

Resistance Begins with the First Foreign Footstep: China and Nicaragua

by

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Abstract

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In a constrained fiscal environment, a shift toward “offshore” balancing as grand strategy may require exercising military, diplomatic, economic, and political measures similar to those that historically contributed to rising anti-foreign sentiment among the populace subject to the consequences of those measures. The risk of such a strategy and the accompanying means for its success may manifest themselves only when the “offshore” military forces actually come “onshore.” The need for forward basing in “partnered” nations may subject the military to resistance in those “partnered” nations whose governments do not enjoy popular domestic support or political legitimacy. This paper examines the circumstances breeding resistance to unwelcomed foreign influence in 1900s China and early twentieth-century Nicaragua and the subsequent use of military intervention by foreign nations (the multi-nation coalition in China and the United States in Nicaragua) as an instrument of foreign policy and protection of economic and political interests.

Resistance Begins with the First Foreign Footstep: China and Nicaragua

The United States' new grand strategy of "offshore balancing" requires securing potential entry points for power-projection capabilities. The United States pursues a strategy heavily reliant on selective engagement. This strategy requires the military capability to help defend allies, deter and defeat adversaries, and maintain freedom of navigation across the seas while providing assured access and protection of United States interests in key regions. In a constrained fiscal environment, the United States might consider alternate strategies to maintain its global leadership role while living within the confines of the depressed global economy. Offshore balancing, a strategy with limited forward deployed forces and the reintroduction of those forces only if a danger to United States interests presents itself, offers such a possibility.¹ Whereas selective engagement requires the United States to commit substantial military resources in areas of national interest, such as Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East, offshore balancing relies more on power balancing among regional powers by removing the reliance upon the United States to provide regional security. The strategy calls for reducing forward deployed United States forces, minimizing alliance commitments, refraining from intervention in regional conflicts not affecting regional power balances, and preparing for power projection in key interest areas only when regional power balance is threatened. While offshore balancing offers a reduction of military commitment abroad, the strategy risks the potential need for significant counter-anti-access and area denial capability and greater reliance on other elements of national power, especially diplomacy.²

One particular risk, when the need does arise to bring “off-shore” forces “on-shore,” is that those forces may not be welcome everywhere. This nation may have to use various techniques to gain footholds, so the likelihood of encountering resistance is great. This prospect warrants an exploration of resistance and counter-resistance throughout history in order to gain insight and manage expectations for success in the future.

The most basic motivation for resistance among a people stems from an irrational fear of values, beliefs, or culture different from one’s own. This xenophobia may be exacerbated by political elites or governments to serve their own interests or may be inspired by the encroaching foreign entities threatening cultural status quo. The perception among a native populace of being inferior to, less affluent than, culturally and religiously threatened by, or marginalized by encroaching foreigners often hardens the will of the resisters.³ While resistance represents a viable form of expression for non-agreement with government or foreign encroachment, resistance turned violent invites societal risk, usually not only on the perpetrators of the violence, but on the general populace: should the violence prove successful, the actors involved usually have a reluctance to share their improved position among their supporters; however, should it prove unsuccessful, the consequences usually fall on more than just the perpetrators.⁴

Resistance as a phenomenon existed well before recorded time, and written evidence appears in the Greek historian Herodotus’ accounts of the Persian Wars. History can provide valuable insight into possible future encounters with resistance and responses to resistance. Such responses to resistance were tempered by the desired outcomes of the occupier and, in many cases, by the cost associated with achieving

those outcomes. Future responses to resistance may comparably be limited by the occupier's willingness to achieve desired outcomes and the benefit to the occupier's national interest. The foreign coalition experience in the early 1900s China and the American experiences in Nicaragua from 1909 to 1912 during the Nicaraguan Rebellion (the First Nicaraguan Civil War) and from 1925-1931 during the Second Nicaraguan Civil War and the Sandino Revolt may provide strategic insight for the contemporary force.

China Circa 1900

At the turn of the Nineteenth Century, most major foreign powers claimed representation in China. The Chinese felt interest from around the world. Many of the existing world powers established legations in Peking. Russia, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and the United States sought representation. Even lesser influences such as Spain, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, and Holland established diplomatic representation in Peking.⁵

Seeds of Chinese Resistance

The major foreign powers' interest in China was spurred on by economic competition and resentment of Britain's dominance of Chinese trade at the close of the Eighteenth Century. This fear of British dominance frequently led the other powers to pressure the weak Chinese government, the Manchu dynasty, for favorable trading positions. Pressure often manifested itself as a coalition of the powers when convenient.⁶ "In these negotiations the Manchus and their mandarins were handicapped not only by their lack of military power but by their ill-conceived conviction of their racial, intellectual and material superiority over all 'barbarians.'"⁷ This Chinese arrogance often aroused equal responses from the western powers' representatives

and heads of state, nor was the Chinese government afforded the opportunity to deal with any one foreign nation individually due to frequent coalition pressure.⁸ While the foreign powers frequently engaged in coalition, each power had its own interests in China.

For the British, interest in China revolved around a mounting trade imbalance in the Eighteenth Century due to increased British consumer demand for Chinese tea, silk, and rhubarb root. Seeking to bring the balance back into England's favor, the British began a lucrative opium import by way of India to China.⁹ Although many corrupt Chinese benefited from the illicit trade, the Manchu dynasty eventually destroyed large stocks of British opium. The British responded militarily, initiating the First Opium War in 1839. The Chinese offered little resistance to the British forces, ceding to the British the Island of Hong Kong and establishing five "Treaty Ports" to accommodate foreign trade through treaties signed in 1842 and 1843.¹⁰ Over the next decade, the Chinese found themselves at the mercy of advances from powerful nations, with the British pressing for equal status as agreed by those treaties. Chinese resentment and open defiance of the treaty agreements eventually led to British dissatisfaction. The Second Opium War began in 1857 with the seizure of the Hong Kong-registered *Arrow* under the accusation of piracy. The Governor of Canton authorized the seizure, drawing the ire of not only the British, but the French as well. Britain approached the United States and Russia to enter the conflict as Allies; however, both countries only sent envoys.¹¹ In 1859, much to the surprise of the British and French, the Chinese repelled a western assault force at the Taku Forts, inflicting 40% casualties and forcing it to withdraw. The following year the British and French successfully captured the forts and marched to

Peking, burning the Summer Palace in retribution. This incident led to implementation of the Treaty of Tientsin of two years earlier, establishing permanent foreign legations in Peking.¹² The most favored-nation status established in other existing treaties allowed the United States and Russia to press for equal representation as provided by the Treaty of Tientsin.¹³ Although Great Britain and France succeeded in pressing the Chinese for concessions in 1860, the success of the Boers in 1899 against the British in South Africa may have emboldened Chinese revolt fomenting in 1900.¹⁴

French interest in China seemed benevolent with the influx of Jesuit missionaries and the Roman Catholic Church up through the early twentieth century. However, missionaries, primarily Catholic bishops elevated to the equivalent status of Chinese governor under pressure from the French, actually generated a growing anti-Christian resentment among many Chinese. Less obvious, French competition with Britain over Chinese trade was second only to France's desire to acquire the vassal Chinese territories making up the future French Indo-China.¹⁵ In 1870, consequent to the killing of a magistrate's servant by the French Consul, "[t]he French Consulate and the Roman Catholic Church were attacked and put to torch, several French priests and nuns and some other foreigners being killed."¹⁶ French and Chinese relations remained strained; in 1884, a short war ensued concluding with French victory and the signing of the Second Treaty of Tientsin, which recognized French control of Indo-China.¹⁷

Russia's initial interest in China revolved mainly around maintaining the Chinese-Russian border, formalized with the Treaty of Nerzhinsk in 1689. As a neutral party in the Second Opium War, Russia gained access to the Treaty Ports and established a legation in Peking, entering into the trade race with the other western powers.¹⁸

Surreptitiously, Russia took advantage of the declining influence of the Manchu dynasty to occupy Manchuria by the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁹

The other nations represented in Peking by 1900 had similar interests in gaining trade concessions and territories from China. Chinese resentment of the Japanese stemmed from Japan's de facto acquisition of Korea in a war against China in 1894-5. Japan's growing interest in Manchuria added to Chinese distrust. Germany's interest primarily rested in competing with the other western powers. Italy's influence was nearly non-existent after a failed and unauthorized attempt at a show of force resulted in the recall of the Italian envoy in 1899.²⁰

The United States interest lay in competing with the other western powers for trade concessions from the Chinese. The United States acquired similar access to Treaty Ports in 1844 under a separate treaty, the Treaty of Whangia. The United States seemed less inclined to territorial acquisition, concerned that the division of Chinese provinces among other Powers would deny it trade access, particularly in Manchuria.²¹

Though the United States attempted to exert, at the time, its limited political influence, "American Protestant missionaries, although perhaps humbler in their attitudes than their French and Italian Catholic competitors, played no small role in exciting Chinese enmity towards Christianity"²² Drawing toward the close of the 1800s, an anti-Christian, anti-foreign, and, often, anti-Manchu movement known as the Boxers, consisting of mostly peasants, manifested itself on the northern Chinese landscape.²³ Various dispatches between the American Minister and the Secretary of State in the late 1890s leading up to the Boxer Uprising underscored the United States' support for Chinese sovereignty. As early as December 1894, Charles Denby,

American Minister to China, reported to the Secretary of State, Walter Gresham, that the other foreign powers pressed the Chinese to allow foreign military guards for the legations in Peking. Denby acknowledged that he had not requested any troops, but believed the legations had the right. Secretary of State Gresham cautioned that none of the treaties with China authorized foreign troops in China.²⁴ "... as a recognized principle of international intercourse, no government would, if it could prevent it, permit the introduction into its territory of such a foreign military force. China, like any other government, is bound to afford adequate protection to our legation."²⁵

From October 1898 through June 1900, the new American Minister, Edwin H. Conger, detailed to Secretary of State John Hay increasing incidents against foreigners by the Boxers. Conger expressed concern that the Manchus were doing little to suppress the Boxers and might even be supporting them, including a decree published by the Empress Dowager, the Chinese Regent, openly calling for action against foreigners. Secretary Hay sternly warned Conger to act independently of the other Powers and to continue to press the Chinese to handle the Boxers. Not until May 1900 did Secretary Hay acquiesce to sending troops to the Peking legation. Fifty Marines arrived in June, followed by advice from Secretary Hay that protecting American interests should be an independent action unless cooperation with other Powers was necessary. Protection of American citizens and the legation was United States policy.²⁶

The Boxers and Rebellion

The origin of the Boxers, or more appropriately, the Fists of Righteous Harmony, remains mostly enigmatic. Membership consisted of mostly peasants, who were anti-Christian, anti-foreign, and anti-Manchu, with no distinct leadership. The name stems from the ceremonial calisthenics practiced by its members. The followers believed they

had a mystical power rendering them invincible. The Boxers were emboldened to violence through the support they received from the Empress Dowager, the Regent of the Manchu Emperor, her nephew.²⁷ The Empress Dowager managed to install her nephew after the death of her son, the previous monarch. The Empress Dowager retained her power through the manipulation of her weak-minded nephew. After the defeat of China at the hands of the Japanese in 1895, the young Emperor attempted to reform and modernize the empire for fear of colonization by the foreign powers. The proposed reforms threatened the Empress Dowager's power base, forcing her to stage a coup against her nephew in 1898.²⁸ The young Emperor's life was spared only through pressure on the Empress Dowager from powerful southern Chinese viceroys; for the next ten years, the Emperor served only in a formal capacity.²⁹ While the Empress Dowager opposed her nephew's reforms, her shared fear of the parcelling of China by foreign powers led her to support the Boxer uprising in 1900, although she underestimated the response from the foreign powers.³⁰

The Boxer Uprising lasted from June 11th, with the murder of the Chancellor of the Japanese Legation, to August 16th, 1900, with the relief of the Peit'ang, the Catholic Cathedral built within the walls of the Imperial City. The uprising included engagements at the Foreign Legations in Peking, among the Taku Forts along the Pei-Ho River between Tientsin and Peking, and at Tientsin. From 43,000 to 46,000 Allied men representing seven foreign nations faced over 100,000 Chinese, both soldiers and Boxers. Poor leadership, corrupt administrators, and antiquated equipment negated any numerical advantage the Chinese military and the Boxers may have enjoyed. Further, appreciation on some Chinese generals' part that the immediate success of the

uprising might incur greater retaliation from the foreign powers kept the generals from committing the best troops to the engagements.³¹ The conflict ended with an American-led assault on the Forbidden City, and the relief of the Peit'ang. While the Americans stopped short of entering the Forbidden City, "this did not prevent the other Allies, spearheaded as usual by the Japanese, from advancing...."³²

China Chagrined

Aside from suffering the first incursion into the Forbidden City by foreign military forces, the result of the Boxer Rebellion for the Chinese brought more foreign incursion into China and the eventual loss of territory which the Rebellion was intended to avert. The foreign Powers demanded remuneration; execution of high officials, generals, and two royal princes; the razing of the Taku Forts; an arms embargo for two years; and the posting of permanent legation guards and twelve garrisons (more than 5,000 foreign troops) along the route from Peking to the port at Tientsin.³³ "[F]ortunately for China the Powers were more concerned with jockeying for position than exacting retribution."³⁴ The Empress Dowager underestimated the strength of the foreign Powers, especially when uniting for a common cause.³⁵ China suffered, however, by how quickly the foreign Powers reverted to their individual interests. Russia cloaked itself as China's friend in its desire for Manchuria; Japan, abetted by Britain, played friend to check Russian advances; and all this culminated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Corrupt Chinese officials benefitted financially off of long-term financing of war indemnities while exacting higher taxes from the population.³⁶ In the end, the relationship between China and the foreign Powers remained relatively unchanged until the advent of World War II. The Manchu dynasty failed to survive, however. The suspicious deaths of the Emperor and Empress Dowager in 1908, and the 1911

republican revolution, which sent the last Chinese Emperor in exile, effectively ended the dynasty.³⁷

Half A World Away: Nicaragua 1909-12

Up until the early 1900s, United States involvement in Central America focused on presenting a recognizable naval presence as an instrument of the Monroe Doctrine and as deterrent for encroaching European colonial powers. The United States national interest in the region from the early 1820s through the early 1900s could be characterized as fickle and distracted. President Monroe established the permanent presence of American naval power in the Caribbean in 1823 with the creation of the West India Squadron, or the “Mosquito Fleet.” Aside from the original purpose of suppressing piracy, the fleet protected American citizens and interests in the region into the 1900s.³⁸ Initial interest in the Caribbean stemmed from the completion of the American-funded Panama Railway in the mid 1800s, adding to the “American interest in the possibility of a canal that would allow seagoing ships to pass directly from the Pacific to the Caribbean.”³⁹ United States interest lapsed temporarily during the Civil War period, allowing two predominant colonial powers, Spain and France, to expand footholds in the New World. This renewed European encroachment, along with Confederates’ use of ports in the Caribbean during the Civil War, temporarily sparked renewed interest in the region. However, with the threat of French, Russian, and Spanish influence waning (the original inspiration for the Monroe Doctrine), the continuing good relations with Britain, and the lack of naval bases, territory, or construction of any transoceanic canal, national interest again subsided. The next 23 years, from 1866 to 1890, saw reduced United States naval activity in the region, with

only three land-based interventions intended to protect United States citizens and commercial interests.⁴⁰

American Hegemony and “Dollar Diplomacy”

With the advent of navalism in the 1890s, the United States realized that acquisition of permanent and temporary bases in the Caribbean was necessary for sustaining a naval campaign to offset the expansion and modernization of foreign navies. Germany and Japan proceeded to grow their navies into world-class fleets with the ambition of acquiring overseas colonies. Great Britain, in response, withdrew its navy from overseas commitments in order to concentrate its resources. This action conceded that the United States assume the dominant power position in Central America and the Caribbean. Perceiving an imminent threat, many Americans realized the need for a means to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets in the event of conflict.⁴¹ This imperative led to the completion of the Panama Canal: “...sponsorship of the revolution that separated Panama from Columbia; and the Anglo-American agreements that replaced the ideal of a neutral, essentially demilitarized transoceanic waterway with one that was, quite literally, under the guns of American fortresses.”⁴²

The United States secured permanent naval bases in the Caribbean with the success of the Spanish-American War in 1898. After the acquisition of Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay, United States interests in the Caribbean focused more on matters of commerce, economics, and foreign encroachment. Concern remained especially strong over German and Japanese naval encroachment in Central America. Germany exacerbated the fear of foreign influence through employment of its navy as a collection mechanism for defaulted European loans.⁴³ “European investors had been in the habit of making substantial loans to the national governments of the various Caribbean and

Central American republics.”⁴⁴ These republics often offered mortgages on mines and land, or the custom duties (revenue) on particular commodities or duties collected in specific locales. Upon default, European governments willingly resorted to naval pressure to collect these securities. The growing kleptocracy in Central American republics usually precipitated the default on international obligations, followed or accompanied by local unrest resulting in political violence. This condition led to increasing foreign military presence ashore to protect diplomats and foreign nationals.⁴⁵ The Venezuelan Claims Crisis of 1902-3, initiated by Germany to collect debts owed to German investors, signaled the beginning of an active United States role in Central American economics. Germany, Great Britain, and Italy conducted a naval expedition into Venezuelan territorial waters, seized Venezuelan ships, and blockaded the port of Caracas. The United States responded by conducting naval maneuvers in the southern Caribbean.⁴⁶ The crisis ended with international arbitration and, following a similar threat to the Dominican Republic in 1904, led to the adoption of the policy known as the “Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine” by the United States. The Corollary implied that forceful attempts at collection of Central American debts by European powers violated the Monroe Doctrine, and insisted the United States actively ensure that Central American and Caribbean republics honored their debts. American financial experts arranged debt consolidation loans secured by the United States for the Dominican Republic, and American officials administered custom houses, ensuring the proper distribution of revenue for government expenses and debt obligations.⁴⁷ “...Dominican leaders at the national level were less reluctant than most of their Caribbean counterparts to sacrifice significant portions of sovereignty on the altar of

security.”⁴⁸ French, Belgian, and American investors preferred United States receivership over German intervention on behalf of Europe. Although the American intervention did little to diminish internal strife in the Dominican Republic, the measures succeeded in forestalling European military intervention to collect debts. Such apparent success led President Taft to push for extending the techniques to other republics in the region, an approach that would eventually be labeled “dollar diplomacy.”⁴⁹

The Nicaraguan Threat

While many Central American republics around the turn of the 19th century were plagued by domestic unrest, insurrection, and revolution, thereby inviting limited United States diplomatic and military intervention, Nicaragua’s Jose Santos Zelaya, in power since 1893, approached the United States and other foreign interlopers with contempt. Zelaya frequently granted business concessions contrary to American commercial interests, cutting into profits. Zelaya refused to accept all concessions demanded by the United States for construction of a trans-isthmus canal. Then when Nicaragua was bypassed as the location, rumors abounded that Zelaya considered granting concessions to other foreign interests.⁵⁰

...Zelaya had done much to undermine the traditional autonomy of the Mosquito Coast, thereby making many enemies among the people who lived there, a number of whom were American citizens. At the same time, he had been involved in a number of thinly veiled attempts to overthrow the governments of Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, and Ecuador.⁵¹

While Nicaragua managed to remain current on its foreign financial obligations with little need for “dollar diplomacy”, the threat to neighboring republics and of a second Central American canal possibly controlled by non-American interests caused United States concern.⁵² In 1907, Zelaya invaded Honduras, supporting a revolt led by

Miguel Davila to defeat the forces of Honduran President Manuel Bonilla. The United States limited itself to patrolling the coast to prevent the shelling of coastal towns, as was naval custom. The conflict also revealed a dichotomy between the Department of State and the local Navy commanders. While Secretary of State Elihu Root labored to secure peace through multi-lateral treaties, the local naval commander, William F. Fullam, strongly chastised a local Zelayista for harassing American businesses in the predominantly American settlement of Bluefields, and forcibly policed the Honduran town of La Ceiba after it had been seized by the Nicaraguan Army. Even after censure from the State Department, Fullam argued that treaties were insufficient and the Nicaraguans should be forced back to their own country with the role of the Navy to protect American citizens and property from local internal strife. Likely, both President Roosevelt and Secretary Root never intended for direct intervention as perpetrated by Fullam. The senior civilian leaders were more concerned with negotiating rules and regulations for the Central American republics that would foster lasting peace.⁵³

Secretary Root managed to arbitrate the Central American Peace Conference in 1907, which Zelaya was induced to attend because "...neither the United States or Mexico, cosponsors of the conference, supported his policies...."⁵⁴ The three major terms of the agreement were that the Central American Court would be established, that revolutionaries could not stage in national territory, and that Honduras was neutral. A second treaty stipulated that all assignees agreed to withhold recognition of any government formed by revolution unless accepted by the people through a constitution. Even with the major treaty success, the end of the year saw another incursion into Honduras. A former railroad engineer, Lee Christmas, led an expedition from

Guatemala, aided by the deposed former Honduran President Bonilla. Honduras plead to the Central American Court, which demanded that all parties submit to arbitration. Secretary Root considered backing the Central American Court with United States military force, but the invasion collapsed before any United States intervention.⁵⁵

Shortly after the inauguration of President Taft, the Zelayan government attempted a takeover of El Salvador. President Taft, using the diplomatic framework created by the former Secretary Root, enlisted the help of Mexico to control the situation. Through the dispatch of American and Mexican naval vessels (the American bearing complements of Marines) to intercept ships carrying arms or revolutionaries, Zelaya was discouraged from continuing his endeavor. Seizing upon the failure, one of Zelaya's lieutenants rallied a rebellion.⁵⁶ Juan J. Estrada, the governor of Bluefields province, declared against Zelaya and asked for aid from the American consul in Bluefields. Although the American consul, Thomas Moffat, ardently supported Estrada, the United States refused intervention at the outset of the rebellion.⁵⁷ Upon seizing key terrain in the town, the Bluff, Estrada declared "...his government would 'recognize' the United States if Moffat would reciprocate, but the State Department dispatched an admonitory message to the impetuous consul that his duty was to look after American interests and remain neutral."⁵⁸

The United States dispatched the navy to protect American lives and property. Within weeks of the October rebellion, Zelaya executed two American citizens who had participated as Estrada's rebels, invoking the United States to break off diplomatic relations. Fearing direct United States intervention and the removal of supporters, Zelaya voluntarily abdicated and exiled himself on December 10, 1909. The move

softened the Estrada-led rebellion, the remaining rebels withdrawing to Bluefields under pressure from Nicaraguan government forces. Much to Estrada's benefit, the actions of the hundred-man landing party and battalion of Marines garrisoned at Bluefields stifled the government troops attempts to eliminate the remaining rebels. Under the auspices of protecting American lives, the senior Marine, Major Smedley Butler, announced that the Marines would act against anyone firing into the city, but any action outward from the city was unobjectionable.⁵⁹ The fact that the actions of United States forces inadvertently abetted Estrada's cause was not lost on Major Butler. "The regular Nicaraguan army was unable to get at Estrada, Butler complained, because the United States supported the revolution."⁶⁰ The United States Navy protected commercial traffic from interference from both the Nicaraguan government and the rebels, which aided Estrada to continue to collect revenue from customs duties and to bring in supplies. With the inability of government forces to eliminate the remaining resistance in Bluefields, the Zelaya inspired government collapsed, rendering Nicaragua victim to a tenuous coalition government whose members drove Nicaragua near international default. The United States solution implemented a similar receivership framework as in the Dominican Republic, including abolition of monopolies and concessions granted by Zelaya. Unlike the Dominican Republic, the elites who viewed those monopolies and concessions as their property were less inclined to surrender their sovereignty upon which United States receivership impinged.⁶¹

Nicaraguan Rebellion 1912

By the summer of 1912, the coalition government in Managua, the Nicaraguan capital, failed, and separate rebellions arose in León and Granada. The rebels in León rallied under a former Zelayista, Benjamin Zeledón, while a recently ousted leader of the

coalition, Luis Mena, led the forces in Granada. While the United States entered the conflict under the auspices of neutrality, its actions clearly benefitted the central government under Adolfo Diaz.⁶² Diaz, a former backer of Estrada's rebellion against Zelaya and the incumbent President, brokered the treaty allowing for the receivership arrangement in Nicaragua, thus earning United States favor. The success of the receivership relied upon the confidence of American investors that their interests would be protected, ostensibly forcing the United States to intervene. Arguably, the more Diaz surrendered Nicaragua's financial survival to United States financiers, the more anti-American rhetoric he inspired, with a national fervor growing over a loss of sovereignty.

Mena forced American intervention in the first week of August when his forces seized two American-owned steamers, directly threatening American property. One hundred bluejackets were dispatched from the USS Annapolis to protect the American legation in Managua. Mena's forces responded with a four-hour artillery attack on the capital, subjecting the Hotel Lupón, which was refuge to American and other foreign nationals, to several direct hits. By August 15, a battalion of 354 Marines arrived in Managua. At the State Department, the situation in Nicaragua was likened to the Boxer Rebellion just over a decade earlier. The assistant Secretary pushed for a similar military response: the commitment of the Tenth Infantry Regiment of the Army. The Army and Navy commands argued the situation was well within the capability of bluejackets and marines. By September, the United States committed more than 1,000 marines and bluejackets (nearly the same number of troops as the Assistant Secretary had suggested) and six warships to the conflict.⁶³ In order to protect 119 miles of the Pacific Railway of Nicaragua (51 percent American owned) and American citizens, the

commander, Admiral William H. Southerland, “established small garrisons at several points between Corinto and Managua, and employed a train full of Marines and machine guns to maintain communications between them.”⁶⁴

Both Zeledón and Mena played into the American commander’s desire to avoid direct engagement. They committed only petty harassment, primarily to damage the railroad, and they limited confrontation in order to preserve their forces from unnecessary loss while still maintaining nationalistic credibility. One object lesson of the wisdom of this strategy occurred in mid-September when Zeledónistas ambushed the Marine-armed train, and lost 128 of their own men while capturing just three Marines and wounding five others. The following day, Zeledón sent dispatches to the train commander, Major Butler, indicating his forces mistakenly ambushed the train and then promptly returned the captured Marines. For Mena’s part, the rebellion ended without resistance; upon Butler’s train arriving in Granada, Butler discovered that Mena suffered from a debilitating disease and had lost the will to fight. In exchange for safe passage from Nicaragua for himself and his son, Mena dissolved his forces and surrendered his weapons.⁶⁵

In short response, Zeledón, realizing that government forces were growing stronger and his forces were alone, seized two hills near Masaya and blocked all rail traffic between Managua and Granada. The Marines responded with a 21-hour artillery barrage, preventing the rebels from firing on the forming assault force and forcing them to withdraw to the reverse slope, abandoning their artillery pieces and machine guns. The United States assault commenced at dawn on October 4, with the infantry providing their own suppressing fire. It proved so effective that only one rebel machine gun crew

could keep firing. They managed to kill four assaulting Marines before being pierced by Marine bayonets. Once the first hill, El Coyotepe, was secured, the U.S. forces used the rebel's own artillery and machine guns to roust them from the second hill. Only after the rebels fled to the town did the 400 Nicaraguan government forces pursue, somehow having avoided the hill campaign entirely. The conflict concluded with a three-hour battle in Masaya between the remaining rebels and the government forces, resulting in Zeledón's death and looting of the town.⁶⁶ By February 1913, most of the American forces returned to their warships, Panama, or the United States. For Nicaragua, the outcome of the conflict marked the beginning of a permanent United States presence with a 100-Marine contingent as a legation guard in its capital. The United States secured, through treaty, exclusive rights for a transoceanic canal through Nicaragua, established a similar receivership as in the Dominican Republic, and supported a favorable government for the next 12 years. Simultaneously, through its sponsorship of a government which had little support of the political elites, the United States created an environment in Nicaragua which was favorable to popular opposition.⁶⁷

Nicaragua 1925-31

While the Nicaraguan Rebellion in 1912 resulted in a Nicaragua at peace, not only within, but with its regional neighbors, the country found itself subservient to American direction. The course of American national and business interests evolved and changed during the years leading to the Nicaraguan national elections in 1924. While the United States secured the option for a second trans-isthmian canal, Nicaragua also ceded the Great and Little Corn islands in the Caribbean and another concession on the Pacific side in the Gulf of Fonseca, all for the price of \$3 million and the guarantee of Nicaragua's freedom. While the Marine presence in Managua kept the

peace, the treaty came under protest from Costa Rica, which had claims on the San Juan River, a portion of the proposed route, and from El Salvador and Honduras, which shared objection to the conceded territory in the Gulf of Fonseca.⁶⁸ Ratification of the treaty solidifying these agreements occurred in 1916, but only after significant delays by Senator and former Secretary of State Elihu Root, who argued that “the Wilson administration could not sign a convention with a government that hardly represented the interests of its people and flagrantly disregarded the rights of its neighbors.”⁶⁹ Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras submitted their protest to the Central American Court of Justice, which upheld the protest but acknowledged it had no jurisdiction over the United States. The affront rendered the Court ineffectual and led to the undoing of Secretary Root’s 1907 effort to provide a forum for the arbitration of Central American grievances.⁷⁰ Indeed, over the ensuing years, the Court continued to decline; it eventually disbanded in 1918.⁷¹

The Nicaraguan Political Landscape

With the ratification of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty, as the treaty became known, Emiliano Chamorro raised himself to favored Nicaraguan status with the United States. In Nicaragua, Diaz gradually lost favor with the people not only due to his negotiations for American receivership but also due to his suggestion in the original treaty negotiations in 1914 that would have rendered Nicaragua an American protectorate much like the Platt Amendment for Cuba.⁷² Chamorro used Diaz’ dwindling popularity along with open United States support to ascend to the Presidency. Chamorro began his political career as Diaz’ minister to the United States, won the Presidency in 1916, and then, knowing he could not remain President, maneuvered his aging uncle, Don Diego, into the Presidency in 1920. Chamorro effectively controlled Nicaraguan politics

until October 1923, when Diego died suddenly, leaving his Vice President, Bartolomé Martínez, to assume the reins. Chamorro, capitalizing on a growing perception that the United States was losing interest in interfering in Central American affairs, conspired to make a run at the Presidency in 1924 (by 1923 treaty, Chamorro would otherwise be ineligible without nomination).⁷³

Almost a year before this election the State Department had officially informed the Nicaraguan government of American intention to withdraw the legation guard as soon as a properly staffed constabulary... could be organized. The Liberals, out of power for a decade, wanted the marines to remain long enough to guarantee a “fair” election, which, it was presumed, Dr. Dodds would closely monitor.”⁷⁴

Dr Harold Dodds was the architect of an electoral code for the 1924 Nicaraguan election which the United States expected to be followed. Martínez, although not endorsed by the United States as a candidate, favored the delay of removing the legation guard in order to ensure a peaceful transition but had no intention to a “fair” election. He maneuvered political opposition against Chamorro, using anti-Chamorro Conservatives and disaffected Liberals to nominate his own candidates. The Martínez backed candidates won, and, although the State Department questioned the fairness of the election, it was reluctant to intervene and withdrew the Marine guard from Managua.⁷⁵ Chamorro, undeterred, conspired to regain power. Within two years, through collusion with Republican allies and not fearing a Marine presence, Chamorro followers forcibly seized La Loma and installed a coalition cabinet with Chamorro as general of the army. Chamorro then engineered an impeachment and banishment for the Vice President, Juan Sacasa, and a plot to have the President declared insane. By March 1926, the President had resigned and, along with Sacasa, fled the country, leaving Chamorro in line for the Presidency based on the rules of succession. Shortly thereafter, a Sacasa

supporter, General José Moncada, staged a revolt against Chamorro by assaulting Bluefields. He enjoyed success similar to Estrada's more than 15 years earlier.⁷⁶

The Second Nicaraguan Civil War

The American response to the incursion at Bluefields was predictable; the local naval commander landed a detachment of Marines to protect American citizens and ensure the neutrality of the town. The similarity to Estrada's rebellion ended there; the United States contented itself with maintaining a presence in the coastal towns to protect American citizens and continuing to support the training of the Nicaraguan constabulary, the Guardia Nacional, at Corinto while at the same time demanding Chamorro resign, recognizing his blatant power grab. The State Department finally engaged in negotiating a peaceful solution when evidence surfaced that the Moncada opposition received aid from Mexico. Mexico had recently threatened American interests by maneuvering to seize American businesses in Mexico. This obvious assistance from Mexico did not, however, lead to a favorable view of the Chamorro government. In late 1926, the State Department arranged for a conference at Corinto between the warring factions. During the conference, Chamorro, realizing that the United States would not recognize his government, resigned. Under pressure from the United States representative, the assembly at the conference named Adolfo Diaz as interim president.⁷⁷

The ascension of Diaz to the Presidency did little to quell the ongoing Civil War; the Liberals, led by Moncada, still felt excluded. Diaz aroused United States suspicions to Mexican intentions in Nicaragua in a skillful attempt at inviting military intervention; however, owing to the growing anti-interventionist fervor in the United States and public concerns that the Monroe Doctrine was being used to protect American investments,

the Coolidge administration implemented a more peaceable solution.⁷⁸ “For such a mission the president turned to a distinguished public servant, Henry Stimson, formerly secretary of war”⁷⁹ In short order, Stimson managed to arrange for Diaz to remain in power, through American force if necessary, until the 1928 election, when the opposition could nominate candidates under a fair election. The condition for this agreement was the peaceful surrender of arms by the opposition for which the Americans offered to pay \$10 per surrendered rifle; Moncada reluctantly agreed by written agreement at the Hotel Tipitapa. At face value, United States sentiment was that intervention had once again imposed stability and peace to a troubled Nicaragua with the United States having to do no more than protect enclaves of American and foreign nationals. In reality, partisans randomly attacked patrolling Marines, and the Marines retaliated just as violently; one incident involved Marines hunting down a defiant rebel general at his home and shooting both him and his mistress dead. One such partisan was Augusto Sandino; he had aligned himself with the forces supporting Sacasa and Moncada, but he felt betrayed by the Tipitapa Accords.⁸⁰

The Sandino Revolt

Prior to the Tipitapa Accords, Sandino was virtually unknown. A Nicaraguan expatriate returned from Mexico and a Liberal, he had observed the dismantling of the Zelaya regime and consequently a decline in family fortune. He was driven by a sense of concern for supposed victims of American capitalism and social injustice in Latin America. Sandino gained the support of his men, along with other sympathetic Nicaraguans, by his disagreement with the Tipitapa Accords. The view of the United States commander, General Logan Feland, was contrary; Sandino was no more than the leader of a group of rebels that had not disarmed. Consequently, a campaign was

launched into the Nicaraguan countryside to hunt for Sandino and his rebels. In July 1927, Sandino responded by besieging the town of Ocotal with 60 regulars and 500 partisans against a garrison of forty Marines and a slightly larger force of Guardia Nacional. The engagement lasted nearly two days, interrupted only by Sandino's attempt to get the garrison to surrender. The conflict ended when five American planes strafed and fragmentation bombed the rebels.⁸¹ "Each of the planes fired 300 rounds of ammunition and dropped six seventeen-pound anti-personnel fragmentation bombs on the rebels."⁸² The detachment commander, Marine Lieutenant Mark Hatfield, in his after-action report, lauded the close air support as the deciding factor in routing the rebels. He also reported one dead and one wounded Marine, three wounded and four captured Guardia Nacional, while the rebels, by his count, suffered three hundred killed.⁸³ After this incident, Sandino avoided direct confrontation with the Marines, engaging only in limited hit-and-run skirmishes, while continuing to build popular support among the populace. Under mounting public scrutiny, which questioned why a bandit garnered such popularity among Nicaraguans, the Coolidge administration maintained that Nicaragua was pacified with a few exceptions. In December 1927, after weeks of ineffectual bombardment by air-borne fragmentation grenades, two Marine-led Guardia Nacional units entered El Chipote, Sandino's mountain safe haven. By this time, Sandino had gathered much support from other Latin American countries and, in late December, he successfully ambushed both units, forcing them to retreat to the town of Quilali. Only the timely and effective use of air support saved the defenders, earning one aviator the Medal of Honor. By mid-January, Marine aviation scattered the

Sandinistas, but when the ground units arrived on the mountain, their quarry was gone.⁸⁴

By mid-January 1928, Sandino had garnered somewhat of a media following. One United States journalist, Carleton Beals, even traveled to Nicaragua for a personal interview, telling Sandino during the interview that his continued resistance would only bring more Marines. Beals wrote for *The Nation*, a magazine which was known for its anti-imperialism position and which had written in opposition to the earlier United States Haitian occupation. While Beals took Sandino's claims of success with reservation, he supported Sandino's charge that the United States government operated on the ruse of protecting American lives and property while, in reality, simply propping up the regime of Diaz and benefitting American banks. While the predicted influx of more Marines soon came to fruition, the building isolationist movement in the United States Congress and the general public took longer to develop; not until the Great Depression did the United States feel significant pressure to bring the Marines home. By early spring 1928, Marine strength in Nicaragua had reached 3,700, along with five American cruisers (complemented with 1,500 bluejackets) patrolling the coast. With the increased Marine presence and renewed pressure on Sandino's northern Nicaraguan safe haven, Sandino moved his activity toward the interior and the eastern coast. Although the Sandinistas continued to harass the Marines, a campaign spearheaded by Diaz offering amnesty for surrender convinced more than two thousand "bandits" to lay down their arms. The campaign and a strong Marine presence during the 1924 election ensured that the "fair" election proceeded as Stimson had promised, with the Liberals winning a resounding victory. Sandino, however, was not placated. Although ineffectual in

overthrowing the government or raising a force to be anything but a nuisance to the occupying United States Marines, Sandino's persistence did erode the popular support of intervention in the United States. By 1929, pressure from critics forced the withdrawal of the main Marine forces, leaving only Guardia Nacional under the supervision of American officers to police the remainder of the Sandinistas.⁸⁵ On January 2, 1933, the last American legation commander lowered his flag. Unfortunately for Sandino, the Guardia Nacional continued their pursuit and, on February 22, 1934, they executed him by firing squad. While Sandino presented very little real threat to the United States' manipulation of Nicaraguan politics and economics, his legacy as a freedom fighter and modern-style guerrilla propagated quickly.⁸⁶ "Coincidence hardly accounts for the naming (in 1927 when Sandino was still barely identified by United States forces in Nicaragua) of a 'Sandino Division' in the Russian-advised Nanking army during the Chinese civil war."⁸⁷ Just as remarkable was the popular support Sandino garnered from prominent foreign writers such as Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, who hailed Sandino as a modern-day "George Washington." Sandino even enjoyed support from factions in the United States: fund raising drives in Lower Manhattan to raise money for guns and the partisan articles from Carleton Beals in *The Nation* editorializing Sandino's plight.⁸⁸ Within his own country, Sandino became somewhat of a folk hero, whose name was carried into the 1970s under the mantle of the communist Sandinista movement.

Conclusion

Why the United States responded so differently in the nearly 30-year intervention in Nicaragua and in the much briefer involvement in the Boxer Rebellion is speculative. For the earlier conflict, the United States, having just concluded the Spanish-American

War and secured the Philippines, possibly was either content with its imperial reach in the Far East, or, more pragmatically, realized that its imperial reach might be nearing its limits. Today strategists speak of the “tyranny of distance” in relation to the Asia-Pacific. Arguably, the “distance” must have been greater in the early 1900s; therefore, the wisdom of limiting over-extension seemed reasonable. Further, the United States’ interest in China was the same then as her interest in the Asia-Pacific today. China in 1900 presented a new growing opportunity for economic prosperity which was potentially threatened by the imperialistic nature of the other world powers, and the United States sought to protect its economic interest by maintaining Chinese sovereignty.

In contrast, Nicaragua was closer to home. The United States’ interest in Central America stemmed primarily from a desire to protect the region from foreign encroachment (with the United States as the exception) and protect growing American economic interests. Some Americans supported such economic interests; some did not. Ironically, none other than Smedley Butler, whose Marines had operated so successfully in Nicaragua, voiced those objections in a bitter anti-war speech in 1931 which drew contempt from the Hoover administration:

I spent 33 years ... being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1916. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City [Bank] boys to collect revenue in. I helped in the rape of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.⁸⁹

Despite Butler’s bitterness, United States interests, then and now, dictate the element and degree of national power employed to attain those interests. One example

is the easing of United States sanctions and the release of financial aid to Pakistan in exchange for supply transit rights to Afghanistan. Another example is the apparent schizophrenia of United States policy in response to the Arab Spring: why intervene on behalf of the opposition in Libya, abstain from Syria, and support the government in Bahrain? The United States leadership perceived an advantage in assisting in the removal of Mohammar Khadaffi, resorted to only diplomatic efforts in Syria so far, and has an interest in protecting naval basing rights in Bahrain. While the United States contemplates alternate grand strategies such as offshore balancing, two constants remain certain when considering the conditions necessary for the United States to employ any element of national power. One is that basing rights, ties, concessions - indeed the very right to bring "offshore" forces "onshore" - need to be secured from the host government. The other constant, however, is that such ties cannot assure a favorable reception by the local populace; resistance may result.

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