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The Costs of US Interventions in Central America: Past and Present

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The Costs of US Interventions in Central America: Past and Present

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation in the Honors College

By

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to establish a link between past interventions carried out by various branches of the United States military into Central America and the unfavorable conditions in which millions of people find themselves living in today. Ironically, while American values such as self determination and democracy are preached by the international elite, financial interests have systematically stood in the way of these developments in Central American societies throughout most of their shared history. Following a brief introduction laying out key turning points in the development of the relationships which the United States has enjoyed with Latin American countries, I go on to examine the historical background of the Nicaraguan Revolution and the subsequent Contra War. The next section emphasizes the contemporary situation in Honduras following the 2009 coup d'état of democratically elected President José Manuel Zelaya, while also emphasizing the historical basis for the motivation of the coup.

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1- Introduction

In international relations, the behaviors of state actors are most commonly determined by preexisting norms and precedents. Leaders of wealthy and impoverished nations alike inherit relationships with other countries from their predecessors, and world leaders typically work to ensure stability through the maintenance of these relationships. Acting in a nation's best interest by developing alliances often ensures stability as a result, and interactions with other world leaders give heads of state legitimacy. This trend is central to the processes that have defined the world since the end of World War II, which marked the beginning of the West's commitment to peace and economic growth. In order to complete this newfound vision, the wealthy and powerful nations of Europe as well as the United States developed structures which would foster interdependence and thus disincentivize international conflict between each other. In regards to the conception of the "third world" which was rapidly being constructed at the time, powerful leaders attempted to solidify pre-existing lucrative relationships with economically weaker nations as a means to avoid power struggles and conflict in those regions. While this process had the effect of fostering trade between the wealthy and poor nations of the world, it commonly legitimized oppressive leaders who seized what little wealth existed in their country in order to come to power. In the vast majority of such cases, the powerful economic elites of poor nations continued to impede economic progress in their societies by restructuring the flow of wealth created by international commerce in order to benefit themselves and their families. This trend has produced unintended social consequences through widespread suffering while entrenching inequality worldwide. As a result, much of the "third world" has historically come to embrace the attractive profile of Marxism through enormous social movements, a phenomenon that has unequivocally generated fierce backlash and opposition from both regional elites and the international community alike.

Following the American War of Independence from Great Britain, the fledgling nation was tasked with creating a sustainable national structure which would prove to be both economically prosperous as well as immune from foreign aggressions. After an unsuccessful attempt to re-establish colonial dominance over the United States by Great Britain during the War of 1812, fostering regional stability became tantamount to national security. In 1823, the administration of president James Monroe published the Monroe Doctrine with the intention of limiting European influence in the western hemisphere while providing the emerging independent republics of Latin America with the freedom of national self-determination. As a result of protecting the western hemisphere from European exploits, American entrepreneurs were able to establish lucrative businesses throughout much of Latin America with little competition. By the end of the 19th century, however, much of Latin America was struggling through a slew of brutal dictators following the violent and drawn out processes of nation building, as is evidenced by the brief existence of the Central American Federation and the brutal regimes which succeeded it.

In 1898, the United States defeated the Spanish Empire in the Spanish-American War, and Spain lost control over its few remaining colonies of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines. This event is commonly interpreted to be the catalyst of the rise of the United States as an international actor on the world stage, as the United States essentially replaced Spain in its role as an economic magnet for the industry of these islands. Recognizing the country's newfound influence, President Theodore Roosevelt added the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904, justifying intervention in Latin America in "flagrant instances of wrongdoing or impotence". True to the corollary, countless interventions by various branches of the US military throughout Latin America occurred in the subsequent decades, however

wrongdoing and impotence were loosely interpreted to prompt military interventions which protected the financial interests of multinational corporations and wealthy landowners.

During the presidency of William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's successor, "Dollar Diplomacy" was officially adopted as a mechanism of foreign policy. This established the practice of granting loans to fledgling nations in order to expand American business presence into those nations. Foreign leaders would enthusiastically accept desperately needed money, while becoming dependent on foreign investors in order to grow their economies to the point where these loans could be repaid. This practice legitimized Latin American regimes by including them in the processes of international finance, while also pegging the interests of dictators to those of American business leaders.

The subsequent decades were marked by increased production due to American needs during the world wars and further entrenchment of Latin American elites. When global dominance was divided between the opposing economic ideologies of Capitalism and Communism during the Cold War, many Latin American societies rejected the status quo which had come to strengthen oppression and inequality. As a result, an interventionist attitude was revitalized within the American government, leading to the apparent sense of obligation that many presidents of the United States have shown in regards to the monitoring of the social and economic dealings of Latin America (Loveman).

The three examples mentioned above reveal a connection between past and present economic initiatives carried out by the US government and emphasize a continuation of international precedents. Furthermore, they show how commercial relationships have worked to entrench social inequalities which exist in Latin America, and offer an explanation into the region's ongoing economic struggle.

Nicaragua: A People Divided

2.1- History of Intervention in Nicaragua

Like many Latin American states, self determination has been a foreign concept for much of Nicaraguan history, and the stage for conflict and intervention in the small country was set even during colonial times. While Europe was undergoing the Enlightenment period, Lockean ideas spread to the Spanish colony around the turn of the 18th century (Booth, 11). While some had much to gain and therefore enthusiastically embraced economic liberalism, others saw their wealth and influence threatened. A rift between liberal and conservative members of Central-American society was thus created which was consistently reproduced throughout the subsequent generations of war and depression.

It was at this point in history that a power-hungry creole (of European descent) elite was divided into new-money liberals and old-money conservatives, drastically destabilizing the upper class. When Central America became independent from Mexico in 1823 following Mexico's independence from Spain two years earlier, the entire isthmus slipped into a bloody civil war. Conservative forces were able to gain a strong enough advantage that in 1838, Nicaragua became independent from the Central American Federation and was immediately engulfed in an economic depression (13). Seeing such economic plight as an opportunity to gain power and influence, wealthy American mercenary William Walker began organizing the country's liberal factions in exchange for land. In response, the British Navy and other Central American countries organized Nicaragua's conservative factions, and the Central American National War

broke out in 1855. 5 years later, Walker and the liberals were defeated, ushering in 30 years of stability and economic growth (19).

From 1860 up until the 1890s, economic growth was marked by the seizure and privatization of indigenous-, church-, and subsistence farmer- owned land, which was converted into plantations for coffee, an emerging cash crop at the time. Financed by British and German investors, a new class of *cafetaleros* emerged and began to occupy the upper echelons of Nicaraguan society. While differences between liberal and conservative ideology continued to exist, elite members of both camps saw their wealth increase drastically as land was converted into coffee plantations under capitalist liberal reforms. When liberal president José Santos Zelaya assumed the presidency in 1893, he ambitiously assumed that he could further attract conservative interests by exaggerating liberal economic reforms of the past 30 years (24).

Another key aspect of Zelaya's administration was nationalism, which engendered anti-interventionism. His presidency thus alienated both domestic conservative factions as well as American and British interests, leading to a U.S.-British sponsored conservative uprising in 1909. In the United States, public self perception following the Spanish-American War of 1898 was that of a civilizer of the world's problems and a regulator of the Western hemisphere. It was only logical for the newly elected Taft administration to send the Marine Corps to Nicaragua in 1912, which occupied the country and enforced conservative rule until 1925 (31).

By stabilizing Nicaragua with the threat of force during the 16 year occupation, Marine Corps presence allowed for the wide gap between the country's richest and poorest sectors to continue to grow, while solidifying the status of the *cafetalero* class as powerful and ruling. Sensing growing division, American General Calvin B. Carter established and trained the Nicaraguan National Guard (38). Civil war erupted anew following the Marines' departure in 1926, however the newly created National Guard gave the conservatives a slight upper hand

until the return of the Marines a year later. In 1928, the Espino-Negro ceasefire agreement allowed for the current conservative president Adolfo Díaz to finish his term, while ensuring liberal general José María Moncada the next term. While this pact was hailed as an unprecedented diplomatic solution in a historically war-torn country, the continued plight of the country's rural poor combined with the status of the agreement as negotiated by American outsiders led to its widespread unpopularity. It was for these reasons that a guerrilla faction of liberal generals led by Augusto Sandino refused to sign the pact and continued waging a guerrilla war against the Moncada government and the U.S. Marine Corps (41).

2.2- Augusto Sandino and the Rise of the Somozas

Economic plight, enormous class differences, and military presence of the United States Marines generated a mixed response among the liberal camp in Nicaragua following the 1926-1928 civil war. While some liberal generals were enraged and refused to accept the conditions of the Espino- Negro pact, others saw it as an opportunity to expand their role in the shaky government. It was in this context that Augusto Cesar Sandino and Anastasio Somoza Garcia, two men whose legacies would agitate Nicaraguan society for decades, became enemies (Booth, 41).

Sandino, who was an illegitimate son of a wealthy white landowner and one of the families' indigenous servants, had grown up witnessing brutal military interventions by the United States as well as fierce repression by Nicaragua's own government in a politically unstable era. Anastasio Somoza, while assuming a similar liberal ideology to that of Sandino, was a product of the emergent, new-money *cafetalero* class, and saw political influence as an opportunity to secure his family's wealth and status. From the signing of the Espino-Negro Pact

in 1928 until 1933, Sandino and his guerrilla factions, mainly composed of poor farmers, fought against National Guard and Marine Corps battalions on the platform of anti-interventionism in the mountains of Nicaragua. It was only after the Marines oversaw the election of Juan Bautista Sacasa in 1933 and their subsequent departure due to the Great Depression that Sandino signed a ceasefire agreement with the Sacasa administration. While agreements had been made to put down arms, anti-interventionist sentiments were still strong and threatening, motivating Somoza to murder Sandino following a meeting between Sandino and Sacasa in 1934 (51). With Sandino's death, guerrilla warfare became much less threatening to the National Guard, and several influential members of the Guard immediately began to favor Somoza as their next commander. As well as gaining the trust of the National Guard, Somoza was endorsed by United States ambassador to Nicaragua Matthew Hanna, effectively securing him the position (46).

As the international Great Depression began to devastate Nicaragua, labor unions began to form across the country, and the National Workers Party (Partido del Trabajador Nacional, PTN) was founded. Feeling increasingly threatened, conservatives began to see Somoza as the only solution to protect their interests, and with his newfound power and popularity he was able to unseat Sacasa in a 1936 coup d'état to assume the presidency (62). Throughout the rest of the 1930s, individual landholders accumulated staggering amounts of debt due to the Great Depression, and foreclosure led to the concentration of this land among a few wealthy families. The following decade, Nicaragua's economy was able to recover as coffee and other exports were in high demand due to World War II. German owned land, which had been purchased as far back as the 1860s and constituted much of the arable territory in Nicaragua, was appropriated by the Somoza family and distributed among family members and

allies of the regime. For these reasons, although the economy recovered, it had come to serve only a small sector of the population, and inequality continued to grow.

By the 1950s, Nicaragua had come to closely resemble the Cuba of the same era: inequality was raging, politics were controlled by a landowning elite, and bribery of public officials by illegal gambling and prostitution rings was common. Furthermore, many of these rings were owned by wealthy Americans. It was for these reasons that in 1956, Anastasio Somoza Garcia was assassinated at a party in the city of León by a known opponent of the regime, Rigoberto Lopez Pérez (67). The country's leadership was immediately taken over by Somoza's sons, first Luis and later Anastasio Somoza Debayle, and qualms against their family's rule subsided slightly. While Anastasio's ruling style resembled the authoritarianism of his father, Luis governed more charismatically, convincing many that the true nature of the current regime was in fact democratic. While anti-regime sentiments had weakened, however, many viewed Somoza's assassination as a testament to the extreme living conditions thousands of Nicaraguans found themselves in. In 1961, Marxist-Leninist groups in the university cities of Managua and León began to form under Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomás Borge. Composed mainly of students, these groups began to organize under Augusto Sandino's former banner, and adopted the name of the National Sandinist Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, FSLN). By 1963, FSLN uprisings had been mostly crushed by the National Guard, however increased repressive tactics such as torture and imprisonment by the Somoza regime kept FSLN support alive. In 1967, Luis Somoza Debayle died from a heart attack, and fear of increased authoritarianism without Luis as a mediator led to another FSLN uprising. At this point, FSLN leaders were overly ambitious in their efforts to make an impact on Nicaraguan politics and were defeated once again, this time with heavy casualties including founding member Silvio Mayorga (140).

Following their 1967 defeat, Sandinista support grew drastically among the country's northern rural regions, leading to increased repressive tactics by the Somoza government in those regions. In 1972, a devastating earthquake in Managua opened the eyes of many to the abuses of power by the government, as foreign aid was severely embezzled. Two years later the FSLN remobilized, this time with an urban presence and a clear goal. When Sandinistas took several politicians hostage at a house party in León, they were able to win \$5 million in concessions as well as the freedom of 18 political prisoners, including future president Daniel Ortega. In response, the Somoza regime declared a state of siege on the FSLN, effectively imposing martial law on the entire country and employing repressive tactics freely. The FSLN at this point had grown popular and powerful due to mentorship by veterans of the various previous mobilizations. In response to growing yet hesitant support, the FSLN in 1975 shifted in ideology from Marxism-Leninism to Democratic Socialism, a change that garnered huge public, as well as international, support (146).

2.3- The Role of Women in the Revolution

By the 1970s, despite brief interruptions by figure-holding presidents, the Somoza family had effectively ruled Nicaragua for 40 years. At this point, the Somoza's owned a larger proportion of land, and therefore national industry, than any other single family. With cotton and coffee being the country's primary exports, the national economy was dependent on American and multinational corporations, and agricultural workers were reimbursed very little. Due to economic pressures, men commonly abandoned their families, forcing women to take any work available to them, including selling homemade baked goods and trinkets, farm work, and even prostitution. At the same time, mounting repressive tactics had been employed by the Somoza

regime in rural areas in response to increasing insurgent behavior by the FSLN and indigenous opposition groups. Seemingly random disappearances of men of all ages had become commonplace, effectively leaving families without a breadwinner. Young people were commonly targeted by the National Guard as most likely to be involved in some sort of resistance efforts, and many women therefore lost their children to the Somoza's suspicious precautions (Randall, v).

In 1977, women occupied approximately 30% of the wage earning workforce in Nicaragua. This figure is much higher than most Latin American countries at the time, and is comparable to industrialized nations such as the U.S. or Canada of the 1970s. While Spanish and Roman Catholic tradition kept women's work domestic in other agriculture-based Latin American economies, wealth inequality and political repression forced Nicaraguan women into the workplace (vi). Along with witnessing abuses against their family members, social participation by women in the workplace laid the foundation for women's political involvement in opposition against the Somoza regime, and working women who formed the economic pillars of their families felt the need to become directly involved due to their first-hand experiences of inequality (vii). Due to these pressures, a small group of women led by Lea Guido and Gloria Carrion began to hold meetings in 1977 and eventually formed the Association of Women Confronting the Nation's Problems (Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional, AMPRONAC). At first, the organization was aimed at informing citizens of their rights as well as spreading information in cities about repression that was taking place in rural areas. Originally mainly composed of middle class women, very few members were also involved in the FSLN, however when Somoza increased "Anti-terrorist efforts" across the entire country due to the fear of increased guerrilla activities following the withdrawal of foreign aid by the Carter administration, cross sectional involvement increased. Furthermore, early efforts at addressing

human rights abuses drew the support of many church groups, which were often harassed and whose members were interrogated by members of the National Guard due to regime suspicions of religious organizations in general (Randall, 5).

In 1978, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, the editor of the country's only opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, was murdered by unknown gunmen. Although Anastasio Somoza claimed his death had come at the hands of business owners whom he had ridiculed, a vast majority of the country rejected this excuse. Riots broke out in the streets of Managua, and because of *La Prensa's* conservative nature, many of its readers who were middle class women decided to join AMPRONAC. With newfound middle class support and an increasing audience, leaders of the organization were able to inform its members about forced disappearances and torture of members of indigenous communities (6). A general strike was organized by middle class members of AMPRONAC as well as Christian organizations and other bourgeois opposition groups, however it was largely unsuccessful in its efforts to restrain the national economy and financial power of the government. Frustration in response to the failed strike by lower- and working- class opposition members translated into a shift in membership and organization of AMPRONAC to mainly working class and poor women, leading the organization to join the United People's Movement (Movimiento Pueblo Unido, MPU), an umbrella organization of opposition groups to which the FSLN belonged. Accompanying this shift in ideology and membership came a change in tactics: at this point, AMPRONAC had grown so popular throughout Nicaragua that its primary objective shifted from organizing women to address the nation's general problems, to organizing anyone in opposition to the Somoza regime (7).

By 1979, AMPRONAC was a militant organization with close ties to the FSLN. Women, through their increased involvement prior to and following the formation of the organization, had

increased their presence in militant activities throughout the previous decade to the point where 30% of the FSLN was comprised of female members (Randall, iv). While many women were nurses and aided wounded fighters, others became rank and file guerrillas, fighting on the front line along with men. Furthermore, several officers in the revolution were women, at times commanding battalions of several hundreds of men and women. Women who were not involved in fighting and militant activities played a large role in the revolution by writing letters to families of members of the National Guard pointing out the paradoxes of their motives and thus weakening their morale, setting up medical clinics in neighborhoods where street fighting was rampant and civilians were targeted, and delivering groceries to poor rural and urban communities whose access to food was cut off due to fighting. Through their involvement in political activities, the nature of family life changed as women commonly became less submissive and more active in decision making processes of their households. Women were developing a new type of social life in Nicaragua, so much so that by the time the Somoza's had been ousted, the new government led by the FSLN assigned several government agencies to be taken over by the leaders of the AMPRONAC (Randall, 23).

In 1980, AMPRONAC changed its name to AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza), after Luisa Amanda Espinosa, the first woman killed fighting against the Somozas in 1970 at the age of 21 (24). The organization's decision to change its name following the success of the revolution accompanied a change in its mission to ensure women's integration into the newly formed Nicaraguan society. Gloria Carrion, one of the founding members of the organization, took the role of the General Coordinator of the AMNLAE (10), and Lea Guido, the group's other founding member, became the new government's Minister of Social Welfare (2). Because the war had left much of the country's infrastructure in rubble, many of the services created by the FSLN and AMPRONAC during the

conflict were kept in place. The civil defense committees which had been created by the AMPRONAC to deliver food, supplies, and medical resources during the war were renamed Sandinist Defense Committees, and their structure remained largely unchanged (18). Despite many of the criticisms of the revolution and the reconstruction government, it is considerable to note that the organizations which worked to rid the nation of its authoritarian leadership did not dissolve once the task at hand was completed, but rather continued in their efforts to create a more wholesome and inclusive society and integrate those who had been marginalized throughout previous decades.

2.4- Attempts at Diplomatic Solutions under Jimmy Carter

In the 1970s, public life in the United States drastically changed. Largely in part due to the Vietnam War and the Hippie movement of the '60s and '70s, humanitarianism became an important factor in American political culture. Sensing this fundamental shift in society, Jimmy Carter ran his successful 1976 presidential campaign against Gerald Ford on a refreshing platform of reformist ideas. In fact, the four years of Jimmy Carter's administration were famously some of the most peaceful for the U.S. military since the end of World War II. Carter's strategy of deliberate diplomacy was also accompanied by a careful revision of states receiving foreign aid, an aspect of his presidency that carried heavy implications for Nicaragua in the near future.

In 1977, the first year of Jimmy Carter's presidency, economic aid to the Somoza government was cut from 25 million dollars during the Ford years to 9 million dollars (Booth, 128). At this point, Anastasio Somoza's state of siege against the opposition had been in place for three years, and a formidable National Guard seemed to be the last remaining asset of the

Somoza regime. An Amnesty International report from July of that year which showed that martial law had effectively become the new way of life in Nicaragua garnered international disdain. Due to the siege, the suspension of civil liberties as well as the imposition of curfews and violent interrogation of rural community and church leaders became commonplace (155). In September, Somoza suspended the siege at Carter's request, leading his supporters to criticize him for bowing to American pressures. In response, the FSLN increased its military activities as the threat of a direct conflict with the United States military seemed less and less likely (129).

At the 1978 Inter-American commission on Human Rights, Jimmy Carter commended Anastasio Somoza by writing him a letter which honored his regime for improving the condition of human rights in the country after suspending the siege. While it was intended to promote further positive developments within the Nicaraguan government, the opposition felt that the letter confirmed their suspicions of the US collaborating with the Somozas (130). Growing wary of the gradual collapse of the Somoza regime, the Carter administration began to negotiate with the Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio de Oposición- FAO), the primary body of Nicaragua's upper- and middle- class opposition. Proposals for a new government included plans to create a new council made up of FAO members and former government officials while excluding radical opposition groups, leading the FSLN and Nicaragua's working class to denounce what they labeled an imperialistic attempt to install "Somocismo sin (without) Somoza" (179).

By this point it was clear that Carter had underestimated the far left of the opposition and its organizing power, alienating its members in the process of trying to negotiate peacefully (129). Nevertheless, further repression by the Somoza regime such as the bombing of an indigenous community at Monimbo in 1978 forced the United States to fully cut all economic aid to Nicaragua from its 1979 budget. When the FAO broke off negotiations with the Carter

administration and put its full support behind the FSLN making it the main body of opposition, it became clear that the United States government had lost its opportunity to determine the direction of Nicaragua's new leadership.

In early 1979, government officials began to flee with their families to the United States, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Tax revenue collapsed and public funds were drained, leading the Nicaraguan Central Bank to default in March while devaluing the national currency and increasing the price of basic commodities. Several regional allies of Nicaragua cut relations, and the Organization of American States (OAS) called for Somoza's resignation (Booth, 166-171). When in May the FSLN announced its final offensive and Radio Sandino called for widespread civilian support to fight the National Guard, the Carter administration still had not found a vessel for influencing the new government, and modestly supported Somoza in a vain attempt to buy time in order to mediate negotiations. On July 17th Anastasio Somoza Debayle was forced to resign as the FSLN purged the National Guard from its last stronghold in Managua, however the final two months during which Somoza was propped up were the most intense in terms of fighting. Of the approximately 45 thousand killed between 1977 and 1979, 15 thousand people, most of which were civilians, lost their lives during the last few weeks of conflict in heavily populated Managua (179).

2.5- Revolutionary Nicaraguan Society

When Anastasio Somoza Debayle resigned from the presidency on July 17th, 1979, Nicaragua's congress named Dr. Francisco Urcuyo Malianos, Somoza's former vice president, as interim president. Naturally, his appointment was immediately rejected by the Sandinistas, and so Jimmy Carter urged Somoza to tell Malianos to resign in order to stabilize relations with

the new government. Malianos responded by announcing his intentions to finish Somoza's term, which sparked massive protests and he was forced to flee after having served only one day as president of Nicaragua (180).

The new government was a five person council of FSLN members Daniel Ortega, Moises Hassan, and Sergio Ramirez, as well as conservative businessman Alfonso Robelo and the wife of the murdered editor of *La Prensa*, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Calling itself the Junta of National Reconstruction, the new government was tasked with repairing a country ravaged by war while inheriting massive debt. Besides the daunting task of reconstruction, the goal of the revolution was to fundamentally restructure society to serve a greater portion of the population. Under the Somoza family rule, unemployment had reached 22% with another 35% of the country underemployed, literacy levels did not exceed 40%, and rural literacy stayed at around 7%. Only 5% of adults were educated past fifth grade, and higher education was reserved for the rich with only .3% of the country having access to a university education. Furthermore, the government lacked a central health care system and doctors were expensive, rare, and under trained. Infant mortality rates were very high and many poor people died from curable diseases, keeping national life expectancy no higher than 53 years (Randall, v). While living under such abysmal conditions, much of the country still relied on multinational corporations and industry owned by the Somoza family. Widespread corruption and financial dependence on coffee and cotton exports under the context of extreme wealth inequality were thus viewed by the opposition as the source of the country's plight.

In direct contrast to the Somoza dynasty, the new government's primary goals were to create an independent and non-aligned foreign policy and to nurture the development of a mixed economy, with both a strong private and public sector (Skidmore and Smith, 376). All Somoza-owned industry was nationalized and with it about 20% of the country's territory,

however most land remained privately owned and multinational corporations were not forced out. The junta was invited by Jimmy Carter to the White House with eight million dollars in emergency relief and 75 million dollars later allocated by Congress to spur private sector growth, and 2500 Cuban doctors and engineers came to the country to help raise living standards. Unlike revolutionary Cuba, Nicaragua was not dependent on a single patron nation like the Soviet Union, and instead received huge amounts of aid from West Germany, Spain, and France. Furthermore, following advice by the Castro regime, the junta consciously avoided alienating the country's aristocracy as had happened in Cuba (378).

Compared with other revolutionary societies, Nicaragua was generally considered to be more open and democratic than most. Following the official end of the war in July 1979, much of the population remained armed and hungry, and many counter-revolutionary bands emerged and incited violence in cities. Much of the newly established police force was under trained and employed increasingly repressive tactics, immediately prompting action by the government and other nations. A "depistolization" campaign coupled with a purge and retraining of police officers by Costa Rican and Panamanian security forces drastically reduced violence while easing the civilian population's suspicions of authority. In 1980, an investigation by the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) found human rights abuses to be very low, as many members of the new government including FSLN founding member Tomás Borge had been victims of torture under Somoza. Opposition parties as well as mild opposition media were allowed to exist, and censorship was low. Ironically, the ultra-leftist *El Pueblo* was the only newspaper to be temporarily shut down after inciting workers strikes for "disrupting economic recovery" (Booth, 197-199).

Once the new government had established a legitimate authority over the country, various steps to reorient society from overemphasized individualism to valuing social

collaboration were taken. In 1980, student volunteers travelled through Nicaragua's rural areas as part of the National Literacy Crusade. As a result, illiteracy levels fell from 50% to 13%, and tens of thousands of rural poor who learned how to read were simultaneously informed of revolutionary values in order to increase political participation (Stansifer, 1). The idea of a universal "social salary" gained popularity, and many felt that citizens should benefit from the government through an overall increase in quality of life. As such, a minimum wage was established, health and safety regulations were expanded, parks were built in poor neighborhoods, squatters were permitted to live on nationalized land, working mothers were given free day care, unions were legalized, and disability services were improved (Booth, 209). In order to decrease bureaucratic limitations, the National Agrarian Reform Institute and the Ministry of Agricultural Development combined in 1980. As a result, nutritional and health services for residential farm workers were expanded and subsidies for small private farmers increased. Furthermore, thousands of unemployed workers found construction jobs after the war, as the new government invested 235 million dollars in the manufacturing sector to rebuild the country (205). Such changes, especially following the nationalization of all Somoza-held land, increased the public share of Nicaragua's gross national product (GNP) from 15% to 41% in 1980 (203).

2.6- Ronald Reagan and the Contra War

In the presidential election of 1980, economic anxiety in the United States against the backdrop of the Cold War resulted in a landslide victory for Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter, who was seen as naive and indecisive. While economic issues at home largely dominated presidential debates, Reagan's stance on international issues contributed significantly to his

headstrong and determined image. The campaign platform of the republican party in 1980 famously stated:

“We deplore the Marxist-Sandinista take-over of Nicaragua...and we oppose the Carter Administration aid program for the government of Nicaragua. However, we will support the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to establish a free and independent government.”

(presidency.ucsb.edu)

The American public viewed Reagan's foreign policy objectives in Nicaragua and other countries as logical to protect the country from communism, and necessary to the international spread of democracy. For Nicaragua however, where wounds were still fresh and society was in the midst of reconstruction, efforts to “establish a free and independent government” held several negative connotations.

While the overstatement of the Sandinista's failures and their vilification by the Reagan administration is important to address, it is worth noting as well that the Sandinista government was far from perfect. Similar in nature to other emergent governments following a revolution, the junta was often overly ambitious. In pursuit of a mixed economy certain companies were nationalized, which resulted in a greater public share of the nation's wealth. However, since much of this land had been owned by the Somoza family or its allies, many managers and company executives fled in fear of their safety, and efficiency in these industries plummeted (Booth, 203). Furthermore, widespread famine broke out shortly after the end of the war which saw more than half of the country's children malnourished. In response, the government orchestrated “social salary” programs which led to massive inflation, yet ended the famine by importing food and subsidizing small farmers (207). While the early government committed several economic blunders and was violent at times, the Sandinistas never had total control of the state like the Somozas did. The values of the revolution remained popular and were widely

equated with a path out of misery, despite being labelled by the Reagan administration as being forced over the population by a totalitarian dictatorship (Grandin and Joseph, 115).

Following Ronald Reagan's inauguration as president in 1981, 30 million dollars in loans to Nicaragua's private sector were immediately cancelled, prompting another wave of nationalizations as private entrepreneurs could no longer sustain certain industries (Booth, 180). That same year, 19 million dollars were directed from the CIA to various counter-revolutionary groups in order to unify them under the blanket-term "contras". Initially mainly comprised of former members of Somoza's National Guard who had fled the country for Honduras and Guatemala towards the end of the 1970s, the largest of these groups was known as the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense- FDN) (Eich and Rincon, iii). While the inauguration of Ronald Reagan initiated the flow of American dollars to counter-revolutionary forces, many insurgent groups had already been trained by foreign intelligence agencies. In fact, immediately after the end of the war, the Argentine secret service began organizing plans for insurgents to disrupt Sandinista progress. While the Argentine government acted independently of Reagan's foreign policy objectives, it is considerable to note that the right wing military junta which had oppressively ruled the country since it was installed in a CIA-sponsored coup against Isabel Peron in 1976 was closely allied with the United States and had been amiable with the Somoza regime until 1979. When the military junta began to destabilize in 1982 and Argentina was forced to cease its regional operations, the CIA was simply able to assume leadership over several funding structures which had already been put in place (Green, 173).

The first major Contra strategy to delegitimize Sandinista leadership was known as Plan C. From training camps in Honduras, guerrilla groups under the FDN would launch invasions into the northern districts of Matagalpa and Jinotega. These districts would be labeled "liberated

zones”, while guerrillas would destroy coffee harvests in order to undermine the government’s economic base. While largely unsuccessful, the FDN managed to capture several villages and farming co-ops with advanced military equipment such as mortars, often killing civilians and workers who were benefiting from newly created government programs. Plan C had been organized by Argentine intelligence and ran from 1982 to 1983, and when it was abandoned a new plan was devised (Eich and Rincon, 11). Driven by FDN leader Jorge Ramirez Zelaya who had trained in Argentina, the goal of Operation M83 was to foster political instability by increasing public anxiety. Supply lines as well as communication to rural areas were cut by guerrilla attacks, and local leaders were targeted in a wave of assassinations. Furthermore, state institutions created by the Sandinistas such as schools and hospitals were subject to terrorist attacks like bombings and many civilians were kidnapped (13). During these first few years of the 1980s, the Contras relied on guerrilla tactics and regional operations. Through the help of American and Argentine advisers and weapons, however, they were able to lay a strong foundation for a modern and well-equipped fighting force (Green, 184).

During the second half of the decade, the nature of conflict in Nicaragua was no longer that of highland guerilla warfare, instead resembling a full-blown civil war. Contra membership among indigenous communities was growing as many villagers were relocated by the Sandinista government to camps away from the Honduran border where they would be less susceptible to terrorism or forced conscription. Photos were released by the Reagan administration showing apparent beatings and killings in indigenous communities, however these were later found to be of National Guard members in the 1970s (Booth, 201). In 1985, the United States led an international embargo on Nicaragua, stifling the country’s economic well being. Economic aid was only permitted by Congress to flow to Nicaragua in order to stop the flow of arms from Nicaragua to revolutionary forces in El Salvador under the Boland

amendments, however the Reagan administration felt that the best way to do this was to “make the Sandinistas say uncle” (Eich and Rincon, iii). While sponsoring the overthrow of the Sandinistas was forbidden, Reagan often commended the Contras as being the “Moral equivalent of our founding fathers”. In response to increasing attacks by the Contras in cities and the countryside while dealing with economic struggles caused by the economic embargo, the Sandinista government imposed a draft to weaken the Contras and increased military expenditures to half of the national budget (Skidmore and Smith, 378). While these actions proved that the efforts of the Reagan administration were working, they also presented difficulties for the Contras. In order to sustain Contra efforts, the CIA under William Casey and the National Security Council (NSC) under Oliver North orchestrated arms sales to Iran from 1985 to 1987. At artificially inflated prices, Israeli smugglers sold weapons to Iran’s government in exchange for the release of American hostages being held hostage in Lebanon by Hezbollah (Green, 173). Not only did this violate Congress’ Boland agreement and therefore the principle of checks and balances, it was also in violation of an economic embargo being carried out against Iran while betraying the famous American policy of not negotiating with terrorist organizations like Hezbollah.

In 1990, presidential and regional elections were held in Nicaragua. The conservative candidate and original member of the Junta of National Reconstruction Violeta Barrios de Chamorro defeated incumbent Daniel Ortega by a large margin, and the economic embargo was lifted which ended rising inflation. Leading up to the election, however, several regional FSLN candidates were assassinated and intimidation at polling stations by the Contras was common. Furthermore, the Contras threatened to increase violent activities if Daniel Ortega was reelected, leading much of the country to vote against the FSLN in fear. Furthermore, despite immediately receiving one billion dollars in foreign aid and ending the draft, unemployment

under Violeta Barrios de Chamorro rose from 12% to 22%. Another 28% of the population became underemployed, and with only 40% full employment many began to nostalgically question how Nicaraguan society would have developed had the Sandinista government not been spending half of its budget on the military in its final years (Skidmore and Smith, 379).

Honduras: Bipartisan Politics and the Military

3.1- The Banana Republic

When the National War of the Central American Federation broke out in 1838, liberal factions under Honduran general and president of the federation Francisco Morazan were forced to take up arms against conservative factions as well as separatists. Morazan had taken over the leadership of the federation with the noble goal of creating a powerful regional block, able to withstand the devastating consequences which historically had ensued when wealthy nations would take an interest in the region's resources. Unfortunately, Morazan was ahead of his time, as Nicaragua was the first to split from the federation in 1840, followed closely by Honduras and Costa Rica. Morazan continued to mount efforts to reunify Central America, however he was captured and executed in 1842. When Morazan died, so did any hope for reunification and ironically, Honduras has arguably fared the worst of the Central American nations following the dissolution of the federation (ThoughtCo.com).

Of the newly independent nations of the former Central American Federation, Honduras relied the most on agriculture as it had the lowest concentration of raw material deposits of the region. Therefore, when the first bananas were imported into the United States shortly after the

end of the American Civil War, it is no surprise that they had come from Honduras. Americans rapidly developed a taste for the exotic fruit following its introduction to the country, and agricultural fertility as well as weak political institutions made Honduras an attractive target for wealthy Americans looking to capitalize on the banana's popularity (Striffler and Moberg, 9). By 1899, 114 companies were based in Honduras due to the country's political elite selling lands around railroads to multinational corporation in hopes of modernizing the transportation network as a result. From the start, these corporations were faced with the lucrative task of buying bananas from small farmers and importing them to the United States. It was at this point that the United Fruit Company, known today as Chiquita, began to buy out smaller banana exporting companies. In Honduras, United Fruit was rivaled only by the Standard Fruit Company, which would eventually become Dole. Fierce competition between these two banana-exporting giants over the American market led them to implement cost cutting measures wherever possible, a tactic which carried deep negative implications for a country as politically weak as Honduras. Both the United and Standard Fruit companies fiercely worked to lower their prices for bananas causing the industry to grow faster and larger than analysts had expected. In response, these companies began to establish plantations and production centers throughout Honduras in order to expedite the process of exporting bananas by eliminating the need to reach out to hundreds of small farmers. As a result, many Honduran banana farmers were forced to sell their increasingly costly-to-maintain land to these companies and abandon their farms, instead taking up jobs with the companies themselves. This massive accumulation of land by these companies directly tied the interests of the American economic elite to the political dealings of Honduras, while also pegging the social situation of Honduras to the whims of wealthy Americans (10).

Once United and Standard Fruit had effectively bought-out the majority of the Honduran Banana exporting sector, it became price-efficient to rotate banana planting plots to cultivate

nutritious soil instead of growing bananas on all land holdings at all times. Furthermore, squatters were not permitted to settle on these empty plots of land, leading many to become suspicious of the country's economic reliance on the banana while so much land stood empty. Meanwhile, continually growing demand and competition made the exploitation of plantation workers commonplace, and several uprisings arose throughout the early decades of the 1900s. These uprisings were reflective of some of the first manifestations of nationalism in a country where two sided politics had dominated since before its inception. Unfortunately, the nationalism that was boiling during the early 20th century developed only among the Honduran working class and poor, and was easily suppressed by both liberal and conservative elites (12).

At this point it is important to note that similar to other Latin American countries, the Honduran political system in the first part of the century was cemented in place by the wealth and power that the country's political elite had accumulated in part through dealing with multinational corporations and foreign investors. Unlike other countries, however, the liberal-conservative divide had become deeply embedded among the country's wealthy, upholding the false dichotomy of political culture which had existed since before the days of the Central American Federation. In the context of the illusion of political pluralism, Honduras came to rely entirely on the United States and its demand for the banana. In the first half of the 20th century, 87% of Honduran exports went to the United States, and of the country's exported resources, bananas constituted half. Furthermore, 67% of goods imported to Honduras came from the United States, so it is safe to say that the United States enjoyed a lucrative relationship with the oppressive Honduran elite. For these reasons, the United States sent its military to the country in response to worker uprisings in 1903, 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1924, and 1925 to assist the Honduran military in protecting the interests of United and Standard Fruit (Bucheli, 9).

These decades were marked by several coups and rebellions, with most regimes lasting less than one year due to deep infighting among the liberal faction. The 1932 elections were surprisingly fair, however, transferring the presidency to Tiburcio Carias, who had organized conservatives by creating the National Party of Honduras (Partido Nacional de Honduras- PNH). Carias' presidential campaign, however, had been massively financed by the United Fruit Company and following his election his administration seized dictatorial control of the country, outlawing the communist party and persecuting liberals. The Great Depression and the ensuing decade were marked by both economic devastation due to Honduras' low export diversity, as well as political repression by the self-made totalitarian regime. Carias held onto power until 1949 when he voluntarily resigned, giving Manuel Galvez, his minister of war and a former lawyer for United Fruit, control of the presidency (13). Galvez ruled in a repressive style as well, however paid more attention to the country's social well-being than his predecessor had. While enacting programs for education reform and the construction of roads, he also incentivized coffee and cotton cultivation, diversifying the country's exports for the first time since Americans had taken a liking to bananas a half a century earlier (Merrill, xxvi).

3.2- The Cold War and the Honduran Military

By the end of the second World War, the United States could not afford to lose partnerships with powerful regimes, especially those located in the western hemisphere. While political instability in Honduras had led to multinational corporations gaining influence in governmental decisions, inequalities became deeply embedded in Honduran society. When it became clear that the United States and the Soviet Union were in a race for global domination, the already existing political structures which had been kept in place due to multinational

interests became the primary vessel through which aid was delivered to the country. As a result, the liberal-conservative divide which had defined the status quo of Honduran politics continued to determine developments in the country. Sensing opportunity, the military became increasingly involved in the country's politics, tasking itself with fixing the disparity which had existed between social life and political processes due to infighting within the PNH and the liberal party (PLH- Partido Liberal de Honduras).

When Manuel Galvez left Honduras in 1954 to be treated for a heart condition, his vice president Julio Lozano Díaz assumed the presidency against Galvez's wishes. Two years later however, Díaz was removed by a coup carried out by the country's military. This marked the first time the Honduran military had acted as an institution independent of a political party or president. The following year, the military permitted elections to take place, and a democratic political reformist by the name of Ramón Villeda Morales was elected. Leading up to the election of 1963, it became clear that Morales' ally Ramón Ernesto Cruz, whose democratizing policies took Morales' a step further, would become the country's next president. Fearing a consolidation of power within the central government and a subsequent decline of military influence, the military deposed of Morales before the elections could take place, installing the general Oswaldo López Arellano who would rule until 1971 when elections were permitted once again. Nevertheless, after Ramón Ernesto Cruz won the presidency with abundant popular support, the military once again decided to remove him from the presidency, replacing him in 1972 with General Arellano. Unsurprisingly, Arellano was removed by an internal coup in 1975 after a bribery scandal with the United Fruit Company, and replaced by Alberto Melgar Castro, also a general in the military. In 1978, Castro was deposed by a final military coup, and a junta took over which scheduled elections for 1981 (Merrill, xxvii).

The decade of military control of the government was marked by economic stagnation that came to define Honduras in the 1970s. Agricultural production and banana exports declined due to the growing wealthy nations of Europe importing bananas from other tropical regions, such as their former colonies in Central Africa. Because of this, industrialization practically came to a halt and Honduras came to rely on economic aid from the United States as well as remittances from ex-patriots living and working in wealthier nations (Rosenberg, 2). Ironically, the flow of money from the North had the effect of bolstering the Honduran public sector and state-owned enterprises, despite the United States' desperate measures to strengthen Central American private sectors in the face of communism. Despite the troubles which had emerged during the 1970s, the military was not despised by the public as in other Central American Nations, like Somoza's National Guard in Nicaragua. This was due to the military's relatively young tradition as an independent actor, which had only been established two decades earlier (7). Therefore, when the country made a concentrated effort to restore civilian-democracy in 1981, the military was granted more responsibilities in the new system in order to act as a conflict moderator and necessary coalition partner, further cementing its influence within the political system (14).

Despite Honduras' democratic transition in 1981, two defining trends continued to exist in Honduran politics: the false dichotomization of political issues under the labels "liberal" and "conservative", as well as the growing presence of the military in decision making processes. It is a testament to the scale of power that the military had amassed that since 1956, every leader of the country has relied on the military's consent. Furthermore, membership in the growing National Guard (Army branch) became the primary vessel for social mobility in the underemployed and under-industrialized nation, contributing to its positive reputation among the public (Skidmore and Smith, 380). In the 1980s, PLH presidents Roberto Suazo Cordova and

José Azcona Hoyo enjoyed the support of the United States due to democratic innovations while taking heed of the growing strength and interests of the military. For these reasons, both presidents aided the United States government in supporting the Contra movement against the newly triumphant leftist-Sandinista government in Nicaragua. US army bases and training camps for guerrillas began to appear in southern Honduras, the military continued to grow, and the Honduran economy was flooded with American dollars (381).

When the Contra War abruptly ended in 1990 with the election of Violeta Chamorro, US disinvestment in Honduras led to economic decline. By this point the Honduran public had begun to recognize the power that the military could command, however attempts to crack down on military influence and collusion with drug traffickers were futile. In 1996, liberal president Roberto Reina announced he would work to shrink the size of the military, and congress approved a constitutional amendment separating the police from the military and putting it under civilian control. Reina's liberal successor Carlos Roberto Flores took steps to continue the trend established by Reina, and in 1998 a further constitutional amendment was passed, removing the military's commander-in-chief and instead assigning that role to the nation's president in hopes of ending the military's status as an independent actor (freedomhouse.org).

When in 1998 Honduras was devastated by Hurricane Mitch, the military was assigned the task of rebuilding the country's infrastructure, a plan that largely flopped. Dissatisfaction with the military continued to rise, and the Honduran public increasingly associated the tropical storm with man-made climate change due to decades of environmental destruction by multinational corporations. In 2001, PNH candidate Ricardo Maduro was elected president and immediately adopted austerity policies following his inauguration in 2002, in hopes of qualifying for loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These policies prompted massive opposition among the country's poor and working classes, whose economic opportunities were restricted

despite not having contributed to economic decline or environmental devastation. Furthermore, they revived the notion that in Honduras power was shared by a triangular alliance of foreign investors, landowners, and the military, despite the constitutional reforms of the late '90s. A movement to create an environmentally sound "New Honduras" which rejected the 100 year old status quo gained momentum, however much of the country felt that this would not be attainable through government reform (Skidmore and Smith, 382). In the 2005 elections, a widespread sense of hopelessness caused low voter turnout with less than half of the population going to the polls. Nevertheless, the PLH was slightly more successful in rallying voters in support of presidential candidate José Manuel Zelaya, despite predictions that PNH candidate and Speaker of the Congress Porfirio "Lobo" Sosa would easily take the presidency (archive.ipu.org).

3.3- The Zelaya Presidency and the Coup

José Manuel Zelaya's presidential campaign as candidate of the PLH focused on broad issues like the government's involvement in the economy as well as corruption among elected officials. In comparison to his conservative opponent, Porfirio "Lobo" Sosa, Zelaya did not differ much in terms of foreign policy and economic relations with other nations. While the PNH platform was characterized by hardline stances on drugs and crime and was perceived to be considerably right-wing, Zelaya advocated largely for the continuation of Maduro's economic policies with increased civilian participation and can be described as right-of-center. Nevertheless, following Zelaya's inauguration, he began to adopt increasingly left leaning policies, and was ousted in a coup in June 2009 in response to his call to hold an opinion poll on whether the country's 1982 constitution should be rewritten.

The first year of Zelaya's presidency was marked by very little change in the Honduran government. As the son of a wealthy landowning family, Zelaya had taken advantage of a network of elite contacts to facilitate his entry into politics, many of which were rewarded with positions in the government following his inauguration. Despite however aiming to continue his predecessor's policies of economic austerity, Zelaya took notice of growing social pressures created by hopelessness and suspicion of the government. To lighten the negative impacts of austerity, Zelaya attempted to improve social life in Honduras by appointing women to half of his cabinets positions and implementing programs for the poor and reforestation programs. Furthermore, an ongoing energy crisis which Zelaya had inherited and which had left much of the country without power prompted the government to bail out the state owned energy company Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica (ENEE) in early 2007.

In response to Zelaya's reforms, the favorability of the government continued to grow. Increasingly, Hondurans felt that the Zelaya administration was legitimately interested in shifting the role of the state from being a mediator of the elite's conflicts to addressing the needs of the public. However, Zelaya began to generate criticism from the United States and wealthy Hondurans in 2007, when his administration attended the 28th anniversary ceremony of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. Furthermore, in response to energy needs due to the lasting crisis and the bail-out of ENEE, the administration announced that the country would be joining the Venezuelan-led oil partnership Petrocaribe. While some were suspicious of Zelaya entering into such an alliance with Hugo Chávez, much of the business sector viewed the decision favorably as a way to secure access to cheap oil. Support of the administration however became much more polarized in 2008, when Zelaya announced he would take integration one step further and join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América, ALBA). ALBA, created in 2004 by

Cuba and Venezuela, was comprised of other Latin American nations with leftist governments as well and aimed to provide economic security independent of the sphere of influence of the United States. It also aimed to create a new currency called the SUCRE in order to stabilize markets in those countries with governments isolated by the United States, a widely unpopular strategy with the US and its allies.

At the treaty signing ceremony which established Honduras' membership in ALBA, Zelaya formally announced that his administration aimed to continue implementing left-of-center policies. At this point, Zelaya's unfavorability among the country's elite became clear as his network of allies began to deteriorate, stagnating his administration's political efforts. By the end of 2008, the government could not reach a deal with business leaders to raise the minimum wage, and instead raised it by 60% through an executive order which the Supreme Court upheld. With a revived sense that Honduran politics were simply not structured to serve the public, Zelaya announced in May 2009 he would organize a non-binding opinion poll on whether the country should have a referendum to determine if the constitution should be rewritten. Since the country's democratic transition in 1981, the constitution had been amended several times, however public frustration continued as the status-quo persisted. When Zelaya ordered the military to organize the polling process, General Vasquez Velasquez refused, and he was removed from his position. In response, other military generals and the country's Defence Minister resigned, leading the Supreme Court to order Zelaya to reinstate Velasquez. Zelaya, citing the 1998 constitutional amendment which transferred the role of Commander-in-Chief of the military to the president and officially ended its status as an autonomous institution, refused and continued to organize plans for a poll for June 29th (Cunha Filho et. al.). During the night of June 28th, members of the military broke into Zelaya's home in Tegucigalpa and evicted him at gunpoint, while his daughter hid under her bed and his cleaning lady was dragged from the

house by her hair, according to a 2011 *Democracy Now!* interview with Zelaya. The next day, the Speaker of the Congress and member of Zelaya's own PLH, Roberto Micheletti, was inaugurated as interim president to serve out the remaining two months of Zelaya's term.

3.4- The United States Responds

In an interview with former president Zelaya conducted in 2011 by Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!*, he claims the CIA was behind a false information campaign to convince business leaders in Honduras that communism was returning to Latin America. Through the leadership of Venezuela, governments of weaker countries would work to dismantle US leadership and thus attack the security of the western hemisphere. Zelaya states that this message was immediately adopted and spread around Honduras' private sector, which relies on the United States for trade, like wildfire. In response, business, government, and military elites orchestrated his kidnapping and removal. While there is no explicit evidence to support this claim, several events leading up to Zelaya's ouster as well as the reactions of top US government officials after June 29th indicate that the results of the illegal coup carried out against president Zelaya were aligned with the interests of the United States government at the time.

In a document released by Wikileaks, the knowledge that the US State Department under Hillary Clinton had regarding the coup is exposed. The report, titled "Open and Shut: The Case of the Honduran Coup" was sent from the United States' embassy in Tegucigalpa a month after Zelaya was removed from his position. In it, US ambassador Hugo Llorens clearly states that Zelaya's efforts to conduct a non-binding opinion poll did not violate any Honduran laws. Furthermore, he states that the Honduran National Congress and the military, the primary organizations involved in the coup, had no authority over the presidency, as stated in the Honduran constitution. In the case of the removal of a president, Llorens states, a structured

process of impeachment must be carried out by the country's Supreme Court. Nevertheless, this already established legal framework was completely undermined. Regarding the interim presidency of Roberto Micheletti, Llorens states that power is only transferred to the Speaker of the Congress in the case of the president's death, resignation, or formal criminal conviction. Finally, under a section titled "Forced Removal by Military was Clearly Illegal" the report cites the Honduran constitution which states that no Honduran citizen shall be forced from the country, definitively proving that Zelaya's forced exile was unconstitutional.

Initially, the international community reacted to the coup in Honduras as expected: the OAS voted to suspend Honduras' membership, the UN General Assembly called for Zelaya's immediate restoration to power, and even President Barack Obama announced the day after the coup that his administration believed "the coup was not legal and that [democratically elected] President Zelaya remains the president of Honduras" (Goodman and Moynihan, 256-257). In the following months, however, such harsh condemnations seemed to relax, and the situation in Honduras adopted an all too familiar aura of despondency. In September, the OAS signed the San José agreement, which would reinstate Zelaya however would reorganize his cabinet to include members of the coup regime. Zelaya accepted the terms of the agreement reluctantly, however Micheletti refused them outright. Furthermore, despite having initially referred to Zelaya's ouster as a coup, the Obama administration suspiciously stopped employing such condemning language. While there is no official explanation for this, many critics point to the fact that recognizing an illegal coup would declare all economic aid to a country illegal. As aid continued to flow from the United States, many have asserted that this strategic move was made in order to continue to support Honduras' new government through legitimate channels, as Micheletti and the traditional power structures which had existed in Honduras for centuries were far more amiable to the United States than Zelaya had been (257).

In Hillary Clinton's 2014 book "Hard Choices" she documents her time as Secretary of State under President Obama. A section from her chapter on Latin America states that he was removed from office due to fears that he would "circumvent the constitution and extend his term in office", and that after she had met with regional leaders, they "strategized on a plan to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot." While these after-the-fact testaments do not appear to be indicative of shady dealings, it is important to note that Clinton's state department was aware that Zelaya was in fact not trying to extend his term due to the contents of the leaked report "Open and Shut: The Case of the Honduran Coup". Furthermore, while Clinton was, in her own words, strategizing a plan to "render the question of Zelaya moot", her public condemnation of the coup immediately after it took place reveals that the State Department's dealings were not being honestly reported. Several critics have also raised questions about Clinton's friendship with Lanny Davis, a high-profile attorney who worked as a lobbyist for the Honduran government in Washington after "free and fair elections" had led to PNH candidate and former Zelaya opponent Porfirio "Lobo" Soza's presidency (Goodman and Moynihan, 269).

Critics of the US response to the 2009 coup d'etat have identified several issues which the United States government and the CIA may have had with Zelaya. First and most obviously, the Zelaya administration's decision to join ALBA raised eyebrows in the north as it seemingly added to Venezuela's growing regional power. Specifically, ALBA's goal to create a currency to replace the US dollar as the universal mode of transactions between member nations would lower the dollar's demand and thus lead to its depreciation, as it has been a floating currency since the 1971 abandonment of the gold standard. Zelaya also had plans to vacate a US military base that had been established in 1981 to train Contras, instead using it as a civilian airport as the infrastructure in the country's main airport was dangerously crumbling and the

country lacked the funds to fix it. Ironically, according to Zelaya's 2011 *Democracy Now!* interview, his plane was taken to that same military base to refuel on his way out of the country, suggesting that the Honduran military had permission to use the base and thus indicating that the US military was aware of the plans of the coup before they were carried out.

3.5- Recent Developments

Immediately following Zelaya's ouster from the presidency, Honduras erupted in protests that were often violently suppressed. Political repression became widespread, and dissatisfaction with the country's government led to the formation of a broad leftist movement which created the political party Libertad y Refundación (Liberty and Refoundation- Libre). In the following years, political violence has increased, as have drug related crimes. Particularly marginalized groups such as the Garifuna population (Afro- Hondurans), the Lenca indigenous population, and women have been the targets of torture, forced disappearance, and murder. All the while, the government continues to pursue economic policies which primarily benefit the country's elite and are almost universally opposed by marginalized groups.

When President Zelaya was removed from his home in June of 2009, the majority of his term had already been carried out and presidential elections were scheduled for later in the year. An attempt by Zelaya to return to the country a week after his removal was blocked when military vehicles drove onto Tegucigalpa's airport's runway, and supporters who had gathered to welcome the president were dispersed with live fire which killed a 19 year old boy (Goodman and Moynihan, 268). Nevertheless, when the question of reinstating Zelaya for the remaining two months of his term arose, the country's National Congress refused to debate the topic until

after Zelaya's former conservative opponent, popularly known as "Lobo" (wolf) Soza, had secured the presidency in a widely boycotted election. The debate was finally resumed, and the congress voted overwhelmingly to deny Zelaya the remainder of his term (Britannica.com). In response, pro-Zelaya demonstrations took place across the country, and OAS-IACHR observers found that protesters were violently suppressed by security forces and that thousands were arbitrarily detained. Later in the year, Zelaya managed to re-enter Honduras secretly, and was granted asylum at the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa. In a show of solidarity, his supporters camped outside the embassy, which was inundated by the National Anthem of Honduras as well as Honduran insult-songs from speakers mounted on military vehicles. Furthermore, the government imposed a curfew after Zelaya's return, and when his supporters refused to comply they were dispersed with water cannons and tear gas. The Honduran government also shut off the Brazilian embassy's water, electricity, and telephone service, and Zelaya agreed to return to exile in 2010 in a deal with Soza under the condition that harassing investigations into his presidency be dropped (Goodman and Moynihan, 256).

Violence in Honduras surrounding Zelaya-related issues became rampant under Micheletti and Lobo, however the trend quickly spread to any opponents of the government and the private sector, eventually characterizing the country as a whole. According to Human Rights Watch World Report of 2014, Honduras reached the world's highest murder rate in 2013, a statistic which has clung to the country every year since. Police brutality has come to be expected, and in 2011 and 2012, there were 149 reported killings of civilians by security forces. These statistics come after the National Congress passed a law in 2011 allowing the military to act as a public security force, which was replaced by a 2013 law which called for the creation of a new military-police force tasked with seizing violent neighborhoods. In the same vein, between Lobo's inauguration in 2010 and 2013, 29 journalists were murdered, as compared with only

seven between 2003 and 2009. Furthermore, rural violence has been rampant since Zelaya's land reforms redistributed land to peasant families. Soza and his administration largely failed to enforce these reforms, resulting in the killings of farmers by mercenaries and private security firms hired by wealthy landowners and corporations. Leading up to the 2013 elections, political violence continued to increase, and a report by Rights Action found a disproportionately number of killings to be of Libre candidates. While candidates are often targeted leading up to presidential elections, the motivation behind these killings is clear when analyzing the victims: Erick Martinez, for example, was an LGBTI activist, and Joni Rivas, a leader in the United Campesino Movement of the Aguan. Ultimately, conservative candidate Juan Orlando Hernandez was successful in his bid for the presidency, however the Libre candidate and Zelaya's wife Xiomara Castro came in second, marking the first time in the country's history that the two party system had been disrupted.

Honduras, during the past four years under Hernandez, has essentially experienced a continuation of Soza's presidency. The murder rate has continued to skyrocket every year, with activists and journalists fearing for their lives. In the aftermath of Libre's unprecedented success, however, popular struggles against corruption and violence have been re-energized. Two events in particular have polarized Hondurans: in 2015, the country's supreme court, packed with conservatives during Soza's and Hernandez' administrations, voted that the country's constitution could not prohibit a sitting president from seeking reelection. In 2016, Berta Caceres, an internationally renowned activist for women's, indigenous, and environmental rights was murdered after protesting a hydroelectric dam project, and ongoing investigations have linked members of the military to her assassins. Since her assassination, an attempt to put a bill called the Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 5474) through the US

Congress, which would deny aid to Honduras until human rights violations have ceased, has seen little support.

When Hernandez made his candidacy for the 2017 presidential election known, a coalition was formed out of the country's major left-leaning parties, and aptly named itself the Opposition Alliance Against Dictatorship. The alliance was led by the Libre party under the coordination of former President Zelaya, however chose its candidate to be Salvador Nasralla, a former television personality and leader of the centrist Anti-Corruption party. On November 26th, after a brief interruption in the vote count that had Nasralla ahead with most of the votes counted, Hernandez was announced to be the winner of the race despite polls leading up to the election clearly indicating Nasralla's dominating lead. Protests again erupted across the country, and even the center-right candidate of the traditional PLH Luis Zelaya put his support behind Nasralla. Many have lost their lives in protests in the days since the election, and when the government called on the police force to enforce a specially imposed curfew, something historic happened: for the first time in its history, the police force disobeyed, stating it would not carry out attacks against its own people. Currently, there is still much in dispute around the November 26th election, however opposition supporters have once again adopted a bleak outlook.

While it echoes former episodes in Honduras, the irony of the current situation is too great to be overlooked: Zelaya, who was removed in a coup d'etat for suspicions of seeking to extend his term has organized a broad alliance, ranging from the center to the far-left of the political spectrum. Hernandez, who supported the coup against Zelaya, has won his unconstitutional bid for the presidency, becoming the first president to be re-elected since the country's 1981 attempt at democratic reform.

4- Conclusion

Across the United States, very few Americans tend to deny the unequal and exploitative relationships of the late 19th and early 20th centuries between the United States and its neighbors to the south. Fewer, however, can recognize the link that exists between these former relationships and the hardships faced by Latin America today. While policies towards Latin America have been determined by the establishment of international norms, this is not to say that the United States resembles a colonial empire. A more accurate term to describe the behavior of the United States government would be opportunistic, as initial developments carried out by the fledgling nation in regards to Latin America were necessary in order to ensure regional stability in the face of colonial dominance. Such developments resulted in the economic well being of the American private sector, incentivizing its expansion both horizontally in terms of reaching other nations and vertically in terms of deepening economic integration. While the American economy flourished, however, Central American leaders became caught in a cycle of paying off debts while their constituents dealt with social issues resulting from foreign influence over the private and public sectors of these nations. Through embezzlement, many leaders have been able to retain power throughout Latin America, while providing a stable and thus attractive economic regime for the United States. For social movements which emphasize equality and freedom, values which are typically associated with American identity, this presents a paradox as their failures have often been exacerbated by American taxpayer or corporate money. In Central America, many of the same problems which existed 150 years ago persist today, and it is important to examine the power structures which maintain social inequalities. Most recently, it has appeared that Central American social movements are gaining traction in the direction of true social reorganization, however these movements will be contingent on the concentrated deconstruction of international norms and precedents. While not dependent on the

generosity of the United States, progress in Central America will certainly be slow if recent trends in the American political culture continue, as evidenced by the adoption “America First” attitudes and policies towards international business relations.

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