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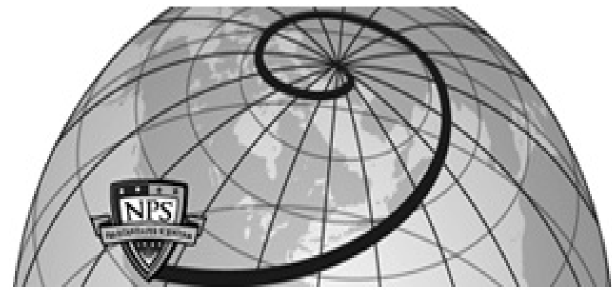

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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

THE FARC AND THE FSLN: A STUDY IN DIVERGENCE IN OUTCOMES OF LATIN AMERICAN MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCIES

by

Stephen Tynes

June 2019

Thesis Advisor: Christopher N. Darnton
Second Reader: S. Paul Kapur

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The factors that fuel the success or failure of insurgencies are an important and debated topic in national security circles. This work examines the cases of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, an insurgency failure, and the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in Nicaragua, an insurgency success, to determine why certain Latin American insurgencies succeed while others fail. Common theories, particularly in Latin America, attribute successful insurgencies to U.S. intervention on behalf of the host nation government, or focus on structural and material factors or regime type. Though these factors play a role, insurgent success in Latin America relies more heavily on the insurgency's ability to cultivate a broad-based coalition of support both externally and domestically, coupled with shrewd political strategy that focuses on pragmatism and compromise. By examining state strategies for dealing with insurgents and best practices for counterinsurgency, the author concludes that efforts focused on alleviating the population's concerns through legitimate societal and political reform, coupled with attempts to undermine the insurgent's critical base of support, are the most efficient strategies for successful counterinsurgency operations.

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THE FARC AND THE FSLN: A STUDY IN DIVERGENCE IN OUTCOMES OF LATIN AMERICAN MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCIES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The factors that fuel the success or failure of insurgencies are an important and debated topic in national security circles. This work examines the cases of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, an insurgency failure, and the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in Nicaragua, an insurgency success, to determine why certain Latin American insurgencies succeed while others fail. Common theories, particularly in Latin America, attribute successful insurgencies to U.S. intervention on behalf of the host nation government, or focus on structural and material factors or regime type. Though these factors play a role, insurgent success in Latin America relies more heavily on the insurgency's ability to cultivate a broad-based coalition of support both externally and domestically, coupled with shrewd political strategy that focuses on pragmatism and compromise. By examining state strategies for dealing with insurgents and best practices for counterinsurgency, the author concludes that efforts focused on alleviating the population's concerns through legitimate societal and political reform, coupled with attempts to undermine the insurgent's critical base of support, are the most efficient strategies for successful counterinsurgency operations.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia [United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia]
COIN	Counterinsurgency
FAO	Frente Amplio Opositor [Broad Opposition Front]
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia]
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front]
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [Sandinista National Liberation Front]
GRN	Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional [Government for National Reconstruction]
SL	Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path]
UP	Unión Patriótica [Patriotic Union]

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANSWER

For militaries across the globe, few issues are more pressing than the need to effectively counter insurgent groups. Whether a military operates in South America, Africa, or Asia, insurgency is an ongoing military issue. Why do insurgencies succeed or fail? There are many competing theories, ranging from large-power intervention to regime type. To better understand this question, this thesis compares and contrasts failed and successful leftist insurgencies in post–Cuban revolution Latin America, examining the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia between 1964 and 1999, and the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, also simply *the Sandinistas*) in Nicaragua between 1961 and 1979.

Why did the FARC fail to overthrow the government of its country, but the Sandinistas were able to succeed? The groups are broadly similar: they are both leftist groups with political origins that rose up and conducted insurgencies due to unpopular governments and policies. The FARC formed in 1964 and the FSLN formed in 1961, both soon after the first elections after a period of military rule in Colombia and Nicaragua.[1] Additionally, both the insurgencies were inspired, at least in part, by Marxist-Leninist ideals. Both groups used guerrilla tactics and they were both opposed by the U.S. at some point. However, the FSLN was most directly opposed by the U.S. with the U.S.-backed Contras, yet Nicaragua was the lone successful revolution, which echoes the Cuban Revolution. I contend that the FSLN's success and the FARC's failure was not due to U.S. involvement, material or structural factors, or even regime type. While these may be important factors in an insurgency's success, I will show that building a broad coalition of support, domestically and internationally, combined with forming a shrewd political strategy of compromise-based pragmatism and exploiting regime political illegitimacy, is the main reason an insurgency succeeds.

[1] Gary Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency* (New York: Zed Books, 2011), 9; John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 54.

The theory for insurgency success that I advocate and test most extensively in this thesis is one that has little, if any, presence in the prevailing literature on Latin American insurgency. I argue that if an insurgent group whose objective is to overthrow the government builds a broad alliance system, internally and internationally, exploits regime illegitimacy, and embraces political compromise, it is most likely to succeed. While this may seem like a truism, the two cases I consider, the FSLN in Nicaragua and the FARC in Colombia, provide support for this theory. The FSLN built perhaps the most diverse coalition of alliances of any twentieth-century Latin American revolution, and embraced the entirety of the political spectrum in its revolution. While the FARC did have an affiliated political arm, the Patriotic Union, and it did gain congressional seats,[2] it was never seen as anything other than an organization "committed to the violent overthrow of the existing system [in Colombia]" by many.[3] While the FSLN had broad support in the country, the FARC's support lay mostly in the peasant class, who many, such as Mao and Theda Skocpol,[4] say are key to an insurgency; yet few analysts would argue that peasants alone can overthrow a legitimate twentieth-century government. While, like the FARC, the FSLN was involved with the drug trade, it was not seen, at least by the Nicaraguan populace, as inextricably linked to the drug trade, as many in Colombia saw the FARC in its later years—to say nothing of the FARC's penchant for kidnapping for ransom and execution.[5] This destroyed the FARC's ability to build alliances, or convince any partner of its viability as a politically legitimate alternative to the Colombian government. I show that the FSLN's decision to embrace all sectors of society, particularly businesses and other economic elites, as well as to compromise on political ideology and maintain a relationship even with an adversary such as the United States, was the reason for its success. Had the

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[2] James J. Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 208.

[3] Brittain, 209.

[4] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[5] "Manuel Marulanda: Commander of the FARC Guerrilla Army during Four Decades of Insurgency against the Colombian State," *Independent*, May 26, 2008, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/anuel-marulanda-commander-of-the-farc-guerrilla-army-during-four-decades-of-insurgency-against-the-834337.html.

FARC made even a cursory effort to build national and international alliances or to compromise on economic and social issues, it likely would have observed a far different outcome in its decades-long rebellion.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Whether the conflicts are labeled as insurgencies, rebellions, or revolutions, and its fighters are called insurgents, freedom fighters, revolutionaries, rebels, or terrorists, it is imperative for the United States in the twenty-first century to understand such groups. Defeating terrorists and transnational militant groups has been a priority for the United States since at least 2001 after the terrorist attack on 9/11; the latest National Security Strategy released in December 2017 highlighted defeating jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organizations as one of the largest strategic imperatives of the United States.[6] In addition to satisfying a key national political imperative in fighting insurgency, Latin America has historically been a major foreign policy focus of the United States, from the domestic importance of the Monroe Doctrine to the repeated active interventions in state affairs in the region. Future President Kennedy in 1960 called Latin America "the most critical area in the world,"[7] showing how important it is to the United States to maintain a favorable state of affairs in the region.

While it is doubtful that Latin America shares similar prominence in the Donald Trump administration, it is still a vitally important region to the United States, both in the hemisphere and on the world stage. Additionally, when Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis visited Latin America in 2018, the White House proclaimed 2018 as the "Year of the Americas,"[8] and the Department of Defense stated that its relationship with Latin America is "critical to a collaborative, prosperous and secure Western hemisphere."[9] Mattis's visit

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[6] President of the United States, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf.

[7] Hubert H. Humphrey, "U.S. Policy in Latin America," *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 4 (July 1964), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-america/1964-07-01/us-policy-latin-america.

[8] "Secretary Mattis Travels to South America," Department of Defense, August 9, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1598303/secretary-mattis-travels-to-south-america/.

[9] "Secretary Mattis Travels to South America."

followed similar visits by high-level U.S. officials, such as Vice President Mike Pence, and the deployment of USNS *Comfort* off the coast of Colombia to aid Venezuelan refugees in Colombia.[10] Of note, the state of Venezuela continues to deteriorate, and the Trump administration has not ruled out military action. If the United States ever did intervene militarily in Venezuela, it would potentially face a protracted insurgency after the overthrow of Nicolás Maduro, highlighting the necessity to understand Latin American insurgencies.

Latin American insurgent groups are also still important today because of the prevalence of leftist insurgent movements in the region during the twentieth century, and because Middle Eastern groups, which bear the brunt of U.S. focus in 2019, could possibly operate in or influence Latin American groups in the future.[11] Christopher Darnton likens the struggle against Latin American insurgents to the current Global War on Terror being waged primarily in the Middle East, stating, "As in Cold War Latin America, regional rivalries are undermining contemporary coalition-building efforts against the common threat of terrorism and insurgency in the Islamic world."[12] This highlights the ability to glean important lessons for defeating current transnational jihadist organizations by studying their antecedents in Latin America. The FARC has been formally designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States,[13] and President Reagan's administration actively sought to overthrow the FSLN-led government of Nicaragua in the 1980s and labeled the FSLN "terrorists."[14] Additionally, countering these groups has

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[10] "US to Send Hospital Ship to Colombia amid Refugee Crisis," Fox News, last modified August 17, 2018, http://www.foxnews.com/us/2018/08/17/us-to-send-hospital-ship-to-colombia-amid-refugee-crisis.html.

[11] Alexander Main, "Latin America and the Middle East: A Threatening Alliance?" *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2010, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/03/latin-america-and-the-middle-east-a-threatening-alliance/; Colin P. Clarke, "Hezbollah is in Venezuela to Stay," RAND, last modified February 9, 2019, https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/02/hezbollah-is-in-venezuela-to-stay.html.

[12] Christopher Darnton, *Rivalry and Alliance Politics in Cold War Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 190.

[13] "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Department of State, accessed April 17, 2019, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm.

[14] John B. Oakes, "Reagan Keeps Gearing Up to Overthrow the Sandinistas," *New York Times*, August 5, 1985, https://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/05/opinion/reagan-keeps-gearing-up-to-overthrow-the-sandinistas.html.

historically been a major focus of the United States, with various U.S. efforts—from the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, to funding the Contras in Nicaragua, to the ambitious aid of Plan Colombia. In addition to the local instability these groups cause, there is also the criminal element to consider; the FARC was extensively involved in the drug trade in the region and was known to partner with cartels.[15] Daniel Ortega of the FSLN, in addition to receiving training from Castro in Cuba, received arms support from Cuba.[16] Finally, according to an exhaustive study by Astrid Martinez, the FSLN was directly funded by Colombian drug money.[17]

Perhaps more importantly, little has been written on what fuels the success or failures of such groups. I explain the causal factors that led to the success of the FSLN in Nicaragua and offer suggestions as to how governments in the future can prevent similar uprisings from succeeding. Conversely, what led to the failure to overthrow the government in Colombia? What did the host government do correctly, and what did the insurgents do incorrectly to facilitate defeat? Did U.S. involvement in the insurgencies hinder or help the governments of the host country? Finally, what lessons can governments in Latin America learn in combatting insurgent groups?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers the main theories, of which there are many, that explain why insurgencies succeed or fail in Latin America. The dominant school of thought is that U.S. intervention is almost always a critical, if not deciding, factor in the insurgency's success or failure. There is a gap in the literature dedicated solely to coalition building as well as a coherent and pragmatic political strategy being a key driver of success. In the case of Nicaragua, most analysts covering the case of dictator Anastasio Somoza DeBayle's overthrow attribute the overthrow to the dictatorial cruelty of the regime; little

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[15] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, 89–114.

[16] William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 24–25.

[17] Astrid Legarda Martinez, *El Verdadero Pablo: Sangre, Traicion y Muerte [The True Pablo: Blood, Treason and Death]* (Bogotá: Dipon, 2005).

attention is paid to the broad-based coalition the FSLN, and how the group avoided many political pitfalls that other groups, such as the FARC, failed to avoid.

There is no shortage of theories about why revolutions succeed or fail, specifically in Latin America. Some analysts believe success or failure is due to out-of-touch elites, some believe it is due to the presence of a personalistic dictator, some believe it is due to U.S. involvement, some believe it is due to cultural diffusion, and some believe it is due to asymmetry of tactics. One main theory in literature on Latin American insurgencies focuses on a ruling elite who has become out of touch with the common people. Cole Blasier in 1967 sums up the theory nicely: insurgencies arise from "the growing gap between the vast majority of the population and a small, ruling elite."[18] He goes on to explain that "the old regimes, having forfeited a claim to legitimacy, were rooted in a setting of corruption and social injustice…. The revolutionaries won not because of their own virtues but because of the old elite's vices."[19] Blasier does not place much importance on economic concerns, insightfully highlighting that if the economy were the arbiter of revolution then every Latin American country would have experienced a revolution. Yet his analysis is perhaps weakened by ignoring that the elites and general population are wildly out of touch in many countries, and indeed certainly were in Colombia where revolutionary efforts by the FARC failed. Blasier's focus is on "the hearts of men" and how the injustices of the regime sustained a lasting and successful revolution.[20] While this inequality and corruption no doubt fueled the revolutions, there is a large gap to bridge between a corrupt regime and a successful revolution, which Blasier does not address. Additionally, he does not anticipate brutal regimes, such as Somoza's in Nicaragua, which would foment successful revolution in a similar situation.

Another theory on why Latin American insurgencies fail or succeed is rooted in the presence of a personalistic dictator, who catalyzes the insurgency and sustains it during the difficult fight to overthrow the government. Robert Dix goes into great depth on this theory

[18] Cole Blasier, "Studies of Social Revolution: Origins in Mexico, Bolivia, and Cuba," *Latin American Research Review* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 49.

[19] Blasier, 50, 51.

[20] Blasier, 50.

and highlights the fact that Latin American countries share many characteristics, such as the reality of a dominant United States to the North and "a common Iberian cultural and historical tradition."[21] Dix importantly recognizes that all revolutionary movements, whether successful or not, share many common themes as well, such as being made up of largely "urban youth," mixing Marxism and nationalism in their ideologies, utilizing the "foco" strategy (or their interpretation of it) in attempting to overthrow the government, and putting belief in the primacy of the fighting arm over the political arm of the movement.[22] Dix immediately discounts socioeconomic considerations in whether a Latin American revolution succeeded or failed, stating, "Examination of comparative levels of economic and social development … seem not to get us very far."[23] Dix provides concrete economic and development numbers, such as growth rate, employment numbers, literacy rates, and other figures to show that in countries with successful revolutions, the political and social state of affairs were sometimes seemingly paradoxically better than those in countries that had failed revolutions. Conversely, in some countries with failed revolutions the political and social state of affairs were far worse than those in Cuba or Nicaragua. Dix instead believes that political reasons are more influential than socioeconomic ones, adopting Charles Tilly's claim that "the factors which hold up under close scrutiny are, on the whole, political ones."[24] The dominant factor differentiating successful and failed revolutions, according to Dix, "has been political, involving the willingness and ability of the revolutionaries to construct wide-ranging alliances or coalitions of opponents of the government."[25] On the surface this indeed seems logical, especially since the FSLN in Nicaragua enjoyed a robust relationship with Cuba and united the disparate elements in Nicaragua successfully, while the FARC was one of several competing revolutionary groups in Colombia and had little, if any, external support. Others who advocate this theory

[21] Robert H. Dix, "Why Revolutions Succeed and Fail," *Polity* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1984): 425, https://doi.org/10.2307/3234558.

[22] Dix, 425.

[23] Dix, 427.

[24] Dix, 432.

[25] Dix, 432.

are Jeff Goodwin[26] and Timothy Wickham-Crowley,[27] who blame the corrupt dictator Somoza and the patrimonial praetorian regime for the successful revolution.

Another element that is necessary to a successful insurgency is the insurgent group's ability to mobilize the masses, something that many—such as Mao Zedong in his writings on insurgency and David Galula, the French counterinsurgency (COIN) officer—say is key to success.[28] Dix illustrates that the Fidelistas and Sandinistas were both able to mobilize the masses, while groups in the other Latin American countries were not. Dix contrasts the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions with others, such as the Chinese and Russian revolutions, stating that peasants were a part of the revolution but their support was neither "massive" nor "widespread."[29] What was critical to success was "rather in their capacity to promote defections from the incumbent regime and to generate support beyond their 'natural' constituency,"[30] which included the urban middle class as well as various societal elites. The establishment, according to Dix, came to support the revolutions in these countries, or at least stopped supporting the existing government. In Nicaragua, the FSLN "received aid from several … neighbors, while the United States equivocated in its backing of Somoza."[31] Dix then necessarily draws attention to the fact that while the insurgency achieved the support of the masses, the question of how this happened is unanswered. He claims it was the presence of dictators that spurred the country into motion, a questionable assertion since numerous Latin American dictators, such as Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the military dictatorship in Brazil, were not overthrown by a popular revolution. Dix sums up his findings by stating that "revolutions are only likely to succeed

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[26] Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[27] Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[28] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 4; Mao Zedong, *On Guerilla Warfare*, 3. Nearly all authors on Latin American insurgencies, such as Wickham-Crowley, LeoGrande, McClintock, Goodwin, Pastor, Booth, and others, also agree that winning over a significant portion of the general population is key to success.

[29] Dix, "Why Revolutions Succeed and Fail," 433.

[30] Dix, 434.

[31] Dix, 435.

where sufficient regime narrowing takes place to push otherwise non-radical elements of society into a loose negative coalition with a core of revolutionary militants."[32] He goes on to state that the essential catalyst to successful revolution is "a personalistic dictator," that "an incumbent regime that is isolative, corrupt, and repressive appears to be the critical variable," and that the urban middle class, not peasants, is the truly important class to court for revolution.[33] The fact that Colombia did not stage a successful revolution under General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla makes this particularly unlikely, though Dix would likely argue that this dictator was not personalistic enough to merit a successful revolt. Additionally, it is highly debatable whether or not the middle class was the most important class in the Nicaraguan Revolution; a stronger case can perhaps be made that elites and businessmen were the class which propelled the FSLN to victory. This highlights a key literature gap, which I fill with my writing: rather than attribute FSLN coalition building simply to the depravity of the Somoza regime, it was the FSLN's political pragmatism and compromise which facilitated these alliances.

Another theory put forward by one of the experts on Latin American insurgency, Timothy Wickham-Crowley, is that of cultural diffusion. This theory states that other significant events in neighboring countries, specifically the revolution in Cuba, spread through to other Latin American countries. Wickham-Crowley argues "that the concept of the 'cultural diffusion of tactical repertoires,' and also the related and recent scholarship concerning 'waves of change,' will enable us better to understand the dynamics by which four successive eras of varying revolutionary activism characterized Latin America."[34] This theory once again discounts "structural features of polity, economy, or society" as the causal factors of revolution, along with the political structures of a given country.[35] How well an insurgency is able to adopt the tactics of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara could

[32] Dix, 443.

[33] Dix, 443–44.

[34] Timothy Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves' of Guerrilla-Movement Organizing in Latin America, 1956–1990," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 1 (January 2014): 216, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417513000674.

[35] Wickham-Crowley, 216.

potentially have a positive correlation with the success of an insurgency. While this cultural diffusion was highly impactful on Latin American insurgencies in the 1960s, Wickham-Crowley points out that "The death of Che Guevara did indeed end the appeal and soon the reality of 1960s guerrilla insurgencies in Latin America."[36] Yet according to Wickham-Crowley, this theory "mostly fails us if we wish better to grasp the near-explosive growth of 'new' insurgencies after 1970 in Nicaragua … and also the persistence and expansion of the Colombian insurgenc[y]."[37] While the level of Cuban involvement in Nicaragua is debated, the fact that Castro personally mentored FSLN leaders pre- and post-overthrow is not.

Another theory is that insurgencies that attempt a quick overthrow of the government are doomed to fail. Wickham-Crowley points to the second wave of Latin American insurgencies between 1970–1990 that adhered to this strategy to illustrate this argument. He maintains that "it is no coincidence that those guerrilla insurgencies initiated or surviving after 1970 had not tried to 'light a fire' quickly and in the style of foquismo, but rather were demonstrating extreme patience and long-term, sub-rosa preparation for the coming storm."[38] While not wholly discounting cultural diffusion, Cuba's success was, in essence, a stand-alone success; for other insurgencies in Latin America to succeed they must engage in a protracted battle, moving slowly. Nicaragua certainly challenges this assumption. Also, contrary to conventional knowledge, Wickham-Crowley states that the guerrilla tactics did not "die" after 1970, and they were in fact used to varying success in both Nicaragua and Colombia. Additionally, Wickham-Crowley concludes that two political actions can end an insurgency in most second-wave instances: "the installation or deepening of democratic electoral systems, and the systematic military suppression of insurgents' capabilities."[39] This leads to a natural conclusion that should a revolutionary insurgency wish to succeed, it needs to either successfully integrate into the country's political system, overthrow the system, or win militarily. The FSLN did succeed in

[36] Wickham-Crowley, 223.

[37] Wickham-Crowley, 228.

[38] Wickham-Crowley, 229.

[39] Wickham-Crowley, 233.

deposing the dictator Somoza, but the group had been building popular support and crafting a post-Somoza strategy for nearly two decades; the FARC largely failed to integrate in a significant way to Colombia's political system, despite its best efforts in the 1980s, or to win any major military victories. Yet the FSLN was not viewed as a serious threat to the Somoza regime until approximately 1978. And when Somoza fled in exile, the series of events in 1979 that led to this were certainly rapid in nature.

D. OTHER POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The literature review touched on several theories as to why revolution succeeds or fails. One key theory, advanced by Dix, and others, is that if there is involvement on behalf of the host government counterinsurgency effort by the United States, then, all other things being equal, this will prevent an otherwise successful revolution from occurring.[40] If this were correct, no Latin American insurgency would have ever succeeded. Touching on the failed revolution in El Salvador, Matthew Soberg Shugart states, "The revolutionaries will almost surely be unable to force the United States to withdraw its support [for the government], a necessary condition for successful revolution in El Salvador."[41] Speaking of Nicaragua, Shugart states: "In Nicaragua it was some time after the middle class had gone into insurrectionary opposition to the Somoza regime that the United States withdrew its support."[42] In highlighting this key fact in Nicaragua, this theory is weakened considerably. Shugart, perhaps quite presciently, points to the middle class being a key catalyst to successful revolution in Nicaragua, but also allows that the United States, to that point, had supported the Somoza regime. If U.S. support is a panacea for all the ills of revolution, why had this support not precluded revolution to that point? However, others, such as former UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, argue that it was the very withdrawal of U.S. support that led to the downfall of Somoza. Indeed, in Colombia, the U.S. government

[40] For what is perhaps the most explicit and best summation of the criticality of U.S. assistance in suppressing revolution, see Matthew Soberg Shugart, "Patterns of Revolution," *Theory & Society* 18, no. 2 (March 1989): 249–71; others, such as William LeoGrande, believe U.S. involvement was instrumental in the fate of the FSLN in Nicaragua.

[41] Shugart, 261.

[42] Shugart, 271.

supported the Colombian government, even contributing forces as early as the battle of Marquetalia in 1964.[43] This served only to embolden the nascent insurgency and provided the proving grounds for the FARC's Manuel Marulanda to hone his guerrilla craft.[44] The United States went on to support anti-Sandinista Contras quite heavily in the 1980s, almost prematurely ending the Reagan presidency,[45] but doing nothing to remove Ortega from power in Nicaragua. While it is likely U.S. support played a major role in bringing the FARC to the negotiating table in the 2010s, there remains heavy skepticism as to just how successful Plan Colombia actually was, with Jonathan D. Rosen labeling the entire endeavor as "the losing war."[46] If this theory were correct it could potentially explain the FARC's defeat in Colombia, but certainly does not explain how the FSLN was able to amass power despite heavy U.S. support for Somoza, nor the fact that the United States was unable to unseat the newly formed FSLN administration in the 1980s. I conclude that U.S. support was important, and indeed helpful for Colombia in defeating the FARC insurgency, but not as important as other factors such as the FARC's inability to garner internal or international support or the group's refusal to compromise on secondary principles or objectives, unlike the FSLN.

Another possible explanation for insurgent victory advocated for by Ivan Arreguin-Toft is that when a weaker power fights a stronger power, the weaker power has the best chance of victory if it adopts an asymmetric strategic approach to that of the stronger power.[47] He points out that from 1950 to 1999, the stronger actor won less than half the time—only in 48.8 percent of all cases.[48] He argues that, "although relative power matters, the interaction of the strategies actors use matters more than how much power they have at

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[43] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, 12.

[44] Brittain, 12.

[45] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 5.

[46] Jonathan D. Rosen, *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).

[47] Ivan M. Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[48] Arreguin-Toft, 4.

the start of their conflict."[49] His argument is sound on its face: it is almost inarguably foolhardy for a far weaker power to engage a far stronger power head-on, and doing so will almost assuredly result in failure. This is akin to the boxing strategy adopted by Muhammad Ali; Ali would wear out stronger opponents such as Foreman or Frazier by "floating like a butterfly" rather than attempting to outpunch them head-on. Arreguin-Toft goes on to say that "the interaction of the strategies actors use during a conflict predicts the outcome of that conflict better than competing explanations."[50] There are problems with this hypothesis. First, while Arreguin-Toft is not absolutist in touting his explanation for the sharp decline in stronger-power victories in the second half of the twentieth century, his theory certainly does not explain Latin America. As Wickham-Crowley states in reference to Latin American insurgencies, the "sweeping shift in their revolutionary strategies [to guerrilla warfare] constituted a 'revolution in the revolution.'"[51] These guerrilla tactics were certainly a marked shift in strategic approach to the host governments in each country, yet the clear majority of insurgencies failed in Latin America. Asymmetric tactics dominated guerrilla warfare in Latin America post-Cuban Revolution, yet only Nicaragua succeeded in the sixty years since. Finally, the utility of Arreguin-Toft's analysis in judging the success or failure of an insurgency is called into question by his characterization of the U.S. war in Afghanistan as a U.S. victory, a characterization with which Afghanistan experts such as Thomas H. Johnson and many other prominent scholars and analysts would vehemently disagree. With thousands of troops still in Afghanistan in 2019, U.S. military presence is still required eighteen years after the start of the war, and the Taliban has regrouped and remains a dominant force in the country. Even ignoring his questionable coding of Afghanistan as a U.S. victory, going by Arreguin-Toft's theory alone, the FARC should have succeeded in overthrowing the government, which it did not.

I also heavily examined the theory that regime type determines success or failure, particularly in the case of Nicaragua, best argued by Goodwin in *No Other Way Out* and

[49] Arreguin-Toft, 6.

[50] Arreguin-Toft, 18.

[51] Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves,'" 4.

Wickham-Crowley in *Guerrillas and Revolutions*. However, I simply find this theory too simplistic; Somozas ruled Nicaragua inhumanely for decades with little to no resistance. What explains the rise of the FSLN in the late 1970s? Somoza was not ruling any more humanely. There had certainly been past protests in Nicaragua, but whichever Somoza ruled at the time merely suppressed them with extreme violence. While the regime type certainly allowed the FSLN to exploit Somoza's political illegitimacy, if this theory were true Nicaragua would have likely been host to revolution far sooner. Additionally, personalistic dictators, such as the Kim dynasty in Korea, have ruled for half a century; if regime type were the main indicator of insurgent success, then why has the government of Korea not faced a similar revolution?

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research has been a complex undertaking; most existing studies examine an insurgent group individually, or only compare one group to another in a highly controlled situation. The case studies of the FSLN and the FARC in Colombia were carefully chosen for their similarities as well as divergent outcomes. Many readers may find the FSLN a curious inclusion; the regime was so oppressive that perhaps any organized opposition may have toppled it regardless of its support or political decisions. I illustrate conclusively that this is not true; additionally, the Nicaraguan Revolution was also the only successful Latin American revolution in the last sixty years. I also considered other such case studies, such as the FMLN in El Salvador, but ultimately discarded them due to their similarity to the FSLN and the fact that the goals of the FMLN were ultimately met in 1992. The Shining Path in Peru was also considered as another case to contrast to the success of the FSLN, but ultimately time constraints and redundancy, particularly with the FARC case study, precluded its inclusion in this paper.

To best demonstrate my arguments and display my findings, I used a wide variety of sources to provide theoretical and factual background. An assortment of books written by people who have spent time embedded with the groups in question, such as James J. Brittain with the FARC, to actual insurgents themselves, such as Daniel Ortega's writings in *Sandinistas Speak* and FARC leader Marulanda's writings in *FARC-EP: Historical*

Outline, have informed my findings. It is important to note bias in these writings, namely implicit bias in the case of authors such as Brittain and George Black, who at times advocate for the group they are covering, and outright mendacity of insurgent writings exemplified by both the FARC and FSLN claiming to have zero involvement with the drug trade. Scholarly journals, such as *Latin America Research Review*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Polity*, and others were a key avenue to better understanding these revolutions, with a preference for the writings of Latin Americanists and native speakers if possible. Newspapers were also consulted, with a particular focus on ProQuest and the *New York Times* to provide a window into the thoughts of the United States and, if possible, the host country at the time. While there have been numerous studies on the FSLN and the FARC done individually, or compared to other revolutions such as the Cuban Revolution, no literature exists that directly compares these two cases exclusively, and drawing results from these specific cases alone was a novel effort. Additionally, little to no specific policy recommendations or potential COIN recommendations exist in Latin American literature on these two groups, and I provide a rudimentary contribution in that regard with policy recommendations for future COIN commanders in Latin America.

F. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter II focuses on the FARC, and Chapter III focuses on the FSLN. For each group, a brief introduction and history is provided, including the group's leadership, ideology, objectives, tactics, and organization. After a brief examination of both insurgencies, I describe the level of U.S. involvement and how it impacted the insurgent group. Next, I explain why the FARC failed and the FSLN succeeded, distilling the reason down to two dominant factors while understanding that few, if any, events in history are monocausal in nature. I examine the FARC's involvement in the drug trade in Colombia as well oppressive tactics of the Somoza regime as key contributors to the failure or success in each country. Finally, in Chapter IV I present my conclusions, provide lessons learned from each of the insurgencies and COIN efforts by the host nations, conduct a brief external validity examination, and discuss areas in which a government did something that was efficient and effective. I have also provided new policy recommendations for U.S. and

foreign COIN personnel alike and have given a starting point for any future consideration of insurgent efforts in the Latin American region.

II. THE FARC AND HOW AN INSURGENCY FAILS

This chapter examines the FARC and the politics of Colombia in great detail. It is vital to note, primarily in the 1990s, that the FARC was not able to take advantage of a favorable political climate and that it allowed the government to shift what had been a largely favorable public narrative about the group. This was, of course, exacerbated by the FARC's involvement in the drug trade and its embrace of terrorist tactics. Throughout the course of the FARC insurgency, the FARC failed to make critical allies or exploit the, real or perceived, illegitimacy of the Colombian government. While perhaps the situation in Colombia was not as dire as it was in Nicaragua under the repressive Somoza, the FARC had ample unseized opportunities to build a coalition and gain international support. This chapter also examines U.S. support for the government of Colombia, and its impact on the insurgency, at great length; while this factor was important, it was not one of the main factors that influenced the FARC's defeat.

A. FARC AND COLOMBIA POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The FARC was a communist-inspired insurgency formally created in the 1960s as a direct result of the earlier *La Violencia* and the resulting political and human rights abuses in Colombia.[52] Quoting former Deputy Chief of Mission in Colombia Robert W. Drexler, author Gary Leech argues via Drexler that the U.S. foreign policy of containing communism in Latin America was a direct result of *Bogotazo*, the popular uprising in Colombia which resulted from the assassination of liberal politician Jorge Gaitan.[53] During the ensuing violence the military seized power in a coup under General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla; his violent rule sought to end *La Violencia* but ended up targeting "demobilized Liberal guerrillas" and "communist peasants" in a bloody reign that brought about the National Front agreement in Colombia.[54] The National Front sought to ameliorate the frayed political and societal fabric of Colombia in a power-sharing agreement, with

[52] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 1–12.

[53] Leech, *The FARC*, 8.

[54] Leech, 10.

Liberals and Conservatives agreeing to transfer power back and forth after a four-year term for an individual party. Leech, Brittain, and many other analysts and historians argue that this did little to repair the damaged country, and did not address the root of the issue, the social and political inequality in Colombia. What followed in 1964 in *Operation Marquetalia* was undoubtedly the key spark to galvanize Marulanda to formally organize the FARC. Backed by one-third of the entire Colombian Army and U.S. advisors, as well as 17 million U.S. dollars, Brittain calls *Marquetalia* "the most aggressive military campaign in Colombia's modern history" and "a defining moment in Colombian history."[55] Brittain goes on to say that "Marquetalia became the turning point in Colombia's revolutionary struggle."[56] Prior to the campaign Marquetalia had housed significant pockets of peaceful resistance to the Colombian government, primarily communists and other leftists who sought to enact change in the government without violence. This all changed after the attack on Marquetalia. Though official death totals for the battle are not available, it became a key rallying cry for the insurgents to point out that, though heavily outmanned and out-armed, they successfully evacuated the civilian population of Marquetalia, that key leaders such as Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas survived, and that this crystalized the idea in FARC leader Marulanda that "no other avenue but armed struggle" was available to the people of Colombia to achieve the desired social change.[57] Additionally, the U.S.-backed hostilities in Marquetalia highlighted the decades of heavy-handed violence the government of Colombia used to repress legitimate grievances of the general population, and foreshadowed what would become a decades-long violent civil war in Colombia between the FARC and the government.

In the individually unattributed work containing a self-documented history of the FARC, *FARC-EP: Historical Outline*, published in 1999, the FARC insurgents highlight the self-proclaimed victory in Marquetalia as the "seed" of the origin of the FARC.[58] The FARC authors go on to state, "[Marquetalia] became a war of 34 years to date, and those

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[55] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 12.

[56] Brittain, 13.

[57] Brittain, 14.

[58] FARC-EP, *FARC-EP: Historical Outline* (Bogotá: International Commission, 1999), 18.

48 [FARC guerrillas] are now more than 60 guerrilla fronts group in seven blocks of fronts present throughout the country."[59] The FARC directly attributes these attacks to the U.S. government and the Pentagon, believing the government of Colombia was under heavy influence from Washington to eradicate the communist rebels in Colombia. Regardless of the veracity of this statement, the FARC-written outline of its history serves as an invaluable insight to the—initial, at least—raison d'être for the FARC: to combat what the FARC viewed as an anti-democratic Colombian government—only members of the Liberal or Conservative party could lead the country, and political participation by the rural population was severely limited due to lack of access—and achieve a communist revolution for the people of Colombia. A Marxist, armed insurgency would be the primary means of achieving these goals. Yet even in its initial stages, the FARC's strategy revealed a critical flaw, one that possibly prevented its leftist revolution from ever gathering the support necessary to succeed in the country in Latin America that was arguably most susceptible to such a revolution: a lack of a clearly communicated or defined plan for a post-Liberal and post-Conservative Colombia. Without such a plan, the FARC was unable to build critical alliances and coalitions. Wickham-Crowley identifies Colombia as having "the persistence of 'old style' closed polities … which tended to push more of the populace into the wing of the armed opposition."[60] The Colombian style, and perhaps more importantly the functions of its government, almost certainly aided the FARC's recruitment. Yet aside from underserved rural areas, the FARC was largely unsuccessful in capturing territory or enacting larger social change. The reason the FARC was unable to capitalize on this is an important piece of the puzzle in understanding why the FARC insurgency failed where the FSLN insurgency succeeded.

In examining the political and military survival of the FARC, Wickham-Crowley gives an in-depth opinion as to why the insurgency survived for decades, stating:

> Yet two basic flaws of Colombia's nominally democratic system remained into the new century, and persuasively explain why that nation has been least successful of all in eradicating its long-term insurgency. The military

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59 FARC-EP, 18.

60 Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves,'" 232.

> often seemed to pursue its own policies vis-à-vis counterinsurgency, without clear control by the executive branch. The judicial system, for its part, has shown itself incapable of trying, convicting, and punishing those responsible for a long series of violent, often lethal attacks on members of the left, many of them ex-guerrillas, who have tried to re-enter the normal routines of a democratic system, especially party-formation and electoral competition. Such was the fate of many members of the Unión Patriótica, [the FARC's political arm], formed by ex-guerrillas under a Betancur amnesty program of the later 1980.[61]

There are many important themes and ideas to unpack from those words. First, remembering the words of Goodwin and Skocpol is important: "The ballot box may not always be the 'coffin of class consciousness' … but it has certainly proven to be the coffin of revolutionary movements."[62] By critiquing the government of Colombia as only "nominally" democratic, Wickham-Crowley signals that one of the two key items necessary to successfully deter the FARC insurgents is a fully functioning democracy. Even allowing for the fact that the United States supported the government of Colombia as early as the 1960s in its battle against insurgents, few if any analysts, U.S. or otherwise, would argue that Colombia operated as a Schmitter and Karl-esque democracy until at least the turn of the twenty-first century. Wickham-Crowley is heavily interested in the type of government, and largely discounts U.S. support of the host regime,[63] influencing the outcome of a revolution, which I address in greater depth later. Wickham-Crowley zeroes in on two factors in Colombia as a result of its weak democracy: poor—or nonexistent—civil-military relations, and a weak and powerless judiciary. While Colombia never descended into a "patrimonial praetorian" regime, it certainly was never too many steps from mutating into one, especially during the depths of *La Violencia*. Colombia also lacked a personalistic dictator, yet democracy was all but an illusion under the National Front.

So why did the FARC fail? According to Rosen, "The FARC recognized that it was not [militarily or politically] strong enough to overthrow the Colombian government and

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[61] Wickham-Crowley, 235.

[62] Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol, "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World," *Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1989): 495.

[63] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 323.

implement a Marxist revolution."[64] Additionally, while Marulanda was recognized as a brilliant military mind and a superb soldier—hence the nickname *Tiro Fijo* (Sureshot)—he was never able to translate his "independent republics"[65] in rural Colombia to Bogotá. Indeed, Leech states that the FARC "was operating as a de facto government for rural communities across vast stretches of countryside where the state had never established a presence."[66] This statement is likely overly charitable, as the FARC did not provide a large number of the services a regular government provides, most notably any semblance of real security. Additionally, the FARC perhaps made more enemies than allies in this endeavor, as its heavy-handed tactics invoked the ire of the traffickers as well as the paramilitaries, to say nothing of the government and the people. Brittain goes on to detail another failure of vision in Marulanda, citing that "Marulanda acknowledged that the FARC-EP was not the sole route to create a socialist Colombia, and emphasized a need for the Party."[67] He recognized perhaps too late, as Mao believed, that the political is primary; military victory is difficult if not impossible to translate into social revolution, especially without allies.

B. FARC TACTICS AND THE DRUG TRADE

The FARC's significant integration into the drug trade was perhaps the singularly most harmful decision and a major detriment to its coalition building. The FARC's tactics, both militarily and politically, changed drastically between its inception in 1964 and its peak membership in the 1990s; the drug trade integration did not occur until later, primarily in the '90s. The FARC evolved from hit-and-run tactics[68] to full-scale assaults on Colombian military bases starting in the 1990s, highlighting an increased sophistication in organization and tactics.[69] Yet very early on the FARC employed a key tactic that enabled

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[64] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 17.

[65] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 11.

[66] Leech, *The FARC*, 25.

[67] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 42.

[68] Jon-Paul N. Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC in Colombia: Breaking the Frame of FM 3-24" (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2009), 13.

[69] Pamela Mercer, "Rebels Kill 80 in Strongest Attacks in Colombia in Decades," *New York Times*, September 2, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/02/world/rebels-kill-80-in-strongest-attacks-in-colombia-in-decades.html.

both its survival and longevity: "[Local township infiltration] allowed the guerillas to gain influence and control of small villages and towns to further expand their logistical base."[70] The FARC also advanced its tactics politically, moving from local organization to formation of an ill-fated political arm, the Patriotic Union (UP). However, two key decisions shaped FARC's tactics—the decision to abandon political aims for a predominantly military strategy, and the FARC's embrace of the drug trade in Colombia. The decision to abandon the political for the military was likely predicated on three factors: the assassination of UP members, the disenfranchisement of the same by Colombian politicians, and the death of Arenas in 1990. Arenas, the ideological and political leader of the FARC,[71] also heavily promoted culture, which he described as "the common bond that will continue to unite the Colombian people after the guns of revolution fall silent."[72] Arenas was the driving factor behind the organization of the FARC into decentralized fronts, as well as much of its military-like rank and file organization. Leech writes that Arenas died "fully aware that his political project, [the UP], was in its own death throes."[73] Had Arenas not died it is possible that the FARC would have taken a very different tack in its decision to fully embrace the drug trade and become an almost fully military organization until the peace agreement of 2016 gave the FARC legitimacy as a political party.

A strong argument can be made that it was the aggressive reaction of the Colombian government that laid the FARC's political ambitions to rest and gave rise to more violent aims and tactics. Law 48 passed in 1968, allowing the military to "organize and arm civilian 'self-defense' units."[74] This gave rise to the violent paramilitary groups in Colombia, such as the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) and other similar groups. These groups were used very rarely until the 1980s, with heavy use occurring under Colombian President Virgilo Barco Vargas, who largely abandoned the peace talks that occurred under Belisario

[70] Maddaloni, "Analysis of the FARC," 10.

[71] Leech, *The FARC*, 14.

[72] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 200.

[73] Leech, *The FARC*, 32.

[74] Leech, 29.

Betancur.[75] Leech details numerous assassinations of UP members: its presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal in 1987, three of sixteen victorious mayoral candidates in 1988, and several hundred other members a year.[76] While debating whether to leave its association with the FARC behind in attempt to stem the attacks from paramilitaries and the Colombian military, the UP remained FARC-aligned. Leech goes on to detail a gruesome assassination in 1990 of UP leader Bernardo Jaramillo. Jaramillo, who predicted his own death at the hands of the paramilitaries, was murdered while campaigning in a Bogotá airport in 1990.[77] According to Leech, a political genocide was occurring for the UP when "two presidential candidates, four elected congressmen and more than two thousands members of the UP were assassinated [in the 1980s]."[78] Decades later, the Colombian inspector general would assign blame to Alberto Romero, head of Colombia's intelligence community, and paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño for the Jaramillo's death.[79] Coinciding with this rise in political violence and abandonment of the FARC's political ideals via the UP was the FARC's embrace of the drug trade and tactics almost always associated with terrorist organizations, such as kidnapping for ransom, civilian targeting, and extortion. Even before it embraced the drug trade, Rosen says that, "throughout its history, the FARC has threatened owners of land."[80] It is very difficult for an insurgent group to make allies if it threatens its most dedicated, and perhaps only, consistent base of support.

While the FARC knowingly involved itself in the drug trade, almost every non-government funded examination paints a picture of an organization backed into a corner, with the FARC's involvement in the drug trade an outcome almost directly a result of

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[75] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 18.

[76] Leech, *The FARC*, 30.

[77] Leech, 31.

[78] Leech, 32.

[79] Leech, 32.

[80] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 18.

Colombian governmental malfeasance.[81] Rosen points to "poor transportation and infrastructure, lack of access to credit … and volatile, unpredictable markets for agricultural products."[82] While decidedly more sympathetic to the FARC than other analysts, Leech still points out that, "in the early years of the cocaine boom, the FARC and drug traffickers formed an uneasy alliance."[83] In the 1990s, Colombian military officers—as well as several U.S. politicians—referred to the FARC as a drug cartel, though Leech disputes the charge.[84] Leech goes on to detail that "the FARC was regulating the production of coca paste and cocaine base in many regions…. In other words, the guerrillas played the role of facilitators and regulators of illicit drug production," while equivocating that they abstained from actual production or trafficking.[85] Finally, even Leech is forced to admit that the activities are recognized as wrong by the FARC, with a quote from Russell Crandall, "Some guerrillas are disgusted by the drug trade and view their involvement in it as a necessary but evil means in order to achieve a better end of social and political transformation."[86] Brittain endorses the practice of coca taxing and protection of peasant coca growers, highlighting the move as the FARC's attempt to keep with its Marxist-Leninist roots and to bring the greatest benefit to the populace.[87] Yet taxation and protection were not the only ways the FARC interacted with the people; intimidation and executions were also normal outcomes for people who did not adhere to the FARC's strict policies. These practices destroyed the FARC's legitimacy in the eyes of many people, including vital would-be supporters.

While the exact figures are unknowable and even ranges are disputed, informed estimates places the FARC's income from all sources at approximately $900 million in

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[81] For some of the most pertinent examples, see: Rosen, *The Losing War*; Leech, *The FARC*; Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*.

[82] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 39.

[83] Leech, *The FARC*, 61.

[84] Leech, 63.

[85] Leech, 64.

[86] Leech, 65.

[87] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 98.

1999.[88] A rough breakdown estimates earnings from the drug industry at approximately $400 million, and an additional $500 million was made from activities such as extortion, kidnapping, robbery, and "taxes," or *gramaje*, on businesses operating in FARC-held territories.[89] The FARC's kidnappings became such an important part of its economic model that Colombia had a national radio station devoted to kidnapped personnel.[90] The group even kidnapped presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt in 2002,[91] perhaps the most infamous kidnapping the FARC conducted. Betancourt detailed her six years in captivity, describing the frequent beatings, lack of food, and even "having a gun poised against her temple."[92] This highlights the full and complete transformation in FARC tactics; while still serving as a limited form of authority in many remote areas, the FARC had moved into drug trafficking, kidnappings, bombings, extortion, and many other nefarious tactics typically associated with criminal organizations.

Many analysts, such as Tom Marks in his article for *Crime, Law and Social Change*, attribute the FARC's 1990s rise almost entirely to the drug trade. Marks says bluntly,

> The money from, initially, taxation of the drug trade, later, direct involvement in it, provided it a resource windfall which made previously marginal political actors into central figures. FARC, in other words, did not become a serious factor due to mobilization of an alienated mass base. It became a serious factor due to the power that came from drugs grown by a marginalized population.[93]

This is an important distinction to make. As coca production exploded in Colombia—Colombia went from producing roughly 10 percent of the global coca supply in the 1980s

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[88] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 16.

[89] Rosen, 16.

[90] Bridget Arsenault, "Kidnapped for Six Years: Ingrid Betancourt Speaks at Head Talks in London," *Forbes*, last modified April 19, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/bridgetarsenault/2017/04/19/kidnapped-for-six-years-ingrid-betancourt-speaks-at-head-talks-in-london/#5ec63593c6a6.

[91] "Kidnapped for Six Years."

[92] "Kidnapped for Six Years."

[93] Tom Marks, "Colombian Army Counterinsurgency," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 40, no. 1 (July 2003): 78.

to roughly 90 percent in the 1990s[94]—so too did the number of FARC combatants, which analysts almost unanimously agree peaked at roughly 18,000–20,000 members in the late 1990s to early 2000s,[95] though Brittain claims FARC's membership reached as many as 50,000 members in the mid-2000s.[96] Given that many of the right-wing paramilitary groups were disbanding or demobilizing during the mid-2000s, including the AUC collectively demobilizing in 2005,[97] and that there were no major changes to Plan Colombia or significant government reforms in the mid-2000s, a reasonable conclusion would be that the FARC reached unprecedented membership due to a massive increase in illicit profits from the coca trade in Colombia in the early 1990s to the mid-2000s.

Along with an explosion in membership, analysts such as Cynthia Norman postulate that the FARC deepened its integration into the drug trade following the dramatic decrease in paramilitaries operating in Colombia.[98] This highlights a key contradiction to conventional wisdom that the FARC had no other alternative: even with less armed opposition, the FARC did not withdraw from the drug trade; it expanded its involvement. Norman even points to evidence showing that following the formation of Bandas Criminales Emergentes (Emerging Criminal Bands; BACRIM), the FARC has aided criminal elements in trafficking drugs into Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Brazil.[99] Norman notes that this is in direct contravention to the FARC's so-called political aims and could potentially impact the FARC's ability to demobilize following the 2016 peace deal. While Norman agrees with analysts such as Leech, Brittain, and Rosen that the FARC's entry into the drug market was driven at least in part by the need for group survival, she deviates in that her research points to deepening, rather than diverging, ties

[94] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 13.

[95] Rosen, 17.

[96] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, 19.

[97] Susan V. Norman, "Narcotization as Security Dilemma: The FARC and Drug Trade in Colombia," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 8 (2017): 652, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1338052.

[98] Norman, 652.

[99] Norman, 653.

with drug organizations in the 1990s.[100] Most troubling for Colombia, Norman theorizes that not all FARC fronts will demobilize and accept the terms of the peace agreement, due to the decentralized nature of the FARC's command and the deep descent into criminal activity of several FARC front commanders.

Other analysts share Norman's dim view of FARC's narcotics-related activities. Jeremy McDermott, a Latin American analyst, posits that the FARC controlled up to two-thirds of all Colombian cocaine production and conservatively earned $200 million from drugs alone in 2012.[101] McDermott also maintains that the FARC is heavily involved in the heroin trade as well, in addition to cocaine and marijuana trafficking. McDermott highlights that while the FARC's seven-man Secretariat does not condone or encourage the drug trade, the decentralized nature of FARC's command gives it "deniability in terms of the drug trade."[102] McDermott also mentions the open methods through which the FARC monetizes the drug trade:

- A tax on the growers (the cocaleros)—which usually does not exceed $50 per kilo of coca base
- A tax on the buyers—up to $200 on a kilo of coca base
- A tax on production in laboratories in their areas of control—up to $100 for every kilo of cocaine produced
- A tax on airstrips and flights that leave from their territory—again another $100 per kilo[103]

McDermott closes with arguably his most damning sentences, stating, "What is certain is that the [FARC] and the drug trade cannot be separated. They might now be described as Siamese twins, and the fate of one is now inextricably bound to the other."[104]

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[100] Norman, 654.

[101] Jeremy McDermott, "The FARC and the Drug Trade: Siamese Twins?" InSight Crime, last modified May 26, 2014, https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/farc-and-drug-trade-siamese-twins/.

[102] McDermott.

[103] McDermott.

[104] McDermott.

Several analysts have disputed the FARC's ties to traffickers, and the FARC has disputed these ties explicitly.[105] In the FARC's self-written historical document, its authors specifically say they have no association or relationship in any manner with drug traffickers. While this is undoubtedly false, given the previously documented relationships with traffickers I have presented, it is important to examine the FARC's position nonetheless. In the FARC-written book, the authors also say that anybody who produces coca does so completely out of necessity, due to a broken system and lack of infrastructure provided by the government; without coca, many would simply die, according to Marulanda and others. This is once again an important fact to highlight. While the Colombian government has made great strides in the past two decades, particularly with the assistance of the U.S. government, there are many remote areas, particularly the east and south of the country, that are at best underserved by the government. A significant portion of the population is simply out of the reach of the government. As late as 2005, over 80 percent of the rural population lived in poverty, according to Brittain.[106] The local populace grows a plant that the people see as their only means of survival; this is certainly excusable, if not even understandable. But the FARC integrated with drug traffickers purposefully, and Marulanda and the FARC's words on its relationship to traffickers were completely untrue. In his article in the *Journal of Drug Issues*, Alain Labrousse states that, "Over time, the FARC has revealed an undeniable tendency to increasingly implicate themselves in activities linked to drug trafficking and not to be content with simply collecting taxes at different levels of production and traffic."[107] He goes on to detail the FARC's expansion into poppy growing and eventual direct sale to traffickers as, in the words of a former guerrilla, a "victory of the drug lobby within the FARC."[108] Labrousse also details a concerted effort on the FARC's behalf to cut out the middleman, which he says serves a dual purpose: elimination of potential informants as well as increased profits

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[105] FARC-EP, *FARC-EP*.

[106] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia*, 83.

[107] Alain Labrousse, "The FARC and the Taliban's Connection to Drugs," *Journal of Drug Issues* 35, no. 1 (January 2005): 178, https://doi.org/10.1177/002204260503500108.

[108] Labrousse, 178.

directly to the FARC. This once again demonstrates that the FARC moved beyond simple funding of military operations and munitions, into further expansion and vertical integration into the Colombian drug trade.

As a result of the FARC's tactics and involvement in the drug trade, the FARC has committed numerous human rights atrocities. In his book, Leech dedicates an entire chapter to the FARC's abuses, constantly contrasting them against the abuses of the paramilitaries and government. Of 403 mass killings in Colombia in 1999, the FARC perpetrated approximately 20 percent, or more than 80, according to Leech.[109] Also, in 1999 almost 3,000 people were kidnapped in Colombia, with the FARC being responsible for at least 728 cases.[110] Leech also details numerous instances of the FARC executing those they suspected of working with paramilitaries, and expressing no remorse for having done so. Additionally, the FARC makes heavy use of child soldiers, as documented by a Bogotá professor who interviewed over 8,000 deserted or captured soldiers, claiming 43 percent joined the FARC at age fourteen or younger—including a "disproportionate" number of indigenous children among the recruits.[111] A Bogotá think-tank catalogued the various human rights abuses from 1990 to 1998, finding that, of 6,059 documented violations, the FARC was responsible for 27 percent, or approximately 1,636.[112] FARC accounted for as many as 40 percent of the violations as late as 2002 as well, according to Leech.[113] Leech also cites differing sources on civilian categories; one from the Colombian Commission of Jurists said that the FARC was responsible for only 25 percent of civilian killings from 2002-2006, while the *New York Times* put the number at 80 percent.[114]

Leech repeatedly points out the violations committed by the government and paramilitaries in what seems like an attempt to pardon the FARC's violations, but it is

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[109] Leech, *The FARC*, 106.

[110] Leech, 106.

[111] Leech, 116.

[112] Leech, 126.

[113] Leech, 126.

[114] Leech, 129.

important to remember that both the government of Colombia and the FARC committed horrible acts against the general public. Research is lacking, and would be truly illuminating, into how deeply the FARC has intertwined with the drug trade and how ruthless its tactics have become. For instance, research has yet to determine if deaths were the result of the drug war, or how many people were killed taking territory, seizing assets, removing rival traffickers, and executing those who did not follow the FARC's strict cultivation and coca-selling dictates, among other so-called crimes. It is impossible to convince a nation to overthrow its government and back an insurgency with tactics such as those the FARC embraced. It also made it increasingly impossible for the FARC to undermine the government's political legitimacy; the FARC was more corrupt and violent than the government ever was. Drug trafficking also certainly induced the United States to act on behalf of the Colombian government, which brought about its own complications for the FARC.

C. BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT (1960s–PRESENT)

With its Plan Colombia and other military and financial aid, the United States heavily intervened in Colombia throughout the duration of the FARC insurgency, as well as in Nicaragua, though with less conventional methods later in its support for the Contras. While it did contribute military assets, the United States largely contributed financially and served in an advisory role in Colombia. Cynthia McClintock points out the "considerable support" the government of Colombia received from the United States, stating that the Colombian government "[did not come] close to defeat by the revolutionaries."[115] Though other analysts may disagree with McClintock's characterization of the conflict, the FARC was never recognized internationally as a legitimate belligerent, nor did it come close to the overthrow of the Colombian government it desired. If U.S. support was truly the deciding factor, as Dix and Shugart argue,[116] the FARC would have likely never formed after the U.S.-backed *Operation Marquetalia*; surely the level of bloodshed and criminal

[115] Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 8.

[116] Shugart, "Patterns of Revolution"; Dix, "Why Revolutions Succeed and Fail."

activity the FARC conducted would have never reached the zenith that it did. U.S. aid in Colombia was much more focused on counter-narcotics than in Nicaragua, but for the so-called war on drugs as a whole, Gustavo Gorriti decries U.S. efforts in the region, arguing that U.S. aid and counter-drug programs actually harmed progress in COIN efforts in Latin America.[117] Though he focuses on the later years of U.S. intervention in Colombia, Jonathan D. Rosen is heavily skeptical of U.S. efforts in Colombia; he titled his book decrying the efforts of Plan Colombia *The Losing War*.

There is still much debate over the efficacy of U.S. efforts in combatting insurgencies in Latin America. Daniela Spenser states, "Studies have made it amply clear that the roots of social movements in Latin America were national in origin and in causes, generated by class, gender, and ethnic subordination and exploitation."[118] While Spenser's conclusion can be debated, none of the issues she mentions can be solved by foreign involvement; solving them would require significant domestic political reforms. The United States gave billions of dollars to Colombia with few, if any, strings attached; in particular, little focus was paid to social reform. Gorriti also states that "The [Latin American] insurgencies fell short of victory in both of the first two [of the three Latin American insurgency] stages, but they managed to provoke military interventions that destroyed democracy as surely as they eradicated guerrilla activity."[119] Because the spread of democracy is a key strategic imperative of the United States, and it was especially so during the George W. Bush administration when the main bulk of the Plan Colombia aid was administered, the U.S. aid may be viewed in a different light be some analysts. Destruction of democratically elected governments, or loss of faith in such elected officials, leads to fragile states that are highly conducive to armed rebellion.

The main way the United States supported the Colombian government in its war against the FARC was with aid. After the early support for *Operation Marquetalia*, U.S.

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[117] Gustavo Gorriti Ellenbogen, "Latin America's Internal Wars," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 85–98, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0002.

[118] Daniela Spenser, "Revolutions and Revolutionaries in Latin America under the Cold War," *Latin America Research Review* 40, no. 3, (October 2005): 377.

[119] Gorriti, "Latin America's Internal Wars," 89.

support for Colombian efforts was more scattered. From fiscal year 1980 to fiscal year 2010, the United States gave approximately $11.25 billion in aid to Colombia, with approximately $360 million in 2010 dollars given to Colombia in the 1980s, approximately $1.32 billion in the 1990s, and almost $8.8 billion in the 2000s.[120] The numbers show a heavy increase in post-2000 aid, a direct result of Plan Colombia. In September 1989, President Bush announced $2.2 billion in aid under the Andean Initiative, which did not target Colombia alone.[121] In 1995, 1996, and 1997 the United States decertified Colombia due to its lack of action in targeting the drug trade.[122] There are perhaps valid criticisms of U.S. aid dollars; in the year 2000, the United States gave $817.8 million to curb drug trafficking and improve security, $121.1 million to promote the rule of law, and only $80 million to promote social and economic justice.[123] Most who write about COIN, from Galula to Max Boot, agree that winning over the population is a key to the fight; it is unclear if the United States' aid dollars reflected that in Colombia. Brittain sums up the totality of U.S. aid to Colombia thusly: "After roughly $8 billion in funding, the deployment of 20,000 U.S. trained forces, and immense weapons supplies, Washington and Bogotá have once again proven to be unable to assist those most exploited or debilitate the insurgency."[124]

U.S. aid to Colombia almost certainly was a factor in bringing the FARC back to the negotiating table for what led to the 2016 peace agreement with its ambitious Plan Colombia. A strong case can therefore be made that U.S. aid positively impacted the Colombian COIN efforts. Yet what of the years prior to Plan Colombia, particularly 1964 through 1989—twenty-five years when very little aid was given to Colombia? What prevented the FARC from overthrowing the government of Colombia? Indeed, Leech references a 1997 Defense Intelligence Agency report concluded that the Colombian

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[120] Peter J. Meyer and Mark P. Sullivan, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: Recent Trends and FY2013 Appropriations*, CRS Report No. R42582, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42582.pdf.

[121] Leech, *The FARC*, 78.

[122] Rosen, *The Losing War*, 20.

[123] Rosen, 65.

[124] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 230.

Armed Forces could be "defeated within five years unless the country's government regains political legitimacy and its armed forces are drastically restructured."[125] While other analysts expressed similar sentiments about the fragility of the Colombian state, it is unlikely the FARC was ever on the precipice of victory as the report suggests. The Colombian government was also not above exaggerating the threat to secure additional financial support from the United States, and had significant incentive, both financial and political, to do so.

While U.S. support was important to a degree in Colombia, U.S. support for the host nation government is not always the turning point in a Latin American insurgency, and there is ample evidence that it may not ever be. Wickham-Crowley is particularly skeptical of the theory that U.S. support or intervention is some sort of panacea. He points to Argentina, Guatemala, and Panama as examples of a government weathering an insurgency and a loss of U.S. support; not only did the insurgents not win, the spurned government prospered.[126] The United States notably withdrew support for the Batista regime in Cuba prior to Castro's conquest, and for the Somoza regime in Nicaragua before Ortega and the FSLN overthrew the government in 1979. Many analysts have theorized that this led to the fall of these governments, including Jeane Kirkpatrick—a foreign policy advisor under the Reagan administration and former U.S. ambassador to the UN—in her chapter in *Rift and Revolution*, in which she excoriates the Carter administration for withdrawing its support for Somoza, thereby facilitating the rise of the FSLN and Ortega. This theory becomes less likely, along with the theory that U.S. intervention is one of or the most important factors in quelling a Latin American rebellion, particularly in the instance Kirkpatrick references when one examines the level of effort the same U.S. government, under the Reagan administration, expended to remove the FSLN from power to no avail. This theory was also fairly well diminished, if not outright disproved, in the non–Latin American examples of Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Regardless, U.S. involvement was clearly not the key factor in the FARC's failure in Colombia. I examine

[125] Leech, *The FARC*, 68.

[126] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolutions*, 317–18.

U.S. involvement in greater depth in Chapter III on Nicaragua, and once again find that U.S. support or opposition is not sufficient in preventing insurgent victory.

D. INABILITY TO BUILD A COALITION

One under-analyzed possibility that is scarcely covered is that the insurgent group's ability to build a diverse coalition of allies may most accurately predict if it will succeed or fail. In what is likely the most in-depth and most specifically dedicated book to Latin American insurgency success or failure, Wickham-Crowley's *Guerrillas and Revolutions in Latin America* does not even consider this factor as a whole. Wickham-Crowley uses Boolean minimization and social theory to analyze Latin American revolutions, and limits his conditions for success or failure to five main conditions: Is there a guerrilla attempt? Is there peasant/worker support? Do the guerrillas possess military-level strength? Is there a patrimonial praetorian regime, and does the host nation government lose U.S. support?[127] In the case of Colombia—and all other instances with a strong regime versus strong guerrillas—Wickham-Crowley says U.S. support and military strength are irrelevant; he points to several cases on both sides where both factors were present but that had differing outcomes. Only when all five conditions are met, as they were in Nicaragua, will an insurgency be successful. Wickham-Crowley is much less concerned with politics—other than regime type—geography, tactics used, media, alliances, exploitation of political illegitimacy, individual leadership, country history, or any other potential variables. This is both out of necessity—they are difficult to quantify and measure—as well as perhaps out of shortsightedness.

Yet what of individual leadership and insurgent group structure? Any profile of the FARC—from Brittain, who embedded with the FARC in Colombia, to Leech, to Army War College analyses such as the monogram written by U.S. Army Major Jon-Paul Maddaloni—describes FARC leadership as Marulanda, the military and tactical genius, with Arenas serving as the soul, political leader, and organizer of the FARC. Leech states that Marulanda "went on to note that it was vital that the guerillas were not only trained

[127] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolutions*, 323.

militarily, but that they were also educated politically and that it was crucial they responded respectfully to the fundamental demands of the peasantry."[128] Maddaloni states that "Marulanda's abilities were as a strong guerilla fighter and charismatic leader, while Arenas was the intellectual Marxist ideologue."[129] He goes on to sum up their leadership thusly: "Together they formed a formidable team and attracted the disenfranchised agrarian poor and socialist leaning rebels to their cause."[130] As a result of Arenas' vision and Marulanda's ability to recruit and fight—though Arenas died in 1990—the Defense Intelligence Agency assessed that the FARC was on the precipice of victory in 1997 in the report mentioned in Chapter II Section C.[131] It should be noted that any similar predictions were made by few, if any, other analysts or agencies. Yet what propelled the FARC to that point, and what changed afterward? What changed was that the FARC was likely no longer perceived as a potentially credible alternative to the government of Colombia in the eyes of the populace, and proved unable to deliver on the promises of an alternate socialist form of government. This was certainly borne of the FARC's inability to cultivate broad support. The FARC failed to build critical alliances necessary to succeed, and refused political compromise with potential allies in a detrimentally absolutist pursuit of victory.

Gauging public support for the FARC in Colombia is difficult due to public polling in Colombia often being unreliable at best. Brittain cites Associated Press reporting in 2008 which states, "Colombian pollsters rarely survey the whole country because they consider responses in war-afflicted rural areas unreliable."[132] In many of the most exhaustive works on Colombia, such as those by Brittain, Leech, and Rosen, all details of public support, when mentioned at all, are strictly anecdotal. In 2015, Colombia Reports polling indicated only 5 percent of the public supported the FARC, though in 2016 support reached a high of 18 percent; incidentally, that was higher than the public support for the Colombian

[128] Leech, *The* FARC, 16.

[129] Maddaloni, "Analysis of the FARC," 10.

[130] Maddaloni, 10.

[131] Leech, *The FARC*, 68.

[132] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 41.

government.[133] This is no ringing endorsement of the FARC; it is akin to when Americans pummel Congress in polling, but continue to reelect the incumbents. The Colombian public has mostly supported peace talks, with negative spikes associated with FARC kidnappings or attacks. Public support for peace negotiations with the FARC varied from 2004 to 2013, with support around 65 percent in the mid-2000s to below 60 percent by 2013.[134] Wickham-Crowley notes that the FARC enjoyed a great deal of peasant support, which is unlikely to be measured in polling, and stipulates that peasant support is "a necessary but not sufficient condition for the victory of rural guerrilla movements."[135] He also states that Colombia likely enjoyed the strongest peasant recruitment of all the second-wave Latin American insurgencies as well; however, the peasantry in Colombia would feed the Colombian government information in exchange for money,[136] which perhaps calls their loyalty into question. Peasant support for and membership in the FARC was extremely strong, particularly among sharecroppers and other farmers. Yet in 1997, the rural population, which is where the FARC was strongest, was down to only 27 percent of the country and shrinking from over 50 percent around the time of FARC's formation in 1964, according to the World Bank.[137] The FARC was able to control as many as 105 fronts in the mid-1990s, but never made significant inroads into urban areas, particularly Bogotá.[138]

The urban residents, particularly the political and economic elites of Colombia, never supported the FARC in any meaningful fashion. In fact, many analysts and news organizations, such as the *Washington Post*, describe the "elites" as being on the opposite side of the FARC, and as being bankrollers of the paramilitaries that engaged in numerous

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[133] Adriaan Alsema, "Colombia's Political Parties Less Popular than FARC Guerrillas: Gallup," Colombia Reports, last modified November 5, 2016, https://colombiareports.com/colombias-political-parties-less-popular-farc-guerrillas-gallup/.

[134] Holly K. Sonneland, "Colombia Update: Facing Public Opinion on FARC Peace Talks," Americas Society/Council of the Americas, last modified July 16, 2015, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/colombia-update-facing-public-opinion-farc-peace-talks.

[135] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 52.

[136] Wickham-Crowley, 57.

[137] "Urban Population (% of Total)," World Bank, accessed February 10, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=CO.

[138] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 19.

bloody clashes with the FARC.[139] This was another key measure in which the FARC differed from the FSLN; while both enjoyed peasant or worker support, the FARC never appealed to the middle or upper class like the FSLN did. Absent a French Revolution–style changing of the guard in Colombia—which Marulanda and other FARC leaders readily admitted the FARC was not capable of overseeing or conducting—the politicians, land owners, and business leaders, to say nothing of the military, police, and bureaucratic agencies over which these elites exerted control, would have to find a common ground with the FARC. This common ground simply was never a possibility. While most in Colombia agreed some political and social reform was necessary, a drastic, socialist government was never a real possibility; this was one of the FARC's most foundational and unyielding demands. Brittain credits the FARC's fifty-plus year survival in large part to the group's Marxist-Leninist beliefs and its ability to fill a vacuum in civil society, particularly rural civil society, that the Colombian government was unable or unwilling to fill.[140] Yet it was precisely the FARC's obstinate refusal to compromise on its anti-capitalist, anti-state views, as well as its inability to translate small, village-level-style governance to any sort of national scale, which precluded meaningful success. While the FARC may have brought the government to the negotiating table via violence, kidnappings, and drug trafficking, its social and political message largely rang hollow to the majority of Colombians, especially those in power. While many desired change in Colombia, the violence and criminal activity of the FARC, and its extreme political views, made change a virtual impossibility.

Had the FARC continued on its initial trajectory, with its initial leadership intact when membership exploded as a result of the drug-trade in the 1990s, the FARC may well have succeeded in overthrowing the government. Rather than continue to attack military installations, the FARC attacked critical oil infrastructure, population centers, and anybody it suspected of being associated with the military or paramilitaries, to include women, children, and other civilians. Had the FARC merely advocated on behalf of the peasants

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[139] Nick Miroff, "The Staggering Toll of Colombia's War with FARC Rebels, Explained in Numbers," *Washington Post*, last modified August 24, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/08/24/the-staggering-toll-of-colombias-war-with-farc-rebels-explained-in-numbers/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4fdd9bde1ed8.

[140] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 44.

who were forced to partake in coca cultivation to eke out a meager survival rather than expending hundreds of millions of dollars to bolster its military capabilities and further integrate with the drug trade, its message could have been better received on an international scale. Even if it is accepted that the most convincing explanation for FARC defeat is the United States' intervention via Plan Colombia, then the FARC's involvement with drugs likely sealed its fate. Without involvement in narcotics, it is highly unlikely that the United States will support the Colombian regime in a significant manner, let alone to the large degree it did in the 2000s.

E. WHY THE FARC FAILED

Mao states, "Because guerilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation."[141] Mao goes on to opine that a guerilla must do seven things to win a revolution: "Arousing and organizing the people; achieving internal unification politically; establishing bases; equipping forces; recovering national strength; destroying enemy's national strength; regaining lost territories."[142] Galula states, "If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war."[143] In his seminar on insurgency and counterinsurgency, Thomas H. Johnson repeatedly emphasizes that the support of only a relatively small portion of the population, approximately 15 percent, is necessary for an insurgent to be victorious. So why did the FARC fail, given that, at its peak, it is highly likely the FARC won the support of between at least 10 and 15 percent of the Colombian population? While there are certainly many reasons, arguably the biggest two are the FARC's lack of legitimacy to effectively govern the people and its inability to convince the country it would be capable of governing in the absence of the Colombian state. This prevented the FARC from building key coalitions of support, and did not permit key political alliances to form that would have enabled it to overthrow the state. The FARC

[141] Mao, *On Guerilla Warfare*, 4.

[142] Mao, 3.

[143] Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

systematically destroyed its credibility in the 1990s with its criminal and terrorist tactics. Additionally, the FARC was not able to convince even a plurality of the population to trust the group and align with its political goals, let alone approach majority support for its goals.

Consider Mao's seven requirements for insurgent victory. While the FARC undoubtedly aroused and organized the people, its peak strength of 20,000 members, many of whom were extremely young and the majority of whom lacked formal military training, represented but a small fraction, 0.05 percent, of Colombia's total population, which was approximately 39 million in 1997.[144] As for achieving internal political unification, the FARC was never able to do that in Colombia as a whole, let alone even internally within the FARC. The decentralized nature of the FARC's leadership in its latter years, as well as the embrace of typical terrorist activities such as kidnappings, bombings, extortion, and drug trafficking, prevented any unified political front, regardless of its members' collective Marxist-Leninist leanings. The FARC did establish numerous bases and control large areas of territory, particularly in the east and south of the country, so it did fully achieve this requirement for success espoused by Mao. The FARC can also be said to have successfully equipped forces, as it had automatic weapons, landmines, rockets, grenades, and other small arms in large number during the group's 1990s peak. As far as recovering national strength or destroying the enemy's national strength, the FARC achieved middling results. The FARC's attacks on oil infrastructure, including 110 attacks in Putumayo in 2000, harmed the government economically; Leech states that "the growing military strength of the FARC in Putumayo during the 1990s had made foreign oil companies hesitant to exploit the vast oil reserves that mostly existed in rebel-controlled regions."[145] Yet the increases in security, both internally and with U.S. assistance and training, largely mitigated this threat. The FARC did control large swaths of the rural population, but this did little to harm Colombia's international standing, nor its standing with its most important political patron, the United States. Finally, as far as regaining lost territories, the FARC

[144] "Population, Total," World Bank, accessed February 10, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=CO.

[145] Leech, *The FARC*, 95.

never owned territory prior to its insurgency; the FARC sought to take territory from the state and overthrow the government.

Most importantly, the FARC also failed, despite nominally succeeding in several critical areas and excelling particularly in rural worker and peasant support, because it could not communicate a clear message to the people of Colombia. Firstly, the FARC did not care to reach the elites and the middle class with its message, unlike the FSLN. Secondly, the FARC lacked legitimacy for the claims it was trying to make. Why should anybody, from peasant to CEO, ally with an organization that trafficks drugs, kidnaps, murders, and seemingly causes more harm than good anywhere its influence reaches? It was much easier for the FARC to promise a better life to rural peasants—who had never been to Bogotá much less spoken with any national politician—than to middle class workers in Bogotá. For those who did not feel the impacts of Colombia's poor infrastructure, corrupt economic practices, and harsh military crackdowns, how was the state to be perceived as an existential threat? For those living comfortably, though not wholly without issues, who were successful under Colombia's nominal democracy, what better alternative did the FARC present? The FARC lacked political legitimacy, internal allies, external sanctuary or allies, and was destructively inflexible in advocating a socialist state. Land reallocation and redistribution of wealth is an excellent policy in the eyes of those who have neither land nor money; for those with both, it is decidedly less popular. Even if the FARC were to convince an urban citizen of the necessity for its Marxist-Leninist government, who was to lead that government? Marulanda showed neither aptitude nor willingness to shoulder such a burden; his place was on the battlefield. Arenas may have been a viable candidate, but his death in 1990 prevented his ascension to even the head of the UP, let alone the country.

The FARC did not fail due to poor military tactics; the FARC's military victories were numerous. The FARC did not fail due to a lack of recruitment; the FARC grew to more than 20,000 members at its height, from its humble beginnings of forty-eight men. The FARC did not fail due to a lack of money; the FARC's involvement with the drug trade and other illicit activities was earning it as much as $1 billion per year in the early 1990s. The FARC did not fail due to U.S. intervention; U.S. intervention in Marquetalia in

1964 served as the spark to from the FARC, and its advice and aid did not enable the defeat of the group for the following thirty-five years before the creation of Plan Colombia. The FARC did not fail from lack of mobility or logistic issues; the FARC moved freely through large portions of the country, to include almost all of the jungle and mountains, most of the land east and south of the Colombian Andes, and many urban centers, and enjoyed robust support and membership from the peasant class. The FARC did fail because it could not provide a compelling vision to attract allies; communism, and later socialism and Marxist-Leninism, seemingly never achieved broad support in Colombia. The FARC did fail because of its tactics; while the government also committed human rights abuses, it at least had the rationale of defending the public—the FARC had no such excuse. The FARC's embrace of kidnappings, of child soldiers, of executions, of extortion, of bombings, of drug production and trafficking shattered the group's legitimacy in the eyes of millions. The FARC did fail because it failed to provide a viable alternative to capitalism; coca production, *gramajes*, and protection rackets work for the few, not the many, and certainly not those in urban centers.

Most of all, the FARC failed because it failed to effectively undermine the legitimacy of the state of Colombia; Colombia's government, no matter how corrupt it may have been, was still better poised to provide for the largest amount of people. The FARC, while seizing upon the social and economic conditions necessary to thrive as a rebel, and later criminally involved, insurgent group never was a viable alternative to the Liberal or Conservative Parties, and never convinced the majority it could effectively form a coalition to govern Colombia post-overthrow and post-capitalism. The brutal tactics the FARC embraced in its later years mirror the tactics of Somoza; as Somoza's bastion of support dwindled, so too did the FARC's. The FARC failed because it could not transition from armed rebellion to a political viable entity. While its evolution into a major military and political force is a remarkable feat, its inability to invest in the legitimate political process proved to be its undoing, and its lack of even a minor coalition of allies doomed the FARC to failure. While the FARC did attempt a legitimate political outreach with the UP, it was met with Colombian repression. Rather than expose and propagandize these transgressions, the FARC retreated within itself and met violence with violence. As Max Weber stated in

his infamous 1918 speech in Germany which was later published as an essay in *Politics as a Vocation*, the state alone has a "monopoly" on the legitimate use of force.[146] As evidence of the toll the FARC's decades of terrorist tactics took on its political legitimacy in Colombia, in 2018 post-peace deal, post-demobilization, post-violence elections, the FARC won a paltry 0.5 percent of the vote.[147] FARC's lack of outreach and inability to work across political divides doomed it to failure in the legitimate political world. The FARC may have stayed true to its initial vision of a Marxist-Leninist socialist paradise of laborers and peasants, but at the cost of both allies and political support, dooming the group to failure.

146 Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

147 "Colombia Election: FARC Fails to Win Support in First National Vote," BBC, last modified March 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43367222.

III. THE FSLN AND HOW AN INSURGENCY SUCCEEDS

This chapter explains the path the FSLN took to assuming power in Nicaragua, and the savvy political moves the group adopted along the way. This chapter also examines U.S. involvement, which many analysts point to as the primary deciding factor in the success of Latin American insurgencies.[148] I lay out the case for the FSLN's success, and its ingenuity in building a diverse coalition of support. While Wickham-Crowley, Goodwin, and others point to the despotic regime of Somoza as the main factor in the FSLN's victory, this chapter shows that such an analysis is cursory and only tells part of the story. Without the compromise and political outreach that accompanied its impressive array of allies, the FSLN would likely have failed. The myopic focus on Somoza as the be-all and end-all to explaining the Nicaraguan Revolution diminishes the improbable victory of the FSLN and obscures key lessons that need to be learned, both politically and diplomatically, as a result.

A. FSLN AND NICARAGUA POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Similar to the situation with the FARC in Colombia, the FSLN in Nicaragua was one of several Cuba-inspired—and backed—groups that formed after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Also much like the FARC in Colombia, the FSLN was heavily inspired by communists inside Nicaragua; two of its founders, Carlos Fonseca and Tomas Borge, came from a youth group of the Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN), and the other, Silvio Mayorga, came from a left-wing student group.[149] After it was officially founded in 1961, the FSLN remained largely in rural areas and enjoyed little early success. According to Wickham-Crowley, a key reservoir for new members was young, college-educated students, and eventually that influence spread even to high school students.[150] Wickham-Crowley also points out that calling the group *Sandinistas*, after Augusto Sandino and his earlier uprising against the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua, was no mistake;

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[148] Dix, Shugart, and LeoGrande, among many others advocate for this theory.

[149] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 222.

[150] Wickham-Crowley, 223.

Sandino and the Sandinistas even shared similarly geographically located bases of rural power.[151] Anastasia Somoza DeBayle, or "Tachito," came to power in 1967—though he was unofficially in power before this as the head of the National Guard—and was the latest in a long line of brutal military strongmen to lead the country. Somoza was no stranger to the United States; he was educated at West Point and enjoyed significant ties to the United States throughout his reign.[152] In setting the tone for his rule shortly after his election in 1966, Somoza's National Guard, which he had led before ascending to the presidency, opened fire on a crowd of protestors, killing forty people.[153] Walter LaFeber states that Somoza "enjoyed total support from Washington," and may have even sent his mother to Washington with over one $1 million to support Nixon's reelection campaign in 1972.[154] Somoza was as fond of the United States as the United States was of Nicaragua; in 1974 he "proclaimed [Nicaragua] did not belong to any third-world nonaligned group, but was 'totally aligned with the United States and the Western World."[155]

In addition to Nicaragua's political dependence on the United States, the economic ties between Nicaragua and the United States were also robust. Fifty percent of Nicaragua's exports were to the United States, with 50 percent of its imports coming from the United States as well. Nicaragua also received $847.9 million in U.S. and multilateral aid between 1953 and 1979.[156] LaFeber also notes that, "Between 1961 and 1967, the Alliance for Progress authorized nineteen loans totaling $50 million. The Inter-American Development Bank injected another $50 million."[157] Additionally, U.S. direct investment increased to $75 million by the end of the decade.[158] Some analysts deride the Alliance's efforts; Daniela Spenser quips that "[the] Alliance for Progress made little difference to a country

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[151] Wickham-Crowley, 246.

[152] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 163.

[153] LaFeber, 163.

[154] LaFeber, 226.

[155] LaFeber, 226.

[156] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 154.

[157] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 164.

[158] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 164.

like Nicaragua because the Somoza family gobbled up most of its spoils."[159] In 1967 the Pentagon gave more than $1.2 million to Nicaragua, which was 13 percent of its defense budget.[160]

LaFeber describes U.S. military relations with Nicaragua as "perhaps the closest in the hemisphere."[161] Robert A. Pastor describes the United States as "the center of the region's consciousness," but assert that "Nicaraguans always remained at the center of events."[162] Pastor takes issue with LaFeber's insistence that "[as] every president after Hoover knew, Somozas did as they were told;"[163] Pastor instead describes the Nicaraguans as having their own agency and choosing to listen to Washington when it suited Nicaragua's interests. Indeed, LaFeber also writes that "Somoza bragged that he had more friends in the U.S. Congress than did [President] Carter," and frequently refers to the "Somoza lobby" inside the United States.[164] William LeoGrande also acknowledges the "Nicaragua lobby," a "small but powerful group of legislators whom Somoza had cultivated as friends and supporters."[165] LeoGrande even recounts a story of when the new U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezullo, first met with Somoza in June 1979, just before Somoza's overthrow: the leader of the "Nicaragua Lobby," Congressman Murphy (a Democrat from New York) "was there, sitting on the edge of Somoza's desk, acting as his adviser and 'witness.'"[166] George Black, a FSLN sympathizer, also concludes that Somoza only remained as long as he did because of the United States.[167] Suffice to say, the United States enjoyed close ties with Nicaragua up until Carter suspended relations and

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159 Spenser, "Revolutions and Revolutionaries in Latin America," 381.

160 LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 165.

161 LaFeber, 165.

162 Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2002), 12.

163 LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 229.

164 LaFeber, 230.

165 LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 19.

166 LeoGrande, 20.

167 George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 62.

demanded Somoza's resignation in 1979. These close ties may seem to support the theory that U.S. support was key to host-nation victory at first, but this theory does not explain how the FSLN came to power or why the United States did not succeed in removing the FSLN from power with its heavy backing of the Contras in the 1980s.

Despite all of Somoza's transgressions, even the most hardcore anti-Somoza rebel in the 1960s would have been hard-pressed to see victory in the near future. Pastor writes that the Sandinistas "posed no threat to the Somozas in the 1960s" and Goodwin writes that the FSLN "never grew larger than a few hundred people until the eve of the insurrection of 1978–9."[168] Like Goodwin and others, Wickham-Crowley notes the humble beginnings of the FSLN, writing that "in the years 1967–1974, the Sandinistas pursued 'accumulation of forces in silence.'"[169] Though the group's successes were few and its membership was sparse in the 1960s, there were still several troubling aspects of the FSLN in the eyes of the United States. First and foremost were the major ties between Cuba and the FSLN. Wickham-Crowley writes that FSLN members "repeatedly" traveled to Cuba and that "the Cuban authorities were apparently crucial in finally getting the three disputatious wings of the Sandinistas truly to cooperate in the movement to oust Somoza."[170]

All the leaders of the FSLN were communists; however, their willingness to sacrifice communist ideals to build bridges to other sectors of society, and even other countries, proved to be one key to the FSLN's success. The FSLN was able to create allies among both the bourgeoisie and the "elites."[171] The FSLN also counted Cuba, Honduras, and Costa Rica among its allies, with bases in Honduras and to a much larger extent Costa Rica.[172] While the FSLN upper leadership was composed entirely of socialists, the five-member leadership junta never disavowed capitalism. The FSLN even courted capitalists,

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[168] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition*, 30; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 163.

[169] Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves,'" 229.

[170] Wickham-Crowley, 228.

[171] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 210, 188.

[172] Goodwin, 189.

and coordinated attacks on Somoza and his forces with countrywide strikes organized by businessmen, including sugar magnates like Alfredo Cesar.[173] The FSLN demonstrated a capacity in its insurgency to serve as a point around which all sectors of society could coalesce, which allowed its revolution to succeed where the FARC's did not. Some analysts, such as Goodwin, point to Somoza and his dictatorial rule as the reason the FSLN was able to succeed; but from Vargas to Pinochet, dictators have ruled Latin American countries without revolution succeeding, or rebellions even taking place.

Many analysts have blamed the United States for its role in the revolution: ambassador Kirkpatrick faults the United States for abandoning Somoza, while others, such as LeoGrande and Black, fault the United States for failing to remove Somoza sooner, and Black advocates for a more sympathetic U.S. view toward the Sandinistas. Yet U.S. involvement was clearly not the critical factor in Nicaragua; the United States neither stopped the FSLN from overthrowing Somoza's government nor removed the FSLN from power despite substantial efforts to do so post-overthrow. While Somoza created the conditions for revolution, and the United States had an impact on events and likely forestalled Somoza's exile to a certain extent, in the next section I illustrate other crucial foundations for the insurgency's success: the FSLN recognized that compromise was key, and took advantage of its background as a student-led movement to later ally with the business class and elites of Nicaragua.

B. HOW THE FSLN BUILT A COALITION OF POOR, MIDDLE CLASS, AND ELITES

While many analysts correctly associate the FSLN with communists, Castro, and left-wing movements, the group itself was much more pragmatic, at least before the United States repeated many of the same mistakes it made with Cuba and pushed the FSLN even further to the left. Shugart notes that "the [FSLN] subordinated its pursuit of its maximum (social revolutionary) goals to tactical-alliance building with groups committed only to a political revolution," and that "business leaders were prominent in the opposition to the

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[173] Goodwin, 189.

Somoza dictatorship."[174] Additionally, Shugart concludes that "moderates played a crucial role in bringing down the old regime [in Nicaragua]."[175] As late as July 1980, Pastor writes that "revolutionary Nicaragua *still* wanted good relations with democracies in Latin America and Europe and 'normal' relations with the United States" (emphasis added).[176] *New York Times* columnist Alan Riding wrote, "Rather than adopting a Cuban or other revolutionary model, the Sandinistas have been feeling their way along a narrow path … with realism generally winning."[177] Even further, Riding believes that the FSLN's "rhetoric, above all in foreign policy, remains leftist, but their policies are pragmatic and, at times, even conservative."[178] The contrast with the FARC could not be more readily apparent; the FARC was unwilling and perhaps unable to sacrifice its Marxist-Leninist ideals to achieve compromise with any sector of the Colombian populace other than the peasants and worker class. The FSLN, however, even cooperated with the Catholic Church—an omnipresent and monolithic force in Latin America in the twentieth century.[179] Lynn Horton details the organization of church groups, which organized in both urban and rural areas in the 1970s. She states, "Where liberation theology groups were active in northern Nicaragua they served to lay a groundwork of rural support for revolution and undermine the existing sociopolitical order by legitimizing rebellion and providing organization and resources to the Sandinistas."[180] Finally, the FSLN did not abandon a core constituency: the poor. Goodwin writes that, in the 1960s, "the Sandinistas managed to establish a sizable network of collaborators amongst the peasants of north-central

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[174] Shugart, "Patterns of Revolution," 255.

[175] Shugart, 252.

[176] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition*, 176.

[177] Alan Riding, "Reality Transforms Nicaragua's Revolutionists into Pragmatists," *New York Times*, July 20, 1980, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/121308455/3BDB6263D61644F7PQ/2?accountid=12702.

[178] "Reality Transforms Nicaragua's Revolutionists into Pragmatists."

[179] To be fair, some Colombian groups also cooperated with the Catholic Church, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) with Camilo Torres figuring prominently in the ELN's early years.

[180] Lynn Horton, *Peasants in Arms: War and Peace in the Mountains of Nicaragua, 1979–1994* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998), 68.

Nicaragua."[181] The FSLN also teamed up with rural workers, and in 1978 created the Association of Rural Workers, a "powerful force of the FSLN" for organizing peasants and rural workers.[182] From rich capitalists burned by the Somoza regime to the poorest laborers in Nicaragua's most remote areas, the FSLN built a diverse coalition that would propel it to success against the Somoza regime.

The event perhaps most responsible for Somoza's undoing was the regime's cash-grabbing and inept response to the massive 1972 earthquake that killed 20,000 Nicaraguans.[183] Somoza, as his family had done for decades in Nicaragua, embezzled funds meant to help the ravaged city of Managua and other citizens. George Black adds that "75 percent of [Managua's] housing and 90 percent of its commercial capacity was destroyed beyond repair, and damage was conservatively estimated by the United Nations at $772 million."[184] Black, who spent much time in Nicaragua with the FSLN and states that he personally "played a significant role in building support for the Sandinistas in Britain,"[185] excoriates the Somoza regime; he notes the drastic change in support for Somoza's regime even among the bourgeoisie and business class. Black states that "the importance of the earthquake as a pivotal moment in the disintegration of [the Somoza regime] can hardly be overstated."[186] Wickham-Crowley echoes these sentiments, citing the earthquake as "the decisive downward inflection point in the remnants of [the military's] legitimacy."[187] The resulting civil unrest was so great that the United States was forced to send 600 troops just to maintain order, and the chaos which followed the earthquake destroyed all public trust and respect for the Nicaraguan military. The FSLN turned this massive tragedy into a major strategic propaganda victory, decrying Somoza,

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[181] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 163.

[182] Goodwin, 164.

[183] Goodwin, 187.

[184] Black, *Triumph of the People*, 59.

[185] Black, back cover.

[186] Black, 59.

[187] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 269.

his National Guard, and his various corporations' efforts to defraud and deceive the population while in turn the FSLN assisted the ravaged city with rebuilding efforts.

The Somoza response to the earthquake became a point of no return for a broad swath of Nicaraguan citizens; business and economic elites were frozen out of the numerous repair contracts, middle-class citizens lost their homes and jobs, and the poor were now not only homeless and landless but living in utter squalor as well. Black states that "the earthquake accelerated the class struggle in Nicaragua," and that the "agitational work of the FSLN," coupled with the decrepit conditions, brought a "rise in class consciousness."[188] The theft of aid dollars was not some vast left-wing conspiracy; discussing the earthquake's impact, Douglas Farah in the *Washington Post* states that "Somoza stole most of the [tens of] millions of dollars in international aid that poured in, and the downtown [of Managua] was never rebuilt."[189] Farah also details the FSLN assurance for permanent houses for all displaced residents—a promise that never materialized, but nevertheless galvanized immense popular support for the FSLN. The earthquake truly laid bare the soul of Nicaragua, and its corrupt core, the Somoza regime. Due to sparse public records and the immense damage caused by the earthquake, it is impossible to calculate precise damage. It would not be unreasonable, however, to conclude that hundreds if not thousands died due to sickness and starvation after the Somoza regime pilfered aid dollars and failed to prevent corruption in reconstruction efforts. Elites were fed up with an unpredictable, thieving "mafiacracy," as Wickham-Crowley terms the Somoza regime, the middle class was left destitute in Nicaragua's main population center, and the poor were fed up with laboring only to barely survive. LaFeber sums up the thoughts of the business class, quoting a "leading" United States businessman as saying in 1979, "He robbed us blind. He was not at all interested in us, except for what we could give, and we gave him plenty…. Right now it is showing up in a backfire."[190]

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[188] Black, *Triumph of the People*, 60.

[189] Douglas Farah, "Managuans Live on in Quake's Ruins," *Washington Post*, January 2, 1995, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/903275313/5516830C83394494PQ/1?accountid=12702.

[190] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 227.

More important than the corruption itself is the incredible loss of support Somoza suffered as a result of the earthquake response. While Somoza did not fall for seven more years, and an FSLN victory still seemed all but outside the realm of the possible, the tide had irrevocably turned. The FSLN capitalized on the massive suffering and misfortunate of the country to build a broad coalition across all segments of society heading into the end of the 1970s, the key to Somoza's downfall.

C. FSLN TACTICS AND GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN

Pastor calls Somoza venal; Goodwin calls him a "neopatrimonial dictator" who was "unpredictable" and "self-destructive," and says that "the Somoza regime not only created its own grave diggers … but also provide[d] them with shovels and a coffin."[191] After consulting well over forty sources, it was difficult to find even one positive word said about Somoza or his reign. The best compliment was half-hearted praise for the relative stability of Nicaragua before his overthrow, but the faint support rings hollow in the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake. LeoGrande characterizes Somoza's campaign against the FSLN as "a war of extermination" and quotes National Guard officers as wanting to "eliminate the contaminated peasants."[192] LeoGrande does not stop there, adding, "For two years, people in the northern provinces were subjected to a systematic campaign of torture, murder, and forced relocation."[193] LeoGrande details the revulsion of Nicaragua's moderates and international condemnation as a result. To call the Somoza campaign against the FSLN scorched-earth is perhaps too weak. Nicaraguan priests testified before the U.S. Congress that the Somoza campaign committed "not only the usual rape and electric shocks," but also "[forced] a prisoner to swallow a button on a string while a Somoza official kept tugging it up."[194] Somoza bombed indiscriminately, shut down the press, imprisoned thousands, and killed thousands more with his National Guard.

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[191] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition*, 27; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 182.

[192] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 15.

[193] LeoGrande, 15–16.

[194] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 228.

Winning over the sympathies of the Nicaraguan public was no Herculean task for the FSLN. Gorriti describes "a 'negative coalition,' in which almost every sector of society joined to overthrow a personalistic dictator and his clique."[195] Somoza declared nine political parties to be illegal, jailed protestors, and won one of the most unfair and illegitimate elections in modern Latin American history in 1974.[196] He bribed and threatened voters, and LaFeber points to the weakness this showed on behalf of Somoza. This led to one of the most infamous actions of the FSLN: the group kidnapped numerous Nicaraguan and visiting officials during a dinner party. Somoza quickly paid the agreed-upon $5 million ransom, and allowed thirteen Sandinistas to fly out of the country. They did so to raucous cheers from crowds gathered at the airport, according to LaFeber.[197] This was a highly significant move on the part of the FSLN. Though LeoGrande, agreeing with many analysts, says that "as 1978 began, the Sandinistas had neither the political nor the military strength to offer a serious challenge to the Somoza regime,"[198] the FSLN's brazen act in 1974 was a sure signal that Somoza's days were numbered. It was perhaps unthinkable even a few years prior in Nicaragua; Nicaragua's economy was doing so well, and Somoza was so entrenched in every facet of the country, that his lifetime rule seemed fait accompli. Of course, Somoza responded in predictable fashion, unleashing what LaFeber calls a "terrorist campaign" against any and all suspected of harboring the FSLN.[199] While the National Guard achieved military victories—including killing the primary leader of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca, in 1976—Somoza was either unable or unwilling to recognize the significant damage these tactics were doing to his support, both inside Nicaragua and abroad. Somoza was losing support almost as quickly as the FSLN was gaining it.

The United States was certainly a major part of Somoza's regime, and arguably could have done more to rein in his human rights abuses before the country fell to the

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[195] Gorriti, "Latin America's Internal Wars," 89.

[196] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 227.

[197] LaFeber, 228.

[198] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 18.

[199] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 228.

FSLN. LeoGrande, Goodwin, Booth, Pastor, and LaFeber detail the various contacts the United States government had with the Somoza regime, including U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Perhaps the worst misstep of the Carter administration was the letter Carter sent Somoza in July 1978 to congratulate Somoza for his efforts in curtailing human rights abuses. Many saw this letter—which was leaked to the press shortly after it was mailed—as tacit approval for the Somoza regime.[200] This letter had disastrous results for the United States, which desired to keep Somoza in place and prevent the FSLN from seizing power, as well as for the Somoza regime. LeoGrande details the impact the letter had on moderates in Nicaragua, who were now convinced that "their strategy of relying on the United States to force [Somoza] out was hopeless."[201] This directly led to the Broad Opposition Front (FAO), which would later organize the general strikes that crippled the country, and was "the first coalition uniting the moderate and radical wings of the anti-Somoza movement."[202] This letter likely cemented Somoza's resolve to remain in power as well; if he could murder his own citizens with impunity and even have the President of the United States endorse his half-hearted efforts for reform, what cause did Somoza have to abandon the presidency? This was just another in a long line of U.S. foreign policy miscalculations in Nicaragua, and indeed Latin America as a whole. In 1964, the CIA did not believe the FSLN "to be a serious threat to the government,"[203] and that attitude seems to have pervaded U.S. actions and thoughts on the crisis until Somoza fell. In 1969, Somoza declared the FSLN dead; in 1970 LaFeber writes that no other country save Costa Rica seemed more unlikely to host a revolution.[204] The United States continually believed Somoza's false promises, and relied upon errant estimates that underestimated the strength of the FSLN and overestimated that of Somoza. In the end, this may have doomed U.S. policy aims; it certainly prevented closer examination of the situation on the ground in Nicaragua.

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[200] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 20.

[201] LeoGrande, 20.

[202] LeoGrande, 20.

[203] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 165.

[204] LaFeber, 225.

Shortly after the letter's release in August 1978, the situation truly became dire. FSLN's Eden "Comandante Zero" Pastora led *Operation Pigpen* and seized the National Palace, with Congress in active session, taking over 1,500 hostages in the process.[205] LeoGrande claims, "The Sandinistas' audacity captured the popular imagination and with it the leadership of the anti-Somoza struggle."[206] As before, the FSLN negotiated a chartered flight out of the country; this time the FSLN also received fifty-nine prisoners in exchange for the release of the hostages.[207] Once again, citizens lined the streets to cheer the Sandinistas, with LaFeber writing that "they were particularly enthusiastic along the airport road that passed through some of Managua's worst slums."[208] This led to a series of bold strikes by the FSLN and the capture of several smaller cities. Unsurprisingly, the National Guard responded by bombing the cities, killing thousands, and eventually retaking the cities in the very definition of a pyrrhic victory. The National Guard may have restored the status quo, but only after 3,000 civilian deaths and thousands of new recruits for the FSLN.[209] At this point, the FSLN grew to over 7,000 members according to LaFeber, a direct result of the public's refutation of Somoza's rule. A survivor of Somoza's brutal campaign after *Operation Pigpen* testified in horrifying detail that, "I could see what they did to my mother after they killed her—they slit her stomach open with a bayonet. They cut off the genitals of my brother-in-law and stuffed them in his mouth."[210] Somoza, and certainly the United States at this point, should have recognized he had lost all legitimacy as a leader.

This was a critical difference between Colombia and Nicaragua: for all its abuses and corruption, the government of Colombia never lost legitimacy the way Somoza did, and the FARC never gained the political legitimacy that the FSLN did in response. LeoGrande writes, "After the carnage of September 1978, no compromise that would retain

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[205] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 20.

[206] LeoGrande, 20.

[207] LeoGrande, 20.

[208] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 231.

[209] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 20.

[210] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 231–32.

Somoza in power was possible."[211] The carnage and distaste was so powerful that the three disparate arms of the FSLN,[212] which each had different views for achieving their desired goal of Somoza's ouster, reunited into the Government for National Reconstruction (GRN) under *Tercerista* leadership. This once again shifted the FSLN toward a decidedly more moderate route, as the three branches all made personal and political concessions, but the insurgency remained focused on removing Somoza from power. Political compromise and pragmatism underscored all major FSLN political decisions with few, if any, exceptions for the duration of its opposition to Somoza.

Early 1979 also saw a critical development that heavily portended FSLN success: major international support. Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico all sent the FSLN supplies, and Costa Rica allowed the FSLN to establish its "government-in-exile."[213] LeoGrande writes that Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela all coordinated to send the rebels arms, with Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, and Ecuador supporting the FSLN diplomatically.[214] This was a huge boon for the FSLN and a major difference from the FARC, which was unable to win international support. In its analysis of ninety insurgencies since World War II, RAND concluded that one of two main factors that dictates insurgency success or failure is external support; those groups without external supported succeeded just 17 percent of the time.[215] The RAND report goes on to say that "sanctuary in neighboring states [is] particularly important for insurgent groups."[216] Still, as late as May 1979, the Carter administration was in denial of the situation on the ground. LeoGrande writes that "United States intelligence analysts were predicting that through sheer

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[211] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 21.

[212] The three arms of the FSLN include the Proletarian Tendency, a Marxist working-class focused group; the Prolonged Popular War Faction, a Maoist group focused on a rural rebellion; and Insurrectional Tendency, or *Terceristas*, which argued for a "policy of tactical alliances." Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*, 273.

[213] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 232.

[214] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 24.

[215] Seth G. Jones, *Improving U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan*, RR RB9357 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/2008/RAND_RB9357.pdf.

[216] Jones.

firepower the Guard could defeat any offensive the FSLN could launch."[217] The FSLN was in prime position. The Somoza administration was in disarray, the FSLN had robust international support, and the Carter administration was conflicted and contradictory in its Nicaragua policy. The FSLN was making ready for its final assault. Goodwin writes that the FSLN's strategy was to "spread the National Guard thin by organizing or supporting insurrections in a number of cities and towns throughout the country."[218] This was a decidedly urban final phase to the Sandinistas revolution, an important milestone for insurgent victory that the FARC was never able to achieve. On July 17, Somoza officially resigned; Managua fell to the FSLN in a manner of days. Somoza was finally gone, but only after more than 50,000 Nicaraguans died and countless more had their lives ruined forever by his reign of terror.

D. U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN NICARAGUA POST-OVERTHROW: THE CONTRA AFFAIR

There are two main theories for why the FSLN succeeded, both of which are undermined by the Contra affair: some analysts point to the United States withdrawing its support for Somoza—at least officially—in early 1979, and most point to the regime type and unique despotism of Somoza. The failure of the Contras led me to conclude these theories are incorrect for three reasons. First, the Contra affair showed that the United States cannot merely wave its hand and change an undesirable regime, even in a small country like Nicaragua. Second, it showed that regime type did not prop up the FSLN; the Contra plan was enacted very soon after the FSLN took power in Nicaragua and did not come close to removing the FSLN government from power. Third and finally, it helps illustrate that the support and pragmatism that propelled the FSLN to victory was enduring.

The Contra affair firmly illustrates that U.S. support is not all that is necessary to defeat an insurgency or unseat an incumbent Latin American government; the United States supported Somoza almost until he fled the country, and the Contras almost immediately after the FSLN overthrew Somoza, both to no avail. For these reasons, it is

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[217] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 23.

[218] Goodwin, *No other Way Out*, 192.

important to also consider the scandal-plagued U.S. support for the Contras in their battle to unseat the FSLN. The economic elites and FSLN maintained an uneasy alliance even after the successful revolution, which aided the regimes efforts to remain in power. To their credit, the major businessmen in Nicaragua pledged to remain in Nicaragua rather than fleeing, as the Cuban elite did after Castro's takeover.[219] The United States also recognized the new reality in Nicaragua; the United States maintained diplomatic ties with the FSLN, and even continued its aid program.[220] Yet the FSLN's support for other leftist insurgencies in the region, particularly in El Salvador, was a sticking point in relations, particularly after Reagan assumed office in 1981. The FSLN continued moving supplies to El Salvador, and Washington threatened to rescind aid if this continued.[221] Despite the FSLN adhering to the United States' conditions, Reagan ended all aid to Nicaragua in April 1981. This would lay the foundation for the arming and support of the Contras, with Reagan actually authorizing CIA covert activities against leftist insurgents a month earlier, on March 9, 1981.[222] In February 1982, the *Washington Post* reported on the covert activities, revealing that $19 million had been used to support roughly 1,000 fighters.[223] By 1983, this number had grown to over 10,000 fighters.[224] This funding of the inept Contras continued for several years, with almost nothing to show for it other than frayed relations, millions of wasted dollars, and political scandal. Congress temporarily ended funding for the Contras in October 1984; members of the Reagan administration, including Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, Admiral John Poindexter, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Elliot Abrams, and numerous other Reagan officials, would later continue the funding off the books, thanks to profits from arms sales to Iran. Despite setbacks, in October 1986,

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[219] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 29.

[220] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition*, 179.

[221] Pastor, 191.

[222] Pastor, 195.

[223] Pastor, 196.

[224] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 335.

Reagan successfully secured $70 million in military and $30 million in non-military funding for the Contras.[225]

The Contra program and its off-the-books funding ended in 1986 in ignominy. One of the main facilitators of U.S. aid to the Contras, the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, shockingly turned out to be a less than savory character. LaFeber writes that Noriega "had been a double agent who passed U.S. secrets to Fidel Castro, and [he] was a drug trafficker who helped smuggle tens-of-millions-of dollars of cocaine into the United States."[226] Robert Owen, a money courier between Colonel North and the Contras, decried the Contras as corrupt and stated that if $100 million in additional funding were given to the Contras, "it will be like pouring money down a sinkhole."[227] When Attorney General Edwin Meese made the details of the scandal public in November 1986, the ill-fated Contra program came to an end. LaFeber writes, "After eight years and at least 43,000 Nicaraguan casualties, [a Reagan critic observed] that the only town the Contra mercenaries ever held was Washington."[228] The Contra program and its failures had wide-ranging implications for the United States in Latin America. It ruined what could have been successful ties between the United States and Nicaragua. It damaged the standing of the United States even further in the region. It also came exceedingly close to prematurely ending Regan's presidency. The Contra program illustrated the fallacy of perceived U.S. omnipotence in Nicaragua. Many analysts blamed the Carter administration for either supporting or not supporting the Somoza regime as the reason behind the FSLN's success, as illustrated by the criticism of ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick in Chapter II Section C. Few, if any, considered any alternative to the assumption that the United States could decide the fate of the FSLN and Somoza. The Contra affair perfectly illustrates the fact that the United States was not the deciding factor in the FSLN's victory in Nicaragua. The United States spent millions and tried to directly foment an opposition to the FSLN government in Nicaragua, and made absolutely no headway. The Contra affair is pinned on Reagan, but Carter

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[225] LaFeber, 333.

[226] LaFeber, 336.

[227] LaFeber, 337.

[228] LaFeber, 339.

continued anti-Sandinista policies in secret and searched for any viable alternative to the FSLN. While Carter did not try to raise an army, he too sought to remove the FSLN from power.

A convincing argument can be made that the United States may have even negatively impacted Nicaragua by supporting Somoza for as long as it did rather than demanding his resignation sooner. As Wickham-Crowley notes repeatedly in *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*, the Somoza regime had many strong parallels to the Batista regime, which the United States also arguably supported for too long. Had the United States militarily intervened in Nicaragua, it would likely have only prolonged the inevitable. Nicaragua was a relatively poor, indebted country, with no prospects of upward mobility for its peasants and workers. Dramatic social change was needed in Nicaragua, and the Somoza regime caused far more harm than good to the country. While the United States has the ability to have an outsized impact on affairs in the region, to remove agency from Latin American nations is a shortsighted endeavor. Just as the United States' drawn-out support for Somoza provided a rallying point for Nicaraguan opposition, so too did U.S. support for the Contras. While the specter of the Somoza boogeyman faded, the FSLN needed a new enemy to coalesce around. The United States gave the FSLN the perfect propaganda tool with the Contra affair. The Contras, whose members included many former National Guard members, committed numerous human rights abuses and even embraced many of the same oppressive tactics the National Guard used under Somoza. The Contras committed torture and kidnappings, and even executed civilians.[229] According to LaFeber, Costa Rican President Arias "understood, however, that the use of force [by the Contras] had only led [the FSLN] to tighten their grip over Nicaragua."[230] The United States' sponsorship of the Contras had hindered rather than helped its interests in the region. This raises a simple, logical question about the United States' decision to undertake such a damaging campaign: Why? Greg Grandin makes a convincing case that Reagan desired to look strong, and was influenced by key voices in his administration who

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[229] LaFeber, 307.

[230] LaFeber, 342.

convinced him intervening in Central America could help the United States regain international standing after the Vietnam debacle.[231] They were wrong.

E. THE FSLN'S ABILITY TO FORM ALLIANCES AND COMPROMISE

While the FARC and its leadership displayed a decided inability to create a broad coalition of support or convince other nations to support its movement, the FSLN did the exact opposite. The FSLN sacrificed some of its more radical aims to achieve its most important goal, the overthrow of Somoza. Goodwin quotes Carlos Vilas, who states that the FSLN searched for and achieved a "national democratic consensus across a broad spectrum of actors."[232] Goodwin also points out that the Sandinistas were not political opportunists, and did not achieve power due to a state breakdown. Instead, they "broke" the state themselves.[233] Goodwin also recognizes that while Somoza's repressive policies drove the elites and moderates into the arms of the FSLN, the FSLN presciently accepted their backing, all while expertly exploiting "the regime's vulnerabilities."[234] This important fact cannot be overstated. While the FSLN did not allow any moderates into its five-member junta, the FSLN did ally with moderates, did confer with the elites of Nicaragua, and did allow moderate-dominated bodies to have legitimate influence on FSLN actions. To wit, the FSLN also established an eighteen-member cabinet, of which only one member was a Sandinista; the rest were "businessmen and professionals."[235] None of the FSLN leaders would likely describe themselves as capitalists—indeed, they all have leftist and communist backgrounds—but in the FSLN's revolution, destruction of the state was not the ultimate goal. The dictatorial fiat by which Somoza ran Nicaragua as his own checking account solely for the benefit of his family and inner circle was unacceptable to the FSLN. And this resonated across a truly diverse cross-section of Nicaraguan society. Elite resistance is the norm, not the exception, for nearly all guerrilla

[231] Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of New Imperialism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

[232] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out,* 210.

[233] Goodwin, 195.

[234] Goodwin, 194.

[235] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 235.

insurgencies in post–Cuban Revolution Latin America. Yet, in Nicaragua, it is very likely the revolution does not succeed without elite backing, highlighting key support which is often overlooked in literature on Latin American insurgencies. The general strikes, which ground Nicaragua to a halt, were supremely effective at reaching the privileged few who were not personally impacted by Somoza's unique brand of violence. While the promises the FSLN had made quickly faded after Somoza's overthrow (democracy and elections became a hindrance rather than a welcome and regular occurrence), the FSLN, prior to its victory, convinced all important parties of the aims of its group—from the lowest Nicaraguan peasants to heads of key Latin American states such as Costa Rica and Mexico.

While Nicaragua was not a failed or fragile state prior to or under Somoza's rule, the FSLN exploited key societal divides and Somoza's lack of political legitimacy to great advantage. LaFeber writes that "Nicaragua was blessed with a highly favorable person-to-land ratio, but … 200,000 peasants had no land at all."[236] LaFeber goes on to point out that while Nicaragua's agriculture production grew faster than any other Central American nation from 1950 to 1977, "the landless labor force was 1,000 percent larger [in 1977] than it was in the 1950s."[237] The FSLN exploited this cleavage between the state and its most destitute members, promising land reform, increased labor force participation, and a greater share of wealth if the FSLN's revolution were supported. This message of populism resonated strongly with the disenfranchised and impoverished peasants of Nicaragua; like many promises made by the FSLN, however, this one did not come to fruition under Ortega. It was these very activities of supporting the poor and promising a more egalitarian future that engendered the FSLN to neighboring countries. The FARC promised a twisted version of this that had a much narrower appeal: take from everybody else and give to the poor. Much handwringing was done at the National Security Council level in the United States toward the FSLN's association with Cuba, and the United States took particular pains to try to avoid turning Nicaragua into another Cuba. However, U.S. Assistant

[236] LaFeber, 226.

[237] LaFeber, 226.

Secretary of State Viron Vaky stated that "Cuba was 'not the only or even the most important' supporter of the Sandinistas."[238]

Neighboring countries saw the writing on the wall as early as January 1979 that the Somoza regime could not hold on much longer. After critical missteps in embezzlement of earthquake aid, targeting of unarmed civilians, and many other human rights violations, Somoza no longer had the authority or the legitimacy to lead Nicaragua in the eyes of an overwhelming majority. The FSLN communicated to its neighbors that it did not seek a radical new Nicaragua; this is a key point that many analysts overlook while attributing all FSLN support to simply not being Somoza. This starkly contrasts the FARC's actions, which advocated for complete overhaul of the state from the ground up. The FSLN promised these countries it would lead in a humane manner while honoring previous agreements and seeking to deepen diplomatic and economic ties. Goodwin argues, "The growing elite as well as popular opposition to Somoza certainly encouraged regional and international support for the FSLN…. Especially important in this regard was the ability of the FSLN to operate from base camps in Costa Rica [and] Honduras."[239] This message worked, and gave the FSLN the legitimacy it needed in the international community to be seen as not only a viable alternative to Somoza but, by the end, the only alternative.

Perhaps the FSLN's most ingenious move was to reunify in 1979 under the banner of the GRN. It was an important move to show potential allies, both internal and external, that the FSLN could unify politically, and even the name of the soon-to-be interim government conveyed an important message for the FSLN. The Government for National Reconstruction implicitly told the potential member of the FSLN, as well as the potential coalition partner, that Nicaragua was broken; indeed, Managua remained in a literal state of disrepair for decades after the deadly 1972 earthquake. However, it not only informed the people of the broken state of Nicaragua but also communicated via the GRN name that the FSLN was the very group to undertake the vital task of rebuilding the shattered country. This was a step the FARC never progressed, or even came close, to achieving. This unified

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[238] LaFeber, 234.

[239] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 189.

government illustrated that FSLN leadership, particularly the five-man junta, was able to unify disparate theories of government into one cohesive product, and most importantly signified that the new FSLN-led government would not simply be a radical group focused on one sector of society; all parts of society and all neighboring countries could count on the FSLN's leadership in the post-Somoza years. Even the United States was resigned to the fact toward the end; the Carter administration recognized that there truly was no moderate alternative to the FSLN and sent $20 million in aid to the new FSLN-led country.[240] The FSLN proved to the United States, to Latin America, and to Nicaraguan elites and peasants alike that it was ready to lead Nicaragua, and that its government would take the country into the future. This promise all fell apart shortly after the FSLN took power, but the initial promise is what garnered the support that propelled the FSLN to victory.

F. WHY THE FSLN SUCCEEDED

When the Sandinista revolution is evaluated by Mao's seven requirements for victory,[241] it is readily apparent how the group achieved victory. The FSLN's ability to arouse and organize the people was resoundingly successful. Guerilla revolutions in Latin America have historically had strong peasant and worker support, and the FSLN in Nicaragua was no exception. Where the FSLN differed was in the high amount of moderate and elite support the group cultivated. Even immediately after the revolution, the relationship between economic elites from the United States and the FSLN was exceedingly strong. LaFeber writes that "North American businessmen reentered the country to be welcomed by the revolutionaries."[242] Additionally, local union members attempted to organize a strike against U.S. businesses such as Coca-Cola; the FSLN kicked them out of the country.[243] Another pre-overthrow fear was potential economic actions the

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[240] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 238.

[241] "Arousing and organizing the people, achieving internal unification politically, establishing bases, equipping forces, recovering national strength, destroying enemy's national strength, and regaining lost territories." Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 3.

[242] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 238.

[243] LaFeber, 238.

FSLN would take. These fears proved unfounded as the FSLN nationalized Somoza's properties and the banks, which were merely turned over to "respected bankers."[244] A U.S. businessman with extensive business operations in Nicaragua even "told a congressional committee that the Sandinista 'economic team' was of high quality."[245] All of these actions would have been unthinkable for U.S. businessmen in Colombia, to say nothing of such a welcome extended by the FARC to even Colombian businessmen.

Of Mao's seven criteria for success, the FSLN almost certainly succeeded most in arousing the people. The FSLN achieved internal political union in a similar fashion: it formed the GRN to unite the three FSLN strands, it formed other organizations such as the FAO to unify with business and economic elites in Nicaragua, and its moderate "cabinet" further created positive ties between elites and the FSLN. The peasants, largely destitute and landless, were also easily swayed by the FSLN's promises of political and future economic stability. The FSLN was adept at establishing bases domestically and internationally, utilizing bases in Costa Rica and Honduras and creating and maintaining seven major fronts between 1977 and 1979 throughout Nicaragua.[246] The FSLN's forces were equipped with weapons taken from conquered National Guard units, as well as from arms shipments from Cuba, other Latin American nations, and the Soviet Union. The FSLN was perhaps weakest militarily—until almost the very end in July 1979, any city taken by the FSLN was able to be recaptured by the National Guard, accompanied by thousands of casualties and abuses—but the FSLN did not suffer politically as a result. The FSLN destroyed the national strength of the Somoza regime, and the National Guard was merely the militarized extension of Somoza policy. Somoza himself was never physically threatened; it was an inspired FSLN political campaign that isolated Somoza domestically and abroad—even from the United States and the Carter administration, who were forced to cut all aid and support to Somoza, at least officially, in early 1979. Domestically, every class loathed Somoza by the end, including the businessmen he exploited for years, the

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[244] LaFeber, 238.

[245] LaFeber, 238.

[246] Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, 193.

economic elites who saw stunted growth as a result of his self-enriching economic policies, the middle class who only rose to prominence after 1960 along with the FSLN, and the peasants, who saw their cries for help in the aftermath of the earthquake ignored, and their aid and supplies plundered and sold to the highest bidder by Somoza's National Guard. Finally, there were no lost territories for the FSLN to take. When Somoza fled in July 1979, the National Guard members who remained crumbled soon after. The entirety of Nicaragua belonged to the FSLN.

The FSLN succeeded because it understood Nicaragua better than Somoza did, ensconced in a web of corruption and deceit for the majority of his rule. This corruption and depredation eroded all support for Somoza, and the FSLN exploited this to garner massive support. One common mistake analysts make is assuming that just because the country turned on Somoza the people had no choice but to support the FSLN. This could not be further from the truth. If the FSLN had adopted terrorist tactics like the FARC and the National Guard, and targeted civilians as the FARC did, it is highly unlikely the group would have received anywhere near the level of support it did. The FSLN expertly grew its support organically. The FSLN started out small, focusing on indoctrinating students at the college, and later high school, level to the evils of Somoza. Nicaraguans needed little convincing that Somoza was bad for the country. There simply was not a sector, aside from his closest inner-circle and most loyal of National Guard generals, that Somoza had not harmed or cheated in some manner. Many analysts, from Goodwin to Wickham-Crowley to Dix, blame Somoza's downfall on his decision to rule as a personalistic dictator; he ran Nicaragua as a mafia-like organization rather than a legitimate state, according to Wickham-Crowley. Yet Somoza ruled with no serious threats for almost twelve years, until the last several months of his reign in 1979. Additionally, the Somoza family had been in power since 1936, a reign of more than forty-three years. While Anastasio's brother and father may not have had quite the same reputation the youngest Somoza has internationally, they also ran the country in an equally or perhaps even more oppressive manner, and became personally wealthy by funneling public funds to their personal accounts. According to the Center for Global Development and authors Nancy Birdsall and John Williamson, the Somoza family owned 23 percent of all land in Nicaragua, and Somoza's personal

wealth was estimated at $500 million, or an astounding 33 percent of Nicaragua's GDP in 1979.[247] If an oppressive dictator was truly the driving factor behind FSLN victory, surely a revolution would have occurred much earlier in the forty-three-year Somoza rule.

The FSLN's political acumen and coalition building are almost inarguably unparalleled in twentieth-century Latin American insurgencies; this was the cornerstone to the group's success. Even in Castro's victory in Cuba, he was much more militaristic and simply managed to beat Batista and his forces tactically. The FSLN's victory was wholly political. The FSLN convinced even unwilling leaders, such as Arias in Costa Rica, that its group was best able to lead Nicaragua. If Arias had been convinced that the FSLN did not have the support of the people, or if there had been any other more palatable alternative, Costa Rica surely would have backed this hypothetical other party, to say nothing of U.S. recognition of the FSLN as the legitimate leader of Nicaragua. Wickham-Crowley argues that in a strong state against a strong guerilla group, U.S. involvement becomes irrelevant to the outcome. While perhaps neither the Somoza regime nor the FSLN were the strongest of actors, few of the United States' actions seemed to aid Somoza or prevent the FSLN from seizing a monopoly on political legitimacy in Nicaragua. The FSLN did not win via military might or economic superiority. The FSLN convinced all relevant actors of its ability to form broad-based coalitions and formulate strategy—not always from political desire, but rather from what was most politically expedient to the largest number of people. It also compromised and abandoned what it deemed to be secondary political goals to achieve the overthrow of Somoza. This is an under-examined theory in Latin American counterinsurgency literature. If a guerrilla group, regardless of its political beliefs, can convince a majority of the people it can potentially govern via an effective coalition better than the previous regime, be inclusive to all groups, compromise politically, and successfully erode the previous regime's political legitimacy, then the group will be successful. The FSLN did just this in Nicaragua in 1979, the last successful revolution in Latin America.

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[247] Nancy Birdsall and John Williamson, *Delivering on Debt Relief: From IMF Gold to a New Aid Architecture* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute, 2002), 134.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I present my conclusions from the FARC and FSLN case studies with a recap of main findings from my research, considering both the insurgencies and COIN efforts of the government. I also perform a brief external validity examination to determine the exportability of my conclusions, and offer policy recommendations to future COIN commanders and policy makers.

My conclusion, while not altogether revolutionary, directly contradicts much conventional wisdom and many of the primary theories on Latin American insurgency. First and foremost, U.S. dominance of affairs is vastly overstated by a significant portion of Latin American analysts. While the United States is undoubtedly the regional—and global—hegemon, many analysts are quick to remove agency from Latin American nations in dealings with the United States; they are equally as quick to treat U.S. involvement as a cure-all for host nations facing robust insurgencies. My research indicates that U.S. involvement was neither the decisive factor in suppressing the FARC rebellion nor was it able to keep the Somoza regime in power in Nicaragua. There is ample opportunity for future research for a more discerning eye to examine U.S. involvement in Latin American insurgencies and attempt to better quantify the results. Next, I found the literature on Nicaragua to be wholly lacking. While Somoza was indeed every bit as poor a leader as he is nearly unanimously described by Latin American analysts, to attribute the FSLN victory to his actions is a surface-level conclusion. If a personalistic dictator is all it takes to foment a revolution, then why did Latin American dictators such as Duvalier and Trujillo never face an insurgency or revolution during their reigns? After careful examination of an array of sources, I concluded that the FARC failed because they could not garner sufficient support and because they were unable to prove the political illegitimacy of the Colombian government all while refusing to compromise in order to achieve its stated political goals.

A. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FARC INSURGENCY

There are many important lessons to be gleaned from the FARC insurgency. The FARC grew from a small, disorganized band of fighters in 1964 to a well-organized,

20,000-member group with more than sixty fronts in the 1990s. The FARC was so organized that the group even offered retired fighters a pension.[248] This was done despite a decades-long effort on behalf of the Colombian government to defeat the guerrillas. Some significant lessons learned are how guerrilla groups recruit and build forces, the relative strength of asymmetric tactics and their applicability to Latin American insurgencies, and the importance of peasant support to sustained insurgency. Also, and perhaps of more importance, are the areas in which the FARC failed: its refusal to subjugate political desires to ultimate victory; its inability to build broad, class-diverse support in Colombia and the resulting limitations on its territorial and political gains; and finally, its embrace of criminal and terrorist-associated activities. Terrorist tactics may temporarily weaken a government and strengthen an insurgency; in the end they do more harm than good to a group's political and social aims, particularly if aimed at the very population the insurgency aspires to one day govern.

The Colombian government was particularly slow to recognize why the FARC was so successful at appealing to and recruiting the rural population of Colombia. The government simply did not serve rural Colombia. A common theme in literature on Colombia is the lack of control the central government had on the more rural regions, even as late as the early 2000s.[249] Fernán González states that this was a result of a weak central Colombian state, which lacked a "monopoly on justice and the legitimate use of force" in these outer regions.[250] The FARC—in particular in the early years of the rebellion before it turned to drugs, kidnapping, extortion, and other criminal means to finance operations—was willing to service remote areas in the Colombian government's absence. The FARC not only served as the authority in the remote eastern and southern regions of Colombia; for all intents and purposes, it was the only government that existed in the region, though

[248] "FARC—Rebels with a Cause?" Council on Hemispheric Affairs, July 6, 2010, http://www.coha.org/farc-%E2%80%93-rebels-with-a-cause/.

[249] I found that the best and most illuminating research on this issue is from CINEP Colombian historian Fernán González. Brittain, Rosen, Wickham-Crowley, Leech, LeoGrande, and others also detail this issue.

[250] Fernán E. González, "The Colombian Conflict in Historical Perspective," *Accord* 14 (2004): 10–15, https://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2014_2The%20Colombian%20conflict%20in%20historical%20perspective_2004_%20ENG.pdf.

it was a poor facsimile of one. This was a key failure of the Colombian government. Its abandonment of the peasants and large portions of the farming population allowed the FARC to rise. Had the Colombian government been cognizant of this fact in the early 1960s, and willing to address the legitimate grievances of these citizens—particularly regarding labor force and economic participation—it is highly unlikely FARC would have grown to its eventual impressive fighting force. Even in the latter years of the FARC insurgency, when prevailing COIN wisdom was shifting to the belief that eroding the base of support for an insurgency group was the quickest way to defeat the insurgents, the Colombian government enacted little political or social reform aimed at the FARC's rural base. Democratic participation, even in the so-called nominal democracy of pre-2000s Colombia, is a critical means to alleviate civil unrest and preclude potential rebellions.

Asymmetric tactics, which Wickham-Crowley refers to as the "revolution in the revolution," as previously noted,[251] achieved moderate success in Latin America. In Colombia, the FARC utilized these tactics with varying success—with the most success seen in its hit-and-run tactics such as attacking undefended critical infrastructure, and attacking a previously undisturbed military base and then moving rapidly to another sector. As Arreguin-Toft and others have argued in great detail, asymmetry in tactics can be an important equalizing force when a weaker insurgency fights an incumbent government, especially since the government is almost invariably stronger.[252] While the FARC was never able to parlay its smaller military successes into large political gains, asymmetric tactics did help the group win key concessions from the government, deter the government from large-scale intervention in FARC-controlled territory prior to the 2000s, and win large swaths of land, some of which was formally recognized by the Colombian government. These asymmetric tactics were most effective before sophisticated Colombian government military offensives, and were of limited effectiveness during the Plan Colombia years. Thus, a reasonable conclusion is that asymmetric tactics are effective against governments

[251] Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves.'"

[252] Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*.

and states with low political influence and legitimacy, and their efficacy is weakened against a strong military with external support.

While the FARC ultimately failed to overthrow the Colombia government, it displayed the strength of a peasant rebellion. A strong argument can be made that the FARC enjoyed the strongest peasant support of any revolution in twentieth-century Latin America, perhaps even stronger than in Cuba and Nicaragua. It is unlikely the FARC would have survived for more than fifty years without extensive peasant support. This support provided key logistical and economic revenues for the FARC, and also allowed for freedom of movement and the ability to remain hidden from the Colombian government, which otherwise would have otherwise been impossible. While nearly all analysts agree that population support is key—from David Kilcullen arguing that securing the population is the primary objective of a COIN mission, to Mao writing that securing popular support is key to winning an insurgency, to Galula writing that COIN is doomed to failure without support of the people—few argue that peasant support alone is enough to win a revolution.[253] Yet the FARC arguably came close to doing so in Colombia, or at the very least achieved numerous tactical victories, both military and political, almost exclusively on the back of peasant support. An interesting topic for future research would be an attempt to quantify peasant support's impact on an insurgency, as well as the most important sector of society to target to best ensure insurgent victory.

A key difference between the FARC and the FSLN was the FARC's refusal to subjugate its political views to attain victory. The FSLN willingly compromised with capitalists, foreign countries, and even U.S. businessmen, which, on the surface, would seem be to be largely antithetical to the FSLN's revolutionary ethos. The FARC, however, refused to do so. The FARC advocated the overthrow of the Colombian government but was not willing to abandon socialism to achieve this goal. The FARC hated the farcical appearance of democracy in Colombia, yet refused to work within the system to defeat the Colombian government, its ill-fated UP experiment notwithstanding. The FARC remained

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[253] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*; Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*.

Marxist-Leninist to the end, according to authors such as Brittain[254]—even while heavily involved in the drug trade—and was unwilling to compromise to achieve victory. The FARC never reached out to the business or middle class in an attempt to include them in its rebellion; the FARC simply stated demands and used violence if the demands were not met. While the FARC did negotiate with the government at various times through the decades-long rebellion, the FARC never seriously cultivated international support, nor did it appeal to many in the urban areas of Colombia. The FARC regularly executed those who were believed to support paramilitaries—a perfect example of the group's self-defeating rigidity. Rather than attempt to convince these civilians of the legitimacy of the FARC's cause or illustrate a cohesive plan for change in Colombia, the FARC instead killed hundreds who could have perhaps advanced the group's cause. While the lower classes have risen up against tyrannical governments throughout history, few have succeeded with just peasant support. None has succeeded against a modern, organized, and professional army such as Colombia's. The FARC was all too willing to abandon morality to fund its army, but could not do so to achieve political legitimacy.

The last, and perhaps most important lesson learned from the FARC was that its tactics and criminal activities ultimately led to its failure as a political entity. The FARC easily had the upper hand in the narrative of the insurgency, particularly in the 1960s until 1980. Losing this narrative superiority is the gravest sin of an insurgency according to Thomas H. Johnson.[255] The Colombian government was democratic in name only, with the National Front precluding any real ability for the Colombian people to choose its leaders. The Colombian government also did little to address the needs of its rural population, and these rural farmers and peasants were provided protection and services by the FARC that many had never had access to. Colombia's poor infrastructure prevented remote farmers from accessing markets, and the FARC addressed this in a way that the central government did not. If the FARC had continued to attack only military targets and support the peasant population while demanding political reform, it may have enjoyed

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[254] Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*.

[255] Thomas H. Johnson, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

greater popular support, particularly in Bogotá. Instead, the FARC kidnapped civilians, attacked civilian targets, and integrated in the drug trade. This eroded the FARC's legitimacy in the eyes of the Colombian population, and allowed the government of Colombia to paint the group as narco-terrorists internationally, which facilitated billions of dollars in U.S. aid to fight the group. This also needlessly distracted the FARC, as the group had to waste precious resources and manpower fighting not only the government but also paramilitaries, traffickers, and cartels in order to maintain its rural coca cultivation base. The FARC wasted decades of advocacy for peasants by converting them into nothing more than a massive supply-chain for its drug activities. If the FARC had not turned to drugs, the group likely would never have grown to the heights that it did in the 1990s. Conversely, the United States may have never intervened on behalf of the Colombian government financially, which may have produced a far different result in the insurgency. While the outcome of the 2016 peace deal between the FARC and the Colombian government will not be known for many years, the terms could have been far different for the FARC with two simple actions: compromise, and rejection of criminal and terrorist tactics. The embrace of terrorist activities and unwillingness to compromise ensured the FARC would never have the political legitimacy necessary to govern in Colombia, and convinced neighboring countries that the Colombian government was right to aggressively prosecute the group. With only the peasants of Colombia convinced of the FARC's political legitimacy—and even that conviction faded after the 1990s—the FARC had no chance of achieving its aim of overthrowing the government. The FARC simply failed to build the broad coalition required to win a Latin American insurgency.

B. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FSLN INSURGENCY

The FSLN avoided many of the mistakes that crippled the FARC insurgency. First and foremost, popular support was the main driver for the FSLN's success; the peasant class, while still important, was likely the least critical sector of support in the FSLN's revolution. The U.S. government opposed the FSLN pre- and post-overthrow, yet never defeated nor meaningfully deterred the FSLN, even with direct support to the Contras and National Guard remnants in Nicaragua. The FSLN enjoyed significant external support and skillfully exploited external sanctuary to its benefit; the FARC was never able to cultivate

either. Finally, the FSLN focused on political legitimacy and a broad support base from the group's inception, while compromising on politics when necessary. The FSLN also avoided major pitfalls of the FARC when it came to civilian targeting; while the FSLN did execute attacks on non-military objectives such as farms and power plants,[256] the group made a concerted effort to not target civilians or to associate itself with typical terrorist tactics that the FARC adopted in its later years. While no insurgency can ever be perfectly crafted and executed, the FSLN led a campaign with no discernable major flaws. While the war left 40,000 to 50,000 dead, with 40,000 orphaned children and one-fifth of the population homeless,[257] this was nearly wholly attributable to the National Guard and the atrocities carried out by Somoza-supporting elements. The FSLN provided a blueprint for oppressed Latin American populations to follow, though none have successfully done so to date.

The FSLN's popular support may not receive enough credit in historical examinations of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Many authors, from Goodwin to Wickham-Crowley, believe the FSLN garnered much of its support simply because it was the lesser of two evils when compared to Somoza. Yet careful examination shows that this may be a misguided, or at the very least superficial, characterization. The FSLN cunningly cultivated supporters from a very young age, targeting colleges and high schools. Somoza was either unwilling or unable to do the same. By creating numerous youth and student groups, and focusing on youth outreach, the FSLN crafted its idealistic young students of the 1960s into its supporters and fighters of the 1970s. These accountings also pay little attention to the FSLN's skillful nurturing of popular support in the face of other competing factions in Nicaragua, particularly the moderates, who even the United States reluctantly admitted had no chance to overthrow Somoza due to lack of support. The FSLN expertly homed in on critical issues to the people of Nicaragua, and promised to fix these issues if and when it governed the country. Here, many of the smaller strategic decisions added up to a favorable FSLN outcome. The FSLN instituted a National Literacy Crusade, which served two

[256] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 229.

[257] LaFeber, 238.

purposes: to improve the lot of the Nicaraguan people and to indoctrinate them to the FSLN's cause. This level of resourcefulness was sorely missing from the FARC's campaign. Whether the realities of governance or a corrupted leadership core prevented the FSLN from delivering on these promises after it deposed Somoza is irrelevant to the consideration of the insurgency victory. The FSLN built up grassroots support across all sectors and did so, remarkably, with little or no demonstrable coercion. While the country's leadership under a dictatorial Somoza was indubitably a marked advantage for the FSLN's efforts to convince the disillusioned population to support its revolution, the group still garnered support without specific threats and violence, a trap many groups, including the FARC, perpetually fall victim to. The FSLN's tactics after achieving power, and indeed Ortega's continued repressive tactics today, show that perhaps eventually all insurgents fall victim to this trap. External support also played a key role in the FSLN's success; according to RAND and other analysts, external support plays a decisive factor in many insurgencies.[258] This was also exacerbated by Somoza's poor management and outright political and economic malfeasance while head of Nicaragua, but was an impressive element of the FSLN's victory nonetheless.

It is difficult to say which is the more impressive feat: the FSLN's ability to counter the United States' nearly unwavering support for Somoza, which lasted almost until the day he fled, or its ability to weather the storm of Contra opposition in the 1980s. Both damage the theory that U.S. support for host nation governments is decisive in Latin American insurgencies. Even in the case of El Salvador—whose ability to prevent insurgent victory is almost wholly attributed to U.S. support and intervention, according to analysts[259]—the government did not defeat the insurgents; it merely achieved a lasting stalemate. If U.S. support is instrumental for insurgent defeat in Latin America, why did the FSLN secure victory in El Salvador? And what of the rebel victories in Cuba, and U.S. failures abroad such as Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq? The answer likely is tied to

[258] Jones, *Improving U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations*.

[259] This theory does have its doubters, with Brian D'Haeseleer's excellent work *The Salvadoran Crucible: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency in El Salvador, 1979–1992* serving as a prime exemplar of this school of thought, which casts doubt on the success of this model and U.S. attempts to export it to the war in Iraq.

Wickham-Crowley's findings that U.S. intervention is irrelevant when a strong state faces a strong insurgency.[260] It is also likely that U.S. influence is a less determinant factor in most insurgencies, even in Latin America. U.S. intervention may accelerate or aid an already successful COIN strategy, but it is likely not decisive, even with a large discrepancy in state and insurgency strength. In Nicaragua, the Somoza government was indisputably stronger than the FSLN up until the end of the 1970s. U.S. support neither changed the outcome nor made a discernible impact in Somoza's COIN campaign in Nicaragua, nor did it prevent FARC growth in Colombia for decades. An important lesson on U.S. support learned from Nicaragua is therefore that a Jeane Kirkpatrick–like view of supporting dictators, as long as they are aligned with U.S. interests, will not necessarily combat an insurgency; at best this approach is unsupported by evidence, and at worst leads to incumbent regime failure such as in Nicaragua and Cuba, to say nothing of abuses committed by other Latin American dictators, such as Pinochet, who enjoyed robust U.S. backing.

The most important lesson learned from the FSLN insurgency is that alliance building, political pragmatism, and political compromise are the most decisive factors in insurgent victory. While an unsupported insurgency surely will never achieve victory in any circumstances, I posit that an under-examined factor in cultivation of support also lies in the insurgent group's ability to undermine the political legitimacy of the incumbent regime. Whether implicitly or not, disparate groups of a population will only support an insurgent group that can effectively unite the population before, as well as after, the incumbent is removed from power. In examining Nicaragua, this is starkly visible in elite and business leader support for the FSLN. The FSLN made no secret of its Marxist-Leninist, communist, left-leaning roots and political philosophy; the FSLN's ability to entice groups that would otherwise be diametrically opposed to its political aims was simply a result of its political legitimacy and ability to compromise. If the FSLN was not deemed able to lead and able to voice the will of the people—regardless of its ability or willingness to do so once in power—then Nicaraguan elites would never have supported

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[260] Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolutions*.

the group's ascendancy or its seizure of power once Somoza fled. The FSLN, with perhaps some influence from Castro and Cuba, organically formed as a counter to Somoza's plunder of Nicaragua. This is the same reason the FARC failed. The group had legitimate grievances with the Colombian government, but did not offer solutions that a majority, or even a plurality, of Colombians found palatable. The FARC never capitalized on favorable political conditions or early political legitimacy and, unlike the FSLN in Nicaragua, did not convince a broad coalition that the FARC was a better solution to the problems plaguing Colombia than the Colombian government. I have concluded that coalition building is the first, and ultimately most important, aspect of insurgency victory, which precedes military buildup and the accrual of political power. Put simply, if the FSLN did not appeal to all echelons of society, then it would not have succeeded. The FSLN's attacks on Somoza, both rhetorically and militarily, would have convinced the population of nothing. The FSLN's message would not have resounded so deeply if the population did not believe the FSLN had the legitimacy to challenge Somoza's rule.

C. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COLOMBIAN AND NICARAGUAN COIN

I combined the COIN efforts of the Colombian and Nicaraguan governments due to their similar inefficiency and poor execution; while the Colombian government was not overthrown, the reason the government survived was more likely due to the FARC's strategic errors and inability to build support rather than Colombian COIN success. Therefore, the lessons learned from COIN are limited, and mostly outside the scope of my research. Both the Colombian and Nicaraguan governments followed roughly the same playbook, though Somoza was almost inarguably more vicious in his civilian attacks and targeting in Nicaragua. Colombia deployed the army and right-wing paramilitaries, Nicaragua the National Guard. Neither group focused on pacification of the populace; both took a take-no-prisoners approach to defeating the insurgents. Colombia, mainly through its support and tacit endorsement of paramilitaries, conducted its own campaign of violence, aimed primarily at the FARC, with no shortage of collateral damage along the way. Somoza did the same with his bombing campaigns of suspected FSLN strongholds, but made two critical mistakes in his campaign. First was the murder of *La Prensa*

journalist Joaquín Chamorro in 1978, which LaFeber states was responsible for the "first mass uprising against the regime,"[261] and second was the on-air execution of ABC journalist Bill Stewart by National Guard soldiers in June 1979. This all but forced the United States to completely abandon the Somoza regime, even in secret, and to "make the best possible deal with the GRN."[262] Conventional COIN wisdom, particularly today—as shown by Douglas Porch in *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* and Johnson in his writing on Afghanistan[263]—decries government violence against the population as not just harmful to COIN efforts but also as a boon for the insurgents. This may as well be the cardinal rule of COIN, and likely doomed the United States' efforts in the Middle East after 9/11. Government violence against insurgents must be targeted strictly at insurgents; when government violence targets civilians, intentionally or not, the host nation loses control of the narrative, a critical factor in defeat that Johnson details extensively in *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict*. Both the Colombian and Nicaraguan governments killed tens of thousands of citizens in their efforts to defeat the FARC and the FSLN, respectively,[264] but did little to hamper the efficacy of these groups politically or militarily.

Where Colombia's COIN effort differs from Nicaragua's is the later reversal of these ineffective COIN strategies. Particularly under Álvaro Uribe in the 2000s, Colombia saw mass demobilization of paramilitaries, minimization of civilian casualties, and increased military victories and FARC leadership killings by the Colombian military. The Colombian government also created massive outreach programs, such as the Familias en Acción program, which provides financial assistance to families for sending children to school.[265] The program has been a resounding success, helping over 2.3 million families,

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[261] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 230.

[262] LaFeber, 235.

[263] Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Johnson, *Taliban Narratives*.

[264] Brittain attributes approximately 90–95 percent of all human rights violations to the government and paramilitaries combined in *Revolutionary Social Change*, 133.

[265] Rachel Glickhouse, "Explainer: Conditional Cash Transfer Programs in Latin America," Americas Society/Council of the Americas, last modified February 8, 2013, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-conditional-cash-transfer-programs-latin-america.

with a budget of nearly $1 billion in 2013.[266] Plan Colombia was also a categorical success, as the Colombian government focused on targeted military action, broad pacification and rural outreach projects, unlike previous COIN efforts prior to the year 2000. This shift in strategy, at least in part, likely encouraged the FARC to enter into the landmark peace deal in 2016, though how long the peace lasts and how successful the agreement will be remains to be seen.

D. EXTERNAL VALIDITY EXAMINATION: SHINING PATH (PERU), FMLN (EL SALVADOR), TAMIL TIGERS (SRI LANKA), AND THE TALIBAN (AFGHANISTAN)

Before offering final policy recommendations for future COIN commanders and policymakers, I briefly examine four external cases—two Latin American, two external to Latin America—and evaluate the theory that broad support and political compromise coupled with pragmatism were the determining factors in insurgency victory. This is not meant to be an all-encompassing study or in-depth summation of findings. Rather, this serves to determine if the theory could be more broadly applied and if further research is merited in this field in future COIN case studies.

1. Peru and Sendero Luminoso

In the case of Peru and the Sendero Luminoso (SL, or Shining Path) in 1980, Steve J. Stern points to an immediate metaphor for the group's efforts: the group "launched its war conventionally enough by burning ballot boxes in Chuschi."[267] By destroying, physically and metaphorically, the legitimacy of a valid election, the SL likely did not inspire confidence in the populace it hoped to one day lead. Stern goes on to say that "the declaration of armed insurgency in 1980 seemed absurdly out of step with the turn of the polity and the leftist opposition toward competitive electoral politics."[268] Stern then concludes that the SL "demonstrated an astonishing capacity, in its political practices, to

[266] "Explainer: Conditional Cash."

[267] Steve J. Stern, *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 1.

[268] Stern, 3.

blend extreme astuteness and extreme ignorance."[269] Furthermore, the SL "squandered its initial political advantages and legitimacies, and seemed unable to process the politically fatal implications of deeply alienating practices that work spark open peasant resistance."[270]

There are several key ideas to unpack here. First, the SL was in disagreement with the majority of the country as to how to proceed politically in the 1980s, signaling a misunderstanding of the will of the population. Second, for all the political ingenuity of the SL, particularly in recognizing that the country was ripe for change, the group seemed clueless about how to enact that change. Finally, the SL committed the sin from which there is no recovering: alienation of the key constituency that the insurgency aims to channel into victory. The SL was not defeated necessarily by the government of Peru; rather, Stern points out, it was grassroots resistance from peasants and the poor alike in Peru that undid the SL. This indicates, at the very least, that the SL was never a viable political entity in Peru. While this was unlikely the sole factor that led to the SL's failure to overthrow the government in its Maoist insurgency, it indicates lack of popular support was at worst highly prevalent in the group's defeat, indicating support for my findings.

2. El Salvador and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)

In contrast to the SL in Peru, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador does not immediately seem to support the conclusion that popular support, political pragmatism, and compromise are paramount for insurgent success; the FMLN enjoyed a good deal of support, internally and externally. Cynthia McClintock writes that none of the groups within the FMLN "extolled political violence for its own sake; terrorism was reserved primarily for military targets."[271] Additionally, McClintock writes that the FMLN enjoyed a number of internal and external alliances, including with Cuba, Nicaragua, and leftist movements in the United States and Europe.[272] However, internal

[269] Stern, 471.

[270] Stern, 471.

[271] McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America*, 48.

[272] McClintock, 48.

divisions abounded in the FMLN. McClintock writes, "The differences among the groups [inside the FMLN] seriously weakened the 'final offensive' of January 1981."[273] McClintock goes on to quote various FMLN group leaders, including Schafik Handal, who stated, "The delay in the unity of the revolutionary organizations did not allow us to take advantage of the revolutionary insurrection situation of 1980."[274] Joaquín Villalobos said, "This lack [of unity] prevented our taking advantage to the maximum of our accumulated political and military power."[275] Finally, another leader said, "If we had been able to rise on that wave [of the popular surge], things would have been more successful. But we weren't ready."[276] This disunity led to the group's defeat in the main offensive in early 1981. When the group later did achieve political unity internally, the group no longer had the popular support it previously enjoyed. A strong argument can be made that the population of El Salvador witnessing the failure to win dissuaded the country from supporting the FMLN. Another conclusion is that the people of El Salvador saw that the group could not even unify internally; how could the FMLN hope to unify the people of El Salvador if the group could not even successfully unify itself? All the necessary requirements were there in early 1981, despite strong U.S. support, to topple the government of El Salvador. Yet the inability to politically unite doomed the FMLN offensive, and likely prevented future support of the group despite the failings of the government of El Salvador. A lack of political legitimacy ultimately undermined the support the FMLN once enjoyed, which prevented its victory in El Salvador.

3. Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers

Another Marxist, but this time Asian, insurgency, seems less tied to the findings of my research. The Tamil Tigers, or LTTE, insurgency, which was eventually defeated in 2009, controlled much of Sri Lanka, including "one-third of the Sri-Lankan coastline," and

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[273] McClintock, 53.

[274] McClintock, 54.

[275] McClintock, 55.

[276] McClintock, 48.

"much of northern and eastern Sri Lanka for nearly a decade."[277] In addition to my own conclusions, this case also challenges many other commonly held COIN theories, namely that civilian targeting and government brutality undermine COIN efforts—"The Tigers were persistent suicide bombers," and Jon Lee Anderson calls the Sri Lankan government's efforts both "brutal" and "grisly."[278] Yet there are indications that other causal factors impacted the Tigers' chances of victory. The *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial board writes of the conflict, "The war quickly became more about Prabhakaran's [the leader of the Tigers] determination to form an independent Tamil state under the exclusive control of his Marxist Tigers than about those Tamil grievances."[279] Additionally, "The Tigers killed many moderate Tamil politicians who would have been willing to cooperate politically with Colombo [the Sri Lankan capital]."[280] This indicates that much of the Tigers' success was due to ruthless terrorist tactics and military prowess, and a population that was coerced into supporting the group rather than supporting it willingly. Additionally, the Tigers were advocates for and made up predominantly of the minority Tamil ethnicity; it is doubtful the majority Sinhalese would have ever accepted minority Tamil rule. Therefore, this case study would likely not prove that support is all that is necessary to win an insurgency conclusively. However, it is important to consider the ethnic cleavages in this conflict, as well as the brutality of tactics. Additionally, the Tigers did enjoy success for a sustained period of time before facing defeat. All in all, this external case provides the weakest support for my conclusions.

4. Afghanistan and the Taliban

Johnson and M. Chris Mason flat-out state that "Afghanistan is today's Vietnam. No question mark needed."[281] Johnson and Mason go on to state that "the Kabul

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[277] Jon Lee Anderson, "Death of the Tiger," *New Yorker*, January 17, 2011, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/843425890?accountid=12702.

[278] "Death of the Tiger."

[279] "A Terrorist Defeat," *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2009, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/399095826?accountid=12702.

[280] "A Terrorist Defeat."

[281] Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Saigon 2009," *Foreign Policy*, last modified August 20, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/08/20/saigon-2009/.

government will never be legitimate either, because democracy is not a source of legitimacy of governance in Afghanistan and it never has been."[282] Today, peace is not negotiated between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban, but rather between the U.S. government and the Taliban.[283] Does this mean the United States won the war in Afghanistan? This is up for much debate. The United States certainly deposed the Taliban-led government after 2001 and propped up its own putatively democratic regime afterward. Al-Qaeda was militarily routed in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden was killed. As Johnson and Mason strongly argue, the legitimacy of Afghanistan's current leader, President Ashraf Ghani, is tenuous at best. The United States and the Taliban are negotiating over U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban avoiding the mistakes of its past—namely, oppressive, illiberal policies and support for terrorists. When, not if, the United States eventually withdraws from Afghanistan, it is doubtful the current regime will be able to hold power for long, especially if the billions of dollars the United States currently sends to prop up the government is ever ended. Essentially, the current U.S. hope is for a kinder, gentler Taliban to emerge from Afghanistan, and for tens of thousands of Taliban insurgents to peacefully reintegrate into society. That will be difficult to accomplish, to say the least.

My conclusion is somewhat difficult to test at first glance in this instance. First, it depends on the coding of the war: Did the Taliban win or lose? Did the Taliban suffer a decade-plus setback, yet ultimately emerge victorious? Did the Taliban lose and this is a new issue that merits separate consideration? Regardless of where an analyst falls on the debate, it is difficult to argue that political legitimacy did not undermine the Karzai and Ghani administrations in Afghanistan. Additionally, that same lack of legitimacy allowed the Taliban to not only continue the fight in Afghanistan for more than seventeen years but also receive refuge in Pakistan. Ultimately, U.S. missteps, sustained internal support, and Pakistan sanctuary may prove to be the key factors in the Afghanistan insurgency, while

[282] "Saigon 2009."

[283] Nick Schifrin, "The U.S. Is Trying to Negotiate Peace with the Taliban, but Is Afghanistan Ready?" PBS, last modified March 28, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/the-u-s-is-trying-to-negotiate-peace-with-the-taliban-but-is-afghanistan-ready.

the Taliban's lack of political compromise, pragmatism, and political acumen decidedly impacted the war, which is being fought to this day in 2019.

E. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT INSURGENTS

COIN metrics for success are still evolving, and little has been settled as to what variable will best determine insurgent success. Ability to build a broad coalition—coupled with politically savvy compromise and pragmatism—emerged as a vital, and little researched, factor in insurgent victory after examining the Colombian and Nicaraguan case studies. Therefore, to best achieve success, a COIN commander or policy maker should attack an insurgent group's ability to connect to the population. In the case of Colombia, the government could have avoided decades of war, thousands of casualties, and millions of displaced persons had it been willing to attack the FARC's rural support and defeat its legitimacy. If the government had been willing or able to reach the rural and underserved portions of Colombia, it is unlikely the FARC would have become the formidable force it became. The attack on Marquetalia in conjunction with the United States in 1964 was debatably one of the worst possible actions the Colombian government could have taken. It emboldened Marulanda and his fighters, it killed civilians, and it did nothing to alleviate the concerns of the guerrillas and the peasants; in fact, it is likely what set previously peaceful protestors in the area to support armed rebellion. It was not until Plan Colombia in the 2000s that the government focused on financial aid, rural integration, and precise military campaigns targeting the FARC that the tide of the war turned. If the FARC did not devolve into a mostly terrorist organization, with less and less attention paid to outreach projects, the government may not have survived as long as it did.

In Nicaragua, Somoza had no political legitimacy. If the United States had demanded Somoza's resignation in the 1960s, and the following government had focused on housing the homeless and feeding the starving, the FSLN likely never would have been able to build the support needed to gain the political legitimacy that dwarfed the incumbent government's. The FSLN's strength was as much in its policies as it was in its simple ability to offer an alternative to Somoza, in both words and actions. A U.S.-backed leader with even a modicum of concern for the well-being of all Nicaraguans and just slightly less

corruption than the Somoza family could have gradually steered the country toward prosperity. Instead of attacking the FSLN's ability to build a coalition by conducting its own outreach, and acknowledging the grievances of the population, the National Guard murdered and bombed anybody who protested the regime.

A good COIN commander should not seek to bring a set of tactics or desired outcomes into an insurgency. Every insurgency is unique and therefore impossible to plan for ahead of time. The United States has JP 3-24, which is the joint doctrine for COIN operations. It has undergone many revisions, and its efficacy remains a subject of debate in COIN circles. It is a start, however, and a place for COIN commanders to begin their understanding of the conflict they are about to enter. However, to best achieve victory, I argue the commander should attack the insurgent group's popular support and its political legitimacy, with military victory being a secondary consideration. That is not to say that securing the population is not tantamount to success, but merely providing security is not enough to guarantee victory. Identifying the key constituency or constituencies that are supporting an insurgency, and facilitating the host nation to win over their support, is central to achieving victory. Military victory did the United States little good in Vietnam, which fell to the communists. Military victory did the United States little good in Iraq, which inches closer and closer to the United States' primary adversary in the region, Iran, on a daily basis.[284] Military victory did the United States little good in Afghanistan, where Taliban influence continues to increase almost eighteen years after the start of the U.S. war in the country. Military victory did little good for Colombia before adopting additional tactics aimed at addressing the grievances of its citizens. Finally, in Nicaragua, military victory actually aided the FSLN due to the nature of the attacks and the massive collateral damage associated with them. If a group draws its source of political legitimacy from filling a security vacuum, the COIN force must first secure the population before it can think of engaging the insurgents militarily. If an insurgent group has an advanced base of support, a COIN commander should seek to sever the ties of individual leaders in the group, and

[284] Seth G. Jones, "War by Proxy: Iran's Growing Footprint in the Middle East," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified March 11, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-proxy-irans-growing-footprint-middle-east-0.

counter the group's message via strategic communications and actions undermining the insurgent group's claim to legitimacy; as Johnson would say, control the narrative. If a government is corrupt and oppressive, this corruption and oppressiveness must be addressed before military action will matter. This will enhance the host nation's state capacity, increase its legitimacy, and decrease that of the insurgent's.

Above all, a COIN commander and policy makers must ensure the insurgent's support never exceeds the government's. This was the case in Colombia, but in Nicaragua, the FSLN clearly had demonstrably more support than the Somozas. This can be achieved by facilitating government reform and pacification efforts, reducing corruption, and providing security, among many other efforts. The Clausewitzian center of gravity for an insurgent group is not its military strength, the territory it holds, its financial assets, or any other material factor. It is the connection formed to the population via its level of political legitimacy and alliance-building efforts. This center of gravity must be ruthlessly attacked across the diplomacy, information, military, economics (DIME) spectrum in order to best ensure victory. It is not U.S. support for Latin American governments, nor structural factors, nor material factors, nor irregularity in tactics, nor regime type that best predicts insurgent success. Further study is warranted to examine the insurgent ability to form national and international alliances while undertaking strategic political compromise, as is study to evaluate the political environment and quantify these metrics; this work will hopefully be conducted by insurgency researchers in the years to come.

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