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A House of Cards: U.S. State Department Policy in Nicaragua, 1909-1928

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by

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Introduction

On January 2, 1933, the last United States marine left Nicaragua —at least for the time being-- leaving behind a democratically elected president in Managua and a guerilla army in the mountains. This withdrawal was the final American act in an international drama that had begun in 1909 and was characteristic of United States involvement. On the surface, it was the product of cool logic and was in accordance with the country's stated goals. Underneath the surface, however, it was the final retreat from an ineffective policy and left only greater chaos in its wake. The democratically elected president was quickly overthrown by a dictator whose family would hold power for decades, and the beloved guerilla leader was slaughtered on the order of the same would-be dictator.

The United States has held a deep interest in Nicaragua since the Central American country's independence. Until the construction of the Panama Canal, America hoped to increase national security by building a canal through Nicaragua to ensure that the U.S. Navy could quickly move from one coastline to the other.[1] Even after the completion of the Panama Canal, American policymakers and strategists continued to view a possible Nicaraguan canal favorably, as it represented a shorter route and an alternative in the event of some unforeseen disaster in Panama.

The United States Department of State also arrived at a conclusion of deep significance for Nicaragua in the first decade of the twentieth century: the department began to conceive of American security as intrinsically linked to Central American stability. Any war occurring between the tip of Texas and the Panama Canal could jeopardize America's ability to defend

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[1] For discussions on the Nicaraguan Canal, see William Kamman, *A Search For Stability: United States Diplomacy Toward Nicaragua* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 8-9, 227-228; Harold Denny, *Dollars for Bullets* (New York: The Dial Press, 1929), 12-23; and Dana G. Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Area* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1934), 63-66.

itself by moving its fleet. This view caused great consternation in the State Department for the simple reason that Central America was quite frequently embroiled in armed conflict.

Out of a desire to bring stability and thus security to a troubled region, a paternalistic Washington invited representatives from each of the Central American states to participate in a conference in 1907. The result was the 1907 Treaty of General Peace and Amity, to which the United States was not a signatory but rather a sort of unofficial guarantor. This treaty, which was reaffirmed in 1923, formed the basis of State Department policy towards Nicaragua during the interventions of 1909-1933.

In 1909, Nicaragua experienced an unusual revolt. Revolutions were not uncommon, but the fact that U.S. citizens living in the town of Bluefields were heavily involved was. In order to protect them and to preserve a host of other interests in the region, the United States sent a force of marines to establish neutral zones but to remain uninvolved in events. By the end of the revolution in 1912, these initial American intentions had long been left by the wayside; the United States had become enmeshed in the internal politics of the Central American country, including a tacit guarantee of the government through a force of marines stationed at the Managua Legation. By 1925, America had tired of this obligation and sought to quietly withdraw. Less than a year after the marines left Nicaragua, the country was once again embroiled in civil war. This time, American intervention lasted from 1926-1933, ending in the withdrawal of all American troops without a firm victory. The interventions have been a subject of historical, political, and ethical contention ever since. The majority of the literature on the topic, however, emphasizes America's motives in intervening and gives scant consideration to State Department policy and the decisive way it affected the interventions.

In an effort to limit its amount of military involvement, the State Department relied heavily on the policy of granting or withholding recognition to the several Nicaraguan regimes. This policy was intended to quiet rebels by announcing approval of the government--or to encourage change by expressing dissatisfaction. The application of this policy in Nicaragua was simultaneously rigid and uncertain. State Department officials tenaciously attempted to control the situation through limited intervention, showing poor ability to adjust to the increasingly dynamic situation on the ground. At the same time, Nicaraguans were baffled as to U.S. intent, due to the varying and sometimes even conflicting information and guidance offered by the Marines, Navy and Army commanders, and a number of other American officials.

Ultimately, the fatal flaw in the State Department's policy was that officials tried to bend diplomatic recognition to serve two different ideals: expediency on the one hand and morality on the other. Over the course of the Nicaraguan interventions, the State Department discovered that these two aims were frequently in conflict, making it difficult to determine what course to take. This duality was no less confusing for the Nicaraguans, who attempted to guess what side of the policy the State Department currently favored and, in a few explosive instances, guessed incorrectly. The charge that American policy failed because of a certain amount of condescension or fundamental misunderstandings is to a certain extent true. It is extremely inaccurate, however, to suppose that these drawbacks account entirely for American policy failure. A great deal more of the weight lies with the structural problems of American diplomacy and intervention, and particularly with the application of diplomatic recognition.

In both interventions, the State Department initially attempted to apply the policy of diplomatic recognition according to a series of international treaties it had sponsored between the Central American states. Problems arose when, several times over the course of events in

Nicaragua, the State Department abandoned the dicta of the treaties in favor of a more expedient approach. This made application of the policy unpredictable and eventually undermined it by giving the appearance of complete partisanship in the State Department's decisions to grant or withhold recognition.

By investigating this policy and how it interacted with other complications in the course of the intervention, it becomes easier to understand the powerful role of the Nicaraguans themselves. This study also emphasizes the ineffectuality of diplomatic recognition of Nicaraguan regimes in particular, and as a consequence, the failure of diplomatic policy as a whole.

The American intervention in Nicaragua is recorded in a well-established set of historical works. The oldest of the thorough accounts belong to Dana G. Munro, author of *The Five Republics of Central America*, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, and *The United States and the Caribbean.*[2] Munro's observations on Nicaragua were made with authority: Munro was a professional historian and worked for the State Department in Nicaragua during part of the intervention, eventually becoming the head of the department's Latin American Division. His purpose was not to analyze the significance of the various elements of the intervention but rather to make sense of it as a whole and to determine whether the United States was justified in its actions. As successive scholars would be, Munro was deeply concerned with the extent to which financial gain was a motive in the State Department's actions. In conclusion, Munro found that finances were merely a tool used by the State

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[2] Dana G. Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1918); Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean 1900-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); Munro, *Caribbean Area.*

Department in an attempt to create stability in the region.[3] Munro is almost universally cited by later historians of the subject and is generally a thorough observer and reasonably balanced in his discussion. Munro's account is far from comprehensive, however, and displays a disconcerting reliance on State Department publications. He gives only cursory attention to State Department policies and obtains most of his information from the official State Department history, *The United States and Nicaragua: A Survey of Relations from 1909 to 1932.*[4]

Surprisingly little differs between Munro's texts and the work of consequent historians. In general, they all seek to answer the same questions: why did the United States intervene, did the intervention fail, and what were the reasons for success or failure? The most common accounting exonerates the government from the claim of being Wall Street's puppet, instead finding that the United States intervened to protect American lives, to prevent foreign action, and to protect its hemispherical interests by keeping the peace. These conclusions seem well-justified and are supported by solid evidence; what is not as compelling is the explanation that American policy 'failed' because the State Department was condescending, because Americans did not understand how Nicaraguan politics worked, and because Nicaragua simply was not ready for stable democratic government. Yet this conclusion can be found in most of the secondary works on Nicaragua from Munro forward.[5]

Perhaps the most insightful of the intervention's chronicles is the 1968 *A Search For Stability: United States Diplomacy Toward Nicaragua 1925-1933* by historian William

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[3] Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Area*, 216.
[4] U.S. Department of State, *The United States and Nicaragua : A Survey of the Relations from 1909 to 1932* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).
[5] Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire 1900-1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 222-223; William J. Kamman, *A Search For Stability: United States Diplomacy Toward Nicaragua 1925-1933* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 232-234.

Kamman.[6] Kamman's work is more tightly focused than most of the other available literature, which often considers Nicaragua in the context of a larger analysis of the so-called 'Banana Wars'. The special strengths of Kamman's work include exceptional archival research on State Department communications and insightful analysis of the people at the heart of the events. Kamman noted that American diplomatic policy involved a "quirk" of recognition, as "Washington had to do more than just decide which government was in control; it had to determine the legitimacy of the government," and concluded that this was a weak policy that provided insufficient guidance for the situation in Nicaragua.[7] However, he then abandoned that line of inquiry and did not examine how this unstable policy and its effects complicated and even drove events in Nicaragua. Because he discounted the importance of this policy, Kamman found the United States' policy failure a result of its unilateralism and misplaced emphasis on constitutional government.[8]

Another significant scholarly work is Lester D. Langley's 1983 *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire.* Langley drew largely the same conclusions as his predecessors, while saying even less about the significance of the policy of diplomatic recognition. He too ascribed American failure to miscomprehension of the fundamental nature of Caribbean politics and an attitude of condescension.[9]

There are several problems with the historiographic tradition as it concerns the Nicaraguan intervention. The existing scholarly literature primarily concerns itself with telling a fairly standard story of the occupation. These accounts, while generally well-written and engaging, often neglect to examine the nuances of diplomatic policy and its vital importance. In

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[6] Kamman, *Stability*. See previous footnote for full publication details.
[7] Kamman, *Stability*, 231.
[8] Kamman, *Stability*, 232-234.
[9] Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire 1900-1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 223.

particular, these historians fail to account for the powerful role of diplomatic recognition and do not explore the question as thoroughly as it merits. This study is intended to rectify this gap.

The sources used in this study generally fall into one of three categories: archival materials, primary sources published by the State Department, and primary sources published by Nicaraguans. Each category has its benefits and deficiencies. Primary sources published by the State Department take the form of the *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* series, an annual collection that contains the most pertinent documents relating to a country's interactions with the State Department. There are several significant problems with information culled from this series. The greatest, of course, is that these are documents chosen by the State Department itself; they are intended to present a specific image of the State Department's actions. What this image should be is not left to the imagination; the sections of these volumes concerning revolution in Nicaragua are headed with the banner: "Efforts by the United States to Preserve Constitutional Government in Nicaragua." There is the additional problem that a great many of the documents are presented in a truncated or even paraphrased form.

Fortunately, the precise content of many key documents can be corroborated and even expanded on by the primary source material contained at the National Archives in Washington, DC and College Park, Maryland. The Archives contain what could nearly be termed an overabundance of documents pertaining to American relations with Nicaragua over the period of the intervention. While several collections of several hundred documents each are now unavailable due to the preservation efforts of the archivists, the Archives do contain more than enough documents to present a clear picture-- at least of the American version of events.

Nicaraguan primary sources in the form of letters, newspaper articles, and the memoirs of significant public figures help fill this gap. These documents present the greatest research challenge; many contain blatant biases or political agendas. Particularly troublesome is the account left by President José Santos Zelaya, which contains a number of official documents that provide a strikingly different version of events than the one presented by the American State Department.[10] A number of these documents cannot be verified elsewhere. This may be because Zelaya took the originals with him when he fled the country; the records may have been destroyed in the 1931 Managua earthquake and fire like many other records of the period were; or perhaps the documents were fabricated and never had originals. Fortunately, some of the claims made by President Zelaya can be corroborated by other contemporary sources, and with this fact in mind Zelaya's story has been given full consideration. Despite the difficulties of working with his and other partisan Nicaraguan sources, this body of documents provides necessary balance to what would otherwise be an American story about American actions.

Chapter One: The First Intervention, 1909-1912

Diplomatic relations between Nicaragua and the United States were not precisely characterized by trust and goodwill in the years leading up to the 1909 revolution. Nicaragua still retained bitter memories of the brief dictatorship of the American adventurer William Walker, who was initially recognized by President Pierce for a span of time in 1856.[11] On the American

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[10] José Santos Zelaya, *The Revolution of Nicaragua and the United States* (Madrid: Bernardo Rodriguez Printers, 1910).
[11] Harold Denny, *Dollars for Bullets* (New York: The Dial Press, 1929), 54.

side, there was concern that Nicaraguan dictator José Santos Zelaya would jeopardize American security by creating trouble among the Central American states.[12]

American diplomatic policy towards Central America was, in its nascent stages, driven largely by President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's basic position was that "all that this country desires is that the other republics on this Continent shall be happy and prosperous; and they cannot be happy and prosperous unless they maintain order within their boundaries and behave with a just regard for their obligations towards outsiders."[13] The United States, of course, would be the authority charged with ensuring that the nations of Central America behaved with said just regard. In an attempt to bring order and stability to the international relations of the five Central American states, Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, Elihu Root, organized the Washington Conference of 1907.

In order to ensure Central American stability without being forced to intervene on a large scale in the event of turmoil, the President and Secretary of State attempted to bind the American states with a series of international agreements. At the time of the first intervention, the most significant of these was the 1907 Treaty of General Peace and Amity, signed at the Washington DC conference organized under Roosevelt. The Washington Treaty secured that "each Republic binds itself not to recognize in another a Government resulting from a coup d'état nor to intervene in favor of or against the existing government of another Republic in cases of disorder therein."[14] It also mandated that "they agreed to use their efforts to secure constitutional reforms

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[12] Langley, *Banana Wars,* 56-58; Kamman, *Stability*, 10-11.
[13] Robert Burr and Roland Hussey, *Documents on Inter-American Cooperation*, Vol. II: 1881-1948 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 60.
[14] U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1907* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), 675. Hereafter to be referred to by *Foreign Relations* and the pertinent year.

that will prohibit the election of a president for a second term."[15] Other significant clauses of the Treaty included that "any disposition or measure tending to alter the constitutional organization of either of the Republics shall be deemed a menace to the peace of all," and that the neutrality of Honduras was guaranteed, in the hope that it would serve as a sort of Central American Belgium, theoretically making it more difficult for one nation to invade another.[16]

The State Department's guiding motive in forming its Central American policies was the desire to keep the region free of strife and economically stable; the canal then under construction in Panama would do the United States little good if the American Navy could not traverse it without becoming embroiled in some Central American dispute. Furthermore, the United States wanted to ensure that the nations of Europe had no justification for intervening in Latin American affairs; this meant that foreign citizens and property had to be held sacrosanct, and national debts had to be honored.[17] The United States did not, however, wish to become militarily involved in the region.

The great paradox of State Department policy towards Nicaragua was that American officials sought to have a sort of veto power over domestic developments while adamantly insisting that they desired to remain aloof from such internal affairs. This led State Department officials to the problematic approach of insisting that the Nicaraguans resolve their own problems, to be followed by an adverse American reaction if the resolution proved unacceptable.

This paradox, abundantly clear in hindsight, did not go unnoticed at the time. Don Ricardo Jimenes, the President of Costa Rica, complained to Lewis Rinstrie of the San José Consulate that the United States "could not 'have our cake and eat it.' Either we should keep away entirely from Central America, or else make ourselves effectively responsible for the

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[15] *Foreign Relations*, 1907, 675.
[16] *Foreign Relations*, 1907, 674.
[17] Langley, *Banana Wars*, 56-58; Kamman, *Stability*, 10-11.

preservation of order."[18] Jimenes proved a surprisingly strong advocate for American intervention, stating "that from the point of view of Costa Rica, it would be of distinct advantage for the United States to be responsible for the preservation of order in Nicaragua and Honduras. At present, conditions in those countries were 'chaos' and likely to continue so irrespective of the party in power."[19] The State Department was unwilling to accept the either-or conception of intervention to which Jimenes ascribed. Instead, the Department resolved to make a show of indifference towards Nicaraguan domestic politics while wholeheartedly pursuing the country's economic stability. As Acting Secretary of State Huntington Wilson confirmed for George Weitzel, the American Minister in Managua, "your action in stating to Señor Chamorro that it is your Legation's policy to devote its attention primarily to the economic situation, leaving political questions to be considered when the country shall have been established on a sound financial basis, is approved by the Department."[20] Had it truly been the case that the State Department disavowed all interest in Nicaragua's political situation, however, then events would not have unfolded in the explosive manner in which they did.

In an effort to avoid flagrant domination of Nicaragua's domestic matters, the United States opted to instead focus on economic matters and the restructuring of government finances. The Nicaraguan political machine was left to blunder along on its own, hoping to find a solution acceptable to its Northern neighbor. This position greatly destabilized Nicaragua, to the point where the political thinker Dr. Gustavo Guzmán appealed in *La Tarde* of Managua,

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[18] Lewis Rinstrie to Philander Knox, December 19, 1911, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, hereafter referred to as NACP. Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, diplomatic posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 19, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions 1912.*
[19] Rinstrie to Knox, December 19, 1911, NACP.
[20] Huntington Wilson to George Weitzel, May 14, 1912, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, diplomatic posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 19, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions 1912.*

> whom do they want? Do they accept Dr. Madriz? Do they want Dr. Espinosa, D. Juan Estrada, D. Emiliano Chamorro … but let them choose at once, tomorrow to-day this very moment; a telegram, a word, a hint: halt there! let the war cease!, [sic] no more slaughter, no more bloodshed!, [sic] and thus it will happen… we are resigned: the Yankees rule.[21]

Guzmán's appeal resonated with both of Nicaragua's political parties, the Conservatives and Liberals, who were normally regarded as mortal enemies who perpetually vied, usually through armed revolution, to control the government.[22] The uncertainty of who would be chosen to assume control of the government, indeed an uncertainty as to who was even eligible to do so, greatly destabilized the situation.

The State Department's efforts to control the situation met with mixed results. Several of the key factors in the Department's inability to exert the positive influence it desired were due directly to the Department itself. Personnel difficulties, inaccurate information, and contradictory approaches to policy were the worst culprits. The first two issues, while certainly significant, could have been circumvented and would not necessarily prove to be a recurring theme in the study of United States diplomacy. The question of the coherency of State Department policy itself is far more difficult to resolve and, in the case of Nicaragua, suggests deep structural inefficiencies in the way Department policy was conceived and enacted. These three factors were present in both interventions in Nicaragua, although they were decidedly more pronounced in the second intervention.

Personnel problems within the State Department complicated the already turbulent situation. A number of Department officials were accused of handling the intervention in a personal, biased manner. U.S. Marine Smedley Darlington Butler, perhaps one of the most famous Marines to ever serve, wrote that "I am not at all surprised that a man of [Secretary of

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[21] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 107.

[22] Denny, *Dollars*, 57-60. Denny's scorn for both parties is quite evident, but he does not exaggerate the extent to which the parties quarreled.

State] Knox's mental and moral fabric, would be bluffed into this row by the lying reports of our Consul [Jose de Olivares] here in Managua."[23] American reporter Carleton Beals concurred, scathingly writing that "our policy has been dominated by ignorance, opportunism, or self-interest--usually the last. Nor is self-interest always national self-interest, but...the self-interest of diplomatic representatives, promoting private deals."[24] Several Nicaraguans likewise laid charges of unbefitting behavior on Department officials. Alceo Hazera, the Nicaraguan Charge d'Affairs to Costa Rica, claimed that the American Minister "Merry is the worst enemy that Nicaragua has here," that "this fellow is simply dreadful," and "that old fellow is an implacable enemy to us."[25] Another Nicaraguan Minister, H. Auguirre Muñoz on mission to Honduras, reported that the American minister Philip Brown "watches with more activity and enthusatin [sic; enthusiasm?] over the interest of Cabrera than those of his country... he is also an agent of the revolution in Nicaragua"[26] Finally, the American Consul at Bluefields, Mr. Moffat, was chided by the State Department itself for his overly enthusiastic support of the revolution in the early days of 1909.[27] Moffat was also reprimanded for supplying his personal opinion to President Estrada in 1911 in advising that certain rebels be shot if discovered.[28] Although these reports may vary in degree of accuracy, together they indicate that the Department could not always be certain of the caliber of its own officers. This would make the task of securing peace in Nicaragua appreciably more difficult, and probably factored in the Department's poor

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[23] Smedley Darlington Butler, *The Letters of a Leatherneck* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 76.
[24] Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932), 123.
[25] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 33, 33, 29.
[26] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 40.
[27] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 453.
[28] To Elliot Northcott, March 25, 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 13, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions and Telegrams from the Department 1911.*

decisions regarding the policy of recognition, making expediency seem much more attractive than authorizing a prolonged investigation into the truth of the Nicaraguan situation.

Poor communication resulting in inaccurate information also caused the State Department a great deal of grief. Reports were often tardy or inaccurate, and the terrain of the country ensured that the East and West coasts functioned as nearly independent entities. Marine Smedley Butler wrote to his father that "these two reporters are abroad here to-night and admit frankly that they are not cabling the truth, simply sending stuff that will be readable and cause more trouble."[29] The reporter Carleton Beals even went so far as to mock the State Department for its poor information, remarking late in the second intervention that "after crossing five countries with the express object of interviewing Sandino, when the periodicals I represented had announced the fact to the world, I discover you people did not know of my whereabouts or what I had been doing. That is an incredible commentary on the intelligence of the Intelligence Department."[30] Beals also reveals that information often traveled poorly between the civilian and military authorities in Nicaragua, recalling that Minister Eberhardt's response to being asked about a Marine officer who had badgered Beals was that "we have nothing to do with him, nothing whatsoever. He is from the Intelligence Corps. Probably he has his duties to do. I know nothing whatever about him."[31] Consul Olivares similarly complained of his inability to acquire accurate information, telegraphing the Secretary of State that "it is impossible to verify, with any degree of accuracy, the many rumors which are circulating regarding what is transpiring at the scene of hostilities."[32] At times, communication between members of the State Department was

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[29] Butler, *Letters*, 78.
[30] Beals, *Banana Gold*, 304.
[31] Beals, *Banana Gold*, 299.
[32] *Foreign Relations*, 1910, 748.

so poor that the Bluefields Consul was uncertain as to whether there remained in Managua an American Consulate.[33]

Another factor undeniably hindering the State Department's ability to arrive at an effective solution was the racism and paternalism many of the Americans held for the Nicaraguans. Smedley Butler was one of the least circumspect in his biases, writing that "they [the Nicaraguans] are the most worthless, useless lot of vermin I have struck yet, even worse than our 'little brown brothers' the Filipinos, for the F--- [sic] will fight and these dogs won't."[34] Harold Denny, an American reporter who went on to author one of the foundation texts on the interventions, said of the Nicaraguans that

> the masses of the population are illiterate, cheerful, charming, and, where civilization has touched them, likely to be dishonest....If they dislike you, or fear you, they will kill you, mutilate you unspeakably, and consider that they have glorified God in the murder. Hookworm and malaria have made them dull, sluggish, and unambitious.[35]

Denny's colorful comments were in keeping with much of what the Americans in Nicaragua thought. Even officials who, because of their position, had to be more circumspect managed to display their disapproval of Nicaraguan politics. Henry Stimson, reflecting back on his experience as a special envoy to Nicaragua, wrote that "under these circumstances it naturally soon became evident that they were not yet fitted for the responsibilities that go with independence, and still less fitted for popular self-government."[36] The United States, ironically enough, was not the only party engaging in slander. In an attempt to discredit the Liberal army

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[33] American Consul in Bluefields to Franklin Gunther, July 15, 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 18, American Legation of Managua, *Consular and Miscellaneous Correspondence 1911 [July 1-December 31]*.
[34] Butler, *Letters*, 75.
[35] Denny, *Dollars*, 49.
[36] Henry Stimson, *Henry Stimson's American Policy in Nicaragua* (New York: Marcus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1927), 3.

raised in revolt against him, President Zelaya derided it as composed of "negro fishermen" who "like marauding, they are cowardly and for the most part can neither read nor write."[37]

These views led the Department to consistently underrate Nicaraguan agency and to assume certain politicians could be controlled. In the first intervention, this is best seen in the case of General Mena; it is the second intervention, however, that shows the full range of the dangers associated with this mentality, as the American interventionists repeatedly underestimated General Chamorro and Sandino. With this basic misconception of the people and political structure at hand, its personnel and information problems, and having decided to reject the standards of the Washington Treaty of 1907, it seems just short of foreordained that the State Department would err in its decisions to either grant or withhold diplomatic recognition of a regime.

While Chamorro and Sandino were the most effective at challenging the State Department and exposing the weaknesses in Department policy, they were by no means the only important Nicaraguans. The principal Nicaraguan leaders in the first intervention were President José Santos Zelaya, General Juan Estrada, General Luis Mena, Mr. Adolfo Diaz, and General Emiliano Chamorro. All of these men, with the exception of President Zelaya and with the addition of General Moncada and Dr. Juan B. Sacasa, would remain the most powerful men in Nicaragua through the second intervention as well. President Zelaya, the ruler of Nicaragua from 1893 to 1909 and scion of the Liberal Party, would be thoroughly denounced by the American interventionists.[38] Estrada was also a leading member of the Liberal Party and would be lambasted by the Liberal Nicaraguans for his defection in siding with the Conservative Party in

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[37] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 24.
[38] Denny, *Dollars*, 66-69.

revolt.[39] General Mena was another leader of the revolution to overthrow Zelaya, although he belonged to the Conservative Party. In 1912, he himself would lead a second revolution, this time against President Adolfo Diaz.[40] Adolfo Diaz was perhaps America's greatest Nicaraguan ally, and would serve as President several times over the course of both interventions.[41] General Moncada was an important Liberal General in the revolution against Zelaya, Sacasa's chief General in the revolution against Chamorro, and eventually President in his own right.[42] Dr. Sacasa, another Liberal, would lead the revolution against Chamorro and serve as President for a short time.[43] General Emiliano Chamorro was the leader of the Conservative Party and alternately cooperated with and opposed the State Department's agenda. One particularly perceptive Department official reported that "General Chamorro is quiet and dignified in his bearing, and extremely likeable personally. His popularity is stupendous....The entire family is essentially pro-American on principle...nevertheless, were the American program to directly oppose the interests of that family or party a change of front might very well be expected."[44] More than any other Nicaraguan, Chamorro would challenge the State Department and demonstrate the flaws in its policy of diplomatic recognition. His greatest moments, however, would not come until the second intervention.

There are two wildly different interpretations of events in Nicaragua: the one espoused by the State Department and the Nicaraguan Conservatives on the one side and the Nicaraguan Liberals and much of Latin America on the other. The State Department maintained that

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[39] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 7-9, 14.
[40] Department of State, *Survey*, 40.
[41] Denny, *Dollars*, 99-100.
[42] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 31.
[43] For more information on Sacasa, see: Dr. Juan B. Sacasa, *Cómo y Por Qué Cai del Poder* (San Salvador: Talleres Gráficos Cisneros, 1936).
[44] Managua Consulate to Philander Knox, Jan 6,1912, NACP, Record Group 84, American Legation of Managua, *Records of Foreign Service Posts Despatches 1912*.

intervention was necessary to protect American lives and property, and although officials attempted to maintain an image of neutrality in the conflict, it was readily evident that the rebels had the Department's sympathies.[45] The Zelayist interpretation is particularly interesting not just in the degree to which it conflicts with the American story but also in the details it mentions. According to Zelaya himself, his overthrow was orchestrated by an unholy alliance of the Conservatives, the traitor General Juan Estrada, the United States, and above all Estrada Cabrera, who like Zelaya ruled Guatemala as a dictator bearing the title of President.[46] What is most striking is that, while Zelaya attributed virtually all of his political ills as well as those of Central America in general to his dire enemy Cabrera, State Department records say virtually nothing about the man. This is a rather conspicuous silence, given Zelaya's vitriolic and profuse accusations.

Zelaya's explanation of events was certainly biased, his book taking on the Herculean task of restoring a reputation that was rather viciously savaged by the American State Department and press.[47] In his defense he presents a series of documents that, if genuine, seem to support at least part of his argument. In particular, his claims may hold true that the Americans exacerbated the situation and that public opinion was not as strongly arrayed against him as Knox claimed. Secretary of State Knox very bluntly outlined his position in his message of December 1, 1909, severing diplomatic relations between the two countries. Regardless of the actual veracity of Secretary of State Knox's remarks, it seems fairly apparent that his diplomatic note had very little to do with diplomacy and was unfitting given the circumstances and the personages involved. His infamous note to the Nicaraguan Charge d'Affairs contains a number of highly inflammatory remarks and implies even worse, stating that "my consideration for you

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[45] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 454-458.
[46] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 6-7, 14, 105.
[47] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 454-458.

personally impels me to abstain from unnecessary discussion of the painful details of a régime which, unfortunately, has been a blot upon the history of Nicaragua and a discouragement to a group of Republics whose aspirations need only the opportunity of free and honest government."[48] These charges were aimed at providing an altruistic justification for American intervention. Zelaya, according to Knox, had unforgivably abused his people, foreign denizens, and the general balance of international politics, which meant that intervention was really quite laudable of the Americans.

The immediate justification for severing diplomatic relations between Nicaragua and the United States was the summary executions of two American nationals captured by Zelaya's forces and accused of helping Chamorro's army to mine a river, nearly in time to destroy a government vessel carrying 400 troops.[49] Leonard Groce and Lee Roy Cannon were unknown neither to the various Central American states, nor to the American State Department. As the Nicaraguan Chargé, Felipe Rodriguez, later protested, "these two men were well known in Central American revolutions; that they had been arrested for like offenses; that this was not their first offense; and that Cannon was recently sentenced to the penitentiary in Honduras for taking an active part against Nicaragua."[50] Even Vice Consul Henry Caldera admitted that he knew Cannon instantly for an American because "he had been identified with previous revolutionary movements in Central America."[51] The State Department immediately resolved to bargain for commuted sentences for the men, but to no avail. According to Caldera, Zelaya "hastened to do it [carry out the executions], it is believed, not so much because they were

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[48] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 455.
[49] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 460.
[50] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 447.
[51] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 448.

revolutionists, but because they were Americans."[52] This accusation is perhaps more accurate than its source might otherwise imply. Edmund Couture, a French citizen captured at the same time as Cannon and Groce, was not sentenced to execution.[53] H. Auguirre Muñoz, the Nicaraguan Minister to Honduras, reacted to the executions by telegramming that "the death of Lee Roy Cannon is a great triumph for Central America. Cannon was brave, bold, intelligent and prepossessing, in a word he was the Walker of our time, with more ambition and still greater gifts than that ill-timed adventurer. They ought to have shot him here a year ago"[54] Despite the State Department's protests that such actions were illegal, both men were executed, raising fears among other Nicaragua-based American nationals that anti-American sentiment might rise to engulf them as well.

A foreign national's rights and the obligations of their host country formed a significant part of the discourse between the State Department and officials in Nicaragua. This is the area where the American attitude changed the most, beginning with a willingness to challenge Nicaraguan regimes that failed to provide sufficient protection and ending with a disgusted announcement that American citizens in Nicaragua were on their own. The State Department's initially adamant stance was somewhat excessive, but soundly founded on inter-American international law. The First International Conference of American States in 1890 had established that "foreigners are entitled to enjoy all the civil rights enjoyed by natives; and they shall be accorded all the benefits of said rights in all that is essential as well as in the form or procedure, and the legal remedies incident thereto, absolutely in like manner as said natives."[55] The State Department maintained that if the host nation failed to provide adequate protections along these

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[52] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 449.
[53] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 137.
[54] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 42.
[55] Burr and Hussey, *Inter-American Cooperation*, 54.

lines, then the native country of the citizens in peril had a right to intervene, militarily if necessary, to protect its people and their property.

This was the justification the State Department gave for ordering the landing of Marines. Consequently, it was this point all prospective governments addressed in hopes of gaining America's favor. The promise to protect American life and property thus became a perceived component of the qualifications for diplomatic recognition. This correlation manifested itself almost immediately. Consul Moffat, reporting on the incipient rebellion, assured the Secretary of State that "appeal will be made to Washington immediately for recognition," which Moffat implied should be granted in part because "they propose to protect property of foreigners".[56] Following the success of General Estrada, the Nicaraguan paper *El Comercio* acknowledged the link while attempting to defend American actions by claiming that "Mr. Dawson did not come to buy us nor to ask us for anything that would be offensive to the Sovereignty or National dignity. He came here, we might say, to make sure that the Provisional Government is capable of guaranteeing the foreign interests."[57] Despite the paper's enthusiasm, its editors would ultimately be disappointed. The Dawson Agreements were but the first in a series of American-Nicaraguan compacts that limited the powers of the native government.

Inherent in the debate over recognizing the several Nicaraguan regimes was the question of sovereignty and what constituted an infringement of Nicaragua's independence. Despite State Department claims, the American interventions posed a serious threat and most certainly demonstrated a degree of disregard for Nicaragua's sovereign status. Smedley Butler wrote of the first intervention that "this government here really consists of an American Consul, two U.S.

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[56] *Foreign Relations*, 1909, 452.

[57] "Regarding American Intervention," *El Comercio*, November 19, 1910, p 4, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 13, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions and Telegrams from the Department 1911.*

Gunboats and 200 American Marines....The whole attitude of our State Department is beyond me, but of course I am simply a hired policemen [sic] and am not supposed to understand affairs of state. I can see...however, that were we not living in this town the revolution would be over in a few minutes."[58] The Nicaraguans themselves perceived that from this point forward, intervention and recognition would be twined together; the State Department would insist on a politician it approved of and who would not hinder the Americans' admittedly good intentions of restoring order. The Nicaraguan paper *El Comercio* noted this link early on in the Nicaraguan revolution, scathingly reporting that

> Madriz made all possible insinuations through his Agents, through Admiral Kimball, and finally through Doctors Modesto Barrios and Sebastian Salinas, in order to have his Government recognized by the American Government....If this does not mean a request for intervention under the sole condition that the Washington Government recognize that of Madriz, I do not know what other significance I should give it.[59]

Despite Madriz's failure to bargain compliance for recognition, it wasn't long before the State Department found an appropriate figure in General Estrada.

The degree to which the new Nicaraguan regime cooperated with the American occupiers can best be seen in the Presidency of Adolfo Diaz, Estrada's successor. In December of 1911, President Diaz "proposed to the United States the insertion of a clause in the Constitution then under discussion which would permit intervention by the United States in order to maintain peace and the existence of a lawful government. The Department of State refrained from expressing an opinion in regard to this proposal."[60] Ultimately, the State Department demurred, recognizing that this Nicaraguan version of the Platt Amendment imposed on Cuba was unnecessary. After all, the United States had thus far managed to intervene in Nicaragua's

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[58] Butler, *Letters*, 88.
[59] "Regarding American Intervention," *El Comercio*, p 3. NACP.
[60] U.S. Department of State, *The United States and Nicaragua: A Survey of the Relations, From 1909 to 1932* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 20.

internal affairs without suffering any particularly unpleasant consequences. Insisting on a formal clause of permission in the Nicaraguan constitution, however, would almost certainly spark a significant backlash and would have threatened Diaz's Presidency. That Díaz voluntarily introduced and supported the proposal would have ruined his authority and led once more to revolution, the very thing the State Department was keenest to avoid.

American recognition of Juan Estrada, the Liberal General who led the revolt against Zelaya, came almost immediately following his capture of Managua and the flight of Dr. Madriz. Secretary of State Knox attempted to put a democratic face on the military general, claiming that only "upon his inauguration, after election by the Constituent Assembly, the government of the United States recognized General Juan J. Estrada as President of Nicaragua."[61] For all of Knox's optimism, the decision to recognize Estrada was one of the State Department's greatest errors over the course of the intervention, both practically and from a legal perspective. General Estrada was not sufficiently powerful or politically savvy to hold his unusual Liberal-Conservative coalition together, nor could he control his own Cabinet. These problems virtually guaranteed that a new revolt would follow shortly. After all, Zelaya who had proven to be a tenacious ruler and adept at crushing resistance nevertheless faced challenges five times over his sixteen-year tenure.[62] Of far greater diplomatic consequence was the blatant disregard for the Washington Treaty of 1907 that recognition of Estrada demonstrated. Estrada had most certainly obtained power through a coup d'état, so that according to the Treaty, he was unequivocally ineligible for diplomatic recognition. While the United States was merely a guarantor and not actually a signatory of the peace treaty and thus under no legal obligation to abide by its terms, the

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[61] Philander Knox to Thomas Moffat, January 5, 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 13, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions and Telegrams from the Department 1911.*
[62] Zelaya, *Revolution*, 9.

Department's actions mortally undermined the Treaty and thus served to destabilize the region even further. In favor of pragmatic considerations, the State Department bestowed legitimacy on the Estrada regime, and then promptly attempted to extricate itself from the bothersome details of running all aspects of the country. Domestic political affairs were left in the hands of Estrada and his cabinet while the State Department turned its energies to rearranging the Nicaraguan economy.[63] Unfortunately for the Department's strategists, this proved to be a difficult endeavor; without constant guidance and direct support, the Estrada regime veered off in directions distinctly unpalatable to its American partners.

The State Department's means of influencing the domestic political situation in Nicaragua could be further used by the Nicaraguans themselves to force Department policy in an unanticipated direction. Following General Mena's attempt to seize power in 1911-1912, General Emiliano Chamorro argued that the State Department's authority and their occasional infringement on Nicaraguan sovereignty and their recognition of Estrada obligated them to openly support the government they had seen installed.[64] The Department did not provide sufficient support to protect Estrada, hoping that he could manage affairs without them. When Estrada proved unable to do so and was replaced by Díaz, the Department belatedly realized that Chamorro had been correct: an American-approved Nicaraguan government would have to receive tangible support. The Department hoped to do this through flogging the recognition horse once more, telegramming that "Mr. Mena must see that for his own interests Diaz's continuance is indispensable since Diaz is the constitutional President who has been recognized as such by

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[63] Langley, *Banana*, 180-182.

[64] Emiliano Chamorro to Philander Knox, 11 December 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, diplomatic posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 19, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions 1912.*

this Government."[65] Mena's machinations were a deeply unwelcome event for the Americans, who had vainly hoped President Estrada and then President Diaz would be able to hold the peace without obvious support from the American government. Until Mena broke out in open rebellion *and* threatened the lives and property of Americans, the State Department intended to remain as aloof as possible.

General Chamorro made this stance increasingly difficult by using the Dawson Agreement against the State Department, using his authority as the leader of the Conservative Party to influence the Department by implying that he could return to the country to personally cause trouble if they did not use any means necessary to restrain Mena-- coincidentally, one of Chamorro's greatest political opponents.[66] That Chamorro was in a position to make threats was of no doubt. A very shrewd State Department official, after conferring with Chamorro in January of 1912, concluded "that General Chamorro could, within a few day's [sic] notice, lead a very formidable revolution, I do not doubt, knowing as I do his tremendous popularity with the people of Nicaragua."[67] Chamorro got what he wanted; when Mena rebelled in 1912, in part because of political pressure placed on him by the then-present Chamorro, the American government immediately stepped in with troops.[68] Although the State Department insisted on maintaining a façade of neutrality, claiming they intended to act only to preserve the life and property of foreign nationals, it was concluded internally that President Diaz was the only acceptable

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[65] State Department telegram, June 2, 1911, Record Group 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Nicaragua, Volume 13, American Legation of Managua, Instructions and Telegrams from the Department 1911.
[66] Emiliano Chamorro to Philander Knox, December 11, 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of Foreign Service Posts, diplomatic posts, Nicaragua*, Volume 19, American Legation of Managua, *Instructions 1912.*
[67] Chamorro to Knox, December 11, 1911.
[68] State Department, *The United States and Nicaragua,* 20-21.

victor.[69] Marine commander Smedley Butler recalled, "I had by this time come to the conclusion that our Government wished to take sides with this Government against the rebels, but did not wish to say so out and out, was just waiting for someone to take the first step."[70] Accordingly, Butler gave the Department the outcome it desired.

With Mena's defeat, the Nicaraguan revolution was over for a time and the State Department could return to its preferred operating mode-- complete control over economic matters and discrete influence over political questions. This position was symbolized by the token guard of Marines left to watch over the American Legation in Managua. The marines were a warning that the United States would not tolerate further disruptions to its grand plan for Central American stability. The plan appeared to work, too, and in 1925 the Marine guard was completely withdrawn on the assumption that Nicaragua had been mastered.[71] This assumption would lead to a disaster even greater than the one following American recognition of President Estrada.

The State Department ultimately obtained a measure of success in their program in the first intervention. On closer analysis, however, this was a superficial victory and stability was a chimera. American diplomatic policy actually contributed to the political and social ills of Nicaragua, which would be temporarily suppressed due to the presence of a force of American Marines. Democracy had not been gifted upon the Nicaraguan people; in November of 1912, Nicaragua "enjoyed a 'fine [[fine free]] [sic] election,' only one candidate being permitted to run--President Adolfo Díaz--who was unanimously re-elected."[72] What little measure of success America had achieved was not gained through the State Department's use of diplomatic

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[69] Gunther to Secretary of State, January 8, 1911, NACP, Record Group 84, American Legation of Managua, *Records of Foreign Service Posts Despatches 1912*.
[70] Butler, *Letters*, 116.
[71] Kamman, *Stability*, 217.
[72] Butler, *Letters*, 129.

recognition. The Department's own official publication on the interventions admits that "despite his nonrecognition [sic] by the United States, Madriz not only managed to maintain his régime but drove the forces of General Estrada into Bluefields, where he besieged them," and only failed to destroy the rebel army due to the protections afforded them by the American creation of a neutral zone at Bluefields.[73] The inability to recognize that it was military interference, rather than the policy of diplomatic recognition, that proved critical in influencing events would again plague the State Department in 1925, when General Emiliano Chamorro challenged the established government.

Chapter Two: The Second Intervention, 1925-1928

General Chamorro had been among the most influential figures in Nicaragua long before the first American intervention, and he would continue to be one long after the last marine left in 1933. That Chamorro posed a challenge to the American-approved order was readily apparent; as one Major in the Marine Corps wryly observed in 1922, "Emiliano [Chamorro] is the stormy petrel of Central American politics and his presence in Washington is of great advantage to the Managuan government, an advantage derived, not from a satisfactory performance of duty...but from a peace of mind due solely to the absence of this particular person from the country."[74] In 1923 President Diego Chamorro threw all of his nephew's careful plots into disarray with a single act: he died.

General Emiliano Chamorro had been perfectly poised to assume the presidency after his uncle's tenure, as he who controlled the government controlled the ballot box and thus the

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[73]State Department, *Survey of Relations*, 8.
[74] John Marston, "Summary of Intelligence," June 30 1922, NADC, Record Group 127, n-59.55 Nicaragua, *Legations, foreign correspondence, misc.* box 26, entry 38.

outcome of the election. Even those elections nominally supervised by United States officials were not free of governmental influence.[75] With a little bit of nepotism, Emiliano Chamorro could use this fact to retain power while superficially obeying the Nicaraguan constitutional clause insisting that no President could serve consecutive terms. Unfortunately for Chamorro, Vice President Bartolomé Martínez belonged to a rival faction of the Conservative Party and used his new executive power to ruin Chamorro's chances for the 1925 presidential election. Martínez formed a coalition with several prominent members of the Liberal Party and used his office to support a mixed ticket of Carlos Solórzano, a Conservative, and Dr. Juan Sacasa, a Liberal. The pair was elected and Solórzano inaugurated as President on January 1, 1925. The United States Marine Legation Guard was finally withdrawn from Nicaragua on August 3, 1925 while the State Department declared its efforts a success and Nicaragua at peace under a constitutional government.[76] At the time, State Department officials could not have anticipated that marines would once again be in Nicaragua less than a year later.

The State Department was quickly to learn that its belief in having created a stable democracy in Nicaragua was dangerously deceptive, as "peace [only] reigned in Nicaragua for three weeks, four days and thirteen hours after the marines departed."[77] The State Department had not, after all, solved the systemic ills of the political system, and had merely controlled their expression through the Marine occupation. The second American intervention in Nicaragua would end in a spectacular failure, with American marines ignominiously abandoning the country to the guerilla leader Sandino, and the State Department disavowing responsibility for any American lives and property remaining in the country. The State Department suffered from many of the same difficulties experienced in the first intervention: personnel problems expanded

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[75] Kamman, *Stability*, 29.
[76] Ibid., 217.
[77] Denny, *Dollars*, 203.

to incorporate the various armed forces, access to accurate information remained poor, and the tendency to underrate the Nicaraguans themselves proved even more catastrophic.

Personnel remained less than entirely reliable. Chamorro himself leveled charges against Dennis,[78] while the State Department fought with the Navy over special titles granted to Admiral Sellars and General Feland.[79] Communication was, as in the previous intervention, problematic, to the point that in some cases American officials were unaware of the landing of Marines.[80] The State Department continued to clash with the strong personalities leading Nicaragua. The colorful reporter Carleton Beals's criticism of the State Department's policies was that

> while devising and enforcing schemes for honest democratic elections, he [the State Department] is telling you that the only salvation for Mexico or Nicaragua is a good dictator. But he soon quarrels with the strong, wise and crooked men capable of becoming dictators (as did General McCoy with Emiliano Chamorro), because they cleverly block his own freedom of action, and turns to weaker sycophants like Adolfo Díaz, or Cuadro Pasos, or Moncada.[81]

There is a certain amount of truth in Beals's analysis. Until an adequate electoral code could be drafted, implemented, and accepted to the extent that the general populace would not permit transgressions against it, a powerful leader with a pro-American agenda was needed. Unfortunately, those like Chamorro who had the power to hold the country together without foreign intervention were disinclined to heed American mandates. Eventually, the State Department would find its tolerable dictator in Anastasio Somoza, who was placed in charge of the Nicaraguan National Guard just prior to American withdrawal from Nicaragua. At the time of the dispute with Chamorro, however, Somoza remained a relative unknown.

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[78] Emiliano Chamorro, *El Último Caudillo: Autobiografía* (Managua: Ediciones del Partido Conservador Demócrata, 1983), 327, 331.

[79] *Foreign Relations*, 1929, 642-647.

[80] Dennis to State Department, August 30, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

[81] Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932), 295.

As in the first intervention the State Department's use of the policy of recognition itself constituted an infringement on Nicaraguan national sovereignty, and aided the Department in compounding its control over the country. Had the infringement been the precursor to a more absolute control, or committed with baldly ambitious intent, the situation in Nicaragua might well have been clearer and caused less strife. The State Department, however, pursued its policy out of an apparently genuine desire to improve that state of affairs in Nicaragua, and to do so through whatever methods it thought appropriate. American reporter Carleton Beals observed that, "ironically, there is a curious resemblance between the thought processes of the American Communist and the American Imperialist. Both move in a world of unreality….Both are dogmatic, earnest, sincere, sentimental. Both believe in the implantation of an ideal upon people by force."[82] Beals's commentary was particularly cutting at the time because of the State Department's concern over socialist-leaning Mexico's involvement in Nicaragua. While these two groups would certainly have been aghast at hearing they had traits in common, Beals's remark captured the State Department's approach with exquisite perception. On paper, a policy of limited intervention seemed appropriate. Nicaragua could retain most of its sovereignty and national functions, with the State Department intervening only on occasions when events began to veer off in an unacceptable direction. In the Department's opinion,

> as long as the people of Central America feel that the "last word" comes from the Department the attainment of political stability will be postponed; the sooner there is created among the citizens of Central American countries a feeling of responsibility which shall give rise to the realization that they themselves must work out their own destiny the sooner will orderly government develop in those countries.[83]

Such an explanation for the State Department's ambivalent interference sounds high-minded.

Nevertheless, in practicality it constituted a serious threat to Nicaraguan sovereignty while

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[82] Beals, *Banana Gold*, 294.
[83] *Foreign Relations*, 1925, 645.

complicating domestic politics in a way that would not have occurred under total intervention. Nicaragua was expected to decide for itself what form its governmental regime would take, and "the United States would then decide, in view of the 1923 treaties of Washington, whether *de jure* recognition could be extended to that regime."[84] This gave the ultimate power of endowing legitimacy not to the Nicaraguan people or to their Congress, but to the American State Department. In the event that the Department declined to grant recognition, any opportunistic leader could step forward and attempt to violently reconstitute a government that would pass muster.

As the second intervention drew out, American infringement of this sort broadened, progressing from diplomatic recognition to passing judgment on the Nicaraguan Constitution. It would peak under President Moncada from 1930-1932, as the President attempted to craft a new Constitution that would favor his party and the perpetuation of his power. The State Department policy was that "while the question of the amendment of the constitution is an old one to be determined by the proper Nicaraguan authorities…this Government always deprecates the adoption of constitutional amendments which extend the term of officials at the time in office."[85] Moncada was quick to decry the unworkable contradiction of the State Department's position, writing with frustration that the Department could not order the Nicaraguans to solve the problem on their own and then expect to still be able to control the final product.[86] State Department control also extended to regulating foreign policy, to the extent that offers for aid following the massive earthquake that devastated Managua in 1931 were met with responses such as "President Moncada will accept the tender of good offices [of El Salvador and

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[84] State Department, *Survey*, 63.
[85] *Foreign Relations*, 1930, 697.
[86] *Foreign Relations*, 1932, 784.

Guatemala] provided the Government of the United States is in complete accord."[87] This infringement on national sovereignty was not a new strategy by any means, but it was practiced with greater fervency in the second intervention. As events began to deteriorate in 1931-1932, intervention peaked, before vanishing with the marines in 1933.

The only truly new element in the second Nicaraguan intervention was red hysteria, a fear caused by Mexico's involvement in arming the Liberal rebels. This element was partly responsible for the difference in intervention outcomes for the Americans. When the State Department decided to take advantage of the Nicaraguan civil war to unseat the dictator Zelaya, the leader of the revolution was an acceptable candidate for the new presidency and could be safely supported. In the second intervention, the State Department resolved that Chamorro must be removed, but could not safely support his chief contender, the former vice-president Sacasa, because Sacasa was receiving aid from Mexico. Mexico's support of Sacasa raised fears that if the doctor returned to power, he might take Nicaragua in a communist direction.[88] This conundrum effectively tied the State Department's hands with respect to using the policy of diplomatic recognition to avoid using force. Chamorro had been warned repeatedly and in no uncertain terms that he would be barred from recognition, and the State Department could not back away from its ultimatum without losing significant authority. Sacasa, on the other hand, was hardly acceptable either, despite possessing a more legitimate if still questionable claim to power.[89] When he traveled to Washington DC in an attempt to garner support, he was informed that the United States

> would never recognize the de facto Chamorro regime. At the same time, it [the Department] pointed out that in the 1923 treaties signed at Washington, there was no provision compelling the signatories to intervene to depose the *de facto* authorities in

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[87] *Foreign Relations*, 1931, 806.
[88] Kamman, *Stability*, 186.
[89] Munro, *US and Caribbean*, 248.

> favor of the *de jure*; and that the United States would not look with sympathy on the resort to arms to bring about a constitutional regime.[90]

The State Department was stymied, unable to see its way to supporting either Chamorro or Sacasa. This reduced the Department's policy from one of limited intervention to one of complete inefficacy for a period of nearly a year, while the Department attempted to find a solution that did not involve the Marines.

The State Department's fear of encroaching communism was not groundless, although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent it was justified. The United States itself played a role in increasing the hysteria, as American marines noticed some Nicaraguan rebels using Russian rifles. This did not actually portend Soviet Union involvement. Rather, it appears the rifles were Russian models produced in the United States for use by the White Partisans in the Russian Revolution, and failing to arrive in time, were then sold to Mexico who shipped them to Nicaragua.[91] The Nicaraguan government was the primary agent in fanning the State Department's fears of an incipient communist takeover. In one meeting between Díaz's men and the Americans, the

> Government ministers replied they understood the United States was determined not to make armed intervention under any circumstances, hence Mexican aid to the revolution would continue unchecked. They therefore only saw the alternatives of surrender to Mexico or a fight to the finish....Any foreign intervention ultimately provoked by resort to drastic measures would be preferable to Mexican domination.[92]

The ministers most likely were not as apprehensive as they acted in front of the American officials. Mexico's support of the revolutionists was sincere but could hardly compare to the aid

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[90] State Department, *Survey of Relations*, 59.
[91] Beals, *Banana Gold*, 268.
[92] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 285.

the Americans offered Diaz. Ideologically, Communist influence in Nicaragua was minimal, and as late as 1935 there was no Communist Party in Nicaragua.[93]

Despite this fact, President Coolidge was convinced of the depth of Mexican involvement, announcing to Congress that "I have the most conclusive evidence that arms and munitions in large quantities have been…shipped to the revolutionists in Nicaragua."[94] Not all Americans agreed with the President, however. One unashamedly Conservative Nicaraguan paper was so enthusiastic in denouncing the Liberal rebels and communists as "villainous robbers and land pirates [consisting] of the lower classes, all of them being ravenous, starved, and unemployed, and always ready for any revolt in which they could satisfy their inordinate desires," that the American agent submitting the report to the Department felt obliged to qualify the article's accusations.[95]

Largely due to Mexico's support and a desire to avoid committing troops, the State Department remained obdurate in refusing Sacasa recognition. The Department even went to the awkward length of refusing to deal with his designated representatives, as "this raised a rather intricate question; that of course the United States Government did not recognize Dr. Sacasa as the Constitutional President of Nicaragua and therefore could not recognize any consuls appointed by him."[96] Sacasa was denied recognition primarily on the grounds that the United States was unwilling to chance his successful revolution. Out loud, however, American

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[93] Robert J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America* (New Brunswick, N.J.,: Rutgers University Press, 1957).
[94] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 295.
[95] "Political Incidents," *La Informacion*, June 3 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.
[96] "Nicaraguan Situation," State Department, May 12 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

reluctance was justified with the claim that if anyone was to be restored to power, it rightly should be former-President Solórzano, not Sacasa.[97]

Mexico was not the only foreign nation to exert a degree of influence on the situation. The State Department was also directly petitioned to act decisively by the British, Belgian, and Italian governments, and in February 1927 the British, unsatisfied with American efforts, even deployed a Man of War to the Nicaraguan coast for a brief time.[98] Consul McConnico was even asked by members of the Chinese community in Nicaragua to appeal to the Chinese minister in Washington and to "Please use your best efforts with the American Government to obtain protection of life and property of our colony during the present revolutionary movement."[99] This pressure contributed to the decision to intervene militarily, as the British protests and actions in particular could have escalated into a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. The interference of other foreign powers is even cited as one of President Díaz's justifications for an American-Nicaraguan alliance in 1927. Díaz believed that "Nicaragua needed such a treaty with the United States to save itself from Mexico. Reference was also made to the representatives of foreign consuls in Managua and particularly to the arrival of the British war vessel to protect British subjects."[100] As important a factor as foreign pressure was, it nevertheless played less of a role in State Department policy than the factors that had determined American involvement in the first Nicaraguan intervention.

As with the first intervention, American justifications revolved around the protection of American life and property. In his message to Congress on January 10, 1927, President Coolidge

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[97] Henry Stimson, *Henry Stimson's American Policy in Nicaragua* (New York: Marcus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1927), 13.
[98] Ibid., 15.
[99] McConnico to Secretary of State, August 23, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.
[100] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 477.

justified armed intervention with thoughts so similar to those expressed in the first intervention that they could almost have been lifted from Secretary of State Knox's letter severing diplomatic relations in 1909. Coolidge explained that American involvement was necessary to protect American lives and property, to safeguard America's strategic interests regarding a Nicaraguan canal, and that intervention was proper under the authority of the Treaty of General Peace and Amity.[101] Charles Evans Hughes also emphasized the importance of protecting American interests abroad, at the Pan-American Conference in 1928 where he argued that

> Much has been said of late with regard to Nicaragua. There sits the Foreign Minister of Nicaragua... He can tell you the situation in Nicaragua and I can tell you that we desire nothing more than the independence and peace of his country and that we are there simply to aid them in obtaining free elections, in order that they may have a sovereign and independent government.[102]

Nicaragua could not be left to its own devices, and the United States could not be faulted for intervening, because "the rights of nations remain, but nations have duties as well as rights," duties which included first and foremost the protection of foreign nationals and their property.[103]

As in the revolutions of 1909 and 1912, Nicaraguan contenders for power readily recognized the protection a regime afforded foreign nationals as a driving force in the decision to grant or withhold diplomatic recognition. Sacasa was no exception, and upon returning to Nicaragua after unsuccessfully appealing to the United States for aid, he "declared himself the Constitutional President of Nicaragua... [and announced] His immediate object will be to protect foreign interests..."[104] Sacasa also ordered his generals to exhibit a similar concern for foreign rights and property, to the extent that General Sandoval even warned the American Consul at Bluefields of his pending attack on the city. His brief telegram warned that "I am going to

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[101] *Foreign Relations*, 1929, 288-289.
[102] Burr and Hussey, *Cooperation*, 91.
[103] Ibid., 91.
[104] McConnico to Secretary of State, December 3, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

bombard [the Bluff at Bluefields] at the end of forty-eight hours I am giving guarantees to foreign lives and interests."[105] In this manner, guarantees to foreigners became so important that they were considered vital for the conduct of warfare as well as necessary for any hope of diplomatic recognition. Chamorro's supporters were similarly cognizant of the link between guarantees for foreigners and diplomatic legitimacy. One paper attempted to bolster his credit by proclaiming "the government presided over by the eminent general, Emiliano Chamorro… had complied with all its international obligations and gave justice to all its inhabitants, natives and foreigners."[106]

In order to protect American interests, the State Department needed to assure that a friendly government controlled Nicaragua. Initially, the Department attempted to use diplomatic recognition, withheld according to the language of the 1923 Treaty of General Peace and Amity, in order to ensure that such a government remained in power. The 1923 Treaties that replaced the 1907 Washington Treaties were virtually the same in language and character, and were used in the same manner as their predecessors had been. According to the reporter Carleton Beals,

> We invoked the Washington treaties of 1923 against Carías; but in Nicaragua permitted the leader of a national revolt, José María Moncada, to become president, while Emiliano Chamorro, with whom we had a quarrel, and who had also staged a coup d'état, was not even permitted to run. Theoretically we have a set policy in Central America--'no government established by force will be permitted.' Actually our policy has been dominated by ignorance, opportunism, or self-interest--usually the last.[107]

Beals may have ascribed an overabundance of ill intentions to the State Department, but his analysis of the inconsistent application on the treaties is quite accurate. The State Department's

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[105] Sandoval to McConnico, August 27, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800. Translated from Spanish: "voy a bombardearlo dando de termino cuarenta y ocho horas yo estoy dando garantias a vidas y intereses extranjeros."

[106] "Political Incidents," *La Informacion*, June 3 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

[107] Beals, *Banana Gold*, 123.

vehement outcries in the name of the Treaty of Peace and General Amity could not have been more strident in 1925 and the early part of 1926, then vanished almost completely as Moncada conducted his presidential election campaign.

American use of the Treaty of General Peace and Amity was already becoming problematic, and the State Department could no longer compel all of the Central American republics to accept its ruling on the constitutionality of a given regime. President Díaz was promptly recognized by only Honduras and El Salvador, while Guatemala initially granted recognition and later retracted it and Costa Rica never granted recognition at all.[108] In addition to disagreements over recognition, the State Department was unable to control events in the region on a larger scale. Nicaragua became embroiled in border disputes with Guatemala, Colombia, and Honduras.[109] The State Department was also unable to prevent significant arms smuggling from Costa Rica and to an even greater extent Honduras.[110] These incidents represented some hope in that they did not escalate into the sort of wars that might have been expected only a few decades earlier. They also demonstrated that the region was not nearly as settled as the State Department might wish and that Nicaragua continued to play a significant role in the unrest-despite being under American occupation at the time of each dispute.

Ultimately, the decision to grant or withhold diplomatic recognition had virtually nothing to do with the Treaties of General Peace and Amity of 1907 and 1923, which is quite disconcerting given the frequency with which the treaties were called upon at the beginning of each intervention. Had the United States been using this international framework as the sole determinant in its equation for diplomatic recognition, it could not have recognized Estrada in 1910, Moncada in 1929, and Sacasa in 1933. The Treaty of 1923 unquestionably stated that a

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[108] State Department, *Survey of Relations*, 65.
[109] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 469; *Foreign Relations*, 1928, 559; *Foreign Relations*, 1930, 709.
[110] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 308; *Foreign Relations*, 1931, 830-831; *Foreign Relations*, 1932, 926-939.

candidate was barred from the Presidency "if he should be the leader, or one of the leaders of a coup or revolution."[111] The most important factors in determining diplomatic recognition were in fact a candidate's apparent ability to protect American interests, property, and lives, and a demonstrated ability to cooperate with the State Department.

Chamorro certainly desired American recognition. As Minister Eberhardt reported he "continues to profess unwillingness to set up a government which might fail recognition of the United States…he repeatedly asks me to recommend a solution of the local problems which might prove satisfactory to the Department."[112] Although he seemed to have made a sincere attempt to work with the American Legation to achieve recognition, a certainty of recognition was not a decisive factor in Chamorro's actions. Historian Dana Munro attempted to argue that the use of diplomatic recognition was a significant factor in events in Nicaragua, briefly acknowledging that critics of American adherence to the treaty of 1923 claimed it passed moral judgment on new governments, discouraged justifiable revolutions, and could weaken legitimately representative governments. He continued to add, "on the other hand, many of those who have closely observed day by day political developments in the less stable Central American countries consider it unquestionable that fear of non-recognition by the United States has often deterred political leaders from starting revolts which had as their only incentive a desire for office and personal gain."[113] Munro then abandoned the subject of diplomatic recognition. His view is completely consistent with that of the 1920s State Department, for which Munro worked and upon which he depended for much of his information. Munro' account, and by extension, the State Department's, was an overly optimistic interpretation of the policy's consequences and entirely fails to account for Chamorro's actions. As Eberhardt himself noted repeatedly,

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[111] *Foreign Relations*, 1927, 289.
[112] *Foreign Relations*, 1925, 644.
[113] Munro, *The United States and the Caribbean Area*, 213.

Chamorro was warned multiple times and by several different authorities that he would not receive diplomatic recognition if he proceeded with his plans. The State Department "hoped that this categoric[sic] statement made both here and in Managua may prove effective in preventing his taking this step."[114] One of the overwhelming features noticeable in State Department records of Chamorro's rise is the obvious emphasis on warning Chamorro of the consequences of his intended actions. Official telegrams were full of statements such as "I have been in communication with General Chamorro and have advised him that this Legation had no other course to pursue than to support the Constitutional Government and that any government assuming power by force would not be recognized by the Government of the United States."[115] Such a pronounced emphasis, both in State Department historiography and in the original documents themselves, seems intentional, as a way of disowning responsibility for the probable disaster to come.[116] It is clear that the State Department could anticipate disaster in the form of Chamorro's likely disobedience, but was at a loss as to how to prevent it.

The strident chorus warning Chamorro not to enact his plans held no real weight with the would-be dictator. As Eberhardt noted just days before Chamorro's inauguration, "contending that he alone can dominate the present situation in Nicaragua and reasserting his determination to conduct such a government that the United States will be forced to recognize him, only an eleventh-hour change can prevent Chamorro from carrying out his expressed plans of 'assuming the Presidency'…and thus forcing nonrecognition [sic]."[117] Chamorro believed that ultimately the American aim of expediency and pragmatism would carry the day; in essence, by holding the power and imposing his control on the country, he would re-establish peace and stability and in

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[114] *Foreign Relations*, 1926, 781.
[115] *Foreign Relations*, 1925, 639.
[116] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 16; State Department, *Survey of Relations*, 55-61.
[117] *Foreign Relations*, 1926, 782-3.

doing so protect foreign nationals, fulfilling America's professed goals. In this way, he could 'force' the Americans to recognize his regime. The recent history of American diplomacy with Nicaragua certainly made this a plausible supposition. Chamorro was reported as once saying he went ahead with his plans because "I didn't think they meant it....They had taken the marines away. What was I to think?"[118] In the end, it was the presence of armed American forces that Chamorro considered most significant. He had learned in the first intervention and the revolution against Zelaya that the United States Marines could prove the salvation of a rebel army and the doom of the central authority.

Shortly after Chamorro's coup, a small number of Marines again landed along coastal Nicaragua. Secretary of State Kellogg issued strict orders that "neither Liberal forces nor Chamorro forces should be hindered in their military operations except so far as may be necessary to assure protection of American lives and property."[119] In practice, this policy was agreeable to no one: military commanders complained of partisanship, the marines complained of having their hands tied, and American nationals living in Nicaragua wailed that they were not being given sufficient protection. The minimal intervention did not ruffle Chamorro, who cheekily told Dennis, the interim American Chargé d'Affaires in Managua, that "he had made up his mind to maintain his position against all Nicaraguans but would welcome intervention by American forces to whom he would cheerfully turn over government".[120] In other words, Chamorro remained resolute in the face of non-recognition, knowing that the State Department would be highly reluctant to resort to armed force to displace him. The possibility of a major infusion of American troops was the critical threat, from Chamorro's perspective, and would be the only American action capable of swaying him.

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[118] Denny, *Dollars*, 218.
[119] *Foreign Relations*, 1926, 787.
[120] *Foreign Relations*, 1926, 790.

The policy of diplomatic non-recognition was almost entirely ineffectual. Following Chamorro's coup, some revelers "were free in their denunciations because of the refusal of recognition, their constant refrain being: 'To Hell with the United States.'"[121] Chamorro himself seemed unperturbed. The Liberal revolution was almost certain to have occurred regardless of whether recognition was granted or not, as the Liberals were preparing to revolt while Solorzano was still nominally in control, leading an American observer to report that "Managua is quiet tonight but there is every indication that revolution must develop as soon as the Liberals can arm themselves."[122] The State Department eventually recognized the inefficacy of its attempts to influence Chamorro through diplomatic policy alone. As Consul Dennis reported, "He [Chamorro] remains obdurate to my repeated arguments against further useless bloodshed and economic ruin of the country in suppression movements likely to recur as long as his unconstitutional and arbitrary rule continues."[123] Chamorro's chances for success remained relatively high despite American diplomatic opposition. As one Conservative newspaper crowed, "we are convinced that as long as General Chamorro is at the head of the Conservative party the Liberal party cannot overcome it. Current history tells us in indelible characters that all those who have raised their hands against General Chamorro have fallen and withered."[124] Unfortunately for the General, there remained one possible occurrence that could destroy his power base and topple him from leadership, one which had nothing to do with American interference: a split in the Conservative Party itself.

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[121] "Political Incidents," State Department, January 29, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.
[122] *Foreign Relations*, 1925, 640.
[123] Dennis to American Consul, September 2, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.
[124] "Political Incidents," *La Informacion*, June 3 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

Henry Stimson proudly stated that "during the entire period of Chamorro's incumbency our government never ceased its moral pressure to induce him to withdraw," and lauded State Department pressure for bringing Chamorro to the negotiating table.[125] Chamorro, however, did not credit his decision to step down in favor of the Congress's *designado* to the American policy of non-recognition. Instead, he would have continued fighting "certain of the triumph of the Conservative arms, if there had not been in the heart of the same Conservative Party a rising wave of strong opposition to my continuance in power and it was this opposition that I feared would cause a profound division in the Party."[126] Chamorro resigned due to division within his own party, predominantly caused by his power struggle with Cuadra Dos Pasos, not pressure from abroad.

Following Chamorro's retreat, the State Department was in an even greater policy quandary: the Congress's *designado*, Señor Uriza, was no more constitutionally elected than Chamorro, and had even less of a chance of holding the country together. He was thus entirely inappropriate for both of the State Department's purposes. The State Department could not choose to recognize Vice President Sacasa and the Liberal rebels, however, because such recognition would have implied an agreement to support them with arms. The Liberal contestants had also committed a sin as grave as any of Chamorro's in the eyes of the State Department by receiving aid, and formal diplomatic recognition, from Mexico. Fear of Bolshevik influence led Dennis to conclude that the Liberals were no good and that "in order to bring about peace and to avert disaster, we must smash the doctrine of constitutional restoration by means of foreign aid to

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[125] Stimson, *Nicaragua,* 10.

[126] Chamorro, *Autobiografía*, 331. Translated from original text: "...seguro del triunfo de las armas conservadoras, si no hubiera sido que del seno del mismo Partido Conservador se estaba levantando una ola de fuerte oposición a mi continuación en el poder y fue esta oposición la que yo temí cuasara una profunda division en el Partido."

revolution, once and for all".[127] The irony that this was precisely what the United States had done in the first Nicaraguan intervention seems to have escaped Dennis.

In the State Department's opinion, Díaz was the only acceptable answer to the now seemingly endless nightmare of intervention in Nicaragua. Díaz had previously proven himself compliant with the Department, even willing to sacrifice Nicaraguan interests for American, and was pleasantly free from personal ambition.[128] Adolfo Díaz's 'election' was rewarded with almost immediate diplomatic recognition.[129] The swift response approving of Díaz's succession gives some indication of how vital the State Department considered Díaz. American interference, however, was not particularly welcomed by the Nicaraguans themselves. Chamorro had been a wildly popular figure in many regions, whereas Díaz was largely perceived as an American flunky whose inauguration

> was not received with any indications of good will or enthusiasm. Silence prevailed as in cases of deep gloom and sorrow, and such undertoned [sic] comments as could be heard were of a derogatory nature. This was in marked contrast to the receipt of the news of General Emiliano Chamorro's accession to power.[130]

In addition to, and perhaps even because of his unpopularity, Díaz fared even worse against the rebels than had Chamorro, and the State Department feared even greater disorder ahead.

Dennis and Eberhardt had proven unable to negotiate a solution, so in desperation the State Department appealed to a new master diplomat for a resolution: Henry Stimson. Stimson was endowed with special plenipotentiary powers and sent to arbitrate an agreement in the Nicaraguan town of Tipitapa. As it had in 1911, the United States found itself defending the

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[127] *Foreign Relations*, 1926, 797.
[128] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 27-28.
[129] Ertz to American Consul, November 15, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.
[130] McConnico to Secretary of State, December 3, 1926, NACP, Record Group 84, *Records of the Foreign Posts of the United States*, Consular Posts: Bluefields, Nicaragua, Volume 77, File Number 800.

dubious legality of a President who was the Americans' greatest supporter.[131] According to Stimson, no other neutral candidate was possible, and all other potentials had ulterior motives unacceptable to the United States.[132] Stimson's analysis of the negotiations at Tipitapa failed to encompass all of the nuances of the situation. Stimson, after all, was famous for being unable to even pronounce 'Nicaragua,' and certainly was unfamiliar with its internal affairs prior to his deployment, as he was not an active member of the government or the State Department at the time.[133] Anastasio Somoza, however, wrote glowingly of Henry Stimson at Tipitapa, portraying the Americans as the grand guarantors of democracy before devoting the rest of his book to denouncing Sandino.[134] Stimson was equally impressed with Somoza, who served as his interpreter at Tipitapa and would eventually become Nicaragua's dictator.[135]

Stimson recognized that a political solution must involve the now partisan Nicaraguan army and attempted to craft his agreement with General Moncada, the leader of Sacasa's forces in the field. Fortunately, while it appeared imperative that Díaz retain control of the political apparatus, Stimson concluded that General Moncada was a man he could work with. According to Stimson,

> Moncada represented the vital force of the revolution....For many years he had been an outstanding figure in Nicaragua both as a soldier and as a man of letters....He had been a friend to United States influence in Central America, and now, as a man of fifty-six, he

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[131] There is an uncanny echo between the justifications for preserving Díaz in 1911 and in 1927. Compare Stimson's language in his book (pp. 27-28) with the January 8, 1911 missive from Gunther to the Secretary of State, NACP, Record Group 84, American Legation of Managua, *Records of Foreign Service Posts Despatches 1912.*

[132] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 27-28.

[133] Langley, *Banana Wars*, 192, 218.

[134] Anastasio Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino: O, El Calvario de Las Segovias*, Managua: Edit. y Lito. San José, 1976, 25-32. '*The Real Sandino*' provides some interesting comments on the American occupation but very little of value on Sandino himself. The work is understandably biased, as Somoza would be the one to order Sandino's assassination following the withdrawal of American troops.

[135] Langley, *Banana Wars*, 192, 218; Kamman, *Stability*, 107.

had won the respect of all military observers by conducting this difficult campaign at the head of his troops.[136]

Stimson decided to circumvent the difficult political figures, most notably Sacasa himself, and deal directly with Moncada. He announced that "we don't want anything to do with the politicians of Puerto Cabezas, who have dedicated themselves solely to attacking the [American] State Department. Therefore, it is the Army that will have the last word," and proceeded to negotiate the surrender of Moncada's troops.[137] In exchange, the United States guaranteed free and fair elections, with the tacit understanding that Moncada should be allowed to run despite the blatant disregard such a turn of events demonstrated for the 1923 Treaty of General Peace and Amity. In a matter of days, the Liberal-Conservative conflict was resolved, producing the Tipitapa Agreements, and Stimson returned to America to a hero's welcome and the certainty that he had accomplished his mission.[138] Stimson's confidence, however, was to prove unfounded. While the State Department's role in destabilizing events through its policy of recognition was finished, Nicaragua's troubles in general were far from over.

Conclusion

By the close of the 1920s, the State Department had already begun a slow but definite withdrawal from the affairs of Nicaragua. The Department occasionally intervened in the country's political apparatus, but mostly confined its attention to Nicaragua's economy. By 1931, the State Department was ready to abandon its failed intervention, and began to withdraw

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[136] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 31.

[137] Somoza, *Sandino*, 25. Translated from Spanish: "no queremos nada con los políticos de Puerto Cabezas, los cuales se dedicaron únicamente a atacar al Departamento de Esado. Por conseguiente, es el Ejército el llamado a pronunciar la última palabra."

[138] Stimson, *Nicaragua*, 29-31.

the Marines.[139] This effort was complicated by the devastating 1931 Managua earthquake, which proved catastrophic not only for the people of Nicaragua, but for historians of the period, as the "Legation [went up] in flames. All archives etc. [were] lost."[140] While attempting to restore order to the stricken city, the Marines were engaged once again by the forces of one Augusto Sandino.[141]

Sandino was, in many ways, Henry Stimson's creation. Following Moncada's agreement with Stimson at Tipitapa, the rebel Liberal forces all surrendered their weapons-- with the exception of Sandino, who believed that in negotiating with the Americans Moncada had betrayed Sacasa. Sandino then launched a fierce guerilla campaign from the Northern mountains of Nicaragua, harrying the Marines until their withdrawal in 1933.[142] As Sandino once wrote to Admiral Lattimer, he believed that

> The only way to put an end to this struggle is the immediate withdrawal of the invading forces of our territory, at the same time replacing the present President by one who is a Nicaraguan citizen and who is not running as a candidate for Presidency, and supervising the coming elections by representatives of Latin America instead of by American Marines.[143]

Sandino eventually won most of what he wanted: the Americans withdrew, and Moncada was replaced by Sacasa at the next election. Unfortunately, the rebel had cultivated a little too much success and popularity with his defiance of the State Department and Navy. He was assassinated on the order of General Anastasio Somoza, the man chosen to command the American-trained Constabulary.[144] In short order, Somoza forced President Sacasa out of power, leaving him once

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[139] Kamman, *Stability*, 217.
[140] *Foreign Relations*, 1931, 783.
[141] For an excellent biography of Sandino, see Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967).
[142] For a detailed study of the Marine clashes with Sandino, see Keith Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2001.
[143] *Foreign Relations*, 1928, 569.
[144] Langley, *Banana*, 219.

again bereft of his government post.[145] Somoza assumed a dictatorship that would rest with his family until 1979.

Ultimately, the application of diplomatic recognition of Nicaragua from 1909-1928 demonstrated that the seeds for the intervention's failure lay in the State Department's policies themselves. Unlike previous scholars have suggested, this failure was not primarily due to State Department condescension and paternalism, a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the nature of Nicaraguan politics, or because Nicaragua simply was not ready for stable democratic government.[146] Instead, the State Department's undoing was contained within its own contradictory policies. The State Department's unequal adherence to the Treaties of 1907 and 1923 created instability that nullified any benefits garnered from having a pro-American government installed in Managua. General Chamorro's coup in particular, which incited the revolution that necessitated the second intervention, was a direct result of the Department's contradictory application of recognition. Because the Department had recognized revolutionary Nicaraguans previously when assured those Nicaraguans would protect American interests, Chamorro believed that he, too, could overcome moralistic objections and secure recognition. In addition to causing grave misunderstandings through its aberrant applications of the Washington Treaties, thus encouraging revolution when this was the last thing intended, the State Department was also bedeviled by its own inability to ensure competent personnel in the field and to obtain accurate information.

Paralleling the abandonment of interest in manipulating Nicaragua through diplomatic recognition, the State Department no longer strove to ensure the safety of American citizens in Nicaragua. In April 1931, Secretary of State Stimson ordered Consul Hanna to "advise American

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[145] Dr. Juan B. Sacasa, *Cómo y Por Qué Cai del Poder* (San Salvador: Talleres Gráficos Cisneros, 1936).
[146] Langley, *Banana Wars*, 222-223; Kamman, *Stability*, 232-234.

citizens that this Government cannot undertake general protection of Americans throughout that country with American forces....Those who remain do so at their own risk and must not expect American forces to be sent inland to their aid."[147] This order dramatically represented the State Department's decision to turn away from its failed intervention in Nicaragua. American citizens, correctly perceiving the State Department in retreat, abandoned Nicaragua in droves, often evacuating alongside the Marines, as the denizens of Puerto Cabezas did.[148]

The State Department's use of diplomatic recognition certainly infringed on Nicaraguan sovereignty, forcing contenders for legitimacy to proffer promises of protection for foreign lives and property. The inconsistent application of the policy, however, and the uncertainty caused by it allowed several proactive Nicaraguans to exploit the situation in the second intervention. Their abilities to take the opportunities in sight and turn them to their benefit are every bit as striking, and every bit as important, as the State Department's abuse of Nicaraguan independence.

Finally, the story of the American intervention in Nicaragua from 1909-1933 gives some credence to the notion that history repeats itself. In the late 1970s, Americans would once again become embroiled in a recognition debate, a Somoza on one side, Sandinistas on the other, and at the forefront, a Chamorro. Of course, some things do change--this time, it was *Violeta* Chamorro, who would become the first female President elected in Latin America.

The sheer persistence of the Nicaraguan people and their determination to control their country should, therefore, always be considered when forming State Department policy. America's policy failures in Nicaragua in the early twentieth century were not unavoidable from the onset, but were rather the products of the State Department's policies and its methods for implementing them. This new perspective can, hopefully, improve Nicaraguan-United States

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[147] *Foreign Relations*, 1931, 808.
[148] Ibid., 808-9.

relations by removing the Nicaraguans from a junior, ineffective role and instead recognizing their proper sovereignty and agency while prompting the United States to review the way it conducts diplomacy.

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