

CENTRAL AMERICA, U.S. POLICY,
AND THE CRISIS OF THE 1980s:
Recent Interpretations

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- WASHINGTON, SOMOZA, AND THE SANDINISTAS: STATE AND REGIME IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD NICARAGUA, 1969–1981.* By Morris H. Morley. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. 343. \$69.95 cloth.)
- THE UNITED STATES, HONDURAS, AND THE CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* By Donald E. Schulz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994. Pp. 368. \$59.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)
- HOSTILE ACTS: U.S. POLICY IN COSTA RICA IN THE 1980s.* By Martha Honey. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. Pp. 640. \$49.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.)
- THE DIFFICULT TRIANGLE: MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND THE UNITED STATES.* By H. Rodrigo Jauberth, Gilberto Castañeda, Jesús Hernández, and Pedro Vuskovic. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992. Pp. 192. \$51.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- CANADA AND THE CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* By Jonathan Lemco. (New York: Praeger, 1991. Pp. 199. \$45.00 cloth.)
- SPAIN AND CENTRAL AMERICA: DEMOCRACY AND FOREIGN POLICY.* By Robin L. Rosenberg. (New York: Greenwood, 1992. Pp. 266. \$55.00 cloth.)
- THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE PROCESS, 1983–1991: SHEATHING SWORDS, BUILDING CONFIDENCE.* By Jack Child. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992. Pp. 199. \$32.00 cloth.)
- THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* By Dario Moreno. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. Pp. 251. \$39.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

After Nicaraguan strongman Anastasio Somoza fell in 1979, a plethora of books appeared on U.S.–Central American relations that, like the literature before it, focused largely on the crisis at hand.¹ The regional crisis also produced the first three historical studies of Washington's rela-

1. Works by noted historians include Lester D. Langley, *Central America: The Real Stakes* (New York: Crown, 1985); and Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983).

tions with the isthmian republics.² Although interpretations varied in their emphases, these works discussed socioeconomic disparities and limited political participation throughout the region as well as the degree of responsibility borne by the United States for those inequities. Because President Jimmy Carter's Nicaraguan policy was scrutinized closely, two of his policymakers—Robert Pastor and Anthony Lake—eventually aired their own interpretations of the same events.³

New Works on U.S. Policy toward Central America

As could be expected, the passage of time has produced new works on U.S. policy toward the Somoza regime. Among them is Morris Morley's *Washington, Somoza, and the Sandinistas: State and Regime in U.S. Policy toward Nicaragua, 1969–1981*. According to this Australian political scientist, Washington's foreign-policy establishment historically has tolerated a variety of Third World governments as long as these regimes did not interfere with U.S. private investments within their borders. When a regime was threatened by sociopolitical change, these same U.S. policymakers sought to guide change in order to secure the continued protection of U.S. investments. Morley describes U.S. relations with Nicaragua from this perspective, particularly the years encompassed by the Carter administration (1976–1980).

According to Morley, Washington's historic presence in Nicaragua and coziness with the Somoza family since the late 1930s contributed to the Carter administration's failure to comprehend the depths of the opposition that surfaced and intensified against Anastasio Somoza in the mid-1970s. Rather, the administration remained optimistic that the dictator would weather the storm. Finally, in mid-1979, when it became apparent that Somoza was going to be toppled, Carter sought to keep the Guardia Nacional operating in some form in the hope that it would provide the necessary stability for continued protection of U.S. investments in Nicaragua. When that effort failed, Carter sought to steer the Sandinista regime in the same direction. That approach did not work either, and therefore before leaving the White House early in 1981, Carter instructed the Central Intelligence Agency to support the political opponents of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Ronald Reagan's arrival in the White House thus coincided with an emerging

2. John E. Findling, *Close Neighbors, Distant Friends: United States–Central American Relations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987); Thomas M. Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search For Stability* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); and John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: The Clients and the Colossus* (New York: Twayne, 1994).

3. Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling: The Nicaraguan Dilemma, a Portrait of Washington at Work* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

hostile view of the Sandinistas and the FSLN. Although the outlines of this story have been told before, they have not been recounted with the detail and persuasiveness found in Morley's *Washington, Somoza, and the Sandinistas*.

Morley presents a compelling argument that Carter's failed policy was not merely the myopia of a short-sighted visionary. Carter was confronted with interdepartmental infighting over assessments of events in Nicaragua and appropriate policy directions and with a pro-Somoza congressional lobby that threatened to derail ratification of the proposed Panama Canal treaties, while he was being pressured by other Latin American governments sympathetic to the Nicaraguan insurgents. Consequently, the president and his advisors could not determine whether the strife was indigenous to Nicaragua or part of the larger cold-war perception of international communism. Nor could they accurately gauge the strength of the FSLN. In the end, Carter failed to develop a clear policy toward the Nicaraguan regime.

Ronald Reagan entered the White House in January 1981 determined to oust the Sandinistas from power in Nicaragua. Convinced that the Sandinistas were Soviet clients directed via Cuban proxies, Reagan viewed the Central American crisis in geopolitical terms, not as a threat to U.S. economic interests in the region (as described by Morley).⁴ Two recent works, one by Donald Schulz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz and the other by Martha Honey, also assess U.S. policy during the Central American crisis in geopolitical terms, focusing on the Reagan administration's efforts to force Honduras and Costa Rica to comply with U.S. objectives in the region. Both studies demonstrate the interplay of domestic issues and international affairs in these two countries.

Of the five Central American nations, Honduras always has been the poorest economically and the weakest politically, the country most often described as the typical military-dominated "banana republic."⁵ Donald Schulz, who teaches national security at the U.S. Army War College, and Deborah Schulz, a freelance writer who spent several years in Honduras, do much to dispel that perception in *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America*. Honduras has experienced the same massive poverty, social disparities, and political repression that have plagued its neighbors. Honduras too was victimized by U.S. policy

4. Among several contemporary accounts of Reagan's Central American policy are Timothy Ashby, *The Bear in the Backyard: Moscow's Caribbean Strategy* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington, 1987); and Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

5. Traditionally, scholars have included Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in their definition of Central America. Although Belize and Panama are also located on the isthmus, Belize has generally been bracketed with the former British colonies, while Panama has been treated separately because of its unique relationship with the United States revolving around the canal.

geared toward strengthening the very institution that prevented democratization—the military. Yet, the authors argue, Honduras has managed to avoid similar revolutionary turmoil because its society is much more complex than that of its neighbors.

Regarding U.S. policy, Donald and Deborah Schulz assert that Honduras became the linchpin of Washington's Central American strategy under the Carter administration (not during Reagan's tenure, as has been generally assumed). Shortly after Somoza fell in July 1979, Carter became determined to contain communist expansion throughout the region. He recognized that the same socioeconomic conditions and political repression on which the Sandinistas had capitalized in ousting Somoza were undermining the other Central American countries (with the exception of Costa Rica). To "save Honduras" and contain the spread of Marxism, Carter increased economic and military assistance to the country, prodded it toward constitutional government, and brought about an official end to the 1969 "Soccer War."⁶

Recounting a story all too familiar to observers of the Central American crisis during the 1980s, the authors describe President Reagan's determination to roll back the communist menace on the isthmus via military means, with the result that his administration paid less attention to socioeconomic improvements and constitutional governments. The limited aid sent in these directions was intended to silence critics in the U.S. Congress, not to benefit Honduran society. The Honduran military readily complied with its benefactors because U.S. military assistance allowed it to strengthen its hold over civilian society, particularly over President Roberto Suazo Córdova (1980–1984). U.S.-Honduran military cooperation led in turn to the Contras being established in Honduras (initially trained by the Argentine military) and a massive U.S. military buildup there throughout the 1980s. All these developments gave rise to the caricature of Honduras as the "U.S.S. Honduras." The U.S. presence also abetted extensive graft and corruption among the Honduran military, which provided funds for expanding into legitimate businesses in the private sector. Clearly, the U.S. government's close ties with the Honduran military left the distinct impression that social change and constitutional government were being ignored. Overthrow of General Walter López Reyes in 1985 demonstrated the lengthy power struggle occurring within the military, rather than constitutional government. Meanwhile, violations of

6. The war derived its name from the fact that the conflict between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969 began with violence among the spectators at a soccer match in Tegucigalpa between teams representing the two countries. The origins of the war can be traced to migration by Salvadoran peasants into Honduras over two generations and their laying claim to land that Honduran peasants viewed as their own. See Thomas P. Anderson, *The War of the Dispossessed: Honduras and El Salvador, 1969* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

human rights and political repression mounted throughout the 1980s. U.S. policy was directed toward preventing a crisis from erupting in Honduras rather than addressing the root causes of discontent. In addition to these familiar perceptions, Deborah and Donald Schulz offer two fresh interpretations in *The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America*.

First, Honduras escaped the internal disruptions plaguing neighboring El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua not because of U.S. policy but because Honduran society was less volatile and more flexible. In the authors' view, the Honduran elite was less entrenched than elsewhere and therefore more willing to co-opt other groups. The elite's co-optation of other social groups helps explain early legalization of labor unions, establishment of land-distribution programs, and formation of political groups outside the traditional, elite-dominated Liberal and National parties. These new groups gave various social sectors a sense of political participation and hope for improving socioeconomic conditions among the lower classes. As a result, according to the Schulzes, safety valves were operating within Honduras that functioned as outlets for potentially disruptive forces, which in turn precluded leftist groups like the Chicheneros from gathering mass support. Also, repression by the Honduran military, which occurred in cycles, paled in comparison with the actions of its counterparts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Second, Donald and Deborah Schulz contradict widely accepted views in concluding that President Reagan's policies during the 1980s contributed to democratization in Honduras rather than to further entrenchment by the military. U.S. insistence on the country returning to democracy in 1980 and 1981 and opposition to Suazo's desire to remain president in 1985 gave the fledgling democracy a sense of security. Massive U.S. programs of economic assistance prevented the Honduran economy from collapsing, while U.S. military assistance gave the Honduran armed forces the opportunity to maintain order in better fashion. The authors claim, "Without the United States, Honduras might well have disintegrated into chaos" (p. 321).

Even so, the Schulzes remain cautious in their optimism about the future of Honduras. The possibility remains that the elite and the military will not continue democratization, end corruption, carry out reforms, and foster modernization of the country. Moreover, given the masses' fatalistic attitude, the Honduran elite may well tighten its grip on political, economic, and social structures without fear of retribution.

Martha Honey is far less sanguine about Reagan's Central American policy in *Hostile Acts: U.S. Policy in Costa Rica in the 1980s*. A freelance journalist who worked out of Costa Rica from 1983 to 1991, Honey presents a harsh interpretation with sensationalist tendencies that reflects her bitterness over experiences suffered by her and her husband, fellow

journalist Tony Avirgan. These events led them to being charged by the U.S. government with drug trafficking, murder, bribing witnesses, and espionage. Like almost all authors writing about this period (including the Schulzes), Honey points out that the United States paid little attention to Central America in recent decades (particularly Costa Rica) because of the region's democratic tradition. This approach ended abruptly with the fall of Somoza in 1979 and Reagan's presidency beginning in 1981.

Honey immediately captures the reader's attention with her account of the bombing at La Penca, Costa Rica, on 10 May 1984. Former Sandinista Edén Pastora was holding a news conference to denounce the Contras, announce his intention to stop cooperating with them, and vow to continue the fight alone against the FSLN from the southern front (meaning Costa Rica). The bombing caused several deaths and injured many, including Honey's husband, prompting extensive speculation about who was responsible for it. Attention eventually focused on a phony Danish journalist named Per Anker Hansen. An international warrant was issued for his arrest, but he was never apprehended. Honey refused to accept the bombing as a singular act of terrorism. After months of investigation, she concluded that Hansen had acted on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which wanted Pastora out of the way because of his refusal to cooperate with the agency-sponsored Contras based in Honduras. The evidence linking the CIA to the bombing is impressive, albeit still circumstantial.

Honey builds an equally impressive case against the United States for its coercive efforts to bring Costa Rica into line with Washington's plans to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Costa Rica drew Washington's attention immediately after Luis Alberto Monge was elected in 1982. Monge disliked the pro-Marxist Sandinistas in Managua and naively thought that the United States would showcase his country as a model of social democracy to be practiced throughout the isthmus. He also believed that in return for his verbal attacks on the FSLN and his diplomatic efforts to isolate the Managua government from the international community, the United States would provide economic development assistance. Monge badly misjudged the situation. U.S. economic assistance became conditioned on privatization of state-owned institutions and development of a free-market economy, steps that exacerbated inflation, the national debt, and hardships for lower socioeconomic groups. Washington took no interest in these problems. Meanwhile, Costa Rican social programs were increasingly strained by the steady influx of emigrés from the north, particularly from Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Monge's cooperation turned out to be extremely costly. Each new concession led to new demands from Washington. The U.S. Embassy and the Agency for International Development in San José worked closely with Costa Rican businessmen, political leaders, journalists, and other

“gatekeepers” to proselytize on behalf of the U.S. effort. In the end, Monge succumbed to many U.S. demands, including permitting U.S. military training for local police forces, establishing a militaristic rural civic guard, allowing Contra operatives to work out of “safe houses” in San José, letting Contra leaders convoy drugs through Costa Rica, and permitting Pastora’s forces to encamp on Costa Rica’s northern border as a base for incursions into Nicaragua. The Costa Rican government also turned a blind eye to the activities of U.S. farmer John Hull. His massive land holdings near the northern town of Ciudad Quesada included some of Pastora’s camps and a ten-thousand-foot-long airstrip for planes from Honduras, which supplied Pastora’s troops and facilitated the comings and goings of Contra drug traffickers linked to Panamanian General Manuel Noriega and the Medellín cartel.

Honey devotes much attention in *Hostile Acts* to Pastora’s southern front and his independent stance that kept him from joining the Contra forces in Honduras. Pastora disliked Contra leader and former Somocista Enrique Bermúdez and had little in common with the Nicaraguan elite represented by Adolfo Calero and Alfonso Robelo. Despite immense pressure from Washington (including visits by U.S. National Security Advisor Oliver North and presidential advisor Robert MacFarlane), Pastora resisted being brought under the CIA’s broad Contra umbrella. His recalcitrance, Honey argues, led the CIA to try to eliminate him. The agency first denied him supplies and money to carry on the fight, and when that failed, planned his assassination. Pastora resigned from the struggle in May 1986, nearly two years after the La Penca bombing. After being harassed further by Costa Rican and U.S. officials, he retired to a fishing village on the Nicoya peninsula.

Election of President Oscar Arias in 1986 signaled a change in Costa Rican policy. He feared that at the present rate, Costa Rica would soon find itself at war—not so much with the Nicaraguans as with the Contras, who were violating Costa Rica’s neutrality and threatening the country’s internal security with their activities. Arias was anxious to close down the southern front and John Hull’s operation and to devise a regional peace plan that excluded the United States.

By the mid-1980s, U.S. policies in Central America were being attacked at home and abroad. In the United States, the congress, the media, and the general public became divided over the causes of the regional crisis and which policies the United States should pursue. While many continued to view the Central American situation as a cold-war issue, a growing number attributed the crisis to long-time socioeconomic and political disparities in the region. These criticisms encouraged the U.S. Congress to cut off military assistance, which was renewed only hesitantly. The international community was echoing many of these same concerns, singly or at international forums such as the Organization of American

States and the United Nations. Three volumes examine the policies of Mexico, Canada, and Spain, three middle powers that became part of the growing opposition to U.S. policy in Central America.

Central American Policies of Mexico, Canada, and Spain

The Difficult Triangle: Mexico, Central America, and the United States presents a nationalistic interpretation from south of the Rio Grande. Rodrigo Jauberth and Gilberto Castañada are Central American researchers at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas in Costa Rica and Guatemala, respectively. Jesús Hernández is a research associate at the Universidad Nacional de Autónoma de México in Mexico City, and Pedro Vuskovic is affiliated with the Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales in Nicaragua.

Historically, Mexico's interest in Central America has been tempered by U.S. actions in the region. Since the Panama Congress held in 1826, according to the authors of *The Difficult Triangle*, the Mexican government has perceived the United States as an imperialistic force in the isthmus that needed to be checked. Mexicans have witnessed U.S. attempts to establish hegemony across the region for decades: the filibustering of William Walker in the 1850s, the Central American Conferences held in Washington in 1907 and 1923, penetration by private entrepreneurs, U.S. tolerance of the dictators who emerged in the 1930s, and the 1954 invasion of Guatemala to protect investments of the United Fruit Company. Some Mexicans feared that if the Yankees proved successful, Mexico would find itself trapped between two U.S. borders and denied the opportunity to pursue an independent foreign policy of its own. Thus the Mexican government viewed Ronald Reagan's policies in the 1980s as no different from U.S. behavior in the past. This perception was based on the Mexican premise that the Central American conflict was not part of the larger East-West struggle but was rooted instead in the region's social and economic inequities and limited opportunities for political participation.

As recounted in *The Difficult Triangle*, Mexican President José López Portillo (1976–1982) welcomed the Sandinista victory in 1979 because he viewed it as a step toward achieving stability in the region via sociopolitical change. But as the crisis deepened after Reagan was inaugurated, López Portillo shifted his policy from promoting pro-change activism to advocating stability through an easing of tensions. Convinced that Mexico possessed influence as a “middle power” and concerned with possible U.S. military intervention in the region, López Portillo arranged for direct talks between the United States and the Sandinistas at Manzanillo. In August 1981, he also co-issued a declaration with the French asking the United Nations to recognize the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador so that the Salvadoran guerrillas could

be incorporated into the peace process. Both efforts met with failure, as did the appeal made late in 1982 by López Portillo and Venezuelan President Luis Campíns to Ronald Reagan, Daniel Ortega, and Roberto Suazo Córdoba to find ways to achieve a negotiated settlement. At that time, none of the belligerents were prepared to compromise—in fact, the United States began to escalate its Contra-sponsored attacks against Nicaragua. Nor were other Latin American states prepared to support López Portillo's diplomatic initiatives, and Central America's only democracy, Costa Rica, was at that point going along with U.S. policies.

Undeterred by his predecessor's failures, newly elected President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) continued to seek a diplomatic settlement in 1983. He promoted the establishment of the Contadora Group (made up of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela) and in 1985 endorsed formation of a support group known as the Grupo de Lima (consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay) to push for a negotiated settlement to the Central American crisis. Acting as an honest broker, de la Madrid sought to improve Mexico's image throughout the hemisphere and enhance its influence with the Central American states. Again the United States proved most reluctant to cooperate. The Reagan administration labeled de la Madrid's initiatives "irresponsible" and formed the so-called Tegucigalpa Bloc (with Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador) to resist diplomatic efforts that would allow the Sandinistas to remain in power in Nicaragua.

By the time 1987 approached, the political climate had changed drastically. As the authors explain, Reagan's policies were being attacked at home, the Monge administration had been discredited in Costa Rica, and the Sandinistas had checked the Contras' push on the battlefield. This conjuncture opened the door for newly elected President Arias in Costa Rica to pursue yet another peace initiative. This time, however, the Mexican government withdrew to the sidelines. Recognizing the need to improve Mexico's own socioeconomic conditions (which would also enhance the political position of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional), President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) acknowledged the pressing need to improve economic relations and increase business contacts with the United States. His efforts eventually led to the North American Free Trade Agreement. As Mexico withdrew from the diplomatic process, it could no longer promote social change in the region and thus it too helped reinforce U.S. hegemony in Central America.

The authors of *The Difficult Triangle* are also not optimistic about the future of the region. Central America's political instability and economic backwardness remain rooted in the exclusive socioeconomic interests of the elites who are subordinated to foreign interests (largely U.S.-based businesses). In their view, despite the changing balance of economic power from the Northern Hemisphere (the United States and Western Europe)

to the Pacific rim, the United States will remain the dominant force in Mexico and Central America. In the end, the peace process begun by Oscar Arias earned him the Nobel Peace Prize but paradoxically ensured continued U.S. hegemony over Central America.

Jonathan Lemco, a native of Montreal and a specialist in Canadian foreign policy, is a Senior Fellow at the National Planning Association and adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins University's Paul Nitze School of International Studies in Washington, D.C. His *Canada and the Crisis in Central America* describes the shift in Canadian policy during the 1980s that elevated Central America from the bottom of its list of foreign-policy priorities to a place of prime importance. Although nongovernmental organizations, including human rights groups and the media, deserve much of the credit for this transition, Lemco gives primary credit to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau for placing Third World problems of underdevelopment on a North-South axis rather than an East-West one. In recounting the policy transition, Lemco concludes that the Canadians were motivated by the belief that their development aid, peacekeepers, and advice would be constructive in ameliorating Central American poverty and instability.

Until Trudeau was elected in 1968, Canadian knowledge of Central America was meager. Few academic studies had been undertaken, personal ties and commercial relations were nearly nonexistent, and there was little to motivate Canada to take an interest in the isthmus, given U.S. hegemonic influence in the region. Shortly after Trudeau's election, he proposed exploring increased political and economic interests in Central America as part of the larger Third World. As a result of his initiative, according to Lemco, reports by a parliamentary subcommittee pointed out Central America's deteriorating human rights conditions, poverty, and the polarized political atmosphere. Subsequently, Canadian economic and military assistance found its way to Central America. Canada also joined the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States. As assistance and involvement increased, nongovernment interest groups such as church organizations and relief agencies increased pressure on the Canadian government to devote more attention to the isthmian region.

The sale of military equipment and disbursement of developmental economic assistance did not lack political motivation and economic considerations, however. At one point, Canada withheld economic assistance from El Salvador and Guatemala for violations of human rights, and in 1983 the Secretary for External Affairs made it clear that economic assistance to the region would increase once the conflict subsided so that it could be absorbed more effectively by local governments and economies.

Like Mexico, Canada wanted to pursue a policy independent of the United States but did not want to antagonize its closest and friendliest

neighbor. This sense of insecurity arose from the dynamic U.S. economy, the superpower status of the United States, its vibrant cultural industry, and the sheer power of U.S. military capacity, the U.S. economy, and its population base. The Canadians recognized that Central America had long been of special interest to the United States. Therefore, policymakers in Ottawa were not about to diverge completely from U.S. policy. But as Lemco points out, they were willing to ignore the U.S. embargo of Sandinista Nicaragua, criticize Ronald Reagan's perception of the situation as an East-West problem, applaud the World Court's decision against U.S. support of the Contras, and vote for a UN resolution calling for the United States to comply with that decision. Yet Canadian officials also understood the importance of the Panama Canal and that any threat to its operation could not be tolerated by the United States. Thus any regional turbulence that might affect Panama merited Washington's full attention.

Lemco also asserts that Canada did not enter the Organization of American States in 1989 just to countervail U.S. influence in that organization. Rather, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney realized that his government needed to help solve Latin America's debt problem if it expected to sell Canadian goods throughout the hemisphere. He also anticipated a free-trade agreement with Mexico and the possibility of importing Mexican labor to fill a native void in the 1990s. The same economic self-interest motivated Canadian foreign assistance to Central America, according to Lemco. Canadian manufacturers, banks, and engineering and construction industries perceived the isthmus as a place to sell their wares and services. As a result, Canadian commercial activity in Central America increased markedly during the 1980s. Likewise, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) invested heavily in rural development, forestry, flood control, communications, and transportation projects across the isthmus. Although Trudeau placed this aid in the context of the North-South axis, the money spent directly benefited the Canadian economy, as did USAID projects.

Canada's most publicized aid to Central America was its contribution to the peacekeeping process. Under UN auspices, the Canadian military had accumulated vast global experience with such projects, and when asked to perform similar duties in disarming the Contras, it agreed to do so. Although the world applauded Canadian endeavors at disarming and peacekeeping, not all Canadians were pleased with these efforts. Critics argued that Central America was not vital to Canadian interests and that the region's volatility precluded permanent peace. But Canadian troops oversaw the repatriation of some twenty-three thousand Contras encamped in Honduras. Because *Canada and the Crisis in Central America* appeared in 1991, Lemco does not discuss Canadian peacekeeping efforts in El Salvador, although he speculates that the Ottawa government would continue to play a significant role in the region.

Following the death of longtime dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, Spain struggled to develop a democratic government and to democratize its political institutions. Robin Rosenberg, currently at the North-South Center at the University of Miami, argues in *Spain and Central America: Democracy and Foreign Policy* that the watermark of this transition was reached in June 1985, when Spain joined the European Economic Community. During that decade, she argues, Spain as a middle power pursued a foreign policy that reflected its transition from authoritarianism to democracy. On Central America, Rosenberg concludes that despite Madrid's inability to provide economic assistance or serve as a major trading partner, Spain played a major role in bringing the conflicted region to the attention of its new European allies.

In 1982 Central America came to the forefront of international affairs just when the Socialists achieved political power in Madrid. At that time, Spain was attempting to maintain friendly relations with all Latin American countries, regardless of their political orientation. But it never resolved the contradiction of supporting democratic outcomes while being friendly with authoritarian regimes, according to Rosenberg. As the regional crisis intensified between 1982 and 1985, Foreign Minister Fernando Morán warmed to the revolutionary movements on the isthmus. After Spain entered the European Community, new Foreign Minister Francisco Fernández Ordóñez enunciated a policy more attuned to Western interests. He had to walk a political tightrope nonetheless because leftist political parties in Spain were criticizing him for being too close to the United States and for acknowledging that Central America was within the U.S. sphere of influence. Under these circumstances, Spanish policy concentrated on facilitating democratic outcomes.

In keeping with Spain's role as a facilitator of mediation, Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González (who was also serving as vice president of the Socialist International) offered a degree of support to the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador, while his official government position provided an entrée into the ruling Central American elite. During the same period, King Juan Carlos, Spain's titular chief of state, visited Latin America frequently, giving credence to Spain's democratization and its newfound role as supporter of human rights causes. In Rosenberg's opinion, the king's visit to Nicaragua following Violeta Chamorro's electoral victory in 1990 helped legitimize the new government while offering indirect criticism of the former Sandinista regime.

Spain also supported the Contadora peace process, which sought national reconciliation in Nicaragua. Because of this stance, the Spanish government was praised by Contra leaders Arturo Cruz, Adolfo Calero, and Alfonso Robelo while being criticized by the Reagan administration for supporting such a "naive plan." When the Contadora process faltered, the Spanish disappeared into the background. After the peace plan was

signed at Esquipulas in August 1987, however, Spain again lent support in urging the adversaries to abide by the agreement. But after the Sandinistas decided unilaterally in July 1988 to break the accords and crack down on internal opposition, Spain again receded into the background. Once the peace process resumed and the United Nations was brought into the effort, Spain willingly participated in the UN force that disarmed the Contras.

As detailed in *Spain and Central America*, Spanish policy toward El Salvador was complicated by the fact that González's fellow vice president of the Socialist International was Guillermo Ungo, a prominent leader of the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR), the political arm of the FMLN. This link strained Madrid's relations with President José Napoleon Duarte and led to Spain's refusal to send observers to the 1984 elections, according to Rosenberg. Spanish policymakers also concluded that Duarte had no interest in having Spain serve as a mediator during talks with the FMLN. Yet the same connection had a positive impact in 1989, when pressure from the Spanish government and the Socialist International brought the FDR into the 1989 election. After the rightist coalition ARENA won that election, however, Spanish leaders thought it impossible for Spain to serve as a mediator between these two extreme groups and let regional actors take the lead. Following the UN-brokered peace agreement in 1991, Spain again saw the possibility of democratization working in El Salvador and therefore became a willing member of the UN verification force to disarm the rebels.

In Guatemala, Spain welcomed the presidential election of Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo in December 1985. Subsequently, Spanish leaders withheld criticism of Cerezo's failure to deal with human rights violations because he supported (lukewarmly at least) Oscar Arias's peace efforts and turned to Europe for economic support independent of the United States. In Rosenberg's opinion, Spain encouraged the various plans for democratization in Central America because they paralleled its own recent political domestic development and provided opportunities for the new government in Madrid to earn credibility in international affairs.

Works Assessing the Peace Process

While each of the works reviewed thus far devotes some attention to the Central American peace process in relation to the individual topic being examined, two volumes focus directly on the peace process. Jack Child's *The Central American Peace Process, 1983–1991: Sheathing Swords, Building Confidence* and Dario Moreno's *The Struggle for Peace in Central America* analyze the peace process from its inception at the first Contadora meeting in January 1983 through the signing of a peace agreement between the government of El Salvador and the FMLN in December 1991.

Professor of Latin American Studies at American University, Child has also worked with the International Peace Academy (an affiliate of the United Nations) on issues of peacekeeping and confidence-building in Central and South America. He focuses on the UN peacekeeping efforts and the confidence-building measures that were used to create trust between the various conflicting parties.

The original Contadora meeting, which brought together the foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela on the Panamanian island of Contadora in January 1983, was prompted by the Reagan administration's emphasis on a military solution to the ongoing crisis in Central America. Unlike Reagan, the foreign ministers of these four countries viewed the conflict as resulting from long-standing socioeconomic disparities that had not been addressed by the region's existing political order. In addition to calling for negotiations among regional belligerents, the foreign ministers also appealed for broader-based Latin American support of the peace process, which eventually manifested itself as the Grupo de Lima (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay).

In summary fashion, Child takes the reader through the group's various meetings up to the first Contadora act of June 1984, the *Acta por la Paz y la Cooperación en América Central*, and its subsequent revisions. Child argues that largely in response to U.S. hegemonic influence over the isthmus, the Contadora ministers continually revised their proposals to satisfy Washington. In response to the Contadora's final draft in September 1985, considered by Child to be the most complete document in the entire Contadora-Esquipulas process, the U.S. Defense Department asserted that the Sandinistas could not be trusted to uphold the proposed accords and hinted that the United States would have to commit a hundred thousand troops to the isthmus to stop future aggression. This response verified the oft-repeated assertion that the Reagan administration intended to eliminate the Sandinistas from Nicaragua. Child adds another important insight: Central Americans themselves had wearied of the Contadora Group's ongoing preoccupation with details of military issues. Viewing such efforts as paternalistic, Central Americans believed that the process had not addressed the issues endemic to the region. In the vacuum created by the Contadora's failure, the secretaries-general of the United Nations and the Organization of American States offered their services, only to be rebuffed by the Reagan administration.

Amidst these failures, newly elected Costa Rican President Oscar Arias consulted with key U.S. congressional representatives and the State Department before making his proposal in February 1987. While incorporating Contadora observation and verification plans, Arias also addressed the internal issue peculiar to Central America: the feeble democratization process. After receiving approval from other Central American presidents, Arias traveled to Europe to garner support for the cause. He

gained momentum from the Iran-Contra scandal that was derailing Reagan's policy and returning greater influence over foreign affairs to the U.S. Congress. The campaign climaxed in August 1987, when Arias and the other four Central American presidents agreed to the peace plan in their meeting at Esquipulas, Guatemala. Subsequently, the Contras, now cut off from U.S. military supplies, met with the Sandinistas at Sopoá, Nicaragua, where they accepted a disarmament plan and an offer to be allowed to return to Nicaragua to participate in a more democratic political process. The key to the agreement's success hinged on a competent contingent of UN peacekeeping forces to oversee the Contras' disarmament and verify the peace accords. The Canadians, drawing on their long record of experience in this area, successfully met the challenge.

Outside factors also contributed to the peace process. Newly elected U.S. President George Bush faced a recalcitrant congress when he wanted to continue support for the Contras, whom he viewed as a legitimate pressure group for forcing the Sandinistas to democratize Nicaragua's political process. When the U.S. Congress granted only minimal humanitarian assistance, the Contras' fighting ability all but vanished. Bush also appealed to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to use his influence in bringing peace to Central America. After some inflammatory rhetoric that satisfied the Cubans and Sandinistas, Gorbachev sent quiet positive signals and in October 1989 called for stability and peace in Central America. The Soviets also supported the United States in the United Nations by calling for peacekeeping forces to cool the crisis. Against this backdrop, Central American heads of state met at Tela, Honduras, where they initialed the final peace treaty ending the Sandinista-Contra conflict.

As Child explains in *The Central American Peace Process*, a key difference between the Contadora and Esquipulas agreements was the Contadora emphasis on the details addressing regional security and military problems, whereas the Esquipulas and Tela accords stressed democratization and the root causes of the Central American conflicts. While the Tela accords were being implemented after 1989, despite some problems, the Salvadoran peace process inched along slowly because of long-standing animosity between the two groups and the Salvadoran elite's determination not to relinquish any political or economic power to the FMLN. According to Child, these attitudes had changed by mid-1991, when both the FMLN and the government forces recognized that a clear-cut military victory was impossible and the political leadership of each side looked to the UN as an honest broker. By this time, the Salvadoran legislature included FMLN representation elected at the expense of ARENA's strength. Under these conditions, an agreement on military and government reforms was concluded in Mexico, and a cease-fire agreement was finally reached on 31 December 1991.

Guatemala's internal crisis remained unsettled because after nearly

thirty years of conflict, the government and the rebels remained far apart. Although the UN played a role in facilitating talks that led to first-time discussions between the belligerents in April 1991, nothing further materialized. Child believes nonetheless that the Contadora-Esquipulas process had a positive impact on Central America in helping the region address its own problems. It also enhanced the image of Canada, the United Nations, and the Organization of American States. But he is quick to point out that several factors helped create the climate that allowed the peace process to succeed: the United States lowered its profile (because of the Iran-Contra affair that discredited the hard-liners), a new administration came into power with the inauguration of George Bush, and the Soviet Union disintegrated. Child concludes in *The Central American Peace Process* that the peace process provided Latin Americans with a greater degree of independence and optimism in dealing with regional affairs.

Dario Moreno, a political scientist at Florida International University and the author of several books and articles on Central America, shares Child's opinion that democratization was the key to the Central American peace process. But whereas Child focuses on the diplomatic negotiations, Moreno emphasizes in *The Struggle for Peace in Central America* that Central Americans recognized that a relationship existed between their domestic and foreign policies. This recognition was evidenced best by the Arias peace plan, which rested on the acceptance by each Central American state of the legitimacy of the other four existing governments, despite sharp ideological differences. The plan also embodied the conviction that each government was committed to progressive democratization of the region. Moreno concludes that the Arias plan succeeded because it recognized the unique "Central American state system" that had been created by U.S. imperialism, the region's heritage of unity and intervention, and its dependency on the world economy.

As already discussed, the fall of Anastasio Somoza set off a chain reaction across the isthmus that contributed to increased violence and economic disruptions, which worsened the plight of the masses and reinforced the military in all but Costa Rica. Unlike other interpretations, however, Moreno's analysis asserts that by the mid-1980s, Central American moderates were calling for a broader solution to the regional crisis that would guarantee the evolution of democratic institutions and respect for human rights. These desires led directly to the Central American peace process. Moreno also criticizes the Contadora peace effort, not for its focus on piddling details but for being self-serving. According to Moreno, the four Contadora nations sought to legitimize the Sandinistas in Managua in the belief that the regime would then be more likely to align itself with Mexico City, Caracas, Panama, and Bogotá at the expense of Havana. Moreno agrees with Jack Child and others, however, that President Reagan's failure to impose a military solution on the region, growing U.S.

congressional and popular opposition to supporting the Contra war, and the crippling Iran-Contra scandal combined to create an opening for the Central American peace initiative.

According to Moreno, Oscar Arias typified the Central American moderates at their best. When he took over the presidency in 1986, Costa Rica was on the brink of being drawn into the Nicaraguan conflict because his predecessors' policies had allowed the country to be linked too closely to the United States. Moreover, the large influx of Nicaraguans and Salvadorans was threatening Costa Rica's generous social safety net. Arias needed a way out. The other Central American countries also had reasons for wanting to terminate the conflict. The Hondurans needed an escape hatch. The stalemated Contra war and the unwillingness of the U.S. Congress to continue financing it threatened to leave nearly 120,000 Contras and their dependents in Honduras to undermine an already poor society or invite Nicaraguan intervention. The Salvadoran conflict had ground to a stalemate, but not before inflicting significant damage on the country's economy and infrastructure. The Guatemalan economy had been ravaged by nearly three decades of conflict. Even Nicaragua needed out of the conflict. The costs of war had ruined its economy, and the Sandinistas' inability to deliver on promised social reforms was inflaming civil unrest. All five republics were facing runaway inflation and charges of violating human rights. Against this backdrop, Arias proceeded and found acceptance of various definitions of democracy in each country.

In reviewing the peace process in *The Struggle for Peace in Central America*, Moreno does not provide the details found in Child's account but zeroes in on the years after 1986. Moreno criticizes more harshly U.S. resistance to the process arising from the desire to maintain U.S. hegemony over the region. Moreno is also much less optimistic than Child about the success of the peace process because it did not end the endemic violence or address the problems of underdevelopment and sociopolitical injustice that engendered the crisis of the 1980s. Still, Moreno applauds Arias's "herculean efforts" in helping end the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran wars, reducing the threat of regional war and U.S. intervention, attempting to guarantee basic human rights, and initiating processes of national reconciliation.

Conclusion

The eight works reviewed cover different aspects of the crisis that gripped Central America during the 1980s, but they exhibit several common themes. Each assumes U.S. hegemonic influence over the region and criticizes the United States for approaching isthmian economic, social, and political problems from a cold-war perspective rather than seeking to

understand the internal dynamics of each country. All the authors are critical of Reagan's militaristic policy. By implication at least, all support a growing body of literature indicating that the Central American countries do have foreign policies of their own and are not as subservient to Washington as has often been assumed.

The two volumes by Rosenberg and by Jauberth, Castañeda, Hernández, and Vuskovic rely heavily on secondary sources including newspapers, but the rest of the authors utilize a wide variety of materials issued by U.S. and Central American governments and by the UN, a broad spectrum of secondary literature, and often interviews with participants in the events of the 1980s. Some critics may argue, however, that Martha Honey's failure to identify all interviewees lessens the credibility of the testimony and that oral statements by participants resemble autobiographical accounts in seeking to justify their own role in events.

Additional criticism will be made of individual works. Some readers will feel misled by the title of Rosenberg's *Spain and Central America: Democracy and Foreign Policy*, which actually pays more attention to political theory and developments within Spain than to its Central American policy, and by her claim that Spain played such a significant role in Central American affairs. Others might interpret Honey's work as a personal vendetta or dismiss Jauberth, Castañeda, Hernández, and Vuskovic's views as overly nationalistic and shortsighted in failing to recognize that Mexico's economic dependency on the United States limited its foreign policy options. Criticisms will be leveled against Jack Child, Donald Schulz, and Deborah Schulz for their complimentary statements about U.S. policy toward Central America during the 1980s and against Jonathan Lemco for his assertions about the self-serving intentions of Canadian policies. Students of the region might also question Morley's claims of excessive U.S. economic influence in Nicaragua in view of the fact that the Somoza family owned some 60 percent of the national wealth in 1979. They might also challenge the accuracy of Moreno's interpretation of historic events in his first chapter.

Yet despite these caveats, each study enhances general understanding of Central America, U.S. policy toward the region, and the isthmian crisis of the 1980s. All of them demonstrate growing sophistication in research on the topic. Morris Morley presents a fresh interpretation of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. Martha Honey, Donald Schulz, and Deborah Schulz relate for the first time the impact of the crisis on Costa Rica and Honduras, respectively. The challenge to U.S. policy by three middle powers also receives attention for the first time in the volumes by Robin Rosenberg, by Jonathan Lemco, and by Rodrigo Jauberth, Gilberto Castañeda, Jesús Hernández, and Pedro Vuskovic. Finally, Jack Child and Dario Moreno place the long and twisted Central American peace process in perspective.