as expected, the personal reaction of its chief. Anxious to have his position conveyed directly to Braden, Somoza dispatched his son-in-law to the State Department. Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa told Braden that Somoza had read the paper in English "with a great deal of care" and

was "tremendously impressed." The book was "brilliant," the obsequious ambassador reported. The government of Nicaragua was "in entire accord with its conclusions," and Braden could rely on Managua's support.³¹

A similar reaction, both from the Nicaraguan opposition and from Somoza, came after the radio broadcast by Braden and Ellis Briggs denouncing totalitarian governments.³² Warren reported that the broadcast was "hysterically greeted" by the leaders of the opposition. They considered it a last minute change to the policy of non-intervention that Braden had relayed to Chamorro. The opposition press considered the broadcast to be directed not only against the Perón regime but also against the dictatorships of Somoza, Tiburcio Carías in Honduras, and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.³³

Somoza, forever pretending to be a democrat and refusing publicly to admit that Washington's criticism even remotely applied to him, also praised the broadcast. He brazenly stated his "agreement with the ideas, suggestions, and viewpoints expressed in the recent speech by the Honorable Mr. Braden, Assistant Secretary of State." Somoza thought Braden had "stated wisely" the problem of totalitarian governments and their threat to all peoples. He even made a recommendation during a press conference—incredible as it was, considering its author—that coordinated measures be adopted throughout the hemisphere to oppose dictatorship. Somoza aggressively denied opposition charges that Braden's comments applied to him. He claimed his government was democratic, boasting that Nicaraguans enjoyed "wide liberties," even at the expense of order. Although these comments appeared to support Braden and the Uruguayan proposal, Warren had learned earlier that Somoza had privately expressed hope that the proposal would fail and that subsequently Byrnes and Braden would "lose out" in the State Department. These comments confirmed Somoza's political astuteness and ability to turn events to his benefit.³⁴

Despite these and other statements pretending individual freedoms in Nicaragua, the General made no pretense to loosen his control of the regime. His hold on the *Guardia* remained absolute. In late 1945, he demanded the relief of the U.S. military attaché for telling a group of young officers that the *Guardia* should be non-political.³⁵ In mid-1946, he expelled a *Guardia* lieutenant for mentioning to friends in the officer's club that a professional soldier's duty was to uphold the constitution, not to give loyalty to one leader. The latter incident illustrated the thorough politicalization of the *Guardia* and the extent to which it still functioned as a personal instrument of Somoza.³⁶

While under pressure to step down, the General continued to court U.S. officials and to demonstrate his affection for the United States. In December 1945, Somoza indicated that he wanted to decorate J. Edgar Hoover for his assistance to Nicaragua in investigations of

subversives during the war. The State Department approved the request but cautioned that Somoza should not use the occasion to strengthen his political position.⁵⁷ In his unsuccessful attempt to obtain an invitation from President Truman in 1946, Somoza told Ambassador Warren that his relationship with the president was "perhaps" stronger than it was with Roosevelt; he bragged to Warren of having just received an autographed photo from Truman.⁵⁸

Although anti-communism had not become central to U.S. foreign policy, Somoza, shrewdly anticipating that it would, tried to use the issue during this period to improve his position with Washington. He included the communist threat as a reason to visit Byrnes and Truman in 1946. Members of the regime passed word to the American embassy that the primary opposition to Somoza consisted of "Communists and Sandinistas." The tactic failed for Somoza because the State Department did not at that time perceive communism as a threat to Nicaragua.⁵⁹

In August 1946, at the Liberal Party convention in León, Somoza withstood the challenge of his strongest opponent within the regular party apparatus, Alejandro Abaunza Espinosa, a regional caudillo and large landowner from Masaya. The widely-respected Abaunza, a Somoza cabinet officer and congressman, arrived at the convention with the largest number of votes for the presidential nomination. Somoza, recognizing Abaunza's strong following throughout the country as a threat to his continuing power, bribed a sufficient number of delegates to even the votes between Abaunza and his nearest challenger, Lorenzo Guerrero. The resulting stalemate allowed Somoza to arrange for the nomination of Leonardo Arguello, a septuagenarian and former foreign minister. Confident that the aging Arguello would be a puppet president, Somoza thus felt assured of continuing the regime after the elections of February 1947.⁶⁰

In 1946, the politically obtuse Warren remained unsure if Somoza understood the administration's post-war policy. He advised the Department that despite his knowledge of English and affection for Americans and the American life, Somoza was still unable to believe that policy as set forth in Braden's speeches applied to his government.⁶¹ Other reports indicated that Somoza obviously understood the new policy, including a local report the legation had forwarded to the Department over Warren's signature in April. Warren was simply unable to realize that Somoza was duping him at every turn.

Somoza believed that time was on his side after Perón won the elections in Argentina in early 1946, according to a long and thoughtful analysis that Warren received at the embassy. This confidential, ten-page paper, prepared for the ambassador by Jesus Sánchez, a former Somoza minister whom Warren described as one of the country's most able politicians, argued that Somoza privately viewed Perón's victory as

a defeat for the Braden policy. The General thought it would result in the elimination from the State Department of those officials promoting democracy abroad. Sánchez wrote that Somoza believed that Perón's election would also mean a return to a policy of cooperation with established regimes because of the need for a united front against Soviet influence in the hemisphere. William Cochran in the State Department agreed with Sánchez's assessment, contending that Somoza hoped for a reaffirmation of the Wellesian policy of strict non-intervention. Somoza was thus praising the Braden group publicly while privately betting on their departure from the scene.⁶²

In the 1945-46 period, the Truman administration made a clear break with previous policies that gave the impression of supporting dictators such as Somoza. The actions of State Department officials during this time signalled that Somoza would also be a target of the administration's plans to oppose dictatorships in the hemisphere. Officials such as Cochran, Briggs, and Braden, firm in their commitment to remove Somoza from power, pressured him directly or through the American embassy to leave office at the end of this term in 1947. Their actions were the strongest argument to that point against those who claim that Washington unceasingly supported the Somoza regime. As Nicaragua was a testing ground for the policy of non-intervention in 1936, it served the same purpose a decade later as the Truman administration pursued new policy goals in Latin America.

Notes

1. Cochran to Rockefeller, 25 July 1945, NA 817.00/7-2545.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States*, 329-330; Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 120-126; Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, 119; Duggan, *The Americas*, 103-104.
7. Joe Alex Morris, *Nelson Rockefeller: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 192-193; Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 205-207; Thomas M. Campbell and George C. Herring, eds., *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., 1943-1946* (New York: New Viewpoints, Franklin Watts, Inc., 1975), 286-288.
8. Frank Gervasi, *The Real Rockefeller: The Story of the Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of the Presidential Aspirations of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 108-122; Morris, *Nelson Rockefeller*, 200-214; *New York Times*, 14 August 1945, 22; Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 205-207. Braden later charged Stettinius and Rockefeller with "moral flabbiness" on the Argentine issue. See Braden, *Diplomats and Demagogues*, 318.

9. U.S. Congress, House, "Analysis of the Philosophy and Public Record of Nelson Rockefeller," 93d Cong., 2d sess., October, 1974; James Desmond, *Nelson Rockefeller: A Political Biography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 131; *New York Times*, 25 August 1945, 1.

10. Grew to Warren, 7 August 1945, RG 84, Box 6, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.

11. Warren to Rockefeller, 14 August 1945, RG84, Box 6, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949 NA; Warren to Byrnes, 8 August 1945, NA 817.00/8-845; *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1214-1215.

12. Rockefeller to Warren, 23 August 1945, RG 86, Box 6, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.

13. Interview with Ambassador Fletcher Warren, 15 October 1973, Fletcher Warren Oral History, pp. 32, 92, Harry S. Truman Library.

14. *Ibid.*, 94.

15. Stettinius to all missions in Central America, 2 February 1944.

16. Warren to Byrnes, 3 October 1945, NA 817.00/10-345.

17. Warren to Byrnes, 11 October 1945, RG 84, 701/800 Argentina-Nicaragua, Box 7, Managua Post Records, 1945-1949, NA.

18. Warren to Stettinius, 18 June 1945; *New York Times*, 19 June 1945, 8; Warren to Byrnes, 28 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-2846.

19. Warren to Byrnes, 1 July 1946, NA 817.00/7-146 and 22 August 1946, NA 817.24/8-2246.

20. Warren to Byrnes, 25 September 1945, NA 817.00/9-2545 and *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1217.

21. Warren to Byrnes, 14 August 1945, NA 817.00/8-1445; *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1217-1220.

22. Byrnes to Warren, 4 September 1945, and Warren to Byrnes, 10 September 1945, RG 84, Box 6, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.

23. Cochran to Braden, 11 October 1945, NA 817.00/10-1145.

24. Byrnes to Warren, 15 November 1945, NA 817.00/11-1545.

25. See Chapter 9.

26. Warren to Byrnes, 15 November 1945, NA 817.00/11-1545.

27. *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1221-1229.

28. Warren to Cochran, 15 November 1945, NA 817.00/11-1545.

29. *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1229-1230.

30. Warren to Byrnes, 11 December 1945, No. 802, NA 800 Nic./Political; *FRUS: 1946*, 11:1068.

31. *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1219.

32. Warren to Byrnes, 14 March 1946, NA 817.00B/3-1446, and 28 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-2846.

33. Briggs to Braden, 10 April 1946, NA 817.001 Somoza, Anastasio/4-1046; *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1220-1222.

34. Braden to Byrnes, 5 March 1946, Box 183, "Nicaragua," PSF, Truman Papers.

35. Briggs to Braden, 10 April 1946.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Cochran to Braden, 23 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-2346.

38. Newbegin to Briggs, 26 August 1946, NA 817.00/8-2646.

39. Clayton to Truman, 3 September 1946, Box 183, "Nicaragua," PSF, Truman Papers.
40. Carlos Castro Wassmer to Braden, 20 September 1945, NA 817.00/9-2045; Warren to Byrnes, 8 October 1945, NA 800/Argentina; Warren to Byrnes, 27 December 1946, NA 817.00/12-2746. Even before Braden became assistant secretary, a former Nicaraguan ambassador to Washington (who then was opposing Somoza) wrote to Nelson Rockefeller about Braden. He praised one of Braden's radio broadcasts that called for an end to arms for non-democratic countries. Alejandro César to Rockefeller, NA 817.00/4-945.
41. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:1068-1069.
42. Memoranda of Conversations by Cochran, 28 June 1946, RG 84, Box 8, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA and 27 June 1946, NA 817.00/6-2746; Braden to Warren, 26 June 1946, NA 817.00/6-546.
43. *Ibid.*; Acheson to Warren, 26 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-2646; Braden to Chamorro, 1 August 1946, NA 817.00/7-1646.
44. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:1071, 1073-1075.
45. *Ibid.*; Gibson to Byrnes, 16 July 1946, NA 817.00/7-1646.
46. Warren to Byrnes, 26 June 1946, NA 817.00/6-2646.
47. Warren to Byrnes, 11 December 1946, NA 800-Dept. Non-Intervention Policy.
48. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:1071.
49. See Chapter 8 and *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1222, 1228.
50. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:224; Welles, *Where Are We Heading?*, 230-232; Wood, *The Dismantling of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 113-114.
51. "President Somoza's Views on the Blue Book," Memorandum by Robert Newbegin, 1 March 1946, NA 835.00/3-146.
52. See Chapter 9.
53. Warren to Byrnes, 31 December 1946, NA 800-Nic. Reaction to Braden-Briggs Radio Broadcast.
54. *Ibid.*; Warren to Byrnes, 1 January 1946, RG 84, Box 8, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.
55. See Chapter 8, note 23.
56. Warren to Byrnes, 13 May 1946, NA 817.00/5-1346.
57. Nicholson to Hull, 27 December 1940, NA 862.20210/381; Ray to Bursley, 7 February 1941, NA 817.00/8925 1/2; Memorandum for the Files, 17 December 1945, NA 817.00/12-1745.
58. Warren to Byrnes, 11 March 1946, NA 817.00/3-1146.
59. Leonard, *The United States and Central America*, 140; Memorandum of Conversation by Dreier, 23 October 1945, NA 817.00/10-2345; Warren to Byrnes, 15 March 1946, NA 817.00B/3-1546, and 8 July 1946, NA 817.00/7-846. The FBI at this time, however, believed that communism was a growing threat to the region, although it included only one Central American nation, Costa Rica, among the ten endangered Latin American countries. See Memorandum by J. Edgar Hoover, 8 October 1945, Box 168, folder "FBI," PSF, Truman Papers.
60. Warren to Byrnes, 4 January 1946, NA 817.00/1-446; 14 August 1946, NA 817.00/8-1346; 15 August 1946, NA 817.00/8-1546; 16 August 1946, NA 817.00/8-1346; and 6 March 1947, NA 817.00/3-647. Interview with Rodolfo Abaunza Salinas, 3 May 1986, León, Nicaragua.

61. Warren to Byrnes, 15 February 1946, NA 817.00/2-1546.
62. Warren to Cochran, 4 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-446; Cochran to Braden, 18 April 1946, NA 817.00/4-1846.

The Diplomatic Break: May 1947-May 1948

The 1947 Election and the "Twenty-Six Days"

The Independent Liberals and the Chamorro-led Conservatives united behind Dr. Enoc Aguado in the Nicaraguan presidential campaign of 1946-47. Aguado, a lawyer and an Independent Liberal from León, was highly respected and popular throughout Nicaragua. Since Somoza had formed the electoral commission in 1946 without opposition representation, and since he controlled the entire voting machinery through the *Guardia*, Aguado's forces conceded early that they had no chance to win the election. The opposition campaigned with enthusiasm before large crowds, however, in the hope of obtaining U.S. and Latin American assistance after the expected fraudulent elections.¹

Washington maintained its policy of not interfering with the internal politics of Nicaragua during the weeks prior to the February 1947 elections. Officials continued to stress the administration's interest that the elections be conducted in a free and democratic manner. Secretary of State Byrnes, after confirming with Warren that the legation should not interfere, nonetheless reminded him two weeks before the voting that

the Department was anxious to see "fair elections which accurately reflect the will of the Nicaraguan people."²

Warren discussed with the regime's candidate, Arguello, the December 1946 radio broadcast by Braden. Arguello approved of the assistant secretary's remarks supporting democratic elections and promised Warren that he would not accept the presidency unless the elections were fair. Warren thought it strange that the elderly politician spoke so "carefully and purposefully" when referring to Somoza. The ambassador mused that, as president, Arguello might act independently. In Washington, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa assured Braden that Somoza planned free elections and had even invited the U.S. press to observe them. He mentioned to Braden, however, that the opposition had threatened violent acts, even revolution, and that Somoza might have to use force to maintain order. Braden warned the ambassador that the entire hemisphere would look on violence in Nicaragua as a "catastrophe" and a "breach of the democratic processes that have been built up on these two continents."³

The elections on February 2 occurred without significant disturbances. With the exception of Somoza regime spokesmen, observers considered the process as blatantly fraudulent as any in Nicaraguan history. The government held the ballots in the National Palace for several days while deciding, according to Warren's report to Washington, which departments were to be "granted" to the opposition. It then announced that Arguello had won 62 percent of the votes. The opposition press immediately initiated an offensive against fraud in the election. Although Warren conceded to some exaggeration on their part, he admitted that "it is the opinion of this Embassy that the opposition did win the election." The ambassador added that the great majority of the people known to the embassy shared this judgement, as did many supporters of the regime.⁴

The U.S. reporters Somoza invited to cover the elections did not serve the General as he might have wished. On February 2 the *New York Times* reported from the provincial capital of Matagalpa that the *Guardia* would be the sole arbiter of the elections. Reporting strong anti-Somoza sentiment in that city, the dispatch stated that roadside placards read that "Braden has condemned the dictatorships" and quoted the opposition leader's claim that local children would "hail Braden as a liberator" were he to come to Matagalpa. After the elections, both the *Times* and the *Miami Herald* reported that Aguado had received a majority of the votes, and one labeled the electoral procedure a "dictator-directed electoral fraud." Other reports called for the United States to find a way to help rid Nicaragua of Somoza.⁵

The opposition expected Washington to condemn the elections and made a vigorous effort to persuade neighboring countries and the United States to withhold recognition from the new government. The

State Department's refusal to make any public comment about the elections increased anti-American sentiment in Nicaragua prior to the inauguration. The opposition press bitterly criticized Washington's inaction, recalling that the State Department had only recently denounced the lack of democratic elections in Poland. The failure to condemn the elections reflected a "callous indifference to the high democratic ideals for which the war was fought," one newspaper argued. Warren attributed the rise of anti-Americanism to both the administration's refusal to pressure Somoza for supervised elections and its subsequent silence regarding the results. He noted a revival of charges that the United States secretly wanted Somoza to remain in power.⁶

Although the State Department did not issue a statement about the elections, Braden did receive Aguado when he came to Washington in April, three weeks before Arguello's inauguration. Aguado expressed hope that the Department would find a way to support his cause for the "moral political effect" it would have. Braden, as he had with Chamorro's delegation the year before, reiterated the administration's commitment to the policy of non-intervention, contending that, in the long run, it would have a positive moral effect. To assuage the opposition leader, however, he repeated the Department's now standard refrain that the United States would have a "greater affinity and warmer friendship" for democratically elected governments.⁷

The refusal to assist Aguado dampened opposition hopes for non-recognition; any remaining optimism ended when the administration announced its representative to attend the inauguration of Arguello, thus signifying recognition of the new government. While opposition forces criticized the United States for this action, Somoza's officials "loudly applauded" the decision, Warren reported, and praised the administration's consistent refusal to intervene in Nicaraguan affairs. The inauguration of Arguello occurred without incident on May 1, 1947.⁸

Arguello, the Surprising Puppet: "A Little Bit *Chiflado*"

It became clear after the inauguration that the new president would be no figurehead for Somoza. Arguello immediately removed many Somoza supporters from government positions and appointed mostly anti-Somoza men to his cabinet. The day after he took office, Arguello began to reorganize the *Guardia Nacional*. He restructured the general staff, assigned senior *Guardia* officials to less important positions, and replaced them with "Arguellistas," officers who had pledged loyalty to the new president. Arguello also removed the chief of the Managua police, a *Guardia* officer, and reassigned Somoza's twenty-two-year-old

son, a *Guardia* major and commander of the Presidential Guard, to a far less important post in the western city of León.⁹

After receiving complaints from Somoza about interfering with the *Guardia*, Arguello informed the General that the actions were necessary to demonstrate to Somoza and to the people of Nicaragua his command of the government. The president reprimanded Somoza for trying to intimidate him by having *Guardia* tanks pass in front of the president's house. Although Arguello wanted to remove Somoza from the *Guardia*, he reappointed him as its chief initially in an attempt to avoid open conflict. He warned Somoza, however, not to boast about the appointment for political purposes.¹⁰

Arguello's actions surprised embassy officials and confirmed a report the embassy had received about him the previous year. At that time a regime insider warned that Somoza might not be able to control the seventy-five-year-old politician. He described Arguello as independent and both proud and arrogant. He also referred to him as "a little bit *chiflado*," a Latin American term for screwy or nutty.¹¹

On May 9, Arguello called in Maurice Bernbaum, the U.S. embassy chargé after Ambassador Warren departed Nicaragua on May 4, to inform the U.S. government of his intentions. The chargé reported that the "old man" complained that Somoza had left the Nicaraguan treasury completely looted and explained that he planned to have an honest and efficient government. Arguello claimed that he was not afraid of either Somoza or the *Guardia*, and he thought the good moral effect of his program would give his government the national and international prestige necessary to overcome any threat from the military.¹²

In an address to a joint session of the national Congress, Arguello's promise to be an independent President drew cheers from the legislators. He outlined a surprisingly liberal program to combat illiteracy, continue roadbuilding, and distribute public lands to the peasants. He also pledged to maintain good relations with all nations, especially with the United States and the neighboring Central American countries.¹³

The Second Somoza Coup, May 26, 1947

His good intentions notwithstanding, Arguello did not have the opportunity to implement his program. A crisis developed in mid-May as a result of Somoza instructing his commanders to ignore all presidential orders. Arguello informed Bernbaum that he intended to request Somoza's resignation. The president made the mistake, however, of allowing Somoza two days to arrange his personal affairs before going into exile. The General instead shrewdly arranged a coup d'état,

which he implemented with a group of loyalists in the *Guardia* early on May 26.¹⁴

After Somoza's troops surrounded the presidential palace, surprising Arguello and the *Guardia* forces remaining loyal to his government, the General informed Bernbaum that he was "forced" to act against the new government. Somoza charged that Arguello was incapable of governing the state because he was "incapacitated," "incompetent," and "dangerous"; that he provoked division in the *Guardia*, thereby threatening the public order; and that he had plainly "driven Somoza to the wall," thereby forcing him to rebel to protect his own life. Somoza admitted that the coup would make an unfavorable international impression and that it would undo efforts to achieve democratic institutions in Nicaragua. He stressed, however, that the country's welfare demanded this great "sacrifice." Bernbaum, upset with events and Somoza's ridiculous, self-serving rationalizations, refused to offer an opinion when Somoza asked for his recommendation for the next president. When the chargé asked what he would do in the event Arguello refused to resign, Somoza, while assuring Bernbaum with a smile that he would not harm the president, told him that he would simply starve the old man out of the *Casa Presidencial*.¹⁵

Upon receiving Bernbaum's initial reports of the coup, Braden discussed the events in Managua with the Nicaraguan chargé, a *Guardia* colonel. He informed the colonel—who denied any knowledge of the coup—that Somoza's actions were not "consonant with democratic practices" and expressed deep regret that the *Guardia*, an organization founded by the United States, had been used to overthrow the government. He thought that the coup d'état would be harmful to Nicaragua, as well as to its relations with the United States. Braden then telephoned Bernbaum in Managua, relaying the Department's concern and adding the understatement that Somoza's justification that he was protecting his own life was "hardly impressive." Braden informed the chargé that the United States continued to recognize the Arguello government, and he instructed Bernbaum to try to see the president to give him word that Washington supported him in the crisis, not Somoza. Braden's call to Bernbaum was one of his last acts as assistant secretary. On May 28, he departed Washington on a trip to the West; during his absence, the White House announced his resignation from the State Department after thirteen years of service.¹⁶ Bernbaum relayed the information to Arguello in the besieged president's office. The old man, isolated from outside communication, handed the chargé a message for President Truman. It explained to Truman that Somoza's actions were an "open rebellion" against Arguello's constitutional government and that the General had thus acted after promising his loyalty to the president. Arguello pleaded for whatever "noble effort" Truman could make on behalf of his "poor country."¹⁷

The next day, Arguello, concerned over the lack of food for older relatives in the president's palace, accepted asylum offered by the Mexican ambassador. Although Arguello did not resign, his departure marked the end of his administration, a period referred to in Nicaragua as the "Twenty-Six Days." Somoza, after giving approval for the asylum, remained undaunted. He claimed that Arguello's departure for the Mexican embassy demonstrated a lack of responsibility and a "criminal desertion of his duties." Somoza made the outrageous charge that Arguello's acceptance of asylum alone would have justified the coup d'état. On the same day that Arguello departed the palace, Somoza had Congress appoint an old ally, Benjamin Lacayo Sacasa, as provisional president and announced that free elections would soon take place to select a candidate of "general harmony."¹⁸

Washington's Initial Reaction

With Braden's departure from the State Department and William Cochran's transfer from the Central American section, Ellis Briggs remained the official most knowledgeable of that region. He therefore took the lead in managing Nicaraguan policy. He wrote to Secretary of State George Marshall, who replaced Byrnes in January, and to Undersecretary Dean Acheson, explaining the Nicaraguan situation from the time Somoza turned over the presidency and "a completely looted treasury" to Arguello on May 1, to the coup d'état on May 26. In Briggs's judgment, the coup d'état returned to power "a corrupt and unsavory Caribbean dictator." The options of the United States were limited by inter-American commitments of non-intervention; both treaties and declarations prevented the United States from taking unilateral action. He recalled that multilateral action, in cases where conditions in one country are of concern to others, as suggested in the Uruguayan initiative, was not supported by a majority of the Latin American republics. Briggs reminded Marshall and Acheson, however, that the administration had in recent years declared repeatedly its preference for governments resting on the consent of the governed, and he noted that Somoza's government rested "on no such consent."¹⁹

Briggs then made two recommendations: First, the United States should consult with other American republics to obtain their reaction; second, the administration should, in the interim, defer sending a new ambassador to Nicaragua to replace Fletcher Warren.²⁰ After Marshall and Acheson's concurrence, Briggs next sent a cable to all U.S. embassies in Latin America, thoroughly reviewing Nicaraguan events and relaying the text of Arguello's plea to President Truman. The interim policy of the United States was to withhold recognition from the new government in Nicaragua. The former Nicaraguan ambassador to

Washington, Sevilla Sacasa, would henceforth be seen in a strictly private capacity should he come uninvited to the Department. The cable instructed all ambassadors to query their host country foreign ministers for local government reactions, and it emphasized that the United States would move cautiously pending their responses.²¹

Briggs had thus arranged for the United States to cease diplomatic relations with the new Somoza government. The decision for non-recognition was a first for the Truman administration. Irrespective of the final policy to be followed, the temporary course of action was significant because it demonstrated the administration's determination to go on record in support of democratic governments in Latin America. Further, it had special meaning when applied to a dictatorial regime long associated with the United States. Although Briggs was probably the principal person involved in arranging the decision, Spruille Braden also participated. Between May 26 and May 28, 1947, Braden's last two days in the administration, he talked to the Nicaraguan chargé and called Bernbaum, instructing him to continue to deal with the Arguello government. Later Braden claimed sole responsibility for the decision: "I just took a stand that, as a matter of fact . . . I would not recognize the Nicaraguan regime under Somoza taking power over in a revolutionary way."²²

The Latin American countries overwhelmingly supported Washington's course of action. Of the nineteen other American republics, eighteen refused to recognize the new government; only Perón's dictatorial regime in Argentina extended recognition. The Central American republics were the first to announce for non-recognition, reflecting the vehement opposition existing in those countries to the Somoza regime.²³

On June 18, the administration formally announced its decision to withhold recognition. The State Department, aware that Somoza would continue attempts to deal with embassy officials, cautioned Bernbaum about conversations with the General or any members of the Lacayo Sacasa government. The chargé was to ensure that Somoza "unequivocally understood" that any conversation he had with an embassy official was equal to one with a private citizen. The Department intended that no official communications take place with any member of the regime.²⁴

The Year of Non-Recognition

The break in diplomatic relations between Washington and Managua lasted one year. It was a period in which U.S. officials constantly reassessed Nicaraguan policy, weighing the value of continuing to demonstrate disapproval of the Somoza regime through non-recognition

against the advantages of following the traditional policy of maintaining relations with a de facto government. During the first months of the year, there was a consensus in the State Department in favor of the decision for non-recognition. Most officials were hopeful that the policy would be effective in forcing Somoza from power. The aftertaste of the Somoza coup remained strong among policy-makers, and they freely expressed disapproval of the regime. One related to a Guatemalan diplomat his "disgust" of the situation in Managua. Robert Newbegin, who replaced William Cochran as chief of the Central American section, expressed the common sentiment in the Department at that time in a conversation with a visiting attorney. He relayed the Department's "abhorrence of Somoza and particularly his outrageous seizure of power." Officials viewed with "skepticism and concern those persons who had anything whatsoever to do with him [Somoza]."²⁵

In August, Somoza arranged for the Congress to elect his elderly uncle, Victor Román y Reyes, as chief executive to replace Lacayo Sacasa. This maneuver failed to change the policy of any of the nineteen countries that had broken relations after the coup, and it did not alter Washington officials' view that the Managua government was obviously a Somoza puppet regime.²⁶

During this period, Somoza continued to converse with U.S. officials who had been left as a skeleton staff in Managua in his uninterrupted effort to ingratiate himself and influence Washington's policy. Although Bernbaum would only see Somoza in private in the chargé's home, the U.S. military attaché, on at least one occasion, disobeyed his instructions and visited Somoza in the latter's office. The General continued his practice of relaying to these officials confidential matters relating to the government as well as sensitive personal affairs. During a meeting with the chargé he discussed the list of individuals he was considering for president and then stated that it would be Román y Reyes, as if he had made the decision during the conversation. The day after Washington announced cessation of official relations, Somoza called to his office Lieutenant Colonel Towler, the U.S. military attaché. Somoza was upset because he discovered through his established practice of intercepting cables and telephone calls that the State Department had reportedly made unflattering remarks about him; Towler asked for and received a transcript of the telephone tap. Somoza then confessed to Towler that he was having financial problems with his agricultural operations and personally owed the National Bank the equivalent of \$300,000. In regard to pressure to force him from power, Somoza assured the attaché that "no one would get him out of Nicaragua until he had things arranged."²⁷

Bernbaum recognized a contradiction in the continuing presence of the U.S. military mission at the Nicaraguan military academy after Washington had broken diplomatic relations with the host government.

Somoza had taken advantage of the situation by showing off U.S. arms and equipment and attempting to arrange press coverage of the mission's presence to prove the continuing support of the United States. The situation was especially inappropriate since the bilateral agreement providing for the military mission had expired. The chief of the mission, Colonel Greco, told Bernbaum that he (Greco) should stay in country and continue to perform his duties until the government received recognition. Bernbaum recommended precisely the opposite course to the State Department. He called for the mission to be withdrawn to demonstrate to both Somoza and the people of Nicaragua the sincerity of the policy of non-recognition and to restate Washington's disapproval of the May 26 coup d'état.²

To Somoza's regret, the Department withdrew Colonel Greco from Nicaragua on July 1, 1947. Two months later Bernbaum reported that to his astonishment he had discovered that Greco had left his family in Managua and that they had continued to live in the home provided the mission chief by the Somoza regime. The Grecos had thus "in one sense," Bernbaum wrote, "been guests of General Somoza since the contract expired on May 22." Furthermore, he noted, against all guidance from the administration, Colonel Greco had flown back frequently to Managua to visit his family in the Somoza-furnished residence. After the State Department brought this information to the attention of the War Department, the responsible official there expressed shock at Greco's lack of judgement in leaving his family in Nicaragua and thought that his trips back to Managua were "an inexcusable breach of orders." The official stated that he would send out instructions to the colonel's headquarters in Panama directing that Greco cease all visits to Nicaragua, although he stressed that he was not sure how the message would be received by the commanding general in the Canal Zone. The general at that time was anxious to reopen the mission and was insisting to Bernbaum—via Greco—that the latter be allowed to return. Greco's actions, and those of the Canal Zone headquarters, demonstrated a lack of commitment by the U.S. military on the scene and in Panama to the policy of non-recognition of the Somoza puppet government.³ The sharp differences that arose during the war between the State and War Departments over relations with the regime clearly continued in the post-coup period.

To counteract the political damage of non-recognition by the United States, Somoza instructed his son-in-law, Sevilla Sacasa, to visit every single official in Washington who would see him and talk about any subject that came to his mind, which should have come easy for this simple diplomat since it was his normal way of conducting diplomacy. The General planned to "play up" this preposterous round of visits as proof that Washington remained close to the regime and was going to recognize his puppet government. Sevilla Sacasa, no longer recognized

in Washington as an ambassador, managed to visit Braden's replacement, Assistant Secretary of State Norman Armour, in the latter's home. Information soon reached the American embassy in Managua that opposition leader Emiliano Chamorro now believed that Washington had decided to recognize the new government. Chamorro understood the decision was related to a two-hour conversation in the State Department between Sevilla Sacasa and Armour. Bernbaum denied in Managua that the embassy had record of such a conversation, but it was exactly the type of rumor that Somoza wanted to come out of Washington.³⁰

At this time, Somoza cleverly arranged for the visit of two conservative U.S. congressmen to Managua, John Bell Williams and Otto E. Passman. The congressmen made no attempt to contact the embassy upon arrival and stayed at a local hotel at the regime's expense. Somoza held a special session of the Constituent Assembly in their honor and entertained them lavishly at one of his country estates. Not surprisingly, the two men gave speeches to the assembly praising the close relationship between the United States and Nicaragua. Bernbaum knew that Somoza had paid for the "junket" in an effort to gain support in the U.S. Congress. It was an effective method to embarrass the Department, and it surely made a lasting impression on the opposition to Somoza.³¹

During the period of non-recognition, Somoza also began a vigorous anti-communist campaign as another method of convincing the U.S. government to resume official relations. Somoza tried to portray the Nicaraguan Socialist Party as a communist threat to his power, and after the May coup, he persecuted and imprisoned its leaders. The General had the National Congress change the constitution to outlaw communist and fascist activities and to extend the legal basis for their prosecution.³²

Somoza promised Bernbaum that the new constitution opened the way for the president to negotiate agreements with other countries to allow their use of the national territory to establish military bases "in time of continental emergency." He implied that the United States would have this right, and he assured Bernbaum that, under the new constitutional provisions, such an action would not violate Nicaraguan sovereignty. In another session with the chargé, Somoza criticized the rejection by the Panamanian National Assembly of a new defense treaty with the United States. Bernbaum reported that the General "magnanimously offered on the part of Nicaragua that which Panama has seen fit to reject." In still another private conversation, employing his "well-known lack of discretion," Bernbaum wrote, Somoza bragged that he would receive recognition because Braden was no longer in the State Department. Bernbaum realized that all of these maneuvers by Somoza were purely political, designed for U.S. and international consumption, and made for the sole purpose of gaining recognition.³³

The State Department first questioned the efficacy of the non-recognition policy in instructions to the U.S. delegation to the inter-American conference at Rio de Janeiro, three months after Somoza's coup. It cabled the delegation that it considered the Román y Reyes government as "nothing less than a continuation of the Somoza regime" and that it was purely a puppet of Somoza and just as repressive as ever. The Department had to acknowledge, however, that the government possessed "all attributes and qualities of a stable de facto government." The delegation had to decide if there was a likelihood in the near future of a more representative regime in Managua. Although the cable reaffirmed that the Department did not in any way condone the Somoza regime, it implied that officials were pessimistic that there would be a democratic alternative in Nicaragua in the near future.³⁴

Bernbaum argued that the policy of non-recognition was partially effective in that it dispelled the idea that the United States always wanted Somoza in power, whether in the presidency or behind the scenes. Since the Román y Reyes government had failed to gain recognition, the opposition Conservative Party was finally convinced, according to the chargé, that Washington no longer supported the Somoza regime. Bernbaum also contended that the majority of Nicaraguans of every walk and station were encouraged by the non-recognition policy. The new policy had finally undermined the old belief that for economic or for other reasons, the United States desired Somoza to continue "running the Nicaraguan show." In Bernbaum's judgement, the Somoza regime had no civilian support other than office holders, and remained in power solely because of the *Guardia Nacional*.³⁵

In early December, Dana Munro, a professor and former Foreign Service officer in the 1920s with staff experience in Latin American affairs in the State Department and in the Managua legation, visited the Department to discuss Nicaraguan policy. Munro thought the Department should go "very slowly" in refusing to recognize a government that, after a period of time, demonstrated its ability to keep internal order and meet its international obligations. He implied that the policy of non-recognition toward the Somoza regime had reached an impasse—that it was counterproductive and only complicated relations between the two governments.³⁶

At the time of Munro's visit, the State Department was undergoing a reappraisal of its Nicaraguan policy. For the purpose of obtaining a new assessment from Bernbaum in Managua, officials provided the chargé with the current Department positions on several key policy considerations. They first reviewed arguments now being made against the policy: the threat to inter-American solidarity by isolating Nicaragua from the hemisphere community; the chance that communism would develop into a major force in Nicaraguan politics during the period of

non-recognition; and the charge that the goal of ridding Nicaragua of Somoza by breaking relations—while morally correct—would fail in the end. Officials then offered another set of arguments supportive of the current policy: Solidarity was not endangered since the Latin American republics were maintaining the same policy as Washington; no appreciable gain in the communists' position in Nicaragua was apparent since the coup d'état; and, although Somoza was still in power, they believed he was passing through a period of attrition that could wear down and finally oust the General. The Department finally stressed that some officials believed a moral victory would inevitably accrue from a policy of opposition to an unpopular dictator.³⁷

During the reappraisal the Department also sought the opinion of the widely respected former head of the American Republics Division, Laurence Duggan. Then retired from the Department for two years, Duggan argued strongly that the policy of non-recognition, if applied without sanctions, accomplished nothing. He recommended immediate reestablishment of complete relations. Duggan believed that Somoza's grip on power could not be loosened, and he reminded the Department that the key to the Nicaraguan situation was the *Guardia Nacional*. It remained the true guardian of the regime, and the idea that it could be turned into a non-political force was "living in a fool's paradise."³⁸

In relaying Duggan's views of the administration's policy, the Department cautioned Bernbaum that the former official was a loyal Wellesian and therefore believed that Washington should not concern itself with the internal affairs of other nations unless those affairs affected the security of the United States. A Duggan policy would recognize Román y Reyes and let Nicaragua deal with its own problems. Department officials thought Duggan overlooked the important moral questions involved in reopening relations with the Somoza dictatorship.³⁹

The State Department recommended to Bernbaum that before he drew up his assessment he also study a "classic" dispatch on the subject of dealing with dictatorships that Ambassador Willard Beaulac had prepared in Asunción, Paraguay in November 1945. Beaulac, who served in the Managua legation in the early years of the Somoza era, discussed in his report the frustrations that the United States faced in implementing its policies in Latin America in the post-war era. Washington's policy toward the region pursued two contradictory objectives. One objective was to promote democratic governments in the region, and the other was to continue the policy of wartime cooperation of the military establishments through training, matériel, and advisory assistance programs. A successful military assistance program, Beaulac wrote, tended to work against the goal of promoting democracies in Latin America because it increased the military's prestige and enhanced

its traditionally important political role in society. And that role, Beaulac reminded the Department, had always been authoritarian.⁴⁰

The dilemma Beaulac faced in Paraguay, where the government experience was perhaps the most militaristic and authoritarian in Latin America, was that in order to implement the policy of supporting democracy, he had to adopt an unfriendly political attitude toward the Paraguayan government. This was a futile approach, he argued, if he had to continue to facilitate cooperation with the same government in military matters. The promotion of democracy on the one hand, and the building up of the already politically dominant Army on the other, was clearly counterproductive, and to some local observers, a plainly "foolish endeavor."⁴¹

After considering the points raised by the Department and the positions of Duggan and Beaulac, Bernbaum concluded that policy toward Nicaragua must be considered within the wider view of U.S. objectives in the Western Hemisphere. He conceded that the larger objectives must include the establishment and maintenance of political and economic stability in Latin America; he believed both political and military cooperation would be necessary to implement these goals. Although hemisphere security must be a consideration, the chargé criticized inter-American military agreements because they overlooked internal problems by addressing only issues arising between states.⁴²

One critical problem, Bernbaum believed, was the frequent recourse to dictatorship and violent militarism that undermined stability and the development of democratic government. Post-war military assistance would not solve this; conversely, it would build up the very elements responsible for the problem. The best equipped armies would lose their effectiveness trying to repress a people united against a hated dictatorship. Nicaragua was a clear case in point, and although he did not condemn all military assistance, Bernbaum was firmly against it for the Somoza regime. He recommended a continuation of the non-recognition policy for the Román y Reyes government but suggested that the issue be discussed at the upcoming inter-American conference in Bogotá, Colombia. He also recommended that the Department propose at Bogotá a policy of multilateral supervision of elections following coups d'état in the region. Advance knowledge that the overthrow of a government would be soon followed by recourse to the popular will, Bernbaum suggested, would discourage unpopular military coups like Somoza's in Nicaragua. Although the State Department made no immediate response to these recommendations from Managua, the policy of non-recognition remained in force, indicating that Bernbaum had for the moment won his argument for the continuation of an anti-Somoza policy in the Department.⁴³

In late 1947 and early 1948, the political opposition to Somoza, encouraged by continuance of the policy of non-recognition by the

American republics, applied increased pressure on him to leave Nicaragua. Some opposition groups received encouragement from the democratic government of Juan José Arévalo in Guatemala. Arévalo welcomed them to his country and allowed them to organize activities against the Somoza regime.

Somoza, concerned about a possible invasion, began to purchase additional arms for the *Guardia*—primarily from the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. The *Guardia* tightened security throughout the country, rounded up and exiled Socialist Party members, and after several small uprisings, Somoza again forced the patriarch of the Conservative Party, the aging Emiliano Chamorro, into exile. As the situation deteriorated, Bernbaum feared the tragedy of a "bloody civil war."⁴⁴

Somoza, in Managua, and Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa, in Washington, continued their efforts to convince U.S. officials that the regime deserved recognition. In a three hour conversation with Bernbaum at the latter's residence, Somoza protested repeatedly his friendship for the United States and his desire to cooperate on all matters important to the Truman administration. He hoped that Washington would recognize his government before the Bogotá conference so that his delegation might provide its "invariable cooperation" during the proceedings. Somoza again made the dubious promise that future elections would be free and assured the chargé that he would join the opposition in requesting U.S. supervision. The General remarked, however, that his understanding of Washington's policy of non-intervention was that it would "unfortunately" not allow the United States to supervise elections.⁴⁵

On December 10, 1947, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa called on Paul Daniels, Briggs's replacement as chief of the American Republics Division in the State Department, in Daniels's home in Washington. The ambassador, ignoring the internal threat to Somoza, stressed that the new government was maintaining peace and order, that economic activities continued, and that the government was meeting its international obligations and cooperating with the United States in world affairs. The Nicaraguan informed Daniels that Somoza was anxious to leave Nicaragua as soon as there was a recognized government because he was tired of his "grave responsibilities." Daniels remarked that the Truman administration desired a solution that would include stable political conditions benefiting the majority of Nicaraguans, adding that there remained a lack of sentiment in the Department for extending recognition due to the "antecedents" of which the ambassador was aware.⁴⁶

Washington's decision against recognizing the puppet governments in Managua had been based on disgust with the Somoza regime and the May 26 coup—and on the almost unanimous support of the policy

provided by the Latin American republics. This consensus began to dissolve in late December when the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica decided to reestablish relations with the Nicaraguan government.⁴⁷ The decision by the Dominican Republic was understandable in view of the close relationship between that country's strongman, Rafael Trujillo, and Somoza. Trujillo had always furnished moral support to the Somoza regime and during the latter part of 1947 provided matériel to the beleaguered Nicaraguan dictator.

The neighboring Costa Rican government's decision was more complicated. Teodoro Picado Michalski, the leftist Costa Rican president, had received a surprising boost from Somoza during Picado's 1944 presidential campaign when Somoza refused to meet the request for aid by Conservative forces. The General even implied that he might provide military assistance to the Picado government. In 1947, Costa Rica was experiencing a period of rare political instability, a condition intensified by the impetus that non-recognition gave to activities of Nicaraguan exile groups in that country. Somoza again informed Picado that he might furnish aid if Costa Rica recognized the Román y Reyes government. Picado, harassed by political exigencies and in urgent need of an ally, decided to join the Dominican Republic and recognize the Managua government.⁴⁸

The extension of recognition to Nicaragua by these two countries, however, did not change Washington's stance, although the State Department recognized that it constituted a significant change in the situation. The Department queried all of its ambassadors in Latin America about the attitudes of their host governments to the recent acts of recognition, reminding them that the views of other governments would continue to influence policy toward Nicaragua. Responses indicated that the majority of the governments desired to wait until the April conference in Bogotá before making a further decision on the recognition issue. Reactions to the decisions by Trujillo and Picado appeared sooner, however. By the opening of the conference, seven of the republics had changed policy and recognized the Román y Reyes government.⁴⁹ These acts did not sway Bernbaum in Managua, who continued to recommend non-recognition as a means to persuade Somoza at least to broaden his regime and reach a peaceful settlement with the opposition. The death in Mexico of the exiled Leonardo Arguello, who was a symbol to many Nicaraguans of resistance to Somoza, led one of Bernbaum's subordinates to surmise, however, that recognition would soon have to be extended.⁵⁰

Immediately before the Bogotá conference, Brazil invited the United States to join with it and Mexico in recognizing the Román y Reyes government. Secretary of State Marshall advised the U.S. Embassy in Brazil that, although the moment was not "opportune" to extend

recognition, the Department would be amenable to a general resolution at the upcoming conference supporting this action.³¹ In Bogotá, the U.S. delegation, in an effort to avoid a fight over the volatile recognition issue, introduced a compromise resolution entitled "Exercise of the Right of Legation." It proclaimed the desirability of continuing diplomatic relations among all of the American republics and declared that the "maintenance of diplomatic relations with a government does not imply any judgement upon the domestic policy of that government." Although Nicaragua was not specifically mentioned, it was clear that the motivation for the resolution was the Nicaraguan situation. Assistant Secretary of State Norman Armour, chief of the U.S. delegation after the departure of Marshall, cabled the secretary in Washington recommending that, based on the adoption at Bogotá of the U.S.-sponsored resolution, the government appoint an ambassador to Nicaragua.³²

Five days later, on April 30, 1948, Marshall informed all U.S. ambassadors in Latin America that in view of the Bogotá resolution the U.S. government "contemplates appointing an Ambassador to Nicaragua in the near future." On May 30, 1948, the administration announced resumption of diplomatic relations with the Nicaraguan government, thus ending its year-long effort to dislodge Somoza from power.³³

Non-Recognition: An Assessment

The Truman administration's opposition to the Somoza regime in 1947-48 reflected the democratic idealism of many U.S. officials in the immediate post-war era. Officials such as Spruille Braden and Ellis Briggs especially sought to demonstrate to the hemisphere that Washington was changing its policy toward a dictator who had managed for so long to create the impression of being a favorite of the United States. Their policy failed in Nicaragua for two reasons. The first was that the employment of non-recognition was an ineffective diplomatic tool when not backed by military or economic action. The second reason for its failure was Somoza's political skill. The astuteness of the Nicaraguan caudillo enabled him to outmaneuver the United States, the Latin American nations, and the internal opposition groups at every turn to survive a year of condemnation and non-recognition. Understanding the United States and Washington politics, and anticipating policy changes, Somoza realized that with patience he could outlast those officials in the State Department who opposed him. The dictator never seriously considered abandoning his power for uncertain exile.

In a larger sense, Bradenism failed because, by 1948, world events brought on a new set of priorities for the United States, forcing to the

background Washington's support for democracy in Latin America before time would permit its success. As the Truman administration grew increasingly alarmed by the threat of Soviet expansion in the hemisphere, enthusiasm to oppose dictatorships, while not entirely disappearing, became much less evident among policymakers. After 1948, Washington began to more readily accept the friendship of anti-communist strongmen such as the Somozas of Latin America as a new threat emerged demanding solidarity in the region.

Notes

1. Warren to Byrnes, 27 November 1946, NA 711.17/112746; Emiliano Chamorro, *El Ultimo Caudillo: Autobiografía* (Managua: Ediciones del Partido Conservador Democrata, 1983), 364; Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, 99-100; Crawley, *Dictators Never Die*, 105; Warren to Byrnes, 31 December 1946; *New York Times*, 2 February 1947, 16.
2. *FRUS: 1947*, 8:841-842.
3. *FRUS: 1946*, 11:1075-1076; Memorandum of Conversation by Gordon Reid, 30 January 1947, NA 817.00/1-3047; Warren to Marshall, 1 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-147.
4. Chamorro, *El Ultimo Caudillo*, 365; *New York Times*, 3 February 1947, 1, and 4 February 1947, 11; Crawley, *Dictators Never Die*, 106; Warren to Marshall, 12 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-1247; Warren to Marshall, 13 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-1347; Warren to Marshall, 26 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-2647; Reid to Braden, 19 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-1947.
5. Warren to Marshall, 12 and 13 February 1947; *New York Times*, 2 February 1947, 16. For additional Nicaraguan opinion of Braden, see E. C. Wharton to Braden, 27 May 1947, NA 817.01/5-2747.
6. *Ibid.*; Warren to Marshall, 14 February 1947, NA 817.00/2-1447.
7. *FRUS: 1947*, 8:846; Warren to Marshall, 12 and 14 February 1947; Memorandum of Conversation by Wise, 11 March 1947, RG 84, Box 11, Managua Post Records, 1945-1949, NA; Memorandum of Conversation by Newbegin, 13 March 1947, NA 800-Nicaragua-Aguado-Arguello visit to United States; Marshall to Warren, 8 April 1947, NA 817.00/4-847.
8. Newbegin to Braden, 17 January 1947, NA 817.00/1-1747; Acheson to Truman, 3 April 1947, OF 1286, Folder 432, Truman Papers; *FRUS: 1948*, 8:847; Warren to Marshall, 2 May 1947, NA 817.001/Arguello, Leonardo/5-247. In order to minimize its support for the new government, the administration designated Ambassador Warren as its representative to Arguello's inauguration. Washington did not send special representatives or military displays. See Marshall to Warren, 8 April 1947.
9. Warren to Marshall, 3 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-347; Bernbaum to Marshall, 9 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-947; Crawley, *Dictators Never Die*, 6-107; Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America*, 26-27.
10. Bernbaum to Marshall, 9 May 1947.
11. *Ibid.*; Warren to Byrnes, 15 August 1946.

12. Bernbaum to Marshall, 9 May 1947.
13. Press reports, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers.
14. Bernbaum to Marshall, 20 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2047; Bernbaum to Marshall, 24 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2447; Bernbaum to Marshall, 25 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2547; Bernbaum to Marshall, 26 May 1947, dispatch no. 204, NA 817.00/5-2647.
15. Bernbaum to Marshall, 26 May 1947 (dispatches nos. 206, 208, and 210); Bernbaum to Marshall, 28 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2847; Press Reports, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers. In an interview years later, Bernbaum recalled Somoza's crude reaction to Arguello's impertinence: "Can you imagine what a stupid bastard? I took him out of León where he couldn't earn a dime, and he does something crazy like that." Cited in Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 28.
16. Memorandum of Conversation by Newbegin and Marshall to Bernbaum, 26 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2647; Braden, *Diplomats and Demagogues*, 369.
17. Bernbaum to Marshall, dispatch no. 210, 26 May 1947.
18. Bernbaum to Marshall, dispatch no. 206, 26 May 1947 and 27 May 1947; *New York Times*, 28 May 1947, 11.
19. Briggs to Marshall, 27 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2747.
20. Ibid.
21. Marshall to the Chiefs of Mission in the other American Republics, 2 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-247.
22. Spruille Braden Papers, Oral History. Spruille Braden, 1396, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York, cited in Leonard, *The United States and Central America*, 200.
23. *New York Times*, 20 June 1947, 4; Memorandum by Daniels, 21 February 1949, NA 834.01/2-2149; Reid to Wise, 31 July 1947, NA FW 817.00/7-2247; Newbegin to Marshall, 11 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-1147; Marshall to Bernbaum, 24 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-1647. For adverse reaction to the Somoza coup in neighboring countries, also see Hines (U.S. Embassy, Panama) to Marshall, and Carrigan (U.S. Embassy, Costa Rica) to Marshall, 28 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2847; Donovan (U.S. Embassy, Guatemala) to Marshall, 4 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-447; Simmons (U.S. Embassy, El Salvador) to Marshall, 19 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-1947; Mecham, *The United States and Inter-American Security*, 291.
24. Marshall to Bernbaum, 3 June 1947, NA 817.00/5-3147; *New York Times*, 20 June 1947, 4.
25. Memoranda of Conversation by Williams, 28 May 1947, NA 817.00/5-2847 and Newbegin, 17 July 1947, NA 817.00/7-1747.
26. Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of U.S. Involvement in Central America*, 30; Bernbaum to Marshall, 7 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-747 and 15 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-1547; *FRUS: 1947*, 8:864-866.
27. Bernbaum to Marshall, 20 June 1947, and Inclosure No. 1, Memorandum by Lt. Col. Harry H. Towler, 19 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-2047; Bernbaum to Marsh, 7 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-747. During this period, Somoza was reported to have exclaimed to Bernbaum that he would leave Nicaragua only under force: "This is my country," he challenged the chargé. "Where do they want me to go? You come and take me out!" Cited in Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 327, n44.

28. Memorandum of Conversation by Reid, 24 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-2447; *FRUS: 1947*, 8:860-861.
29. Bernbaum to Marshall, 1 July 1947, NA 817.20 Missions, 23 August 1947, RG 84, Box 12, Managua Post Records, 1945-1947, NA; Bernbaum to Marshall, 7 August 1947; Reid to Wise, 25 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-2547.
30. Memorandum of Conversation by Armour, 18 July 1947, NA 817.00/7-1847; Memorandum of Conversation by Reid, 26 July 1947, NA 817.00/7-2647; Bernbaum to Marshall, 23 July 1947, NA 817.00/7-2347; Marshall to Bernbaum, 24 July 1947, NA 817.00/7-2347.
31. Bernbaum to Marshall, 21 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-2147.
32. Memorandum to Chargé d'Affaires from Controlled Government Source, 9 October 1947, RG 84, Box 12, Managua Post Files, 1945-1947, NA; Memorandum of Conversation by Reid, 30 June 1947, NA 817.00/6-3047; Bernbaum to Marshall, 3 October 1947, NA 817.01/10-347; Bernbaum to Marshall, 20 January 1948, NA 817.00B/1-2048; Bernbaum to Marshall, 7 August 1947.
33. Bernbaum to Marshall, 7 August 1947; Bernbaum to Marshall, 9 October 1947, NA 817.01/10-947; Bernbaum to Marshall, 12 December 1947, NA 817.01/12-2947.
34. *FRUS: 1947*, 8:867-868.
35. Bernbaum to Marshall, 26 August 1947, NA 817.00/8-2647.
36. Memorandum of Conversation by Pringle, 5 October 1947, RG 84, Box 12, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.
37. Reid to Bernbaum, 2 October 1947, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*; Duggan to Wilson, 16 November 1931, NA 711.17/253.
40. *FRUS: 1945*, 9:1289-1293.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Bernbaum to Reid, 20 October 1947, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Bernbaum to Marshall, 7 February 1948; *FRUS: 1948*, 9:103-107; Leonard, *The United States and Central America*, 146-148.
45. *FRUS: 1948*, 9:103-107.
46. Memorandum of Conversation by Daniels, 10 December 1947, NA 817.00/12-1047.
47. Bernbaum to Marshall, 29 December 1947, NA 817.01/12-2947.
48. *FRUS: 1947*, 8:872-874, 877-878; *FRUS: 1948*, 9, 105-107; Leonard, *The United States and Central America*, 21-38; Woodward, *Central America*, 225-226. Wooldridge to Secretary of Defense, 23 April 1948, p. 3, Command File, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval Historical Division, Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.; Interview with former Nicaraguan foreign minister, Dr. Oscar Sevilla Sacasa, 22 May 1986, Miami, Florida.
49. *FRUS: 1947*, 8:880; *FRUS: 1948*, 9:99; *New York Times*, 6 January 1948, 7; *New York Times*, 8 January 1948, 11; *New York Times*, 7 March 1948, 22.
50. Leonard, *The United States and Central America*, 148.
51. *FRUS: 1948*, 9:107-108.

52. Charles G. Fenwick, "The Recognition of De Facto Governments," *American Journal of International Law* 42 (October 1948), 863-866; *FRUS: 1948*, 9:63.
53. *Department of State Bulletin* (30 May 1948):716; *FRUS: 1948*, 9:108.

The Cold War Takes Over: The U.S. Warms to the Regime, 1948-1956

The recognition of the Nicaraguan government in May 1948 marked the beginning of a long period of stable relations between the United States and Nicaragua. In Managua, General Somoza remained firmly in control—either as chief of the *Guardia* or, after 1950, as president—until his death at the hands of a young Nicaraguan poet in September 1956. In Washington, the period spanned the entire second Truman administration and the first four years of the Eisenhower presidency.¹

The continuation of normal relations with the Somoza government until 1956 did not, however, mean that officials in Washington favored the dictatorship or that they ceased all efforts to influence it toward democracy. Especially in the period immediately after the resumption of relations, the State Department continued to express concern about the regime and approach Somoza and his officials with suggestions that Nicaragua move toward democratic government. Because of other foreign policy priorities in the emerging Cold War environment of the era, these expressions of concern became less frequent after 1948. The debate over recognition policy in general did remain active in the

Department in late 1948 and early 1949 due to the problem posed by coups d'état in other Latin American countries. By the spring of 1949, however, the Department had decided that breaking diplomatic relations would no longer be the administration's reaction in these situations, and the United States returned to its traditional policy of de facto recognition.²

The Cold War Setting

From a broader perspective, the Truman administration's view of the Somoza regime after 1948 must be viewed in light of developing Cold War foreign policy. The new policy—a reaction to the aggressive policies of the Soviet Union in Europe from 1945 to 1947—resulted in changed perceptions in Washington of the national security interests of the United States. In its application to Latin America, Cold War policy had an effect similar to policy during World War II: It caused Washington to seek allies in the region, and the purpose this time was the emerging struggle against Soviet imperialism. Solidarity and unanimity again became important goals of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. In the years immediately following the announcement of the policy of containment in the spring of 1947, Washington's view toward Latin America returned to one focused on security considerations, with military cooperation again overshadowing other aspects of U.S. relations with hemisphere nations.³

Under these conditions, the U.S. government began to give priority in its foreign policy to areas of the world where officials perceived the largest communist threats existed. Although officials in the Cold War planning councils of Washington did not consider Latin America a high priority threat area, some of the republics nonetheless received attention for their potential for communist penetration.⁴

Nicaragua was not one of these countries in the immediate post-war years, although the American embassy in Managua reported some communist activity in that nation. One analysis of the opposition to Somoza noted evidence of a "subjugated Communist fringe" in Managua but concluded that the real opposition came from those of basically conservative character whose sole objective was political power. The assistant secretary of state, Norman Armour, told a member of Congress in 1947 that Nicaragua had few communists and that "communism is not an important factor in the Nicaraguan political situation." Other reports noted a "sprinkling" of communists among Nicaraguan labor but contended that communism had not penetrated the intelligentsia or the *Guardia* and that the communists were not a threat to the government.⁵

The Truman administration's policy toward Latin America became more clearly defined by 1952. In that year Thomas C. Mann, a senior

State Department official for Latin American affairs, prepared for President Truman a long memorandum on Washington's policy in the region. Among many topics, including economic cooperation and the administration's concern for democratic government, Mann stressed in the 42-page paper the importance of solidarity and military cooperation in countering communist inroads in the Americas. He emphasized that, in the future, multilateral action might be necessary in the event that a communist government came to power in the hemisphere. Although he referred to the potential for communist penetration in a number of countries, Mann did not mention Nicaragua in his analysis.⁶

Somoza's Efforts to Influence U.S. Policy After Restoration of Relations

General Somoza made a vigorous effort after 1948 to please Washington officials and to secure the resumption of full U.S. support—including military assistance—following the non-recognition period. One of the principal tactics he used was to espouse a strong anti-communist program when he dealt with U.S. officials. All incidents against the regime became "communist-inspired," and opponents of the regime, in the view of Somoza and his subordinates, inevitably drew condemnation as communists, including even the aging Conservative Party caudillo, Emiliano Chamorro.⁷

In the 1949-50 period, Somoza often boasted to U.S. officials of his anti-communist exploits. He bragged that he prevented communist influence by jailing the movement's leaders and later releasing them only if they promised never to participate in labor activities. In a conversation with the U.S. military attaché in 1950, Somoza claimed that he had successfully met the leftist threat to his government and that he had "put his foot firmly on the spark of Communism."⁸ As long as he stayed in power, the General contended, communism would never gain a foothold in Nicaragua.⁹

Somoza developed broad arguments about the danger of communism to the Americas, and he began to use them in conversations with the U.S. ambassador and other U.S. officials. He argued that communism was the hemisphere's greatest danger—"a cancerous growth which had to be cut away." He believed that Washington should be more concerned about communism in the Americas, and he argued that the communist threat in the hemisphere came primarily from the Soviets' policy of infiltration in the region. Accurately sensing at this early stage of the Cold War the tilt of foreign policy in Washington, Somoza pledged his government's support for the United States in any East-West confrontation.¹⁰

During this period, Somoza perceived a threat to his power from the democratic governments of José Figueres in Costa Rica and Juan José Arévalo in Guatemala. Both governments supported, and in turn were supported by, an organization called the Caribbean Legion, a loosely organized force consisting primarily of exiles from rightist dictatorships such as Somoza's in Nicaragua and Trujillo's in the Dominican Republic.¹¹ Somoza and his officials labeled the Legion a communist-controlled organization, as he did the governments of Figueres and Arévalo.¹² To one official, Somoza complained that Nicaragua, in his view the strongest opponent of communism in Central America, was in a difficult position because of its location between the leftist countries of Guatemala and Costa Rica.¹³

Somoza and the Guatemalan Leftists

The desire to overthrow the left-of-center, yet democratic Arévalo government in Guatemala, and especially after 1951 its more radical successor, the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, became an obsession with Somoza. Long before Washington became involved in the effort to overthrow the Arbenz government, Somoza entertained U.S. officials with his plans to get rid of Arévalo. As early as 1949, he boasted to the ambassador that he would bring down the Guatemalan in "short order" if the diplomat would only give his approval.¹⁴ The ambassador discovered that Somoza had become deeply involved that year in an unsuccessful operation by Guatemalan exiles to overthrow the Arévalo government.¹⁵

Somoza became the most loyal Cold War ally of Washington, developing his own "Domino Theory" regarding the threat of communism in Central America. He held that the communists' regional strategy was to surround his regime with enemies and ultimately to take over the Panama Canal. He bragged that he had warned the Guatemalan government to refrain from interfering in El Salvador and Honduras unless it wanted to "fight the battle of Managua in Tegucigalpa." In an interview with U.S. journalists, Somoza alluded to a plan he had developed to defend the entire hemisphere against the communist threat, claiming that it could be implemented for "a fraction of what you have spent in Europe."¹⁶

In 1952, Somoza again became involved in a plot to overthrow the Guatemalan government, which at that time was led by Arbenz. In conversations with the assistant military aide to President Truman, he explained the details of the exile-supported operation and gained the false impression that the U.S. supported the venture.¹⁷ Somoza also bragged that he presented the plan to overthrow Arbenz to President Truman and Secretary of State Acheson, although the record does not

substantiate this claim.¹⁸ The General informed a U.S. naval officer that both Truman and Acheson were "most interested," but that the under-secretary of state—whom he did not name—strongly opposed his plan.¹⁹ When exiled Guatemalan military officers, supported by the CIA but far more significantly by the regular Guatemalan Army, did overthrow the Arbenz government in 1954, Somoza cooperated fully in the operation, providing aircraft, airfields, and training facilities for the invading force.²⁰

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the General tirelessly advanced the idea with U.S. officials that his government would back Washington on all international questions. He offered the United States raw materials and troop support during the Korean War and argued that Latin Americans should view the war as their own. As they had been during World War II, Somoza offers were viewed as idle boasts that he could not begin to back up. He also directed that his diplomatic representatives support the United States at the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations, even on issues sensitive to Third World countries such as the admission of China to the United Nations and the election of Turkey to the Security Council. State Department reports indicated that Nicaraguan delegations in that period were "extremely friendly" and would invariably vote with the United States on critical issues.²¹

Somoza also continued his practice of making flamboyant gestures and statements in praise of the United States and its officials. When senior U.S. military officers visited Managua in 1951, the General made them national guests of honor and held official receptions and other elaborate events to celebrate their visit. The same year, at a military academy graduation, the U.S. ambassador reported that the ceremony was "notable for the homage paid to President Roosevelt." In 1953, in an interview with the Venezuelan press, Somoza praised the Monroe Doctrine—always a controversial subject in Latin America—and reaffirmed his belief in "America for the Americans." A year later, a U.S. Air Force pilot died in a crash at a Managua air show. Somoza declared three days of national mourning, arranged for the body to lay in state overnight in the National Palace, presented a posthumous award to the aviator as he stood by the officer's casket, announced that a new airport would be named in the pilot's honor, and promised that the government would produce a commemorative stamp bearing his image and that of his Sabre jet.²²

Somoza's diplomats during this period often provided intelligence to U.S. government officials. On one occasion, the American embassy in Managua reported that it had received confidential information on Trujillo and his ministers from a Nicaraguan diplomat after the latter had visited the Dominican Republic. On another occasion, Somoza's intelligence service provided the United States information about an assassination plot against a U.S. official in Guatemala. Somoza

instructed his ambassador in El Salvador to keep the American embassy there informed on all matters of interest in that country. In early 1953, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa reported to the State Department the details of a conversation he had with a Soviet diplomat. In agreeing to the Department's request to supply additional information about the contacts of Soviet diplomats with his Latin American colleagues, Sevilla Sacasa became essentially an intelligent agent for the Department in the diplomatic community. On numerous other occasions, Nicaraguan diplomats or agents in third countries supplied U.S. officials with information on political activity, especially communism, in Central America.²³

These pro-U.S. actions on the part of Somoza were inconsequential to the larger interests of the United States in the region—particularly to its interests in the major countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. This did not mean that Somoza's endless praise and flattery of the United States and its officials and his obsequious offers of cooperation with Washington did not influence the administration to return to a friendlier relationship with the regime. Whether due to Somoza's own efforts, or because of larger Cold War considerations, the policy of the United States toward the Somoza regime did undergo a significant change between 1948 and the dictator's death in 1956.

Cold War Demands on Washington Policy

In the first year after the restoration of relations, Washington officials maintained a correct but at times distant relationship with the Somoza regime. The State Department did not place Nicaragua on the list of those Latin American countries eligible to receive surplus military arms and equipment, and in the late 1940s it repeatedly turned down requests from Nicaragua for military equipment. Although small air or ground missions were present in each of the other Central American countries, Somoza was unable to obtain the return of the military mission to Nicaragua. Based on information in mid-1949 that Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa might approach President Truman about the possibility of a Somoza visit to Washington, an official announced that there was "no valid reason for such a visit at this time." These incidents made it clear that the non-recognition period had a marked effect on the bilateral relationship in the year after Washington restored relations, and that Washington at this time was not following a policy specifically designed to guarantee Somoza's survival.²⁴

From 1948 to 1951, the Truman administration's ambassadors to Nicaragua were George Shaw (1948-49) and Capus Waynick (1949-51). The embassy under their tutelage maintained an objective and often critical view of the situation in Nicaragua. Officials met with opponents

of Somoza such as Emiliano Chamorro and Enoc Aguado, and they frequently conversed as well with many lesser known opposition leaders, impartially relaying their views to the State Department. They freely discussed with these figures the potential for democracy in Nicaragua and listened to and reported opposition charges of the continuing tyranny of the Somoza dictatorship, including instances of intimidation, torture, and murder by the *Guardia Nacional*. The ambassadors also fully reported complaints and charges against the regime and many bitter attacks against Washington's recognition of the Somoza government made by the opposition press when the regime allowed it to operate during that period.²⁵

Waynick, a North Carolina newspaperman, was particularly objective, notwithstanding what the State Department referred to as the "blandishments" for him offered by the servile son-in-law of Somoza, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa, even before the new U.S. ambassador departed Washington. The Department commented that Sevilla Sacasa did his best to influence Waynick in favor of the Somoza regime in order to win his sympathy for the Nicaraguan ambassador's "tales of woe."²⁶

Despite Somoza's characteristically warm attentions to Waynick, the ambassador was not "taken in" by the General in the sense that Stewart and Warren had been years before. After six months in the embassy, Waynick forwarded reports with revealing insight into the Somoza regime and its methods of maintaining itself in power. He recognized that, in his propaganda, Somoza used the U.S. embassy as one means of projecting an image of U.S. support, but he shrewdly observed that it was only one of many techniques the General employed. Waynick reported in early 1950—when Román y Reyes was still the puppet president—that Somoza would have himself elected for the next term. Waynick informed the Department that the General had predicted that, in the then current Cold War atmosphere in Washington, the United States was unlikely to again withhold recognition from his government. The next election would probably be, the ambassador reported, a "patent fraud," and the continuance of the regime would surely mean the continuance of the existing flagrant abuses of political and economic freedom.²⁷

The perceptive Waynick had an uncommon view of the essential problem confronting the United States and its representatives in Managua in dealing with Somoza. The United States, as the champion of democracy in the world, had to decide if it had a duty with respect to Nicaragua except to let the people "stew in their own political grease." Nicaraguans would remain "in chains for an indefinite period" unless the United States assumed responsibility for democracy there. Washington could continue to work with Somoza as long as it was willing to ignore the way people lived under a "military dictatorship."

Waynick conceded the advantage for the United States of having an ally in Managua who would support the United States in all international controversies while keeping order at home, but he questioned the wisdom of Washington's policy over time. The State Department, although receptive to Waynick's view, did not move away from the new policy of rapprochement with the regime.²⁸

From 1950 to 1952 it became apparent that Somoza and his government were undergoing a form of political rehabilitation in Washington. In May 1950, Román y Reyes died, and the Nicaraguan Congress appointed Somoza interim president. Several weeks later, staged elections again gave him a full term as president.²⁹ The Truman administration continued diplomatic relations with both the interim and new Somoza governments. The dictator temporarily quieted the internal political situation when he signed an agreement with Emiliano Chamorro assuring the Conservative Party a one-third minority representation in Congress. In August 1950, responding to reports that Somoza desired a White House visit if he came to the United States, the chief of protocol reminded President Truman that the General was a "warm friend" of the United States and suggested that the administration do something for him. He thought that Somoza would appreciate an unofficial luncheon with the president, and he recommended this gesture. Although Somoza did not make a visit at that time, the official's position was in sharp contrast to the administration's strong recommendation against a presidential visit the year before.³⁰

Administration policy statements regarding Nicaragua in the 1950-1951 period were more generous to the Somoza regime, revealing a growing appreciation for his unyielding support for the United States. While they called for continued efforts by officials to encourage Somoza to move toward democracy, they stressed equally the need for economic and social development in Nicaragua. The statements did not, however, recommend military assistance either to that government or to the other small countries of the region.³¹

The U.S. Military and Somoza in the 1950s: Mutual Admiration Continues

In early 1952, Somoza finally got to visit the United States, coming ostensibly for the purpose of medical treatment. The State Department informed the White House that the General had again expressed a desire to visit with the president and had remarked that he wanted to repay the visit that his "good friend," Senator Truman, made to Managua in 1938. General Harry Vaughan, the president's senior military aide, assumed responsibility for the project. Vaughan had met Somoza the previous year during a visit to Managua when Somoza

held a reception in his honor. Vaughan became an enthusiastic proponent of a White House visit for the General, and he informed Truman that, while Somoza was a dictator, he was also a "firm friend of the USA and Harry Truman." Vaughan recommended that Truman give Somoza "some recognition plus a dinner and a kidney medal."³² Truman displayed little interest in the visit and did not appear to remember Somoza fondly, if at all. He instructed Vaughan to discuss the matter with the Departments of State and Defense. He thought a Somoza visit would be "rather difficult" but that it might be managed "in some way."³³

Secretary of State Dean Acheson was not especially warm to Somoza. He recommended that Truman show Somoza the "minimum courtesies due a Chief of State" and receive the General unofficially at a small White House luncheon in early May 1952. Acheson's briefing paper to Truman on Somoza was not complimentary. It described the Somoza regime as democratic in theory, but a pure one-man dictatorship in practice. He noted that the agreement with Chamorro had eased tensions somewhat and that the regime had become, to a degree, less repressive. Acheson also noted that the Somoza government had "consistently supported United States foreign policy."³⁴ The State Department, although it did not consider the luncheon an official function, invited some senior government officials, such as the speaker of the house, to attend. This allowed Somoza to enjoy considerable attention in Washington during his first time there since his visit with Roosevelt in 1939.³⁵

The 1952 Washington visit was substantially more beneficial for Somoza than Truman and Acheson had intended due to the friendship that developed between Somoza and Truman's two military aides, General Vaughan and Colonel C. J. Mara. Vaughan subsequently arranged for an Air Force plane to transport Somoza on his journeys within the United States and for an aircraft, with himself and Colonel Mara as escorts, to fly the strongman back to Managua. Somoza decorated the officers with presidential medals, and his officials gave Mara briefings on the *Guardia* and a tour of the facilities of the military academy. Somoza and his son requested through Mara that the United States reopen military assistance channels to Nicaragua. Somoza also discussed the need for action against the "communist" Arbenz government of Guatemala. Mara later brought these matters to Truman's attention and, at the president's suggestion, discussed them with the chief of staff of the Army, General J. Lawton Collins. As in the war years, U.S. military officers were again demonstrating a much warmer attitude toward Somoza than did civilian officials in the State Department.³⁶

Although there were no immediate results from the visit, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa claimed that it did have a positive political

benefit for Somoza in Managua. In July, he informed Assistant Secretary of State Miller that the "overwhelming ovation" Somoza received upon his return to Managua was evidence of his great popularity with the Nicaraguan people. The American embassy confirmed that the visit was helpful for Somoza and reported that upon returning the General continued to make a point of his "close friendship" with President Truman.³⁷

The Regime Plays the Anti-Communist Card in Washington

Sevilla Sacasa reiterated to Miller the concern of Somoza about communism in Guatemala and remarked that the Nicaraguan government planned to discuss with Honduras and Costa Rica a resolution for consideration by all Central American countries that would recognize the danger of communist infiltration in the region. The resolution would put Guatemala "on the spot," the ambassador thought, compelling it to take a stand on the question.³⁸

A subordinate of Miller in the State Department, Edward Clark, wrote to Ambassador Waynick the next week about Sevilla Sacasa's proposed resolution. He thought Somoza's idea regarding a resolution against communism could have some merit, but he referred to it as a "delicate matter and one with which we do not want to become identified in any way whatsoever." Notwithstanding this statement, he then instructed Waynick to let Somoza know obliquely that Washington might have interest in the idea without openly admitting official U.S. involvement. Such a proposal had "far-reaching possibilities," and the Department would be pleased to see Nicaragua carry it through, he continued. Noting that if a formal resolution condemning communist penetration in Central America resulted, it would be a "strong peg on which we could hang our action" in the event the United States needed to bring the Guatemalan issue before the OAS.³⁹

In succeeding months, Sevilla Sacasa frequently conversed with State Department officials about a plan of Somoza's to organize a Central American military force to overthrow the Arbenz government. In these conversations, he also requested the resumption of military assistance and arms sales to Nicaragua, relating their need to the threat from the Guatemalan government. Thomas Mann reminded Sevilla Sacasa that the Department did not believe it appropriate to speak of a military venture against Guatemala by a group of American nations because such a military action would be against the principles of the United Nations and the OAS. Mann thought an operation against Guatemala would be "reckless" since secrecy could not be guaranteed. He told Sevilla Sacasa the problem would have to be solved legally, possibly through the OAS. U.S. officials were non-committal regarding military

assistance to Nicaragua, informing the ambassador that it would depend on the overall needs of hemisphere defense. At the end of the Truman administration in January 1953, the U.S. government had not made a decision regarding action against Guatemala, nor had it approved military assistance to the Somoza government.⁴⁰

During 1953, officials in the Eisenhower administration discussed military assistance for Nicaragua and other Central American countries on numerous occasions. The State Department under the ardent anti-communist John Foster Dulles became increasingly concerned about communism in Latin America and the regional threat in Central America of the Arbenz government. In March, the new administration took the position that the traditional policy of non-intervention in Latin America did not preclude multilateral action within the inter-American system, a position identical to the one argued by Ellis Briggs and George Butler eight years before. A policy paper stated that "overriding security interests" could require the United States to act with the support of less than two-thirds of the American nations, or even on its own. The paper noted that additional funds had been appropriated by Congress for military assistance to Latin America. It further stated, however, that there was "no progress to report on including Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador in the program."⁴¹

Administration officials, fearful of aggression by Guatemala in Central America and alarmed by the revolutionary, anti-American domestic policies of the Arbenz government, hardened their position in the first half of 1954.⁴² At an inter-American conference in March in Caracas, Venezuela, Secretary Dulles, in a move to coerce Guatemala, introduced an anti-communist resolution similar to the one Somoza had proposed two years earlier. Under tremendous pressure from the Department, it was approved by the convention. After the conference, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua—joined by the CIA—participated in a plot led by an exiled Guatemalan officer to overthrow the Arbenz government. With the critical support of the fiercely anti-communist Guatemalan Army, the plan succeeded in overthrowing Arbenz in June 1954.⁴³

The events surrounding the overthrow of the Arbenz government, including the gradual buildup of concern over the threat of communism and finally the decision by the administration to secretly join rightist governments to effect a coup d'état, were significant for U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. The two countries signed a bilateral military assistance agreement in the spring of 1954 that opened the way for the return of an enlarged military mission to Managua and for the sale of arms to the Somoza regime. After the Guatemalan operation, the Eisenhower administration's treatment of Somoza and his government appeared to be more consistently favorable, although officials did not always approve of the General's policies. Somoza found through his

long-standing Guatemalan policy a way to finally return to the good graces of the U.S. government.⁴⁴

In the summer of 1954, the State Department became involved in the mediation of a dispute between Somoza and the democratic government of Costa Rica. Somoza, despite declarations against the idea by Washington, threatened to send the *Guardia* into Costa Rica. Although Eisenhower officials were against the dictator's plans, they handled the situation in a manner that assured Somoza would not be offended by their disapproval of his actions. The State Department cabled the U.S. ambassador that Somoza's actions would violate inter-American treaty obligations and could provoke a response by the United Nations. Although instructing the ambassador to caution Somoza about the danger of aggressive action, the Department stated that "it values highly the friendship of Nicaragua and of Somoza and does not want to be in a situation where its actions might appear in opposition to Somoza or Nicaragua." This statement—not released to the public until 1987—represented at last a definite break by the Dulles State Department with the long-held policy in Washington to avoid a clearly pro-Somoza stance.⁴⁵

After Vice President Richard M. Nixon made a visit to Nicaragua in 1955, Somoza wrote to Eisenhower expressing his appreciation for the goodwill mission. Somoza thought Nixon's "discreet and effective efforts" strengthened the friendly relations already existing between the United States and Nicaragua. Nicaraguans' faith in democracy, Somoza assured the president, was one of the many bonds that held the two countries together. Nixon proved to be a Somoza supporter. Upon his return, he reported to Eisenhower that he found an encouraging situation in Nicaragua because Somoza had "dealt effectively with the Communists." Richard Nixon had no criticism for the dictatorship.⁴⁶

At the U.S. embassy in Managua, the view of officials toward Somoza became decidedly more favorable after the appointment of Thomas E. Whelan as Ambassador in 1951. Whelan, a political appointee from the Midwest, arrived in Managua with no prior experience outside of the United States. The new ambassador immediately assumed an outlandishly pro-Somoza attitude, which he maintained for the ten years he served in Nicaragua.⁴⁷

Whelan, a passionate anti-communist, viewed his task as one of providing unqualified support to the Somoza regime. He was one of the first officials to recommend restoring full military assistance and arms sales to Nicaragua. Whelan's favorable view of the Somoza regime stood out, even among other U.S. officials who supported Somoza. Although he held that his mission was to merely "report the facts and maintain friendly relations," embassy reporting during his tenure was hardly objective. Because he believed that no opposition figure could successfully challenge Somoza's power, he argued that the

General had no real opposition and that, therefore, contrary to the popular impression, Somoza was not a dictator. Whelan had a provincial view of foreign affairs: he had been a potato farmer in North Dakota; he had a narrow understanding of Latin America; he did not speak Spanish; and he was largely ignorant of and insensitive to the conditions of the majority of the people in Nicaragua. He proved to be a classic "ugly American" while in Managua, yet he survived as ambassador throughout the entire Eisenhower presidency.⁴⁸

During Whelan's tenure, embassy communications forwarding opposition views were often accompanied by unfavorable comments about the sources involved, unlike messages forwarding the views of regime supporters. Whelan normally classified Somoza opponents as communists. He criticized the Eisenhower administration for not returning Somoza's friendliness and support in equal measure, and he vigorously praised Somoza's pro-Americanism and anti-communist policies. The ambassador became an intimate of Somoza and his family and in effect a propagandist for the regime.⁴⁹

U.S. relations with Nicaragua continued to be close during the last year of Somoza's life. Sycophancy continued as a tactic of the regime. In the fall of 1955, Ambassador Sevilla Sacasa and his brother, Foreign Minister Oscar Sevilla Sacasa, lavishly praised the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Henry Cabot Lodge, during a visit to the State Department. The Nicaraguans assured officials that Nicaragua would always support Washington's policy in the United Nations. In January, Whelan, acting for the administration, signed a "Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation" with Nicaragua. Its purpose was to establish a reciprocal basis for the protection abroad of the interests of citizens from both countries. Somoza, in one of his final gestures of friendship for the United States, sent Eisenhower the pen used to sign the treaty.⁵⁰

Somoza's Death

On September 21, 1956, a young poet and bitter opponent of the regime, Rigoberto López Pérez, shot Somoza four times at point-blank range at a political convention in León. At the request of Whelan, the Eisenhower administration dispatched an aircraft to transport Somoza first to Managua, then to a U.S. military hospital in the Panama Canal Zone. Despite extensive efforts by a team of U.S. surgeons, including the head of the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, Somoza died on September 29. Eisenhower condemned the assassination as a "dastardly" act. In a surprisingly terse eulogy, he recalled that Somoza "constantly emphasized, both publicly and privately, his friendship for the United States—a friendship that persisted until the moment of his

death." Sevilla Sacasa thanked Eisenhower for the efforts to save Somoza's life. Indicating continuity in Nicaragua's policy toward Washington, the ambassador took the occasion to praise the president's recent announcement of the "Eisenhower Doctrine," assuring him that his warning to the Soviet Union had been well received in Latin America.³¹

The significance of the Cold War era for U.S.-Nicaraguan relations was that U.S. officials' concerns of Soviet aggression in Latin America opened the way for an ardent anti-communist, such as Somoza, to rehabilitate his image in Washington. To some extent after 1952, and certainly after 1954, Somoza was allowed to reenter the group of close U.S. allies, a change symbolized by his White House visit and his return to Managua accompanied by senior U.S. presidential aides. In 1954, Somoza's redemption was confirmed when Washington used him to assist in implementing its goals in Guatemala. In the mid-1950s the State Department, whose officials only a few years before had worked mightily to bring down the dictator, took the position that it did not want to be placed in a situation in which its "actions might appear in opposition to Somoza or Nicaragua."³² At the time of the caudillo's death, his regime rested—as he had so long desired—firmly in Washington's camp.

Notes

1. Thomas W. Walker, "Nicaragua: The Somoza Family Regime," in Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, eds., *Latin American Politics and Development* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 323, 327; George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 31-33; Charles D. Ameringer, "Nicaragua: The Rock that Crumbled," in Wesson, ed., *U.S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s*, 143.

2. Memorandum of Conversation by Daniels, 29 December 1948, NA 817.00/12-2948; *Department of State Bulletin* (2 January 1949), 30; *FRUS: 1948*, 9:112-113; *FRUS: 1949*, 2:750-752.

3. For overviews of the development of Cold War policy in the 1945-1950 period, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 316-361, and Howard Bliss and M. Glen Johnson, *Beyond the Water's Edge: American Foreign Policies* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1975), 72-80. For the application of Cold War policy to Latin America, see Atkins, *Latin America in the International Political System*, 99-101; David Green, "The Cold War Comes to Latin America," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 162, 189-190; Norman Armour, "Achievements of the Bogotá Conference," *Department of State Bulletin* (30 May 1948): 714-716; Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence, Vol.2*, 30-33.

4. Green, "The Cold War Comes to Latin America," 99; *Intelligence Review* No. 65, 15 May 1947, 24-30, Naval Aide Files, Truman Papers; Department of State, "A Report to the National Security Council," National Security Council (NSC) Report No. 16, 28 June 1948, Records of the NSC, RG 273, NA.

5. Warren to Marshall, 29 January 1947, NA 817.00B/2-2849; Armour to Hale Boggs, 11 November 1947, NA 817.00/11-1347; Williams to Acheson, 28 February 1949, NA 817.00B/2-2849; Waynick to Acheson, 3 November 1949, NA 817.00/11-349; Waynick to Reid, 30 January 1951 and Welch to Acheson, 30 April 1952, RG 84, Managua Post Records, 1950-1954, NA. One post-war FBI report that identified communist penetration in ten Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, also ignored Nicaragua. J. Edgar Hoover to the Attorney General of the United States, 8 October 1945, Box 168, PSF, folder "FBI," Truman Papers.

6. Mann to Murphy, 11 December 1952, PSF 182, Latin America, Truman Papers.

7. *New York Times*, 8 July 1947, 13; *New York Times*, 20 January 1948, 10; *New York Times*, 24 January 1948, 4; Williams to Acheson, 13 June 1950, NA 717.00/6-1350 and 2 July 1949, NA 817.00/7-249.

8. Waynick to Acheson, 18 January 1950, NA 717.00/1-1850.

9. Williams to Acheson, 20 April 1949, NA 817.812/4-2049.

10. *Ibid.*; Waynick to Acheson, 29 September 1949, Box 1228, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.

11. CIA Report, The Caribbean Legion, Box 256, folder "CIA-1949, No. 1-16," PSF, Truman Papers; Wooldridge to the Secretary of Defense, 23 April 1948; *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 4:395-396.

12. Memorandum of Conversation by Topping, 2 August 1949, and U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires, to Acheson, 15 February 1949, Box 1228, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA; Whelan to Acheson, 28 November 1952, Box 5, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Warner to Whelan, 4 September 1954, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Waynick to Acheson, 29 September 1949.

15. Waynick to Acheson, 23 September 1949, Box 1228, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Waynick to Acheson, 4 October 1949, NA 817.00/10-449.

16. Williams to Acheson, 18 June 1949, 817.00/6-1849; *San Antonio Express*, 28 June 1952, 1; Memorandum of Conversation by Clark, 14 July 1952, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.

17. The Truman Papers contain two notes dated 11 July 1952, both prepared for the president by Colonel C. J. Mara. Apparently one of these, which mentions Somoza by name, was not sent to Truman. The second, which refers to "a gentleman in whom you have confidence," discusses the need for the United States to act against the "Communist leaders" controlling Guatemala. This memorandum passes on the "gentleman's" recommendation that the State Department decide on a "stringent action and implement it in a sudden move." Documents published by the Department of State in 1983 indicate that the "gentleman" Mara referred to was Somoza. Two memorandums from Mara to

Truman, 11 July 1952, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers and *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 4: 1041-1042.

18. *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 4:1042; Memorandum of Conversation by Miller, 11 September 1952 and Miller to Whelan, 17 September 1952, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954.

19. Whelan to Acheson, 29 November 1952.

20. Ameringer, "Nicaragua: The Rock that Crumbled," 143; U. S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Latin America. *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs*, 95th Cong., 2d sess., 4, 5, and 6 October 1978, p. 206; Memorandum for Files by Sharp, 29 July 1954, 320. Nicaragua-Guatemala, RG, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.

21. Shaw to Heins, 10 September 1948, Military Intelligence Division 091.1, "Nicaragua, 1 January 1946-31 December, 1948," RG 165, NA; Department of State, "Report of the Latin American Liaison Work at the 4th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 20 September 1949 to 10 December 1949," (16 March 1950), p. 33, Box 3, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954. NA; Waynick to Acheson, 7 July 1950, NA 717.00/7-750 and 4 January 1951, NA 717.00/1-1451; Williams to Acheson, 7 September 1950, 312 UN, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Republica de Nicaragua*, Nota 0018, 7 February 1951, *Archivos Nacionales*, Managua; Memoranda of Conversation by Lyon, 21 November 1955, 312. United Nations 1954-1955 and Newbegin, 12 December 1955, Box 1, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1955, NA; Patrick McMahon, "Somoza of Nicaragua," *American Mercury* 78 (April 1954):132-133.

22. Waynick to Acheson, 20 January 1951, NA 717.00/1-2051 and 2 June 1951, Box 8, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; U. S. Embassy, Caracas to Dulles, 21 October 1953, Box 5, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Whelan to Dulles, 1 January 1954, NA 717.00/1-2254.

23. Whelan to Dulles, 2 September 1952, NA 717.00/9-352 and 22 June 1954, Box 5, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Whelan to McDermott, 11 May 1954, NA 320-McDermott, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Memorandum of Conversation by Mann, 12 February 1953, Box 1, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires, to Acheson, 15 February 1949; Whelan to Dulles, 24 May 1954, 350. Honduras, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.

24. Shaw to Marshall, 16 November 1948, NA 817.20 Missions/11-1648; Muir to Connelly, 15 June 1949, Box 1286, OF 432 Misc., Truman Papers; Reid to Siracusa, 9 May 1951, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.

25. Shaw to Marshall, 21 December 1948, NA 817.00/12-2148 and 24 December 1948, Box 22, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA; Williams to Acheson, 11 February 1949, NA 817.00/2-1149; Williams to Acheson, 12 February 1949 (Nos. 152 and 153), NA 817.00/2-1249; Williams to Acheson, 11 March 1949, NA 817.00/3-1149; Williams to Acheson, 30 November 1950, NA 611.17/11-3050; Waynick to Acheson, 26 July 1949, NA 817.00/7-2649; Waynick to Acheson, 4 August 1949, NA 817.91211/8-449; Waynick to Acheson, 12 August 1949, NA 817.00/8-1249; Waynick to Acheson, 9 September 1949, NA 817.00/9-949; Waynick to Acheson, 23 December 1949, Box 1229, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.

26. Webb to Truman, April 28, 1949, OF 432-A, Truman Papers; Reid to Barber, 30 June 1949, Box 1228, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1945-1949, NA.
27. Waynick to Acheson, 26 August 1949, NA 817.00/8-2649 and 25 February 1950, NA 717.00/2-2550.
28. Waynick to Acheson, 26 August 1949.
29. *New York Times*, 29 May 1950, p. 3.
30. Muir to Connelly, 15 June 1949; Simons to Truman, 29 August 1950 and Acheson to Truman, 23 April 1951, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers; Reid to Nufer, 3 January 1952, NA 717.00/1-352.
31. Department of State Policy Statements, "Nicaragua," 15 May 1950, NA 611.17/5-1550 and 15 April 1951, NA 611.17/4-1751.
32. Vaughan to Truman, 7 April 1952, Box 183, folder "Nicaragua," PSF, Truman Papers. Vaughan became an ardent admirer of Somoza. Comparing him to Truman, he remarked that Somoza liked "a friendly poker game, a good story, and a stiff drink." *Time*, 29 January 1951, p. 17.
33. Truman to Vaughan, 9 April 1952, Box 183, folder "Nicaragua," PSF, Truman Papers.
34. Acheson to Truman, 18 April 1952, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers and 1 May 1952, Box 183, PSF, folder "Nicaragua," Truman Papers.
35. Muir to Connelly, 23 April 1952, Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers.
36. Waynick to Truman, 20 January 1951; Somoza to Vaughan, 23 June 1952; Vaughan to Somoza, 25 June 1952; Landry to Mara, 3 July 1952; Somoza to Truman, 6 July 1952; Mara to Truman, 11 July 1952; Mara to Sevilla Sacasa, 17 July 1952; Mara to Anastasio Somoza, Jr., 18 July 1952, all in Box 1286, OF 432, Truman Papers; Welch to Acheson, 11 July 1952, NA 717.00(W)/7-1152.
37. Memorandum by Clark, 14 July 1952; Welch to Acheson, 11 July 1952.
38. Memorandum by Clark, 14 July 1952.
39. Clark to Waynick, 22 July 1952, 310.OAS, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA. The meeting of Central American republics at that time did not occur, although Somoza continued to call for it as a forum to express his anti-communist views. See Whelan to Dulles, 3 March 1953, 720.001/3-353.
40. *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 4:1372-1375, and Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence*, Vol. 2, 46-47. Smith discusses the restrained policy of the Truman administration toward both the Arévalo and Arbenz governments despite congressional pressure for action.
41. "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Latin America," Reports dated 6 March 1953, 23 July 1953, and 20 November 1953 of NSC No. 144, NSC Series, Policy Papers, Eisenhower Library; Minutes of the 174th Meeting of the NSC, 10 December 1953, Records of the NSC, RG 273, NA; Lay to the Secretary of Defense, 14 December 1953, Records of the NSC, RG 273, NA.
42. "U.S. Policy in the Event of Guatemalan Aggression in Latin America," 24 May 1954, NSC No. 5419, NSC Series, Policy Papers, Eisenhower Library.

43. John Foster Dulles, "The Kremlin Out to Destroy the Inter-American System," in Johnathan L. Fried, et al., eds., *Guatemala in Rebellion* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 77-80; Wesson, ed., *U. S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s*, 14; Smith, ed., *The United States and the Latin American Sphere of Influence, Vol. 2*, 50; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 124.
44. *FRUS: 1952-1954*, 4:1378-1390. Robert E. White, a one-time senior official in the U.S. embassy in Managua and a former ambassador to El Salvador, argues that Washington's view towards the Somoza regime changed after the Guatemalan coup and calls 1954 a watershed in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. Interview with Ambassador Robert E. White, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts, 13 September 1984.
45. O'Conner to Dulles, 23 July 1954, Box 6, Special Assistant Chronological Series, John Foster Dulles Papers; J. F. Dulles to A. W. Dulles, 30 July 1954, Box 2, Telephone Call Series, Dulles Papers; Holland to Whelan, 12 January 1955, JFD chronological, January 1955, Dulles Papers.
46. Somoza to Eisenhower, 1 April 1955, Box 37, Ann Whitman File, Eisenhower Papers; Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 11 March 1955, Box 3, White House Office Staff Secretary Notes, Cabinet Series, Eisenhower Papers.
47. Hassett Christianson, 3 August 1951, Box 1286, OF 432-A, "Endorsements for Ambassadors," Truman Papers; Albert M. Colegrove, "Nicaragua: Another Cuba?" *The Nation*, 1 July 1961, pp. 6-7; Germán E. Ornes, "Ugly American Ambassadors," *The Colorado Quarterly* 9 (Autumn 1960):107; Marvin Alisky, "Our Man in Managua," *The Reporter* 23 (22 December 1960):26-27.
48. Whelan to Dulles, 6 March 1953, 350. Nicaragua, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Whelan to Warner, 11 September 1954, Box 1, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.
49. Welch to Acheson, 21 June 1952, NA 717.00W/6-2152; Welch to Dulles, 9 October 1953, NA 917.61/10-953; Warner to Dulles, 20 April and 13 July 1955, 320. Nicaragua, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1955, NA; Colegrove, "Nicaragua, Another Cuba?" 6-7; Ameringer, "Nicaragua: The Rock that Crumbled," 143; Whelan to Welch, 13 April 1953 and Whelan to Neal, 7 June 1954, 320. Nicaragua, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA.
50. Memorandum of Conversation by Lyon, 21 November 1955, RG 84, Managua Post Files, 1950-1954, NA; Simmons to Williams, 6 February 1956, Box 37, Ann Whitman File, Eisenhower Papers; Eisenhower to Somoza, 11 February 1956, Box 883, OF 207, Eisenhower Papers.
51. Walker, "Nicaragua: The Somoza Family Regime," 323; Colegrove, "Nicaragua: Another Cuba?" 7; Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 214-215; "Statement by the President, 29 September 1956," and Oscar Sevilla Sacasa to Eisenhower, 5 October 1956, Box 37, Ann Whitman File, Eisenhower Papers; Marin Abaunza to Lombard, 2 October 1956, and Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa to Dulles, 12 January 1957, Box 883, OF 207, Eisenhower Papers.
52. Holland to Whelan, 12 January 1955.

The Myth of Somoza as Washington's Favorite Son: A Conclusion

Events surrounding Somoza García's rise to power from 1933 to 1936 illustrated the U.S. loss of leverage in Nicaragua after the advent of the Good Neighbor Policy. If some U.S. officials favored Somoza's appointment as the first native head of the *Guardia*, the ultimate decision remained with the Nicaraguan president, Juan Sacasa, who named his in-law to the post. Moreover, Somoza's new position did not guarantee that he would eventually become Nicaragua's strongman. His ascendancy took place in an indigenous environment and through means over which U.S. officials in Washington and Managua had little control after 1933, despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, which has spawned a mythology that persists today.

Somoza's native ability to operate more effectively than his opponents within the Nicaraguan socio-political milieu allowed him to consolidate his political power during the 1930s. He used the Liberal Party apparatus, as well as persuasion, flattery, and bribery, to achieve his ends. A key to Somoza's power was the use of the *Guardia* to intimidate, imprison, torture, and exile political adversaries—traditional

tactics long used by successful Latin American caudillos. To be sure, a contributing factor to Somoza's success was the advent in Washington of the policy of non-intervention. Through it, the second Roosevelt sought to gain the friendship of Latin America by committing the United States to remain apart from the internal affairs of those nations. It was one of the major foreign policy initiatives of Roosevelt's administration, one that achieved great success after Pearl Harbor when most of the Latin American republics supported the United States during World War II.

Sumner Welles provided the guiding hand for the Good Neighbor Policy, and his knowledge of Latin America led him to understand that strict adherence to non-intervention was critical to its success. He refused to let the internal politics of any one country alter the broad course and purpose of the administration, whether that country was Argentina under Perón or Nicaragua under Somoza. Welles was objective and farsighted in his strategic approach to foreign relations. Although attentive to U.S. officials such as Arthur Bliss Lane, who vehemently protested Somoza's rise to power, Welles did not let their complaints change policy direction. Nor did Welles allow the pleas of Somoza's exiled opponents to move him toward intervention and away from the broad strategic designs of the Good Neighbor Policy. This did not mean that he favored Somoza, but it did mean that he would not violate larger policy goals in order to prevent the Nicaraguan political system from running its natural course. With this hands-off policy, had another leader—whether politician or officer in the *Guardia*—demonstrated the ability to push Somoza aside and seize power, diplomats such as Lane would have been equally unable to influence the course of events in Managua.¹

The school of criticism that dogmatically contends that it was only the steadfast backing of the United States that kept Somoza in power during the 1930s and 1940s implies that Washington made a conscious effort to provide him the support needed to retain that power. Somoza's 1939 visit to the United States is usually cited as an example. Welles surely erred in recommending the Somoza visit, but it was not the administration's intention for it to be the great honor for Somoza that the dictator subsequently projected. Somoza shrewdly turned the visit and his elaborate reception—which the administration had arranged as a rehearsal for the visit of the king and queen of England—to his political advantage. He used this same tactic on numerous other occasions when he was able to turn routine contacts with U.S. officials into public relations coups, giving the impression, however false, that he was Washington's man in Managua. The General's actions were clever politics, beyond the control and perhaps even the understanding of American officials.

The widely held impression that Somoza García was simply a U.S. surrogate was due, in part, to the actions of certain American ministers, ambassadors, and other officials in Managua. These envoys, notably Ambassadors James Stewart, Fletcher Warren, and Thomas Whelan—and especially the majority of U.S. military officers who came in contact with the General—were charmed by Somoza and responded by publicly demonstrating their admiration for him. This created the illusion that the U.S. government preferred Somoza and his regime over a democratic alternative. It should be stated in these diplomats' defense, however, that the task of maintaining friendly relations with the Nicaraguan government while distancing themselves from the charismatic caudillo, as Washington had instructed, was difficult: The dictator and the government were essentially one and the same. An excessive display of affection for Somoza, though—such as that shown consistently by Ambassador Thomas Whelan in the 1950s—misled many Nicaraguans, as well as outside critics, into believing that the purpose of Washington's policy was to keep the dictator in power. Only years later would it be realized how much Whelan's actions harmed U.S. interests in Nicaragua.²

The dichotomy between what actually was and what was thought to be Washington's position regarding the Nicaraguan dictator—reality versus myth—was exacerbated by dissension among U.S. officials. Beginning in World War II a clear disagreement existed between War and State Department officials over the conduct of relations with Somoza. While the State Department often opposed the Somoza regime, the War Department generally supported it. U.S. colonels and generals assigned to or visiting Nicaragua were particularly solicitous of Somoza since it was an opportunity to deal with a chief of an Army *and* a head of state. Somoza's constant flattery and pro-American declarations obscured for these unsuspecting military diplomats the political disadvantages that identification of the United States with an unpopular dictatorship would bring.³

Historians have given little space to the efforts of Foreign Service officers who fought Somoza. Arthur Bliss Lane spent two years of his bright career in the 1930s trying to prevent Somoza from coming to power, an effort that argues eloquently against those who claim U.S. officials in Managua during this period sought to establish Somoza as a U.S. surrogate. First Meridith Nicholson, and later Harold Finley, La Verne Baldwin, and Maurice Bernbaum, U.S. chargés in Managua in the 1930s and 1940s, warned Washington of the tyranny of Somoza rule and fought efforts by other officials—and some military officers—who wanted to assist the regime. During and after the war, mid-level State Department officials in Washington such as John Cabot, Philip Bonsal, William Cochran, and Robert Newbegin, and more senior personnel such as Briggs and Braden, worked tirelessly to develop a

policy that culminated in open opposition to the dictatorship. Although it has been largely overlooked by critics, the record of these career diplomats is compelling evidence that the United States, over an extended period, made a serious effort to end the Somoza regime.

Somoza used his close ties to certain U.S. envoys for his political gain in Managua, and the inability of U.S. officials to reach an official consensus regarding him assisted this effort. The United States was rarely able to repudiate Somoza's professions of loyalty in order to counteract the impression that he had full support from Washington. His great pretense to be Washington's favorite in Central America, while often unrelated to reality, came naturally to him because of his having lived in the United States. It was a unique stratagem for a Latin American strongman and a technique that he perfected.⁴

Somoza not only understood the U.S. government and its policies but also anticipated how broader events would shape them. He realized in the 1930s that non-intervention was inviolate to the concept of the Good Neighbor Policy and that he was free to act without fear of Washington's interference. Before the war, he recognized the coming need of the United States for allies, and he accurately perceived that the enthusiastic support of even a small country such as Nicaragua would be well received in Washington. Throughout, the chameleonic Somoza made certain that his policies fit the needs of Washington.

During World War II, he was able to portray his regime as one of the strongest allies of the United States in Latin America. His support of Washington, although outlandish, was not in substance exceptional, even in comparison with cooperation offered by other governments of neighboring Central American countries. Nor did assistance from Washington to Managua stand out among U.S. wartime aid programs to the region. Somoza's incessant pro-American proclamations gave the impression that a special relationship that had begun with the 1939 visit continued unaltered during the war years. It was an impression created by the General, not by the actions of the Roosevelt administration. In Washington's view, the Somoza government was merely another U.S. ally in the hemisphere.

Two major and conflicting trends surfaced in U.S. relations with Nicaragua during the post-war period. First, policymakers gave much more emphasis to military affairs with that nation, as they did throughout Latin America, and Somoza ultimately benefitted from this change. Second, key U.S. officials, caught up in the idealism of a war fought for democracy, begin to turn a more critical eye toward Somoza's increasingly tyrannical regime. After Hull, Welles, and other long-term Roosevelt officials in the State Department left office, support for strict non-intervention as practiced in the first ten years of the administration diminished. Their replacements, especially officials such as Spruille Braden and Ellis Briggs, were determined to disassociate the United

States from Somoza. These new officials vigorously applied to Somoza the new policy of opposition to dictators of all persuasions, perhaps because he was the strongman with whom they were most familiar. He was surely the one identified more closely with the United States, a circumstance that motivated Washington officials all the more in efforts to erase the image of support for his regime and to work toward removing him from power.

Although U.S. policy toward Somoza prior to 1945 was consistent with policy toward the rest of Latin America, Washington's open opposition to him after the war was exceptional. The significance of the Braden policy is not that it ultimately failed but that it was implemented at all in the first Cold War years. The efforts of Braden and others in the Truman administration to block Somoza's continuance in power came in the early stages of what would become Washington's long phobia toward communist inroads in the Third World. Despite the fact that Somoza was pro-American and the quintessential anti-communist, U.S. officials attempted for two years to remove him from the scene because his regime was the antithesis of the democratic ideals of the post-war era. Their efforts culminated in the decision by Truman and Marshall to withdraw recognition in 1947. The twelve months that the Truman administration withheld recognition from Somoza's government is significant because it represents the longest period between World War II and the Cuban Revolution that the United States went without diplomatic relations with a Latin American country. It remains, even in the 1990s, one of the most important post-war efforts of the United States, demonstrating to the hemisphere and the world its desire to oppose non-communist dictatorships.

Ultimately, however, Somoza remained in power notwithstanding the United States and its policies. It is significant that, at the point of greatest crisis in his rule, Somoza survived despite firm opposition from Washington. He endured as a strongman for the same reason that caudillos have kept power in Latin American countries since their independence from Spain: He successfully used his extraordinary natural talents to survive in a complex political *ambiente*. That the United States has limited influence in that environment is often not understood by those observers from Latin America and the United States who find it convenient to blame Washington's policies for the products of Hispanic American political traditions.

Notes

1. Referring to the Lane period in Managua, Robert Pastor argues that Nicaraguans' belief that the United States was in the middle of their politics in 1934-36 was one of the illusions that mark the history of U.S.-Nicaraguan

relations. For this three year period, he sees Washington as merely "a witness to events it did not like." *Condemned to Repetition*, 187.

2. Political scientist Robert Wesson contends that U.S. policy created the false impression that Washington favored dictators in Latin America, and that returning the embrace of friendly dictators was naive and one of the central foreign policy errors made by the United States in the region. He argues that the tendency of the United States "to treat as friends those who showed themselves friendly was ultimately to make the position of the United States in Latin America less solid. It was self-reinforcing; the impression grew that the superpower favored dictatorship." *U.S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s*, 1-18 (quote, 15).

3. U.S. military officers normally have close relations with their counterparts in foreign countries when they are sent on diplomatic or advisory assignments. Somoza García (and later his sons) was able to win the strong friendship and support of senior military officers who came to Managua because he had lived in the United States, spoke English, sent a son to West Point, and was thoroughly familiar with U.S. military customs. The author, himself assigned to the American Embassy in Managua in the early 1970s, observed the positive effect that direct access to the Somozas had on U.S. officers. The author has never heard criticism of the Somozas from U.S. military officers assigned to Nicaragua with the exception of the last, Lieutenant Colonel James McCoy, who served in the bitter last days of the regime. The State Department-War Department conflict continued after the death of Somoza García. Illustrative of this conflict was an incident in the late 1960s when the State Department was attempting to demonstrate disapproval of Anastasio Somoza Debayle's continuance of the dynasty. To keep a low profile at Somoza Debayle's inauguration, the Department sent a small delegation of lower-ranking officers to represent the administration (as had been done in 1937). Somoza Debayle invited a number of his American military friends to attend and paid their expenses to Nicaragua. Their attendance gave the impression of strong support from Washington, which was not the signal the administration intended to send. The attitude of Colonel McCoy is from an interview with the author, Miami, Florida, 1 May 1986. The incident at Somoza Debayle's inauguration is from an interview with Ambassador Robert White, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts, 13 September 1984.

4. Pastor is one of the few scholars to reject outright the idea that Somoza was a U.S. puppet. He attributes Somoza's rise to power to increased independence of action in the Central American region in the post-banana empire era. Pastor sees a role reversal after 1933, with Somoza using the United States more than it used him. It was a reversal that Pastor thinks historians like Walter LaFeber found "difficult to interpret." Pastor argues that "Somoza's venality and his pretense of being a U.S. surrogate obscured a significant historic development: the expansion of the region's autonomy, its growing ability to control its own destiny." This thesis runs counter to most interpretations, which argue that U.S. imperialistic policies in the region never allowed real independence in Central America. *Condemned to Repetition*, 15, 33.

Epilogue

The sons of Somoza Garcia, backed by a loyal *Guardia Nacional*, continued the oppressive regime from the caudillo's death until a violent, nationwide revolution finally destroyed it in July 1979. The United States maintained stable relations with the Somozas during most of these years. The nature of the regime remained essentially unchanged, theoretically democratic but functionally authoritarian and repressive. The sons, Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle, continued to closely identify with the United States and to enthusiastically support U.S. foreign policy, including the furnishing of a training base for the abortive CIA-directed Bay of Pigs operation against Cuba in 1961.¹

Opponents continued to seek Washington's support to oust the Somozas, and U.S. officials persisted in their argument that this would be counter to the policy of non-intervention. As world events hardened U.S. Cold War attitudes and policies, it became more difficult for Washington to oppose friendly, anti-communist regimes, despite their repression and brutality. The political appointee, Ambassador Thomas Whelan, who stayed in Managua through both terms of the Eisenhower

administration, continued to closely associate with the regime after the caudillo's death. Whelan had no appreciation for the need to encourage democracy in Nicaragua, and made no attempt to develop contacts with elements opposing the regime. He favored the transfer of power to Luis as president and Anastasio as chief of the *Guardia*, and reportedly served as their unofficial political counselor.²

Not all American officials were so short-sighted. After the North Dakotan departed Managua during the early 1960s, President Kennedy instructed his ambassador to Nicaragua, Aaron Brown, to distance the embassy from the regime, and Brown made every effort to do so. Unlike Whelan, he did not use embassy funds to entertain the Somozas; he traveled widely in Nicaragua to make contact with a range of sectors, and he made it difficult for the Somozas to identify the regime with the United States. Brown was followed by Ambassador Kennedy Crockett, who continued this even-handed policy and also opened contacts with opposition figures in carrying out President Kennedy's policy of "an abrazo for democrats and a handshake for dictators."³

The policy of the Nixon administration appeared to be a reversion to the 1950s. Nixon sent another non-professional as the ambassador to Managua—Turner B. Shelton, who, like Whelan, spoke no Spanish. Shelton quickly assumed Whelan's role of near sycophant in the Somoza court. Shelton lacked the prudence and foresight to see the dangers that would eventually accrue to Washington by continued close identification with the regime. He allowed the last Somoza, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, to again fix on the Nicaraguan people an image of strong American support for the dictatorship, an impression reinforced by President Nixon when he allowed the young Somoza a White House visit.⁴

There is evidence during this period, however, that some officials in the State Department, realizing the dangers of the ambassador's course, desired to continue the Brown-Crockett initiatives. At least one member of Shelton's staff in Managua used the Department's dissent channel—effectively bypassing the ambassador—to report that the regime's position was becoming increasingly precarious, and that it was on a destructive path that could take a blindly supportive U.S. policy down with it.⁵

After Nixon's fall, the Ford administration sent an ambassador to Managua with instructions to keep distance between himself and the regime and to open contacts with the opposition. To the dismay of Somoza Debayle—now accustomed to Shelton's shameless fawning—Ambassador James Theberge followed these instructions and established close contacts with the opposition Conservative Party and its leader, the life-long, vehemently anti-Somocista journalist, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro.⁶

The Carter administration's foreign policy after 1977 focused on promoting human rights and separating Washington from dictatorial regimes throughout the Third World. The administration withdrew most military and economic aid from the increasingly repressive Somoza regime, and Carter's ambassador, Mauricio Solaun, a sociology professor, had orders to aggressively seek out and develop a broad range of alternatives to the regime in the event it fell. Solaun strongly recommended, in late 1977, that Washington bring pressure on Somoza Debayle to democratize the country. President Carter did not condemn the regime publicly, however, until 1979. By that time, it was too late for the United States in Nicaragua. When Washington finally pressured Anastasio Somoza Debayle to step down, a national revolution had left the last of the dynasty no other choice.⁷

The stringently anti-American Sandinista regime that emerged out of the devastation of post-Somoza Nicaragua turned the Somozas' identification with the United States to its political advantage. The myth of U.S. support for the Somozas played well in the 1980s as a unifying, nationalistic issue before a people long unaware of efforts by Washington to oppose the Somoza regime; Nicaraguans remembered the impression of U.S. support that the three Somozas, particularly the first, managed to project. Now, in the post-Sandinista era in Nicaragua, at least among the educated sectors, the myth appears to be disassembling as that country begins to focus on rebuilding the nation in the very different world of the 1990s.⁸

The multitude of new critics that have discovered Nicaragua have focused on the decades of power of the sons Somoza. They invariably condemn Washington's policies as purposely and unremittingly supportive of the regime since the 1930s, and they almost always use the tenures in Managua of Whelan and Shelton to illustrate their theses. Rarely do they mention the quiet diplomacy of Brown, Theberge, and Solaun to oppose the Somozas and give encouragement to the democratic opposition that eventually allied with the Sandinistas to overthrow the regime. These U.S. officials' hopes for democracy in Nicaragua—and the hopes of those many others beginning with Arthur Bliss Lane during the Somoza García era—may have finally been realized with the election of Violeta Chamorro in early 1990. Their long effort deserves recognition by those who study and write about U.S. relations with Nicaragua. They represent a bright, high mark of American diplomacy in a country where critics have unjustly painted only the darkest motives of the United States.

Notes

1. The best general works on the revolution that brought an end to the Somoza regime are John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982) and Shirley Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1985). Policy questions and U.S.-Nicaraguan relations are thoroughly treated in Pastor's book, *Condemned to Repetition*. Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, is a best source on the *Guardia* and the regime in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. Alisky, "Our Man in Managua," 27; Ameringer, "Nicaragua: The Rock That Crumbled," 143; Ornes, "Ugly American Ambassadors," 107; Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 36, 266.

3. In discussing U.S. policy toward Nicaragua in the Kennedy period, the historian Charles Ameringer notes that, although Washington welcomed support from the regime in its anti-Castro policies, at the same time it helped to undermine the regime by providing covert funding through the CIA for democratic opponents of the Somozas. See "Nicaragua: the Rock That Crumbled," 143. Ambassador Robert White knew both Aaron Brown and Kennedy Crockett. Brown told White that President Kennedy's instructions to him before he departed for Managua were that "I never want to see you in a photograph with your arm around that SOB [Somoza]." Brown's anti-regime activities raised a special wrath in Anastasio Somoza Debayle. White, who also served in Managua, recalls that "some of the worst venom I have ever heard from Tachito Somoza was about Aaron Brown." The quote on Kennedy's policy ("an abrazo. . .") is Ambassador White's. Interview with Ambassador Robert E. White, 13 September 1984.

4. Ameringer, "Nicaragua: the Rock that Crumbled," 145-147; Black, *Triumph of the People*, 41; and Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, 44. Richard Millett discusses the Somoza Debayle visit to Washington and the effect of the "Nixon-Shelton" support for the regime in *Guardians of the Dynasty*, 235, 241. Ambassador White, who served under Shelton in Managua, remembers that Shelton conceived of his job as to "shore up" the regime. White argues that many problems the United States later faced in Nicaragua came from the Shelton years in Managua when the ambassador helped the regime "shut down the opposition." Interview with Ambassador Robert E. White, 13 September 1984, and the author's experience as an official in the U.S. Embassy during Ambassador Shelton's tenure in Managua.

5. White interview, 13 September 1984.

6. Ameringer, "Nicaragua: the Rock that Crumbled," 147; Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, 44; Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 38-39; Somoza, *Nicaragua Betrayed*, 58.

7. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, 3d ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1983) 398-399; Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, 35-36, 44; Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, passim.

8. The effect of this impression can be seen today in the attitude of the Sandinista leader and former president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega. He claims that his anti-Americanism came from childhood when he was taught by his parents to hate the United States because of "its permanent complicity with the Somoza government." Ortega was reared to think that "anything that came

from the United States was bad" because in his family's view "the U.S. was supporting Anastasio Somoza." Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 41; and *Washington Post*, 18 July 1989, A15. The idea, or hope, that the attitude among Nicaraguans—even among Sandinistas—of blaming the U.S. for their problems is changing is in Antonio Lacayo, "Good Things are Happening in Nicaragua," *Washington Post*, 6 March, 1991 (opinion page), and Lee Hockstader, "Sandinistas Promote New Image: Bid for Friendlier U.S. Relations Belies Decade of Bitter Enmity," *Washington Post*, 2 February, 1992, 10, A20.

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San Antonio Express

Washington Post

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El Liberal Independiente

La Noticia

La Prensa

Novedades

Nueva Prensa

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