

Central America in Historical Perspective

by

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INTRODUCTION

In geopolitical terms the Central American States, with the exception of Panama, are of little importance, unless one considers all politics as an extension of missile warfare. The sudden elevation of El Salvador as the Verdun of the new 'Cold War' can only be attributed to the Reagan administration's need for a perceived easy victory in the confrontation with Russia, or to the inherent American gift for exaggeration. What effect would the "worst case" possible, a communist victory in at least four of the six Central American republics, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala, actually have? An area of 373,000 square kilometers with a population of 12-18 million, gifted with an inadequate agricultural base, and lacking most of the requirements of an industrial society such as power, capital and skilled labour, would be added to the dependents of the Soviet/Union, a country which at this moment is not too enamoured of its Cuban vassal. Can the Soviet Union truly wish to add to the client states queuing up in Moscow with their hands metaphorically held out? However, the opposite viewpoint, based on political emulation and destabilization, deserves serious consideration. A communist triumph in the El Salvador-Nicaragua complex, if followed by destabilization of the regimes to the north (particularly Mexico) would necessitate a United States response. Political unrest in Mexico, if it spread to the Hispanic population of the United States, would be a serious threat indeed to U.S. peace and prosperity. Given such an interpretation, it is natural for the United States to wish to influence the course of events in Central America even though its concern may be seen as premature.

The American perspective on Central America is essentially a nostalgic one. Ever since the sudden overthrow of the Spanish Empire in 1819-1822, American statesmen have created myths about the lands to the south. Initially, it was a useful excuse for expansion, to deliver orations on extending Jefferson's Empire for Liberty, west, north and south. But the experience of the Mexican war suggested that the United States did not wish to add to its Catholic, Spanish-speaking population so the suggestion that the whole of Mexico be annexed was quickly dropped, although it was militarily feasible in 1848. American "spread," as it was known, with its glorious vision of the Stars and Stripes waving over the Americas from the North Pole to the South Pole and from the Atlantic to the Pacific was quickly shelved, as the more realistic and immediate task of absorbing the huge gain in territory from Mexico was undertaken.

As for the Monroe Doctrine and its extrapolations, it was not serious invoked during the nineteenth century because there was no European threat to the Americas. The first time an American statesman raised the issue was during Grover Cleveland's administration, when, for

the sake of impressing American voters, Richard Olney threatened Great Britain in its dispute with Venezuela in 1895. The British government quietly denied the legality of the Monroe Doctrine in the international sphere and the issue proved a damp squib rather than the explosive issue Olney anticipated.

During the final decade of the century, however, U.S. interest in the Central American area increased for three reasons. First, the United States had caught the infection of militant imperialism and was anxious to try its hand at ruling the less advanced peoples of the world. Second, strategic reasons were a factor, as, even with its advanced railway network, the United States naval strategists decided on the basis of shaky arguments that an inter-oceanic canal was necessary for the defense of the United States. The third reason was economic. From the 1870s American entrepreneurs joined the British in the economic penetration of the region, buying up cheap land and establishing banana, coffee and fruit plantations, and building the railroads and infrastructure to support these enterprises. Therefore, in Central America strategic and economic interests appeared to be mutually supportive, unlike those in the other areas of Latin America. Mexico, for example, had rid itself of the French attempt to establish a protectorate there in 1863-1867. It was not a military threat to the United States and it permitted unrestricted American investment until the 1920s.

With the acquisition of Puerto Rico in 1901 and the Panama Canal Zone in 1903, the United States became more deeply committed to the region. The expense of building the Canal and the problems of its defense had justified American expansion into the area in the first instance and was escalated into a policy of hegemony over neighboring states in the Central American isthmus, to prevent rival great powers from building canals of their own. Another concern was expressed by a State Department official, namely, "the internal disorder which made it impossible for some of the Central American and West Indian States to protect foreigners and pay their foreign debts."¹ What he had in mind were the German-British threats against Venezuela in 1902 and the French acquisition of Morocco in 1905.

Possibly Americans were influenced by the partition of Africa earlier, along with the Russo-Japanese expansion in the Far East, which indicated a willingness to expand on the part of European powers, wherever a weak state existed. Although not easy to conceive, the same sections of American opinion envisioned rampant European imperialists on the United States' doorsteps to the north and the south, because Britain was still perceived by some politicians as a possible enemy.

The Anglophile foreign policy of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft plus a determination on the part of the British to reduce its North American commitment, beginning to take shape in the 1870s, produced a détente between the two powers and made the border between Canada and the United States secure. Only the unrest in states to the south remained to disturb American complacency about its security. Initially, the Americans felt uneasy in the case of Cuba, where the United

States hoped to replace a fraternalistic, Spanish administration with a democratic, pro-American, Cuban one. This proved more difficult than anticipated. Although U.S. complaints of corruption in Cuba and other Latin American countries may strike the neutral observer as ironic, given the nature of American politics, nevertheless this expansion of U.S. influence occurred at the time of the Progressive Movement within the States. Corrupt city and state governments were being overthrown by reformers and the quality of U.S. politics improved dramatically. Career statesmen, such as Sumner Welles, and career diplomats brought this belief in reform to the conduct of foreign policy. The United States was to be an agency for stability and reform in the states to the south, just as it had been a model for revolution and for parliamentary democracy ever since the Latin Americans expelled their colonial masters. The belief of American citizens that political issues should be decided by ballots not bullets had been confirmed at enormous cost in the late Civil War of 1861-1865.

The Latin American states, motivated by a belief in machismo and by a failure to develop meaningful political parties, relied on the opposite approach. Parties which lost elections also lost control of the country's finances. Therefore, they often resorted to force to change the result. Even more frustrating to U.S. observers, they frequently used force to influence the election itself, so that honest elections were rare. It became a useful ploy for one party to refuse to participate in an election because it could claim in advance that the results would be dishonest. When the left-wing parties refused to participate in El Salvador's recent elections, this was not done just to frustrate President Reagan and his agents. The parties were employing a time-honoured tactic in Central American politics dating from the late nineteenth century. The use of terror and intimidation by both sides is also not new; only the scale and some of the techniques have changed. According to the code of honour in such countries every death must be avenged ten-fold, which produces a self-perpetuating anarchy.

The United States was drawn into this maelstrom, which it had ignored during the nineteenth century, by two factors. First, it perceived the acquisition of bases in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Panama as strategic necessities, and second, it considered the implications of the 1902 punitive expedition against Venezuela by Britain and Germany, especially Germany's hunger for expansion and use of force, to be dangerous. Theodore Roosevelt and the State Department saw this intervention as a result of the fiscal weakness, which beset most Latin American states. Fiscal weakness had developed when overly optimistic European and American bankers proved receptive to the purchase of government bonds issued by those states, apparently ignoring the faulty tax base which existed for repayment of these bonds. Cipriano Castro of Venezuela had been reckless in borrowing and the country was bankrupt under his tyrannical and feckless rule. Teddy Roosevelt and his government feared that European nations would use this lever to extract sites for naval bases in such weakened countries. This, in turn, would affect the primary concern of the United States, its strategic safety. Critics who questioned the

desirability of acquiring naval bases, because they could not conceive of any enemy attacking the U.S., nevertheless equally objected to evidence of European intervention in the Americas. Whether traditional isolationists or anti-imperialists, their rhetoric merged on this point.

Roosevelt's fundamental argument that the weakness and instability of Latin American governments allied to extravagant indebtedness would result in European intervention appeared incontrovertible to both Republican and Democratic statesmen in the years which followed. The old pattern of election, *coup d'état*, followed by revolution seemed unacceptable in the pre-1914 world order, when the use of force as in China in 1901 seemed the civilized response to uncivilized behaviour. By 1907 the Central American states, meeting in Washington, signed a series of treaties "designed to put an end to the chronic disorder which had discouraged any sort of progress in the isthmus."² These treaties established a permanent Central American Court of Justice to settle disputes and signatories promised not to permit their territory to be used as a base for revolutionary activities against other states. Signed in the peace-making process following two wars (1906 and 1907) involving Honduras, treaty participants "promised to respect the neutrality of Honduras, whose weakness and central position invited aggression."³ One of the objectives of the negotiations was to refuse to recognize governments established by revolution or *coup d'état* until sanctioned by a "free" election. It proved impossible for the five participants in the treaties to live up to such a clause and just as impossible for Mexico and the United States, as moral guarantors of the treaties although non-signatories,⁴ to enforce.

The Central American Court of Justice did not survive its first case. When Nicaragua agreed to give the United States rights to build a canal along the San Juan River, forming part of its border with Costa Rica, and to offer a site for a naval base on the Gulf of Fonseca, Costa Rica protested the former and El Salvador objected to the latter. The Court, comprised of political appointees from the five member states, upheld the claimants, but both the United States and Nicaragua ignored the decision and the Court ceased to exist from 1918.

The first American intervention in Nicaragua followed the practice of sending marines and warships to protect U.S. citizens and property, a practice common to all great powers of the day. In 1912, President Adolpho Diaz invited the United States to send marines to Nicaragua on the pretext of ending the chaos in that country, though the true purpose was to assist Diaz in the defeat of a revolution by Liberals. Although the supporters of the revolution outnumbered the supporters of the government, they were defeated. One hundred American marines remained as a "legation guard" but, in fact, they assisted in maintaining the Diaz government. Thus, Nicaragua became an American 'protectorate.'⁵

During the 1920s El Salvador and Costa Rica were relatively stable. The principal U.S. interest in the remaining three republics was to preserve the concerns of the major American fruit companies, such as United Fruit, and to support the factions in those countries which foreign

investors preferred. An examination of the population statistics for the area in the 1920s and 1930s reminds one of the surprising fact that Guatemala was still the dominant power, though there had been a shift from colonial times when it possessed 50 percent of the population to 1925 when it held about 33 percent. Population estimates allotted 2 million to Guatemala, 14 million to El Salvador, 900,000 to Honduras, 700,000 to Nicaragua, 500,000 to Costa Rica and about the same to Panama. By 1982 El Salvador was overtaking Guatemala with 4.1 million to 6.1 million for the latter and Nicaragua ranked fourth with 2.3 million.⁶

Dana G. Monro, a State Department official in the area during the period of the 1920s, makes three points clear in his history of the region. First and foremost, he depicted the underdeveloped nature of these countries, which had few paved roads (none in Honduras), few railways and none of the other infrastructure of a viable modern nation, such as banks, other financial institutions, etc. Second, he recognized the disposition of all the governments of these countries to turn to American banks and investors for help, a move often necessitated by their inability to establish wise fiscal policies. Monro's third point about the area deserves quoting in full:

The State Department has always thought that its efforts to promote peace and economic progress in the Caribbean would be welcomed by intelligent and peace-loving people in the countries concerned. This assumption was less naive in the first decades of the century, than it would seem today. Many property owners and professional men, and many small farmers, were sick of civil wars and misgovernment and economic stagnation, and thought that American help offered the only hope for improvement. Diplomats in the field and officers in the State Department naturally had more contact with people who held these views, and with political leaders who wanted American support for more selfish reasons, than with unfriendly persons. President Wilson and his advisers had been honest in their belief that their efforts to enforce peace and better government were opposed chiefly by selfish and corrupt professional politicians.⁷

While Monro admitted that those who valued national independence or were alienated by clumsy American policies also opposed the Americans, he seems to take for granted a fund of good will towards Americans.⁸ Yet he admits that the United States was badly represented, as, for example, two ministers (there were no ambassadors in those years) were fired for incompetence and, in 1922, one secretary handled the work of all five legations. Thereafter, each legation had one inexperienced secretary and, if lucky, one clerk.⁹ This condition continued until the years of expansion of the State Department, following the Second World War. Given such an official information network, it is not surprising that Washington's policy continued to reflect that

government's assumptions rather than to reflect or to be based on data gathered in the field.

Yet Monro did note a change in U.S. attitudes both inside and outside the State Department during the 1920s due to the work of Francis White, Chief of the Latin American Division (June 1922-1926) and Assistant Secretary in charge of Latin American Affairs from 1927 to 1933. It is significant that the second U.S. intervention in Nicaragua was launched while White was away from Washington in late 1926. The other pressure for change came from anti-imperialists within the United States, whose strong idealistic objections to U.S. intervention did have an impact on policy. However, the State Department resented the implications made by these American critics, particularly as criticisms were quickly exploited in the Caribbean area by opponents of the governments in power, who claimed that American policy in the area aimed to "subjugate" small neighboring countries for the benefit of American business. In fact, the State Department attempted to monitor loans to these states to ensure that the "terms were fair" and a "sound 'economic' proposition."¹⁰

The problem of organizing any business enterprise larger than a trading company, a plantation or similar agricultural enterprise interested few Latin Americans during the nineteenth century and, with the exception of centers such as Sao Paulo in Brazil, interested few in the twentieth. As Arthur P. Whitaker points out in his analysis of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, the Latin rancher and farmer was reluctant to invest in the infrastructure of a modern economy, in the railroads, public utilities and even in food processing. In Uruguay, where the major industry was cattle ranching, the meat packing business established in 1902 by Uruguayan nationals was, within a decade, sold to an Argentinian company which, in turn, was developed by Swift's and Armour's, two American giants in the meat packing industry.¹¹

The process of expanding industrialization as a result of British and, after the 1880s, American investment in Latin America was not a necessarily disastrous course for those countries. In the early nineteenth century British investment and technical know-how spread its discoveries into Belgium, France, Central Europe and finally Eastern Europe. However, the process in Europe involved national entrepreneurs, who entered into partnership with the British and usually bought out their British partners and expanded the enterprise themselves. The French, who built the Suez Canal and laid the foundation for the Panama Canal, were obviously major competitors with the British by the decades after 1860. Yet in 1815 France had been heavily dependent on Britain for technical training and financial capital. In contrast, the rich landowners of Argentina showed no interest in investing in the railroads and other utilities which contributed to the remarkable growth of Argentine wealth in the period 1880-1910. "Instead an excessive portion of the national income in this prosperous age went into the pockets of the great landowners, whose use of it mainly for consumption rather than production was the main reason why the Argentine economy lost its momentum."¹²

Similar analyses can be made of other Latin American countries. In El Salvador the utilities were British or American owned. Only the banks were bought back by native capitalists.

Not only was the industrial enterprise in largely foreign hands but all Latin American nations eagerly borrowed money from European and American bankers. There was fault on both sides. Just as in the period 1979-1983, bankers loaned to governments depending on unstable economies, because the rate of interest return was much higher than at home and because they mistakenly believed that governments would not go bankrupt. When governments defaulted the bankers asked for intervention by their own governments to secure payment, a process which historically enjoyed mixed success. The fault on the part of the Latin American nations lay in the failure to match government expenditures to government income. Rather than collect taxes efficiently, they used a corrupt system to reward relatives and political supporters and when the crisis arrived had no recourse except default. It always seemed politically easier to borrow money than to raise tax levels, a process which requires political stability and a long period of education (compare the history of smuggling in Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries with the history of tax evasion in any Latin American country). Of course, the historian can be dispassionate about this but the protagonists were and are incensed. Having ignored Polonius' warning "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," the debtors and creditors are usually critical of one another, and often hostile. Argentina managed to avoid a British intervention in the 1890s, thanks to Vice-President Carlos Pellegrini's fiscal reforms, but Venezuela provoked intervention in 1902.

During the years from 1916 to 1930, U.S. interventions in the Caribbean and Central America followed a twin policy of Wilsonian idealism and support for factions friendly to U.S. investments. In the case of the Wilson policy of refusing recognition to governments seizing power by *coup d'état* when elections were deemed possible and practicable, the U.S. intervened both to establish order and to attempt to bolster the democratic process. Even during the Republican years of the 1920s when small U.S. military units were sent into Nicaragua twice to end civil war, the promised objective was a proper electoral process. Space does not permit the detailing of the complicated faction fighting but the U.S. left a double legacy in Nicaragua, the U.S. trained national guard which supported Anastasio Somoza's rise to power and the Sandinista guerrilla movement, which fought a vaguely idealistic struggle against the Nicaraguan elite who shared power. The U.S. marines' fight with the Cesar Augusto Sandino-led guerrillas in 1927-1932 was very unpopular in the U.S. press. Sandino was murdered by Somoza in 1934.¹³

During the period of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency the Good Neighbor Policy of the United States was fairly vigorously applied. There were no U.S. interventions, except for diplomatic pressure in the 1934 Cuban elections. Some critics today censor the U.S. for not using force to remove the monster created in Somoza but such kinds of intervention were contrary to Roosevelt's ideals. One must weigh in the balance the relatively long periods of internal peace created in Central

America against the alternative permanent civil war. American liberals are now also critical of U.S. investment, which supported a two-crop economy in the area, bananas and coffee. However, it is difficult to imagine an alternative economy for the area and, since 90 percent of the area's exports were bought by the United States, the arrangement had some economic benefit for the area. Further, liberals argue that the expenditures of United Fruit and other companies on public services, such as medical clinics and schools, were limited to the region they controlled.¹⁴ Again it is difficult to imagine an alternative policy in that period. It was a period of depression throughout the world and it would be difficult for a corporation to justify social expenditures to its stockholders, at a time when income was limited. Nevertheless, the policy of the fruit companies of buying land and leaving it fallow for future use was unpopular with an expanding peasant population hungry for land.

In El Salvador it was the native oligarchy of "Fourteen" or "Forty Families" which controlled the expansion of coffee plantations at the expense of the peasants. This was accelerated after World War II as a result of the move to larger farm units which became the basis of a new farm economy using large quantities of synthetic fertilizer and expensive machinery. England had pioneered scientific agriculture in the nineteenth century and the twentieth century produced similar social revolution in the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, the safety valve of movement to industrial cities, which saved Britain and America from social chaos, did not and does not exist in Central America, though half a million Salvadorans migrated to neighboring countries in the 1950s and 1960s.

The agricultural revolution, which deprived peasants of land most critically in the forties and fifties, was matched by a new political factor, a result of the cold war. Military elites developed in all of the Central American Republics except Costa Rica. In 1951, under the Military Defense Assistance Act, the U.S. provided for the military training of internal security officers from Latin America. Costa Rica, which disbanded its army in 1949, still sent 1,639 officers for training in the years 1949-1964 to the U.S. School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. Nicaragua sent 2,969, Guatemala, 958, El Salvador, 358, while Brazil sent the fewest (165) and Mexico a mere 178.¹⁵ This training program was not strictly military but included courses in civic action because the military were envisioned as instruments for social reform by a succession of U.S. administrations. American Military Assistance Teams, that is, military advisers, were also required, until 1968, to make a civic contribution. Usually it took the form of digging a well or building small schools or recreation halls. Fear of Communist subversion and knowledge of the Communist triumphs in Czechoslovakia and China caused the U.S. to view with alarm any political developments which were considered leftist, or even too liberal. A paternalistic social program was considered desirable in the mistaken belief that poverty equals potential communism. Unwittingly, the U.S. had strengthened a previously weak¹⁶ political force, the army, in each of these countries

(except for Costa Rica). In time the army became part of the landowning class and determined to protect its vested interests against both the left and the moderates. If necessary, it would attack the right also, when conservatives were moved to attack the army's more bizarre actions on humane considerations. Ironically, faced by criticism from the U.S., the Central American armies joined both their confrères in South America and their left-wing opponents in playing the seductive game of Yankee baiting. For a relatively large investment of money in military aid over a period of forty years, the U.S. received an uncertain return in the form of its apathetic Central American military allies.

To conclude, the United States perceives itself, and is perceived, as playing a greater role historically in Latin American affairs than is in fact true. The Monroe Doctrine became meaningful only in the last five years of the nineteenth century. From an instrument of opposition to Europe it was converted into an excuse for intervention in the Caribbean. The thirty-two years from 1898 to 1930 were sufficient to convince American statesmen that the effort was not worth the price. Subsequently, the U.S. converted its role to one of leadership against totalitarianism, first fascist, then communist. The latter concern, since the Russian triumph in World War II, has dominated all policy-making with the result that the U.S. has consistently claimed a greater role for itself than it could possibly achieve. While the earlier years of the century found it supporting the claims of its citizens with investments in the region and following a policy designed to secure the Panama Canal, since World War II the U.S. has claimed to be struggling against the subversion of democratic regimes by communism as well as a Russian strategic threat. This has involved counter-revolutionary action, such as that in Guatemala when the left-wing government of Jacobo Guzman Arbenz was overthrown with C.I.A. support¹⁷ as well as global security arrangements. The self-centred U.S. policy of pursuing its own economic and strategic goals was matched by more idealistic policies: Wilsonian idealism which involved support for democratic institutions even at the risk of war; Truman's "Point Four Doctrine"; and, Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress." "Point Four" was the result of a 1948 campaign promise, a program to aid Latin America similar to Marshall Aid to Europe. But, whereas the latter spent \$13.2 billion in the four years 1948-1952, Point Four's total expenditure for technical assistance was a mere \$267 million for 1950-1960. Both this and the Alliance for Progress were aimed at economic cooperation among the Latin American states with United States support, but the main effort was to be made by the Latins. Kennedy provided \$1 billion in the first year and promised continuing aid on the same order. By 1964 it was faltering because of failure to carry out economic and political reform in the Latin countries.¹⁸ Each of these policies was subverted by the protagonists of U.S. nationalism, some of whom may be the same people as the idealists. Thus Wilson's intervention in Haiti in 1916 to restore democracy was also strategically important in preventing that island and its potential naval bases from falling into the hands of enemy states. The momentum of economic aid under Point Four was lost in the Korean conflict and Kennedy's "Alliance for

Progress" program ran afoul of Castro's expansionist revolution and the suspicions created by the U.S. Bay of Pigs operation in 1961 and Johnson's Dominican Republic intervention of 1965. The United States had apparently completed a circle from the intervention in Cuba in 1898 to this new cycle of interventions. The rhetoric of Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" appeared hollow indeed with its assurances of non-intervention.

The achievement of greater power status automatically requires a power to assume a more active role in the affairs of smaller nations than had been previously required. Where empires border on each other as in the case of British India and Russia, the affairs of both Persia and Afghanistan became the concerns of the rival powers. Economic or strategic interests may also require intervention as the British found in Egypt in 1882, when the safety of Suez, the lifeline to India, was at stake. Today, the control of the southern end of that waterway had caught Russia's interest, hence its role in the Horn of Africa and South Yemen. It is therefore to be expected that the temptation to intervene will be exceptionally strong in the case of Central America.

As in the past, the United States will lean on the side of propertied classes, who are struggling to survive in the face of armed rebellion. While force can be the solution to such political problems, it will require a degree of ruthlessness compatible with the El Salvador massacre of 1932, when 30,000 peasants were killed. Yet that particular horror aroused no interest in a United States concerned with the depression at a time when Central American affairs were conducted by minor State Department officials. While the current guerrilla war in El Salvador had been a factor for several years before 1980, it was only with the murders of the Archbishop of San Salvador in April, the rape and murder of four American nuns in December, and the killing of two American agrarian experts on January 2, 1981, that the civil war became headline news in the United States. True, it was regarded by the media as a spin-off from the Nicaraguan Sandinista triumph in 1979 and American interest was fuelled by evidence of aid from Cuba and Nicaragua to the El Salvadoran guerrillas. Yet the American public is normally informed only about the activities of pro-American forces or anti-American forces, and only rarely about the civil war itself. In spite of the publicity, the embassies in the region are still class IV, the lowest category in the State Department's hierarchy.

One characteristic of the Salvadoran struggle, which makes a peaceful settlement difficult, is the existence of at least five major guerrilla groups, which rarely cooperate. They produce their own internecine warfare reminiscent of the struggles between Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and national revolutionary groups in the Russian civil wars of 1919-1921. In April 1983 Salvador Carpio, the most important Salvadoran guerrilla leader, committed suicide following the murder of his deputy in the Popular Liberation Forces, Melida Anaya Montes, by rival guerrillas. Earlier victims included Roque Dalton, historian of the massacre of 1932, which ended the Farabundo Marti rebellion.

(Marti is the Sandino of Salvadoran leftist history.) Carpio's group is regarded as the most intransigent of the left-wing forces. As Richard Gott wrote of the El Salvador rebellion, "It is a revolution that devours its children long before they have had time to seize power."¹⁹

The United States position is complicated by the fact that power on the government side belongs to an army, which has become steadily more right-wing since 1979. Moderate voices are hard to find in its ranks and it is unquestionably responsible for some of the atrocities of the war. American policy has been one of cautious support for the Duarte government, which came to power in 1984, but which has yet to demonstrate that it possesses power other than that conceded by the army. The United States is criticized for supporting this force but never receives credit for the contributions made to the overthrow of tyrannical dictators in the past. For example, the demise of Batista in Cuba owed as much to American withdrawal of support as to Castro's actions. America's policy has not been one of uniform support for right-wing dictators, although in common with all governments in the world it tends to support the regime in power. Castro's victory, and even that of the Sandinistas, was at first greeted with sympathy by Washington, but this quickly turned to distrust following the attacks on American-owned property in those countries. This raises the problem of cultural differences between the two areas. Inheritors of English legal traditions have always equated the ownership of property with freedom and assign to property rights the same divinity which other civilizations have given to human rights. The two are closely intertwined in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, especially since the work of John Locke in the seventeenth century. The Spanish tradition, which assigned ownership of sub-soil rights to the Crown, and therefore the people, makes possible a communal approach to property ownership rather than an individual approach, although the latter may make claims similar to his Anglo-Saxon counterpart. In matters such as oil rights and mining claims American property owners in Latin America assume rights which the Hispanic tradition does not recognize and these owners are regarded as exploiters. Even those companies with good employee relationships, such as the W.R. Grace Company, are condemned.

In summation, the United States can base its decision in Latin America only on strategic concerns. The U.S. may, it is true, decide that, since neither side offers much hope for a just solution to the crisis, it is best to support those forces which are most heavily dependent on the U.S. America is still perceived in Latin American history as the nation which unjustly attacked Mexico in 1846, took Panama unjustly in 1903 and intervened in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the region between 1916 and 1932 with unhappy results. 'Yankee-phobia' dominates the thinking of most young Latin Americans so it is unreasonable to expect that U.S. policies will win favor. Nor will the U.S. be able to supply economic aid in forms which will satisfy its critics to the south. It will be seen either as dumping surplus products or as attempting to tie governments to itself through aid programs. Military aid is always condemned as a form of intervention and so is private investment in these peculiar times. With a

rapidly growing population, the peoples of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, in particular, can never hope to solve the problem of land hunger, until a reverse demographic trend occurs. Short of famine or disease, this will require at least seventy-five years to take effect. Land reform has been a joke in the light of the need. It requires little foresight to predict that the present situation may remain constant, unless the United States decides to draw its containment lines elsewhere. With the current analysis that guerrillas require large numbers of regular army soldiers to control them, these Central American states cannot expect to do more than deny the guerrillas final victory. To achieve a non-communist victory seems equally out of the question. Therefore, if the United States wishes to maintain a non-communist front in the region, it must be prepared to swallow the unpopularity of this policy both at home and abroad. Other policies may appear more desirable but the political results will naturally tend to the left and the U.S. must prepare itself for such a decision. After an initial anti-American reaction the result may not be all bad from the U.S. point of view.

Footnotes

1. Dana G. Monro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republics 1921-1933* (Princeton, 1974), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
4. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States* (New York, 1967), pp. 160-161.
5. J. Lloyd Mecham, *A Survey of United States-Latin American Relations* (Boston and New York, 1965), pp. 325-327.
6. Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of Population History* (Penguin Books, 1978); and, Canadian International Development Agency, *Report of CIDA* (Ottawa, 1982).
7. Monro, p. 12.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Monro, pp. 7-8.
10. Monro.
11. Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Southern Core* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976), pp. 113-114.
12. Whitaker, p. 33.
13. Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* (New York, 1983), pp. 69-83.
14. LaFeber is typical of this school of thought. See also editorials by John B. Oakes in the *New York Times*, various dates; John B. Oakes, "The Salvador Syndrome and the Search for Security," *Bryn Mawr Alumnae Bulletin*, Summer 1983, pp. 14-16; Richard E. Feinberg, ed., *Central America, International Dimensions of the Crisis* (New York, 1982) tries to put the conflict in perspective.
15. LaFeber, p. 109.
16. The army may be deemed as "previously weak" because, prior to World War II, it could be defeated by armed insurrectionists or needed support from the United States marines, as in the case of Nicaragua.
17. Richard Alan White, *The Morass*, (New York, 1984), p. 101.
18. Mecham, pp. 202-205.
19. See, *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, May 1, 1983.