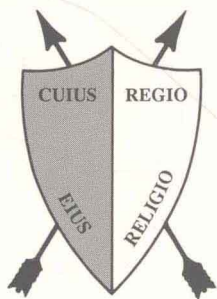


AN HONORABLE PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA



LEN CAUDILL DEALY

***An
Honorable Peace
in Central America***

Glen Caudill Dealy



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To the memory of Bartolome de las Casas
(1474-1566) who heroically defended
Central Americans from the “benefit” of
aid packages sent by a great power that
could not distinguish between maintaining
its geopolitical hegemony and imposing
its ideology.

Preface

My friends here in Chile have known successively democracy, Marxism, and dictatorship; they also know the ambiguity of United States policy toward all three. In a recent discussion of U.S. foreign relations, conversation moved to an analysis of the American character. Finally the query came down to this: "Since individually U.S. citizens embrace those values, hopes, and promises symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, how is it that together they so often support causes, groups, and classes in Latin America that represent just the opposite?"

It is a good question. Although in a sense every page of this book is relevant to that issue, in a few paragraphs I would like to respond to it directly.

According to the international press, three American presidential candidates have already signaled their affinity for some kind of active intervention in Central America. From this distance their motives, while not clear, have a familiar ring. One notes that the Arias Peace Plan contains leftist ideas; another implies America has a religious duty to assist; and a third believes an invasion "would be welcomed by the people of Nicaragua." What these positions share with that of President Reagan and every former president at least since Eisenhower, is a strong American impulse to help others attain the kind of freedom and the form of government that we have known for 200 years.

This task seems altruistic and pure because when thinking about the Western Hemisphere, individual citizens as well

as their leaders see no credible differences separating strategic priorities, other peoples' desires, and extending the American way of life. In fact, strictly speaking, since WWII the United States has had no foreign policy in Central America and the Caribbean; it has had a cultural policy.

However worthy in conception, "Americanism" leads to its antithesis for at least three reasons. First, because it does not link U. S. actions specifically to either national interest or Latin American realities, self-fulfilling myths must be created to meld together these ubiquitous factors. Since local peculiarities and distinctions south of the border have no standing within this model, dissenting groups and causes are condemned *a priori* as irrational or tools of outside forces. The bright light in New York's harbor is therefore in constant danger of being exchanged for Congressional arms appropriations.

Secondly, Americanism shifts the foreign policy focus to domestic politics, engendering competition among political contenders to convince the electorate that one course is more authentically "made in the U.S.A." than another. Once formulated in this language and forum, get tough rhetoric tied to our traditional ideals makes diplomacy sound weak-kneed and a compromise of principle. For example, President Carter's noble vision of a Latin America where human rights were protected put him on the side of the suffering masses; President Reagan's stress upon democratic rules and procedures inevitably aligns him with the oligarchs. Yet by themselves neither furnishes the basis for a workable agenda. By the end of his term, President Carter was caught between leftist representatives of those deprived masses and a U.S. electorate who wanted human rights but not communism. President Reagan's entire tenure could be characterized as grassroots support for democratic reforms in Central America, but not U.S.-sponsored oppression. As both these men stated their cause in the language of unnegotiable domestic values and historical apotheosis, diplomatic resolution was impossible.

Thirdly, Americanism fosters its opposite because it is inherently an “ethos of intention” unbounded by result. It turns a deaf ear to the truism—insistently taught by the late theologian Reinhold Niebuhr^{*}—that moral cause can readily have immoral consequences. Foreign policy conceived by making carbon copies from a sacrosanct original master plate may be piously implemented, oblivious to possible deleterious effects. For example, few Chileans doubt that U.S. righteous encouragement and assistance to the anti-Allende, anti-Marxist forces, helped fuel murderous vengeance, torture, and general brutality during the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship.

Worse, the endeavor to press our form of government on others inherently impels us to abandon those principles that we set out to disseminate. The reason is evident: Liberal democracy rests upon the priority of local self-determination, a principle that is necessarily violated by every attempt to impose it from above or without.

Promoting human dignity in individual cases always redounds to our credit. But advancing a specific procedural course requires the United States to pass beyond the existential person to enter an alien and complex social-historical milieu where there will be winners and losers: *campesinos* face landowners, workers confront businessmen, the military clash with civilians, and the rich stare down the poor. By intervening to advance one group over another—each of which normally purports to favor democracy—we cease to be innocent advocates of principle and are transformed into a powerful factional participant in a contest whose consequences we cannot direct or foresee.

In short, it is *because* Americans are individually so susceptible to the discourse of principle that their collective contribution tends toward political repression. With moral cause and cloned governance having subsumed all other

* Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1932).

variables, U.S. citizens feel naked and inefficacious before the threat of adversaries espousing different principles and different political forms, especially when these appear to be majoritarian movements. In such situations, local allies are too often found among the enemies of the people.

Foreign policy implies a concept of national goals, hopefully honorable, coupled with diplomatic initiatives to resolve antagonisms and find common ground. I believe if this country would have defined its policies in language devoid of Americanisms, a skillful diplomat like President Reagan's recent Special Envoy to Central America, Philip Habib, probably could have reached accord with the Sandinistas long ago.

Central America's immediate future will be determined by the August 1987 Peace Plan wherein leaders of these five countries dedicated themselves to collective problem solving. Their path is strewn with pitfalls: Dealing with rebelling groups may prove easier than harmonizing their own armed forces and privileged elites who have a mostly negative stake in fundamental reconciliation.

There may be pragmatic reasons for not endorsing this plan. But unfortunately when President Reagan decided to remain outside the discussions—until Nicaraguans have elections and become free—he sent an all too familiar coded message: Neither local self-determination nor negotiated quid pro quo will govern our behavior. Only the Americanization of Central America, their appropriation of our values and procedural mirror image, will be acceptable.

As long as that lodestar dominates U.S. policies, this country is unlikely to pursue a course that advances either Central American peace or North American honor.

Glen Caudill Dealy
Santiago, Chile
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Introduction

Since President James Monroe, there has been domestic consensus that the U.S. geopolitical position mandates exclusion of foreign powers from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, if not from all of Latin America. Our hemispheric policy has traditionally been crafted to achieve this objective.

The theme of these essays is that in recent times the United States has diverged from its customary course. Since 1954, *realpolitique* has become ambiguous and confused: Isolation of ideological regimes is often equated with the actual containment of our world antagonist. Indeed, probably at no time in the history of the Republic have strategic considerations of tangible foreign influence been more neglected or subordinated than under the anti-communist policy initiated by John Foster Dulles in Guatemala, continued most notably in the circumstances leading up to President John F. Kennedy's Bay of Pigs invasion, and persevered in by the Reagan administration's sponsorship of the *Contras*.

In a few words, by trying to destroy or quarantine Marxist/nationalist regimes for being heretical, rather than tolerating them as cases of internal populist realignment, the United States has opened a power vacuum that has literally invited the Russians into the area. The Cuban missile crisis can be characterized fairly as American resolve in the face of the Soviets testing the limits of that vacuum, not as a pragmatic policy of containment built on foresight. The *Contras*,

established without a prayer of victory, ensured the militarization of the Sandinistas with Eastern Block assistance—the antithesis of containing foreign incursion.

In the Stalinist era of the Communist International—before the Russo-Chinese split and subsequent push by Russia's allies for their own cultural and nationalist identity—it may have made sense to fear ideological fellow-travelling as an automatic prelude to military alliance. It is now clear, however, that revolutions since World War II have not been sustained so much by the legitimacy and authority of their leftist doctrines as by their leaders' role in overthrowing imperial, or imperialist-allied, domination. Nationalism has proven to be the hypnotic catalyst.

The threat to U.S. interests in Central America is Russian might, not Marxist ideas. We have little to fear from nationalistic movements, however much to the Left they may be, as long as they do not align with Soviet power. Yet, our ongoing anti-communist policy increases the likelihood of that alliance. This is ironic because in the natural order of things, populist-based governments—including Marxist/nationalist orders—shun all foreigners. Nowhere have such regimes welcomed outsiders unless their territorial integrity was threatened. It is minority movements, like those of the Afghan Marxists or the Nicaraguan Somocistas, that encourage outside intervention in order to secure themselves against their own people.

Strategic interests require almost benign indifference toward those factors—tradition, political culture, ideology—over which U.S. diplomats have little control and the American polity can have little understanding. The Sandinistas, by virtue of their nationalist origins, are inherent antagonists of the United States. But they are also an expedient regime receptive to severing foreign military ties in exchange for their unqualified sovereignty. By accepting this reality, the United States could oust the Russians and eliminate the prevailing vacuum.

In the following essays I have tried to show why the anti-communist premises underlying our attempted subversion of first the Guatemalan Left, then Castro's Cuba, and now the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, do not stand scrutiny as a means for keeping the Russians at bay. Essentially, these assumptions fail because they emerged as countervailing dogmas to the Marxist challenge, rather than from a reasoned analysis of human desires and local political realities.

Our present policy has conjured up a universal man, teleologically driven toward liberal democracy. Capturing the heart and mind of this mythical being makes an ad hominem misreading of the Latin political ambience necessary. Specifically, we assume that Central Americans, as individuals, are longing for a kind of political freedom which the United States can bring; and that, as a whole, they embrace a political tradition similar to ours which only needs to be defended or reestablished in the area.

In denying these premises, the first two essays demonstrate America's lack of a solid prescriptive base for its current policy. Essay One proposes that Central American political culture is unitary, not pluralistic like our own, and therefore provides little foundation for U.S. assistance in building parallel democracies; Essay Two reveals that we have no idea how to satisfy populist demands in the area because our revolution was based upon freedom, while theirs are grounded in necessity. The third essay illustrates how the too facile merging of moralized anti-Marxism with U.S. self-interest, conspicuous in the politician's dread of being tagged as "soft on communism," has blinded our statesmen to geopolitical priorities.

A tough-minded alternative is found in seventeenth century Europe's *realpolitique*, which concluded an equally polarized era. Competing local princes had aligned with rival outside forces in the name of dogmatic truths. But contenders, adopting the slogan *Cuius Regio, Eius Religio* ("Whose the

Region, His the Religion”), eventually learned to coexist without incessantly reducing political and economic diversity to Protestant or Catholic differences and interests.

Political prudence suggests it is time for the United States to place its differences and interests vis-a-vis Central America in an equally pragmatic context. Living in a democratic age charged with nationalistic longings, we might accept the political reality inherent in the slogan, “Whom the Masses Sustain, Theirs the Refrain.”

***Can
Nonpluralist States
Become
Democracies?***

