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Peaceful Collaboration: The Truman Administration's Response to the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949

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PEACEFUL COLLABORATION: THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION'S
RESPONSE TO THE COSTA RICAN REVOLUTION OF 1948 AND THE
COSTA RICA-NICARAGUA CRISIS OF 1948-1949

by

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B.A. May 2018, Old Dominion University

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ABSTRACT

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James Wilkerson
Old Dominion University, 2020
Director: Dr. Robert H. Holden

Before, during, and after the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949, the Truman Administration maintained a posture of strict neutrality and helped to isolate, and bring a quick end to, both conflicts. This thesis attempts to revise the historiography of the Costa Rican Revolution by challenging the common view that the United States inaugurated the Cold War in Latin America by facilitating the overthrow of the communist-supported government in Costa Rica. The Truman Administration did not care who won and only wanted the Revolution and Crisis to come to a quick end. The United States' response to the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis was consistent with its broader hemispheric policy of promoting peaceful collaboration among the American republics in order to convince the Soviet Union that the Western Hemisphere was united against international communism.

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This thesis is dedicated to the 2017-2018 Old Dominion University baseball teams.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CENTRAL ARGUMENT	4
METHODOLOGY AND INTERPRETIVE PREMISES	9
CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER BREAKDOWN.....	11
I. SETTING THE STAGE: U.S.-COSTA RICAN RELATIONS IN 1947	14
THE UNITED STATES' APPRAISAL OF THE OPPOSITION	15
THE UNITED STATES' APPRAISAL OF THE PRN	25
THE UNITED STATES' APPRAISAL OF THE PVP	33
CONCLUSION.....	40
II. "LOCALIZING" THE COSTA RICAN REVOLUTION OF 1948	41
BRACING FOR THE REVOLUTION	46
LOCALIZING THE REVOLUTION.....	51
ENDING THE REVOLUTION.....	61
CONCLUSION.....	66
III. PROMOTING PEACEFUL COLLABORATION: THE UNITED STATES' RESPONSE TO THE COSTA RICA-NICARAGUA CRISIS OF 1948-1949	68
THE ARMS QUESTION	69
PVP: A NEW THREAT	73
SOMOZA AND THE CALDERONISTAS	77
FIGUERES AND THE CARIBBEAN LEGION	79
THE DISSOLUTION OF THE COSTA RICAN ARMY AND THE COSTA RICA- NICARAGUA CRISIS	84
CONCLUSION.....	94
IV. "WAGING PEACE IN THE AMERICAS": THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION'S HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE PLAN	96
CLANDESTINE COMMUNISM: "THE RISKS OF MERE SUPPRESSION"	97
THE ARMS QUESTION	103
RESOLUTION XXXV AND PEACEFUL COLLABORATION.....	106
TRUMAN'S HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE PLAN AND THE NEW THREAT.....	110

	Page
CONCLUSION: COLD WAR INTERVENTION IN LATIN AMERICA – TRUMAN’S LEGACY?.....	112
CONCLUSION.....	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	120
VITA.....	125

INTRODUCTION

From 1947 to 1952 a conflict between revolutionaries and dictatorships threatened the peace of the Caribbean and Central American regions.¹ Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, after an attempted coup d'état against him failed on February 25, 1947, exiled all known Dominican revolutionaries involved in the plot. Juan "Juancito" Rodríguez emerged as the leader of the exiled army, known as "Liberation Army of America," and found sanctuary in the Cayo Confites off the coast of Cuba. Naturally, Trujillo was outraged that the government of Cuba allowed a Dominican revolutionary force to base its operations there, and he demanded its immediate removal. The U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, in an attempt to keep hemispheric peace, insisted that Cuban President Ramón Grau investigate the matter and immediately remove the threat if found. Under pressure from the United States and the Dominican Republic, Cuba removed the revolutionary force on September 20, 1947, and Costa Rican José "Don Pepe" Figueres persuaded "Juancito" to move his army to Costa Rica to overthrow the government there. In December, revolutionaries from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, looking to overthrow the governments of Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, signed the "Caribbean Pact," signifying the creation of the Caribbean Legion.²

Shortly before the Legion's formation, a crisis emerged in Costa Rica during Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia's tenure as Costa Rican President from 1940 to 1944. In 1942 Calderón exiled his political enemy, Figueres, who spoke out against the president in a national radio

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I define revolutionaries simply as any group (either communist or noncommunist) that aimed to violently overthrow any government in Latin America.

² Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950*, (State College: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 26-74.

broadcast, and the two would constantly be at odds throughout the 1940s and 1950s. While in office, Calderón implemented a series of populist reforms that diminished the power of the oligarchy in Costa Rica, which led to an alliance between the embittered elites and ex-president León Cortes Castro.³ In response, Calderón's party, the Partido Republicano Nacional (PRN), and the Vanguardia Popular (PVP), the communist party of Costa Rica, entered into an alliance to defeat Cortes. The PRN and the PVP selected Teodoro Picado as their presidential candidate for the 1944 elections, and in an obviously rigged election, Picado defeated Cortes. Following the election, the Unión Nacional emerged, which was headed by newcomer, Otilio Ulate, editor of the Costa Rican newspaper *Diario de Costa Rica*. Ulate, Cortes, and Figueres teamed up during Picado's presidency and created a united opposition against the PRN and the PVP.⁴

After Picado entered office, the PRN and the opposition prepared for the 1948 elections, and both groups charged and countercharged each other with acts of fraud and intimidation. Bombing campaigns and violent disturbances between 1946 and 1948 created an unstable political environment in Costa Rica, which only worsened in December 1947 after opposition leader Ulate and Calderón were officially nominated as the presidential candidates. On February 8, 1948, the results of the elections came back and the electoral tribunal declared Ulate the victor. Immediately, the PRN and the PVP cried fraud, and Calderón appealed to the legislative assembly, consisting mostly of PRN members, to annul the elections, which was promptly done. With the support of the Caribbean Legion and opposition forces, Figueres responded to the annulment by starting the Costa Rican Revolution on March 12, 1948.

³ John Patrick Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica: the 1948 Revolution*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971), 40.

⁴ The opposition consisted of multiple political parties, including the Acción Demócrata, Partido Social Demócrata, and Unión Nacional; Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 108-112, 36.

Just to the north, in Nicaragua, Director of the Guardia Nacional and ally to Picado, Anastasio Somoza, actively supported the Picado government during the Revolution, despite the United States' strongly discouraging intervention by any of the other American republics. Somoza feared that the Caribbean Legion, led by Figueres and materially supported by the Guatemalan government, would look next to overthrow his puppet government in Nicaragua, headed by Victor Manuel Román y Reyes. After Figueres defeated Picado with his revolutionary army on April 19, Somoza harbored many of the exiled Calderonistas, which led to a vicious cycle of charges and countercharges both by Figueres and Somoza that the other intended to attack.⁵ Ultimately, the situation deteriorated into the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949, which began on December 10, 1948, when an unknown number of Calderonistas invaded northern Costa Rica.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Truman Administration had its hands full in dealing with the Soviet Union. Immediately following the formation of the United Nations in October of 1945, U.S.-Soviet relations began deteriorating rapidly, and the State Department started drawing up a contingency plan to counterbalance the potential failure of the UN. Article 52 in the Charter of the United Nations permitted the creation of supplementary regional organizations that fell under the jurisdiction of the UN, but these organizations were allowed to act independently on issues concerning regional security and local disputes. The Truman Administration, realizing that it could not depend on the UN to preserve peaceful cooperation between the Soviet Union and the western world, immediately began planning for the creation of regional organizations in the fall of 1945 in an effort to convince the Soviet Union that the entire

⁵ After the disbandment of the PRN in Costa Rica, the exiled counterrevolutionaries were commonly referred to as "Calderonistas."

world was united against it. The first regional defense system, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) of 1947, would be created and tested in Latin America and would bring an end to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis.⁶

Central Argument

Before, during, and after the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949, the Truman Administration maintained a posture of strict neutrality and helped to isolate, and bring a quick end to, both conflicts. This thesis attempts to revise the historiography of the Costa Rican Revolution by challenging the common view that the United States inaugurated the Cold War in Latin America by facilitating the overthrow of the communist-supported government in Costa Rica. The Truman Administration did not care who won and only wanted the Revolution and Crisis to come to a quick end.

U.S.-Latin American relations during the Truman years have been the central subject of few scholarly works, and only a handful of authors have paid close attention to the United States' role during the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949. Charles D. Ameringer, Juan Carlos Zarate, Kyle Longley, John Patrick Bell, Steven Schwartzberg, Paul L. Atwood, Rodolfo Cerdas Cruz, and Jacobo Schifter have specifically studied this subject, and, with the addition of several other scholars, have collectively come to three conclusions: The Truman Administration advocated for peace and stability in Central America; suppressed the Caribbean Legion seeking to overthrow various governments in the

⁶ United Nations, "The Charter of the United Nations, Including the Statute of the International Court of Justice," June 26, 1945, *Papers of Harry S. Truman: White House Central Files – Official File*, in *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Vol. 35 The United Nations, 1945-1953: The Development of a World Organization*, ed. Dennis Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), 168.

region; and helped overthrow the communist-supported government in Costa Rica.⁷ This third conclusion, incompatible with the first two conclusions, contributes to a fourth and final conclusion – that Truman’s policy in Latin America, in general, and Costa Rica, specifically, was one of “confusion,” “division,” and “contradictory desires.”⁸

⁷For arguments that the Truman Administration advocated for peace and stability in Central America, see Bryce Wood, *The Dismantling of the Good Neighbor Policy*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 192; Paul L. Atwood, *The United States and Costa Rica, 1945-1960: The Containment of Liberal Nationalism*, (PhD. Diss., Boston University, 1991), 86; Juan Carlos Zarate, *Forging Democracy: A Comparative Study of the Effects of U.S. Foreign Policy on Central American Democratization*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 39; Thomas M. Leonard, *The Decline of the Recognition Policy in United States-Central American Relations, 1933-1949*, (Miami, FL: Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University, 1985), 26; Steven Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy in Latin America during the Truman Years*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 173; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 2nd ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 105; Kyle Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk: The United States and Costa Rica during the Rise of José Figueres*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 97. For arguments that the Truman Administration suppressed the Caribbean Legion seeking to overthrow various governments in Central America, see Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion, Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 10; Leslie Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War: 1944-1954,” in *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America*, edited by Abraham F. Lowenthal, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 63; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 106; Atwood, *Containment of Liberal Nationalism*, 84; Piero Gleijeses, “Juan Jose Arevalo and the Caribbean Legion,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21 (1989): 133-145; Zarate, *Forging Democracy*, 86; John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: The Clients and the Colossus*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 63; Schifter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 349; Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 97. For arguments that the Truman Administration helped overthrow the communist-supported government in Costa Rica, see Longley, “Peaceful Costa Rica, The First Battleground: The United States and the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948,” *The Americas* 50, no. 2 (October 1993): 152; Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 173, 179; Rodolfo Cerdas Cruz, “Costa Rica,” in *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293; Schifter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 296, 298; Atwood, *Containment of Liberal Nationalism*, 74; Ameringer, *Don Pepe: A Political Biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 63; Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 150; John E. Findling, *Close Neighbors, Distant Friends: United States-Central American Relations*, (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1987), 105-6; Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 128; Leonard, *The United States and Central America, 1944-1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 37;; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America Since 1920*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 134,145; Coatsworth, *The Clients and the Colossus*, 59; Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War,” 51; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 104-105.

⁸ Robert Freeman Smith, *The Caribbean World and the United States: Mixing Rum and Coca-Cola*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 27; Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, “The Postwar Conjunction in Latin America: Democracy, Labor, and the Left,” in *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 24; Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 173.

However, Marcia Olander offers an alternative look at the Truman Administration's hemispheric policy. Olander deconstructed, and convincingly repudiated, the longstanding argument that the United States intervened during the Costa Rican Revolution to facilitate the overthrow of the communist-supported government.⁹ Though she could not find a definitive answer as to why the United States refused to intervene, since this was outside the scope of her argument, Olander revealed that some historians have only been imagining a U.S. intervention against communism in Costa Rica that in reality did not happen.¹⁰

First, allow me to explain why it is essential to take the Costa Rican Revolution into serious consideration when trying to define the Truman Administration's Cold War strategies in Latin America. Some scholars, with hardly any pushback, incorrectly identify the Costa Rican Revolution as the first known instance of the United States' facilitating the overthrow of a communist-supported government in the Western Hemisphere.¹¹ If the premise is accepted that the Truman Administration assisted the toppling of the government in Costa Rica, then one can reasonably assume that Truman did so elsewhere in Latin America. For example, in places like Panama and Venezuela, evidence of Truman's facilitating the overthrow of these governments is only circumstantial, and historians admit that it is only *possible* that Truman indirectly supported these coups.¹² However, the Costa Rican myth substantiates their hypotheses, and while none of

⁹ Anthony P. Maingot also maintained that the United States did not play an important role in the Revolution and that "the US did not feel inclined to get involved in the Costa Rica case [since] they, along with the rest of Latin America, were at the same time in Bogotá, Colombia hammering together the Organization of American States (OAS)." – Anthony P. Maingot, *The United States and the Caribbean: Challenges of an Asymmetrical Relationship*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994) 78-80.

¹⁰ Marcia Olander, "Costa Rica in 1948: Cold War or Local War?," *The Americas* 52, no. 4 (1996): 465-493.

¹¹ See footnote 7.

¹² For Venezuela in 1948, see Bethell and Roxborough, "Postwar Conjuncture," 29; Steve Ellner, "Venezuela," in *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 167-169; For Panama in 1949, see John H. Coatsworth, "United States Interventions: What For?," *Revista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Spring/Summer 2005): 6-9.

these authors cited Costa Rica, their readers can assume that if the United States helped overthrow the government in Costa Rica, then it could have done the same in Panama and Venezuela.

After examining U.S.-Costa Rican relations and studying the Truman Administration's actions in Latin America before, during, and after the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis, I believe that the circumstantial arguments – that the Truman Administration facilitated the overthrow of various Latin American governments and encouraged the outlawing of communism in Latin America – are very weak.¹³ Let me be clear, though. I am not *definitively* making the claim that the Truman Administration did not facilitate these coups or encourage the outlawing of communist parties outside of Costa Rica. However, until some direct evidence is presented to support these claims, I propose that the *assumption* that Truman facilitated the overthrow of governments and the violent suppression of communists in Latin America should be abandoned. The first step historians must take is to dismiss the idea that Costa Rica was the “First Latin American Battleground of the Cold War.”¹⁴

As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, State Department officials questioned whether outlawing communist parties, much less overthrowing communist-supported governments, in Latin America would serve the best interests of the United States. The State Department's Policy Planning Staff, shortly before the Bogotá Conference began in March 1948, decided that a study should be conducted before encouraging Latin American governments to

¹³ Most historians, as do I, look beyond the rhetoric of any presidential administration's public policies by paying attention the administration's *actions*. I base my evidence throughout the thesis on confidential reports detailing *actions*. Though some theoretical approach is taken in defining the Truman Administration's hemispheric defense plan in the final chapter, the definition of the hemispheric defense plan is largely based on what the State Department under Truman is doing – not merely saying.

¹⁴ Quotation borrowed from Kyle Longley's title of the fourth chapter in *Sparrow in the Hawk*.

outlaw communist parties. Moreover, after the Revolution ended in Costa Rica, the U.S. embassy was concerned that the outlawing of the Vanguardia Popular might inadvertently transform it into a more dangerous, clandestine organization.¹⁵ I argue that, yes, the Truman Administration had concerns about, and closely observed, communism in Latin America, but the State Department and the U.S. Embassies also understood that simply outlawing communist parties, or overthrowing communist-supported governments, would not necessarily eliminate the communist threat. It was not as black and white as some historians like to imagine.¹⁶

My broader argument for Truman's Latin American Cold War policies, then, is this: Truman recognized that there was more than one way to fight the Cold War. In Europe and Asia where there was a direct Soviet communist threat, Truman armed and financed noncommunist governments to counter the USSR's growing influence and to directly suppress communists in the Eastern Hemisphere.¹⁷ Meanwhile, in Latin America, the United States believed that communist parties were "within the power orbit of the United States" and did not warrant violent intervention.¹⁸ In order to fight the Cold War in only one hemisphere at a time, Truman urged his

¹⁵ Citations below.

¹⁶ For example, Greg Grandin without any supporting evidence asserted that by 1947, "U.S. Embassies began to pressure governments to proscribe Communist parties." – Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8-9; Though Bethell and Roxborough claimed that in Cuba and Brazil "it was not necessary for the United States to intervene directly, even behind the scenes, to secure the proscription of Communist parties and the purging of Communists and other militants from labor unions," they asserted without evidence that "there was a general awareness of Washington's approval of such measures." – Bethell and Roxborough, "Postwar conjuncture," 26. Others have recognized that the United States did not play a hand in the outlawing of communism or severing ties with the Soviet Union in some countries. Andrew Barnard in "Chile" on page 90, argued that in proscribing communism and "breaking off relations with the Soviets, [Gabriel González Videla] was not responding to any direct pressure or request from the State Department." – Andrew Barnard, "Chile," in *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90.

¹⁷ Arnold A. Offner, "'Another Such Victory': President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War." *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (1999): 139-153.

¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States," September 26, 1947, *Papers of Harry S. Truman: President's Secretary's Files – National Security Council Meetings*, in *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Vol. 23 The Central Intelligence Agency*, ed. Dennis Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), 215.

Latin American counterparts to cooperate in peaceful collaboration (see definition below) so that the Soviet Union's attention might not be drawn toward the Western Hemisphere.

Methodology and Interpretive Premises

Initially, I began this project by investigating the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations' influence on, and reaction to, Costa Rica's disbandment of its military. Only a few historians have touched on this issue, and no one has dedicated significant space to answer this question.¹⁹ After reading Olander's article, I realized that I needed to redefine the Truman Administration's Costa Rican policy within the broader context of the Cold War in order to understand Washington's influence on, and reaction to, Costa Rica's disbanding its military. First, I began by sifting published documentary histories of the Truman Administration at the Old Dominion University Perry Library in Norfolk, Virginia, and then I traveled to the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, to examine the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations' political and military relations with Costa Rica from 1945 to 1955. Primarily I searched through State Department communications in Record Group (RG) 59, but I also sifted RGs 263 (CIA), 319 (Army Staff), and 165 (Military Intelligence Division).²⁰ Upon my return to Norfolk, I organized the evidence and began writing.

¹⁹ John Gardner, *The Costa Rican Junta of 1948-49*, (PhD. Diss., St. John's University, 1971), 225-226; Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 96; Zarate, *Forging Democracy*, 36; Schifter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 349-350; Kirk Bowman, "Militaries and Modern States: The Comparative Evidence from Costa Rica and Honduras," in *Demilitarization in the Contemporary World*, ed. Peter Stearns, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 195.

²⁰ List of published material includes: Department of State *Bulletin; Foreign Relations of the United States*; Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov, *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Louis W. Koenig, *The Truman Administration, Its Principles and Practice*, (New York: New York University Press, 1956); Dennis Merrill, *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*, (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1995); Organization of American States, Department of Legal Affairs, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance 1-3*, (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1973).

For the purposes of this thesis, I define the Cold War from the Truman Administration's perspective, as a direct conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union and not between the general concepts of capitalism and communism. From the perspective of the State Department,²¹ there existed a stark difference between national communists – commonly referred to as “local” communists by U.S. officials – who operated outside of the power orbit of the Soviet Union, and international communists, who practiced Soviet-style communism.²² More specifically, local communists in Latin America, from the State Department's and CIA's perspective, did not pose a serious threat to the hemisphere and often practiced their own unique brand of communism within their nation's borders. Meanwhile, international communist parties worked closely with Moscow to initiate subversive movements, lead revolts, and dismantle noncommunist governments. The U.S. embassy only perceived the PVP as a “local” communist party, and international communism, from the perspective of the State Department and CIA, did not yet pose a serious enough threat in Latin America for Truman to intervene.²³

Since the American republics, from Washington's perspective, were geographically and politically isolated from the dangers of the Cold War, the Truman Administration promoted peaceful collaboration in Latin America. “Peaceful collaboration” refers to the Truman Administration's policy of promoting hemispheric peace and nonintervention among *all*

²¹ The State Department and War/Defense Departments disagreed on key issues, such as a Latin American arms program and multilateral defense site agreements, but the State Department had the final say in implementing U.S. policy in Latin America. The War and Defense Departments had bigger concerns in the Eastern Hemisphere.

²² For State Department officials, “local” means “national.” Other historians have also noticed that the State Department made a distinction between local (or national) and international communists. See, for example, Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States Policies, 1820s-1980s: A Guide to Issues and References*, (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1985), 56. The argument of whether communists in Latin America were actually tied to Moscow is outside of the scope of this thesis. I simply am conveying to my audience how the State Department perceived communism in the Western Hemisphere.

²³ Bethell and Roxborough also noted that the “CIA review of Soviet aims in Latin America in November 1947 contended there was no possibility of a Communist takeover anywhere in the region.” – Bethell and Roxborough, “Postwar conjuncture,” 26.

American republics in order to avoid a violent conflict that might draw the attention of the Soviet Union toward the Western Hemisphere. In promoting peaceful collaboration, the United States reacted to the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis by isolating – or “localizing” – the conflicts or, in other words, preventing state-sanctioned and revolutionary violence from spreading beyond the internationally defined borders of either Costa Rica or Nicaragua.²⁴ Simultaneously, it discouraged other governments from materially or militarily intervening in the conflicts in order to prevent the violence from escalating into a regional conflict.²⁵ The United States also maintained a policy of strict neutrality throughout the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis, meaning that it was careful not to show favoritism or antagonism, by giving or withholding moral and material support, either to Costa Rica or Nicaragua. Furthermore, Figueres’ disbanding of the constitutional army in Costa Rica meant very little to the United States, since this did virtually nothing to improve the unstable situation brewing in Central America. Embassy officials viewed it as a purely political move that was intended to increase Figueres’ popularity among the Costa Rican populace.

Chapter-by-Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, “Setting the Stage: U.S.-Costa Rican Relations in 1947,” examines the Truman Administration’s appraisals, respectively, of the opposition, the PRN, and the PVP. The U.S. embassy had concerns about all three political groups, regardless of their ideologies, but it

²⁴ Though Costa Rica and Nicaragua did not have a clearly defined border, the Truman Administration implemented its policy of localizing violence by discouraging the deployment of troops to the borders. For a discussion of borderlands, see Pekka Hämmäläinen and Samuel Truett, “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 338-61.

²⁵ “Regional conflict” simply means state or revolutionary violence that the Truman Administration perceived as having spread beyond the internationally defined borders of any of the American states; John Findling similarly argued in *Close Neighbors, Distant Friends*, on page 106, that the United States did not want the revolt to “become a much wider conflict.”

primarily wanted to prevent violence from erupting between the opposition and the PRN. In their appraisals of the PVP, U.S. Ambassadors Hallett Johnson and Walter J. Donnelly both concluded that it did not constitute a serious international communist threat. Therefore, the Truman Administration adhered to a policy of strict neutrality in Costa Rica in 1947 in the hopes that the three political organizations would settle their differences in a relatively peaceful manner.

The second chapter, “‘Localizing’ the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948,” enters into conversation with Marcia Olander and Kyle Longley. While Olander effectively dismantled Longley’s argument, I support her claim with evidence that suggests that the United States had no reason to choose sides during the Revolution. Washington officials only did damage control by consulting with other Central American and Caribbean countries. Ultimately, I argue that the Truman Administration successfully isolated the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 by remaining neutral and by discouraging other countries from intervening.

The third chapter, “Promoting Peaceful Collaboration: The United States’ Response to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949,” argues that Washington refused to give Figueres weapons because they would likely be used against Somoza. In addition, the Truman Administration sought to end the revolutionary activity (communist and noncommunist alike) existing in both countries, and it assisted the Organization of American States in isolating and ending the conflict. The dissolution of Costa Rica’s constitutional army had little effect on the defense of the hemisphere against Soviet communism and did nothing to bring an end to the crisis. Neither did the Costa Rican army pose a serious threat to the peace of the hemisphere, as the Truman Administration understood that Somoza’s much larger Guardia Nacional would keep

it in check. Therefore, the Truman Administration largely ignored the disbandment of the small army and demanded Figueres disband the Caribbean Legion as well.

The final chapter, “‘Waging Peace in the Americas’: The Truman Administration’s Hemispheric Defense Plan,” as the title suggests, defines the Truman Administration’s hemispheric defense plan that guided the embassy’s actions during the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis. Historians tend to narrowly focus on the passage of Resolution XXXII at the Bogotá Conference, which denounced international communism as a totalitarian doctrine, and conclude that this signified the inauguration of the Cold War in Latin America, where the United States actively sought the violent eradication of communists living in the Western Hemisphere. However, I argue that the United States did not yet perceive there to be a serious international communist threat lurking in Latin America, and, instead, the Truman Administration promoted peaceful collaboration among all American republics in order to convince the Soviet Union that the Western Hemisphere was united against international communism.²⁶ This policy differed drastically from Dwight D. Eisenhower’s strategy of directly intervening in Latin America, most notably in Guatemala, to violently overthrow communist-supported governments and forcefully suppress communist activity.

²⁶ Truman’s hemispheric defense plan appears to have been congruent with his broader global policy in the late 1940s, defined by Odd Arne Westad, that allowed for flexibility in diplomacy in order to collaborate with other countries and create alliances against the Soviet Union. Westad noted, however, that this policy, by the early 1950s, had shifted to one of unilateral aggression against communist forces, and at that point, I argue, Truman’s Latin American policy had become an anomaly. – See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third War Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE: U.S.-COSTA RICAN RELATIONS IN 1947

Throughout 1947, the U.S. embassy in Costa Rica reported to Washington the unstable political situation brewing in San José in response to the upcoming presidential elections in February 1948. However, this caused relatively little alarm among high-ranking State Department officials, who unanimously urged the embassy to maintain a neutral position and accept all visitors from members of the two parties in power, the Partido Republicano Nacional (PRN) and the Vanguardia Popular (PVP), as well as from their opponents. While the embassy kept a watchful eye on the PVP, which had ties with the Communist International until its disbandment in 1943, the reports sent to Washington often emphasized that the PVP and its leader, Manuel Mora Valverde, were merely “local” communists with no direct connections to Moscow. Though the political unrest in Costa Rica alarmed the U.S. embassy, Washington officials were more concerned with Argentina and the drafting of the Rio Treaty, and they largely ignored Costa Rica.²⁷

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first two sections present a side-by-side comparison of the State Department’s assessments of the two main political factions in Costa Rica. This comparative approach reveals that the U.S. embassy had serious concerns about both the opposition and the PRN, and, therefore, the officials in Washington ordered the embassy maintain a posture of strict neutrality. The third section demonstrates that the Truman

²⁷ For more information on the United States’ feud with Argentina, see Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 45-90.

Administration's high-ranking officials, across the board, did not perceive the PVP in Costa Rica, or communism in Latin America, as a serious threat in 1947.²⁸ Ultimately, this chapter argues that the Truman Administration maintained a policy of strict neutrality throughout 1947 in an attempt to keep the peace between the PRN and the opposition, in order to avoid a civil war. The PVP was largely irrelevant.

The United States' Appraisal of the Opposition

The U.S. embassy in 1947 believed that the opposition coalition, consisting of the Acción Demócrata, Partido Social Demócrata, and Unión Nacional, had little chance to win the 1948 presidential election. The PRN had a popular leader, Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia, who effectively centralized his coalition and increased its numerical support by allying with the PVP. Meanwhile, the opposition, after ex-president León Cortes passed away in 1946, was without a strong leader to unite the three political parties. Otilio Ulate eventually emerged as the opposition's chief and presidential candidate, but the embassy still doubted his capability to unite the coalition. Due to the opposition's weak political condition, the embassy feared that the loose coalition would lose the election and, thereafter, resort to violence.

On December 20, 1946, the U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica, Hallett Johnson, reported to Washington that the opposition had no justification for revolutionary action. After receiving news that one of the opposition leaders, Alberto Oreamuno, was leaving for Washington, Johnson suggested to the Office of American Republic Affairs (ARA) that it should express to

²⁸ Some authors disagree with this premise but have presented little evidence to support their claims: Von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 43-44, citing Russell Crandall, *Gunboat Democracy: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 17-18; Findling, *Close Neighbors, Distant Friends*, 106; Leonard, *Perceptions of Political Dynamics*, 34, and Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 127.

Oreamuno that the U.S. government is more friendly “toward a healthy and sane opposition” than toward an opposition that pushes its cause “through terroristic and similar acts of violence.” The “acts of violence” to which Johnson referred were the frequent, yet ineffective, bombing campaigns committed by members of the opposition against the PVP and the Costa Rican government. These were indicative, according to Johnson, “that the more fanatical leaders of the Opposition have been unable to organize a popular revolutionary movement.”²⁹

Though Johnson believed members of the opposition to be “fanatical” and that the Truman Administration should encourage Ulate and Oreamuno not to resort to violence, the State Department decided it best not to request a visit from Oreamuno during his trip to Washington, since he was not invited there by the State Department. The Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs (CPA), Robert Newbegin, believed that such a request “might well be considered as unwarranted interference on our part.” The Secretary of State agreed with Newbegin’s position and informed Johnson that while the United States would “gladly receive Alberto Oreamuno...it does not seem appropriate for the Department to initiate conversation.”³⁰

Rumors also emerged that the opposition was receiving personnel and material support from outside Costa Rica’s borders. On January 14, Johnson reported that “certain members of the Nicaraguan Opposition” were combining their efforts with the Costa Rican opposition. In a message circulated throughout the department, Area Specialist of the CPA, William Tapley

²⁹ Hallett Johnson to James F. Byrnes, “Internal Political Situation,” December 20, 1946, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-2046; Johnson to Byrnes, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” January 6, 1946, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-647; William Tapley, Bennett, Jr., “Costa Rica – Psychology of the Opposition,” January 8, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-347.

³⁰ Robert Newbegin to Ellis O. Briggs, “Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs to the Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs,” January 9, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/1-947; James F. Byrnes, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” January 10, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-647.

Bennett, Jr., made a note that the election day in Nicaragua, February 2, “is mentioned as a possible date for further subversive attempts in Costa Rica.” The Costa Rican government feared that the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican oppositions would join forces to oust the Picado administration and then look next to overthrow Somoza in Nicaragua. Ambassador Johnson, in response to these rumors, proposed that the State Department send a destroyer to Costa Rica as a show of force, which could serve as a “deterrent to subversive activities.” However, the CPA recommended that the Department deny Johnson’s request.³¹

Johnson again reported to the State Department on January 31 that the opposition was putting together an “effective subversive campaign” to oust the Picado government, and he requested again that a destroyer be sent down as a show of force. This time Spruille Braden directly responded to the embassy that a destroyer would not be sent since “it would be risky under present circumstances and might result in allegations of intervention.” Two days after the Nicaraguan elections took place, the Costa Rican Minister of Public Security, René Picado, visited the house of Calderón, which sparked further outrage by the opposition since this was blatant evidence of the Costa Rican government’s unabashed support of Calderón. Johnson, who, since 1945, had been rather optimistic that a revolution could be avoided in Costa Rica, expressed his newfound pessimism that “the situation has now changed” and that “perennial talk of the opposition may be transformed into action.” While the U.S. Ambassador remarked that the

³¹ Zarate argued, “[Johnson] feared that the Vanguardia would take advantage of the general chaos and usurp power. In hopes of deterring any subversive acts Johnson requested a destroyer visit Costa Rica as a ‘moral effect deterrent to subversive acts.’” However, the evidence here clearly shows that by “subversive acts,” Johnson was referring to the opposition’s actions. – Zarate, *Forging Democracy*, 41; Johnson to Byrnes, “President Picado Is of the Opinion That a Part of the Opposition is Engaged in Subversive Activities,” January 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-1447; Bennett, Jr., “Costa Rica – Further Disorder Expected,” January 16, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/1-947.

visit between the minister and Calderón was foolish, he still believed that there did not exist a legitimate excuse for a revolution to occur.³²

On February 13, a convention held by the Acción Demócrata, Partido Social Demócrata, and Unión Nacional chose Ulate as the coalition's chief, thus officially uniting the three political parties under one leader. In his acceptance speech, Ulate remarked "that the redemption of Costa Rica must be obtained by any means and at any sacrifice." Johnson did not believe Ulate to be a strong enough leader capable of uniting the three parties, and he commented that Ulate's nomination as the opposition's leader made the election of Calderón "more probable." Johnson feared that a PRN victory would inevitably result in the opposition's resorting to violence.³³

The U.S. Ambassador also found the opposition to be hypocritical in choosing Ulate as supra-chief of the three parties. On March 27, after Calderón announced his candidacy for the PRN candidate, Johnson recorded that Ulate threatened to withhold the nomination of an official candidate "until it becomes clear whether there will be 'free elections' in February 1948." Johnson remarked that the battle cry of "free elections" by the opposition was ironic since "many crooked votes were cast in the convention which named Ulate chief." It would therefore, in the Ambassador's opinion, be "somewhat illogical" for the opposition to refuse to name a candidate or refuse to vote at the presidential elections merely because of "their apprehension that the elections will not be free."³⁴

³² Johnson to Marshall, "Pacific Railroad Track is Bombed, Apparently as Part of Organized Subversive Campaign on Part of Opposition; Conversation with Minister of Public Security," January 30, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-3047; Spruille Braden to Johnson, "The Assistant Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Costa Rica," February 3, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 579; Johnson to Marshall, "Political Situation Tense," February 4, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-447.

³³ Johnson to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," February 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1347; Johnson to Marshall, "Nomination of Otilio Ulate as Opposition Leader Does Little to Solidify Political Situation," February 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1447.

³⁴ Johnson to Marshall, "Internal Political Situation," March 27, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2747.

Furthermore, the opposition frequently attacked the U.S. embassy for acting on behalf of the PVP and the PRN. For instance, the military mission in Costa Rica had an active hand in training the small mobile unit, which the U.S. Army mission considered to be the “nucleus” of Costa Rica’s military and the most disciplined and apolitical of the other units. However, the opposition often expressed its fear that the highly trained unit would “be used to prevent free elections” and blamed the U.S. embassy for giving Picado this potentially dangerous weapon. On March 28, after Johnson announced his resignation, he reported to Marshall that both major political parties attempted to “exploit” his resignation and that the opposition in particular inferred that the Ambassador was relieved because he had “been too closely in touch” with the government, the PRN, and the PVP.³⁵

Johnson would not leave until May 16, though, and he continued monitoring the opposition’s situation in order to properly brief the incoming Ambassador. On April 3, Johnson made a note that José Figueres emerged as the central figure within the opposition most likely to start a civil war in case of a PRN victory. The Ambassador reported that Figueres was one of Calderón’s “bitterest enemies” and that “he is a firebrand” and “not a practical politician.” He also added that Figueres’ unique ideology mixed elements of “[a]uthoritarianism and certain precepts of socialism” together, causing “his policy to be a confused one.”³⁶ Frequent rumors of Figueres’ and the opposition’s seeking outside aid also helped shape Johnson’s negative opinions of the “firebrand.”

³⁵ Johnson to Marshall, “The United States Military Mission in Costa Rica,” March 18, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.20 Missions/3-1847; Department of the Army, Assistant Chief of Staff (S-2), “Costa Rica – Chapter 3: Political,” in *Strategic Intelligence Digest* July 29, 1947, NARA, RG 319, 47; Johnson to Marshall, “Exploitation by Local Political Parties of My Resignation,” March 28, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2847.

³⁶ Johnson to Marshall, “Local Political Situation: Appointment of Campaign Manager and Secretary of Opposition Forces,” April 3, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-347.

On April 8, Costa Rican Foreign Minister, Julio Acosta, approached Johnson and expressed his concern that the opposition had apparently been smuggling arms from Guatemala into Costa Rica with the intent to overthrow the government. Acosta reminded Johnson of the regional conflict brewing in Central America and “that he did not trust President Arévalo who has a mania for bringing about Central American union.”³⁷ The Foreign Minister further asserted that Arévalo might be planning to overthrow certain governments in the region, particularly the dictatorships of Somoza and Tiburcio Carías, to get rid of the opposition against Central American union. According to various rumors, Arévalo intended to dismantle the Picado regime in order to use Costa Rica as a base of operations for his future missions. Johnson heard similar rumors that same day from the Salvadoran Chargé d’Affairs.³⁸ However, there is nothing in the subsequent record regarding these possibilities.

Still, the opposition’s repeated attempts to smuggle arms into Costa Rica from other countries caused some alarm within the U.S. embassy. U.S. Chargé John Willard Carrigan on June 26 noted that Figueres left the country for Cuba, “possibly in an effort to purchase arms.” The following day, the new U.S. Ambassador, Walter J. Donnelly, also reported that Figueres departed for Cuba because “he intends to purchase arms and to gain other support for the cause of the opposition.” These rumors were confirmed on July 10, when U.S. Vice Consul Alex A. Cohen received reliable information that Figueres attempted to purchase weapons while in Cuba, though he ultimately failed. After being denied material assistance from Cuba, Figueres reportedly tried to convince the Cuban government to allow the shipment of weapons from Mexico into Cuba then to Costa Rica, but this, too, was unsuccessful. The embassy informed the

³⁷ For a good discussion on the failure of Central American union, see Thomas L. Karnes, *The Failure of Union: Central America, 1824-1960*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

³⁸ Johnson to Marshall, “Rumors Regarding Subversive Activities,” April 8, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-847.

Department that Figueres had traveled to Guatemala and Salvador to lobby for physical and moral support for the opposition's cause in Costa Rica.³⁹

Meanwhile, tensions between the opposition and the Picado regime within the Costa Rican borders intensified. After Costa Rican policemen unsuccessfully attempted to break up a demonstration by the opposition in Cartago, a street brawl erupted, resulting in the death of one of the opposition's members. Donnelly informed the State Department that he feared that either the government or the opposition "may provoke an incident with serious consequences." Moreover, the opposition once again blamed the United States for furnishing weapons to the Picado government, which the opposition alleged the police used to kill the victim. That night, July 24, Alberto Oreamuno and other prominent opposition members visited Donnelly and informed him that they held the United States "partially responsible" for the "ten persons killed and twenty wounded."⁴⁰ Donnelly tried to pacify his visitors' anger before leaving for Washington to help Marshall get ready for the Rio Conference, but Oreamuno's and the opposition's minds were set. The U.S. embassy would be held responsible by the opposition for all future casualties inflicted by U.S. weapons in Costa Rica.

After Donnelly left for Washington on July 29, Carrigan took charge of the embassy and reminded Ulate and his supporters that the State Department would remain neutral during Costa Rica's upcoming election. When the opposition candidate persisted in his efforts to get U.S.

³⁹ John Willard Carrigan to Marshall, "The Chargé to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," June 26, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-2647; Walter J. Donnelly to Marshall, "Summary of Political Events from June 20th to 27th in Costa Rica," June 27, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-2747; Carrigan to Marshall, "Further Allegations Concerning Jose Figueres' Trip to Havana," July 11, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-1147.

⁴⁰ Donnelly to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," July 23, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2347; Donnelly to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," July 24, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2447; Donnelly to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," July 25, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2747.

support, an agitated Carrigan wrote to Washington “that it was somewhat annoying to find people trying to drag us in against our will.” In Washington, Donnelly was requested by Rafael Oreamuno, Alberto Oreamuno’s brother living in the United States, to see members of the opposition while in D. C. Donnelly informed Rafael that he had accepted visitors shortly before his departure from San José and that if they had any more questions, they should raise them with the U.S. embassy in Costa Rica. Donnelly then emphasized to him that the Truman Administration “would continue to maintain a neutral position” and that the chances of the Department receiving any delegation from San José were unlikely since “everyone was so busy with preparations with the Rio Conference.”⁴¹

The opposition, in an apparent retaliation to Donnelly’s response, began a letter-writing campaign directly to President Truman to try to solicit a reaction from him. These letters consisted of claims of U.S. arms “in the hands of a ferocious mob of communist bullies firing on unarmed and peaceful crowds” and complaints of U.S. citizens who were “engaged in teaching bad Costa Ricans to intimidate the people of Costa Rica.” In addition, on August 8, in a communication to the U.S. embassy from the town of Escazú, an anonymous writer requested that “the arms which the United States placed in the hands of our Government for Continental Defense may be withdrawn, in order to keep the Government from continuing the massacre of our defenseless people.”⁴² Still, the U.S. embassy and the State Department saw through the

⁴¹ Carrigan to Marshall, “The Chargé in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State, July 31, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 585; Wise, “Costa Rica – Political Situation,” August 1, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-147.

⁴² Eduardo Cortez, Franklin Venegas, Gonzalo Esquivel, Haracio Ruiz, Victor Bogantes, Manuel Miranda, Rafael Vilanova, Inocente de Vilanova, Carlos Bogantes, Rodrigo Soto, Alfonso Rodriguez, Abelardo Flores, Mario Flores, Ramon Briceño, Celso Flores, Edgar Gregory, Ramon Montano, Margarita Saborio, Clara Barquero, Bety Bogantes, Maria Flores, Eduardo Hidalgo, Alcides Arias, Humberto Madrigal, Pedro Vilalabos, Edgar Garcia, Berta de Flores, Guillermo Cabarrero, Antonio Carranza, Victor Bogantes, and Rodrigo Esquivel to Harry S. Truman, “Letter to the President of the United States,” August 2, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/8-247; Benjamin Nuñez to Harry S. Truman, “Father Nuñez to the President of the United States,” August 3, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/8-347;

opposition's charades – particularly its “anti-communist” demonstrations and its numerous attempts to guilt-trip the State Department into taking away U.S. weapons already in the Costa Rican government's possession – and consistently replied, despite these charges, that the United State would remain neutral in the upcoming elections.

After these approaches failed, the opposition tried yet another strategy to garner U.S. support. On August 20, Carrigan visited the house of wealthy Costa Rican citizen, Victor Manuel Yglesias, to discuss the new location of the U.S. embassy. However, he was surprised to find that Ulate had been invited to the meeting as well, and upon his arrival, the opposition leader approached Carrigan and started talking about the upcoming elections. After speaking at length on the opposition's typical charge of the Picado government's misusing U.S. weapons, Ulate then accused Calderón of possessing “Communist leanings.” Carrigan shut the conversation down immediately, “since it might have proved embarrassing to a degree such that it might have been wise for me to leave.”⁴³ As will be expanded upon in the third section of this chapter, the U.S. embassy throughout 1947 did not perceive there to be a serious communist threat lurking in Costa Rica, and, therefore, Carrigan did not feel that it was appropriate to hear accusations of a presidential candidate's “Communist leanings.”

Shortly before his permanent departure from the U.S. embassy at the end of October, Donnelly gave his farewells to Calderón and Ulate and made it clear to both candidates that the embassy, after his departure, would continue to maintain a position of strict neutrality and nonintervention. As a note of interest, Donnelly's last remarks about Ulate were rather unflattering. He described the leader of the opposition as a “relatively incoherent” politician

Carrigan to Marshall, “Communication from Municipality of Escazú Concerning Lend-Lease Arms,” August 8, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.20/8-847.

⁴³ Carrigan to Marshall, “Unexpected Afternoon with Otilio Ulate,” August 20, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-2047.

who “spoke in terms of vague generalities, and left a comparatively unfavorable impression.”⁴⁴ Efforts by the opposition to pull the United States into Costa Rican matters became much less frequent after Donnelly’s departure.

After a relatively quiet fall, Ulate made international news in November during a political gathering in Panama, where he gave a speech riddled with revolutionary undertones. Ulate visited a large group of Costa Ricans living in Panama, and, according to the U.S. Ambassador in Panama City, Carlos G. Hall, Ulate “predicted that the semi-dictatorship of CALDERON and Communism would be suppressed by the people in 1948 as the dictatorship of TINOCO had been abolished in 1919.”⁴⁵ Federico Tinoco served as a dictator in Costa Rica from 1917 to 1919, and his removal from office served as a symbol for the opposition, and for many Costa Ricans, of the people’s reclaiming their political power.⁴⁶ The mention of Tinoco in Ulate’s speech was not insignificant. After Ulate received the formal nomination as the opposition’s presidential candidate on December 9, the stage was officially set for the chaos that would take over Costa Rica in 1948.

This section argues, then, that the U.S. embassy was extremely cautious in its dealings with the opposition, and the relationship between the embassy and Ulate had undertones of mistrust and, at times, animosity. There is no evidence in the U.S. embassy’s appraisal of the opposition in 1947 that suggests that the Truman Administration would have cast its lot with the

⁴⁴ Donnelly to Marshall, “Conversation with Dr. Rafael Angel CALDERON Guardia, Presidential Candidate of the National Republican Party, and with Sr. Otilio ULATE, Candidate of the Opposition,” October 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/10-1447.

⁴⁵ Carlos G. Hall to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Panama to the Secretary of State,” November 15, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-1547; Willard to Marshall, “The Chargé to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” December 9, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-947.

⁴⁶ For more information on Federico Tinoco, see Hector Pérez-Brignoli, *A Brief History of Central America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 113-115; and LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 57-60.

opposition to dismantle the government during the Revolution of 1948. In Washington, diplomatic officials were largely indifferent toward the opposition.

The United States' Appraisal of the PRN

On the other hand, the United States' relations with Calderón and Picado were neither friendly nor hostile, but rather ambiguous. Throughout 1947, the embassy's attitude toward the government and the PRN fluctuated from positive to negative, never showing a clear pattern of approval or disapproval of the regime. Similar to Truman's relationship with the opposition, officials in Washington remained rather indifferent toward the Costa Rican government and the PRN.

Though Johnson frequently praised Picado for his efforts to implement reforms to ensure freer elections, Picado's brother and Minister of Public Security, General René Picado, worried the U.S. Ambassador, since René was constantly accused of selectively enforcing the law to support the PRN while simultaneously undermining the opposition.⁴⁷ On January 30, 1947, Johnson reported that René, "unlike his brother...believes in strong measures against those disturbing the public peace." Johnson perceived trouble on the horizon after a private meeting was held between General Picado and Calderón, which the opposition seized as proof that Calderón had the support of the army and that, therefore, the "elections will not be free." The U.S. Ambassador only remarked of the General's actions that they were unwise, since this provoked "inflammatory articles to be printed in the opposition press." Despite René's actions,

⁴⁷ Frederick Ehrenreich, "National Security," in *Costa Rica: A Country Study*, ed. Harold Nelson, (Washington, D. C.: American University, Foreign Areas Study, 1984), 259.

Johnson still had faith in the Costa Rican president that he “will do everything that may prove possible for him to do in an effort to secure free elections.”⁴⁸

On March 27, after the opposition threatened that it would not name a presidential candidate until it was guaranteed that there would be free elections, the U.S. Ambassador asserted that it had enjoyed “complete political liberty” and “complete liberty of speech and of the press” under the Picado presidency. Furthermore, Johnson noted that not a single person had been thrown in jail for political reasons during Picado’s tenure in office and that the midterm elections had been conducted in a fair manner. Despite this, the opposition had a history of charging the Picado regime with repressing civil liberties, and the party members boldly asserted that “they have enough guns in the country to permit their putting out the Government by force.”⁴⁹

Though concerned about these claims, Johnson continuously cautioned Washington against giving the Costa Rican government weapons in order not to stir up any more trouble. When the opposition newspaper, *Diario de Costa Rica*, on February 13 exposed Costa Rican Ambassador Francisco de P. Gutierrez’s request for an export license for U.S. weapons, Johnson wired the State Department urging it to deny him the license. The U.S. Ambassador and the military attaché agreed that the “arms in present possession of [the] Government [are] adequate to preserve law and order.” In a meeting with the Costa Rican Ambassador, Marshall informed

⁴⁸ Although Leonard argued that the U.S. embassy in 1947 did not share Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs Spruille Braden’s belief that “Picado would be successful in his efforts to restore democracy,” it appears that in March there was still some hope that Picado could restore democracy in Costa Rica. – Leonard, *Political Dynamics*, 24; Johnson to Marshall, “Pacific Railroad Track Is Bombed, Apparently as Part of Organized Subversive Campaign on Part of Opposition; Conversation with Minister of Public Security,” January 30, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-3047; Johnson to Marshall, “Political Situation Tense,” February 4, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-447;

⁴⁹ Johnson to Marshall, “Internal Political Situation,” March 27, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2747.

Gutierrez that the grand total of Costa Rica's Lend Lease account amounted to \$153,502.07. The Secretary of State then stated that of the grand sum, Costa Rica was responsible for payment of \$83,000 and that "[n]o payments have been received to date." The request for an export license for *arms*, then, was denied. However, the U.S. government on February 14 granted an export license to Picado for ammunition for "small arms already in possession of [the] Costa Rican [government]." ⁵⁰

Of course, the export license for small arms ammunition made a bigger splash in the Costa Rican news than it probably should have. On February 20, both the opposition and government newspapers took Marshall's approval for an export license for ammunition and inflated it into national headlines. In response to Ulate's charge that the Costa Rican President planned to use U.S. weapons to shut down the opposition, Picado stated that his administration only "endeavored to renew certain of the armament required in moderate amounts by the police and the cuarteles." Picado further pointed out that former presidents, including the late Leon Cortes, "periodically replaced such military equipment as they considered necessary" and that this was a "natural and logical" measure taken by the government. Johnson noted that Picado did not reveal the small amount of ammunition received by the government, possibly to keep the opposition "in the dark" regarding the actual material involved in the purchase. ⁵¹

Though Johnson discouraged the sale of weapons to Picado, this did not mean that he or the military mission were leaving the Costa Rican government defenseless against subversion.

⁵⁰ Johnson to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," February 13, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1347; Johnson to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," February 13, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1347; Marshall to Francisco de P. Gutiérrez, "The Secretary of State to the Costa Rican Ambassador," February 13, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 594; Marshall, "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica," February 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1347.

⁵¹ Johnson to Marshall, "President Picado Replies to Opposition Charges Regarding Purchase of Arms," February 20, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-2047.

Again, on March 27, Johnson and the military mission assessed the arms situation in Costa Rica, and despite Ulate's repeated assertions that the opposition could take the government by force, the U.S. embassy was convinced that Picado "has at present sufficient arms and ammunition to maintain public order."⁵²

Johnson did, however, continue to advise Washington officials not to formally interact with the unpredictable General Picado. After hearing rumors that the War Department planned to give a decoration to René, the U.S. Ambassador urged General Willis D. Crittenger in Panama to refrain from such action. Johnson continued to press the matter, and the State Department finally assured him that Crittenger would not decorate General Picado without first consulting the U.S. embassy. Furthermore, General Picado tried "to procure 26 Thompson submachine guns" from the United States, but William Tapley Bennett, Jr., reassured a worried Johnson that the State Department would block the purchase. After the general's request for the submachine guns was officially rejected, Gutierrez approached the Department on March 21 and asked the assistant chief of the CPA, Murray M. Wise, to keep the matter quiet so that the opposition could not claim that the United States was antagonistic toward Picado. The State Department complied.⁵³

Johnson on March 28 announced his resignation as U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica. The opposition gladly received the news of Johnson's resignation, but so did the PRN who claimed that Johnson had been "too close to the Opposition." The U.S. Ambassador took the comments

⁵² Johnson to Marshall, "Internal Political Situation," March 27, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2747.

⁵³ Johnson to Marshall, "Internal Political Situation Makes It Inadvisable to Give a Decoration to Señor René Picado, the Minister of Public Security, at this Time," February 18, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1847; Bennett to Johnson, "To the Officer in Charge of the American Mission, San José," February 28, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1347; Murray M. Wise, "Sub-Machine Guns," March 21, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2147.

from both parties as evidence of his “steering a completely neutral and middle course.”⁵⁴

Johnson’s actions throughout his tenure support this claim.

Donnelly then stepped in as Ambassador in June 1947, and though he sometimes expressed distrust toward the PRN, he maintained the policy of strict neutrality. The first issue that arose between Donnelly and President Picado was the arms question. Picado approached the new U.S. Ambassador on July 15 and expressed his hope that the Truman Administration “would agree to exchange the present armaments...for American-made armaments.” Donnelly then asked if Picado considered this an urgent matter, to which the president responded that he did not. Donnelly then suggested to Picado that he should wait until the U.S. Congress passed the proposed arms bill (H.R. 6326) to exchange old and foreign weapons for new U.S. arms.⁵⁵

However, Donnelly’s real intention in discouraging an arms exchange, perhaps, was to keep U.S. weapons out of Calderón’s hands. On July 21, Donnelly said he believed that Colonel Manuel Rodríguez, assistant secretary of Public Security during Calderón’s presidency, only sought to procure weapons to suppress the opposition during the elections. Moreover, Donnelly was conscious of the opposition’s attempts to blame the United States for the murder of Costa Ricans by U.S. arms, and after a riot erupted in late July, resulting in the death of one of the members of the opposition, Donnelly reported that the opposition held the United States responsible.⁵⁶ For Donnelly, the shipment of more weapons to Costa Rica would only result in more accusations of murder being leveled against the United States.

⁵⁴ Johnson to Marshall, “Exploitation by Local Political Parties of My Resignation,” March 28, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2847.

⁵⁵ Donnelly to Marshall, “President Picado Praises the United States Military Mission to Costa Rica,” July 15, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.20 Missions/7-1547.

⁵⁶ Donnelly to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 21, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2147; Donnelly to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 24, 1947,

Moreover, the U.S. embassy in Costa Rica received reports from members of the opposition that the PRN “brought in by air from Nicaragua twenty members [of the] Guardia Nacional fully equipped with machine guns.” Donnelly ensured his visitors that though he was departing the next day for Washington to help prepare for the upcoming Rio Conference, the U.S. embassy would investigate these charges.⁵⁷ Nothing ever came of the investigation. Upon his arrival in Washington, Donnelly reported to the State Department that he “had maintained a position of absolute neutrality.”⁵⁸

After Donnelly’s departure, Carrigan reported back to Washington that stores, shops, and banks started closing en masse due to the unstable political situation in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican government tried to mandate the continued operation of private businesses, and members of the PVP and the PRN even threatened to “attack upon closed stores,” which they believed were closing in order to undermine the Picado presidency and make the PRN’s economic policies look worse than they actually were. Carrigan, on August 28, observed that the police refused to intervene when looters vandalized private property, and he even noted that certain of the policemen “waved at looters and were cheered by them.” Though Carrigan considered the situation to be serious enough “to warrant an official protest to the Government,” Wise and Donnelly decided that the “protest should be made informally and verbally.” The Chargé went on the record protesting the State Department’s decision, noting that “two American stores had been damaged, one American gassed, and that the trolley company operated by American

NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2447; Donnelly to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 25, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2547.

⁵⁷ Donnelly to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 25, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2547.

⁵⁸ Wise, “Costa Rica – Status of Revolt,” July 25, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2547.

interests had been ordered to resume service,” though it had no insurance.⁵⁹ However, the Truman Administration, as of June 26, had abandoned its policy of intervention through *official* diplomatic channels when it had fully reestablished normal relations with Argentina in order to complete the Rio Treaty in September.⁶⁰ The State Department, after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, decided that the continuance of cordial relations with each Latin American country was essential in order to draft the Rio Treaty. In other words, the higher echelons of the State Department wanted Carrigan’s protest to be made “informally and verbally” so that there was no written record of the United States’ protesting to a Latin American government. That way it could deny any accusation of unilateral intervention, which in turn could upset other Latin American states and prolong the Rio Treaty’s completion.

Though concerned about the Costa Rican government’s apathy toward the vandalization of closed shops, Carrigan followed the Department’s instructions and maintained a neutral posture. The embassy throughout the rest of the summer continuously rejected both the Costa Rican government’s and the opposition’s requests for the United States to intervene, diplomatically or materially, to support their cause. Despite the government’s “indiscriminate use of untrained armed forces” against the opposition, the embassy kept a safe distance from the action.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Carrigan to Marshall, “Costa Rican Political Situation,” July 29, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2847; Carrigan to Marshall, “The Chargé to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 29, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2847; Wise, “Costa Rican Political Situation,” July 29, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2947; Wise, “Costa Rican – Political Situation,” July 29, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2947.

⁶⁰ See last chapter, third section: “Resolution XXXV and Peaceful Collaboration” on U.S. resumption of normal relations with Argentina to create the Rio Treaty; Marshall to Harry S. Truman, “Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman,” June 26, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 226.

⁶¹ Alex A. Cohen to Marshall, “Current Political Situation,” August 22, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-2247.

Upon his return to San José, Donnelly reported that Picado found himself under pressure to officially recognize Victor Román y Reyes' government in Nicaragua, which had entered office through a coup d'état on May 26, 1947. The U.S. Ambassador warned the State Department that "efforts are being made [by Picado] to draw me in as an intermediary" and that "unless some formula is promptly found, Costa Rica may very easily recognize Román y Reyes." After World War II ended, the United States, along with a vast majority of Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, decided it best not to recognize *de facto* regimes that had risen to power through the force of arms in order to discourage violent revolutionary activity in other Latin American countries. Acting Secretary of State Lovett responded to Donnelly that while he could not understand Picado's decision to act outside of unison with the rest of the hemisphere, the United States did "not wish to influence in any way what Costa Rica may do."⁶² Costa Rica then recognized Román y Reyes in December 1947.

The last quarter of 1947 was relatively quiet for the U.S. embassy, likely due to Calderón's and Ulate's preparing for the upcoming presidential elections. On December 9, both were formally selected as presidential candidates, officially marking the beginning of the campaign season. If it is unclear as to who the U.S. embassy hoped would win, that is because it was. This chapter has tried to demonstrate that the U.S. embassy showed considerable distrust both toward Calderón and Ulate, and especially toward Figueres and General René Picado. Though one could argue that the State Department would still have favored Ulate simply because of Calderón's association with the PVP, the next section challenges the often-stated assumption that the United States perceived the Vanguardia as a serious international communist threat.

⁶² Donnelly to Marshall, "The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," September 20, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 873-874; Robert A. Lovett, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica," September 23, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 874.

The United States' Appraisal of the PVP

The PVP in 1947, according to State Department documentation, was nothing more than a tightly knit national organization that followed its own version of communism and had no direct ties to Moscow.⁶³ Though at times the embassy under Donnelly observed that the party was well organized, the middle-ranking State Department officials only investigated the matter when the communist organization threatened to cross national boundaries. Moreover, State Department and CIA reports defined communism in Latin America as “local” in nature, and communists did not yet pose a serious threat to the hemisphere’s security in the eyes of Washington officials.⁶⁴

On October 29, 1945, a report entitled “Communism in Costa Rica” was circulated throughout the Truman Administration, which considered the PVP a militant party and a potential force to be reckoned with. A year-and-a-half later, W. S. Lester was requested by Murray M. Wise to critique the report, and he concluded that the argument no longer held water. “The party is not now militantly communist,” Lester argued, “and appears not likely to be so any time soon.” He added that the party’s membership was “relatively small” and that the reforms being pushed by the PVP were “not extremely radical in nature.” Furthermore, Lester assured Murray that the PVP was not “violently anti-United States,” and he concluded that the report was “slightly alarmist in nature.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Leonard also noted that “U.S. policymakers generally regarded the Popular Vanguard party as more interested in domestic reform than in goals of international communism and thought that the party’s proposals ‘would be defined in most countries a merely a liberal program.’” – Leonard, *Search for Stability*, 127.

⁶⁴ See last chapter, first section, “Clandestine Communism: ‘The Risks of Mere Suppression.’”

⁶⁵ W. S. Lester to Murray M. Wise, “Report Entitled ‘Communism in Costa Rica,’ Forwarded as Enclosure to D-2495, October 29, 1945,” January 13, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00B/5-747.

Ambassador Johnson supported this claim on March 21, 1947, in explaining the possible reasons behind the PVP's creating new party bylaws. Johnson hypothesized three distinct motivations for the party's actions. First, he reasoned that "because of hemispheric thinking" the PVP wanted to "eliminate any semblance of a link" to Moscow. Second, Johnson suggested that Soviet communism "is again finding it necessary to take action similar to the dissolution of the Comintern," which would effectively eliminate Moscow's connection to the communist party in Costa Rica. Third, it was likely, according to Johnson, that Calderón's distancing himself from the party and other "local circumstances" might have forced the PVP to "clean its skirts of any connections...with Moscow which may now exist." His third hypothesis seems to be more likely, since the PRN and the PVP officially disavowed "the existence of any pact or agreement...or for cooperation in the coming elections."⁶⁶ Whatever the reason, the U.S. Ambassador believed that the modifications in the PVP's statutes meant that it probably had no connections to Moscow.⁶⁷

Moreover, on April 11, Johnson observed a demonstration held by the PVP on the anniversary of William Walker's defeat, in which the Vanguardia made speeches "antagonistic" to the recent U.S. policy in Greece and Turkey.⁶⁸ However, the U.S. Ambassador noted that there was a general "lack [of] enthusiasm" among the protesters. Supposedly in reaction to the anti-U.S. demonstration, another group of protesters gathered, waving American flags and denouncing communism in Latin America. Johnson, though, was skeptical of their motives, as the parade ended in front of the building of the opposition's newspaper, *Diario de Costa Rica*.

⁶⁶ Johnson to Marshall, "Proposed Reorganization and New Statutes of VANGUARDIA POPULAR," March 21, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00B/3-2147; Bennett, "Costa Rica – Current Political Situation," April 7, 1947, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/3-2747.

⁶⁷ Leonard remarked that the PVP in 1947 "became increasingly isolated, but it also became more militant and remained the voice of the lower class." – Leonard, *Issues and References*, 56-57.

⁶⁸ For more information on William Walker's National War of 1855 in Nicaragua, see Scott Martelle, *William Walker's Wars: How One Man's Private American Army Tried to Conquer Mexico, Nicaragua, and Honduras*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2018).

The Ambassador commented that the demonstration “resulted not so much from any real sympathy for our country but rather from purely local and domestic politics.” In fact, Johnson requested the Department’s guidance in the future for intimating both to the opposition and the government that the embassy “cannot permit the [United States’] Flag to be used for any political purposes.” For the time being, though, the U.S. Ambassador believed that such a protest would “serve no useful purpose...since the superficial intent of the demonstration was to support the United States.”⁶⁹ Still, Johnson was not easily moved by the opposition’s anti-communist and pro-U.S. rhetoric.

However, Costa Rica was certainly not immune to communist penetration in the eyes of the embassy. On April 24, Johnson described to Washington the critical economic situation developing in Costa Rica that could potentially serve as a fertile breeding ground for international communism. He noted that “the majority of the wealth...is held in a few hands” and “that the situation is a basic reason for possible Communist penetration.” He believed the situation warranted more leniency by the United States’ toward Costa Rica concerning repayment loans in order to “avoid complete bankruptcy of the Government.” Consistent with the United States’ economic self-help approach toward Latin America, Johnson also suggested that the “Costa Ricans must be taught that the United States is not Santa Claus” and that they needed first to “put their house in order.”⁷⁰

Washington at the end of April also began hearing rumors that the PVP might be linked to communists in Cuba, thus suggesting that international communism might presently be

⁶⁹ Johnson to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 14, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1447; Johnson to Marshall, “Political Situation, Costa Rica, April 12 – 18, 1947,” April 18, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1847. Italics added.

⁷⁰ Johnson to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 24, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 594-595.

lurking in the hemisphere. Bennett made a note of this on April 28 when an anonymous source indicated that “top leaders” of the PVP received instructions from Cuba, which had “typical Communist jargon...of American political and economic ‘imperialism.’” Still, the report lacked “some communication going the other way,” which the State Department started looking for immediately thereafter but evidently never found.⁷¹

Moreover, W. S. Lester of the Division of America Republic Affairs wrote to Bennett on May 7 expressing his concerns about a tighter connection between the PVP and Moscow. Lester argued that “the Vanguardia, despite its apparent intent to appear less communistic, has been evidencing a more essentially Communistic character than it has heretofore under its present name.” Part of his logic was that Archbishop Victor Manuel Sanabria Martínez, who in previous communications with Ambassador Johnson conveyed his belief that the PVP “does not follow ‘Marxist’ theories or instructions from Moscow,” had “noticeably cooled in his attitude toward the organization.” Although Lester reasoned that the PVP was becoming more communistic, he noted that the “cooling” of Sanabria’s attitude “will tend to weaken the Party.”⁷²

When Walter J. Donnelly stepped in as Ambassador on June 27, he started speculating that the bombing campaigns, which had begun in 1946 and had been perpetuated by the opposition in order to create instability in Costa Rica, might be linked to the weakened PVP, who he claimed could be “creating fear on both sides” so that “the administration would call on the support of the Vanguardia.” That way the PVP “would have a high bargaining power with the

⁷¹ Bennett, “Costa Rica – Indications of Connection between Vanguardia Popular and Cuban Communists,” April 28, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00B/4-1047.

⁷² Wise to William P. Cochran, “Archbishop Sanabria and Labor in Costa Rica,” May 9, 1946, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1246; Lester to Bennett, “The Vanguardia Party in Costa Rica,” May 7, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00B/4-1047.

opposition.”⁷³ However, the PVP maintained a relatively low position on the United States’ list of threats in Latin America, and it was largely ignored for the rest of the summer.

This may be explained by the Central Intelligence Agency’s “Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States,” published on September 26, which assessed the communist threat in Latin America. In short, the report stated that Latin American “local Communists, isolated from direct Soviet support and operating within the power orbit of the United States, cannot seize and hold political control.” For this reason, according to the report, the USSR “pursues limited objectives in that area.” Moreover, in its summary, the CIA reported that the Soviet Union “is presently incapable of military aggression outside of Europe and Asia,” and in the CIA’s list of priority areas to protect from Soviet influence, Latin America was absent.⁷⁴

Donnelly made a similar assessment of the communist situation in Costa Rica on October 9. In it he stated that the PVP’s leader, Manuel Mora, was “not a militant communist” but was “intelligent, honest, with a carefully balanced program.” Concerning the question on whose side Mora and the PVP would take in an armed conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, Donnelly reported that Mora most likely “would accept the judgement of the Government and the people,” though he “would not actively support the Government” if it allied itself with the United States. The U.S. Ambassador further noted that overall, “the position of the United States [in Costa Rica] will in all probability continue favorable.” Though Donnelly in another

⁷³ Walter J. Donnelly to Marshall, “summary of Political Events from June 20th to 27th in Costa Rica,” June 27, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-2747.

⁷⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States,” September 26, 1947, *Papers of Harry S. Truman: President’s Secretary’s Files – National Security Council Meetings*, in *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Vol. 23 The Central Intelligence Agency*, ed. Dennis Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), 215, 208.

report on the same day considered the PVP “one of the best-organized Communist groups in Latin America,” neither he nor the CIA perceived the local communist party to have direct ties to Moscow.⁷⁵

Two days after Donnelly’s departure on October 15, Vice Consul Cohen noted that the opposition used the reestablishment of the Communist International in Moscow as political capital to charge Calderón of allying himself with “local communists.”⁷⁶ Though Carrigan on October 30 expressed his belief that the communist strength in Costa Rica “as an international factor is on the increase and must not be taken lightly,” his opinion largely went unnoticed, except for Bennett’s commenting that the Department would investigate the matter of the Guatemalan and Venezuelan presidents reportedly being indoctrinated by Costa Rican communist Carmen Lyra. On November 20, Bennett was informed that “no definite information” indicated a link between Arévalo and Carmen Lyra and that “nothing whatsoever” indicated Betancourt’s association with Lyra.⁷⁷ Because it appeared to remain inside Costa Rica’s borders, the PVP remained a relatively small threat to the United States.

On December 17, the CIA published another “Review of the World Situation,” which this time discussed the increase in anti-communist activity in Latin America. Based on the anti-communist actions of the overwhelming majority of the American states, the CIA concluded that the United States could now expect “extensive support” from the American republics “on issues

⁷⁵ Donnelly to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” October 9, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 590-91.

⁷⁶ Findling speculated that Ambassador Donnelly was relieved by Nathaniel P. Davis because Donnelly was not sufficiently anti-communist. – Findling, *Close Neighbors*, 106; However, according to Olander, the incoming ambassador (Davis) requested to be posted in Costa Rica since that duty station would not “tax his health.” – Olander, “Costa Rica in 1948,” 490; Ultimately, no documentation has yet been found concerning the reason behind Davis’ reassignment to Costa Rica.

⁷⁷ Cohen to Marshall, “Current Political Situation,” October 17, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/10-1747; L. D. Heck to Bennett, “Memorandum of Conversation,” November 20, 1947, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-2047.

with respect to the USSR.” However, the CIA also noted that the “increase in anti-communist activity...stems in part from a desire to win favor and possible financial assistance from the US.” The CIA concluded the report by assuring Truman that the USSR “now probably believes both that its efforts to counterbalance US influence in Argentina have failed and that Argentina (and the rest of Latin America) is firmly committed to a pro-US orientation.”⁷⁸

At the year’s conclusion, the higher ups in the Truman Administration across the board believed that the American republics wholly supported the United States, and the PVP virtually did not exist in the minds of Acheson, Lovett, and Marshall – all of whom had been actively involved in building the U.S. hemispheric defense plan in the immediate aftermath of World War II. If any evidence exists that may reveal legitimate apprehension of Latin American communism originating from State Department top officials in 1947, I have missed it.

Ultimately, this section suggests that Washington permitted the existence of local communism as long as it remained inside its country’s borders. Moreover, the evidence in this chapter has shown that the anti-communist, pro-U.S. propaganda espoused by the Costa Rican opposition failed to impress State Department and the CIA officials, who suspected that these actions were taken merely to obtain either political or economic support from the United States. Communism in Latin America, particularly in Costa Rica, did not yet constitute a serious enough threat to warrant intervention.

⁷⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States,” December 17, 1947, *Papers of Harry S. Truman: President’s Secretary’s Files – National Security Council Meetings*, in *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*, Vol. 23 *The Central Intelligence Agency*, ed. Dennis Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), 262-3.

Conclusion

In 1947 the U.S. embassy was more concerned with the growing feud between the opposition and the PRN than it was with eradicating the PVP. The embassy did not attempt in any way to pressure the Costa Rican government to proscribe the PVP, and Washington officials certainly did not preoccupy themselves with local matters in Costa Rica. Thus, Washington entered 1948 with Costa Rica hardly on its mind. Meanwhile, the embassy in San José braced itself for a tumultuous election in 1948.

CHAPTER 2

“LOCALIZING” THE COSTA RICAN REVOLUTION OF 1948

From January to April 1948, the unstable political climate in Costa Rica rapidly deteriorated into a civil war. After Ulate won the popular vote on February 8, Calderón immediately charged the opposition with fraud and overturned the electoral tribunal’s decision by appealing to the PRN-dominated congress to annul the elections. The U.S. embassy during February and March simply watched as the violence unfolded, hoping that the Costa Ricans could solve the problem themselves. Meanwhile, the officials in Washington walked a fine line in protesting any interventionist action taken by another American republic in Costa Rican matters, while simultaneously maintaining its own policy of strict neutrality. On April 19, the U.S. embassy, in a group effort with the diplomatic corps in Costa Rica, helped bring about peace negotiations between the rebels and the government, thus ending the conflict. The civil war was ultimately a victory for the opposition *and* the United States, the latter being relieved that the conflict did not spread beyond Costa Rica’s borders.

However, Kyle Longley’s third chapter in *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, titled “The First Latin American Battleground of the Cold War: The U.S. Response to the Costa Rican Civil War of 1948,” argued that the United States clearly intervened on behalf of the revolutionaries to oust the communist-supported government. Longley noted, for example, that the Area Specialist of Central America and Panama Affairs, William Tapley Bennett, Jr., by January had become increasingly apprehensive of the Vanguardia’s position in the Costa Rican government. Yet, Longley also observed that “Bennett failed to establish adequately any direct relationship

between the Vanguardia and the Soviet Union.”⁷⁹ Even if he had determined that such a connection existed, the evidence presented here indicates that the United States viewed Manuel Mora and the PVP as fluid opportunists, capable of allying either with the government or the opposition.⁸⁰ In other words, removing Picado and the PRN from the government would not have necessarily solved the communist problem or gotten rid of the PVP, at least from the United States’ perspective. Allying with the opposition, in this regard, would not have made much sense.

In addition, Longley suggested that the Director of the Office of European Affairs John D. Hickerson’s statement – that the crisis in Czechoslovakia in February of 1948 had “scared the living bejesus out of everybody” – was reflective of U.S. “fears of Soviet expansion in Europe, Asia, and Latin America” and that it motivated Truman to intervene to suppress communism in Costa Rica.⁸¹ However, Hickerson’s statement by itself is a drastic overgeneralization and misrepresentation of the State Department’s general opinion of the severity of the communist threat in Latin America. For example, Bennett remarked during the revolution that comparisons between Costa Rica and Czechoslovakia were likely “overdrawn.”⁸² Moreover, the delegates responsible for crafting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in March 1948 decided that the “North Atlantic” restriction was necessary in order “to prevent efforts of Latin America, Australia, etc., to adhere” since they were not “directly threatened by Soviet Communism.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 65.

⁸⁰ See footnote 119.

⁸¹ Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk*, 71; Schwartzberg makes a similar claim that the comparison between Czechoslovakia and Costa Rica was “designed to grab attention, and it succeeded.” – Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 179.

⁸² Bennett, “Memorandum by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs,” March 26, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 503.

⁸³ “Minutes of the Third Meeting of the United States-United Kingdom-Canada Security Conversations, Held at Washington, March 24, 1948,” March 24, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, III, 67.

Longley also suggested that the United States successfully pressured Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and El Salvador not to give the Picado government weapons.⁸⁴ Longley cited a message from the U.S. Chargé in Honduras to Secretary of State George C. Marshall on March 18, 1948, but I discovered that the message did not indicate, in any way, the United States' pressuring Honduras to withhold material support from Picado. Rather, Tiburcio Carías initiated the conversation and assured Cohen that he would not give Picado arms.⁸⁵ Moreover, Longley's claim, that "the United States restricted Somoza's assistance to Picado," failed to emphasize that that "assistance" was the Guardia Nacional, which Somoza never tried hiding. Instead, Somoza openly lobbied for U.S. support of his actions to help Picado defeat the rebels, but the United States declined and discouraged intervention. Meanwhile, Guatemala only sent arms to the rebels, and even then, the U.S. embassies in Costa Rica and Guatemala had trouble in determining whether to blame Arévalo or his military subordinates, who may have been acting independently and not under the orders of Arévalo. With the Bogotá Conference approaching, it is likely that the Truman Administration did not want to instigate a conflict with one of its southern neighbors and, therefore, did not accuse the Guatemalan president of materially assisting Figueres.

Longley's most persuasive piece of evidence – that the U.S. military attaché Colonel James R. Hughes "visited Figueres' camp several days before the fighting started...making several recommendations to improve their capabilities" – was dismantled by Olander. Olander pointed out that Longley mistakenly placed Hughes' trip in the days prior to the Revolution, though State Department documentation had him visiting Figueres on March 15. Even then, the

⁸⁴ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 73.

⁸⁵ See footnote 104.

purpose of his visit was only to investigate reports of U.S. pilots being captured by the rebels. Olander also noted that Hughes reported to the embassy “a vastly exaggerated figure” of 2,000 rebel soldiers, though Ameringer’s *The Democratic Left in Exile*, and a good number of other sources, indicate that there never existed more than an estimated 700 soldiers. For Olander, Hughes’ drastic miscalculation is indicative that the U.S. military attaché did not have insider’s information of the rebels’ logistics and planning and, therefore, was not an active player for the rebels during the civil war.⁸⁶

Furthermore, Longley cited a paper produced by the National Security Council and the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff titled, “U.S. Policy Regarding Anti-Communist Measures Which Could Be Planned and Carried Out within the Inter-American System.” This paper emphasized that “international communism...is a direct and major threat” to the Western Hemisphere. However, the document’s authors in the next line stated that they considered the international communist threat only to be a “potential rather than an immediately serious one in Latin America,” and suggested that the Truman Administration take “preventative measures” to “minimize” the threat.⁸⁷ This did not necessarily mean the violent suppression of communist parties in Latin America, and as demonstrated here, Washington did not believe that the defeat of Picado and the PRN meant the end of the PVP and communism in Costa Rica.

Finally, though Longley did not definitively assert that the United States mobilized its troops in the Canal Zone in order to counteract the communist threat in Costa Rica, he emphasized that this action, if it ever happened, influenced Picado’s decision to surrender prematurely.⁸⁸ Most historians, including Longley, who suggest that the Truman Administration

⁸⁶ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 75; Olander, “Cold War or Local War?,” 470.

⁸⁷ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 77; Policy Planning Staff, “PPS-26,” March 22, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 196-201.

⁸⁸ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 82.

mobilized troops in the Canal Zone to force Picado's surrender, cite Bell's *Crisis in Costa Rica*. However, Bell primarily relied on a 1964 unfootnoted secondary source, Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla histórica de Costa Rica*, and he cited a grievance pamphlet created by the Comisión Política de Vanguardia Popular in Guatemala City in 1949 titled (translated to English) "Why Democracy Fell in Costa Rica." This hardly constitutes evidence of U.S. intervention.⁸⁹

Ultimately, I agree with Olander's central argument – that the State Department "consistently adhered to a policy of non-intervention in the Costa Rica civil war and the crucial events immediately preceding it."⁹⁰ The Costa Rican revolution, and its potential to turn into a regional conflict between dictators and revolutionaries throughout Central America and the Caribbean, concerned the State Department since it threatened the peace and stability of the hemisphere. Consistent with its approach in 1947, the U.S. embassy maintained a posture of strict neutrality. Meanwhile, Washington discouraged other countries from intervening in the Costa Rican revolution in order to keep it confined to Costa Rica.

This chapter is divided into three sections and makes a chronological argument. The first section covers the period leading up to the Costa Rican revolution and argues that the United States remained completely neutral during the Costa Rican presidential elections and did not respond to the PRN-dominated congress's annulment of the elections. The second section covers the beginning of the Revolution and argues that the United States did not intervene in the conflict and encouraged other American republics to do the same. The last section discusses the end of the revolution and argues that the quick termination of the Revolution was a success for the

⁸⁹ Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 150; Olander, "Costa Rica in 1948," 489; Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla histórica de Costa Rica*, (San José: Imprenta Atenea, 1964), 155; Comisión Política de Vanguardia Popular, *Como y por qué cayó la democracia en Costa Rica*, (Guatemala City, 1949), 1.

⁹⁰ Olander, "Costa Rica in 1948," 467.

United States, not because the communist threat had dissipated, but because the local conflict did not escalate into a regional war.

Bracing for the Revolution

In the opening months of 1948, the U.S. embassy witnessed a rapid deterioration in the relationship between the PRN-PVP alliance and the opposition. It consistently reported back to Washington the charges of fraud dealt by both coalitions, which the embassy feared would inevitably lead to a civil war. Still, with the Bogotá Conference approaching in March, the new U.S. Ambassador, Nathaniel P. Davis, and his staff maintained a posture of strict neutrality and denied both the PRN-PVP alliance and the opposition material or moral support.

Shortly before Davis' arrival to San José on January 31, General Picado in an interview published by the government's newspaper, *La Prensa*, warned the opposition that if it wanted to "challenge the power of the Government they already know my sole reply: Bullets." This was in direct response to the opposition's attempt to register "ghost parties" for the upcoming elections, which would make it appear that the opposition had more numerical support than it actually had. The PRN, in turn, created its own ghost parties, which made a mess for the electoral tribunal to try to clean up. Ultimately, it was decided by the tribunal that only members of the Unión Nacional (Ulate's party), the PRN, and the PVP could serve on the voting boards that oversee the elections. However, the names of the ghost parties in the voting booths was permitted, which Vice Consul Cohen believed "will open the way for claims and counter claims of fraud to such an extent that no one can predict the final outcome."⁹¹

⁹¹ Cohen to Marshall, "Current Political Situation – Pre-Selection Activities," January 23, 1948, NARA, RG 59 818.00/1-2348; Cohen to Marshall, "Pre-Election Activities," January 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-1248.

The creation of the ghost parties subsequently opened outlets for both sides to viciously attack their enemies without having to claim responsibility for the attacks. Cohen reported in January that each side hurled “vituperation and personal insults” at each other “under the cloak of being publications of the ghost parties,” thus permitting the PRN and opposition to “deny responsibility” and even “apologize for such publications.” For instance, Cohen noted that Ulate had been labeled as “a terrorist, a drunkard, a person without ability, etc.,” while Calderón had been called “a thief, a communist, and numerous other vile epithets.” Furthermore, the opposition began publishing illustrations in its newspapers comparing life in Costa Rica before and after Calderón’s tenure as president, which Cohen believed to be “an illy [*sic*] concealed attempt to instigate class war,” which had up to this point been “within the exclusive province” of the PVP. The publications were indicative, in the view of the U.S. vice consul, “of the steadily degenerating tempo of political campaigns in Costa Rica.”⁹² When the new U.S. Ambassador, Nathaniel P. Davis, arrived on January 31, 1948, the political situation in Costa Rica was highly unstable.

On February 10, Davis reported the final numbers of the 1948 presidential election – Ulate – 47,487; Calderón – 37,194. Davis, still fresh in his role as U.S. Ambassador, could not fully appreciate the significance of Ulate, the underdog, achieving a victory over the PRN, though the rest of the embassy optimistically believed that this might be for the best. It should be recalled that throughout 1947 the embassy reported that a victory by Calderón would likely result

⁹² Cohen to Marshall, “Concluding Phases of Electoral Campaign. Final Mass Demonstration of National Republican Party,” January 27, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-2748.

in a revolutionary and violent reaction by the opposition. With this upset, there was some hope that a civil war might be avoided.⁹³

However, this optimism quickly disappeared when Calderón cried fraud.⁹⁴ Though he claimed that a “hundred thousand” voters were prevented from casting ballots, Davis believed that the final number from the polls “destroys” Calderón’s charge and that the “number of Calderonistas unable to vote is apparently fairly well balanced by the number of Ulatistas unable to do so.” Still, the PRN and the PVP refused to stand down. Though Manuel Mora and the PVP “solemnly promised the country to accept the election results,” the party decided that the “fraud committed by the Electoral Register,” preventing the votes of “tens of thousands,” justified its refusal to accept the results.⁹⁵ The election, then, was appealed to the electoral tribunal.⁹⁶

Rumors also began to emerge that Calderón might go outside of Costa Rica’s borders to get military assistance. On February 20, the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Maurice M. Bernbaum, reported to Secretary of State George C. Marshall that “there are increasing reports” indicating a growing interest by Somoza to intervene on behalf of Calderón. Supposedly, in a message given to Bernbaum, it was rumored that “some 200 Guardia Nacional” were observed proceeding to the Costa Rican border, “armed with a considerable number of sub-machine guns.” However, the Ambassador ultimately concluded that intervention by Somoza was unlikely since the “announcement in the local press” of the United States’ interest in a “peaceful solution of the

⁹³ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 10, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1048.

⁹⁴ Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 133.

⁹⁵ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 10, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1048; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1148; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 10, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1048.

⁹⁶ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 44-5.

Costa Rican election” had made the Guardia Director second-guess any interventionist action.⁹⁷ Still, the slightest threat of an international conflict breaking out in Central America generated some concern in the State Department.

Nearing March, the political tensions between the parties morphed into unpredictable chaos. Davis reported on February 25 that stores had been boarded up and that business was “quite stagnant” due to the strained political situation. Calderón and Ulate both indicated their unwillingness to accept the decision by the electoral tribunal if unfavorable, and Ulate threatened Calderón with a “revolutionary strike” if the election results were overturned. Meanwhile Calderón promised to have the electoral tribunal’s decision nullified by congress if Ulate stood as the winner. On February 28, the electoral tribunal voted in favor of Ulate, and Calderón, as promised, took the matter to congress, which nullified the elections in a vote of 27 to 19.⁹⁸

Immediately, the Costa Rican government appealed to Davis to support Picado in suppressing the outraged opposition.⁹⁹ Davis emphasized the United States’ policy of nonintervention, reiterating that his “sole motive” was to help the Costa Rican government in its effort to “avoid bloodshed.” On the other hand, Ulate wrote directly to President Truman to try to goad him into intervening on behalf of the opposition by reporting that U.S. arms in the hands of the communist party “are being used to kill Costa Ricans.” Private U.S. citizens even tried pressuring the Truman Administration into intervening on behalf of the opposition to overthrow the communist-backed government. Orion Solera, a self-identified ex-American sailor living in

⁹⁷ Maurice M. Bernbaum to Marshall, “Further Nicaraguan Reaction to Costa Rican Elections,” February 20, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-2048.

⁹⁸ Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 178; Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 45; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 25, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-2548; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 28, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-2848; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 1, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-148.

⁹⁹ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 68.

Costa Rica, complained to Davis that his request to the Costa Rican government to protect U.S. property prevented Figueres from taking tractors that belonged to the Pan American Highway, which in turn interfered “in the fight against communism.” Additionally, Hamilton Vonbreton, a resident of Los Angeles, wrote to Democratic U.S. Senator Sheridan Downey, of California, that unless “cooperative action” between the United States and other Latin American countries takes place very shortly, there will be a “full fledged communist country...one hundred miles north of the Panama Canal.”¹⁰⁰

However, the United States did not budge on its policy of strict neutrality. When Senator Downey referred Vonbreton’s letter to the State Department, the Counselor of the Secretary of State, Charles E. Bohlen, responded that the initial statement in the letter (“a communist controlled government has illegally placed itself in office in Costa Rica”) contained “certain inaccuracies,” but that the State Department shared his concern over the “state of unrest” and was “observing the situation closely.” While the State Department discounted the idea that the communist-supported government “illegally” placed itself in office, Secretary Marshall wrote the embassy on March 12 to say that Davis, in his discretion, should inform President Picado that the United States hopes that the problem may be solved within “traditional constitutional processes.” Marshall finished by instructing Davis to keep the conversation “entirely informal” and to approach Picado as a representative of “a friendly power.” Marshall also asked Davis to evaluate the communist threat in Costa Rica, but the U.S. embassy became distracted after “an uprising of real importance had occurred in San Isidro” on March 12. Calderón and the PVP maintained that

¹⁰⁰ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 3, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, IX, 490; Otilio Ulate to Harry S. Truman, “The President-Elect of Costa Rica to the President of the United States,” March 9, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-948; Orion Solera to Davis, “Letter to the Ambassador of Costa Rica,” March 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1148; Hamilton Vonbreton to Sheridan Downey, “Letter to the U.S. Senator,” March 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1148.

Figueres started the revolt “to bring about intervention by the United States.”¹⁰¹ Whatever the reason for Figueres’ actions, the United States did not intervene, and the Revolution began without U.S. involvement.

Localizing the Revolution

As soon as the Revolution started, rumors buzzed in the embassy that each side was receiving foreign aid. Davis reported this back to Marshall, who in turn ordered diplomatic representatives in Latin America to inform their respective governments that the Truman Administration denounced any action taken by any of the republics that could constitute intervention in Costa Rican affairs. The United States, leading by example, also maintained a position of strict neutrality and nonintervention.

On March 15, the embassy received a report from President Picado that “rifles with partly obliterated Guatemalan coats of arms” destined for Figueres had been confiscated by the Costa Rican government. However, upon examination of the weapons, the embassy informed Washington that the weapons “did not disclose such markings.” The same day, the military attaché reported to Davis that he observed “Costa Rican pilots flying the two [Transportes Aereos Centro Americanos] planes” to transport arms from Guatemala and Panama to Figueres. Additionally, the attaché estimated that “about a dozen Guatemalan officers or cadets” had joined the rebels’ ranks and had brought with them weapons that had the “rubber seal of [the]

¹⁰¹ Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 179; Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 137; Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 50; Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 69; Charles E. Bohlen to Downey, “Counselor of the Secretary of State to the U.S. Senator,” March 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1248; Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” March 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 492-493; Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” March 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00B/3-848; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1548.

Guatemalan military school.”¹⁰² Meanwhile, Somoza messaged the embassy in Nicaragua that he intended to assist the militarily weak Picado regime in shutting down the opposition’s revolution.¹⁰³ Secretary Marshall ordered Bernbaum to informally remind the director of the Guardia Nacional that the United States discouraged intervention and to advise the Guardia Director to “refrain from intervening.”¹⁰⁴

The communist question reemerged on March 16, when William Tapley Bennett, Jr. received a message from Republican U.S. Senator of Indiana Homer E. Capehart’s office, who had heard rumors of communists being “in control of the Costa Rican Government” and that “communists had seized an airfield near San José.” Though the Senator expressed some concern that the revolution in Costa Rica could have “some sort of international complications in light of recent happenings in Europe,” Bennett assured him that while “communists were supporting the Government,” the legality of the current administration should not be under question. Bennett further stated that “the Department had received no news of communists having seized an airport.”¹⁰⁵

The Department at the time was more concerned with the violence potentially spreading to other countries and escalating into a regional war. The Ambassador in El Salvador, Albert E. Nufer, informed the department that the Pan American Airlines radio operator “overheard [a] radio conversation” indicating that Somoza was moving “about 300 troops by air” to San José.

¹⁰² Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 15, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1548; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 15, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1548.

¹⁰³ Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 180; Robert Rinehart noted that Picado’s government had at its disposal “a poorly equipped army of only a few hundred men and a small police force.” – Robert Rinehart, “Historical Setting,” in *Costa Rica: A Country Study*, ed. Harold D. Nelson, (Washington, D. C.: American University, Foreign Area Studies, 1984), 45.

¹⁰⁴ Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Nicaragua,” March 16, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 494-495.

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, March 16, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1648.

Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Edwin J. Kyle messaged the department that the Costa Rican Minister to Guatemala informed the U.S. naval attaché that Guatemala and Nicaragua both were “intervening actively” in Costa Rica and that the “present civil war threatens [to] degenerate into [an] open conflict.” In Costa Rica, Davis discussed the conflict with Foreign Minister Lara, who pessimistically remarked that “this is the only revolution since 1870” that threatened to spread beyond Costa Rica’s borders. On March 18, the Honduran Foreign Minister approached the U.S. embassy in Honduras on President Tiburcio Carías’ instructions and assured the embassy that Carías “would not lend material support to the Costa Rican Administration.” However, Carías expressed his concern that “if the rebels succeed there with Guatemalan aid,” then Costa Rica could potentially be used “as a base” to launch invasions against Nicaragua and Honduras. Finally, on March 19, Manuel Mora met with Davis and informed him of Guatemalan president Arévalo’s “excessive preoccupation with the idea of Central American Union,” which made it “possible that he had become involved” in Costa Rican affairs.¹⁰⁶

It is also important to note that Davis’ evaluation of Mora and the PVP, requested by Marshall, did not indicate that there was an international communist presence lurking in Costa Rica. Instead, Davis reported to Washington that Mora would align himself “with whatever faction would appear to be in his self-interest,” and that he was a narcissist, an “idealist,” and a “practical politician.” While Davis and Mora did discuss the general question of international

¹⁰⁶ Albert E. Nufer to Marshall, “The Ambassador to El Salvador to the Secretary of State,” March 16, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1648; Edwin J. Kyle to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Guatemala to the Secretary of State,” March 17, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1748; Davis to Marshall, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 17, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1748; Harold E. Montamat to Marshall, “Attitude of Honduran Government toward Unsettled Costa Rican Situation,” March 18, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1848; Davis to Marshall, “Memorandum of Conversation with Manuel Mora, Secretary General of Vanguardia Popular,” March 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1948; Glejiceses on p. 143 argued that the United States “had urged Arévalo to renounce his support of the Caribbean Legion” during the Costa Rican Revolution.

communism, the U.S. Ambassador did not draw the conclusion that the PVP had ties with Moscow. Ultimately, Mora was only a political opportunist who would support the party that in turn supported the PVP, whether that be the opposition or the PRN. Moreover, in response to Cohen's claim that the situation in Costa Rica "is in many respects similar to that prevailing today in Eastern Europe," Bennett stated that that "estimate may be a bit overdrawn." Still, he recommended that the situation should be closely monitored, in consideration of Peruvian politician Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre's describing Costa Rica as "the Czechoslovakia of the Western Hemisphere."¹⁰⁷

The United States, then, kept its focus on isolating the revolution. Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs, Paul C. Daniels, met with Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, to respond to the various rumors of armed Nicaraguans coming to the aid of the Picado government.¹⁰⁸ He told the Ambassador that it would be "most unfortunate" if the dispute now confined to Costa Rica "were to spread over the border of that country and involve other Central American states." Similarly, the Acting Secretary of State, Willard L. Thorp, stressed to the U.S. embassy in Guatemala his concern over "reports indicating official Guatemalan arms and ammunition being used in Costa Rica." He then ordered Ambassador Kyle to solicit a response from Arévalo concerning these rumors.¹⁰⁹

Despite Washington's protests, Guatemala and Nicaragua refused to back down.

Bernbaum reported that Somoza, on March 18, observed a plane taking off from San Isidro for

¹⁰⁷ Davis to Marshall, "Memorandum of Conversation with Manuel Mora, Secretary General of Vanguardia Popular," March 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1948; Bennett, "Memorandum by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," March 26, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 503.

¹⁰⁸ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 73.

¹⁰⁹ Daniels, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs," March 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 495; Willard L. Thorp, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Guatemala," March 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 497.

Guatemala allegedly intending to “return with fighter planes and larger planes to bomb San José.” Somoza, in response, ordered his air force to be on “constant patrol” with the orders “to shoot down any ‘pirate’ plane crossing Nicaraguan territory.” Bernbaum also heard rumors that Somoza planned to deploy “1,000 fully equipped guardia” to the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border.¹¹⁰

On March 20 Somoza, in the Nicaraguan press, denounced Arévalo’s alleged support of Figueres, and he emphasized that Guatemala’s support of the rebels was part of Arévalo’s larger plan “to establish a Central American Union,” by overthrowing the governments in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador. Bernbaum believed that this statement was mostly an appeal to the other American governments to support Somoza’s intervention in Costa Rica in order to neutralize the revolutionary threat. This effort failed to gain approval from Washington or the other American republics, but the United States and Costa Rica queried the Guatemalan government concerning these rumors. The response consisted “only of denial of all facts.”¹¹¹

On March 21, Davis still hoped that the situation could be resolved in a peaceful compromise between the rebel forces and the government. Davis observed that while it was estimated that Figueres maintained a “strong military position,” he felt that “psychological and political factors involved [were] perhaps equally controlling.” With that said, the U.S. Ambassador believed that the majority of the Costa Rican population would still accept a

¹¹⁰ Bernbaum to Marshall, “The Chargé d’Affaires to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” March 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1948.

¹¹¹ Bernbaum to Marshall, “The Chargé d’Affaires to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” March 20, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2048; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 21, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 498.

“reasonable compromise rather than continue armed strife and economic stagnation.”¹¹² This was only possible, though, if the other American republics stayed out of Costa Rica’s affairs.

On March 22, after Somoza informed the embassy in Managua that he planned to “send by air 1000 troops of Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional to San José,” Marshall ordered all U.S. Embassies in Latin America to express to the governments to which they were accredited that the United States condemned such action. Additionally, Marshall informed his subordinates that the State Department had already protested Arévalo’s material assistance to the rebels and that the Guatemalan government had, thereafter, denied all allegations of its involvement in Costa Rica’s civil war.¹¹³

Though it has been argued that the embassy and the State Department had a pretty good idea that Arévalo was supporting the opposition, an open statement of distrust toward the Guatemalan government on the eve of the Bogotá conference would have presented a problem for the U.S. delegation in keeping up appearances of peaceful collaboration with its southern neighbors.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, Somoza’s blatant admission of sending troops to Costa Rica justified the State Department’s diplomatic posturing against the *de facto* government. When Sevilla Sacasa confronted the Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs, Robert F. Woodward, to defend the actions taken by Somoza as a measure to help a friendly government being attacked by communists, Woodward replied “that such intervention would have an

¹¹² Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” March 21, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2148.

¹¹³ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 74; Ameringer, *Democratic Left in Exile*, 79; Lester D. Langley noted that Somoza justified his deployment of 1,000 troops as support of “a legitimate government,” but he withdrew his forces “at the special request of Secretary of State George C. Marshall.” – Lester D. Langley, *The United States and the Caribbean, 1900-1970*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 204; Marshall, “The Secretary of State to Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics,” March 22, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 499.

¹¹⁴ See last chapter.

inflammatory effect” and that the allegation of communists attacking the Costa Rican government “was at variance with the reports received by the Department of State.”¹¹⁵

On the other hand, the Department also reminded the opposition that it still maintained a posture of strict neutrality. Revolutionaries Mario Gutierrez and Jorge Hazera visited Robert Newbegin and Murray M. Wise of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs and tried obtaining “at least moral support” from the State Department for the opposition’s cause. Newbegin responded that the United States remained entirely neutral and expressed his “disappointment over the political unrest in Costa Rica,” which in large part was caused by the rebel forces. Gutiérrez and Hazera, then, fell back on the typical charges made by the opposition that the communists in Costa Rica “had enough power to be very dangerous” and that the opposition needed outside help “to rid Costa Rica of this evil.” Realizing that they were fighting a lost cause, the two gentlemen informed Newbegin and Wise that they would then “approach the chief of the Chilean delegation” in New York because “he would lend a sympathetic ear to the cause of Costa Rica.” Wise noted that throughout the entire conversation, the visitors “approached the problem with a dispassionate attitude,” and they appeared “to understand very well the Department’s policy of non-intervention in these matters.” The United States at the height of the civil war, thus, made it abundantly clear that it would resist intervention, despite both the government’s and the opposition’s numerous requests for U.S. support.¹¹⁶

Two days later, on March 24, Marshall received a report with positive news that Somoza ordered Sevilla Sacasa to Managua to discuss the possibility of foregoing military aid to Costa

¹¹⁵ Robert F. Woodward, “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by the Deputy Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs,” March 22, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 500.

¹¹⁶ Wise, “Memorandum of Conversation with Mario Gutierrez and Jorge Hazera,” March 22, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2248.

Rica and to assist Picado in working out a “peaceful compromise” to resolve the “local problem.” Still skeptical of Sevilla Sacasa’s motives, though, Marshall wired the U.S. embassy and informed Bernbaum that while the Department was “anxious” for a prompt settlement in Costa Rica, the chargé should relay to Somoza that Washington “does not support any specific solution,” thus discrediting any statement Sevilla Sacasa might make concerning “U.S. approval” of his plan.¹¹⁷

A little less than a week later, the Chief of the Division of Foreign Activity Correlation, Jack D. Neal, had a conversation with the Guatemalan Ambassador to the United States, Ismaél González Arévalo, who again denied accusations that the Guatemalan government was in any way involved in the Costa Rican matter. Though González Arévalo expressed his concern that “extension of Nicaraguan aid might well result in the feeling of certain other countries...to take some steps to counteract Nicaragua,” he assured Neal that the serial numbers on the Guatemalan arms found in Costa Rica could not be traced back to Guatemala and that “a legend on a case was meaningless in itself.” However, the U.S. embassy in Mexico still received reports that various members of the opposition looked to Guatemala for material support.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, in Costa Rica, Davis became extremely annoyed with the opposition’s insistence on trying to involve him in the Costa Rican dispute. On April 1, the frustrated Ambassador wrote to Marshall:

It is surprising to note how many otherwise perfectly sound citizens simply cannot believe or understand that the United States is bound to a policy of scrupulous impartiality. That we are carefully avoiding any act, deed or expression which might

¹¹⁷ Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Nicaragua,” March 24, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-1248.

¹¹⁸ Jack D. Neal, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Foreign Activity Correlation,” March 30, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-2348; Walter C. Thurston to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Mexico to the Secretary of State,” March 31, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-3148.

possibly be interpreted as interference in the internal affairs of another nation. By [the opposition] we are condemned for our failure to come to the rescue in a situation which Costa Ricans themselves have not been able to solve.

Davis further noted that the opposition tried luring him into the conflict by holding the United States liable for supplying the current communist-backed government with weapons and that “the very words lend-lease are regarded as a curse.”¹¹⁹

The opposition also sent Davis a memorandum, which criticized his neutral stance in their current fight against communism. The message emphasized Davis’ short tenure in office and noted that U.S. citizens who had lived in Costa Rica for “4, 5, or more years” had criticized Davis’ actions for not supporting the global fight against communism. Davis forwarded the document to Marshall, commenting that “it is hardly necessary to comment further on the contents of the memorandum.”¹²⁰

Additionally, in response to a letter from William Pennington, a private U.S. citizen, expressing his concern over “the small communistic minority” that pressured the Costa Rican Congress into overruling the “freely expressed desire of [the] majority” in the presidential elections, Newbegin wrote:

Our efforts have been directed toward *localizing* the problem in so far as possible leaving it to the Costa Ricans themselves to bring about a solution without intervention by third powers. To that end we have made informal, oral representations to both the Nicaraguan and Guatemalan Governments, reminding them of their commitments under various inter-American agreements to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of a sister republic. We have also brought our action to the attention of the other

¹¹⁹ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 1, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 504.

¹²⁰ Davis to Marshall, “Criticism of the United States Policy,” April 1, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-148.

American Republics with the result that certain of them have made similar representations.¹²¹

For Newbegin and the State Department, isolating the revolution by keeping other countries out of the conflict still held a higher priority than intervening to eradicate the “the small communistic minority.”

The United States had yet another reason not to intervene. On April 3 Bernbaum received information that a perceived “attack of Communists” on the U.S. embassy in San José was intended to provoke U.S. intervention in Costa Rica “in order to provide the Soviet Union with justification for its intervention in Europe.” Furthermore, although Bernbaum saw through the Nicaraguan press’s attempts to connect the communist activity in Costa Rica to Figueres in order to justify Somoza’s intervention, such an alliance was not improbable for Davis. On April 3 Davis noted that “since a Calderon victory is now out of the question,” it was very possible that “the old Vanguardia-Republicano voting alliance will be replaced by a Vanguardia-Union Nacional combination.” He further remarked that Mora, an opportunist seeking to “preserve himself and his party,” had been “participating in discussions seeking a generally acceptable solution” to the Costa Rican revolution and would potentially enter an agreement with Ulate in exchange for the “safeguarding of existing social legislation..”¹²²

With rumors emerging of the Soviet Union watching the United States’ actions in Latin America and of the PVP’s potentially switching sides, there was good reason that the U.S. embassy in San José remained a cautious observer and let the Costa Ricans handle their own

¹²¹ Newbegin to Bennett, “Costa Rican Political Situation,” April 2, 1948, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/3-1848. Italics added.

¹²² Bernbaum to Marshall, “Press Campaign Linking Figueres Revolt with Costa Rican Communists and with the ‘International Communists,’ Arevalo and Betancourt,” April 3, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-348; Davis to Marshall, “Some Thoughts on the Political Situation,” April 3, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-348.

problems. Now that Calderón's defeat seemed inevitable, Davis and the State Department anxiously waited for the local violence in Costa Rica to die down.

Ending the Revolution

In the final days of the revolution, the Picado Administration blamed the United States for preventing the transfer of arms to the Costa Rican government while unsuccessfully keeping Guatemalan weapons out of Figueres' hands. The State Department vehemently denied these accusations of intervention and continued preaching nonintervention both to Guatemala and Nicaragua. Meanwhile, in Costa Rica, the diplomatic corps helped the government and the opposition find a peaceful solution to bring a quick end to, and successfully isolate, the Costa Rican conflict.

On April 6, a hopeless Alvaro Bonilla Lara, Acting Foreign Minister of Costa Rica, visited Davis to express his disappointment in the Department's blocking of Nicaraguan arms going to the Picado government, though "Figueres got 'tons' [of] arms munitions from Guatemala." Bonilla cited Calderón's expulsion of the Germans during World War II, reminding Davis of Calderón's and Picado's compliance with U.S. aims since 1940. Davis, as he had with the opposition, did not fall for these antics used by the government to try to gain U.S. sympathy, and he reminded the Foreign Minister that the United States' sole objective was to remain neutral and to "localize conflicts" by discouraging other countries from intervening. Acting Secretary Lovett also informed Davis that he could bring to the attention of the Foreign Minister telegrams sent to Nicaragua and Guatemala, requesting both governments to stay out of Costa Rica's affairs. Lovett added that he regretted that the United States' action, which had been guided by the desire "to localize [a] purely Costa Rican domestic situation" and "to avoid Costa Rica

becoming a scene of conflict of opposing outside interests,” had been misinterpreted as being “unfriendly” to the Picado government.¹²³

Picado also tried blaming the uninterrupted flow of arms to the rebels from Mexico and Guatemala for his defeat, but the United States was aware that he, too, likely received arms clandestinely from sources outside of Costa Rica’s borders. In a meeting with the diplomatic representatives in San José on April 7, Picado displayed several cases of rifles and ammunition that “bore a legend stating that they were from the Guatemalan Ministry of Defense, and had been manufactured in the National Munitions Factory of Mexico.” On the same day, however, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Walter C. Thurston, reported rumors that René Picado obtained “approximately one hundred machine guns and necessary ammunition” during his visit to Mexico. The Ambassador also expressed his concern that U.S. arms shipped to Mexico for transshipment to Palestine might be “filtering into Central America clandestinely without the knowledge of the Mexican Government.”¹²⁴ Regardless of who received the weapons, the United States expressed its disapproval of the shipment of arms to Costa Rica during the civil war.

On April 13, Costa Rican Ambassador Gutiérrez approached the State Department and again suggested that the United States’ “action in discouraging intervention in Costa Rica” worked to Picado’s disadvantage, resulting in the inability of the government in obtaining arms. Meanwhile, Gutiérrez claimed, the United States’ efforts did not prevent the opposition from

¹²³ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 6, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 505; Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” April 7, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 505-506.

¹²⁴ Bell remarked that “Mexico consistently manifested interest in the *calderonistas*’ (PRN) cause but found itself unable to help the government when it was in dire need,” U.S. State Department documentation suggests otherwise. – Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 141; Andrew E. Donovan II to Marshall, “The First Secretary of the Embassy in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 7, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-748; Walter C. Thurston to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Mexico to the Secretary of State,” April 7, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-748. I could not find any further information on arms being sent to Palestine through Mexico, which could potentially be a topic worth investigating.

receiving weapons from Guatemala. Lovett and Newbegin informed the Ambassador that the United States' stance of nonintervention "was designed to prevent Costa Rica from becoming a battle ground" and reminded him that the U.S. government protested intervention both by Guatemala and Nicaragua. Later that day, Newbegin called Gutiérrez and informed him that a search of the Department's files failed to "reveal any instance" in which the Truman Administration had specifically requested any other state "to refrain from supplying arms to the Costa Rican Government." Newbegin, then, emphasized the difference between the proposed shipment of weapons and "Somoza's proposal to send a thousand troops into Costa Rica," and he added that the only arms the United States attempted to block were the ones being sent from Guatemala to the opposition. Nicaragua's assistance "exceeded all reasonable bounds when Somoza dispatched troops to Costa Rica."¹²⁵

After Gutiérrez's visit, the State Department became extremely cautious in its dealings with Costa Rica. In response to Davis' request to bring about a compromise between the opposition and the government, Acting Secretary Lovett informed the Ambassador that the proactive extension of his good offices to bring an end to the conflict would inevitably "be subject to misinterpretation as intervention and that it should therefore be avoided." However, Davis could still be involved in "any *group* diplomatic corps action that seems to hold forth humanitarian possibility." On the morning of April 13, Davis, with his other diplomatic colleagues, met with Figueres to bring about peaceful negotiations.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Newbegin, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," April 13, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 508; Newbegin, "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," April 13, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 509-510; Newbegin to Lovett, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs to the Acting Secretary of State," April 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1348.

¹²⁶ Longley, "Peaceful Costa Rica," 169; Olander, "Costa Rica in 1948," 473; Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," April 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1148; Lovett, "The Acting Secretary of

Lovett on April 14 wrote to Daniels in Bogotá to keep him updated on the Costa Rican situation. The Acting Secretary justified the State Department's actions since Daniels' departure in March, claiming that it had maintained a strictly neutral stance throughout the entire conflict. The preventative measures taken against Guatemala and Nicaragua were justifiable, according to Lovett, because Nicaragua threatened to deploy armed forces and because Guatemala's shipping of weapons to the opposition was in violation of the Havana Treaty of 1928. Finally, Lovett ensured Daniels that the Department never blocked any shipment of arms to the Picado regime.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, peace talks between Figueres and Picado continued throughout the week without gaining much headway. Ambassador Gutiérrez, realizing that the situation was hopeless for Calderón and Picado, visited Newbegin's office and urged the State Department to take more affirmative action to quickly bring peace to Costa Rica. Newbegin simply replied that Davis "had been doing all that was proper." The United States was certainly eager to bring an end to the conflict but was also careful not to show partiality toward Figueres, who refused to enter into a compromise with Picado.¹²⁸ It is also not plausible that the United States would have helped Figueres secure a quick victory in order to get rid of the PVP. Cohen observed that Figueres during the week had issued statements with phrases in it, such as "war against poverty" and "a country without misery" that were "virtually identical" to those which the "Vanguardia Popular has maintained for a long time" and that "both Figueres and Vanguardia have certain definite aims in common." While the Truman Administration did not consider the PVP a serious threat,

State to the Embassy in Costa Rica," April 13, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 511; Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," April 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1348; Italics added.

¹²⁷ Lovett to Daniels, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs," April 14, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1348.

¹²⁸ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 79.

Cohen's report indicated that the end of Picado did not mean the end of the PVP. On the other hand, the United States was careful not to show partiality toward the government. Picado requested to evacuate Costa Rica via U.S. aircraft, but Lovett decided this was ill-advised and informed Davis that asylum within the U.S. embassy was prohibited unless the person's life was in immediate danger.¹²⁹ Thus, the State Department did not want to appear to take sides by supporting a potential PVP-Figueroes alliance or by granting asylum to Picado. It only wanted the Costa Ricans to reach an agreement by themselves before another state intervened.

On April 17 Davis received more news that Somoza planned to invade Costa Rica, and he worried that Nicaragua's intervention would disrupt the progress made between the opposition and the government to bring about peace.¹³⁰ The Ambassador and the diplomatic commission in Costa Rica desired that "all American countries obtain complete cessation of Nicaraguan intervention in the Costa Rican revolution" and believed that the most effective means of accomplishing this would be through "the authority of the Bogota conference." Lovett relayed Davis' message to the embassy in Bogotá, suggesting that multilateral action at the conference should be made to prevent a "potential international conflict." Lovett the next day warned Davis that if the warring factions failed to reach a settlement soon, then it was very likely that Somoza might join ranks with Picado and that Arévalo might join ranks with Figueres. Fortunately, for the State Department, Figueres and Picado reached an agreement on April 19. Picado stepped down as president, and all military action came to a halt. Davis, the next day, received a message

¹²⁹ Wise, "Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Wise of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," April 15, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1548; Lovett, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica," April 15, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1548; Cohen to Marshall, "Text of Proclamation of Insurgent Leader José Figueres, Expressing Attitude Concerning Social Questions," April 16, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1648; Lovett, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica," April 16, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1648

¹³⁰ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 62; Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 81.

of commendation from Lovett, expressing his gratitude for his “role in facilitating the reaching of agreements between Figueres and Picado.”¹³¹

Conclusion

The United States eventually achieved its goal in isolating the Costa Rican Revolution without being charged with intervention by the American republics. Davis consistently encouraged peaceful negotiations between Figueres and Picado within Costa Rica, while the State Department discouraged intervention by Guatemala and Nicaragua. Historian Steven Schwartzberg and I have found no direct evidence indicating that Davis, the U.S. embassy, or Washington ever wanted the PRN or the PVP to be defeated by force of arms.¹³² And while I also agree with Longley’s claim that the United States took a firmer approach toward Somoza than it did toward Arévalo (only because Somoza mobilized his military), the assumption that the United States *knew* that Arévalo shipped arms to the opposition does not hold water. U.S.

Ambassador Milton K. Wells, on April 13, wrote:

However, there now [*sic*] appears some reason to believe that President AREVALO may not, after all, be responsible; and that such assistance as is now reaching FIGUERES is being arranged for directly by the Army, whose leaders (Colonel ARANA, Major ARBENZ and Major COSENZA) are more apprehensive over the possibility of [a] communist-dominated Government in Costa Rica than over hostile regimes in Honduras and Nicaragua.¹³³

¹³¹ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” April 17, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1748; Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Bogotá,” April 17, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1748; Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” April 18, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1848; Lovett to Davis, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador to Costa Rica,” April 20, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1448.

¹³² Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 184.

¹³³ Milton K. Wells to Marshall, “Guatemalan Assistance to Revolutionary Movement in Costa Rica,” April 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-1348.

The bottom line is that the Truman Administration, while certain that the arms sent to Costa Rica came from Mexico and Guatemala, did not know who exactly to blame. Meanwhile, Somoza made his position abundantly clear in the hopes that the Truman Administration and other American republics would support his interventionist actions.

The United States succeeded in helping isolate the Costa Rican Revolution. Communism and the PVP in Costa Rica were closely monitored, but they never posed a serious enough threat for the United States to intervene to support Figueres. Even if the PVP had been considered a serious enough threat, the U.S. embassy believed that it would potentially ally with the opposition in the case of a Figueres victory. Thus, removing the PRN from the government would not have eliminated the PVP from the embassy's perspective. The Truman Administration, therefore, sought only to keep the conflict within Costa Rica's borders while simultaneously discouraging intervention by the other American republics.

CHAPTER 3

PROMOTING PEACEFUL COLLABORATION: THE UNITED STATES' RESPONSE TO
THE COSTA RICA-NICARAGUA CRISIS OF 1948-1949

The end of the Revolution did not bring about regional peace. After the opposition took over, Figueres and Ulate signed a pact that gave Figueres and an eleven-man junta the power to rule by decree for eighteen months. Ulate would, thereafter, take over as the first president of the Second Republic of Costa Rica.¹³⁴ Figueres still held onto the Caribbean Legion, which the Truman Administration understood to be the principal factor in the opposition's victory. The Legion now looked to overthrow Somoza. Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, Calderón began organizing a counterrevolutionary military consisting of exiled Calderonistas trained and supported by Somoza's Guardia Nacional. Furthermore, the PVP now constituted a threat to regional peace since it was the only formidable opponent of Figueres that could potentially force him out of office, which the State Department feared would lead to more instability. Ultimately, the volatile relationships among Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the three groups of revolutionaries deteriorated into the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949. The Truman Administration's work in bringing about peace in Central America was hardly over.

This chapter is divided into five sections to make the argument that the Truman Administration promoted peaceful collaboration between Costa Rica and Nicaragua and helped isolate the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis by working with the Organization of American States (OAS) to eliminate revolutionary activity in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The first section

¹³⁴ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 66.

discusses the multiple rejections by the United States of Costa Rica's requests for arms. I highlight these conversations to emphasize that the Truman Administration did not materially assist Figueres to violently suppress the PVP and, instead, refrained from giving him weapons since they might be used against Somoza. The next three sections compare the United States' relationships, respectively, with the PVP, the Calderonistas, and the Caribbean Legion in the latter half of 1948. Each group, regardless of its ideology, now posed a threat to regional peace, and the United States took positive steps toward – or at least did not intervene to stop – the elimination of these forces. The final section discusses the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis and the Truman Administration's role in bringing a quick end to the conflict.

The Arms Question

From May to December of 1948, Figueres, on numerous occasions, requested arms from the United States, which for various reasons were denied each time. Of principal concern to the United States was the Caribbean Legion's presence in Costa Rica, and Washington feared that any U.S. weapons going to Figueres might be used against Somoza, thus impeding Central America's return to peace. Additionally, the junta had inherited an outstanding Lend-Lease account of roughly \$85,000 that still needed to be paid. Meanwhile, Costa Rica underwent an economic crisis, due in part to the recent Revolution, and Washington did not want to place a financial burden on the junta by giving it expensive weapons. Finally, the United States could not give Costa Rica, and Latin America in general, "cheap" weapons since it had sold all its surplus material to countries outside Latin America. Latin American militaries, especially Costa Rica's, were a low priority in Truman's larger Cold War strategies. Since the arming of Costa Rica would be an impediment toward peace, and since its military could not contribute much to

the fight against international communism, the United States during the latter half of 1948 refused to sell the junta weapons.

On May 11, the Chief of the United States Military to Costa Rica, Colonel Edwin Messinger, discussed with Ambassador Davis the prospects of the United States' selling arms to Costa Rica. Davis informed the Colonel that Costa Rica still had "an outstanding account for previous deliveries" and that he needed from Figueres assurances that no U.S. arms would "be used in military adventures in other American countries." Davis also noted that Costa Rica's military remained a low priority for the United States' hemispheric defense plan and, therefore, concluded "that the Embassy was not prepared at this time to discuss arms questions." Moreover, Vice Consul Alex A. Cohen observed that Figueres' recruiting campaign to increase the size of the military was publicly criticized by Ulate's newspaper, which published editorials with titles such as, "Militarism NO," and "WE DO NOT WANT AN ARMY." The United States, having been accused often by the opposition during the Revolution of supplying Picado and Calderón with arms through Lend-Lease agreements, decided to avoid giving more arms to an unpopular and unpredictable army.¹³⁵

On May 21 the junta announced the disbanding of the revolutionary military, but Cohen reported a week-and-a-half later that the order did not include members of the "so-called 'National Army'" now in the process of organization. Davis did notice a change in Figueres' attitude, though, likely due to the population's being "profoundly sceptical [*sic*] of political promises and anything of military rule." Ulate led the public fight against the militarization of Costa Rica, warning that the "tendency of some young veterans of the revolution to strut their

¹³⁵ Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," May 12, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 528; Cohen to Marshall, "Current and Proposed Military Activities of the Governing Junta," May 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-1348.

uniforms may lead to the development of a military caste.” The junta was also dealing with an economic crisis in the aftermath of the Revolution, and the purchase of weapons to maintain a large army would only lead to further economic decay.¹³⁶

In an attempt to convince the United States to forgive the Lend-Lease debt accrued by the Calderón and Picado regimes, Costa Rican Ambassador to the United States, Mario A. Esquivel, complained to the State Department that the arms used by the Picado government to suppress the opposition had come from lend-lease agreements. After Newbegin dismissed this overdrawn complaint, the Costa Rican Ambassador then asked if the junta “could supply wood and other building materials rather than make payments in colones.” Newbegin responded that this was not “a practical arrangement,” thus leaving the junta with an outstanding balance of \$84,877.25.¹³⁷

William Tapley Bennett, Jr., again met with Esquivel in July to discuss a new arms request sent to the United States by the junta. Bennett informed him that while the State Department did not oppose the transaction, the difficulties in completing such transactions lied in the “lack of arms” and the “lack of authority” to declare the leftover U.S. military equipment as “surplus.” Esquivel replied that he was “sick of the whole armaments mess” anyway and that he had become discouraged over the militarization of Costa Rica. Bennett then advised the Ambassador not to look for arms to solve the crisis with Nicaragua but, instead, develop a “spirit of confidence” with its Central American and Caribbean neighbors. On July 29, Esquivel

¹³⁶ Cohen to Marshall, “Current Political Situation,” June 1, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-148; Davis to Marshall, “Costa Rican Opposition to Interventionist Plotting,” May 26, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-2648; Davis to Marshall, “Political Notes,” June 7, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-748.

¹³⁷ Newbegin, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs,” June 9, 1948. *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 528-529.

informed the State Department that “he would not be disappointed if the request were turned down.” Shortly thereafter, it was.¹³⁸

On August 19, Cohen outlined the junta’s military policies, which up to this point in time had been very divisive. He noted that the complete reorganization of the army had led to charges that Figueres “was attempting to militarize the country.” Figueres had significantly increased the size of the standing army from the traditional figure of roughly 550 officers and men to a much larger figure of 181 officers and 1,813 enlisted men, though Cohen observed that the army cannot “be considered unduly large” when compared to Somoza’s Guardia Nacional. Still, the increased size of the military was criticized by the Costa Rican population who wanted, instead, to rid itself of a military. Cohen expected that the committee tasked with creating the new constitution might try “entirely to eliminate the army in Costa Rica.” Cohen finished his report by stating that any U.S. arms given to Costa Rica during this time “might conceivably be diverted to international adventures.”¹³⁹

Ambassador Esquivel, during his visit to Costa Rica in October, approached the U.S. embassy once more to discuss Costa Rica’s Lend Lease account. Esquivel brought up the possibility of cancelling the debt, which Davis immediately discouraged. Instead, he informed the Costa Rican Ambassador that he might be successful in appealing to the officials in

¹³⁸ Bennett, “Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs,” July 20, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 532-533; Wise, “Informal Conversation with Ambassador Esquivel,” July 29, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2948; Bennett, “Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs,” August 10, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 533-534.

¹³⁹ Tord Høivick and Solveig Aas argued, “The idea of abolishing the army did not originate with Figueres. It was first presented in the Project for Political Constitution. The Ulate-Figueres Pact had called for a new constitution, and this draft constitution published by the Junta May 25, 1948, was written by a group of young men related to the Social Democratic Party.” – Tord Høivick and Solveig Aas, “Demilitarization in Costa Rica: A Farewell to Arms?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 18, no. 4 (1981): 342; Cohen to Marshall, “The First Hundred Days of the Junta,” August 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-1948.

Washington for Costa Rica to pay in colones, rather than dollars. Still, Esquivel left disappointed, as he evidently had instructions either to request a cancellation or reduction of the outstanding debt.¹⁴⁰

Thus, Costa Rica went without U.S. arms in the months leading up to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis. Washington refused these requests because the junta could not afford the arms, would likely misuse the arms, and, most importantly, did not need the arms to defend itself from a Soviet attack.¹⁴¹ The argument has also been made that similar action was taken by the United States concerning arms sales to Nicaragua in 1948.¹⁴² The United States did not expect Latin American militaries to effectively defend the hemisphere from an overt communist threat, so the United States, in this regard, did not have had an incentive to give Nicaragua weapons.¹⁴³ Moreover, the United States had a desire to keep the peace among the American republics, and Truman refused to give arms to Nicaragua because the weapons likely been would have used against Figueres.¹⁴⁴ Finally, Nicaragua as of August 31, 1948 had an outstanding Lend Lease debt of \$511,760.16, which the Truman Administration took into consideration.¹⁴⁵

PVP: A New Threat

Rather than arming Costa Rica and Nicaragua to defend themselves from communism, the United States, instead, kept a close watch on the three principal revolutionary and

¹⁴⁰ Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," October 18, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 535.

¹⁴¹ Atwood noted that because the United States boycotted military arms deliveries to Costa Rica in 1948 and 1949, "Figueres was unable to repay the aid which had been extended to him by the Caribbean Legion," thus weakening ties between the junta and the Legion. – Atwood, *Containment of Liberal Nationalism*, 84.

¹⁴² Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 202.

¹⁴³ Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, 195.

¹⁴⁴ Atwood, *Containment of Liberal Nationalism*, 86; Green, *Containment of Latin America*, 284; Coatsworth, *Clients and the Colossus*, 52.

¹⁴⁵ Robert L. Maxwell, "Status of American Republic Lend-Lease Accounts by the Commissioner of Accounts of the Treasury Department," August 31, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 221.

counterrevolutionary groups in Central America: the PVP, the Calderonistas, and the Caribbean Legion. Each group, regardless of its ideology, now were threats to the peace and stability of Central America. Therefore, the United States, while maintaining a policy of strict neutrality toward all American states, advocated, and sometimes aided in, the elimination of the PVP, the Calderonistas, and the Caribbean Legion in order to establish Central American peace.

Davis on May 4 said he believed that the PVP now posed a threat in Costa Rica, not because of its communist ideology but because it “is presently the only organized political force capable of offering any opposition to the revolutionary government.” However, Cohen did not seem to be as worried, and ten days later he sent the Department a report indicating that the PVP and “its parallel labor organization, the [Confederación de Trabajadores de Costa Rica] have ceased to exist.” Davis disagreed with Cohen’s assessment, though, as he believed that participation of the PVP in Costa Rica’s political affairs would continue indefinitely. After a meeting with Father Benjamin Nuñez on May 20, Davis was convinced that the PVP-supported C.T.C.R. “doubtless continues to a limited extent in certain areas,” despite the Father’s assertion that the “organization has largely been broken up.”¹⁴⁶

The U.S. embassy did observe that public opinion was “forcing the hand of the government in its attitude of the Vanguardia Popular party.” Vice Consul Cohen reported on June 10 that the PVP had become increasingly unpopular due “to the many lawless acts of violence” during the revolution, and there seemed to be “a marked tendency” among the Costa Rican populace to blame “every outward incident” on the PVP and to “persecute them accordingly.” Nonetheless, the vice consul noted that the PVP “has prepared for years” for the

¹⁴⁶ Davis to Marshall, “Some Thoughts on the Political Situation,” May 4, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-448; Cohen to Marshall, “Activities of the Junta,” May 14, 1948, 818.00/5-1448; Davis to Mrashall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” May 20, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-2048.

forced exile of principal party leaders and that the persecution of the PVP “is bound to make the leadership more defiant and more desperate.” Though Davis and Cohen believed that the PVP had been severely weakened, the embassy worried that an attempt to forcefully outlaw what was left of the communist party might provoke a counterrevolution, which would threaten regional peace.¹⁴⁷

Still, on July 19, the junta outlawed communism, and subsequently the PVP, and the embassy braced itself for such a counterrevolution.¹⁴⁸ Cohen immediately notified the State Department of this decision and expressed his concern:

As previously pointed out by the Embassy on a number of occasions, drastic action on the part of the Junta against Vanguardia has forced it to go underground. Whether this policy, in the long run, is preferable to a more lenient one which would enable the Junta to keep a closer check on Vanguardia’s doings, can only be told in time. It is significant to note, however, that there exists a not inconsiderable school of thought that the repression as now practiced by the Junta, while restraining Vanguardia from remaining in the open, will not prevent its continued existence as a much more dangerous clandestine organization.¹⁴⁹

Though the local press, “without exception,” approved of Figueres’ outlawing the PVP, Cohen was rather apprehensive that the remaining PVP members might react violently.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Davis to Marshall, “Political Notes,” June 7, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-748; Cohen to Marshall, “Present Status of Communism in Costa Rica,” June 10, 1948, NARA, RG 263; Cohen to Marshall, “Present Status of Communism in Costa Rica,” June 10, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-1048; Davis to Marshall, “Some Thoughts on the Political Situation,” June 11, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-1148.

¹⁴⁸ Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica*, 158; Donovan to Marshall, “First Secretary of the Embassy in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” July 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-1948.

¹⁴⁹ Cohen to Marshall, “Outlawing of VANGUARDIA POPULAR Party,” July 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-1948.

¹⁵⁰ Leonard remarked that “Davis viewed communism as an issue the local elite exploited to pressure its position” and that “he found the economic and social philosophies of both Mora and Figueres strikingly similar.” – Leonard, *Issues and References*, 57; Cohen to Marshall, “Press Reaction to the Outlawing of VANGUARDIA POPULAR,” July 22, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/7-2248.

A month later, the first secretary of the U.S. embassy in Guatemala, Milton K. Wells, reported rumors that Figueres' anti-communist actions had resulted in exiled PVP leaders' moving to Guatemala. According to the rumors, Figueres informed Arévalo that he had expelled members of the PVP, "not because they were communists" but because they "had proved to be nothing more than incapable grafters." Still, the Guatemalan president cautioned Figueres against the blanket exiling of the PVP as a communist organization, since this would draw undue attention toward Guatemala's receiving communist exiles.¹⁵¹ It was too late, though, and the State Department realized that outlawing a communist party in Central America would not necessarily eliminate it, but would only move it from country to country.

However, after observing the overwhelmingly positive reaction from the Costa Rican population, Cohen, in August, ultimately commended the junta's outlawing the PVP. Though the State Department had no hand in dissolving the communist party in Costa Rica, Cohen believed that this measure "if enforced...can only result in ultimate benefit to the country as a whole" since it "meets with the approval of the great bulk of the citizens." The unification of Costa Rica meant a less likely chance of another revolution erupting.¹⁵² Since the PVP left the country, so did the only force within Costa Rica that could forcefully oust the government. The State Department, then, focused on other revolutionary groups in Costa Rica and Nicaragua that potentially threatened hemispheric peace.

¹⁵¹ Milton K. Wells to Marshall, "Question of Costa Rican Political Emigres in Guatemala Reportedly Topic of Discussion Between President Arévalo and Figueres During Latter's Recent Visit," August 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-1248.

¹⁵² Cohen to Marshall, "The First Hundred Days of the Junta," August 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-1948.

Somoza and the Calderonistas

In Nicaragua, the U.S. embassy tried to quell a Calderón-Somoza alliance aimed at ousting Figueres. On April 29, U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Maurice M. Bernbaum, reported to Washington that Somoza was waging a “war of nerves” against Figueres to keep the unstable political situation “stirred up” in order to prevent Figueres from aiding or allowing the Caribbean Legion to invade Nicaragua. Supposedly, an ex-Costa Rican army officer in exile had been training troops in Managua with Guardia assistance, weapons, and equipment. The following week, the chargé received news that Calderonistas captured “two truck-loads of arms and ammunition” that were en route to resupply Figueres’ forces near the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border. On June 19, Davis informed Marshall that the junta on the previous night announced the suspension of individual liberties in response to the threat of counter revolution by the “Calderonistas and Communists from abroad.”¹⁵³

On June 19, Newbegin protested to the Nicaraguan Ambassador, Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, after receiving reports of Somoza financing and providing other support for the Calderonista counterrevolutionary army in Managua. The Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs explained to Sacasa that he found it “thoroughly undesirable that action taken by one country outside its own frontiers should be disguised as defense measures.” If Nicaragua hoped to receive any sympathy from the American republics, regarding Figueres’ assistance to the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica, then Somoza needed to cooperate with the United States and get rid of the Calderonistas. That same day, Newbegin made it a point to call

¹⁵³ Bernbaum to Marshall, “The Chargé d’Affaires in Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” June 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-1248; Bernbaum to Marshall, “The Chargé d’Affaires to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” June 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-1948; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” June 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/6-1948; Bernbaum to Marshall, “Transmittal of Message from Costa Rican Provisional President,” April 29, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-2948.

Esquivel and praise him for Costa Rica's longstanding tradition of "strictly minding its own business." Esquivel assured the Ambassador that the junta would continue this policy, though the chief of the CPA was aware of the continued presence of the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica.¹⁵⁴

Esquivel on August 10 alleged that Somoza had been training "a substantial number of Costa Rican exiles" near the border, and that there had recently been "frequent incursions" into Costa Rican territory. The Ambassador also mentioned "the occasional flights by Nicaraguan war planes" over Costa Rica and asserted that "General Somoza has a definite intention to invade Costa Rica." Meanwhile, Somoza complained about reports from Costa Rica and Guatemala of revolutionaries in those two countries planning for the invasion of Nicaragua. The new U.S. chargé in Nicaragua, Halleck L. Rose, after hearing this believed that "Somoza may invade Costa Rica alleging self-defense."¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the State Department tried to prevent the formation of a Carías-Somoza-Trujillo alliance to aid the Calderonistas in overthrowing Figueres. On November 26, Marshall received news that Calderón had traveled to the Dominican Republic allegedly to receive support from Trujillo, which created enough alarm in Washington to provoke a response from the Secretary of State. Marshall immediately requested that the embassy in the Dominican Republic send him any information it might have on Calderón's visit there.¹⁵⁶ I could find no further documentation on the visit, but it can be assumed that such an international alliance would not be tolerated by Washington, since, like the Caribbean Legion, this threatened regional peace. Still,

¹⁵⁴ Newbegin, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," June 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 531.

¹⁵⁵ Bennett, "Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs," August 10, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 533; Halleck L. Rose to Marshall, "The Chargé in Nicaragua to the Secretary of State," August 12, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 534-535;

¹⁵⁶ Marshall, "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the Dominican Republic," November 26, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.001 GUARDIA CALDERON, RAFAEL/11-2648.

the most dangerous threat in Central America, from the Truman Administration's viewpoint, was the Caribbean Legion.

Figueres and the Caribbean Legion

After the revolution, Figueres still held on to the Caribbean Legion, which was the deciding factor in the opposition's victory, and it was well-known in the State Department that the Legion's next objective was toppling the Nicaraguan government. Davis heard rumors that Figueres' military plans might be "closely related to Arevalo's international ideological concepts" of unifying Central America and expressed his regret to Ulate if these rumors were true since the "direct or indirect" participation by Costa Rica in this endeavor would endanger Central American and continental peace.¹⁵⁷

On May 5, Davis reiterated to Ulate that regardless of whether Somoza was harboring communist-supported Calderonistas, the United States expected Costa Rica to maintain its policy of strict nonintervention. The U.S. Ambassador warned the president-elect that a Costa Rican military venture in Nicaragua's territory "would quite possibly endanger the peace of Central America and could quite possibly extend to endangering the peace of the continent."¹⁵⁸ However, Davis was talking to the wrong person.

After the establishment of the Founding Junta of the Second Republic on May 8, Figueres refused to recognize the Dominican Republic's government, which contributed even more to the instability in the Caribbean. "The precipitous nature of the Costa Rican action," Davis remarked, "is not dissimilar to the Guatemalan breaking of relations," and he attributed Figueres' actions as

¹⁵⁷ Bernbaum to Marshall, "Transmittal of Message from Costa Rican Provisional President," April 29, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/4-2948; Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," May 2, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-248.

¹⁵⁸ Davis to Marshall, "Some Thoughts on the Political Situation," May 4, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-548.

having much to do with Figueres' commitment to Arévalo. Davis also understood that Dominican revolutionaries, who were among the members of the Caribbean Legion, "played a prominent part" in the overthrow of Picado, and he reasoned that "there may be a certain reluctance on the part of Costa Rica to appear to maintain cordial relations with dictatorships."¹⁵⁹ Figueres' harboring the Caribbean Legion and the complications that came with that had made him extremely unpopular among U.S. embassy officials – and the large portion of the Costa Rican population loyal to Ulate.¹⁶⁰

In a speech on May 26, Ulate condemned the military nature of the junta and its rogue army of revolutionaries. According to Davis, the president-elect had "very positive ideas on three allied subjects." First, Ulate cautioned against the development of a military caste. Second, he claimed that the enthusiasm of the young revolutionaries "may lead to Costa Rican involvement in military adventures in neighboring countries." And third, he feared that the harboring and employment of the Caribbean Legion in "high government offices" may "becloud" Costa Rica's friendly relations with her neighbors. Davis applauded Ulate's anti-military sentiments and held similar opinions of the revolutionary army. The Ambassador concluded from the speech that:

[I]t would appear that [the Caribbean Legion] may be losing the initiative... This is not to say that the danger of Costa Rican involvement in neighboring countries is by any means past, or that plotting on Costa Rican soil for uprisings in Nicaragua and Honduras does not continue; but it is at least a hopeful sign that a man of Mr. Ulate's prominence and influence should bring these matters forthrightly before the public, as is the evidence that he does not stand alone.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Davis to Marshall, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," May 10, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-1048.

¹⁶⁰ Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 92.

¹⁶¹ Davis to Marshall, "Costa Rican Opposition to Interventionist Plotting," May 26, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/5-2648.

Davis, throughout the rest of his tenure in Costa Rica, would consistently support Ulate's noninterventionist and anti-militarist messages.

Meanwhile in Washington, Newbegin received a visit from the new Costa Rican Ambassador to the United States, Mario A. Esquivel, who confirmed his and the junta's desire, like that of Arévalo's, to form a Central American federation. However, Esquivel complained that dictators posed an obstacle and that "before such a federation could be evolved it was necessary to eliminate Somoza." After informing the Costa Rican Ambassador that the United States did not care whether a Central American federation was formed, Newbegin expressed Washington's grave concern over revolutionary groups "who were working in exile to overthrow the governments of neighboring countries." Newbegin, then, referred to Washington's actions during the Revolution to localize the Revolution and informed Esquivel that this policy still applied.¹⁶²

As Costa Rica-Nicaragua relations deteriorated throughout the latter half of 1948, Washington became very critical of Figueres.¹⁶³ In his review of the first one hundred days of the junta, written on August 19, Cohen highlighted the continued existence of the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica and criticized Figueres' assistance to the revolutionaries to overthrow the Carías, Somoza, and Trujillo dictatorships. However, the vice consul observed that other members of the junta appeared to be less involved with the Caribbean Legion and wanted it gone altogether,

¹⁶² Newbegin, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central American and Panama Affairs," May 27, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 168.

¹⁶³ Kirk Bowman noted that "Conservatives, communists, certain US officials, and regional dictators and potential targets of the Caribbean Legion such as Anastasio Somoza all had Figueres in their sights." – Bowman, "Militaries and Modern States," 193.

since public opinion in Costa Rica traditionally had been “against mixing in the affairs of its neighbors.”¹⁶⁴

On October 13, Bennett received a report from the embassy that Figueres’ current popularity in Costa Rica was only temporary, as he had just led a “victorious revolution,” and public support for the junta is “indirectly dependent almost entirely on Ulate’s attitude toward the regime.” In an apparent attempt to gain favor from the U.S. embassy, Figueres reminded Davis of the junta’s decision to outlaw communism, to which the Ambassador gave no reply. Instead, Cohen nine days later remarked that Figueres’ advocacy of “state control over private property and industry” was indicative of “the socialistic tendency which motivates the junta.” Furthermore, Davis reported on November 4 that the economic measures taken by Figueres provoked “public discontent and mistrust.”¹⁶⁵

The tensions between Figueres and Somoza intensified on November 12, when *Prensa Libre* made the first official mention of the Caribbean Legion’s continued occupation of the garrisons in San José. According to the article, members of the Legion obstructed the police investigation of a robbery that occurred in the area of the garrison in which the revolutionaries were living. Cohen remarked that the significance of the article lay in “the bold-faced admittance in the press that the cuartel is occupied by the Caribbean Legion.”¹⁶⁶ This was alarming for the

¹⁶⁴ Cohen to Marshall, “The First Hundred Days of the Junta,” August 19, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/8-1948.

¹⁶⁵ Monica Rankin remarked that the junta’s socialist measures “alarmed government leaders in the United States who had been eying potential communist activity in the Western Hemisphere.” – Monica Rankin, *The History of Costa Rica*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), 115; Bennett, “Conversation between Ambassador Nathaniel Davis and President Figueres,” October 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/10-548; Bennett, “Conversation between Ambassador Nathaniel Davis and President Figueres,” October 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, FW 818.00/10-548; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” November 4, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-448.

¹⁶⁶ Cohen to Marshall, “‘Collector’s Item’: The Caribbean Legion Appears in the Local Press,” November 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-1248.

State Department because Nicaragua could now justifiably accuse Costa Rica of plotting against Nicaraguan President Victor Manuel Román y Reyes with some supporting evidence and, thereby, justify intervention.

Immediately, Ulate publicly condemned the Legion's continued presence in Costa Rica. In the *Diario de Costa Rica*, he emphasized that the revolution for Costa Rica was over and that "Central American emigrés... would do us a favor if they would withdraw their hands from Costa Rican political matters." *La Nacion* applauded Ulate's advocacy for the return to the "Costa Rican tradition of nonintervention," which Davis believed to be a hopeful sign that public opinion would influence Figueres to disband the Legion and forget about Somoza.¹⁶⁷

On November 26, a depressed Figueres met with Davis in the U.S. embassy to discuss various policies of the junta moving forward.¹⁶⁸ Davis observed that Figueres was discouraged due to the junta's unpopularity both in the United States and Costa Rica, and he looked to the Ambassador for moral support. The elections for the constituent assembly, which would be tasked with creating the new constitution, were only two weeks away, and Figueres feared that his unpopularity impeded his quest to implement certain reforms that he believed were in the best interest of the country. Concerning the economy, Figueres hoped to negotiate new concessions with the United Fruit Company in order to help settle some of the country's debt, but he feared that even a new agreement with the UFCO "will be subject to criticism" unless he managed to reach a foreign bondholders' agreement that would lower the interest rates on outstanding loans.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Davis to Marshall, "Remarks of President-Elect of Costa Rica Concerning Non-Intervention in Affairs of Neighboring Countries," November 18, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-1848.

¹⁶⁸ Also cited in Zarate, *Forging Democracy*, 86.

¹⁶⁹ Davis to Marshall, "Conversation with President Figueres," November 26, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-2648.

Davis recognized the opportunity and unhesitatingly rebuked Figueres for his continued support of the Caribbean Legion, suggesting that it would negatively affect any potential arrangements made between the junta and foreign bondholders. The conversation went in part as follows:

Basic to everything is confidence which can best be created by an intergovernmental agreement, settlement with the bondholders, and convincing the world that Costa Rica has no war-like intentions... The President agreed readily as to the necessity for that. He admitted that so long as the Caribbean Legion is in Costa Rica, appearances are against him.

Figueres ended the conversation by promising to split the remaining members of the Caribbean Legion up into “groups of two or three” and to disarm and scatter these small groups throughout Costa Rica, though Davis withheld his optimism. “Each time he has taken steps to get rid of any of these people,” the U.S. Ambassador noted, “it has taken months.” The next day Figueres publicly announced the disbanding of the Caribbean Legion, but more than words were required for Davis’ applause. The U.S. Ambassador pessimistically wrote to Marshall, “Just what will happen to the members of the Caribbean Legion remains problematical,” as many revolutionaries either stayed in San José or traveled in large groups to Guatemala where the PVP also resided.¹⁷⁰

The Dissolution of the Costa Rican Army and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis

Historians still argue the reasons behind Figueres’ disbanding the official standing army on December 1, 1948. Robert H. Holden suggested that the timing of the junta’s decision to abolish the military could be explained “by the Junta’s conviction that the Nicaraguan threat had dissipated” and that Costa Rica could look to the United States for “unilateral protection against

¹⁷⁰ Coatsworth, *Clients and the Colossus*, 63; Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 95; Davis to Marshall, “Conversation with President Figueres,” November 26, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/11-2648; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador in Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” November 29, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 536.

Panama or Nicaragua.”¹⁷¹ On the other hand, Charles D. Ameringer seemed confused by the junta’s decision to abolish the army since “the threat of violence persisted.”¹⁷² Although the Costa Rican Foreign Minister, Benjamin Odio, informed Davis on December 1 that he had “no real fear [of] invasion from Nicaragua,” the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Walter C. Thurston, noted that the Costa Rican Ambassador there still had “apprehensions [of an] invasion from Nicaragua.”¹⁷³ Apparently, the threat of a Calderonista attack still concerned some Costa Rican officials at the time of the army’s dissolution, but Holden was correct that the United States would not idly stand by as Nicaragua invaded Costa Rica.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Deborah Yashar, Annamarie Oliverio, Pat Lauderdale, and Monica Rankin suspected that Figueres disbanded the military out of fear that it might attempt a coup against the junta.¹⁷⁵ However, with much of the Legion still occupying the garrisons in San José, Figueres was relatively safe from an internal coup.¹⁷⁶

Thus, when Figueres disbanded Costa Rica’s official army on December 1, Truman’s top officials in Washington did not respond for several possible reasons. First, the army was small and insignificant, and the U.S. embassy and Washington understood that the Legion had taken its place in the garrisons in San José. Second, with the PVP mostly exiled, there were no more counterrevolutionary movements within Costa Rica’s borders that could truly challenge the

¹⁷¹ Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 218.

¹⁷² Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 75.

¹⁷³ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” December 1, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-148; Walter C. Thurston to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Mexico to the Secretary of State,” December 2, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-248.

¹⁷⁴ Documented below.

¹⁷⁵ Deborah Yashar, *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s-1950s*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 189; Annamarie Oliverio and Pat Lauderdale, “‘No Hay Rosas Sin Espinas’: Statecraft in Costa Rica,” in *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*, ed. Cecilia Menjévar and Néster Rodríguez, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 211; Monica A. Rankin, *The History of Costa Rica*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), 114.

¹⁷⁶ Rinehart, “Historical Setting,” 50.

junta's authority, thus negating the need of a strong military to neutralize counterrevolutionaries from within the country. And finally, the United States cared more about the existence of the Legion in Costa Rica than the absence of its official standing army.¹⁷⁷ While the dissolution of Costa Rica's constitutional army may have been reported as a unique and momentous occasion in the U.S. press, Truman officials, both in Washington and San José, did not offer congratulations or pretend to be impressed by Figueres' actions.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, the dissolution of the army came as no surprise to the U.S. embassy, which had suspected it would eventually happen, just at a later date. Davis, in a long message to Marshall titled "The Demilitarization of a Pacifist," speculated that it was a political stunt:

For some weeks discussions have been going on with officials of the national museum looking towards the removal of troops from the Bella Vista cuartel, razing its walls, and transforming the remaining parts of the structure into a museum... Agreement to turn over the cuartel was recently reached and the museum authorities notified the Junta that they would be ready to take possession and commence demolition of the walls on January 15, 1949. But in its impatience to demonstrate its pacific intentions the Junta decided to cede the cuartel on December 1, 1948, which was duly accomplished with much publicity. The fact that this symbolic act took place six weeks before it need have, but one week before the election day deadline, is doubtless purely coincidental.

In the same message, Davis noted "that some eighty men of the Legion, with arms sufficient for considerably more, remain in San José" and that their presence had "not been too reassuring to

¹⁷⁷ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 106; Ameringer remarked that Figueres, supposedly, successfully convinced the Caribbean Legion to leave Costa Rica at the time he abolished the constitutional army on December 1, though a significant number of Legionnaires remained thereafter, according to reports from the OAS (documented below). – Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 80.

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion on the long-term effects of the demilitarization of Costa Rica, see John A. Booth, *Costa Rica: A Quest for Democracy*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 48; "Costa Rica Abolishes Her Army; Nation Not Military, Leader Says," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, December 2, 1948, 1; "Costa Rica Leader Explains Why He Disbanded Army," *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, December 4, 1948, 3; "Latin Armies," *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, December 6, 1948, 8.

the majority of the populace which would prefer to have none of them.” Laced with a heavy dose of sarcasm, Davis finished his message describing the superficiality of the military’s dissolution:

Thus everybody should be happy; including the disbanded army, which retains its organization and continues to report to the same Minister of Public Security; and the abolished Legion, which continues to enjoy the companionship of barracks life in the center of the city. Mention might also be made of the American Military mission which, with no army to train, should now have ample time to enjoy the amenities of life in the land of eternal Spring.¹⁷⁹

The U.S. embassy clearly was not amused, and I have found no evidence of mid- to high level officials in Washington even caring to respond to the army’s disbandment.

However, a solution to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua problem seemed to have arisen the day after the army’s dissolution. During a conversation among the Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, and U.S. ambassadors in Mexico City, the Costa Rican ambassador expressed Figueres’ discontent with the continued presence of the Legion in San José, but he feared that “it might turn against [Figueres]” and kill him if he tried forcing its removal. The Nicaraguan ambassador, after this conversation, likely understood that more than mere persuasion would be required to force the Legion’s removal. Sevilla Sacasa then conferred with Mexican President Miguel Alemán Valdés to come up with a solution to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua conflict and suggested the possibility of outside mediation that “could not be construed as intervention.”¹⁸⁰ When Costa Rica on December 3 became the fourteenth state to ratify the Rio Treaty, thus fulfilling the two-thirds requirement for the treaty to come into force, Sevilla Sacasa’s opportunity had come. A week

¹⁷⁹ Longley also believed that Costa Rican officials at the time of the army’s abolition “seemed more interested in the upcoming elections for representatives to the Constituent Assembly than the external threat.” – Longley, *Sparrow and the Hawk*, 96; Davis to Marshall, “The Demilitarization of a Pacifist,” December 2, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-248.

¹⁸⁰ Thurston to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Mexico to the Secretary of State,” December 2, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-248

later, on December 10, an unknown number of Calderonistas and Guardia Nacional crossed the border into the northern parts of Costa Rica, to which Costa Rican Ambassador Esquivel responded by invoking Article VI of the Rio Treaty on December 11 – thus, calling for outside mediation that could not be construed as intervention.¹⁸¹ On December 12, Somoza admitted to the new U.S. Ambassador, George P. Shaw, that the invasion “had occurred because it would force Figueres’ hand and get the matter settled.”¹⁸² Although speculative, the argument can be made, within reason, that the invasion followed by Costa Rica’s invocation of the Rio Treaty was part of Somoza’s plan to assist Figueres in getting rid of the Caribbean Legion. Regardless of whether Somoza actually planned it, the United States would assist the OAS in ridding Costa Rica of the Legion.

Still, the State Department had a daunting task ahead of it, as the invasion provoked the remilitarization of Costa Rica. On December 12, Davis reported that the recently “demilitarized” junta had once again militarized and that the Bella Vista cuartel, which had “converted into a museum just days ago,” now contained “some 600...members of the Caribbean Legion.” Even Ulate, the outspoken advocate for pacifism and demilitarization, approached the Ambassador to discuss the possibility of obtaining 2000 rifles, 100 light machine guns, 100 medium machine AA guns and armaments for a P-38 fighter aircraft. Though Davis reminded Ulate that the United States for some time had been unable to sell any equipment to Latin America in general,

¹⁸¹ Amerginer, *Democracy in Costa Rica*, (New York, NY: Praeger, 1982), 82; Coatsworth, *Clients and the Colossus*, 63.

¹⁸² George P. Shaw to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” December 12, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1248.

he sent the request to Washington, which was denied.¹⁸³ The Truman Administration, instead, placed its faith in the Organization of American States to solve the problem.

On December 14, the OAS convened in Washington to hear the complaints of the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan delegates. Though the Colombian government reported to the U.S. embassy that the counterrevolution launched from Nicaragua was aided by communists, the predominant theme at the meeting was the Caribbean Legion. Costa Rican delegate, Esquivel, in redefining the accusations levied against Somoza “in more precise terms,” made no mention of “communism” and, instead, only charged the Román y Reyes government with “aiding a conspiracy concocted in Nicaragua in order to overthrow the Costa Rican government by force of arms.” The Nicaraguan delegate, Sevilla Sacasa, responded by specifically denouncing the Caribbean Legion for “stirring up anxiety and unrest in the Central American Republics.”¹⁸⁴ The council ultimately agreed to appoint a special committee to investigate the charges of both delegates, thus marking the beginning of the OAS’s first test as a Latin American peacekeeping machinery.¹⁸⁵ Davis worried that the failure on the part of the OAS to quickly bring about a peaceful resolution would result in an all-out war.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Bennett, “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, by Mr. William Tapley Bennett, Jr., of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs,” December 12, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 538-539.

¹⁸⁴ Edward G. Miller, Jr., to Acheson, “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to the Secretary of State,” January 5, 1950, *FRUS, 1950 II*, 642; Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to All Diplomatic Officers in the Other American Republics,” December 13, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1348; Mario Esquivel, “Address to the Council of the Organization of American States,” December 14, 1948, in *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance: Applications 1-3*, ed. Organization of American States, (Washington, D. C.: OAS, 1973), 35; Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, “Address to the Council of the Organization of American States,” December 14, 1948, *Applications*, 35.

¹⁸⁵ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 83; J. Lloyd Mechem, *The United States and Inter-American Security, 1889-1960*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1961), 393.

¹⁸⁶ Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” December 14, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1448.

Meanwhile in Guatemala, Arévalo assured the U.S. embassy that he was not giving aid to Figueres, but Ambassador Robert C. Patterson believed that the “circumstantial evidence” indicated otherwise. Furthermore, on December 17, a U.S. civilian pilot blatantly notified Patterson that two of his planes “will fly Guatemalan arms and passengers [on] December 18...from Guatemala to San Jose.” Though the *Diario de Costa Rica* reported that the Caribbean Legion “has not been in Costa Rica an active threat against any neighboring country,” the State Department and the OAS knew otherwise, and understood that it was active on an international level.¹⁸⁷

On December 16, the OAS investigating committee, which included William Tapley Bennett, Jr., Paul C. Daniels, and U.S. Army Colonel T. A. Sapia-Bosch, departed for San José.¹⁸⁸ After a brief visit with Figueres, the committee flew to Managua on December 18 and wrapped up its investigation, returning to Washington on December 24. The committee published the “Resolution of December 24, 1948,” which condemned both governments for abetting foreign revolutionaries in their respective territories and encouraged Figueres and Somoza to “faithfully observe the principles and rules of nonintervention and solidarity contained in the various inter-American instruments signed by them.”¹⁸⁹ The committee then

¹⁸⁷Richard C. Patterson to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Guatemala to the Secretary of State,” December 14, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1448; Cohen to Marshall, “Refutation of Nicaraguan Allegations in Connection with Present Situation,” December 17, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1748.

¹⁸⁸ Other members of the investigating committee were the presiding officer from Mexico, Luis Quintanilla; Brazilian Ambassador José María; and Columbian Ambassador Silvio Villegas – Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 81.

¹⁸⁹ Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” December 16, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1648; It is interesting to note that Arévalo immediately condemned Figueres’ welcoming of the OAS, as he believed that “Costa Rica has enough arms and men not only [to] repulse invasion but also [to] ‘go right into Managua.’” - Patterson to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Guatemala to the Secretary of State,” December 18, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/12-1848; Committee of Information, “Resolution of December 24, 1948,” December 24, 1948, *Applications*, 43.

created the Commission of Military Experts, which would ensure that the governments of Costa Rica and Nicaragua were taking positive steps to rid their territories of foreign revolutionaries.

After the publication of the resolution, both Figueres and Somoza tried playing the victim. Figueres, in a long national radio broadcast on New Year's Eve, vehemently denied the continued existence of the Caribbean Legion, and he emphasized that Costa Rica "had been the victim of armed invasion from Nicaragua." Meanwhile in Managua, U.S. Ambassador George P. Shaw observed that one of the local newspapers criticized the investigative committee's neutral resolution for the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis, which had "boxed the ears of both" parties. The editor complained that the committee should have been more critical of Figueres, rather than play it safe by blaming both parties, since Nicaragua was innocent.¹⁹⁰

However, the Commission of Military Experts ignored these complaints and immediately went to work in eliminating the regional threats. On January 11, the commission heard rumors of military equipment arriving in Transportes Aereos Centro Americanos and Lineas Aéreas Costarricenses airplanes coming from Cuba. When they confronted the Costa Rican foreign minister, Benjamin Odio, he responded, "The only arms that have entered the country...were those used in March and April by the Costa Rican Army of Liberation." Odio then assured the commission that all of Costa Rica's airports had been "properly guarded and many had been barricaded." The commission demanded more than assurances, though, and requested detailed information on the specific measures being taken by the junta to control the arms, munitions, and flights moving in and out of Costa Rica. Meanwhile, the U.S. embassy in Managua demanded

¹⁹⁰ Cohen to Marshall, "New Year's Eve Chain Broadcast by President Figueres," January 5, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-549; Shaw to Marshall, "Fletcha Editorial Criticizing Actions of International Commission in the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan Dispute and in Palestine," January 7, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-749.

that the “pro-Government press...quit publishing bitter editorials against Figueres,” as this would only “lead to frictions in the relations between the two countries.”¹⁹¹

On January 21, Davis reported that the Caribbean Legion was still present in San José and that the Calderonistas remained active in northern Costa Rica. Davis also heard rumors of the Guatemalan Ambassador compelling Figueres to return the arms that had been used by Caribbean Legion during the civil war to Guatemala, since members of the Legion had been transported to Guatemala.¹⁹² It was becoming rather clear to the State Department that the removal of the Caribbean Legion in Costa Rica, like the removal of the PVP, would not be the end of it. But first, the immediate dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua needed to be settled before worrying about the Legion in Guatemala.

During a reception in Managua on January 22, Ambassador Shaw was approached by the Nicaraguan Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs who hinted that a quick end to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis would likely result in the removal of the troublesome Figueres from office. The Acting Minister informed Shaw that Figueres could defeat the Calderonistas promptly if he wanted, but that he did not want to, as the crisis had created a “critical situation” and had made Figueres a “necessary man.” He continued that if “the situation were cleared up...[Figueres] would have no excuse for staying in power.”¹⁹³ Whether this conversation had any influence on

¹⁹¹ Commission of Military Experts, “Note N° 10,” January 11, 1949, *Applications*, 54; Benjamín Odío, “Note N° 209-B,” January 11, 1949, *Applications*, 55; Davis to Marshall, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” January 12, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-1249; Shaw to Marshall, “Nicaraguan Pro-Government Press Mitigates Attacks on Costa Rica,” January 12, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-1249.

¹⁹² Davis to Acheson, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” January 21, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-2149; Davis to Acheson, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” January 22, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-2249.

¹⁹³ Shaw to Acheson, “The Ambassador to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” January 22, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-2249; Acheson, “The Acting Secretary of State, to the Embassy in Costa Rica,” January 28, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-2849; Consuelo Cruz on p. 136 remarked that Figueres’ junta was “unwittingly fortified” when the Calderonistas invaded from Nicaragua and that “Figueres’ leadership was now assured” because of the crisis. Essentially, Cruz argued that the crisis made Figueres a “necessary man.”

the OAS's actions is unclear, but it is interesting enough to note that less than a week later, the OAS delivered a proposed pact of friendship for Costa Rica and Nicaragua to sign. However, Figueres refused to sign the pact, and on February 7, he asked the Costa Rican constituent assembly for a six-month extension for the junta "with respect to the serious mission which fate has bestowed upon it."¹⁹⁴ The assembly approved the extension, and the State Department would have to deal with the revolutionary president for an additional six months.

More importantly, Somoza would have to deal with an anti-Somocista as the Costa Rican leader at least until the following May. Since Figueres stayed in office and refused to sign the agreement, Somoza's options were narrowing. U.S. Chargé d'Affairs ad Interim Philip P. Williams noted that while Nicaraguans in general had "no fear of Costa Rica," Somoza "wants to get rid of Figueres," and if the crisis continued any longer, Somoza might take drastic measures. Meanwhile, Davis expressed his belief that Somoza's "greatest concern" is the possibility of an "internal upheaval" in Nicaragua while negotiations continue. The pro-government press in Managua began criticizing the inaction of the Commission of Military Experts and demanded the publication of reports from Costa Rica, but this was to no avail.¹⁹⁵ The silence from the commission and the six-month renewal of Figueres' term in office, matched with internal instability in Nicaragua, amounted to a ticking time bomb in Central America that the State Department would have to somehow defuse.

However, on February 16, the U.S. embassy in San José received some good news. Davis reported that the San José newspapers reported "with a remarkable similarity" that the Caribbean

¹⁹⁴ Davis to Acheson, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-749.

¹⁹⁵ Philip P. Williams to Acheson, "Chargé d'Affairs ad Interim in Nicaragua to the Secretary of State," February 7, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-749; Davis to Acheson, "The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State," February 6, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-649; Williams to Acheson, "Charge d'Affairs ad Interim in Nicaragua to the Secretary of State," February 9, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-949.

Legion was “making plans to leave Costa Rica.” The following day, the military commission confirmed that there were “no groups of nationals or aliens organized on a military basis in Costa Rican territory at present.”¹⁹⁶ On February 21, Costa Rica and Nicaragua signed the Pact of Amity, which stated in part:

The Governments of Costa Rica and Nicaragua agree to prevent the repetition in the future of events of this nature, through the constant application by both Governments of effective measures for the safeguarding of the principles of nonintervention and continental solidarity, as well as for the faithful observance and treaties, conventions and other inter-American instruments intended to ensure peace and good neighborliness.¹⁹⁷

The Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis had officially come to an end. Somoza reported that Calderón was being held under house arrest, and Figueres ridded Costa Rica of most of the Caribbean Legion.¹⁹⁸ Though some remnants of both of the revolutionary armies remained in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, they did not constitute a large enough threat either for the U.S. embassy or the State Department to respond.

Conclusion

While the United States preached nonintervention to the American republics, it also strived to maintain its own posture of strict neutrality during the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis in order to avoid appearing partial to either government. Throughout the latter half of 1948 and the first quarter of 1949, the few times high-ranking State Department officials cared to respond to

¹⁹⁶ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 93; Davis to Acheson, “The Ambassador to Costa Rica to the Secretary of State,” February 16, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1649; Commission of Military Experts, “Report of the Inter-American Commission of Military Experts,” February 17, 1949, *Applications*, 57.

¹⁹⁷ Article II, “Pact of Amity between the Governments of the Republic of Costa Rica and Nicaragua,” February 21, 1949, *Applications*, 63.

¹⁹⁸ Ameringer argued that this really was a victory for Somoza: “For just a mild reprimand, Somoza had ‘smoked out’ the Caribbean Legion and, at least temporarily, relieved himself of a nuisance.” – Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 83; Williams to Acheson, “Charge d’Affaires ad Interim to Nicaragua to the Secretary of State,” March 4, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/3-449.

open criticisms of the United States during the crisis were only when the Truman Administration was charged with supporting either Figueres or Somoza.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, in the eyes of mid- to low-level State Department officials, both Figueres and Somoza were responsible for the crisis because both were harboring and aiding revolutionaries. Washington, therefore, strongly admonished each country not to attack the other, and the embassies worked with the OAS to come up with a quick solution to bring back regional peace.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ On September 21, Daniels rejected Samuel Piza's claims that the Embassy in San José was "pro-Figueres and anti-Calderon" and responded that he "deplored the existence of such unwarranted rumors" and that Washington's official attitude "was one of strict impartiality," – Daniels, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs," September 3, 1948, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/9-348; On January 14, Bennett requested the counselor of the Costa Rican Embassy in Washington, Jorge Hazera, to investigate the charges from the Costa Rican Embassy's information program of the United States' supporting dictatorships, including Somoza's, and explained to Hazera that he "could not see anything of constructive nature in this type of article," - Bennett, "Effects in Costa Rica of the COAS Resolution," January 14, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/1-1449; On February 12, Secretary of State Acheson, after receiving information that the Costa Rican chargé might officially accuse the U.S. chargé in Managua of intervening, urged the Embassy in Managua to clarify to the Costa Rican Ambassador that his "report represents [a] misrepresentation [of the] conversation," – Acheson, "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Nicaragua," February 12, 1949, NARA, RG 59, 818.00/2-1249.

²⁰⁰ Schifter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 352.

CHAPTER 4

“WAGING PEACE IN THE AMERICAS”: THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION’S
HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE PLAN

“We are now working out with a number of countries a joint agreement designed to strengthen the security of the North Atlantic area... We have already established such a defense pact for the Western Hemisphere by the treaty of Rio de Janeiro. The primary purpose of these agreements is to provide unmistakable proof of the joint determination of the free countries to resist armed attack from any quarter... *If we can make it sufficiently clear in advance that any armed attack affecting our national security would be met with overwhelming force, the armed attack might never occur.*” – Harry S. Truman

This chapter defines the Truman Administration’s hemispheric defense plan, which I argue served as the framework that guided the United States’ actions during the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis of 1948-1949. The Truman Administration did not think that the most effective way of combatting communism in Latin America was to outlaw communist parties or forcefully suppress them, since this could lead to the creation of dangerous, clandestine organizations and Latin American charges of U.S. imperialism. Therefore, instead of arming Latin American militaries with expensive weapons to aggressively eradicate local communists, the Truman Administration promoted peaceful collaboration among all American republics by abandoning its policies of “aloof formality”²⁰¹ and nonrecognition and, instead, encouraging the continuance of friendly diplomatic relations

²⁰¹ “Aloof formality” is a term I borrowed from Steven Schwartzberg’s *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, and it refers to Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs Spruille Braden’s policy toward Argentina during World War II and the immediate postwar years. See third section, “Resolution XXXV and Peaceful Collaboration.”

among all American republics. That way the Soviet Union would be discouraged from acting against an apparently unified Western Hemisphere, lest it “be met with overwhelming force.”²⁰²

Clandestine Communism: “The Risks of Mere Suppression”

The most cited document by historians that emerged from the Bogotá Conference was Resolution XXXII of the Final Act of Bogotá, which denounced “international communism” as a “totalitarian” ideology.²⁰³ Undoubtedly, Resolution XXXII deserves special attention from these historians, since it would eventually justify U.S. intervention against communist forces in Latin America.²⁰⁴ However, Resolution XXXII was only one tiny aspect of the U.S. hemispheric defense plan during the Truman years, and between 1948 and 1952, it served as a preventative, rather than active, measure. Nowhere did the resolution address the “legal existence of Communist parties in Latin America” as a “direct threat,” as Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough suggested.²⁰⁵ On the contrary, the Truman Administration in confidential conversations (documented below) questioned the effectiveness of outlawing communist parties or aggressively attacking communist-supported governments because this could lead to a more dangerous form of clandestine communism.

During the Rio Conference in August 1947, Argentine Foreign Minister Juan Atilio Bramuglia proposed to Secretary of State George C. Marshall a “secret anti-Communist pact” that would sever Latin American “relations with the Slav group.” Marshall responded that “the

²⁰² Harry S. Truman, “Inaugural Address on January 20, 1949,” in *The Truman Administration: Its Principles and Practice*, ed. Louis W. Koeing, (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1956), 276-7. Italics added.

²⁰³ Schifter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 303; Bethell and Roxborough, “Postwar conjuncture,” 26; Cruz, “Costa Rica,” 294; David Green, *The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 284.

²⁰⁴ Roger Trask, “The Impact of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 1 (Summer 1977): 283.

²⁰⁵ “Resolution XXXII: The Preservation and Defense of Democracy in America,” *Final Act of Bogotá*, May 2, 1948, in *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 193-4. Italics added; Bethell and Roxborough, “Postwar conjuncture,” 26.

measures against Communism could best be left to individual countries,” and, instead, he tried to convince Bramuglia that Argentina could contribute to the fight against communism by sending material aid to Western Europe. Marshall compared the communist threat “to a fire from which [the American republics] were already receiving sparks” and that “it was necessary to stomp out the fire at the source (Eurasia)...and to maintain our own countries in a healthy (economic) condition.”²⁰⁶ Shortly after the conference ended, the CIA on September 26 reported that “local Communists” in Latin America were “isolated from direct Soviet support and operating within the power orbit of the United States.”²⁰⁷

On March 22, 1948, the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff published PPS-26, which assessed the communist threat in Latin America.²⁰⁸ While the report acknowledged that communism in France and Italy could spread to the American republics (many of which had large Italian and French populations), it concluded that the international communist threat “is a *potential* rather than an immediate serious one in Latin America generally.” The Policy Planning Staff, then, recommended that a study be conducted by the Office of American Republic Affairs before suggesting that “all Communist parties in the Western Hemisphere [be] declared illegal.” A resolution encouraging the outlawing of communism in Latin America was therefore never proposed at Bogotá.²⁰⁹ The United States was simultaneously crafting the North Atlantic Treaty

²⁰⁶ George C. Marshall, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chairman of the United States Delegation,” August 20, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 41.

²⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, “Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States,” September 26, 1947, *Papers of Harry S. Truman: President’s Secretary’s Files – National Security Council Meetings*, in *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Vol. 23 The Central Intelligence Agency*, ed. Dennis Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Publications of America, 1996), 215.

²⁰⁸ Bethell claimed that “U.S. hostility to Communism was made explicit in State Department Policy Planning Staff Document PPS 26.” However, this document revealed much more about how the State Department planned to address communism in Latin America. – Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War,” 61.

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Mixing Rum and Coca-Cola*, 29-33; Policy Planning Staff, “PPS-26,” March 22, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 196-201; All italics added.

Organization, and the creators restricted the treaty to the “North Atlantic” area to keep Latin American countries and Australia out of the treaty, since “none of those are now directly threatened by Soviet Communism.”²¹⁰

In 1949 the National Security Council suggested that the United States should “conduct an intensified program” to defeat communism “outside the Soviet orbit.”²¹¹ However, the Office of American Republic Affairs rejected the NSC’s proposal of an arms program in Latin America, and the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff reasoned that the immediate threat in Latin America seemed to be one of “subversion” by “small but highly organized communist groups.”²¹² The communist presence in Latin America in 1949 did not yet require the shipment of U.S. weapons to suppress it, though, and the scholarly literature does not indicate that the United States encouraged the outlawing of communist parties.²¹³

In 1950, the Office of American Republic Affairs advised the State Department to take “steps to lessen the Communist threat in the Americas, but to enter no anti-Communist agreements with other American Republics.” The Office of American Republic Affairs then suggested that the U.S. Embassies and their respective Latin American governments only “exchange information of Communist activities.”²¹⁴ On March 1, 1950, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Edward G. Miller, Jr., met with Argentine President Juan

²¹⁰ “Minutes of the Third Meeting of the United States-United Kingdom-Canada Security Conversations, Held at Washington, March 24, 1948,” March 24, 1948, *FRUS, 1948* III, 67.

²¹¹ National Security Council, “Draft Report by the National Security Staff,” March 30, 1949, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949* I, 275; The National Security Council often echoed the Defense Department’s views on Latin America, which often clashed with the State Department’s views. See next section.

²¹² Policy Planning Staff, “Paper Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff,” September 20, 1949, *FRUS, 1950* I, 618. Italics added.

²¹³ Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 114; Nor could I find anything in *FRUS* indicating that the United States encouraged outlawing communism in Latin America.

²¹⁴ Office of American Republic Affairs, “Policy Record Guide: ARA: Anti-Communist Measures in the Inter-America System,” September 22, 1950, *FRUS, 1950* II, 624-625.

Perón, and Perón indicated his desire to enter into a military pact to provide the means for Latin American governments to combat communism within the hemisphere. Miller replied that the Truman Administration's attitude was "one of working for peace and towards the prevention of war," and he concluded that "our policy is to assist in the raising of living standards rather than to combat Communist influences as such."²¹⁵ On May 10, Acting Secretary of State James E. Webb wrote to the U.S. Embassy in response to the Venezuelan government's outlawing communism, stating that the State Department did not believe that "outlawing" the communist party was the "most effective means" in dealing with the "Commie problem." Webb further explained that outlawing would "increase difficulties [of] observation and control," while "repression in [the] end tends [to] breed Communism."²¹⁶

In 1951, the CIA suggested in vague terms that the United States should help dissipate "the support of the local Communist party in those countries where one is actively functioning" by strengthening the will of Latin Americans to resist "internal and external forces of communism." However, when listing the global regions where the communist threat was the greatest, the CIA relegated Latin America to the lowest priority in comparison to Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Near East and Africa, and the Far East. The CIA also remarked that each of the other regions were confronted with "Soviet" imperialism, while Latin Americans only faced a "local" communist threat.²¹⁷ No suggestion was ever made to outlaw communism in Latin America.

²¹⁵ Stanton Griffis to Acheson, "The Ambassador in Argentina to the Department of State," March 1, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950 II, 696.

²¹⁶ James E. Webb, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in Venezuela," May 10, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950 II, 1021.

²¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA/OPC Strategic War Plan in Support of the Joint Outline Emergency War Plan," April 4, 1951, *FRUS*, 1950-1955: *The Intelligence Community*, 129.

In fact, the State Department made it clear that it still did not “advocate the outlawing of the Communist Party as the most effective way of combatting communism,” and, instead, it strived to *isolate* the communist labor and political parties in Latin America by publishing anti-communist propaganda and discouraging noncommunist parties from allying themselves with communists.²¹⁸ In Guatemala, where the communist threat was perceived to be the most dangerous, and where Truman believed that U.S. military aid was necessary, the State Department still maintained that it should not aggressively act against local communists:

Nothing would harm overall interests of the United States in Guatemala more than the premature employment of overly aggressive measures with respect to Guatemalan internal matters. The communists would be furnished with a valuable weapon throughout Latin America and would be able to do great harm to the inter-American system through a revival of mistrust in the United States and fears of a return to the days of unilateral intervention and ‘big-stick’ diplomacy.²¹⁹

In September of 1952, U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Rudolf E. Schoenfeld met with Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz to discuss the increased communist influence in the government and the population in general. Arbenz reminded Schoenfeld that Guatemala was still a young democracy and that “it had been the local experience that when attempts were made to suppress any political movement, it tended to grow.” Schoenfeld agreed, stating that he “recognized the risks of mere suppression.”²²⁰ On November 17, Secretary of State Dean Acheson met with Guatemalan Ambassador Guillermo Toriello, who told Acheson that the suppression of communism “would easily lead to dictatorship,” and the government at the

²¹⁸ Department of State, “Policy Statement Prepared by the Department of State,” February 27, 1951, *FRUS, 1951 II*, 1244; Edward L. McGinnis, Jr., “Memorandum by Mr. Edward L. McGinnis, Jr., of the Office of South American Affairs,” June 15, 1951, *FRUS, 1951 II*, 1396.

²¹⁹ James E. Webb, “Paper Prepared by the Under Secretary’s Meeting,” June 12, 1951, *FRUS, 1951 II*, 1438.

²²⁰ Rudolf E. Schoenfeld, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Guatemala,” September 25, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954 IV*, 1040.

moment was, instead, “attempting to remove the evils which gave communism a base.” The Secretary of State did not attempt to correct the Ambassador, nor did he ever suggest to Toriello that the Guatemalan government should suppress communism.²²¹ Moreover, the United States discouraged any military adventure, particularly by Nicaragua, against Guatemala since it “would find it difficult to fight aggression in Korea and be a party to it in this hemisphere.” The State Department explored the possibility of employing the OAS “to deal with the problem,” but it first looked into the question of “how much unanimity of opinion there might be concerning its applicability.”²²² Collective intervention never occurred, though, and the Truman Administration never interfered in the internal affairs of Guatemala to suppress communism.²²³

Thus, it appears that the Truman Administration perceived communism in Latin America as a force to be reckoned with through nonviolent means. This did not mean that the Truman Administration was friendly toward the communist parties, and one can reasonably assume that if the Truman Administration had perceived there to be an aggressive communist threat lurking in Latin America, it would have intervened with its military as it had in Korea. However, as the above evidence suggests, and as the U.S. responses to the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis reveal, the United States, at the time, did not find it necessary or practical

²²¹ Dean Acheson, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State,” November 17, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954 IV*, 1050.

²²² Thomas C. Mann, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State,” September 29, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954 IV*, 1372.

²²³ Nick Cullather and John Findling have reported on Operation PBFORTUNE, a cancelled operation proposed by the CIA and allegedly authorized by Under Secretary of State David Bruce to dismantle the Guatemalan government, which would indicate that Truman seriously considered intervening in Latin America to combat the communist threat there. – Findling, *Close Neighbors*, 112; Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 29-37; However, Stephen G. Rabe considered this heavily redacted document “both hazy and incomplete,” and Steven Schwartzberg doubted whether the operation was ever authorized by anyone outside the CIA. – Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 48; Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, xvi.

to intervene to topple communist-supported governments or to encourage the outlawing of communist parties, as this might create more dangerous, clandestine organizations and result in Latin American charges of “Yankee imperialism” and U.S. unilateral intervention.

The Arms Question

The historiography of U.S.-Latin American military relations during the Truman years proposes two general conclusions: either the Truman Administration ignored Latin America, or it expected the American republics to use the limited weapons they had to suppress local threats.²²⁴ However, the five-year debate (1946 to 1951) surrounding a Latin American arms program suggests that the United States did not relegate the defense of the hemisphere to the periphery of its Cold War strategies. Though the War and Defense Departments persistently advocated for the standardization of Latin American militaries with U.S. training and equipment to keep foreign influences out of Latin American militaries, the State Department maintained that the potential financial burden either of military grant aid or weapons sales would create instability in the forms of internal economic turmoil and disparity in the sizes of Latin American militaries.²²⁵ Instead, the State Department promoted the maintenance of healthy economic conditions in Latin America, which would ideally prevent violence from breaking out in the hemisphere.

The Inter-American Military Cooperation Act (H.R. 6326) was a proposed Latin American arms standardization bill in 1946 that was designed to replace foreign and antiquated weapons held by Latin American militaries with upgraded U.S. arms. The War Department supported the bill, since foreign influences in Latin American militaries during World War II

²²⁴ Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War,” 60; Zarate, *Forging Democracy*, 36; Chester J. Pach, Jr., “The Containment of U.S. Military Aid to Latin America, 1944-1949,” *Diplomatic History* 6 (1982): 243; Coatsworth, *Clients and the Colossus*, 52; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 94.

²²⁵ Coatsworth, *Clients and the Colossus*, 51.

cost the United States “a great deal of additional organization and training in [U.S.] concepts of warfare,” but the State Department opposed it.²²⁶ In 1946, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Spruille Braden, feared that the arms program not only would impose a financial burden on the American republics but could also inadvertently give new weapons to communists “already infiltrating Latin American armies.”²²⁷ Moreover, in 1947, Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson argued that the “economic handicaps” imposed by the bill would “perpetuate and aggravate conditions of economic and political instability,” which “are the soil in which the seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured.”²²⁸ H.R. 6326 was ultimately voted down in Congress.

However, a new bill, H.R. 3836, was introduced to Congress in June 1948, and this time the bill offered discounted surplus equipment to Latin America. Though the State Department at first supported the program because it made available cheaper military supplies to Latin America, the Army’s surplus levels dwindled rapidly with the intensification of the Cold War, as it went to other parts of the globe that were directly threatened by the Soviet Union. The Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs, Paul C. Daniels, opposed the new bill in October because the higher costs of non-surplus equipment would “increase the differences in armed strength between the wealthier and poorer countries.” H.R. 3836, too, was ultimately rejected.²²⁹

²²⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Statement before Congress on the Proposed *Inter-American Military Cooperation Act (H.R. 6326)*,” May 28, 1946, United States, Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Inter-American Military Cooperation Act, Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Ninth Congress, Second Section, on May 28, 29, 1946*, 14.

²²⁷ Spruille Braden to James F. Byrnes, “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State to the Secretary of State,” December 16, 1946, *FRUS, 1946 XI*, 108-9.

²²⁸ Dean Acheson to Robert P. Patterson, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of War,” March 19, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 106.

²²⁹ “Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense,” June 19, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 217; Paul C. Daniels to George C. Marshall, “The Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs to the Secretary of State,” October 5, 1948, *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 223-224.

The debates surrounding a Latin American arms program persisted into the 1950s. On the one hand, the Department of Defense still worried that in the absence of an arms program, Latin American governments would be prone to allowing foreign influences, including communism, into its militaries. On the other hand, the State Department did not want to bankrupt its southern allies, whom the United States deprived of a Latin American Marshall Plan.²³⁰ In response to the National Security Council's claim that Washington was "obligated" to furnish weapons to Latin America, the Policy Planning Staff in 1949 quoted, in part, a speech that Truman gave to Congress in May 1946, regarding H.R. 6326:

This Government will not...in any way approve of, nor will it participate in, the indiscriminate or unrestricted distribution of armaments, which would only contribute to a useless and burdensome arms race...[I]t is the policy of this Government to encourage the establishment of sound economic conditions in the other American Republics which will contribute to the improvement of living standards and the advancement of social and cultural welfare. Such conditions are a prerequisite to international peace and security.²³¹

Two years later, Congress passed the Mutual Security Act of 1951, which provided worldwide military grant assistance. Latin America received just 0.6 percent of the program's total military aid.²³² As historian Chester J. Pach, Jr., concisely noted, "Cold War thinking actually restrained...U.S. military aid to Latin America."²³³

This five-year debate reveals three aspects of the Truman Administration's hemispheric policy at the start of the Cold War. First, the security of the hemisphere held a position of

²³⁰ For more information on the Marshall Plan, see John Gimbel, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

²³¹ Policy Planning Staff, "Paper Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff," September 20, 1949, *FRUS, 1950* I, 615.

²³² 82nd Congress, 1st Session, Document No. 73, "Mutual Security Act of 1951," September 27, 1951, (approved October 10, 1951), Washington, D. C. Senate, 5; Robert H. Holden noted that until 1961, "grant collaboration to protect Latin American governments from internal enemies was prohibited." –Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 114.

²³³ Pach, Jr., "Containment of U.S. Military Aid," 243.

relatively high priority in Washington. The State Department believed that Latin America, at the time, was relatively safe from Soviet communism, and the higher-ups in the Office of American Republic Affairs wanted to keep it that way. Had top State Department officials like Dean Acheson ignored Latin America, or relegated it to a low priority, they would not have persistently blocked the Defense Department's multiple attempts to arm Latin America. From the State Department's perspective, bankrupting and destabilizing Latin America with expensive weapons would have the inadvertent effect of bringing the Cold War to the Western Hemisphere. Second, the State Department had the final say in planning the defense of the hemisphere. This is especially evident during the Bogotá Conference when Marshall made the unilateral decision, despite the Defense Department's objections, not to push the issue of multilateral defense agreements, giving each country access to other Latin American military bases in case of an attack on the hemisphere.²³⁴ Third, the significance of the hemispheric defense plan did not lie in the weapons sent to Latin America and, therefore, did not make the Latin American militaries responsible for suppressing communist activities within their countries' borders. Instead, the United States encouraged all American states to cooperate with each other through peaceful collaboration in order to keep Soviet communism outside of the hemisphere.

Resolution XXXV and Peaceful Collaboration

The passage of Resolution XXXV at the Bogotá Conference marked the end of the Truman Administration's policies of aloof formality and nonrecognition.²³⁵ Two of the most

²³⁴ James V. Forrestal to Marshall, "The Secretary of Defense to the Secretary of State," January 21, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 208; Marshall to Forrestal, "The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense," February 3, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 210; Marshall to Forrestal, "The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense," March 4, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948 IX, 211.

²³⁵ For a good discussion on the evolution of Truman's diplomatic policies in Latin America, see Leonard's *Decline of the Recognition Policy*, and Schwartzberg's *Democracy and U.S. Policy*.

cited examples of these policies between 1946 and 1948 were the United States' publication of the *Blue Book on Argentina* and its nonrecognition of Nicaragua's *de facto* government. The abandonment of aloof formality and nonrecognition, in large part, had to do with the intensification of the Cold War and the necessity for the United States to create regional defense systems to counteract the Soviet Union's aggression. In order to accomplish this, all the American republics, including Argentina and Nicaragua, needed to be part of the Rio Treaty and the Organization of American States, thus necessitating Washington's shift away from aloof formality and nonrecognition toward peaceful collaboration.

On February 11, 1946, Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs Spruille Braden published, and circulated throughout all of Latin America, the *Blue Book on Argentina*, which denounced Argentine President Edelmiro J. Farrell's regime for collaborating with the Nazis during World War II.²³⁶ However, the *Blue Book* was an abysmal failure, and historian Steven Schwartzberg noted that it arguably led to the election of Farrell's chosen presidential candidate, Juan Perón.²³⁷ Still, the Truman Administration continued pressuring the Argentine government to get rid of its Nazi influences by not permitting it a seat at the Rio Conference. That was until the Cold War intensified after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine on March 12, 1947, when the President denounced communism in Greece and Turkey. In April, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee warned the Truman Administration that "anything less than rapprochement" between the United States and "every one of its neighbors to the south" was "entirely unacceptable." This warning was largely directed at the State

²³⁶ Spruille Braden, *The Blue Book on Argentina (Braden Report)*, U.S. Department of State, *Consultation Among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation; Memorandum of the United States Government, February 11, 1946*, Publication 2473, Inter-American Series 29, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1946), in *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 177.

²³⁷ Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 62.

Department, which was working to finalize the regional defense systems it had started planning in 1945. Since Brazil and most of the American republics refused to attend the Rio Conference without Argentina's participation, the State Department found no other solution but to fully resume normal relations with Perón. On June 26, 1947, the Truman Administration removed all trade sanctions against Argentina, and the Rio Conference began on August 15 with Argentina participating.²³⁸

During the conference, on August 27, the Guatemalan delegation made a motion to insert into Article VI of the Rio Treaty a statement denouncing any act that endangers "the democratic structure of American governments." Arthur H. Vandenberg of the U.S. delegation, in concurrence with the Argentine, Dominican, and Honduran delegations, considered the "Guatemalan language as outside the proper scope of the treaty." An overwhelming majority, then, voted down the Guatemalan proposal, with only Guatemala and Cuba voting in favor of it.²³⁹ Vandenberg's statement made it clear that the State Department was more interested in promoting peace between democracies and dictatorships in order to create the inter-American alliance than it was in encouraging democratic forms of government.

Still, the United States refused to recognize *de facto* governments that had come to power through the use of force. For this reason, the Román y Reyes government in Nicaragua, which had entered office through a coup d'état on May 26, 1947, was not allowed to attend the Rio

²³⁸ Dean Acheson, "The Acting Secretary of State to Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics Except Argentina and Haiti," April 1, 1946, *FRUS, 1946 XI*, 11; James F. Byrnes to William D. Pawley, "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Brazil," December 21, 1946, *FRUS, 1946 XI*, 27; State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, "SWNCC 360/1," April 29, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 743; Spruille Braden, "Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs," March 13, 1946, *FRUS, 1946 XI*, 7; Marshall to Harry S. Truman, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman," June 26, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 226.

²³⁹ George C. Marshall to Michael J. McDermott, "The Chairman of the United States Delegation to the Acting Secretary of State," August 27, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 63.

Conference.²⁴⁰ This posed a problem for the Truman Administration in creating a solidified hemisphere united against the Soviet Union.²⁴¹ On December 31, though, the Costa Rican and Dominican governments extended their recognition to Nicaragua. Acting Secretary of State Robert A. Lovett believed that this constituted an “important change in [the] previously existing situation where all American Republics were pursuing [a] similar course of action in withholding recognition,” and the Truman Administration began working on a policy to recognize all forms of government.²⁴² The American republics and the United States, then, agreed that Nicaragua should participate in the upcoming Bogotá Conference in March, and on April 25, Resolution XXXV was passed, which declared:

1. That continuity of diplomatic relations among American states is desirable.
2. That the right of maintaining, suspending or resuming diplomatic relations with another government shall not be exercised as a means of individually obtaining unjustified advantages under international law.
3. That the establishment or maintenance of diplomatic relations with a government does not imply any judgment upon the domestic policy of that government.²⁴³

Nicaragua was immediately recognized by the United States, thus marking the end of Truman’s policy of diplomatic intervention, and, thereafter, all Latin American states were encouraged to continue normal diplomatic relations with one another and operate in peaceful collaboration.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Bethell, “From the Second World War to the Cold War,” 63.

²⁴¹ George C. Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Nicaragua,” May 26, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 854; George C. Marshall, “The Secretary of State to the Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics,” July 29, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 27-28.

²⁴² Cruz, “Costa Rica,” 296; J. Lloyd Mechem, *The United States and Inter-American Security, 1889-1960*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1961), 291-298; Robert A. Lovett, “The Acting Secretary of State to Diplomatic Representatives in the American Republics Except Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua,” December 31, 1947, *FRUS, 1947 VIII*, 880.

²⁴³ “Resolution XXXV,” Final Act of the Ninth International Conference of American States, April 25, 1948, in *FRUS, 1948 IX*, 98.

²⁴⁴ Leonard, *Decline of the Recognition Policy*, 24.

Truman's Hemispheric Defense Plan and the New Threat

One can conclude, then, that in the absence of a Latin American arms program, the U.S. military expected to bear much of the burden in defending the hemisphere from an external attack.²⁴⁵ Still, Truman sent a clear message to the Soviet Union, through Resolution XXXII, that the American republics and the United States were united under a military alliance that denounced international communism as a totalitarian ideology. Moreover, in his inaugural address in 1949, Truman warned the USSR that it would be met with “overwhelming force” by the signing participants of the Rio Treaty and NATO if it attempted to attack the United States. In order to keep up the appearance of a strong, unified military alliance, the United States needed all the Latin American republics to continue normal diplomatic relations with one another under Resolution XXXV. At the same time, the United States sought to obtain “rapprochement” with all its southern neighbors, thus discouraging Truman from intervening in the internal affairs of the American republics. The State Department also feared that the outlawing of communist parties would prevent the American governments from being able to closely observe communist activities within their respective territories.

Therefore, I argue that Truman's hemispheric defense plan did not rely on the weak Latin American militaries to attack overt or suppress subversive communist threats, and, instead, it promoted peaceful collaboration among all American states in order to convince the Soviet Union that the United States and Latin America were united under a tightly knit military alliance with one common enemy: international communism. The direct threat to the Western Hemisphere, from the Truman Administration's perspective, was not the local communist parties

²⁴⁵ Gordon Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 195; John Child considered the Rio Treaty “militarily impotent.” – John Child, *Unequal Alliance: The Inter-American Military System, 1938-1978*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 111.

or communist-supported governments in Latin America but, rather, regional violence that would indicate a chink in the inter-American armor. In other words, it would not have made sense for the United States to help Figueres start a revolt in Costa Rica that could potentially draw in the involvement of other American states, which in turn could potentially attract the Soviet Union to a divided Latin America – an area that the Truman Administration believed was relatively safe from the dangers of the Cold War.²⁴⁶

The Costa Rican Revolution, the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis, and the Venezuelan coup, all occurring within the same year, frustrated Truman's hemispheric defense plan. The State Department issued a press release on December 21, 1948, stating that violence in politics was not only "deplorable," but also "a danger to all the countries of this hemisphere."²⁴⁷ On September 10, 1949, Secretary of State Acheson in a speech to the Pan American Society assured them that the American republics "are relatively remote from any direct threat" and that they "are in a real sense waging peace in the Americas." Acheson then identified the real threat to the Western Hemisphere:

For more than two years the Caribbean area has been disturbed by plots and counterplots. These plots have in themselves been inconsistent with our common commitments not to intervene in each other's affairs... Since 1945 few nations in the Caribbean area have escaped involvement, and at times the entire area has approached a state of political turmoil... Aggression or plotting against any nation of this hemisphere is of concern to us. Wherever it occurs, or may be threatened, we shall use our strongest efforts in keeping with our international commitments to oppose it and to defend the peace of the hemisphere.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Michael J. Kryzaneck similarly argued that "the United States envisioned the [Rio Treaty] as part of a larger strategy to prevent the Soviet Union or its agents from spreading their influence to the hemisphere." – Michael J. Kryzaneck, *U.S.-Latin American Relations*, 4th edition, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 56.

²⁴⁷ Department of State, "U.S. Concerned at Overthrow of Governments in Certain American Republics," January 2, 1949, Department of State *Bulletin* 20, 30.

²⁴⁸ Dean Acheson, "Waging Peace in the Americas," September 10, 1949, Department of State *Bulletin* 21, 462.

This policy seems to have been consistent throughout the entirety of Truman's tenure as President.²⁴⁹

Conclusion: Cold War Intervention in Latin America – Truman's Legacy?

After Dwight D. Eisenhower won the presidential election in 1952, he charged the Truman Administration with being too "soft on communism." Immediately, Eisenhower reimplemented the Monroe Doctrine of unilateral intervention in the internal affairs of the American republics, and his Under Secretary of State, Walter Bedell Smith, relabeled the communists in Guatemala as "disciplined agents of international Communism, preaching authentic Soviet-dictated doctrine."²⁵⁰ In 1953, the Eisenhower Administration began planning the overthrow of Arbenz, and Eisenhower directed the CIA to support the Guatemalan rebels led by Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Operation PBSUCCESS, as it was called, officially began on June 18, 1954, when Castillo Armas invaded Guatemala from Honduras and overthrew Arbenz a little over a week later, thus constituting the first indisputable instance of U.S. military intervention in Latin America since the start of the Cold War.²⁵¹ The U.S. policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries had officially come to an end. Throughout the rest of the Cold War, Washington would be involved in various attempted coups in Latin America, successful and unsuccessful, most notably in Cuba (1961), Chile (1970), and Nicaragua (1979-1990).

²⁴⁹ It can be argued that the disbandment of Costa Rica's military was congruent with Truman's hemispheric defense plan. On the other hand, as I pointed out in the third chapter, there is no evidence indicating that the Truman Administration was impressed with the army's dissolution or that it believed this action had any influence on keeping the peace of the hemisphere.

²⁵⁰ Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith quoted in Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 47.

²⁵¹ Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 29, 42-57.

Though the overthrow of Arbenz is the first indisputable case of unilateral intervention by the United States in Latin America after World War II, some historians have argued that Eisenhower's interventionist policies were a continuation of Truman's old policies, thus crediting Truman with inaugurating Cold War intervention in Latin America.²⁵² However, no direct evidence has yet been presented that might indicate Truman's participation in the outlawing of communism or the overthrowing of governments south of the Rio Grande.

This thesis, therefore, has challenged the assumption that Truman inaugurated Cold War intervention in Latin America and has offered evidence that suggests otherwise. Ultimately, I wholly support Leslie Bethell's and Ian Roxborough's call for more research on U.S.-Latin American relations during the Truman years: "We need to know more about the precise mechanisms by which the Cold War arrived in Latin America, how far anticommunism was sponsored by the United States, how it meshed with existing anticommunism and conservatism."²⁵³ For now, though, it is probably safe to assume that the Cold War in Latin America is Eisenhower's legacy – not Truman's.

The Truman Administration's actions in Costa Rica from 1947 to 1949 fell in line with its broader Latin American policy. Washington did not intervene forcefully to outlaw or defeat the PVP; it never sent weapons to Figueres to violently suppress communists in Costa Rica; and it helped bring about peace between Costa Rica and Nicaragua during the Costa Rica-Nicaragua

²⁵² Henry Raymont, *Troubled Neighbors: The Story of US-Latin American Relations from FDR to the Present*, (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005), 91; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 100-127; Bethell, "From the Second World War to the Cold War," 64-66; For more on Eisenhower's Latin American policy, see Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 161-186; Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1983), 159-225; David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, *The Invisible Government*, (New York: Random House, 1961), 165-183; Wood, *Dismantling the Good Neighbor Policy*, 152-190.

²⁵³ Bethell and Roxborough, "Postwar conjuncture," 31.

Crisis. The State Department understood that Latin America was relatively safe from the dangers of the Cold War, and to keep it that way, the Truman Administration helped to maintain peace in Central America.

CONCLUSION

In February and March of 1950, George F. Kennan, Counselor to the Secretary of State, toured Latin America for the first time in his life, and, upon his return, he wrote a report on March 29 for Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Kennan concluded that “the activities of the communists represent our most serious problem in the area.” While admitting that the communists in Latin America had practiced their own unique brand of communism and that their “bond with Moscow is tenuous and indirect,” the Counselor opined that United States had “no justification for complacency about communist activities in this hemisphere.”²⁵⁴

He advised the State Department to follow the example of nineteenth-century U.S. politicians and use the Monroe Doctrine to expel communism from the hemisphere. Kennan complained that the new inter-American system, “over which the State Department has little control,” was an obstacle to Washington’s removing communism from Latin America, and he suggested that the Truman Administration reassert its dominance over the Western Hemisphere.

It is important for us to keep before ourselves and the Latin American peoples at all times the reality of the thesis that we are a great power; that we are by and large much less in need of them than they are in need of us; that we are entirely prepared to leave to themselves those who evince no particular desire for the forms of collaboration that we have to offer; that the danger of a failure to exhaust the possibilities of our mutual relationship is always greater to them than to us; that we can afford to wait, patiently and good naturedly; and that we are more concerned to be respected than to be liked or understood.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ George F. Kennan to Dean Acheson, “Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department to the Secretary of State,” March 29, 1950, *FRUS, 1950 II*, 603-4.

²⁵⁵ Kennan to Acheson, “Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department to the Secretary of State,” March 29, 1950, *FRUS, 1950 II*, 606, 619, 622-623.

Kennan's report has been cited by historians as evidence of the Truman Administration's shift in 1950 toward supporting strongarm dictatorships over weaker democracies in order to rid the hemisphere of communists, a policy that succeeding administrations would follow.²⁵⁶ Particularly, Bethell, Roxborough, and LaFeber, three of the most well-known historians to have studied U.S.-Latin American relations in the twentieth century, have made this argument based on Kennan's comments. Bethell and Roxborough concluded from the report that in the "new conditions of the cold war," the Truman Administration determined that "if dictatorships (in Latin America) proved more effective at dealing with communism...they might be preferable to democracies."²⁵⁷ Although LaFeber did not cite Kennan's report, he made a similar argument based on the Counselor's comments made during his tour of Latin America, one of which was: "It is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by Communists."²⁵⁸

Without a doubt, the highly influential Kennan advocated for the reassertion of U.S. dominance in Latin America by supporting and arming strong dictators who would take drastic measures to suppress communist influences within their respective countries' boundaries, and future administrations, indeed, would adopt this policy. However, Bethell, Roxborough, and LaFeber missed one important point: The State Department under Truman *rejected* Kennan's comments. In *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, a retired Kennan recounted Edward G. Miller, Jr.'s and Acheson's reactions to his report:

[T]he report came as a great shock to people in the operational echelons of the department, so much that the Assistant Secretary for Latin America immediately persuaded the Secretary...to forbid

²⁵⁶ Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat: Conspiracy, Murder, and the Cold War in the Caribbean*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 43-44; Crandall, *Gunboat Democracy*, 17-18; Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy*, 203.

²⁵⁷ Bethell and Roxborough, "Postwar conjuncture," 29.

²⁵⁸ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 109.

its distribution within the department and to have all copies of it locked away and hidden from innocent eyes which was promptly done.²⁵⁹

The report seems to have had virtually zero effect on Truman's Latin American policies.²⁶⁰

When I started researching Truman's and Eisenhower's responses to Costa Rica's disbanding its military, I ran across Kirk Bowman's claim that the United States "exerted considerable influence in an attempt to militarize Costa Rica" after it disbanded its military, without specifying which administration. His evidence came from an interview in 1997 with Gonzalo Facio, who had served as the president of the Legislative Assembly during Figueres' first presidency in 1953. Facio recalled, "We received great pressure from the United States [to remilitarize] so that we would form a modern army here. They wanted to give us equipment and training and everything. We said no."²⁶¹

The glaring problem in Bowman's claim is that the reader cannot determine from the text which administration tried remilitarizing Costa Rica or when it occurred. Since Bowman was discussing the early 1950s, it can be assumed that he meant the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. Truman certainly did not attempt to remilitarize Costa Rica, though. As was highlighted in chapter three, the Truman Administration consistently discouraged the purchase of

²⁵⁹ Kennan assumed that his comments were thrown out because of some racist language that was included in the report. Regardless of the reason behind the dismissal of Kennan's report, it should not be used as proof of a shift in Truman's Latin American policy without supporting documentation that was circulated throughout the administration. With that said, I have found no supporting documentation of Truman's Latin American policy in the 1940s and '50s that validates Kennan's conclusions concerning communism. In fact, the evidence in chapter four suggests that Truman implemented a policy opposite of Kennan's suggestions. – George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 480.

²⁶⁰ Henry Raymont argued: "Notwithstanding Miller's ostensible disavowal of Kennan's original report, the document could not have failed to have some impact, not only through the force of his own prestige but also because it largely coincided with the negative attitudes (toward communism) prevailing in the highest reaches of the State Department." This argument without supporting evidence is highly speculative. – Henry Raymont, *Troubled Neighbors: The Story of US-Latin American Relations from FDR to the Present*, (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005), 78.

²⁶¹ Bowman, "Militaries and Modern States," 195.

U.S. weapons by the revolutionary junta throughout the latter half of 1948, and the issue was not brought up again until Ulate entered office. When Ulate took over, he asked to purchase military equipment from the United States, and Truman obliged this request. However, Ulate could not afford the arms, so the agreement was never finalized.²⁶² In failing to purchase U.S. weapons through private channels, Ulate requested grant aid from the United States, but Truman denied this request.²⁶³ Ultimately, Costa Rica never received a single weapon from the United States while Truman was in office, thus suggesting that there was no sense of urgency on Truman's part to militarize Costa Rica.

Eisenhower, on the other hand, actually *withheld* \$487,734 worth of weapons from Costa Rica, which were purchased with cash by Figueres in 1954. In fact, it was Figueres who placed “a great deal of pressure” on U.S. General Russell L. Vittrup to have the weapons shipped. Still, Eisenhower delayed the order until Figueres condemned Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in front of the OAS for abetting communism in Guatemala.²⁶⁴

Of course, Kennan's report and the United States' continued military relations with Costa Rica are outside of the scope of this thesis, but the point I am emphasizing is that some of the key pieces of evidence that have been used to define the Truman Administration's Latin American policy have been weak, at best, and misused, at worst.²⁶⁵ This thesis has highlighted

²⁶² John L. Ohmans, “Costa Rican Arms,” April 15, 1952, NARA, RG 59, 718.56/4-1552; Philip B. Fleming, “Costa Rican Arm Exchange,” August 11, 1952, NARA, RG 59, 718.5 MSP/8-1152.

²⁶³ Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 219.

²⁶⁴ Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 220; Charles R. Burrows, “Memorandum of Conversation with General Vittrup of the Department of Defense,” May 28, 1954, NARA, RG 59, 718.5 MSP/5-2854; Burrows, “Costa Rican Arms Purchase,” June 4, 1954, NARA, RG 59, 718.56/6-454; Raymond G. Leddy, “Costa Rica's Insistence on Arms Acquisition,” June 10, 1954, NARA, RG 59, 718.56/6-1054; John Foster Dulles, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Nicaragua,” July 1, 1954, NARA, RG 59, 718.5-MSP/7-154.

²⁶⁵ For example, LaFeber misinterpreted the speech Edward G. Miller, Jr. gave on May 15, 1950, that was published in the Department of State *Bulletin*. LaFeber argued that the “Miller Doctrine of 1950” was a warning to the American republics that “the United States reserves the right to intervene unilaterally” by “send[ing] in the marines” if they refused to behave. – LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 97, 99; However, nowhere in Miller's speech

and challenged the historiographical consensus, which was formed on circumstantial evidence, that the Truman Administration encouraged the outlawing of communist parties and the overthrowing of various governments. Historians who have accepted these two premises can only arrive at the conclusion that Truman's Latin American policy was one of "confusion," "division," and "contradictory desires." However, it appears that Truman's Latin American policy was much more defined and consistent than what historians have suggested.

To recap, I have argued that the Truman Administration promoted peace between Costa Rica and Nicaragua in order to maintain the outward appearance that the entire Latin American region was united under the protective umbrella of the United States against Soviet communism. The U.S. embassy in San José remained a cautious player during the Costa Rican presidential election campaign of 1948, and it maintained a posture of strict neutrality throughout the Costa Rican Revolution and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis. Furthermore, the Truman Administration attempted to isolate the Revolution by discouraging Guatemalan and Nicaraguan intervention, and the U.S. embassies worked with the OAS to bring a quick end to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Crisis. Finally, although Truman and Ulate had entered two arms agreements in the 1950s, U.S. weapons, for various reasons, were never shipped to Costa Rica during the Truman years, suggesting that the Truman Administration did not possess a sense of urgency to ship U.S. weapons to Costa Rica to violently suppress communism. Truman's Costa Rican policy, therefore, appears to have been in sync with his broader Latin American policy of peaceful collaboration.

did he warn that the United States reserved the right to unilaterally intervene, and, instead, he stated that unilateral intervention by the United States "died a universally un lamented death" and would no longer be the policy to uphold the Monroe Doctrine. Instead, the Rio Treaty, through collective action, would replace the outdated method of unilateral intervention. See Edward G. Miller, Jr., "Nonintervention and Collective Responsibility in the Americas," Department of State *Bulletin* 22, May 15, 1950, 768-770.

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