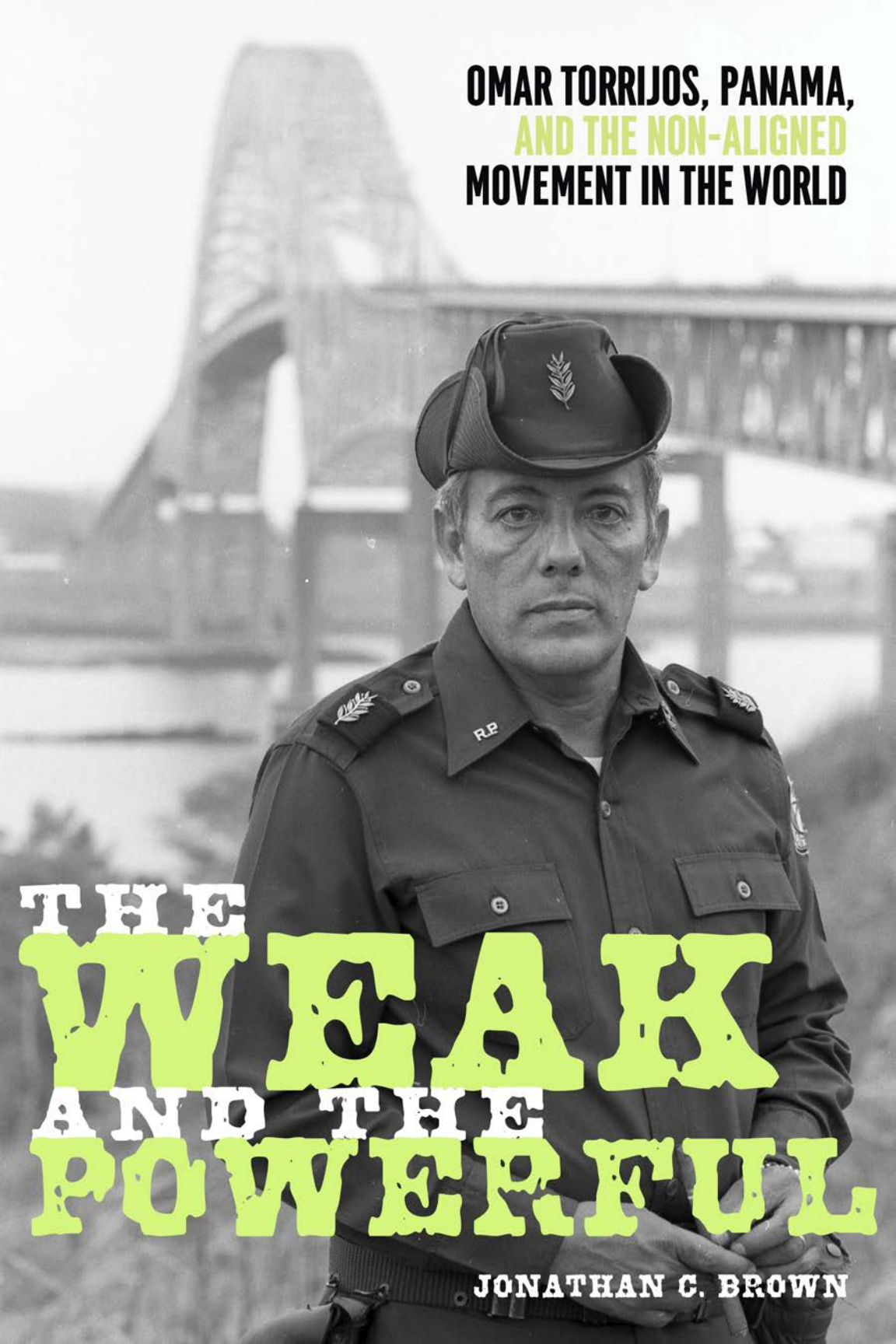
OMAR TORRIJOS, PANAMA,
AND THE NON-ALIGNED
MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD
THE
WEAK
AND THE
POWERFUL
JONATHAN C. BROWN

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PITT LATIN AMERICAN SERIES

Catherine M. Conaghan, Editor

THE WEAK AND THE POWERFUL

OMAR TORRIJOS, PANAMA, AND THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD

JONATHAN C. BROWN

University of Pittsburgh Press

Published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15260
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Manufactured in the United States of America
Printed on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cataloging-in-Publication data is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 13: 978-0-8229-4807-0
ISBN 10: 0-8229-4807-9

Cover art: General Omar Torrijos Herrera standing with the Bridge of the Americas behind him. Photograph by Tom Zimberoff courtesy of the Fundación Omar Torrijos Herrera.
Cover design: Joel. W. Coggins

I dedicate this book to my grandchildren
Apollo Sean Brown
Atticus Scott Brown
Athena Stormagedon Brown

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Scholars rely on many associates to help them produce knowledge and understanding. Generations of librarians and archivists in university libraries, presidential archives, and national document collections often go unheralded, yet they are essential and critical to this task.

I thank Sara Pistotnik of the University of Slovenia and David Brown of the University of Graz for their assistance in obtaining and organizing the documentation from the Yugoslav Archive. Professor Pistotnik provided the translations.

For this study, I am especially indebted to a host of colleagues. At conception, I had the indispensable advice of Brittmarie Janson Pérez and Michael Conniff, both authors of important books on Panama. Along the way, John Tutino, Martin Melosi, James Hershberg, and Michael Conniff read excerpts and offered wise counsel. In addition, I benefited from the reviews of three anonymous readers at the University of Pittsburgh Press. I owe much to my editor at the press, Joshua Shanholtzer.

Richard Downs, with whom the author served in the Southern Command from 1968 to 1970, actually read the entire manuscript, corrected many errors of fact, and made suggestions. Omar Jaén Suárez, diplomat and scholar, wrote the best study of the long process of treaty negotiations. He proved tireless and punctual in answering many questions throughout my three years of writing. Virginia Garrard, Michael Gonzales, Eline van Ommen, Michelle Paranzino, Clay Katsky, Casey VanSise, and Molly Avery read my various drafts and advised me on the scholarship concerning the Central American civil wars and other matters.

Finally, this study benefits from my interviews with those who knew, collaborated with, or opposed Omar Torrijos. Their names appear in the Bibliography. They gave generously of their insights and memories, and all responded to follow-up inquiries. Knowing them as friends and colleagues has enriched this book and my life.

Four interviewees stood out as exceptionally insightful. They are General Rubén Darío Paredes, the former presidents Arístides Royo and Nicolás Ardito Barletta, and the businessman Roberto Eisenmann. José de Jesús (Cheché) Martínez contributed valuable services in the acquisition of photographs from the Fundación Omar Torrijos Herrera. Cheché also shared important memories of his father, José de Jesús (Chuchú) Martínez.

Moreover, I had the great privilege of corresponding with and interviewing the photographer Tom Zimberoff, a true artist. He is also a master storyteller, as evidenced by his reflections on the Internet.

Santiago Villalobos transcribed many of my interviews, helped me immensely with the translations from Spanish to English, and monitored the Zoom interviews. Marcus Golding participated in my Zoom interviews and in the follow-up correspondence. Marcus provided critical technical assistance in communicating with colleagues in Panama. Gabrielle Esparza in Buenos Aires obtained for me the photograph of Torrijos and Juan Perón (fig. 6.1).

I received research and travel funding from the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies and from the History Department of the University of Texas at Austin. I have been fortunate in my academic career to have been associated with the faculty and staff of both institutions. I owe a special note of gratitude to Miriam Bodian, Courtney Meador, and Mary Neuburger for conducting my Zoom conference on Omar Torrijos and Josip Broz Tito in the fall of 2020.

Lynore Brown accompanied me on my research trips to Panama and attended some of the interview sessions. She also read the manuscript and offered frank assessments thereof. She remains my muse.

THE WEAK AND THE POWERFUL

INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF POWER

How does a small country, without resort to war, convince a great power to give back valuable real estate? This question confronted the political leaders of Panama as they waited several decades for the United States to renegotiate the outdated 1903 canal treaty.

The Cold War's foremost military power, the United States, treated the Republic of Panama like a colony. American citizens constructed the Panama Canal and managed its operations. US armed forces protected the ten- by fifty-mile Canal Zone, through which that artificial waterway flowed.

One extraordinary person dominates these pages. General Omar Torrijos Herrera. He provided the dynamism behind the actions analyzed herein.

This book focuses on relations between Panama, a small nation with a big power problem, and other countries of the Global South. As dictator, Torrijos decided to engage proactively in mobilizing world opinion through horizontal diplomacy. That is, he secured the support of other small powers of the Third World. He made it difficult for American diplomats to engage with international organizations without living up to their own democratic principles.

Torrijos rose through the officer ranks in Panama's National Guard. Only once did he engage in a minor skirmish. Otherwise, he acted as one of the guardians of the oligarchy. That is, until civilian politicians threatened the military. As the nation's eventual military ruler, he operated more like a diplomat—indeed, like a world-class chess player—relying on strat-

egy and placing pressure on the American occupation through brilliant maneuvers. Omar Torrijos, a pawn himself, deployed lots of other pawns against the United States.

Torrijos prevailed because the solution to his big power problem resided elsewhere, in the Third World of developing nations not only of Latin America but also of Africa and Asia. This was the arena of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), created in 1956 by several leaders of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The emergence of these nations extended the chessboard, so to speak, and Torrijos exploited the opportunity that the NAM presented. He also pleaded his case in other international bodies such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

He was a hero not only at home in Panama. Latin Americans respected Torrijos for standing up to the North American "colossus." To leaders of the emerging countries of Africa and Asia, he epitomized their own goal of navigating an independent path between the dominant world powers of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Torrijos sought and received the advice of the last remaining founder of the NAM, Marshal Josip Broz Tito. To complete this quest, Torrijos traveled a great deal. He went to Yugoslavia, Algeria, Libya, Sri Lanka, Israel, and nearly every country of Latin America. On one two-week tour of Europe, he conferred one-on-one with eight heads of state and the pope.

Celebrities of the age came to call Torrijos their "friend." They included John Wayne, Gabriel García Márquez, Graham Greene, Marshal Tito, Fidel Castro, Juan Perón, Muammar Gaddafi, Nelson Rockefeller, and Jimmy Carter. It was the literary giant García Márquez who compared Torrijos to "a cross between a tiger and a mule." He possessed the tiger's "supernatural instinct and its precise finesse." These he combined with the stubbornness of a mule, García Márquez explained.[1]

His list of enemies included Anastasio Somoza, Augusto Pinochet, and some ultraconservative members of Congress. Omar did not like Generalissimo Francisco Franco or the Shah of Iran. Ronald Reagan once called him the "tinhorn dictator." Yet, on becoming president, Reagan accepted the canal treaties as a political reality that he chose not to reverse.

Consequently, this military dictator was able to acquire possession of one of the world's busiest waterways from the great power. General Omar Torrijos did not seize it militarily. His diplomacy forced the withdrawal of an occupying US armed force more powerful than the Panamanian National Guard. "I don't want to go down in history," he often said. "I just want to go into the Canal Zone."[2]

Torrijos deserves as much credit as Jimmy Carter for convincing two-thirds of the US Senate to ratify the Panama Canal Treaties that only 40 percent of American voters supported. Arguably, more American

government officials traveled to meet Torrijos than any other world leader of the 1970s. They included some forty members of the United States Senate as well as Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, and countless American diplomats and military generals. Most came away impressed by the integrity of the Panamanian dictator.

According to the new treaties he signed with President Carter, the Americans gradually relinquished territories within the Canal Zone and withdrew their armed forces over a twenty-three-year transition of power. It was on the last day of the millennium, December 31, 1999, that a US military color guard lowered Old Glory for the last time. That day marked ninety-seven years of American occupation of Panama.

After the general negotiated the canal treaties with the multilateral assistance of many weak nations, some of his fellow pawns turned on him.

As a lifelong peacemaker, Torrijos spent the last years of his life attempting unsuccessfully to stem the rising violence within and between the small countries of Central America. But he died in a plane crash in 1981, and, thereafter, the Central American death toll rose to the hundreds of thousands of lives in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Had he lived another twenty years, Torrijos would have found it ironic that the bloodletting began to subside at the same moment that United States completed the turnover of the canal to the Panamanians.

This parable of the Non-Aligned Movement teaches that weak nations may be able to unite for the big battles, such as those against colonialism. Yet ideological, religious, and cultural rivalries within the Global South tend to divide one small country from another and to invite intervention from powerful nations. Neither the United Nations, nor the Organization of American States, nor the Non-Aligned Movement has been able to manage these kinds of intraregional conflicts.

The pages that follow also suggest a corollary about the fragility of democracy itself. Omar Torrijos in 1968 overturned decades of elected governments that had been unable to pursue tough negotiations with the United States. His predecessors, the party leaders, had fought among themselves over the four-year presidential term rather than uniting the nation against the US occupation.

As a dictator, Torrijos managed to stay in power long enough—thirteen years—to conclude a treaty. However, this autocrat could not replace the democracy he destroyed. The general wanted to manage a transition back to elections. Torrijos died first and one of his former military subordinates, Manuel Noriega, turned the moderate dictatorship into a vicious criminal enterprise. It took an armed invasion by the great power itself in 1989 to reestablish democracy in Panama. Omar Torrijos would have been disappointed.

Today, not all observers of international affairs remember his name. One can find more books about his notorious successor, General Noriega, than about Omar Torrijos. Few experts on the Cold War can link General Torrijos to the grand international crusade he formed to force Washington to give up possession of the Panama Canal.

We can learn one other thing from the biography of Omar Torrijos: the power of social justice and inclusion. The dictator liked to think of himself as a progressive. He joined the military in the first place as an avenue of upward mobility. The men he commanded came from the rural and urban working classes. They were brown, Black, and poor white people. Fully 90 percent of Panama's population in 1968 consisted of persons of mixed racial heritage. Omar bonded with these people. In the countryside, the general paid unannounced calls on villagers, joked with them, asked about their problems, and frolicked with the children. He built schools for them.

In other words, he was bringing the victims of social and racial discrimination into the citizenship of the nation. They could not vote for their leaders (it was a dictatorship), but they felt included in the Panamanian Revolution of Omar Torrijos.

An alliance between students and the military scarcely approximated the norm in Cold War Latin America. Often high school and university activists joined revolutionary groups and challenged the political systems that the military defended. Not so much in Omar's Panama. He called the students "national heroes," welcomed them as participants in his "revolution," and engaged them.

Still, Torrijos's rule depended on his control of the National Guard. Under his command, the Guard increased its numbers to ten thousand armed men. He professionalized the officer corps by sending them for training at the United States Army School of the Americas.

He reestablished diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro in 1974 without renouncing his own ideological moderation. "Neither left nor right," the strongman used to say, "Panama!" Torrijos committed his country to the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Cuba was a charter member. He styled himself a democratic socialist. Only later did Torrijos regret Fidel Castro's sponsorship of the radical leftist revolutionaries in Central America.

Among his contemporaries, there were two sides to Omar Torrijos. One view, represented by his loyalists, praises his sagacity, temperament, and wisdom. Many of his supporters maintained silence about his womanizing and explained away his addiction to alcohol. His closest living associates say that Torrijos died a poor man. There were no landed estates or urban palaces. After the funeral, friends had to collect donations to support his widow and children, they claim.

Another view of Omar is much harsher. Torrijos sustained criticism for his lavish travel, nepotism, insider business deals, and suspected drug dealing. He was a dictator and, granted, his opponents suffered. Some died. Others went into exile. But even in this regard, he does not compare in savagery to other military rulers of the 1970s.

As for evidence, this study draws systematically on a rich source little used by historians: the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). This digitized database consists of a worldwide collection of radio and television intercepts, combined with English language résumés of news clips from the foreign-language print media. The Central Intelligence Agency sponsored this massive collection during the Cold War. The agency maintained listening posts inside the Canal Zone as well as in the capital cities of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.[3]

These news clips allow this historian to tell Omar's story through his own words, as told to dozens of TV, radio, and newspaper outlets.

I also gathered materials from the usual document collections for US and British diplomatic history: seven presidential libraries and the National Archives in College Park and London. There is limited documentation on Torrijos in the Cuban and Spanish foreign affairs archives. The Yugoslav Archives in Belgrade contain correspondence and conversations between Torrijos and Marshal Tito. Their relationship has gone unheralded in the historical literature.

In the two research trips I made to Panama before COVID-19, I discovered that the Foreign Ministry archives were closed for reconstruction. Torrijos ruled for nearly thirteen years, yet he left no archive. As his former president, Arístides Royo, says, "He was a man of few papers."[4] We do have his speeches, and many of his public writings appear in printed form. But he conducted day-to-day business orally. He preferred to receive reports on audio cassettes, which he recycled by recording over them with fresh instructions. None of these cassettes were archived. Most of all, in Panama, I interviewed thirteen people who knew the dictator.

Omar Torrijos was unique among Third World leaders. He succeeded in convincing the preeminent world power to give up its claim to the canal, end its military occupation, and pay the Republic of Panama millions of dollars to take over the Canal Zone. No fighting. No war. For that alone, the Panamanian strongman deserves a study of international dimensions. "What for Torrijos is biography," a close associate wrote, "for Panama is history."[5] His story belongs to the entire world as well.

CHAPTER 1

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

General Omar Torrijos Herrera died at the age of fifty-two years. In 1968 he and other officers had organized the coup d'état that terminated several decades of oligarchic presidents and rigged elections. That *golpe de Estado* placed Torrijos on the path to dictatorship. Thereafter, he consolidated political control of the nation and held numerous titles: commander of the National Guard, chief of the government, and maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution. He preferred to call himself the "strongman." Omar perished after twelve years and ten months in power.

REQUIEM FOR THE COMMANDER

Just three years after the Panama Canal Treaties went into effect, the news broke throughout Panama and the world: The country's military dictator had died. Panamanians received the news on the first day of August 1981 via television and radio stations. "It is announced to citizens," the official government bulletin said, "that Panamanian Air Force Plane 205, missing on a flight from Penonomé to Coclesito, has been found by rescue patrols. It has been confirmed that it crashed. The remains of General Omar Torrijos Herrera have been officially identified."[1]

Reports by the National Guard revealed the six names of those killed in the same air crash, which occurred during a severe thunderstorm. They included Teresa Ferreira, a dentist from Coclesito, four of the plane's crew, and two military escorts.[2] The Panamanian National Guard conducted the recovery and transport of the bodies. Rescue crews found the plane just four meters below the crest of the mountain.

The victims' remains arrived at the Panamanian Air Force Base at Tocumen International Airport in the late afternoon of August 1. The widowed Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos rode in the passenger seat of a blue station wagon that carried the remains of her late husband to the capital city. Close behind, President Arístides Royo drove his own automobile with Vice President Ricardo de la Espriella in the passenger seat. Torrijos had appointed both to their positions three years previously.

Hundreds of mourners gathered in a nighttime vigil at the Medical Center in Panama City to await the procession. Some carried torches. A group of men unfurled a large portrait of Omar Torrijos. It was draped with a Panamanian flag, which had become a powerful symbol of the nation's long struggle over the canal.

Television stations broadcast live interviews with arriving dignitaries. TV news anchors read the condolences coming in from foreign leaders and the heads of Panamanian trade unions and professional organizations. A message came from President José Napoleón Duarte of the governing junta of El Salvador. He wrote that, years earlier, Torrijos had been one of his cadet students at the Salvadoran Military Academy. The general's death came as "a real shock," Duarte said.[3]

Forty members of the Salvadoran guerrilla group, known by its acronym, the FMLN, flew in for the ceremonies honoring their friend and confidant, Omar. They arrived on a flight from Managua, Nicaragua, whose revolutionary government was sheltering them from the right-wing death squads back home in El Salvador. They had no speaking opportunities during the funeral, but one of them wrote a poignant tribute that appeared two decades later: "General Torrijos was a man who loved his people. He risked everything as a revolutionary. He dared to visit Cuba, to assist the Sandinistas until they took power, and to support us without asking anything in return."[4]

A radio reporter spoke to a representative of a business group long opposed to the general's dictatorship. It is "a national tragedy," said Dulcidio González, president of the National Council of Private Enterprise (CONEP). "I believe Panama has lost a great man."[5] Though Torrrijos had promoted Panama as the Latin American banking emporium, members of some business groups spent years in exile during the dictatorship.

Foreign delegations began to arrive for the official funeral. Among them were ex-president Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela, President Adolfo Suárez of Spain, and Secretary General Alejandro Orfila of the Organization of American States. The former Venezuelan president called his friend "one of the greatest figures in Latin America," a man who "leaves a rich legacy of dignity and nationalism."[6] Sandinista *comandantes*

Sergio Ramírez, Tomás Borge, and Daniel Ortega arrived from Managua, Nicaragua.[7]

Fidel Castro made himself conspicuous by his absence from the funeral. The longtime communist leader Carlos Rafael Rodríguez led the Cuban delegation. He told a Panamanian TV interviewer that senior advisers in Havana kept Castro from attending. We "believed he should not leave Cuba at this time, because of the circumstances facing Central America, because all that has been said and thought regarding General Torrijos's death."[8]

Though Fidel did not attend the Panamanian leader's funeral, he did express his condolences in writing to the Torrijos family. "I feel great emotion addressing you because of the great admiration and immense affection I have for Omar, because he has not died nor will he ever," Castro wrote. "To me and to every Cuban, he is one of the most illustrious men that the Continent has given us this century." [9]

By contrast, the administration of President Ronald Reagan sent a delegation that appeared purposely understated. Barbara Bush, the wife of the vice president, and General David C. Jones, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, headlined the US delegation.[10] The American visitors had a half-hour interview with President Royo. He told them that Panama wanted friendly relations with the United States. The Panamanian head of government offered to act as a bridge between the Reagan administration and a Central America that was beginning to decline into violence and turmoil.[11]

The Panamanian archbishop Marcos McGrath conducted religious services at the Metropolitan Cathedral. This prelate had not always agreed with the regime's policies except for one: the dictator's stance on the Panama Canal. The archbishop's homily was gracious. "How will the vacuum which he left be filled?" Monsignor McGrath asked. "Above all stands . . . concern for those who can do the least in their own interests and defense, for the poor of our Panama."[12]

From the cathedral, a riderless horse led the funeral procession past the Legislative Assembly to the Headquarters of the National Guard. It was from this location in 1968 that Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos had coordinated the coup d'état that put him into power for nearly thirteen years. Thousands of Panamanians lined the streets as the cortege passed by.

Another farewell ceremony commenced in the early afternoon on Ancon Hill. This lone hilltop inside the US-controlled Canal Zone could be seen from nearly every barrio in Panama City. The US Armed Forces, whose Southern Command headquarters occupied the far side of the mount, had had the good sense not to place the Stars and Stripes in full

view of the residents of Panama City. Nor had they seen the Panamanian flag flying there until 1979. In that year, the Panamanians took over Ancon Hill from the Americans, according to the treaty Torrijos had signed with President Jimmy Carter. It has been the sacred ground of Panamanian nationalism ever since.

Quite naturally, Ancon Hill became part of the farewell ceremonies for its liberator, Omar Torrijos. In the afternoon, a hearse brought the general's casket, covered by a Panamanian flag, to the top of the hill. National Guard pallbearers in dress uniforms deposited the casket at the base of the flagpole. A select group of mourners awaited the procession. Television crews recorded the ceremonies live.

Torrijos's family arrived by automobile and lined up next to President and Mrs. Royo. Next came the National Guard general staff officers led by Omar's cousin, Lieutenant Colonel Roberto Díaz Herrera. In their dress uniforms, they formed a cordon around the base of the huge flagpole. The foreign minister of Panama, Jorge Illeuca, delivered the main address. He called General Torrijos "the builder of the modern state with the abolition of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903."[13]

The final ceremony took place at a gravesite in the Panama City slum of El Chorrillo, close to the headquarters of the National Guard. Only later would the family move the remains to a monument in Fort Amador, soon after the US Army abandoned this headquarters post according to the treaty's timetable.[14]

As he spoke directly to the general's casket at the El Chorrillo cemetery, President Royo referred to the future date of Panama's final takeover of the canal according to the treaties. "When 31 December [1999] arrives," he said, "you will descend from the land of the angels and preside over the march of all your people who will completely recover Panamanian sovereignty. [General Torrijos] will be standing at attention with a patriotic salute," President Royo concluded.[15]

The funeral agenda reserved the final words to General Torrijos's chief of staff. Colonel Florencio Flórez addressed the casket before him. "Allow me, colleague, to take a drink from your canteen," he said. "Allow me to take a drink as a tonic and to strengthen our institution." As Flórez took a sip from the canteen, mourners and guardsmen broke into a chant: "The people united will never be defeated." Flórez, the deceased's successor as National Guard chief, concluded with a solemn pledge. "Our rifles will always honor your memory. Farewell, Commander."[16]

Several times during this state funeral, reporters and broadcasters announced without comment a variety of reports about the general's death. One leader of the Latin American socialist movement mentioned Omar's frequent predictions that he would not die in bed. The accident of the

commander's plane "may have been premeditated," he told reporters. Rumors had always circulated in Panama about attempts on the life of its leader.[17] Ambassador Moisés Torrijos, Omar's older brother, also commented on the possibility of sabotage. So did the Cubans.

"Soviet radio said today that General Torrijos might have been assassinated by the Central Intelligence Agency and the United States," TV newscasters reported. "The Soviet Radio report said that the plane accident in which Torrijos was killed might have been planned by the CIA, adding that the CIA had been behind several attempts on the life of the late Central American leader."[18] Panamanian news media also relayed messages containing similar speculations from state news agencies in Sandinista Nicaragua and revolutionary Cuba.

The funeral befit the ruler Torrijos had become. His associates shed tears during their orations, though the archbishop did not. The general's family, dressed in black, sat in the front row during the various tributes to the hero. The foreign delegations appeared somber. Most of all, urban laborers and innumerable rural workers and their families considered that they had just lost a loving patron.

His friend, the future Nobel laureate in literature (1982), Gabriel García Márquez, did not attend the funeral but did comment on the airplane crash, "whether accidental or provoked," from his home in Mexico. "The bereaved crowds that went to the funerals were, without a doubt, moved by a secret knowledge: that this kind of impertinent death of greatness is one of the most deserving ways to achieve martyrdom."

"I wasn't there, of course," Gabriel added. "I have never had the heart to bury my friends."[19]

THE FAMILY TORRIJOS

Born in February 1929, Omar Torrijos Herrera had grown up the seventh of twelve children in the town of Santiago, capital of Veraguas Province. His father José María Torrijos was the Colombian-born school teacher in that city. He married a local girl, Joaquina Herrera, also a teacher. Omar subsequently told friends that they were both "communists."[20]

When José María immigrated, Santiago had two basic social groups. Sons and daughters of Spanish settlers and immigrant Europeans made up the so-called *poblanos*. They owned the cattle ranches, operated rural shops, and married among themselves. The *cholos*, a pejorative term for persons of mixed racial heritage, made up the majority of the province's population. These poorer folks worked for the white families or squatted on marginal lands. As a group, they were less likely to have access to proper housing, education, and health care.

Young Omar attended his father's school in the town of Santiago,

located midway on the Inter-American Highway running west to east along the Pacific coastline and the Panamanian mountains between Costa Rica and Panama City. When he graduated with the equivalent of six years' schooling, Omar stayed on for a while teaching at his father's school.

On the Panamanian social scale, Omar did not belong to the politically active elite families such as the Arias and De la Guardia clans. Nor did he grow up in Panama City, the nation's capital, there to mingle with those urban middle-class youth at the National Institute and the University of Panama.

Omar applied for and gained a scholarship to military school. It was his ticket to get out Santiago, Veraguas Province. He set off in 1948 to attend the military academy of El Salvador. The Republic of Panama did not have an officers' training school at the time.[21]

Omar Torrijos returned as a second lieutenant in 1952 at a time when the Panamanian police officially became known as the National Guard. "Government was a marriage between armed forces, oligarchy and bad priests," Torrijos wrote later, "and since ecclesiastical marriages don't admit divorce, that anti-patriotic triad appeared to be indissoluble."[22] Thereafter, the guard collaborated with oligarchs of the Liberal Party to keep at bay the populist firebrand Arnulfo Arias. Vote rigging became the order of the day among the oligarchy.

These were good days for newly minted officers, some still in their teens. They strutted through the streets in their National Guard uniforms and flirted with the girls. Torrijos's younger colleague, Rubén Darío Paredes, who attended the military academy of General Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, tells of the joys of military school—the emancipation from home, the camaraderie among cadets, the handsome uniforms, and the amorous adventures of cadets and junior officers.[23] Anyone who could approach young ladies the way Omar Torrijos did garnered the respect of his peers.

Omar's good looks and charm obviously turned the heads of women in Colón, the Atlantic port on the northern entrance to the Panama Canal. He assumed command there in 1955. Having a free trade zone, Colón attracted merchants engaged in international business. One was the Jewish family of Pauzner, whose daughter Raquel fell under the spell of Captain Omar Torrijos, a Catholic and a mere policeman. She accepted his offer of marriage. Her father did not. When Omar and Raquel eloped, Señor Pauzner shunned his daughter and eventually moved the rest of his family to New York City.

Raquel felt distraught for many years thereafter, especially as she brought up two sons and a daughter who did not know their maternal grandparents. Later, as the undisputed leader of Panama, Torrijos asked

to meet a vacationing Israeli Mossad agent who was in town. Mike Harari had gained a certain notoriety. He had led the Mossad hit squad that avenged Israeli athletes killed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1972 Munich Olympics. Harari was also involved in the rescue of Jewish passengers on one El Al flight. The PLO had hijacked the plane and flown it to the Entebbe Airport of Uganda's dictator Idi Amin.

Torrijos requested that Harari intercede with the Pauzner family to reconcile father and daughter.[24] It worked, much to the relief of Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos.

Omar explained to the British novelist Graham Greene what happened on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. "It has been very hard for my wife all these years, for she loves her father dearly," Torrijos told Greene. "Panama had voted at the United Nations in support of Israel over the Entebbe affair," Torrijos continued. "We were the only state in Latin America to do so, and afterward the Israelis were grateful and they offered me all sorts of help, but I told them that I had asked [General Moishe] Dayan for the only thing I needed and he couldn't help me. Then suddenly, yesterday, my father-in-law telephoned from New York and asked to speak to my wife. Today she has gone off to see him—after twenty-five years. I said to the old man on the telephone that he had a wonderful daughter and that I owed everything to her."[25]

Raquel and Omar eventually brought up three children together, though they lived apart most of the time. They had an upper-middle-class residence on Calle 50, the main road heading east out of Panama City. It became his "office" when meeting with visitors and subordinates in the capital. On these occasions, Raquel acted as hostess and organized meals and refreshments for guests. Once in power, the general spent most of his time close to the expansive military base at Río Hato.

In his lifetime, Omar Torrijos made many well-known friends. He met two of them while assigned as district commander in Colón. Stationed there in the mid-1950s, he met the former president of Argentina, Juan Domingo Perón, together with his personal secretary and companion, María Estela Martínez. She too was Argentinean, better known as Isabelita. In fact, Perón and Martínez first met each other in Panama, where she been touring with a dance troop. The affable, relaxed Perón made a great impression on the young Panamanian officer. Torrijos thereafter considered him "America's great leader."[26]

Ex-president Perón had become one the world's most famous exiles. In September 1955, his own military overthrew the onetime army colonel and twice-elected president. He escaped to Paraguay and ended up in Panama City on the Pacific side of the Isthmus. There Juan Perón

encountered opposition to his residency. By May 1956, he had moved to Colón with Isabelita.[27]

The Panamanian press indicated that Perón may have been in residence for about one year without obtaining final permission to stay. He left in 1957 for brief stays in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic before he and Isabel finally settled in Spain. Eventually, Juan and Isabel married and returned home in 1973 to become the president and vice president of Argentina. There they would invite Omar and Raquel for a state visit to Buenos Aires.

But for Fidel Castro, Omar Torrijos might not have been able to receive an invitation for a state visit to Argentina or anywhere else. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 contained such disruptive power that it challenged existing governments throughout Latin America as well as the traditional dominion of the United States over inter-American affairs. Within months of their triumphant entry into Havana, Fidel and his guerrilla revolutionaries would be creating the conditions in Panama for the rise of Captain Torrijos.

CHAPTER 2

THE SKIRMISH AT MOUNT TUTE

Most officers of the Panamanian National Guard completed their careers without a chance to engage in authentic battle—until 1959. That year changed everything for Captain Omar Torrijos. It also connected his own destiny closely to that of the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and, indeed, of all the Third World.

Beforehand, the United States Armed Forces stationed in the Panama Canal Zone sufficed to defend the canal through two world wars and a Cold War. Ten thousand US troops were organized into two combat battalions, coastal artillery units, a Special Forces Group, and fourteen military bases in the Panama Canal Zone. There were training schools for Spanish-speaking soldiers, a parachute jump school, and a jungle training center. But the Americans never had to confront a foreign invasion during the ninety-three years they were stationed there. For most of that time, the National Guard of the Republic of Panama did not function as a military command but as a police force.

However, the year of 1959 did not turn out to be a normal year in the lives of the one million citizens who then inhabited this isthmian republic—that long narrow strip of land connecting the continents of North America and South America. This land bridge was split through the middle by "the big ditch," as it was called by the Americans who built and operated the Panama Canal.

The year 1959 was when the revolution in Cuba threatened to spread to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America. For Panama, it was a time in which the nation experienced two domestic uprisings and an amphibi-

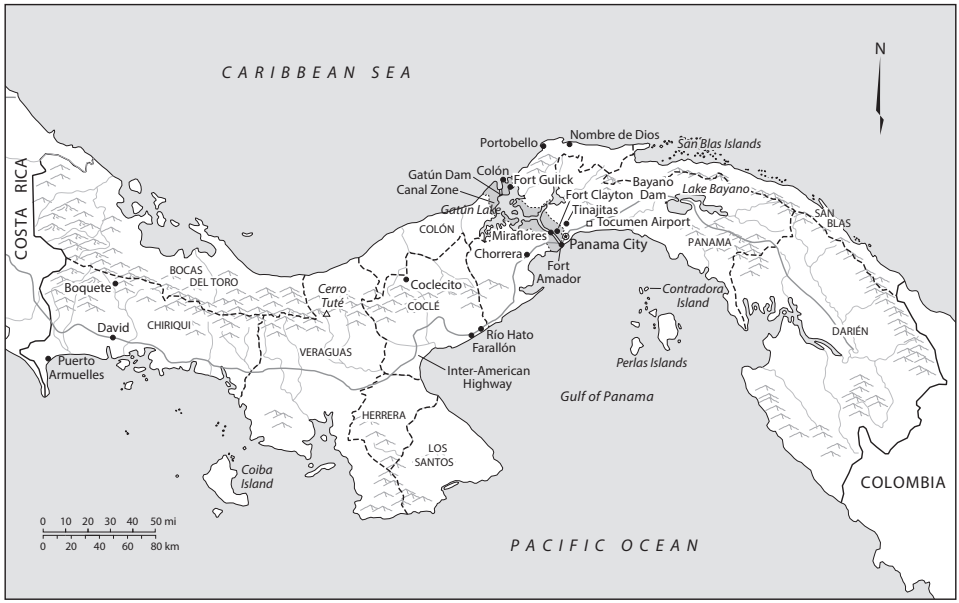


Figure 2.1. Map, The Republic of Panama.

ous assault from eighty armed Cuban combatants. That year, the National Guard began its conversion from a national police unit to a combat defense force. Captain Torrijos's life changed in that year as well.

THE MOVEMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTION

The seizure of power by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters in January 1959 inspired the restless youth of Latin America to think about the possibilities of change. Young people became fascinated with Castro's audacity and yearned to achieve similar results in their own countries. Panamanians were no different. In the first week of April 1959, fifteen armed students in three cars occupied the small town of San Francisco in the highlands of Veraguas Province. They took food supplies from a store in exchange for a chit promising to pay in full "when the revolution triumphs."

These poorly armed youth announced that they represented the Movement of Revolutionary Action (MAR), whose armbands they sported on the sleeves of their homemade blue uniforms. They tarried in San Francisco for a few hours, waiting for other associates to join them. Several fellow members including their leader, a poet and former student leader at the University of Panama, Polidoro Pinzón, never showed up. The fifteen youthful rebels eventually set off on foot to establish a guerrilla base at Cerro Tute, the highest peak in Panama.

The MAR proclaimed three principal objectives: to terminate American control of the Canal Zone, to reform and expand the nation's educational system, and to overturn the government of Panama's corrupt oligarchy.[1] Therefore, these young guerrillas of middling socioeconomic background actually were struggling against the political establishment of their country.

The Movement of Revolutionary Action participated in a larger conspiracy involving multiple armed uprisings and two invasions of armed guerrillas from Cuba. The overall organizers represented the social elite of the few families of landed wealth and political influence who were attempting to imitate Fidel Castro's successful overthrow of the Cuban dictatorship. Although they had Fidel's assistance, they lacked his organizational talent. The Panamanian uprisings came off as a comedy of errors rather than an organized rebellion from below. The MAR was the first to go into action.

Once President Ernesto de la Guardia got word of the Veraguas insurrection, he turned to the commandant of his police force, the National Guard. Colonel Bolívar Vallarino agreed that the government should avoid making the mistake of Cuba's Fulgencio Batista, who had ignored Fidel Castro's uprising in the Sierra Maestra until it was too late. General Vallarino acted immediately. He appointed one of his officers, Captain Omar Torrijos, to command a special task force of 125 guardsmen to pursue the small band of would-be guerrillas.

Torrijos, a native of Veraguas Province, knew the terrain very well. Within days, by truck and airplane, he transported his policemen to the province. Soon, a peasant showed up at his headquarters and informed him of the location of the fledgling guerrillas. Captain Torrijos assembled twenty-five men and led them on the trail of the insurrectionists.

The combatants of the Movement of Revolutionary Action—the youngest being fifteen years old and the eldest, twenty-four—had relatives in Veraguas who helped them get into the mountains. But their academic studies at the National Preparatory School, the nation's premier high school, and at the University of Panama did not train them for guerrilla warfare. Physically and mentally, the youthful guerrillas proved ill-equipped for operating in the wilderness. Long marches, hunger, and sleep deprivation took a toll on their esprit.

Within a short period of time, Captain Torrijos's column caught up to the fifteen would-be guerrillas climbing slowly up Mount Tute. The young National Guard commander decided to trap the small enemy force. Captain Torrijos and his main force would follow the guerrillas up the mountain while his second in command, Lieutenant Rubén Darío Paredes, conducted a flanking movement to prevent their escape.

He ordered Paredes to take a detachment of guardsmen to the back side of the peak and slowly climb up to the top. Paredes's men intended to ambush the student guerrillas as they fled Torrijos's frontal attack from below. It took a day and a half for the Paredes detachment to reach the top, by which time the skirmish on the other side of the mountain had already come to its decisive end. Paredes lost radio contact with Captain Torrijos when the batteries failed.

As the guerrillas ascended the mountain, they left behind two poorly armed youngsters as the rear guard. They were to slow down the main column of Captain Torrijos. No sooner had the guerrilla force split up than the guardsmen engaged the rear guard.

"I told them to surrender," Captain Torrijos detailed in his report. "They responded with rifle fire that struck my cap but miraculously did not kill me."[2] Torrijos took grazing bullets to the hand, arm, and shoulder on his right side. Still, he directed his men to flank the two guerrillas on the right and left, killing them after a brief gun battle. Two coups de grâce made sure the guerrillas were dead.[3]

The main body of thirteen would-be guerrilla fighters heard the battle from above and decided that they, armed with pistols and .22 caliber rifles, were powerless to help their colleagues. They anxiously assessed the situation and concluded that their revolution was collapsing. These friends from high school and college broke up into groups of two and three and fled from the mountainside. Several fell into the hands of the National Guard, while most made their way back to Panama City. Some took refuge in foreign embassies of Chile and Brazil.

His men evacuated their wounded commander, Captain Torrijos. National Guard Colonel Vallarino then sent in Lieutenant Boris Martínez to take command of the rest of the operation. (As fate would have it, nine years later, Torrijos and Martínez would team up for the coup d'état against the very Panamanian oligarchy that the schoolboy guerrillas of 1959 were challenging.)

In the meanwhile, Lieutenant Paredes and his men remained at the top of Cerro Tute ready to intercept rebels fleeing the frontal assault below. They actually stood on the Continental Divide and could see the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Bay of Panama to the south. Days passed into two weeks. To feed his men, Lieutenant Paredes had to acquire foodstuffs—plantains and tubers—from Indigenous peasants living in this isolated highland rain forest. As the retired General Paredes recalled a half century later, he and his guardsmen lacked sources of protein and began losing weight.

"I remained stationed there for about fifteen days with the troops," Paredes says. "Then, Colonel Vallarino had ordered a patrol to get up to

where I was." When the patrol's leader found Paredes, he jokingly said, "'Sub-lieutenant Paredes, the war is over. The High Command orders you to retire. Mission accomplished."[4]

Fidel Castro's revolution may have inspired the guerrillas of the Movement of Revolutionary Action, but the students had no communication with their hero in Havana. However, Omar Torrijos, in the fullness of time, had pondered the National Guard's role in the Mount Tute affair.

"When I was a Captain," Omar wrote years later, "I put down a guerrilla insurrection commanded by young students and led by a just cause. I was the most injured one among my group and also the most convinced that those fallen young guerrilla warriors represented neither the corpse nor the burial of the discontent that had led them to protest through an armed insurrection."

"Had I not worn the uniform," Torrijos continued, "I would have joined them in the trenches."[5]

Captain Torrijos suppressed this small insurrection just weeks before the Cuban-sponsored armed expedition landed two hundred miles away near Nombre de Dios on Panama's Atlantic Coast. Recovering from his gunshot wounds, Captain Torrijos missed action in defending Panama from its first armed invasion since the US Marines landed to help Manuel Amador declare Panamanian independence from Colombia in 1903.

THE CUBAN SEABORNE ASSAULT

Castro's invasion of Panama reflected his hubris in believing that he could take down the remaining Caribbean dictatorships such as Anastasio Somoza's regime in Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo's in the Dominican Republic, and François "Papa Doc" Duvalier's in Haiti. Castro was convinced that all he had to do was provide a few weeks of training to political dissidents who had come to Havana from these nations. They came to learn how a band of rural guerrillas commanded by Fidel, his brother Raúl Castro, and the Argentinean fighter by the name of Ernesto "Che" Guevara had defeated Fulgencio Batista's standing army of some thirty-five thousand men.

However, Panama under President Ernesto de la Guardia did not qualify as a dictatorship so much as an oligarchic polity of conspiring elites. "We recognized perfectly well that no iron dictatorship existed in Panama," one Cuban invader later admitted, "but we knew that four or six families exchanged the presidency among themselves through rigged elections."[6]

Two Panamanian political dissidents had come to Havana to seek Castro's assistance in organizing a "revolutionary" invasion to overthrow President de la Guardia. They were Rubén Miró and Roberto Arias, the

latter a wealthy former ambassador to England. Both were cousins of Panama's president! Theirs was not a revolution from below. It was a political turf battle among the oligarchs.

The plot ripened when Roberto Arias and his British wife, Margot Fonteyn, came to Havana to meet Fidel Castro at the end of January 1959. Dame Margot had gained fame as a prima ballerina and the dance partner of Rudolf Nureyev. Fonteyn played on Castro's vanity, begging his assistance for her husband Roberto Arias's plot against De la Guardia.[7] Only thirty days had passed since Castro's own revolution had succeeded.

With Fidel's help, Miró acquired two Cuban fishing yachts and permission to recruit guerrilla fighters for an amphibious assault on Panama's Atlantic Coast.

Roberto Arias and Fonteyn traveled back to Panama to organize simultaneous attacks on the National Guard. Fifteen young men attacked a National Guard post at Boquete in Chiriquí Province, and others assaulted the barracks in the Atlantic port city of Colón. Both attempts failed. Moreover, they were completely unconnected with the action at Mount Tute.

Meanwhile, Roberto Arias and Margot Fonteyn were planning a separate attack on the National Guard garrison at Chorrera, ten miles west of the capital. Arias and Fonteyn sailed their yacht out from Panama City on the Pacific side to meet up with a shrimp boat containing weapons for their fellow conspirators. Fonteyn returned to the capital on her yacht, while Arias joined the small crew in the shrimper.

The shrimp boat ran aground and a water leak damaged some of the weapons. The crew dumped overboard about a third of the firearms that were damaged. By then, the National Guard had gone on alert, and Arias and his crew members attempted to escape to shore. One of his coconspirators, an Afro-Panamanian student named Floyd Britton, engaged in a firefight with a squad of policemen to cover Roberto Arias's escape.

Several of their confederates were captured, but Britton and Arias managed to flee separately. Floyd Britton suffered a gunshot wound and found treatment among friends in Panama City. He finally took refuge in the Guatemalan Embassy. On foot and under cover of night, Roberto Arias reached one of his family's ranches and caught a ride back to the capital.

There the police had already detained and interrogated Margot Fonteyn for twenty hours at the women's prison. The police confiscated address books containing the names of Hollywood movie stars like Errol Flynn and John Wayne, neither of whom played any part in this farce. However, John Wayne had been a business partner of Roberto Arias's brother in the shrimping business.[8] To avoid a diplomatic incident with

the British government, President de la Guardia put the English ballerina Margot Fonteyn on a plane to London. Her conspiratorial husband, Roberto Arias, found asylum in the Brazilian Embassy. The couple was reunited in Rio de Janeiro two months later.

Due to poor planning, the in-country uprisings had ended before confederates from Cuba under Miró's command landed on the Atlantic coastline. Miró's expedition departed on a fishing trawler from Cuba on April 19, 1959. The armed men cast off in broad daylight, sailing out of port past a Cuban patrol boat. "The crew enthusiastically waved goodbye to us," one Cuban volunteer remembered.[9] The expeditioners landed on Panama's coast fifty miles east of Colón, the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Canal.

Remarkably, the Panamanians on board the fishing boat were outnumbered—eighty Cubans to only six Panamanians. A few of the Cubans had participated in Fidel's guerrilla forces during the revolution, and the conspiracy's expedited timetable had left them little time for training. Yet the expedition managed to take over the colonial port town of Nombre de Dios on April 27.[10] The Cuban prime minister Fidel Castro was just finishing up a trip to Washington, DC, where he had an interview with Vice President Richard Nixon. He denied any knowledge of the Cuban expedition to Panama's Caribbean Coast.

President de la Guardia immediately appealed to the Organization of American States, which condemned the invasion. US military forces in the Canal Zone sent out ships and planes to patrol the Caribbean coast for the expected second boat.

De la Guardia also requested more American aid. He reminded diplomats at the US Embassy that Panama's National Guard was but a police organization. Moreover, the invasion might spark a coup d'état of his government by any number of divergent groups that "possess arms and could take advantage of the guard's preoccupation with the invasion."[11]

Only one Cuban invader died in the sole firefight of the brief incursion. Captain Torrijos's second-in-command at Mount Tute, Lieutenant Rubén Darío Paredes, participated in that action. Paredes rushed to the coast near the landing site. He took command of a unit of guardsmen who set up an ambush to prevent the advance of a column of Cuban invaders.

"I was in charge of that site," Paredes recalls. "We were notified by local informants that [the Cubans] were advancing." Parades explains that National Guard officers had spent the last year of their military training at the School of the Americas in the Canal Zone. "The officer training for this kind of jungle operation was of high quality. However, my men were barely acquainted with their M-1 Garands [assault rifles]."

"When . . . the [Cuban] column emerged, they were on the other side

of the river. I was waiting for them to be in the water so I'd give the order to shoot. Obviously, that's when they were the most vulnerable. I heard the leader of their column. He said to the other *guerrilleros*: 'Let's find a place where we can cross.' That's when I fired. The rest of my men fired too. [The Cubans] dispersed immediately."

Paredes concludes: "We crossed the river to see what had happened, we found the fallen Cuban there. His name was Toledo."[12]

The bulk of the invasion force, assured that their lives would be spared, surrendered to the Panamanian National Guard on May 1. "We will submit ourselves to the Panamanian courts in an unconditional surrender at the request of brothers Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro," the Cubans said, "so as not to obstruct international relations, so as not to hamper the work of the Cuban Revolution."[13]

Roberto Arias's cousin and coconspirator, Rubén Miró, had stayed behind in Cuba to launch a second boat of armed men. They turned back upon learning of the invasion's failure, as if to prove the incompetence of their own "revolutionary" leadership.

All in all, the whole episode of the Panamanian uprising with Cuban assistance fizzled without any need for the deployment of US troops from the Canal Zone. Panamanian police of the National Guard sufficed to put down the revolutionary threat. The ease with which they handled the challenge greatly boosted the status of the guardsmen.

THE RISING OFFICER

Before the 1959 skirmish at Mount Tute, Panamanian newspapers had not given much coverage to Captain Omar Torrijos, but he received more publicity thereafter. Torrijos ultimately received a promotion to the rank of major and, in 1963 to 1965, he commanded guardsmen in the far western province of Chiriquí Province. He stepped in to mediate disputes between a US-owned banana company and the port workers union in Puerto Armuelles. The American manager of the Chiriquí Land Company, which cultivated and shipped bananas, was refusing to recognize labor organizers who were recruiting the firm's workers.[14]

Later he would reflect on this experience as formative to his eventual favoritism for the trade union movement. Returning years later to commemorate the strikes of the mid-1960s, Torrijos addressed the port workers at Puerto Armuelles. "Your conquests have not been obtained for free nor have they been given to you gratuitously," he told the workers. "Behind all your union fights there is a whole past of sacrifice, death, and battles. The bullet that injured Dionisio Arrocha didn't only hurt his heart, it hurt the sensibility of all of us Panamanians who are willing to build, no matter the cost, a better fatherland for everyone."[15]

Another social movement involved the Guaymí people on their mountainous territorial reserve. Major Torrijos received orders to lead a unit of one hundred guardsmen to capture the tribe's "rebellious" chieftain, Samuel. This leader led protests against non-Indians settling on Indigenous lands.

"I stayed for several days in the mountains because I wanted to befriend Samuel," Torrijos later reminisced. "Then I became a friend of Samuel, it was then that he explained to me why the Indian fights, why the Indian resists, and, instead of taking him prisoner to [headquarters in the city of] David, I turned into an ally of his."[16] Later, as Panama's maximum leader, Torrijos conferred often with Indigenous communities.

In Chiriquí, Major Torrijos also conducted the National Guard's rural development program called Civic Action. It had become US Army doctrine in the 1960s as a method of winning the hearts and minds of the peasants at a time of communist-inspired rural rebellions. Spanish-speaking instructors at the School of the Americas in the Canal Zone taught the virtues of Civic Action, by which the military would build roads and schools to promote economic development in the isolated countryside. The US ambassador, Jack Hood Vaughn, visited one of the exercises developed by the Panamanian National Guard based on that instruction.

"[Major Torrijos] was a quiet and agreeable guy with rugged good looks and chiseled features that would lend themselves well to busts and statues," wrote the ambassador. "He brought me along with a caravan of medical personnel who were pulling teeth and administering vaccinations in the countryside. Torrijos and I rode horses. He wore a cowboy hat and looked like the Marlboro man; I looked like Woody Allen."[17]

Omar and his fellow officers were confronting the social unrest of the day, whether among port workers, Indigenous peoples, or African Panamanian citizens of Colón. Even stationed at Panama City's National Guard headquarters, on each duty day the policemen walked past the slum dwellings of the most impoverished areas of the nation's capital. The guardsmen had a greater sense of social inequities in the mountains, plains, and jungles of the nation than most urban youngsters.

It was true of Major Omar Torrijos as well. "To this day I can't recall a single incident while in command of public order special troops, where reason was not on the opposite side of our bayonets," Torrijos reflected.[18]

Clearly, the National Guard had matured as a military institution while Torrijos rose through the ranks. Training at the School of the Americas, having a presence throughout the entire country, and being responsible for the welfare of workers and farmers—these experiences bred

in Torrijos and his fellow officers contempt for corrupt politicians. He also developed resentment toward the inability of Panama's government to stand up to the English-speaking employees and soldiers in the Canal Zone.

CHAPTER 3

THE BREAKDOWN OF DEMOCRACY

To Latin Americans, the Panama Canal symbolized United States imperialist hegemony over the entire hemisphere. The Canal Zone consisted of a ten- by fifty-mile swath of land inhabited by forty-six thousand English-speaking administrators, operators, military personnel, and their dependents. In the minds of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking peoples, this Yankee-dominated territory divided Latin America into two pieces.

The continued existence of the American-controlled Canal Zone was becoming a prominent issue in the ideological conflict of the Cold War. More US dollars circulated than balboas, Panama's official currency.[1] Moreover, the zone was wealthy, and the country was not.

The Panama Canal Zone separated this republic's capital of Panama City to the east from its productive countryside and secondary cities and towns to the west. Practically the only national territory east of the capital was the underpopulated vastness of tropical jungles known as the Darién. Here, dense tropical forests prevented the completion of the famous Pan-American Highway that connects Alaska and Canada to the Tierra del Fuego—except through the Darién.

THE ZONIANS

Most of the Canal Zone had no fences. Fourth of July Avenue (its name had long since become an affront to Panamanians) separated the zone from the commercial district of the capital. Hundreds of Panamanians drove to work on Fourth of July Avenue every day, turning into the unguarded zone. There was nothing like Checkpoint Charlie. There was no

equivalent of the Berlin Wall, although Canal Zone policemen, consisting of white American males, did stop Panamanians who looked like they did not belong. Military police mounted tighter security at US bases, stopping cars that lacked the proper window sticker.

The vast majority of citizens of the Republic of Panama had never entered the Canal Zone. House girls and maids were practically the only Panamanians living there in the households of their American employers. President William Howard Taft's proclamation of 1912 had banished forty thousand native countryfolk from their towns and farms in the zone.[2]

Panamanians nevertheless felt the presence of a mighty foreign power in their midst. From Panama City on the Pacific Coast to Colón on the Atlantic, they could see the ships sailing in and out of the canal. In the shopping districts of these cities, Panamanian pedestrians frequently walked past Zonians, the English-speaking employees of the Canal Zone, as well as off-duty US military personnel. These Americans shopped at stores full of Asian electronics and linens. They spoke English.

Most of all, what rankled proud Panamanians was the method by which the Americans had acquired the Canal Zone. Teddy Roosevelt stated it succinctly, "I took the Canal Zone and let Congress debate."[3] He meant that he precipitated a revolution there in 1903 after the government in Bogotá rejected US terms to build a ship canal through Colombia's province of Panama.

The one man most responsible for declaring Panamanian independence was Philippe Bunau-Varilla, a citizen of France. Bunau-Varilla had worked for the De Lesseps Company. This French construction firm, which had built Egypt's Suez Canal, had nonetheless failed miserably at digging a canal through the tropics of Panama.

When the Colombian government hesitated to transfer the De Lesseps concession to the Americans, Bunau-Varilla arranged for Manuel Amador to proclaim the independence of this Colombian province. President Roosevelt dispatched warships to Colón long before the news of the movement had even reached Bogotá.

President Roosevelt immediately recognized the new nation of Panama and concluded a treaty by which it acquired the rights to construct the canal. The treaty permitted the US to lease the 895-square-mile property by paying the Panamanian government $10 million up front and $250,000 per year "in perpetuity." The French citizen Bunau-Varilla had acted as chief treaty negotiator and signatory for the new republic, after which he stayed on in Washington as Panama's ambassador.[4] The entire episode gave new meaning to the French term "fait accompli."

The Americans came to dominate this new republic. They built the canal, truly a triumph of industrial ingenuity and government planning.

In the process, Americans brought in thousands of West Indian construction workers, primarily English speakers of African descent. By 1920, the canal had opened to the world's ship traffic. Many West Indians stayed on as permanent employees—though not supervisors—and lived in segregated housing.[5] Every four years, Washington sent out a new governor, a general of the Army Corps of Engineers, to run the Canal Company and to govern the zone.

The US Armed Forces staffed a full complement of fourteen army posts, airbases, and naval stations astride the canal. A four-star general presided over the United States Southern Command. Yet military life, particularly following President Truman's order to racially integrate the armed services, began to differ strikingly from Zonian society. Officers and enlisted men inhabited housing according to rank rather than race, while racial segregation survived in the neighborhoods of canal employees.

There was little socialization between the military and the Zonians. Military personnel came and left for other assignments while the white canal workers stayed on for their entire careers. Six thousand other employees, mainly West Indians, also lived in the zone. An additional nine thousand mostly Panamanians entered the Canal Zone five days a week as nonresident workers.[6]

Zonians developed a colonial mentalité not unlike that of the British in India and the French in Algeria. White-skinned technicians lived in neat communities of tree-lined streets and homes with covered porches and screened windows. Their West Indian gardeners kept the tropical vegetation at bay. Afro-Caribbean women tidied up their homes, cooked their meals, and cared for their children.

White Canal Zone policemen, recruited in the United States, maintained order. The Zonians had their own schools, clubs, hospitals, restaurants, and commissaries, over which they proudly unfurled the Stars and Stripes. Neighborhoods outside the zone in the capital of Panama had, as one American described it, "a kind of aimless shabbiness" to them.[7]

Zonians may have come from modest social backgrounds in the States, but in Panama they lived like a colonial elite. They stayed in the zone for their social lives and recreation. An intense "resentment" built up over the decades between Panamanians and Zonians living divergent ways of life in such close proximity.[8] Zonians enjoyed privileges not available to them in the States and believed that their status was worthy of preservation.

Owning property did not count among those privileges. The Panama Canal Company owned and maintained the homes where its employees lived and the businesses and shops in which they worked. The United States government had built the canal, and the Panama Canal Company

ran it like a welfare state. Zonians at the same rank received the same salaries. Schools and services were free of charge. Free hospitalization and guaranteed pensions completed the cradle-to-grave benefits that only career military personnel also received.[9]

What made the privileges all the dearer to the mainly white Zonians was that West Indians and Panamanians did not qualify for the same lavish benefits, including the "tropical differential" of 15 percent paid to US workers. Said one US ambassador, "The Canal Zone is an example of how socialism really works if you've got enough money."[10] Ironically, the average Zonian would not have condoned such "creeping socialism" in the United States.

In the 1950s, the average "gold wage" of the Zonians equaled $6,000 per year and the "local wage" averaged $1,300.[11] Some proud Panamanians came to resent the whole arrangement even though they made good livings as canal employees. However, citizens of Panama could do nothing but complain—that is, until the late 1950s.

The Panamanians were alerted to their neocolonial condition not by Fidel Castro but by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. This Egyptian officer and his fellow soldiers had carried out a coup d'état on the pro-Western king of Egypt. In 1956, they seized the Suez Canal from its French and British owners. France and England sent troops, which President Dwight Eisenhower opposed. Israel and Egypt went to war. The United Nations intervened and eventually awarded Egypt possession of the Suez Canal with the guarantee of access by ships of all nations.

Even before the Cuban invasion, Panamanian youth exhibited frustration over the national humiliation of a Yankee-owned strip of land running through the heart of their country. High school and college-aged youth identified national pride with the Panamanian flag.

The first flag incident occurred on May 2, 1958, while Vice President Richard Nixon was touring South America. A group of students entered the Canal Zone and planted seventy Panamanian flags on the grounds. As the Canal Zone police were removing the display, anti-American protesters lined up along Fourth of July Avenue. Panama's National Guard confronted the rioters and violence broke out. Nine demonstrators lost their lives.[12] Many guardsmen—including Captain Torrijos—regretted having to shed Panamanian blood for the Americans.

A second flag incident occurred several months after the Cuban invasion of April 1959. On November 3, Panama's Independence Day, a group of secondary students from the National Institute marched into the zone and ran up the Panamanian banner at the closest flagpole. Canal Zone police responded with tear gas to disperse three hundred protesters. A mob attacked the US Embassy downtown and tore down the American

flag. However, on this occasion, President Ernesto de la Guardia declined to call out the National Guard.[13] In this second flag riot no one died, although one hundred Panamanians sustained injuries.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower sympathized. He had served in the Canal Zone as a young officer in the 1920s. Eisenhower issued an executive order stipulating the flying of a Panamanian national banner alongside every star-spangled banner displayed in the zone. The president's directive went unheeded. The Zonians refused to run up the Panamanian flag over their schools, clubs, and shops.[14]

For sure, the Canal Zone was not a democracy. Zonians could not vote for the governor. But the Panama Canal Company did not rule by fiat. Zonians voted absentee in their states back home. Therefore, they could and did correspond with members of Congress, who voted to withhold funding for new flagpoles.[15] Only one Panamanian banner fluttered near the front entrance to the Canal Zone on the Pacific side.

As leader of the oligarchic Liberal Party, Roberto Chiari supported the US diplomatic goal of isolating and embargoing Fidel Castro's regime. On taking over the presidency in 1960, Chiari "maintained a frankly hostile policy towards Cuba," according to Fidel's embassy in Panama.[16] Chiari thought the new US president John F. Kennedy would be grateful.

President Chiari wanted yearly payments to Panama raised from a $250,000 to $10 million. The Panamanians had some justification for the increase. A later study indicated that the US government was subsidizing shipowners by more than $500 million per year.[17] Yet, powerful members of Congress considered the Panamanians ungrateful to ask for higher rent.

Kennedy could only repeat his reluctance to renegotiate the treaty.[18] He did agree to reduce the display of the Stars and Stripes to just eight locations in the Canal Zone. Panama's colors would also fly at these eight sites, according to Kennedy's directive. Jingoistic students of military and Zonian families protested by refusing to display any flags at all. "Children become more American the longer they stay here," explained one school administrator, "and perhaps less tolerant. They are prouder than ever of being American because of the contrasts."[19]

Clearly, Panama's political leaders were gaining no concessions over the Canal Zone issues from their bilateral relations with the United States. President Chiari had even signed on to Kennedy's boycott of Cuba, but he received nothing in return for joining the US side in the Cold War.

The lack of progress on the flag issue frustrated secondary and university students. The government of the oligarchy appeared more and more incapable of gaining any concessions at all from the entrenched Zonians.

THE FLAG RIOT

Omar Torrijos, then a major, had settled into the command of the Panamanian National Guard garrison in Chiriquí Province. Therefore, he missed the most dramatic moment of Panamanian-United States relations in the half century since the canal had opened to commercial traffic: the Flag Riots of January 1964.

Not that the presence of Colonel Bolívar Vallarino's best field commander would have made any difference at all. As the senior police officer Vallarino had already decided that he would never again place National Guardsmen between Panamanian protestors and Canal Zone policemen. He did not want a recurrence of the 1958 anti-American riots in which the Panamanian police killed nine Panamanian students.[20]

In the meantime, Washington was becoming worried that the treaty controversy might incite anti-American agitation. The Panamanian Communist Party had an estimated 5,000 members out of a total population of 1.2 million. American agents also knew that party members had visited Cuba, where Castro's intelligence operatives had asked them to spy on US military forces and on ship traffic in the canal.[21]

However, sympathy for Castro did not spark Panamanian student demonstrations as much as the Zonians' refusal to fly the Panamanian flag did. At 4:30 p.m. on January 9, two hundred schoolboys from the National Institute carried a Panamanian flag as they passed on foot into the Canal Zone. They were heading to Balboa High School to hoist their national banner on the empty flagpole.

The Canal Zone police halted the column one block before it reached its destination. Negotiations ensued. Everyone agreed that five Panamanian youths could proceed with a police escort to raise a Panamanian flag in front of the school. Five hundred American youths gathered around the flagpole. Scuffling broke out between the two groups. An American schoolgirl fell to the pavement, and the jostling exposed a tear in the Panamanian flag.

The police escort ordered the Panamanian students to retreat. As they returned to Fourth of July Avenue, a few stragglers broke away and started hurling paving stones at cars and buildings inside the Canal Zone. Others followed. By 7:00 p.m., the governor's office had requested assistance from military police units to help expel the remaining marauders. The violence of the protest spread exponentially thereafter.[22]

Radio reports of the afternoon's events soon brought out a crowd of angry Panamanians—not all of them students—onto Fourth of July Avenue. They stopped cars and set them afire. Other rioters threw Molotov cocktails across the fence into the zone. By 8:00 p.m., the boisterous

crowd had grown to number six thousand Panamanians, several still in the zone damaging property. Fifty Canal Zone policemen, practically the entire Pacific side force, had been shooting their weapons into the air with little effect. They could not hold the fenceless boundary between the zone and Panama City.

In the meantime, the Canal Zone vice governor made several calls to the headquarters of the National Guard—even to the office of President Chiari—to request assistance in controlling the crowd. No guardsmen ever showed up to control the rioters.

The commanding general of the United States Southern Command finally had to take charge. Armed US troops relieved the Canal Zone policemen, chased the Panamanian marauders out of the zone, and secured the canal side of Fourth of July Avenue.[23] Never before had American troops been called upon in such large numbers to defend the Canal Zone from Panamanians. Their main mission had always been to protect the canal from foreign aggressors.

Soon the rioters in Panama City turned their wrath on buildings associated with US interests. Someone drove a car through the front door of the PanAm Building and dropped a match into the gas tank. The resulting fire consumed most of the structure. Arson attacks occurred at the library of the US Information Service and at the American Embassy. American servicemen and families living in Panama prudently drove their cars into the Canal Zone for protection, as violence spread to the port city of Colón on the Atlantic side of the canal. Then, late at night and into the next day, snipers from streets and buildings on the Panama side of Fourth of July Avenue fired random rounds of bullets into the zone. American troops did not return fire, according to the Southern Command.

President Chiari held a different view of events. He alleged that US troops had inflicted "acts of ruthless aggression" on Panamanian citizens. Panama temporarily broke diplomatic relations with the United States and demanded indemnifications.[24] Twenty-four Panamanian citizens and five American servicemen died.[25] Hundreds, mainly Panamanians, were wounded.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson had been in office for less than two months since Kennedy's assassination. From the Oval Office, he placed a telephone call to President Chiari on the second day of rioting. Johnson attempted to be conciliatory, but Chiari blamed the violence squarely on Washington's refusal to renegotiate the Canal Treaty of 1903.

"This situation has been building up for a long time, and it can only be solved through a complete review and adjustment of all agreements," Chiari told Johnson. "I am convinced that the intransigence and even indifference of the U.S. are responsible for what is happening here now."[26]

President Chiari demanded the immediate renegotiation of the Canal Treaty. Neither President Johnson nor his team of advisers was inclined to negotiate anything. A *Washington Post* poll had indicated that 85 percent of Americans agreed that the United States should *not* give in to Panama's demands.[27]

The US Southern Command's after-action report saw nothing but communist influence in the Panamanian riots. Consistent with "Communist patterns of agitation and violence," the military intelligence reported, Panamanian agitators engaged in "sniping, looting, burning, and hurling of Molotov cocktails." Moreover, many of these known activists had received training "in Cuba or Russia."[28] In the minds of Washington politicians, Castro always popped up as the cause of the troubles over the Panama Canal.

Continued White House resistance placed political pressure on President Chiari in his final months in office. With presidential elections coming up, laid-off workers were increasingly turning to the opposition politician Arnulfo Arias. Though he was a Harvard-trained medical doctor, Arias considered himself an outsider among the elite families.[29] He advocated populist politics, not the conservatism of the oligarchy.

At the time, the United States had its staunchest allies in the Panamanian oligarchy. That is, the wealthy political families that had produced Presidents de la Guardia and Chiari. However, to continue to win elections, these oligarchic politicos needed to demonstrate some progress in treaty negotiations with the United States. But there was no political will in Washington to renegotiate the 1903 treaty.

NATIONAL GUARD BUILDUP

American diplomats, meanwhile, believed that the United States had a good working relationship with the men of the Panamanian National Guard. This force now combined police and national defense functions. National Guardsmen regularly attended the "internal security" courses given yearly at the Inter-American Police Academy in the Canal Zone. The United States Agency for International Development (AID) conducted this training. Panama's elite Presidential Guard appeared in AID training films distributed to police units throughout the Americas.

In 1963, the Police Academy held its fourth training course for 127 students from 11 countries. Students went on tours of the Canal Zone and Fort San Lorenzo, the oldest Spanish fortress under American control. Two guest lecturers made presentations on the counterinsurgency campaigns conducted in the 1960s by the armies of the Philippines and Colombia.[30]

The National Guard also initiated Civic Action projects in the coun-

tryside and enjoyed popularity among the mixed-race working classes from which it recruited its soldiers. With justification, Washington expected Panamanian National Guardsmen to form the first line of defense of the canal.

All the while, the United States government was contributing to the expansion of Panama's National Guard. In 1966, the force numbered 4,300 men. The US Congress voted to pay the expenses for an additional 500 new recruits. The Panamanian government requested that the American government continue to fund another 1,000 recruits in 1967. American taxpayers assumed the cost of the Civic Action programs that the guardsmen conducted in the countryside.[31]

By 1968, the guard had grown to number 5,400 policemen. The officer corps of more than 200 men originated primarily from the middling sectors of society. The United States provided most of the professional schooling and arms for this force. Approximately half of its enlisted personnel and all its officers had taken training courses at the Inter-American Police Academy and at the School of the Americas, both conducted and financed by the United States government. Panama's future leader serves as a case in point.

Omar Torrijos attended the Jungle Warfare Center at Fort Sherman, Canal Zone, in 1959. Seven years later Fort Sherman became a major training site for Vietnam-bound US soldiers. Torrijos also took courses on maintenance and on command and general staff functions, all offered at the School of the Americas. The only course Torrijos attended on counterinsurgency was called "Guerra de Guerrillas," the exact title of Ernesto "Che" Guevara's 1960 book on the subject.

Such expansion in manpower and training cost money. The National Guard budget rose from $6.2 million in 1966 to $9.2 million in 1968 and the US Congress funded most of it.[32] Clearly, the expansion of the National Guard relied on US sources of funding and training. No doubt, the politicians in Washington, DC, believed that the guardsmen would be enough to support the oligarchy in Panama.

ROBLES-JOHNSON TREATY TALKS

The Liberal Party oligarchs did not realize that President Marco Robles would be their last hurrah. In a reputedly rigged national election in 1964, Robles beat the populist politician Arnulfo Arias, who CIA analysts feared might make a deal with Panamanian communists. The failure to secure an acceptable new treaty by the end of Robles's tenure in 1968 was to doom the oligarchy to political irrelevance.

In the meantime, the US intelligence community kept an eye on Arnulfo Arias. His political star seemed to rise as the Robles–Johnson

negotiations progressed for three years. CIA analysts continued to link Arias, the defeated presidential candidate of 1964, to left-wing forces. They suggested that the veteran Panamanian politician encouraged student disturbances. Communist leaders in the universities "have repeatedly intimidated politicians, demanded and received audiences with Panamanian ministers and presidents, and occasionally had a direct impact on government policy," reported the CIA.[33]

American intelligence agents did not actually believe that Arias had become a communist agent but only that he might "deal with the devil" in order finally to get into power. Twice elected, in 1940 and 1948, and twice prevented by the National Guard from completing his term in office, Arias felt that he had been cheated by Robles's fraud in the 1964 elections as well.[34] Arias also said that "the National Guard had participated in it." Arias's accusations placed its commander, Colonel Bolívar Vallarino, on the defensive. He had to pledge neutrality in the coming 1968 election. The commander instructed his guardsmen to "respect the Constitution and the country's laws."[35]

It did not allay the concerns of the Panameñistas, as the partisans of Arias called themselves, when President Robles subsequently promoted Vallarino to the rank of general. Nor did rumors that General Vallarino might become the oligarchy's presidential candidate in the coming election.[36]

As soon as his own elections of 1964 confirmed a landslide victory, President Johnson instructed the State Department to begin treaty talks. He proposed to reaffirm Panama's sovereignty over the Canal Zone and raise payments to the government of Panama. The two presidents, Robles and Johnson, discussed treaty issues in person and found themselves far apart.

Lyndon Johnson met his Panamanian counterpart at the presidential summit conference of the Organization of American States. It convened in April 1967 in the Uruguayan coastal resort town of Punta del Este. Three years of treaty discussions had preceded this meeting, and President Robles said Panamanians were not pleased with the result. He mentioned his desire to demonstrate sovereignty over the Canal Zone by placing it under the Panamanian justice system.

Another issue pertained to Robles's intent to increase his country's share of revenues. He told President Johnson that the national debt was leading the Panamanian economy to a state of "asphyxiation." Therefore, Panama needed a much fairer return on the canal's operations. Finally, Robles wanted to sign a satisfactory new treaty before his term ended. Failing that, he might not be able "to eliminate the nationalist passions and emotional effects" that might lead to additional domestic unrest.

FIGURE 3.1. Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos commanded this mobilization of the National Guard in June 1968. His armed men succeeded in saving the presidency of Marco Robles by preventing the National Assembly from ousting him following defeat of the Robles–Johnson treaty proposal. Photograph courtesy of the anonymous owner of a private collection.

"We share Panama's sense of urgency," Johnson replied. No doubt, the president had been reading the CIA briefings. They predicted that if no new canal treaty were to be signed, the plutocratic families might not be able retain control of the government.[37] Nevertheless, the differences between the Panamanian and American negotiators were not trivial. The Panamanians wanted $80 million per year and the Americans were offering only $20 million.[38]

Omar Torrijos was becoming one of the more senior officers during the Robles presidency. When he completed his command duties at the Chiriquí garrison and obtained additional staff training at the School of the Americas, he received a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. Moreover, younger officers in the National Guard were making the claim that the treaty provisions were so unpopular that they would never be ratified by Panama's National Assembly unless Guardsmen "fire on the people [in order] to maintain order." Torrijos and other officers resented that the American military occupation of the Canal Zone might continue indefinitely.[39]

General Vallarino appointed Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos to act as the secretary of the headquarters with an office next to the commander's own office.[40] Torrijos was not yet on the general staff of the commander, as there were still six active-duty officers who had seniority over him. But, as secretary of the commander, he controlled communications between Vallarino, the general staff, and the regional troop commanders.

The crisis these officers feared came quickly when the National Assembly rejected the Robles–Johnson treaty, and the Panameñista majority in the assembly voted to impeach President Robles and install an interim chief executive from Arias's party. [41] If the *arnulfistas* succeeded, Arnulfo Arias would control the voting process in the coming presidential election. President Robles asked the National Guard commander, General Bolívar Vallarino, to close down the legislature and invalidate the impeachment.[42] Failure might bring political violence to the streets.

General Vallarino ordered troops to surround the National Assembly building. They used tear gas to prevent the *arnulfistas* from entering and installing their interim president.[43] General Vallarino entrusted command of this cordon sanitaire to Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos. The National Guard had saved the presidency of Robles.

The treaty lay dead in the water. The government of Panama had been receiving an annuity from the US Treasury of nearly $2 million since 1955. If the 1967 treaty had been ratified by the US Senate and the Panamanian Assembly, that payment would have amounted to $20 million annually.[44] Neither the oligarchs nor the Panameñistas could accept the treaty and expect to win the election that followed.

POLITICAL CRISIS

Arnulfo Arias returned to the presidential election campaign of 1968. Early polling had Arias in front. Robles's Liberal Party had chosen the president's brother-in-law, David Samudio, as its candidate in the elections. The opposition *arnulfistas* suspected that the oligarchy would again commit electoral fraud.

However, the outgoing president turned the tables. President Robles presided over a fair election despite his brother-in-law's vote "irregularities." Arias won by a decisive landslide victory. The next challenge appeared to be whether the National Guard would allow Arias to take office on October 1, 1968.

Despite the historic hostility between the Panamanian National Guard and *arnulfistas*, General Vallarino met with president-elect Arias. The general made an agreement with Arnulfo Arias that the guardsmen would not prevent his inauguration. "I will not tolerate any act that would void the will of the people."[45] To demonstrate his faith in Arias, General

Vallarino vowed to retire from the military following the presidential inauguration. In return, Arias promised that he would not disrupt the chain of command of the National Guard—despite its coups against his two previous presidential victories.

Vallarino gathered his officers at guard headquarters in downtown Panama City. He told his men to obey orders to withdraw from politics.[46] Democracy in Panama had survived—or had it?

Among those officers who remained suspicious of Arias was Major Boris Martínez, the brash new commander of Torrijos's old garrison in the city of David, Chiriquí Province. Omar Torrijos also did not trust the president-elect. In fact, Omar's elder brother, Moisés Torrijos, had advised Samudio's presidential campaign.[47] Nonetheless, the inaugural ceremony proceeded without a hitch. US officials and businessmen had come to terms with an Arias presidency. They treated President Arias to a gala inaugural reception on a yacht.[48]

However, soon after he took the oath of office, Arnulfo Arias acted vindictively and broke his agreement with the retiring General Vallarino. According to one young attorney's recollections, Omar Jaén Suárez writes, Arnulfo Arias "appeared to want to govern without any curbs or opposition."[49] At Vallarino's retirement ceremony, the president began his purge of the National Guard's leadership.[50] It was held at Old Panama on the historic plaza fronting the cathedral tower constructed in 1625. The officer corps, resplendent in their dress uniforms, arrived for the ceremony. A senior staff officer read the president's official retirement orders for General Vallarino to the assembled officers.

President Arias also ordered that Colonel Omar Torrijos was to leave immediately for El Salvador, where he would serve as military attaché to the Panamanian Embassy. Major Boris Martínez lost his command in Chiriquí. The president also ordered the dismissal of the senior staff officer, Colonel José Pinilla, who was expecting to succeed Vallarino as National Guard commander.[51] With one order, President Arnulfo Arias had eviscerated the top brass of the National Guard.

Senior officers of the guard immediately sounded out the US Embassy. We are not fools, one colonel told the American military attaché, "and [we can] see the handwriting on the wall." American diplomats suspected that Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos and Major Boris Martínez, both being "strong-minded" and "vulnerable," were directing the guard's opposition to Arias's presidency.[52]

The two officers formed a perfect combination. Torrijos could communicate with all troop commands from his office at headquarters, and Martínez commanded the largest troop unit. But they had to act quickly—

within hours of Vallarino's retirement—before they had to vacate those posts.

However, the US State Department did not want another *golpe de Estado* in Latin America. Secretary of State Dean Rusk immediately wired a message to the US ambassador. "A coup in Panama in [the] wake of [the] Peruvian Coup would be very disturbing," it said. Rusk advised his ambassador in Panama to make it clear that "any coup attempt by [National Guard] officers would be very badly received by the [United States government]." US military assistance might be in jeopardy.[53] The American Embassy so informed restive military officers on October 10, 1968.

No one factor accounts for the 1968 political crisis in Panama. The fraudulent treaty of 1903, the colonization of its territory by arrogant foreigners, student frustration with national weakness, the ineptitude of oligarchic democracy, the professionalization of the National Guard, the vindictiveness of a populist politician, and the inability of the US government to make a deal: all these issues formed a volatile accelerant.

Moreover, one also cannot discount the context of the Latin American reactionary opposition to the disruption caused by the Cuban Revolution. The Panamanian *golpe de Estado* continued a pattern of military takeovers in Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru. Since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, military coups had become acceptable remedies for "communist unrest," a convenient excuse to end democratic procedures in Latin America.

Omar Torrijos summed up his own attitude toward solving national crises. "Men of action usually succeed," Omar Torrijos told a White House adviser several years later. "Men of inaction wait for something good to happen and it never does."[54]

CHAPTER 4

EL GOLPE DE ESTADO

Timing mattered. To save themselves, the aggrieved National Guard officers had just a few hours on October 11 to plan and execute the *golpe de Estado*. Of all the Latin American coups d'état of the 1960s and 1970s—and there were scores of them—the Panamanian overthrow took just a few hours from beginning to end. It certainly stunned President Arnulfo Arias and his supporters. And nobody died!

The 1968 Panamanian *golpe de Estado* amounted to the first of three separate showdowns. The hierarchy of command within the National Guard had dissolved with General Bolívar Vallarino's departure. Minus the one commander in chief who had promoted them all, the officers eventually turned on each other until the savviest among them emerged triumphant. Resolution of the new political order did not come until fourteen months later, in December 1969.

As Omar Torrijos used to say, "Rank is given by decree. Hierarchy is conquered with exemplary acts." He also said, "He who has a high rank says: 'You go.' He who has hierarchy says: 'Follow me.'"[1] On October 11, the two senior-most officers, Colonels José Pinilla and Bolívar Urrutia, had rank but no hierarchy, meaning no loyalty among the troops.

Those in mid-career at the grades of major literally made the Panamanian *golpe*. There was only one lieutenant colonel without troops, Omar Torrijos, who coordinated the operation. This rebellion originated among the up-and-coming officers whom President Arias had begun to reshuffle. They decided among themselves to strike before Lieutenant Colonel

Torrijos had to vacate the headquarters and Major Boris Martínez lost his troop command.

No one at the time had any idea that overturning the elected president would place his eventual successor in a position to challenge US occupation of the Panama Canal. No one could have predicted such a thing. The only explanation for what happened in the fullness of time depended on the character of the leader who eventually consolidated power and how the Panamanian people responded to him.

OVERTHROWING THE PRESIDENT

Major Martínez from the city of David moved prematurely but with a definite purpose. An ambitious officer, Boris Martínez knew that the audacity of being the first to launch a successful rebellion would confer great prestige (hierarchy) on him. He also had the largest number of armed troops under his command in Chiriquí Province.

The senior-most general staff officers, Colonels Pinilla and Urrutia, had no troops. Colonel Torrijos controlled national headquarters in downtown Panama City, which served as the nerve center of the National Guard. He had few troops of his own, but he did control communications to regional troop commands throughout the country.

Thus, Major Martínez's premature troop movements threatened to outflank the ostensible coordinator of the coup. If Torrijos, the plotter with rank, did not react quickly, his rank would not have mattered. But he already had prestige among his fellow officers for previously having had command of National Guard troops at the National Assembly that same year.

What happened next is a matter of conjecture. The Spanish-speaking US liaison officer at National Guard headquarters learned that the coup had begun. His name was Efraín Angueira. He told Torrijos that he needed to inform his superior intelligence officers in the Canal Zone. "Like hell you will," replied Torrijos. The lieutenant colonel ordered his men to lock up Angueira for the night, together with a bottle of whiskey.[2]

Torrijos quickly notified the other units that the coup had begun early. Guardsmen stationed near Tocumen International Airport mounted their vehicles, headed downtown, and surrounded the presidential guard at the Palace of the Swans. President Arias had already left the presidential residence to attend a movie, reportedly with his mistress. Gunfire broke out but produced no casualties.

By 9:00 p.m. (the precise time Torrijos had scheduled for the coup to begin), the National Guard already controlled the city, the airport, and most radio and television stations. Pro-Arias followers did not take to the streets, despite the president's plea that they rise up in "support of

the constitutional majority."[3] Arnulfo Arias successfully sought refuge by driving his car into the Canal Zone. He had not even completed two weeks of his four-year presidency.

The National Guard worked efficiently to consolidate power in the two days following the coup. The regime censored the media such as *La Estrella de Panamá* and the *Star & Herald,* the English-language newspaper serving Panamanians of West Indian heritage. The guardsmen arrested thousands of people, especially members of leftist organizations and prominent partisans of Arias's Panameñista Party.[4] The *golpistas* also closed down the National Assembly and, for good measure, the University of Panama. Students were already emerging as the first critics of the coup.

The first statements by Secretary of State Rusk expressed the deep distress of the United States government. "We have a close relationship with Panama and a stake in the stability of the isthmus in view of our presence there as stewards of the vital Panama Canal," he said. "This coup d'état must be equally disturbing to our sister republics in the hemisphere."[5]

This last remark is puzzling. The secretary of state ignored the fact that general officers were already ruling the largest of the "sister republics." For what reason would the military governments of Latin America be distressed about Panama joining their rising numbers? Generally, military juntas feel secure with neighboring countries similarly governed. Brazil's generals in particular had aided such military takeovers in Argentina in 1966 and Chile in 1973.[6]

The Americans soon realized who wielded the real power behind the Panamanian coup. The US Embassy reported that "Torrijos is the spark plug, most determined, perhaps least civilian oriented, most power minded" officer involved in the *golpe de Estado*.[7]

But the State Department severed relations with Panama immediately. Therefore, the *golpistas* could not communicate with any American foreign service officers who might inform them about Washington's attitude toward the coup. Torrijos had known Major General Chester Johnson, commander of the US Army Southern Command at Fort Amador, the Canal Zone, from various social gatherings. In fact, Johnson had attended General Vallarino's retirement ceremony on the very morning of the coup.

Torrijos received a call from General Johnson, who had a message from Washington, DC, to deliver to him in the ambassador's absence. Johnson had survived the Bataan Death March and Japanese incarceration in the Philippines during World War II. The two men could talk soldier to soldier.

Rubén Darío Paredes remembers this encounter.[8] As a captain, he accompanied Torrijos to the meeting at Johnson's residence at Fort Amador. "[General Johnson] was waiting for us with a group of colonels," Paredes

explains. "We didn't even go inside the general's house, instead we walked the streets of the citadel under the moonlight and talked."

According to Paredes, "General Johnson said that he'd been instructed to request that we [National Guardsmen] place Dr. Arias back into the presidency to prevent public disorder from occurring in Panama. That's what he wanted to say to us. That's why he invited us for this late-night discussion."

"Torrijos replied that we [Panamanian officers] also had a mission to accomplish for our country and that we were not going to step back. People weren't going to be taking to the streets. Instead, little by little, [Panamanians] would accept the *golpe* against Dr. Arias." In Paredes's version, the conversation between Chester Johnson and Omar Torrijos ended with an exchange of salutes. Both had been firm in stating their positions. But there was no agreement.

Finally, Secretary Rusk had to accept the Americans' inability to reverse the *golpe de Estado*. "We should not facilitate any attempts by Arias [to] overturn the junta by violence," Rusk advised President Lyndon Johnson. "[Arias] cannot now be successful and any effort would lead to bloodshed without a satisfactory solution."[9]

The *golpistas* set about establishing executive control of government through a junta of senior staff officers, none of whom had access to any troops. The public knew that Colonels Pinilla and Urrutia presided as heads of the government, but they had no real power. Junta members by rank were senior to the *golpistas*, yet completely dependent on them. Torrijos was running the government with Martínez as the second in command.

Almost immediately the *golpistas* promoted themselves: Torrijos to full colonel, and Boris Martínez and Federico Boyd to lieutenant colonels. Omar assumed the position as acting commandant of the National Guard. After all, he had engineered the coup, possessed date of rank over Boris, and held the allegiance of the zone commanders throughout the country.

But Borís Martínez had a commanding—even overbearing—personality. He did not shy away from defining in what direction he intended to take the new military government. Martínez was rabidly anticommunist in a country in which communism actually posed little threat.

In the meantime, the type of revolution that Boris Martínez wished to promote was not communist but moral. One news article subsequently defined his agenda as "the persecution of those who did not return books from public libraries, the removal of pinball machines from public places so as not to corrupt the youth, and the imposition of fines to those who violated traffic regulations."

While Major Boris Martínez was morally rigid, Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos spoke of a more flexible revolution. "We are not communists. We are not going to try to put a regime like Cuba's in Panama. We are not going to appropriate any [property]," Torrijos reportedly said.[10] His fellow officers concurred more with the flexible approach of Torrijos than with the puritanical rigidity of Martínez. They worried that the latter might not overlook their own peccadilloes.

Omar and Boris appointed a cabinet of civilian ministers to run the government. They consisted of Torrijos's close friends Eduardo Morgan Jr. and Demetrio Lakas to administer the Justice and Social Security Ministries. Lakas ran his own construction business. Attorney Morgan participated in the coup planning, prepared the rules of engagement, and served in the Justice Ministry of the first government under the junta.[11] Both had attended North American universities: Morgan at Yale, and Lakas at Texas Southern.

Then Torrijos and Martínez interviewed Nicolás Ardito Barletta for economic planning. Ardito Barletta had earned a PhD in economics from the University of Chicago and had already been working for two years in the government of President Marco Robles.[12]

The next order of business concerned the presence of President Arias in the Canal Zone, where he broadcasted messages urging his supporters to resist the National Guard usurpers. Torrijos protested several times to the Canal Zone government asking it to expel the ex-president. On October 21, ten days after the *golpe de Estado*, ex-president Arias finally boarded a US Air Force flight out of the Canal Zone.[13] He would spend the next decade in exile in Miami.

While Washington was pondering recognition of the junta, the military attaché from the US Embassy invited Colonels Omar Torrijos and Boris Martínez to lunch at his home in Panama City. They talked for three hours. The two most powerful National Guard officers in the new junta never once complained about the lack of US recognition. Yet they wanted to impress the Americans with their moderate agenda.

The *golpistas* also responded to American concerns by saying that the junta planned to reinstate civil liberties in due time. After all, Omar Torrijos and Boris Martínez stressed one very important fact: the Panamanian coup d'état had succeeded without civilian casualties.[14]

Back in the White House, the special adviser Walt Rostow suggested to the president that the time had arrived to recognize Panama's new military government. Thirteen other Latin American governments representing the largest countries had already renewed diplomatic relations.[15] US recognition came two months after the Panamanian *golpe*.

CONSOLIDATING POWER

After the October 1968 coup, the first to go was Lieutenant Colonel Boris Martínez, the doctrinaire anticommunist. He alienated many pragmatic National Guard officers who desired to use their positions for personal gain. Petty bribes and scams had always been a source of extra income for the underpaid guardsmen. These men gravitated to Colonel Torrijos as the better alternative.

Martínez had become number two in the chain of command at the headquarters of the National Guard in Panama City. However, he could not keep himself from complaining about the social reforms that Omar Torrijos was contemplating. Boris could count on the support of only a few other officers, such as Lieutenant Colonel Federico Boyd.

With pistols drawn, Majors Amador Sanjur and Ramiro Silvera joined Torrijos in arresting Colonel Martínez one evening in February 1969. Majors Sanjur and Silvera then forcibly detained Boyd and placed him, bound in duct tape, on the same flight that took Martínez and a third officer to exile in Miami.[16]

One diplomat at the British Embassy quoted a Panamanian official about the inside story on the deposed leader. "Despite the immense zeal and vitality of Colonel Martínez, a real danger had been removed with [his] disappearance." This Panamanian source compared Martínez to Robespierre of the French Revolution "for his fatal combination of great energy, incorruptibility, and unscrupulous ruthlessness."[17] The informant suspected that Boris Martínez was planning to assassinate Omar Torrijos.

As Torrijos told his economic planning minister following the elimination of Boris Martínez, "Look, one thing is rank, and another is hierarchy. In the National Guard, I have both. I loosen the ropes in order to observe, but when I tighten and shake them, I do it with determination."[18] Following the ouster of Martínez and Boyd, Torrijos awarded himself the rank of brigadier general and commandant of the National Guard. He was now superior in rank to anyone in the junta.

Torrijos promoted his accomplice Amador Sanjur to lieutenant colonel and chief of staff. According to US military intelligence sources, Sanjur represented the right wing of the officer corps. He had attended the Military Academy of Venezuela during the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez in the 1950s. Sanjur continued to admire the military dictator thereafter. US intelligence agents recognized Sanjur as pro-American. His wife worked in the offices of the US Information Service. He also took the usual military courses at the School of the Americas.

In the 1968 election, Sanjur had opposed the candidacy of Arnulfo Arias because he shared a fear of the populist's intrusions into the lead-

ership of the National Guard. Following the coup, Major Sanjur styled himself as an expert on communism and wrote occasionally in the Panamanian press about his objections to leftist ideology.[19]

Ramiro Silvera, like Sanjur, received a promotion after he assisted in Martinez's arrest. In the early 1950s, he had attended cadet schooling in Guatemala. Silvera's training included counterinsurgency and jungle warfare courses at the School of the Americas, as well as police training in Italy and "traffic control" courses at Northwestern University.

American intelligence agents considered Silvera pro-American and a man who "drinks heavily" and "engages in extra-marital affairs."[20] In the latter two proclivities, the lieutenant colonel differed little from his fellow officers. The alliance between General Torrijos and the two subordinate officers had nothing to do with ideology. It had to do with survival. Eventually these three would have their own shakedown.

THE ROCKEFELLER MISSION

The year 1969 turned out to be a busy one for Torrijos. In May, Governor Nelson Rockefeller arrived in Panama on his good-will trip to Latin America on behalf of President Richard Nixon. The foreign minister hosted Rockefeller and arranged for him to speak to some of the young, US-educated cabinet ministers. "Our impression was that Panama had the ablest and most knowledgeable, most efficient and dedicated young Cabinet of any country we had visited thus far," he reported to President Nixon.

Then Rockefeller sat down with General Torrijos for a two-hour chat. "It struck me as significant [for a military dictator] that he came not to talk of arms, but with a large number of photographs depicting the poverty of Panamanians," he wrote in his report. The general told Rockefeller that anti-American feelings were running high in Panama. Were it not for the National Guard, Torrijos said, the United States would have to maintain three divisions of US soldiers in the Canal Zone just to keep the peace.

Rockefeller reported that Torrijos "was going to keep the government honest [and] that they are cleaning up corruption." Having elections too soon would only encourage the return of the old oligarchy that used to buy votes to stay in power. He expressed annoyance at the current US ambassador for making public statements urging quick elections. Torrijos asked the Americans to send a more "understanding" ambassador.

"There is no question that Colonel Torrijos is a strong man and that he is young, attractive, and well meaning," Rockefeller concluded. "I am convinced he does not want a military dictatorship, but he finds himself in the dilemma of having an outstanding group ready to go on economic and social problems."

"Until the new Panama Canal Treaty is signed, there is grave dan-

ger of a blow-up which could have the most unfortunate repercussions throughout Central and South America," Rockefeller wrote in his report.[21] He departed Panama very much impressed with the new military government. He was even more impressed with Omar Torrijos. In fact, the governor of New York State even invited General Torrijos to visit the bankers of Wall Street.

The CIA also took note of the reformist tinge of the Torrijos regime at the end of its first year in power. Analysts mentioned the moderate land reforms and the expansion of Civic Action programs. But the Central Intelligence Agency also corroborated that the regime had moved to incarcerate known agitators and dismiss left-wing professors from university classrooms.

The return of strong economic growth helped Torrijos blame the country's problems on the corruption of politicians of the pre-coup elite. The middle class responded well to his anti-oligarchic political rhetoric. General Torrijos also canceled the American leasehold on the Río Hato training ground on the Pacific coast west of the canal. Next came the airstrip called France Field, into which the Colón Free Trade Zone expanded its warehouses.[22] The Torrijos government thus struck a couple of blows for national pride.

THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

Not all was well in the National Guard. The reformist ideas of Torrijos bothered some of his fellow officers. An important sector of the business class disliked the entrance of several Communist Party members into the government run by Torrijos. They began to view Torrijos himself as having "communist" leanings. The all-purpose charge of communism certainly made no sense when leveled at a leader who was going to New York to visit with Wall Street bankers.

Thus began a conspiracy of the newly minted lieutenant colonels, Sanjur and Silvera. They perceived an opportunity to act on their misgivings about Torrijos in December 1969. It was then that General Torrijos flew to Mexico City to cheer on the Panamanian thoroughbred entered in the annual Race of the Americas. In the commander's absence, Sanjur and Silvera seized National Guard headquarters in Panama City.

Lieutenant Colonel Sanjur told a reporter for the conservatively oriented Radio Libertad that Torrijos had assumed too much power. "We, the members of the National Guard, should support the mission of the junta, not just one man, exclusively." The news reporter asked if the coup plotters would return quickly to democratic elections. "It's a step in the right direction," Sanjur answered.[23]

Several other guard officers expressed some ambivalence about this

coup within the coup. They hesitated and remained silent, waiting to see what action General Torrijos might take. Their dilemma revolved around timing—when to declare definitively in favor of the Sanjur/Silvera duo or Torrijos. The longer one waited, the more that officer might lose. The positions of the senior-most officers in the junta but with no troops, Pinilla and Urrutia, were most precarious.

At 2:00 a.m., Omar Torrijos received a phone call in his Mexico City hotel room. The conspirators had coerced the two junta members, Colonels Pinilla and Urrutia, to warn Torrijos not to return to Panama. "We have decided that you should not come back home again," they told him on the phone. His fellow officers indicated that they represented some Panamanian businessmen who worried about "communists" in the government.

"I can't leave this poor country in your hands," Torrijos shouted into the phone, "I'm coming back."[24]

Torrijos was determined to return without delay before other National Guard officers made the same decision as the junta members. He immediately called his traveling friends to his suite at the Hotel Camino Real in Mexico City. They were Lieutenant Colonel Paredes, Major Contreras, and the chief of social security, Demetrio Lakas.

"Look, I've decided to go back," Paredes quotes Torrijos as saying, "I understand what I intend to do is a suicide mission but I would much rather die over there in action than to die from sadness, abandoned here in Mexico. I'll leave it to you to decide if you want to come with me or not. But I want to tell you that I'm not staying in Mexico. I am not ready for life in exile."[25]

Paredes, Contreras, and Lakas accepted the risks of returning. They decided not to take a commercial flight to Costa Rica and then cross into Panama. Colonels Sanjur and Silvera would easily learn of their itinerary and have "loyalists" among the military police meet them at the airport. Better to "go dark" and enter Panama by surprise.

Within a few hours, they borrowed $6,000 from a female staff member in the Panamanian Embassy in Mexico City and rented an air taxi to fly the four men to Mexico's southern border. By daybreak, the four fugitives were boarding the air taxi.

The rented plane and pilot took the four passengers to Tapachula on the Guatemalan border for refueling. They dared not take a hop to Guatemala, for Colonel Pinilla had friends in the Guatemalan Army from his days as a cadet there. Even though Lieutenant Colonel Paredes had gone to the military academy in Managua, Torrijos did not trust General Somoza.[26] They settled on going all the way—285 miles—to El Salvador, where former cadet classmates of Torrijos awaited his landing.

"When the party arrived at El Salvador, the Salvadoran officials

greeted us euphorically and amicably," Paredes recounts. "That's when Luis Posada, the Mexican pilot, realized what was happening."[27] The news had reached Central America. General Torrijos, a victim of a coup, was returning to reclaim command of the Panamanian National Guard. The pilot received instructions from the owner of the air taxi: he was to return to Mexico City with the plane. The pilot decided to push on with his passengers.

"There is a moment in which one enters a trance-like mindset in which there is no turning back," Paredes explains. "I was convinced that my destiny was to come back and that nobody was going to challenge that notion. I understood very well Torrijos's state of mind."[28]

Demetrio Lakas and Major Contreras stayed behind in San Salvador. Torrijos and Paredes boarded the same Air Taxi with the pilot Posadas. Red Grey, reputed to be the most famous fighter pilot in Central America, volunteered to serve as the copilot. This "gringo" veteran of World War II, Red Grey, had won recognition as an "ace" fighter pilot for the Salvadoran Air Force. He fought against Honduras in the brief Soccer War earlier that year. The Salvadorans claimed victory in that short war.

Before takeoff, Torrijos borrowed the phone at the military air terminal and called his post commanders and subordinate officers in Panama. He alerted them that he was on the way home and ordered them to neutralize the *golpistas*.

At the time, Captain Manuel Noriega commanded the Panamanian police station at the western border city of David. From El Salvador, Torrijos called Noriega, an officer he once supervised while stationed in Colón. Noriega agreed to guide the secret night landing of the plane that brought Torrijos from El Salvador to David. "Just do not call me again. It is not safe," Captain Noriega advised.[29]

Red Grey guided the Mexican pilot of the air taxi along the Pacific coast all the way to Panama. At night! With no radar! "Red Grey had the navigation map," Paredes says, "and he was giving instructions to Posadas: 'A hundred feet up. Fifty feet down.'"[30] In this flight through the darkness, Red Grey charted their progress on the map by the lights of cities and towns below. Grey then took the controls for a nighttime landing in David's airfield, which had no landing lights whatsoever.

Down on the landing site, Noriega ordered his men to line the runway with cars and trucks. He made radio contact with Torrijos's Mexican air taxi and his guardsmen turned on the lights to illuminate the runway for the general's welcome home. Torrijos climbed down from the plane to shouts of "Viva Comandante Torrijos."[31] He immediately issued a special nationwide bulletin to his fellow Panamanians that his accusers had lied to them. In no way does Omar Torrijos sponsor communism.

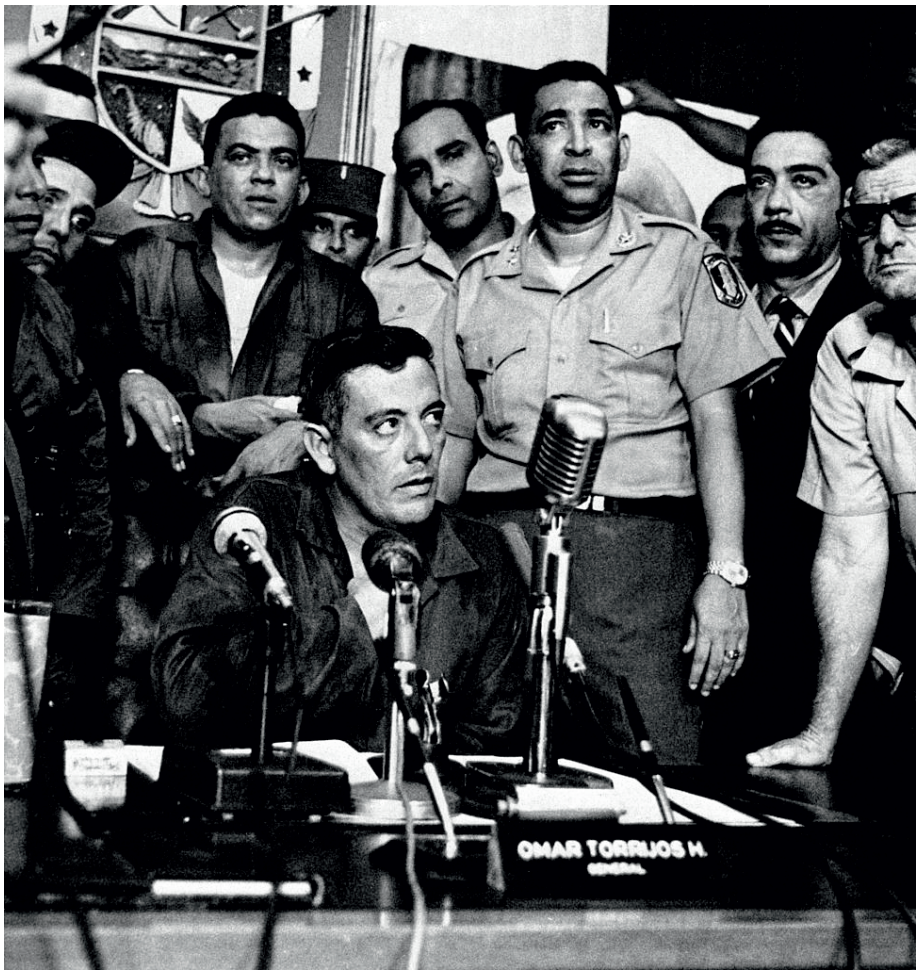


Figure 4.1. General Torrijos conducts a news conference following the collapse of the countercoup of December 1969. Lieutenant Colonel Paredes stands right of center behind the strongman. Photograph courtesy of Getty Images.

At daylight, Torrijos, Paredes, and Noriega began the drive eastward on the Pan American Highway with armed guardsmen in military vehicles. Panama City was a day's drive away. The caravan picked up supporters as it passed police stations and towns along the road. By the time Torrijos reached the Bridge of the Americas spanning the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal, the caravan numbered more than one hundred vehicles. Their formation occupied all lanes of the bridge as it headed into the capital.

The general's cousin, Major Roberto Díaz Herrera, was serving at the time as chief of the National Guard's public relations office. He explained to the television audience how his cousin Omar had taken back power within a matter of hours. "On Monday morning when Torrijos contacted a few supporters that he was returning to Panama, nearly all the troop commanders holding the rank of major and their garrisons chose to remain loyal to Torrijos," Díaz Herrera said.

Before Omar Torrijos arrived in Panama City, these junior officers moved to detain Sanjur, Silvera, and the junta members who conspired with them. Only the general's personal intervention prevented the collaborators from hanging the conspirators. "There is much indignation against them," Major Díaz Herrera explained.[32]

Not only did Sanjur and Silvera compromise their careers, but prominent members of the business community inadvertently exposed themselves as coconspirators. The National Council of Private Enterprise (CONEP) had paid for front-page advertisements in favor of Torrijos's ouster and in support of a quick return to presidential elections. The victory caravan arrived when these morning newspapers were circulating widely throughout Panama City.

Almost immediately, CONEP had to backtrack, but Torrijos would not accept its regrets. He ordered that eleven members of the National Council of Private Enterprise could not leave the country until further notice. Torrijos's friend Demetrio Lakas returned to Panama and had several conversations with his business friends who were members of CONEP. He persuaded Omar to rescind the no-travel orders. "Calm returned to Panama," as one British diplomat reported.[33]

On the day after his return, Torrijos recounted events at a news conference aired on national television. "Colonel Pinilla [head of the junta] called me at 0200 hours to give me the news. Colonel Paredes and Major Contreras were in the room next to mine. I woke them up and we discussed the matter. We decided to return immediately to Panama because we considered it best that we should be present," he explained. They were counting on the element of surprise, and it worked.

The general then explained that he would appoint a provisional president to run the government. By that, Torrijos meant that he had dismissed Colonels Pinilla and Urrutia and dissolved the military junta.

A reporter wise to the current trends in Latin America asked General Torrijos why he himself did not consider becoming president. "Can't you see how tired my face looks, Julio?" the general responded. He explained that he wanted someone else as president "who can carry out the same government policies."[34] Sure enough, the government announced that Demetrio Lakas was to act as provisional president starting immediately.

THE FALLOUT

Within just two days, Omar Torrijos consolidated his control over the armed forces and the government. "Since this incident, the National Guard and the government have emerged much stronger," Torrijos told the press.[35]

However, when he arrived back at headquarters, General Torrijos could not contain his fury at the Americans. He understood that the US diplomats may not have been happy with him. But the commander of the National Guard had grown to trust the men from the 470th Military Intelligence Group located at Fort Amador, especially its Puerto Rican–born agent Efraín Angueira.

He had served as the US Army's link to the National Guard. Angueira developed a close relationship with the officers in charge of this institution. His first language was Spanish, and he had lived in Panama for more than ten years. He and his wife became godparents to the children of several officers. "More than a security relationship," Paredes says of the Puerto Rican, "it was a personal relationship. Angueira was a very close friend."[36]

This member of the US intelligence service had been assigned as the US liaison at National Guard headquarters for several years. Omar had confided to him about the guard's unhappiness with president-elect Arias. Of course, he was more circumspect about plans for the October coup. It was Angueira whom Torrijos locked up with a bottle of whiskey until the October 11, 1968, coup ended.

But now, after the December 1969 rebellion, Torrijos blamed his friend Efraín Angueira for not warning him of Sanjur's conspiracy. "He said I was involved in the [December] coup," Angueira explained later.[37] From that point on, the National Guard began to avoid all the officers and men of the 470th Military Intelligence Group.

Neither Sanjur nor Silvera had seemed much of a threat to Torrijos, according to intelligence estimates of the 470th Military Intelligence Group. "[Silvera] is an ostentatious swaggerer who lacks the capacity to support his presumptuousness," they concluded, "and Colonel [Sanjur] is only a sincere plodder who lacks the cunning wit necessary to succeed as leader of the [National Guard]."[38] Then why did the officers of the 470th Military Intelligence Group not inform Torrijos of the coming coup attempt?

It turned out that the decision did not reside with Angueira and the 470th Military Intelligence Group but with the US Army commander, General Chester Johnson. Army intelligence learned of the coup attempt

several days beforehand, but the commanding general withheld this information for seventy-two hours. Johnson warned neither the diplomats at the US Embassy nor the higher-ups at the Pentagon.

Torrijos told the US Embassy that Angueira and the 470th Military Intelligence Group had actively conspired with plotters, advising them of the commander's flights coming home from Mexico City. The victorious Torrijos claimed that Angueira had even called Captain Noriega in Chiriquí warning him not to allow Torrijos to cross the border.[39]

Thereafter, the restored commandant, General Omar Torrijos, no longer permitted American liaison officers to communicate directly with National Guard commanders. "This guy Angueira disappeared the following day. The Americans sent him away," says Rubén Darío Paredes. "We never heard from him again."[40]

The conspirators in the December revolt languished for six months in the guard's fetid prison in Panama City. Newspapers reported in June 1970 that Colonels Sanjur and Silvera and another officer managed to escape from the cellblock. The escapees had paid the guards "large sums of money." They fled directly into the Canal Zone and turned themselves over to American security personnel.[41] Or, at least, that was the report.

"Many people still think that [the jailed conspirators] really busted out," Paredes says, but the National Guard coordinated the "escape" with the US State Department. "We simulated their jailbreak because, by having them break out of prison, we were getting rid of a problem. It was very easy for them to cross into the American zone, which was only 400 meters away."[42]

Eventually, the 470th Intelligence Group declined in influence and the CIA took over. The Central Intelligence Agency paid more money to their Panamanian informants, including Manuel Noriega. "We had close relations with the CIA for years," Noriega claimed, "and both Torrijos and I felt comfortable with the succession of CIA station chiefs posted in Panama City."[43]

Each showdown increased Torrijos's hold on power and resulted in quick promotions for his loyal subordinates, especially Manuel Noriega. After the triumph of December 1969, Omar Torrijos and his military government began to lean even more to the left, purposely cultivating popular support. The general did not want to rule with only the backing of the police. He considered himself not just another dictator of a banana republic but a socialist revolutionary.

In the new year of 1970, Omar Torrijos had firmly consolidated his power. Never again would his travels—and he traveled frequently—jeop-

ardize his command of the National Guard and the nation. Omar was free now to make the Panamanian Revolution. He could begin to pursue his ultimate objectives of reclaiming the Canal Zone and ridding Panama of its foreign military occupation.

CHAPTER 5

REVOLUTION, PANAMANIAN STYLE

Omar Torrijos ultimately promoted himself to general and assumed the title of maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution. He opted for military reformism on the Peruvian model rather than Brazil's hard-line reactionary regime. He called his movement a revolution, carefully separating it from the more radical version that Fidel Castro was conducting in Cuba.

He and his fellow National Guard officers had displaced both the pro-American oligarchy and the populist party of Arnulfo Arias. Therefore, he needed to consolidate popular support at home. The Panamanian strongman wanted to succeed where elected presidents before him had failed. Torrijos moved to the left to appeal to workers, peasants, students, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-Panamanians.

"You can't make a revolution from the top down," General Omar Torrijos used to say. "It has to start from the bottom up."[1] Achieving a left-of-center unity at home would endear Torrijos to a growing number of new states emerging from the decolonization of peoples in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Torrijos always told leaders of these relatively weak new nations that he too had grown up in the colony of an imperial power.

Yet, at home, the revolution for Torrijos would amount to a balancing act. As General Torrijos once said, "neither the left nor the right can capture, mold and [inform] the thoughts and feelings of Panamanians." He also mentioned on other occasions, "The basis for peace and coexistence [in the country] does not lie in a repressive apparatus, but in social justice."[2] As a military man, he did not believe he could deliver inclusion and social justice without order.

All these reforms had one purpose. The Panamanian Revolution served to keep Omar Torrijos in power for as long as it took to conclude a new treaty that would transfer the canal to Panamanian control and mandate the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country. His dictatorship muted all political factionalism that threatened to obstruct treaty negotiations. With this solid base at home, Omar Torrijos could mobilize world opinion abroad sufficiently to force the United States government to bargain in good faith. And if he failed, the next generation would have to "pick up the flag, kiss it, and march on to victory." The general would repeat that very phrase time and again.

CHARACTER OF OMAR TORRIJOS

As dictator, Omar Torrijos left his mark on how the government carried out policies and treated the citizenry. Fortunately for Panamanians, this strongman possessed a mild temperament. "Not speaking badly about anyone. As a commander, I have to be a responsible person. Everyone's got his own merits," he would say.[3]

An early character sketch by diplomats at the British Embassy described Torrijos as "shrewd rather than intelligent, but his shrewdness has enabled him to cut the ground from under his opponents' feet." And additionally, "he follows the Panamanian custom of womanizing. Drinks heavily. And he is prone to find agreeable jobs for old friends."[4]

When the author Graham Greene first arrived in Panama, everyone was telling him that the Panamanians only drink to excess on Sunday afternoons. But he went for dinner one weekday at Omar's second home, the beach house of the businessman and friend Rodrigo "Rory" González, "Drinks were going the rounds with no thought of the weekend to come," Greene wrote.[5] Omar admitted that he could only sleep after a few drinks.

Since childhood, Omar had normally arisen early in the mornings, a practice that continued in his military career and as maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution. He often held general staff meetings with his senior National Guard officers early in the mornings. Yet he proved capable of staying up all night and having lucid conversations with visitors. One can only conclude that, at critical moments, Torrijos managed to control his "heavy drinking."

With those leaders who claim great power, family members consider plumb government jobs as their birthright. Torrijos used to joke, "I am the seventh of eleven children, and if at that time there had been birth control I would not have been born."[6] In other words, he had many family members to take care of—including in-laws and cousins. Several led public lives.

Among the sisters, Berta Torrijos de Arosemena seemed to be in

the news more often than the others. She defended Panama's right to promote foreign policies independent of those of the United States. She supported her country's 1974 opening of diplomatic and trade relations to Cuba in defiance of the isolation of Castro imposed by the Organization of American States. "We cannot accept [the boycott]," she told the press. "Panama will have to face the consequences" of US displeasure.[7]

As an educator, Berta Torrijos specialized in the training of deaf children and youths and directed the Panamanian Institute of Special Education. In March 1975, she led a delegation to Cuba, where she met with officials of the Federation of Cuban Women.[8]

Berta also advocated both for women's rights and for Panama's entry into the Non-Aligned Movement. "Women's struggle for dignity is inseparable from the battle for decolonization," she said in January 1977. "We must make efforts . . . to put an end to the exploitation and international plundering of the wealth of the Third World either by governments or transnational enterprises."[9]

The older brother of Omar Torrijos also made headlines, though mostly outside of the controlled press of Panama. Moises Torrijos had been practicing as a newsman when he signed on as a campaign aide for David Samudio, the 1968 presidential candidate of the oligarchy's Liberal Party. Samudio lost that year's election to Arnulfo Arias.

Charges of drug trafficking against Moisés originated in 1971, yet they never reached a court or resulted in any legal problems for the Torrijos clan in the United States. Eventually the general sent Moisés to Spain, where he served as the Panamanian ambassador from 1974 to 1978. While still in Madrid, Moises again made international news. US senators opposing ratification of the Panama Canal treaties trotted out the old drug-running rumors to derail ratification.

Hugo Torrijos also pursued a career in the foreign service. In July 1974, he traveled to Argentina and Peru on behalf of his brother Omar. In Buenos Aires, he led the Panamanian delegation to the state funeral of President Juan Domingo Perón. In 1978, the younger brother Hugo replaced Moisés at the embassy in Madrid. The Foreign Ministry claimed that the change had been the result of plans made well in advance of the Senate hearings and renewed publicity about drug smuggling.[10] Jobs, yes, but General Torrijos never gave his siblings important positions in running the country.

Conjecture abounds about those age-old afflictions of politics everywhere in the world: corruption and venality. To read the early writings of the dictator's opponents, he acted just as greedily as Idi Amin of Uganda or General Augusto Pinochet of Chile. He lived well, no doubt, and traveled with large entourages.

But Torrijos owned remarkably little. He acquired no rural estates and held title to neither house where he and family members slept. Twice, his associates took up a collection for Raquel and the children: in October 1968, when President Arias wanted to banish Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos and, in 1981, when Omar died.

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1972

Following four years of the Nixon administration's disinterest in treaty negotiations, it occurred to the general that he needed a good amount of time in order to secure an acceptable canal arrangement with the United States. His long-term strategy consisted of uniting Latin America and all the Third World behind his diplomacy.

The maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution, therefore, did not wish to be bothered with the day-to-day administration of the government. For that purpose, he set up a civilian presidency without ties to the military. The National Guard and the presidential bureaucracy existed as coequals under the revolutionary leadership of the chief.

His lawyers confirmed these political arrangements by writing the Constitution of 1972 according to his wishes. To replace the dysfunctional national legislature that discredited electoral politics in 1968, they created a new body. The National Assembly of Community Representatives consisted of 505 locally elected members free of party partisanship. Torrijos tightly controlled the candidates for this assembly, which thus voted consistently for whatever the dictator put before them. They approved of government officials appointed by the chief and passed judgment on legislative proposals advanced by the government and the National Guard.

These political arrangements assured the broad base of support that Omar Torrijos needed as maximum leader over the course of eight years to conclude a new canal treaty with the US government. The secret to the structure's stability consisted of the willingness of the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution to choose capable people to operate the machinery of state.

Torrijos felt intellectually comfortable enough to select people whose education was superior to his own training. Omar Torrijos allowed only one military man—Paredes—to serve in the government. "The rest were young Panamanians, with their proper degrees, intellectuals, but very hardworking," Paredes says. "Some got their degrees from American or European universities. Most obtained their higher education in Panama, but they were idealists, and very young, most of them about thirty or thirty-five years old."[11]

For the first four years, 1968 to 1972, Torrijos had cultivated a nationalist and reformist agenda that, domestically, seemed to favor officials

who were on the left. When the new constitution went into effect, the general looked to steer the regime back to the center. He reappointed his friend Demetrio Lakas. The constitution stipulated that the president would serve for a six-year term—not like the old four-year terms of previous elected presidents.

Born in 1925, Lakas and the younger Torrijos had struck up a friendship before the coup of 1968. Demetrio spoke English well, even if with a slight Texas accent. He had studied architecture and business administration at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth. He had operated a construction business for many years.[12]

A British diplomat described Lakas as "large, robust and jolly," possessing an engaging personality. "He is a man of strong emotions, who can pour out his problems with no regard for discretion, and on at least one occasion has slapped the face of one of his ministers in the course of a cabinet meeting." The British also praised him because "his English is perfect."[13]

However perfectly he spoke English, Lakas proved to be out of his element as a treaty negotiator. He was one of the few Latin American leaders to meet President Richard Nixon in the Oval Office, and Lakas practically gave up all the bargaining chips. The only demand he made of the president was to end the "colony within the colony," referring to the two separate jurisdictions between the Americans in the Canal Zone and the Panamanians outside. Lakas requested that the Zonians come under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Panama.

"President Lakas asserted that Panama does not want the Canal," a White House notetaker recorded. "He regarded the United States not only as the defender of the Canal but as a 'big brother' to Panama and, indeed, to all the Americas. Panama does not want to operate the Canal either, [the Panamanian president] stated."[14]

What Lakas offered to Nixon would not have pleased his boss, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution. Torrijos not only wanted the canal but, as commander of the National Guard, he demanded to have sole responsibility for defending it too. Lakas never again participated in any treaty talks. For his part, Richard Nixon could not be bothered at all with Panama.

Otherwise, Torrijos's domestic political success depended on the many learned men with advanced degrees working for him. The rise of Arístides Royo serves as a case in point. Royo had obtained his law degree from the University of Panama and received higher education abroad in France and Italy. Then he returned to teach law at his alma mater. While searching for a legal expert to write up a new criminal code in the early days of his rule, Torrijos had heard about Arístides. He asked Royo to

come to his home on Calle 50 for an interview about writing a new criminal code.

The chief told Royo that he wanted a code with more lenient sentences than the present ones. Why do you want lesser sentences? Royo asked. "So that when we fall from power, I won't have to spend the rest of my life in jail," the general joked.[15] He eventually chose Arístides Royo as minister of education.

One other attribute set Omar Torrijos apart from many dictators such as Anastasio Somoza Bayle and Fidel Castro—he wanted the viewpoints of his subordinates. "The General listened, and he knew how to do it," an aide wrote. "[Torrijos] listened with his ears, his nose and his eyes. He would never distract his gaze."[16]

LAND REFORM

The pronouncements of Omar Torrijos about meaningful land reform—providing opportunity for landless peasants to work their own fields—won many rural adherents to the Panamanian Revolution.[17] At the time, the Cuban model of state-led agrarian reform influenced Latin American leaders looking for quick solutions. Once he settled on a statist solution, General Torrijos looked for a capable administrator to oversee the details. He found someone in an unexpected place—the military.

Lieutenant Colonel Rubén Darío Paredes, who had accompanied the general in his victorious return to power in December 1969, had obtained a military command in the zone of Bayano. The area remained underpopulated due to the raging hydrology of Darién Province. Its proximity to Panama City and its unrelenting rain patterns made Bayano the perfect location for a hydroelectric project. The government contracted a Yugoslav firm for the construction of a dam and an electricity generation plant.

Paredes as zone commander assumed the task of relocating the bigger producers as well as subsistence squatters from valleys that were to be submerged by Lake Bayano. His performance impressed the chief, who appointed him as the only military man to serve as a cabinet minister. Paredes became head of the Ministry of Agriculture.

As Paredes explains, General Torrijos at first designed agrarian reform around the peasant communities of twenty-five to one hundred families. The Ministry of Agriculture assigned to these communities a certain parcel of land. The parcel was put into production and seeded for whatever the land was good for: rice, corn, vegetables, animals, or chickens. The government established a state-run market system to ensure that speculators could not profit unduly from what small farmers produced.

"But we made some mistakes," says Paredes. "We let that model run for too long and it became rather paternalistic and absorbed too many

economic resources. Food production was not enough to pay for the investment of planting, and there was always a need for subsidies." The government then turned to co-ops and to privatization. "We allowed the farmers to become independent owners with rights to credit," Paredes concludes.[18]

Private farms, both big and small, produced the agricultural exports on which the nation's economy depended. Sure, poverty and landless peasants existed, but underdevelopment (the lack of roads, electricity, and credit) caused more poverty in the countryside than did overpopulation and elites' ownership of large estates. Panama still had vacant lands that, with effort, the state helped to clear for the benefit of landless peasants.

Ultimately, Panama's agrarian reform did not follow the Cuban model, in which the bureaucracy ran large state farms and directed the production activities among small farmers. The government of Panama expropriated only land where "many squatters and humble people were living." The state always paid a fair price to private owners for the expropriated land, Paredes claims.[19]

Torrijos traveled frequently to even the most remote rural communities of Panama. He arrived mainly by helicopter. His trip to Boquete in 1974 seems rather typical. He observed the terrain from above and, on landing, gathered together community members to talk about farming. The chief had noticed a lot of uncultivated "bush" areas and said that he would send government expert technicians to the community to lay plans for cultivation.[20]

Omar Torrijos maintained intimate, personal relations with peasants throughout his thirteen years in power. The general visited their remote communities, played with their children, talked to the elders, joked with the ladies, and—at the end of the day—shared a bottle of rum with the men. He even experimented by introducing water buffalo from Southeast Asia to remote agricultural settlements.

"In the Republic of Panama," former minister Paredes says, "the Agrarian Reform was not drastic."[21]

WORKERS AND UNIONS

The 1972 Labor Code solidified Torrijos's ties to urban workers. During the days of oligarchic presidencies, foreign and domestic employers controlled labor markets according to their needs. They established wage schedules and hired and fired workers at will. Union formation and strikes did take place but did not spread much beyond the port workers loading bananas. Major Omar Torrijos as commander of the Chiriquí military district had received orders to settle such strike activities—with force, if necessary!

In fact, the most powerful labor organization in the whole country had no Panamanian membership at all. It was the American employees' union in the Canal Zone. In this sense, the Zonians occupied the highest-paid jobs on the canal and their exclusive labor organization prevented Panamanians from rising to those critical and well-paid positions. The Canal Zone unions did not protect workers' rights so much as American workers' jobs.

Labor relations outside the canal changed when Torrijos formed a commission to draft legislation for the Assembly of Community Representatives. The new labor code gave workers government protection. All types of workers, even street vendors, could form their own organizations. Collective bargaining now became not only possible but mandatory. Union members had to support their representatives by paying union dues. Employers could not dismiss employees without due process; and they had to obey government directives concerning wages, vacations, overtime, and strikes.[22]

Membership in unions proliferated as private sector and government job opportunities expanded in the economic boom of the early 1970s. By mid-decade, the number of trade unions had risen to 217 entities representing 14 percent of the nation's work force.[23] Consequently, labor leaders became vocal backers of the Torrijos revolution.

AFRO-PANAMANIANS

The Panamanian government did not keep statistics on racial origins of its 1.5 million citizens. CIA estimations for the 1970s yielded the following breakdown:

Indigenous peoples	6 percent
Afro-Panamanians	14 percent
Mixed-race people	70 percent
White people	10 percent

The white upper class constituted less than 2 percent of the population. "A small circle of 20 to 30 families known as the *rabiblancos* (whitetails) formerly constituted a subgroup within the elite and virtually monopolized political and economic power," according to a CIA country profile.[24] The coup of 1968 broke the political monopoly of the oligarchic families. Thereafter, their economic and social status endured to give solace to the politically emasculated 2 percent.

Omar's Torrijos's political movement reached out to the excluded descendants of West Indian immigrants, calling them Afro-Panamanians. The chief suggested that they formed part of the nation just as much as

he did. Several Black professionals received appointments to high government positions. Juan Materno Vásquez became minister of the presidency and spoke forcefully for the integration of black Panamanians through education and assimilation.[25] In the 1960s, Materno had been affiliated with the Panamanian Communist Party, one of the only political groups actively recruiting among the Black population.

A second one-time party militant, Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt gained appointment as rector of the University of Panama. Another accomplished Afro-Panamanian attorney, Escobar also served as an expert legal writer in drafting the canal treaties of 1977. The American negotiators came to admire his ability to craft the language of diplomatic compromise. He would perform this task in the White House of Jimmy Carter at a critical point in treaty negotiations.

Adolfo Ahumada also rose to a high level in the government, serving as minister of labor. Time and again, Torrijos tapped this talented lawyer for diplomatic missions and negotiations with Americans as well as with the Libyans.

The chief co-opted the People's Party, the small Moscow-line Marxist Party. The communists held low-ranking bureaucratic posts particularly in social reform agencies favoring labor and rural workers. They became loyal *torrijistas* or followers of Torrijos.

Several of the general's top officers of the National Guard and most enlisted personnel consisted of men of mixed racial heritage. Colonel Manuel Noriega was one of them who, as a student, felt held back by his physical appearance. Colonel Rubén Darío Paredes calls himself a *moreno*, a person of African and European heritage. Though white, Torrijos himself treated his subordinates according to their contributions rather than the color of their skin. In this, Omar differed from his predecessor, General Bolívar Vallarino, a man of the oligarchy, according to Paredes.[26]

The city of Colón on the Caribbean side of the Panama Canal had the heaviest concentration of Afro-Panamanian population. Torrijos had commanded the police station there as a captain. He returned from time to time to consult with local leaders and to give rather nostalgic speeches referencing the time he had spent in this Caribbean port.

However, his speeches to audiences of color here never seemed to offer much detail on plans for alleviating Colón's persistent poverty. "Fellow countrymen of Colón: Let us resume the conversation we started in 1960," he said a decade later. "Now, we have to think more profoundly, establish the problems of the province and incorporate it to the fatherland's development process."[27] Later talks in Colón very much consisted of the same generalities.

STUDENTS AND REVOLUTION

Most military dictators in Latin America repressed the students. Not Omar Torrijos. The chief of the Panamanian Revolution aimed to involve students as part of the revolutionary family. They were to take their place alongside the peasants, workers, and citizens of color in the inclusive Panamanian Revolution. It was with extreme care that Torrijos dealt with the pupils at the secondary and university levels.

Owing to their groundbreaking activities in protesting against the nation's colonial status, students lent powerful symbolism to the chief's long-term objectives. They had earned respect nationwide for their role in the 1958–1964 Flag Riots. Holding them in line, however, required ingenuity. The commander no longer wished to control students with the nightsticks, tear gas, and rifle butts of his guardsmen. Instead, Omar offered students personal attentions similar to those he accorded to the peasants and workers.

Expansion of public education had always been an important goal for the student movement since the days of the Mount Tute guerrillas. Therefore, the Panamanian Revolution took notice. The number of teachers certified for classroom instruction increased from 11,500 in 1968 to 21,600 in 1978. School construction proceeded throughout the dictatorship. The number of schools had doubled to total 3,000 toward the end of the Torrijos era.[28] The general attributed the success of these educational reforms to the education minister, Arístides Royo. When it came time in 1978 to appoint a second president of the government, Torrijos would choose Royo.

"I do not believe in the class struggle," Omar once remarked to one of his military aides-de-camp, "I believe in the struggle in the classrooms."[29]

Torrijos even made amends to the students whom, over the decades, the National Guard had repressed from time to time. He once referred to his own wounds suffered while putting down the 1959 revolt at Mount Tute. He vowed that he would have been with the student rebels had it not been for the uniform he wore. "The bodies of these young, dead guerrillas were not the end of the discontent," he said.[30]

Torrijos expressed identical sentiments to the British novelist Graham Greene. "If the students break into the Zone again I have only the alternative of crushing them or leading them," he explained. "I will not crush them."[31] Relations between the National Guard and the students remained tense. Yet contact between the two groups had become frequent during much of the Torrijos period."[32]

Occasionally, leftist student groups at both the secondary and university levels attacked Panamanian conservatives. A mob of students

from the José Dolores Moscote High School assaulted the building of Radio Impacto. Its owner, the conservative businessman Alberto Quíroz Guardia, accused the students of wanting to destroy the "people's radio station."[33] While National Guard policemen stood by, they painted slogans supporting the government on the building housing Radio Impacto, which frequently criticized General Torrijos. The youngsters accused Radio Impacto of being an "agent of the CIA, the number 1 enemy of students and of the revolutionary process."[34]

There were other occurrences of student unrest due to a number of factors—the economic downturn of 1974, delays in treaty negotiations, and political rivalries among students. A clash broke out between two groups of students—left- and right leaning—on the grounds of the National Institute in September 1976. Forty-two pupils suffered injuries. The physical plant of the institute had been damaged as had nearby storefronts and parked cars.[35]

In student demonstrations two years later, one radio station interviewed a student leader. The young man expressed disappointment over the stalled treaty talks as the Americans conducted their presidential campaign. "The fact that all Panamanians must obey does not mean that all Panamanians agree with those who are ruling us," he told the radio audience.[36]

As the minister of education during the Lakas presidency, Arístides Royo had to deal directly with two disgruntled constituencies. One consisted of teachers who, after 1974, were befuddled by the rising cost of living. The other group comprised secondary and university students. They felt helpless in a world they perceived as controlled by international capitalism and the Central Intelligence Agency.

As minister, Arístides Royo had to ask everyone "to respect the authorities," to protest "within norms," and to act with "respect and discipline." But the students created more violence, throwing rocks and bottles, occupying buildings, and disrupting traffic. Minister Royo suspended miscreants on one day and reinstated them on the next.[37]

But Panamanian youths really had very little to object to when it came to Omar Torrijos. They criticized North American imperialism and praised the heroic people of North Vietnam. So did Torrijos. Besides, the Panamanian leader was admired by students of neighboring countries as few other dictators had been. All Minister Royo had to do was read a welcome greeting from General Torrijos to a meeting of the Central American Confederation of Students, and the entire audience of activists jumped to their feet for an ovation.[38]

The general himself addressed a student organization in Costa Rica, stating that Panama was prepared to use force if peaceful means did not

produce a new treaty. "You students understand better than anyone else the Panamanian cause because if there is anyone having a vocation for giving the only thing he has—his life—it is the youth," Torrijos told them. "Because young people prefer to die rather than to live in dishonor. I understand this because I have a youthful soul."[39]

Getting the students to buy into maintaining unity behind the government and the National Guard proved difficult. The educated youth remained fairly restless. Both Royo and his chief had to deal with student organizations with much forbearance.

NATIONALISM

However, it took more than inclusionary policies and social reforms to force the Americans back to the negotiating table. General Torrijos used his close physical proximity to the US hegemon just as Fidel Castro had been doing. Castro had the US in Guantánamo; Torrijos, the Canal Zone. Moreover, the general's criticism of Washington's reluctance to renegotiate the1903 Canal Treaty burnished his growing reputation as a nationalist.

In the first years of the regime, the general veered left in order to consolidate his gains in power with the unlikely coalition of students, workers, peasants, and middle-class nationalists. Unlikely, because the only thing these groups held in common was the country of their birth. Therefore, they demanded the soothing claims of citizenship—of belonging. These disparate classes obtained satisfaction from the chief of the Panamanian Revolution.

A speech that General Torrijos delivered on the third anniversary of his *golpe de Estado* illustrates well his nationalist message:

> Omar, this servant, who today wears the uniform of General of the Revolution, is nothing but a modest son of this country, product of the same entrails of the native country. None other than a man made up of the same clay as the majority of men and women [at] whom I am gazing from this balcony.
>
> Omar understands, accepts the position in which history has placed him. I wish only to express my gratitude to you with these words: thank you, people of Panama. Thank you, men and women of our country. Thank you, peasants. Thank you, students. Thank you, laborers. Thank you, people of Panama for this support which you have given to your Revolution.[40]

Nationalism came to be a powerful political tool for Torrijos. To learn how to use it, all he had to do was observe a populist like his friend Juan Perón or a revolutionary like Fidel Castro. In his own country, he had

observed the president he overthrew, Arnulfo Arias, a master at berating the United States for political gain.

Given this expansive community of supporters, Omar Torrijos proved himself a much tougher negotiator than the Americans had previously encountered. Attending one of his first meetings with State Department envoys led by the diplomat Robert B. Anderson, General Torrijos seemed bored by the formulaic diplomatic perorations. He interrupted Anderson and said bluntly, "Let's get to our problem."

Thereupon, chief negotiator Anderson launched into a long discussion emphasizing the opposition of Congress to a new Canal Zone treaty. We need flexibility and half measures, Anderson said. We cannot go from full US control of the Canal Zone "to zero" in one treaty agreement. Above all, Anderson added, we must avoid "mob violence" that "would be extremely damaging to Panama's interests."

General Torrijos replied that some of Panama's youth were talking of fighting the Americans. "Ho Chi Minh had fought the colonialists twice and achieved great successes." Torrijos said that "good will" could solve problems, but it was not easy to persuade Panamanians. Many people say "good will has not achieved anything since 1964 and patience is wearing thin."[41] These early negotiations achieved little beyond demonstrating the stark differences between the American and Panamanian positions.

Then in 1971, the general expelled 120 American volunteers of the US Peace Corps. These American volunteers were working in cities and the countryside: building latrines, constructing schools, teaching kids, and encouraging community participation.

The reason for their expulsion? The general wanted these benefits to come from the Panamanian Revolution, not from the Americans. He had the minister of foreign affairs Juan Antonio Tack make the announcement: "The Panamanian Government has decided to end the Peace Corps agreement with the United States," Tack said, "because we can enlist Panamanians and international volunteers to do the same things the Peace Corps is doing."[42] Anyway, shutting down operations of mostly young American idealists appealed to Panamanian nationalists.

THE NATIONAL GUARD

Without order, inclusion and nationalism would not guarantee the patience that Torrijos needed to deal with the United States. For order, the general relied on his control of the military. Torrijos said that he had to have the rank of general de división to be at the level of the military men he might meet in his travels. "Any 'gorilla' in Latin America has numerous ranks, I know many, but I almost never see any generals with hierarchy," he used to say. "Wherever there are lots of generals, there is General Dis-

content."[43] This attitude explains why hard-line military dictators did not approve of Torrijos. He was a moderate.

Nevertheless, he depended first and foremost on the National Guard. As commander, Omar Torrijos professionalized his police force. He developed an air force. He nurtured the institution's combat capabilities and developed an intelligence agency within the National Guard. The general wished to travel domestically and internationally without restrictions. His security team, headed by Manuel Noriega, prevented all threats of possible subversion from within the National Guard while the commander traveled abroad for weeks at a time. Noriega's job was to prevent a repeat of the December 1969 coup attempt.

As his priority, Omar Torrijos chose to develop the National Guard into a modern military force capable of protecting the canal and the nation without foreign troops. He especially wanted to dismantle the Canal Zone and US military occupation—peaceably, if possible.

"I'm not interested in going down in history," General Omar Torrijos was fond of saying. "I just want to go into the Canal Zone."[44] This line always drew cheers and applause. Torrijos himself expressed similar ideas of nationalism at a military promotion ceremony. "Our last 10 years have not passed in vain. The National Guard will never again be an instrument of repression," he said. It will be an instrument for development and its presence at the side of the people will be permanent and irreversible."[45]

Not that Torrijos worried about fighting the United States. If the Americans invaded Panama, Torrijos vowed to defend the nation to his last breath. "We could hold Panama City for forty-eight hours," he later told the novelist Graham Greene. "As for the Canal, it is easy to sabotage. Blow a hole in Gatún Dam and the Canal will drain into the Atlantic. It would take only a few days to mend the dam, but it would take three years of rain to fill the Canal. During that time, it would be guerrilla war."[46]

"And don't forget," Torrijos added, "for the first time since the American Civil War, U.S. civilians would be in the firing line. There are 40,000 of them in the Zone, apart from the 10,000 troops."[47]

Panama's acquisition of the Río Hato military training base struck another blow for Panama's sense of nationhood. Río Hato consisted of thirty square miles of terrain suitable for military maneuvers. It lies seventy-five miles west of Panama City on the Pan-American Highway.[48] The US military first leased this property in World War II as a training site for conventional warfare.

The Mechanized Infantry Battalion from Fort Clayton in the Canal Zone drove armored personnel carriers up the highway for combined arms training. They practiced outmoded World War II tactics against an imaginary Soviet seaborne assault—this in the Latin America of the

1960s, where guerrilla warfare and internal subversion were becoming the norm.

Río Hato reverted back to Panamanian control in August 1970. Torrijos chose not to renew the American lease of this military training ground. The National Guard converted the bulk of the military base into Fuerte Cimarrón. The word referred to a "wilderness" but also described runaway enslaved people of the Spanish colonial period. This military base became home to the Machos de Monte combat unit. Graham Greene translated this regiment's nickname as "the Wild Pigs."[49]

Torrijos also set apart the most fertile piece of the Río Hato site into a farming cooperative.[50] In this manner, the country people of the surrounding terrain were encouraged to view the Panamanian National Guard as an institution favoring land reform.

From this point on, Omar Torrijos made his headquarters at Fuerte Cimarrón. He maintained a spacious office on the military base, where he conducted his staff meetings and held receptions for large groups of visitors. Moreover, his home away from the family home on Calle 50 in Panama City, became the beach house at Farallón close to the military base. The González family owned both properties. From the hammock on the deck, wearing guayaberas rather than uniforms, the general conversed with small groups of foreign and domestic visitors. He entertained friends like Gabriel García Marquéz, Graham Greene, and John Wayne at the Farallón beach house.

The government and the National Guard expanded greatly under Omar's leadership. By 1978, the number of guardsmen had nearly doubled to 15,000. The military budget topped $10 million per year. Government employees ballooned at even higher rates to number 150,000, a threefold expansion in the first decade of the dictatorship.

After several years, Torrijos's guardsmen had become powerful. In a way, they were democratizing the graft and corruption engaged in by the oligarchy before the 1968 coup. Even lower-ranking officers enhanced their salaries with outside businesses to support mistresses and buy expensive cars.[51]

No one ever doubted that Omar's major claim to power rested on the National Guard. General Torrijos also retained his military title as commandant of Panama's only police and military force. He rid himself of rivals from his own generation of officers in the December 1969 coup attempt. Thereafter, all his staff officers were younger in age and more loyal to Torrijos than to each other. Manuel Noriega, head of military intelligence, monitored them closely. Omar Torrijos's consolidation of power over the guard and the government allowed this dictator to travel the world like the international player he needed to be.

TWO CRITICAL GUARDSMEN

While Omar Torrijos was a country boy, Manuel Antonio "Tony" Noriega grew up in the city. He graduated from the best secondary school, the National Institute. He attempted university study in medicine but foundered for reasons having to do with institutional racism. His brown skin rendered him insufficiently acceptable for the practice of medicine.

Tony's older brother was working at the Panamanian Embassy in Lima and secured a scholarship for him at Peru's military academy. Four years later, in 1962, the twenty-eight-year-old joined the National Guard as a second lieutenant. He was older than most new officers. The guard was but a police force "at the service of the economic elite of the nation," Noriega later admitted.[52] He received orders to join the staff of Captain Omar Torrijos in the Colón military zone.

Lieutenant Noriega managed the traffic police, a job that apparently did not fire his imagination. After three years of active duty, he had not advanced in rank. Torrijos sent him to advanced officer training at the School of the Americas. Suddenly, the "stars began to align," as one of his biographers put it, and Manuel earned the best grades.[53] He joined the intelligence unit of the National Guard, which posted him to Chiriquí Province under the command of Major Boris Martínez. An exacting officer, Boris Martínez appreciated the efficiency that Noriega developed as a subordinate officer.

"If the boss wants coffee, he brings it," Martínez once recounted. "If he wants brutality, Noriega is brutal. I don't like people who kiss my foot, but I do like an officer who delivers. I gave Noriega many assignments. I don't know how he completed them all, but he did. Whenever I wanted to be informed of any movement in Chiriquí Province, he kept me informed."[54] Boris Martínez explained Manuel Noriega's power as being due to his having embarrassing intelligence about his boss, Omar Torrijos, and the Torrijos family.

What luck for Noriega! Both of his commanders teamed up to make the *golpe de Estado* of October 11, 1968. Four months later, Noriega advanced to the rank of captain and commanded the crack combat company called "Los Pumas," stationed at the Tocumen military base east of Panama City. When some partisans of the deposed President Arias began a guerrilla movement in the mountains of Chiriquí, the National Guard dispatched Captain Noriega and Los Pumas to suppress them. Los Pumas succeeded expeditiously.

In October 1969, Colonel Torrijos rewarded Noriega with another promotion—this one to the rank of major. He became the commander

of the provincial garrison of Chiriquí, the guard's most prestigious troop command.

Major Noriega in Chiriquí responded with loyalty when he picked up General Torrijos's telephone call from El Salvador in December 1969. "Come quickly and do not call me again, because here we have already burned our ships in favor of the true commandant of the Guard, which is you," he told Omar Torrijos.[55] Major Noriega rode next to Torrijos in the victory caravan that crossed over Bridge of the Americas into Panama City on December 16, 1969. The National Guard celebrated that date thereafter as Loyalty Day.

Eight months later, Noriega received promotion to lieutenant colonel and appointment as chief of G-2 Intelligence. The man who spent three years as a second lieutenant rose to lieutenant colonel in just four years. Noriega's rise was so meteoric that the Central Intelligence Agency chose to highlight his career in a report on the evolution of Panama's National Guard. "Responsible for all facets of intelligence and national security, the Guard's G-2 is directed by the competent Lt. Col. Manuel Noriega—probably the second most powerful man in Panama," reported the CIA.

American security analysts concluded their discussion of Noriega with the following comment: "Exiled former Guard officers and politicians, students, professional groups, the Communists, and probably members of the civilian government bureaucracy are subject to surveillance, wire-tapping, and on occasion, intimidation and reprisals."[56]

Many observers of Panamanian affairs were convinced later that both Torrijos and Noriega provided intelligence information and received payroll checks from the CIA station in Fort Amador. Noriega admitted that he often consulted with US agents. It was his job to do so, just as he had such contacts in Havana too.

"Some people close to Torrijos told me that he was actually scared of Noriega," says Roberto Eisenmann, the businessman and newspaper executive. "He was so effective at what he did that Torrijos didn't want Noriega to turn against him."[57]

The second most indispensable member of the general's military household was also the most educated. The average officer of the National Guard possessed four years of cadet training in the military sciences just as Omar had. The commander chose not a junior officer, however, but an enlisted man as his personal aide-de-camp, his right-hand man. And even this person required a quick promotion from private to sergeant to qualify for the position.

José de Jesús Martínez was the most unique enlisted soldier one could imagine. He was born of mixed racial heritage in Nicaragua and

took pride in his Mayan lineage. He grew up in Costa Rica and attended military school at Tabor Academy on the Massachusetts shoreline. There he perfected his English. For college, Martínez moved to Madrid to attend Complutense University. He studied the classics and had become a published playwright in his early twenties.[58] At that time, Lieutenant Torrijos was completing his first police assignments.

Almost no one called him José de Jesús. He became better known by his nickname Chuchú.

Martínez obtained an appointment as a professor of Marxist philosophy at the University of Panama. His linkage to the Communist Party had marked him for persecution in the early days of the National Guard's coup d'état. Professor Martínez, therefore, found it expedient to go into exile in Paris. Eventually, he earned doctorates—in philosophy from the Sorbonne and in mathematics in Berlin. All his travel and studies enabled Chuchú to learn and speak five languages.

On hearing that Torrijos was calling himself a "revolutionary," Chuchú returned to Panama in 1972. Soon he decided to revert to his teenage days at the military academy, one might think, by volunteering to enlist in the Panamanian National Guard.

Moreover, Chuchú distinguished himself by arriving at Fuerte Cimarrón in his own airplane for basic training with the Wild Pigs. On hearing about this recruit's age and education, Torrijos said, "Let's see if he holds up."[59] The commander agreed to admit the volunteer for basic training, "on condition that I cut my beard," Chuchú wrote.[60] He successfully completed basic training—at forty-five years old!

These attributes in an aide-de-camp might have intimidated many a Latin American general officer. Not so Omar Torrijos, who had an inquisitive mind and a rustic intelligence born of the keen observation of human behavior. He felt equally at home with renowned novelists, peasant villagers, military staff officers, lawyers discussing legal phraseology, and yes, with published playwrights who knew the intricacies of Marxism.

Therefore, after a few conversations with this older, highly educated soldier who had just passed basic training, General Torrijos promoted Chuchú to the rank of sergeant and made him his personal assistant. The sergeant's fluency in foreign languages would also come in handy from time to time. Chuchú translated for non-Spanish speakers, including foreign diplomats, heads of state, and US senators. He even used his plane on official business. Most of all, with Sergeant Martínez by his side, General Torrijos would always have intelligent conversation wherever he went.

In addition, the general had someone who could edit his writing. "When General Torrijos gave me his writings for me to clean them up,

he always asked me, whenever possible, to eliminate the word 'I,'" the sergeant mentioned in his memoir.[61]

However, Sergeant Chuchú may have edited his boss's speeches, but he did not write them. "He liked simple speeches that expressed his ideas," says Arístides Royo. "I've said many times that Omar Torrijos's improvisations were his best speeches, whenever he spoke without papers, or notes, when he spoke whatever came to his mind."[62]

Together, the inclusive revolutionary coalitions and the men of the National Guard supported Omar Torrijos in power as long as it took for him to sign the Panama Canal accords with a recalcitrant United States, and then some.

Most of all, Omar's "revolution" did not approximate Fidel's. There was no socialization of the economy, no confiscation of private property, no firing squads, no exporting of the revolution abroad, no gulag for political prisoners (though Coiba Island came close), and no alliance with the Soviet Union. Panama did not even maintain embassies in Moscow or Beijing. Nor did this most traveled of Latin American dictators ever go behind the Iron Curtain. Travel to Havana was close enough.

Torrijos departed from Castro in one other regard. Omar's anti-imperialism went only so deep. He respected American military institutions. He himself had enrolled eagerly in military training programs of the US Army School of the Americas.[63] Commander Torrijos continued to send his own guardsmen there to improve their professional standards. Omar's anti-Americanism extended only to the Canal Zone itself, which he considered a privileged colony *within* Panama but not *of* Panama.

Torrijos did not want US armed forces occupying his nation, just as much as Americans would have resented British troops stationed along the Mississippi River.[64]

CHAPTER 6

OMAR ENGAGES THE THIRD WORLD

Omar Torrijos may have been a man of action, able to act decisively and to seize the opportune moment for political gain. He was a superb tactician, as he amply displayed in the 1968 coup and the 1969 countercoup. But he also had a strategic mindset, a knack for long-range planning. General Torrijos arranged his world in ways that contributed to the ultimate success—namely, to take control of territory running through the heart of his nation and to ease out its American occupiers.

What other weapon besides world opinion did a weak country have when confronting the world's mightiest military power during the Cold War? "When the powerful nations are shooting at each other," Torrijos used to say, "the small ones have to follow the example of the infantry soldier and hit the dirt."[1]

Weak countries such as his had to use caution in resorting to violence against the mighty ones. Sure, North Vietnam had succeeded but only with allies like the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. General Torrijos required alliances of fellow small powers everywhere. He began assembling allies on three fronts. One was his own neighborhood of Central America. The second terrain of influence consisted of the other nations of the Western Hemisphere. He also sought support among the emerging countries of the Global South.[2] No dictator of a small Latin American country had ever achieved such a feat. Finally, Omar even aspired to convince important sectors of United States society about his people's just cause.

Panama, its strongman realized, could not duplicate what Cuba had

achieved—economic and military reliance on Moscow. Not only could Washington strike back preemptively to such a provocation, but Torrijos would also lose his neighbors and his own people.

Like a player of multidimensional chess, therefore, Omar Torrijos maneuvered his pieces over these arenas simultaneously without losing sight of the final objective—the new Panama Canal Treaty. He could not use violence because the inadvertent destruction of the canal's intricate operations would benefit no one. Commander Torrijos, trained in the military arts, resorted to diplomacy instead.

ROMANCING TITO

The Panamanian strongman saw his entrée to the Third World through a portal that most leaders of the Americas had not pursued: the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Within the Western Hemisphere only Cuba had joined the Non-Aligned Movement that the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito had helped organize in 1961 with the leaders of Indonesia, India, Egypt, and Kenya. No other Latin American country had sought NAM membership. None wanted to risk Washington's ire. The trend in the Americas, driven by US anticommunist policies, had been moving in the opposite direction—to isolate revolutionary Cuba. Yet nonalignment flourished. In 1970, the NAM had a membership of seventy emerging countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Torrijos recognized the opportunity to play the Third World card by joining the Non-Aligned Movement. In fact, Chile under Salvador Allende and Peru under the left-leaning leadership of General Juan Velasco Alvarado were also moving to join with Cuba members. Growing NAM membership from the emerging decolonized countries of Asia and Africa offered Panama an expanding source votes in the United Nations.

Few Panamanians knew about the rise of Josip Broz Tito. In 1915, the Croatian-born Tito fought on the Russian front as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Army. He was captured and imprisoned by the czar's military forces when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in 1917. Tito collaborated with the Bolsheviks and became a member of the Communist Party.

He eventually returned home to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, newly created by the Versailles Treaty ending the Great War. In the 1920s, he rose in the local Communist Party hierarchy. To avoid the Yugoslav Royal Police, Tito fled into exile in the Soviet Union. There Stalin and the Kremlin in 1939 confirmed Tito as secretary general of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

Nazi Germany invaded Yugoslavia three years later, and Tito mobilized anti-Nazi guerrillas fighting in the mountains. His partisans joined

the Soviet Army in occupying Belgrade as the Germans retreated. His grateful subjects promoted him to the rank of marshal of the nation's armed forces. In 1946, he used his military and party credentials to install a regime that ruled over a heterogeneous collection of ethnic groups divided religiously into Catholic Croatians, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Bosnians.

Marshal Tito defied Stalin's dictates from Moscow and, in 1948, for the crime of "anti-Sovietism," Stalin expelled the Yugoslav leader from the international union of Communist Parties. Nevertheless, Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited Belgrade seven years later to renew relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.[3]

Tito and two other Third World leaders—Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser—met together in 1956 on the Adriatic Island of Brioni to design the Non-Aligned Movement. Its members claimed independence from the great powers in the Cold War. Both the Kremlin and the White House suspected the motives of this organization.[4]

Meanwhile, in Panama, General Torrijos realized that the nonaligned nations might help him confront the power of the United States. Therefore, in 1971, Panama's chief seized on the fact that a Yugoslav construction conglomerate, EnergoProjekt, had won the bidding for a dam and hydroelectric plant at Bayano, fifty miles east of the Panamanian capital.

Torrijos sent a letter to President Tito expressing his gratification that a Yugoslav company had won the bid.[5] Engineers from Belgrade soon arrived to begin constructing the dam. In an exclusive interview with a reporter from the Yugoslav state news organization, Torrijos touted his own conversion to socialism, the favored economic philosophy of President Tito. "The only road for Latin America[,] and this means for our country as well, is socialism," the general stated. "This continent has nothing more to ask or hope for from capitalism."[6] Torrijos said that he looked forward to closer economic relations between Panama and Yugoslavia.

As a next step, General Torrijos invited Yugoslav diplomats to the 1972 inauguration of Demetrio Lakas for a second term as president of the government of Panama. An official close to Tito arrived from Belgrade, and the Yugoslav ambassador to Mexico flew in for the ceremonies. Yugoslavia did not yet have diplomatic representation in Panama.

Finally, the hosts arranged that the Yugoslav delegation would sit at the table of the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution during the inaugural luncheon. Omar Torrijos spoke exclusively to the Yugoslavs. They, in turn, sent a report of the conversation to the Marshal Tito.[7]

Torrijos informed his guests about the Canal Zone. He explained that the US employees living in the Canal Zone enjoyed greater privileges than did average Americans at home. Torrijos compared the situation to

the French colonials in Algeria "prior to the liberation." He explained that social tensions existed in the Canal Zone between the white Zonian residents and the African American soldiers and Afro-Panamanian workers. General Torrijos claimed that the Zonians were planning to trigger a provocation that would force the US military to intervene in Panamanian affairs.

As for the treaty negotiations thus far, Torrijos said, the Americans were very tough. "They are spreading false news throughout Latin American countries that, if we [Panamanians] obtained sovereignty over the Canal Zone, we would raise the shipping rates and place the canal under the control of the socialist camp."

Then the chief of the Panamanian Revolution turned to the subject of freight rates for ships passing through the canal. The Americans kept them artificially low, at around $0.90 per ton, practically unchanged since the canal started operations in 1914. General Torrijos explained that 80 percent of the ships using the canal were American owned, "so that the canal administrators could brag about the small earnings." In other words, American managers of the canal were subsidizing US shipping companies while also saving them from trip expenses through the Straits of Magellan at the tip of South America.

The host, Torrijos, then raised the possibility of Yugoslavia investing in the Panamanian economy. He praised its construction company EnergoProjekt. General Torrijos requested that Yugoslavia make bids on other Panamanian projects in road building, cement factories, and bridges. "[Torrijos] directly asked us why we have not opened an embassy in Panama," the Yugoslav delegation reported. "We said that we will put our energy into opening a consulate."

Finally, Torrijos turned to political affairs in the Mediterranean region such as relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union. The Panamanian strongman wanted to know how the Egyptians were operating their canal. "Did the Russians give or sell weapons to Nasser? Did they want to take control of the Suez Canal?" As the discussion ended, Torrijos expressed admiration for the wartime struggles and nation-building of the Yugoslavs.

"[Omar Torrijos] emphasized that in his opinion, President Tito is the most skilled and knowledgeable politician in the contemporary world," the report concluded.

From time to time thereafter, Yugoslav journalists came to Panama City. General Torrijos graciously received these reporters to remind Marshal Tito and the Yugoslavian people about the struggle of the Panamanians for territorial sovereignty. The general explained that "the spirit behind Panama's foreign policy is that of being the maker of our own

destiny." He added that the Panamanians agreed "with the points of view of the nonaligned countries, and we uphold the nonaligned principle as one which is fundamental for human coexistence."

Torrijos concluded that improved Panamanian-Yugoslavian relations "will contribute to peace in the world."[8] Yugoslav journalists disseminated Torrijos's views through state media back home.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL IN PANAMA

Another opportunity for Yugoslav cooperation presented itself to the Panamanians during an unusual meeting of the UN Security Council in Ethiopia. It was the first meeting of its kind outside of the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Panama's UN ambassador, Aquilino Boyd, attended as a rotational member of the Security Council.

Prompted by Torrijos, Boyd took this occasion to propose that its next meeting convene in another small country with a big problem—Panama. The United States representative immediately objected. The British delegate abstained, regarding this as "an issue between the Governments of the United States and Panama."[9]

Most other members, including the Yugoslav representative, voted to hold the next Security Council meeting in Panama. The resolution passed.[10] The primary issue on the agenda concerned the stalled talks on revisions to the 1903 Canal Treaty between Panama and the United States. The UN Security Council convened in Panama City in March 1973.

In his welcoming address, the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution deliberately played on the anti-imperialist sentiments shared by many UN members from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. "Panama understands very well the struggle of people who suffer the humiliation of colonialism," he said. Torrijos asked that the United Nations play an active role in solving problems experienced "by our countries."

Torrijos directed his final comment directly to the American delegates. "We find it very difficult to understand how a country, which has been characterized by not being colonialist, insists on maintaining a colony in the heart of our fatherland. For the United States people this should be an offence, because the United States was a colony and experienced how denigrating it was to be in that position."[11] He reminded the Americans that their nation had once been a victim of imperialism too.

After several days of discussions, thirteen members of the UN Security Council, including the Yugoslav delegate, voted in favor of the pro-Panama resolution. John Scali, the US ambassador to the United Nations, vetoed the measure. Scali criticized the Security Council for taking a "partisan stand" while President Nixon was preoccupied with reducing

tensions with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. In addition, he charged Panamanians with ingratitude for the many US contributions to the country's rapid economic growth over the previous five years.[12]

On the following evening, General Torrijos went on Panamanian television with a different conclusion. "Yesterday the veto was made publicly," he said. It leads us "to the conclusion that it will not be easy to get rid of the colonial enclave."[13] Clearly, the outcome of the Panama meeting had exposed Washington's foot-dragging on the canal issue.

Students had been among the hardest-to-please supporters of Omar Torrijos. However, the US veto at the UN Security Council meeting transformed them into allies of the commander. "We have won an unprecedented victory," a communiqué of the Federation of Panamanian Students stated. "The US veto only reflects the isolation of imperialism and the arrogance of those who for many years hid the truth and the real roots of our struggle from the world."[14]

"A special bridge unites Addis Ababa and Panama," said the Yugoslav representative on the UN Security Council, "two historic meetings of the United Nations Security Council outside of its headquarters. That bridge was built based, first of all, on the solidarity between all the Third World countries among which the nonaligned states played an especially active and dynamic role."[15]

The Security Council meeting demonstrated to Torrijos the advantage of the NAM within the United Nations. No "great power" had a veto among the nonaligned. Before the Yugoslav delegates returned home from Panama, they briefed General Torrijos on the forthcoming NAM conference in Algiers.[16]

THE ROAD TO BELGRADE

Practically overnight, his performance at the Security Council meeting vaulted Omar Torrijos into being one of the most heralded leaders of Latin America, indeed of the Third World. The general decided to take advantage the moment. His first overseas trip would take him to Algiers for the next conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. Yugoslav diplomats in Panama were already preparing him for that meeting.[17]

Nineteen seventy-three was the year for Latin America to join the nations of the Non-Aligned Movement. Fidel Castro's Cuba was the lone member from the Americas. However, member nations of the Organization of American States (OAS) had given in to President John F. Kennedy's pressure in 1962 to boycott the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, the rest of the Americas refrained from joining the Non-Aligned Movement.

Things had changed in the 1970s. Castro ended his support for guer-

rilla uprisings throughout the hemisphere, and several countries defied Washington in order to renew their diplomatic relations with Cuba. By 1980, eleven Latin American governments had joined Cuba in the NAM.[18] Panama was a leader among them.

The 1973 meeting in Algiers attracted much interest in Latin America. The "revolutionary" governments of Salvador Allende's Chile and of General Juan Velasco's Peru officially became members. Other countries sent observers.[19] The European press took note of the increased involvement of Latin America in the Non-Aligned Movement. *Le Monde* in Paris ran a lengthy article devoted to an interview with Peru's foreign minister.[20]

Yugoslavia's aging President Tito, as the only living cofounder of the NAM, sent a plenary message to the conference. One of his written remarks appeared to refer to Panama's plight. "Above all," Tito said, "our cooperation should find expression in increased solidarity and mutual support in case one of the nonalined [*sic*] countries is threatened or exposed to foreign pressure."[21]

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution made an impressionable appearance in Algiers. The host of the conference, Algeria's Houari Boumédiène, interrupted one morning's agenda by proclaiming the Panamanian's imminent arrival. "I would like to announce to the heads of state . . . and their representatives," he pronounced from the podium, "that Omar Torrijos will arrive in Algiers in two hours as an expression of solidarity with what we are doing in this conference." The audience did not seem to recognize the name: "President Omar Torrijos of Panama!" Boumédiène reiterated, and the audience erupted in applause.

The Panamanian general flew to Algiers on the Panamanian Air Force's turboprop airplane. During this meeting, the NAM approved a resolution for delivery to the United Nations that Washington should return the Canal Zone to Panama.[22] Torrijos submitted an official request to join the membership of the Non-Aligned Movement, which would become effective at its meeting three years hence. He also had arranged a visit to Yugoslavia following the Algiers Conference.

The general had a one-week hiatus until his scheduled visit with Marshal Tito in Belgrade. He decided to go to Spain in the interim—without notifying the Spanish government. Torrijos's plane landed in Madrid on September 8, 1973, with an entourage including his mother and a sister. The Panamanians checked into the Hotel Meliá Castilla. Notification that a head of state was visiting threw the Spanish Foreign Ministry into a quandary. An audience with Generalissimo Francisco Franco and the Prince of Asturias on short notice would be impossible.

It took a few days for the Spaniards to arrange proper protocol for

the Panamanian head of state. Therefore, he went off on a sightseeing trip. The Panamanians stopped in the cities of Córdoba and Marbella and other port cities on the Costa del Sol. Torrijos received an invitation to attend the Feria de Pesca in Vigo on the Atlantic coast of Galicia and requested that a plane take him there. The Panamanians went to Segovia and the Escorial. They also toured the Valle de los Caídos, the Spanish Civil War Memorial build by Franco. Everywhere they traveled, local officials provided transportation.

Spanish diplomats did arrange for talks with some military officers a day before his departure. Panama's strongman found time to stop off at the Egyptian Embassy, where he spent two hours in a phone conversation with President Anwar Sadat.[23] Then he boarded his Panamanian Air Force plane and took off for Yugoslavia.

A CHAT WITH TITO

President Josip Broz Tito was eighty-one years old. His guest, forty-four, did not disguise his admiration for the host. Torrijos said he wanted to bask in Tito's wisdom, seek advice, and test his own ideas. They sat down together at the marshal's villa on the resort island of Brioni, site of the 1956 meeting between Tito, Nehru, and Nasser.

In his introductory remarks, the Panamanian general solicited the marshal's "ideas and suggestions for quickening the liberation of the Panama Canal from US domination."[24] He said that he needed advice on how to handle impatient Panamanian youth who were demanding quick results in the treaty negotiations.

Tito answered by evoking his own experiences in converting his partisans of World War II into a modern military. One must explain to the youth about "the realistic situation," Tito said, the realities of war, and "the unity of the nation." Young people need to be included in the struggle for national independence. Marshal Tito explained that "[the students'] activities should be channeled and [their] liberating ideas should not be suffocated."

General Torrijos responded that the students and the government agreed on one thing. "The true state of affairs in Panama is such that the canal represents the only religion that today unifies all Panamanians," he said.

Tito asked his guest about "the education of the masses for the basics of liberation." The Panamanian replied that there was some preparedness. "If needed, the army would give arms to the people," Torrijos said. The Yugoslav president also inquired about the US military defense of the canal. Torrijos informed his host that the canal, with five hundred weak points, was indefensible.

"But I do not want to [attack the canal militarily]," the general said. "Incapacitating the canal would cause damage to international commerce and would invite antipathy from every nation using the canal. We need to seek a different way to liberate that waterway." Tito expressed his approval. "One of these means would be to better inform the world's public about the true state of affairs in Panama," the marshal advised, "and in this sense a continuous action in the United Nations would produce some good results."

Tito spoke about garnering international support for Panama's demands for a new canal treaty with the United States. He said, for example, that he had been a supporter of the Algerian Revolution against France. "French authorities even confiscated one Yugoslav ship loaded with arms for the Algerian rebels."

The two leaders discussed the Non-Aligned Movement. Tito emphasized the importance for the Latin American countries of joining the NAM. He spoke of the need for all Third World countries to form a powerful bloc in the United Nations.

Tito and Torrijos also explored what should be done about the Chilean coup d'état that had occurred on September 11, 1973, just thirteen days before this conversation on Brioni Island. Both leaders had sympathized with President Allende, whose democratic revolutionary government fell from power just after Chile had joined the Non-Aligned Movement. "Allende did not pay enough attention to arming his forces," General Torrijos observed. "Instead of holding a gun, he held the constitution under his armpit."[25] Tito and Torrijos discussed whether an economic boycott of the Chilean military would do any good. General Torrijos had to admit that he lacked the ability to do anything, because Panama traded very little with Chile.

Torrijos changed the subject and told his host how Panamanians suffered from North American flags planted in the very heart of his country. "Panama will never stop fighting until it recovers national sovereignty over the Canal Zone. In negotiating with the United States, we will be firm and never kneel down," he said.

Torrijos emphasized the role of Tito, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the United Nations in Panama's struggle. The Panamanian general mentioned how pleased he was to tour a model farm in Yugoslavia. He praised the hydroelectric construction of EnergoProjekt in Panama and requested that the two countries increase economic cooperation.

At the conclusion, Torrijos told the translator, "This meeting with Marshal Tito has been one of the most illuminating and unforgettable moments of [my] life." Torrijos obviously relished being the pupil of Marshal Tito in a tutorial on world affairs.

The maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution squeezed in one last stop on his trip: the Vatican in Rome. Torrijos and his mother delayed their departure from Italy and toured Milan, Turin, and Genoa to fill the time before the Vatican meeting. As the Spanish press agency reporter writes, Pope Paul VI scheduled a time to meet with the general to discuss the situation of Panama's "peaceful intentions" in its relations with the United States over the canal issue. Torrijos spoke with the Pontiff for an hour.[26]

THE MEDIA STAR

Omar was very astute. He thought deeply about the world order and what it meant to be a leader of a small Third World country. These attributes made General Omar Torrijos a big media star in most countries of the world outside the United States of America. In his quips to the press, it always appeared that Torrijos had anticipated the questions and thought out the answers ahead of time. He seldom contradicted himself or said anything that compromised his determination to take over the Canal Zone completely and remove all foreign armed forces from Panama.

Despite living in a capitalist world, Omar professed socialism more than any other economic philosophy. Therefore, the press in socialist countries often publicized his remarks. He gave Cuban TV interviewers good copy, particularly if it was critical of the United States. "The American veto in Panama was not against Panama," he told them. "It was against the American countries and against all countries in the world suffering from the cancer of colonialism."

Torrijos referred to the case of Panama when he said, "It must be known that the treaty [of 1903 between the US and the newly independent Republic of Panama] was not negotiated by a Panamanian. The treaty was signed by two foreigners." He was referring to the American secretary of state, John J. Hay, and the citizen of France and erstwhile employee of the defunct Ferdinand de Lesseps construction company, Philippe-Jean Bunau-Varilla.

Torrijos often placed Panama's situation into the context of world affairs. "I always cite the case of Vietnam," he once told Cuban newspeople. "Some 600 aircraft were attacking it. The halt to the bombing did not come about as a result of lack of fuel, lack of pilots or lack of bombs. All three were available. The halt came about as a result of the moral sickening caused in the world by that genocide."[27] Such press dispatches validating most of the propaganda disseminated in the Soviet and Chinese media drew much attention to Panama and Torrijos.

His travels throughout Panama also drew enormous attention in the

local press. In one provincial visit to the town of La Palma, local officials arranged for a ten-year-old schoolboy to give a recitation for the chief of the Panamanian Revolution. "General, we the revolution's favorite sons are proud of you and, if necessary, we will give our lives to see the Panamanian flag flying over all the national territory."

Omar Torrijos seemed genuinely moved. "I can assure this boy that they are not going to have that problem because this generation is not going to take the easy way out," he affirmed. "We are determined to solve that problem and it is going to be solved and you, the children of my fatherland, are going to live in a truly free country."[28]

The newspaper *El Pueblo* of Madrid ran an article on the Panamanian strongman in which they quoted him as saying, "We are not enemies of the United States. We only love our flag very dearly and oppose continuing to be a colony." He then mentioned his favorite slogan, "On our feet or dead, but never on our knees." The general also admitted to having political opponents at home on his right. "Oligarchies have no nationality and no matter how nationalistic a movement may be, [the oligarchs] disagree with it if it is a matter of sharing wealth more justly and, above all, educating the people so they will learn not to be exploited."[29]

His internationalism extended to the Franco regime in Spain, even though he did not have a great relationship with the generalissimo. On learning of Franco's death in 1975, he said, "We Panamanians, bent on removing the colonialist stakes from our territory, feel that the struggle of the Spanish people over Gibraltar has the same goals of freedom."[30]

In Moscow, as in Havana, the anticolonial aspect of Torrijos's discourse pleased the propagandists in charge of the media. The Soviet state news service TASS widely distributed Torrijos activities, speeches, and travels. When Torrijos traveled to Argentina, TASS reported that the Perón government in Buenos Aires supported Panama's claim to sovereignty over the Canal Zone and that the Republic of Panama backed Argentina's claim to the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands).[31]

Despite the favorable press in the USSR and the People's Republic of China, Torrijos never contemplated playing the communist cards. Why antagonize Washington too much? Better to organize support in arenas less threatening to the Americans. He counted on their votes at the UN but never traveled to countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact.

THE WARM EMBRACE OF PERÓN'S ARGENTINA

Relations between Panama and Argentina warmed just at the moment that Juan Domingo Perón returned to the presidency in 1973. He did not forget his old friend from Colón, Panama. How could he? Omar Torrijos had just become Latin America's latest anti-imperialist hero by expos-

ing the "big power chauvinism" of the United States in vetoing the pro-Panama proposal at the recent UN Security Council Meeting.

President Perón needed such a friend at that moment. He was having trouble controlling his own youthful supporters on the left while also maintaining the loyalty of his less radical Peronista labor bosses. Workers and students had already come to blows. The Montoneros in particular felt empowered. They had just helped overturn an Argentinean military that, for eighteen years, had prevented Juan Perón's return from exile.[32] In June 1973, deadly gunfire between youth groups and unionists interrupted Perón and Isabelita's welcoming ceremony.

Perón placated the nation's restless youth by taking advantage of his friendship with Omar Torrijos. President Perón sponsored a conference in the Panamanian strongman's honor at the University of Buenos Aires on the occasion of the publication of Torrijos's speeches in a volume titled *La batalla de Panamá*. Therefore, he invited his old friend to Buenos Aires at a time when progressives throughout Latin America were lamenting the military overthrow of President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973.

Perón wrote:

> My dear friend, if an untimely illness had not prevented me from traveling, I would have done it a long time ago so that I could have the great pleasure of embracing you. Now, new responsibilities and liabilities have me tethered to my country.
>
> As you surely must have noticed, the Southern Cone has been scourged by terrible imperialist blows. In Chile, the situation turned into a crisis caused by . . . foreign pressures and . . . the mistakes of domestic leaders. Our friend [Salvador] Allende has been so twisted around by those who pulled him from the front as much as those who pushed him from behind. Marxism in our countries is not the thing that can consolidate a people's government. Its enemies were the pro-imperialists who had yearned for its fall as much as the communists who drove [Salvador Allende] to take far-fetched actions.
>
> I hope to welcome you in Buenos Aires and to have a lengthy discussion about the things we share. Until then, I beg you to receive my most affectionate greetings and my best wishes. *Un gran abrazo*, Juan Perón.[33]

General Torrijos accepted the invitation to make a state visit to Buenos Aires in January 1974. President Perón did not receive the chief of the Panamanian Revolution at the airport tarmac. Instead, his vice president and wife, María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón, led the welcoming party. She was no stranger to Torrijos. However, there was no hint of familiarity in the vice president's prepared remarks at the airport. Delivered

Figure 6.1. President Juan Domingo Perón (right) welcomes the Panamanian strongman (left) to Argentina in January 1974. Omar Torrijos arrived as a popular anti-imperialist hero at a moment when Perón was losing the support of the radical left at home." Photograph courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

rapidly with little inflection, it seemed a boilerplate welcoming speech, revised to replace the name of the previous visitor.

In contrast, Torrijos spoke at the airport without notes. He praised Juan Perón's political leadership in Latin America as an example of "one of the bulwarks of the dignity of small nations."[34] Perhaps the word "small" referring to Argentina was a slip of the tongue. No matter, all factions of the nation turned out to welcome Latin America's newest anti-US hero.

Argentinean citizens greeted him enthusiastically, cheering and applauding at the theater newsreels that covered his activities. Juan Perón's youthful supporters, the Montoneros, turned out at his public appearances beating their bass drums, jumping up and down, and chanting slogans. "Perón, Torrijos, solo corazón [one heart]." It was becoming clear to bystanders at the time that, despite the enthusiasm, Perón was losing

patience with the militant Montoneros.[35] Still, all Argentineans broadly supported Panama's struggle with the Colossus of the North.

Perón invited the Panamanian leader to the presidential residence in the Buenos Aires suburb of Los Olivos for two hours of discussions. They talked of each country's "decolonization" efforts, Argentina's quest to reclaim the Islas Malvinas from Great Britain and Panama's quest for possession of the Canal Zone.

Afterward, Perón answered the questions of news reporters. He told them, "If [the North Americans] do not take measures to do what Panama wants, it will be an injustice and an arbitrary act which some day Latin America will have to confront as a problem for the whole hemisphere." He observed that what had been entered into at an earlier period of history often no longer corresponded to conditions of the present day. He was referring to the 1903 Panama Canal Treaty. "The Big Powers as well as the small ones must obey the mandates of the United Nations," President Perón said.[36]

In his remarks after receiving an honorary degree from the law faculty of the University of Buenos Aires, General Torrijos continued to highlight the theme of youth. "Back there in Panama I have a big issue," he said, "it is that our youth do not believe in negotiations but in liberation."[37] This comment perhaps reflected Perón's view of his own leftist supporters.

Moreover, Torrijos referred often to his support for Argentina's claims to the Islas Malvinas of the South Atlantic. These references alluded to the anti-imperialist struggle that Panama shared with Argentina over the loss of national territory to outside powers.

Torrijos impressed the youth for having exposed US imperialism at the recent meeting of United Nations Security Council meeting in Panama. He wore business suits to his public appearances, which encouraged these youthful activists to overlook that General Torrijos commanded one of the military dictatorships that the youth had helped overthrow at home in Argentina. His regime was just more moderate.

News outlets reported that eighty thousand students of the University of Buenos Aires wanted to present Torrijos with an honorary degree. In addition, it was reported that thirty thousand members of several Peronist youth groups "also met with" the Panamanian strongman. He invited thirty youth leaders to visit Panama, offering them transportation on his "presidential airplane." He arranged a date in March for their transport.[38]

Perón and Torrijos had two additional chats. Then the Panamanian strongman toured several military installations in and around the capital city. Vice President Martínez de Perón escorted Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos on a tour of a model home for the aged. Diplomats at the Ameri-

can Embassy speculated that President Perón profited more from the trip than his guest did because the visit of the popular Panamanian gave his host's "sagging popularity with leftist youth a much-needed boost."[39]

Back in Panama City later that same year (1974), Torrijos invited the delegation of Peronist youth to his home for an informal talk. Being anti-imperialists, the visiting youngsters brought up the subject of the School of the Americas. Someone asked about American "indoctrination" of Latin American armed forces "in order to inculcate a mentality of dependence."

Torrijos responded by alluding to two officers besides himself who resisted such indoctrination: Colonel Francisco Cáamaño, leader of the 1965 constitutionalist rebellion in the Dominican Republic, and General Juan Velasco Alvarado, chief of the reformist military junta of Peru.

"We send officers to the military schools of the United States. I am a product of [the School of the Americas], also Cáamaño came from there. Velasco Alvarado too. It is not easy to indoctrinate a man—us, because we have [the schools] here within our own fatherland."[40] Here Torrijos alluded once again to the ability of Latin American military officers to chart their own course despite what appeared to be overwhelming subservience to US influence.

When President Perón died in July 1974, Torrijos expressed his "deep sorrow" to the Argentinean people and ordered Panamanian flags to fly at half-staff for three days.[41] The general enlisted his younger brother Hugo Torrijos to lead the Panamanian delegation to attend Perón's funeral. He offered Panama's condolences to Argentina's new president, the widow Isabel Martínez de Perón. When she moved up from the vice presidency, she became the first female head of state in the Western Hemisphere.

WITH GENERAL VELASCO IN PERU

On the next leg of the January 1974 tour, the Panamanian entourage flew from Buenos Aires across the Andes Mountains to Lima, Peru. It was to become a feature of the strongman's increasingly elaborate foreign travels that he invited selected ministers and family members. Raquel Pauzner and their eldest son, sixteen-year-old Dumas Torrijos accompanied him to Buenos Aires and Lima. Foreign Minister Juan Antonio Tack and his wife came along, as did the minister of commerce Fernando Manfredo, the National Bank manager Ricardo de la Espriella, and three Panamanian newspeople. The minister of economic planning, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, and his wife joined the second half of the tour in Lima.[42] Twenty-one people completed the entourage.

Torrijos had long identified his own Panamanian Revolution with that of his Peruvian host, General Velasco. Economic nationalism had

become a fact of life in twentieth-century Latin America. One of the first acts of General Velasco after his army's coup d'état in 1968 had been the nationalization of the International Petroleum Company (IPC), Peru's monopoly producer, refiner, and marketer of oil products. The IPC had belonged to Esso International, a Standard Oil (New Jersey) subsidiary since the 1910s. Velasco's government also nationalized foreign-owned copper mines as well as some of the large rural estates owned by the oligarchy in the highlands and along the coast.[43] Velasco distributed this land to peasant communities and laborers.

When he toured nationalized sugar plantations outside the coastal city of Trujillo, the Panamanian leader called Velasco "a revolutionary wearing a general's uniform." On this occasion he was touring the "largest cooperative in the world, one of the former sugar plantations belonging to the oligarchic landowners of Spanish and German extraction, the Asillaga and the Gildemeister clans.[44]

Torrijos addressed the workers there, asking them to defend the social benefits that General Velasco had introduced for laborers and peasants in Peru. In turn, the workers briefed the visiting dignitary on the gains in sugar production that the cooperative had produced since the land reforms. "Never allow yourselves to work for a master again," Torrijos told them.[45]

Back in Lima, the foreign ministers joined Velasco and Torrijos in discussions. The two sides agreed to support each other's territorial claims. Peru was the only country in the world to lay claim to territorial waters extending outward two hundred miles (rather than the international standard of twenty miles) from its coastline. Peru backed the Republic of Panama's claim to effective sovereignty over the Canal Zone. Both leaders additionally agreed on the necessity of social reforms based on the anti-oligarchic alliance between the state and laborers, peasants, and students.

Velasco and Torrijos also proclaimed opposition to measures of political and economic coercion used by the great powers against independent peoples. Similarly, the two military reformers opposed the "forced isolation of the fraternal republic of Cuba from the rest of the continent." In fact, both leaders had plans for renewing diplomatic and commercial relations with Fidel Castro later that very year. Each of the above agreements aimed to counter policies promoted by politicians in Washington, DC. The very last statement of their joint declaration made plain this intention. "The two parties," it stated, "reject the imperialist, colonialist and neo-colonialist policy in all its manifestations."[46]

The success of these trips set the general on a trajectory of internationalism. Omar Torrijos wanted to unite Latin America with all the

Third World. If most of the nations of the world supported Panama in its quest for effective sovereignty, the United States would have to give up the Canal Zone without resort to warfare.

Above all, the Panamanian strongman was becoming renowned. A committee of judges from six South American countries named Omar Torrijos as the Bolivarian Citizen of the Year for his international achievements. The judges represented Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Panama, all countries that owed their independence in part to Simón Bolívar's leadership in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century.[47]

For these reasons, Torrijos as a military professional appreciated historical settings. General Juan Velasco Alvarado of Peru invited several neighboring states to Peru again to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Ayacucho. In that battle, General Simón Bolívar drove Spanish forces from Peru in 1824. Torrijos arrived with a Panamanian delegation of thirty members.

Before Torrijos left, he invited General Velasco along with Venezuela's president Andrés Pérez and Bolivia's General Hugo Banzer to a second Bolivarian Congress of the Americas in Panama. "I know that Bolivar [*sic*] was especially interested in Panama," Torrijos told them. "We would not live up to his memory if we did not commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Congress of Panama as befits the occasion."[48] Therefore, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution planned for a second Bolivarian Congress of American Republics to be held in Panama City in 1976. He intended to use it to unify Latin America against the big powers.

FAILURE OF THE BOLIVARIAN CONGRESS

Thereafter, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution spoke often about hemispheric solidarity. At a luncheon of news reporters, Torrijos said that Panama was never a problem for the United States until his and other countries in the United Nations demanded "decolonization." Yet the canal was always a big power problem to the Panamanians. He compared the Canal Zone to the Falkland Islands of Argentina and to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba—all three occupied by foreign troops. "But [Guantánamo and the Falklands] are located, one could say, in the back bedroom," the general concluded. "We [Panamanians] are located in the foyer of the whole continent."[49]

The year 1974 had been a busy time in the Latin American diplomatic campaign of Omar Torrijos. He had sent a delegation of Panamanian government officials to Havana to renew his country's diplomatic relations with Cuba for the first time in twelve years. He followed that initiative with a trip to Cuba to meet Fidel Castro in January 1975. With

these initiatives, Torrijos was hoping finally to return Cuba to its proper place in the cultural fraternity of Hispanic American nation-states, as will be explained in chapter 7.

The next move toward unity came from the Costa Rican Foreign Ministry, which announced a summit meeting for March 1975 in Panama City. The original committee of the heads of state of Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Colombia had invited Fidel Castro as well as President Luis Echeverría of Mexico to attend the meeting.[50] Fidel did not attend but Torrijos's goal of returning Cuba to the Latin America family appeared to have gained some traction with other nations.

Fortunately, the presidents of Panama's closest neighbors stood solidly behind its dictator. Ironically, these were all elected heads of state: Daniel Oduber of Costa Rica, Alfonso López Michelsen of Colombia, and Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela. In March 1975, Colombia hosted these leaders at a presidential summit in which officials of the four countries discussed inter-American relations. In fact, part of the declaration of the Colombian summit reflected a new "internationalism" of Latin America rather than merely "nationalism." This March 1975 conference produced the following proposals in a document called the Panama Declaration:[51]

—recognition of the Third World nations' contribution to international economic relations;
—renunciation of the "coercive nature" of the US foreign trade practices that contradict the principle of equality between trading nations;
—need for transference of financial and technological resources from developed to developing countries; and
—the formation of Latin American-owned companies in natural resources.

The host, President López Michelsen, pronounced that Panamanian jurisdiction over the Canal Zone was "not a matter which concerns one Latin American country, but a problem in which we are all interested."[52]

Additional planning for the Bolivarian Conference in Panama proved difficult to accomplish. Only Pérez, Oduber, and López Michelsen showed up for a planning meeting in Panama City. Castro and Echeverría did not. Although the Mexican president did not make the summit, he did take the occasion to write a letter to President Gerald Ford expressing his support for a new canal treaty.[53]

Bolivia too was celebrating an anniversary year in the history of Latin American Independence. Simón Bolívar had completed the last battle against Spanish colonial forces in South America in 1825, and the grateful residents of colonial Upper Peru named their new republic Bolivia,

after the liberator. Its president, General Hugo Banzer, wanted to celebrate the 150th anniversary of that event with his fellow heads of state. Torrijos brought Raquel Pauzner, six high-ranking government officials, and fifteen Panamanian journalists.[54]

General Banzer welcomed the arrival of the Panamanians with a twenty-one-gun salute. "You are appreciated and admired in this country," he said at the airport, "because of the worthy representative of a people tied to Bolivia in its longing for justice and, historically, through the work of the liberator, Simón Bolívar."[55]

Omar Torrijos expounded on several parallels between Bolivia and Panama, besides the obvious one that both had heads of state who seized power in coups d'état. "It is a disgrace to keep a country landlocked," he said. "It is a somewhat provocative intransigence because people sometimes lose their patience. In this you (Bolivians) have been very conscientious." The visiting head of state was referring to Bolivia's efforts to recover its pathway to the sea, which Chile seized in the War of the Pacific in 1883. "Until the Bolivian and Panamanian problems are resolved, the word 'solidarity' has as much meaning as 'etcetera,'" Torrijos said.[56]

Looking forward to his own historic reenactment in the next year, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution next recruited a delegation to fly to Santiago, Chile. Panamanian officials were to bring Torrijos's personal invitation to General Pinochet to attend the Bolivarian conference.[57]

Just as the chief of the Panamanian Revolution most needed a demonstration of Latin American solidarity, his Bolivarian Congress disintegrated. Months of planning with the leaders of Costa Rica, Colombia, and Venezuela had come to naught.

Fidel Castro's attendance became the sticking point. The Cuban revolutionary carried too much ideological baggage of the Cold War for these military dictators to agree to attend. Generals Ernesto Geisel of Brazil, Banzer of Bolivia, and Pinochet of Chile had never indicated much enthusiasm for that Panamanian historical event. They felt that the Cuban Revolution had interfered too much in the internal political affairs of their countries for them to share a meeting with Fidel Castro.[58]

Peru became the back breaker. The "revolutionary" General Velasco became ill, and his replacement as president, General Francisco Morales Bermúdez, moved foreign and domestic policies to the right. With Velasco gone, Torrijos remained the only military reformist in the hemisphere. Then came the coup de grâce, so to speak. In March 1976, the Argentine military overthrew the Peronist government of President Isabel Perón. More than three-quarters of all Latin Americans now lived under right-wing military rule. The unification of Latin America was going in the opposite direction from the one Torrijos had been planning.

Such a setback—the inability to unify one's neighbors—might have defeated most political leaders. Not Omar Torrijos. He pursued many strategies simultaneously so that victory in one tactic would offset defeat in another. Latin American unity gained little traction—in fact, it backfired. But the nonaligned gambit remained in play. The NAM had the capacity to neutralize Cold War ideological tensions sufficiently for enemies like India and Pakistan as well as European members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact to vote unanimously against US policy elsewhere in the world, like Panama. This nonaligned approach required the Panamanian strongman to pursuit both Fidel Castro and Josip Broz Tito.

Moreover, every avenue toward ultimate victory depended on Torrijos staying in power long enough to get there. Big powers had enormous capacities to put off dealing with small countries. The general still had to manage domestic crises if he expected to achieve his foreign objectives. The oil shock of 1974 was such a threat.

CHAPTER 7

BANKS, OIL, AND BANANAS

To the democratic socialist Omar Torrijos, capital was never a bad thing. That is why he had accepted Governor Nelson Rockefeller's invitation to visit New York City. In late September 1969, the general and his wife Raquel Pauzner boarded a plane so that he could keep his appointments on Wall Street. His team of government economists headed by the University of Chicago PhD, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, accompanied them.

In the Big Apple, the Panamanian strongman addressed a meeting of American executives at the Goldman Sachs financial firm. Torrijos invoked the refrains that American investors liked to hear from Third World leaders. "The base of [our proposed economic expansion] has to be private enterprise, creative, agile, and competitive. Four concepts summarize this potential: exports, national integration, educated human capital, and agile capital markets."

"In short, gentlemen, with a well-defined economic policy, private enterprise will develop the economy; and the state will develop opportunities for the improvement of our people for their fulsome participation."

"We know that you frequently hear these presentations," Omar Torrijos continued, "and, with reason, many times you are suspicious of what you hear. For that we invite you to come to Panama, observe everything you want to see, converse with the Panamanians, and accompany us in our inspection tours of the countryside. I think that the best observation is being there, and for that I invite you to see for yourselves."[1]

Torrijos spent a full day on Wall Street. He conferred with executives of the World Bank, Chase Manhattan Bank, and various inter-

national business groups. That evening, Omar and Raquel traveled by limousine to the Pocantico Hills estate of the Rockefellers. They had dinner with the governor and spent the night at the mansion before returning to Panama.

America's investment banks eventually provided the economic growth Torrijos needed to secure the backing of peasants and workers without alienating the middle class. The chief did not choose to confiscate assets or cancel contracts with foreign companies like other revolutionaries in the region. Instead, his government wrote up English-language brochures inviting foreign businesses to invest in the Panamanian economy.

Three selling points could naught but appeal to capitalists in the 1970s as well as to free-market economists working for the US government. Panama touted its open economy with bank reforms that permitted unlimited flows of foreign and domestic capital. The one-to-one convertibility of the dollar to the Panamanian balboa assured investors that inflation would not wreak havoc.

One final enticement was the most important of all. Torrijos never intended to socialize the economy along the lines of Fidel Castro's revolutionary project. Domestic businesses faced higher taxes but not outright state takeover. Nor did Torrijos wish to nationalize the foreign banks. Quite the contrary. Omar's government advisers loosened international monetary exchanges sufficiently to encourage foreign bankers to make Panama the leading financial center of Latin America.

Did these supply-side economic reforms make Omar Torrijos any less of a democratic socialist? In his own mind, apparently not. He once mentioned to his aide de camp Chuchú, "No one can redistribute imaginary wealth. First you have to create it."[2]

In meetings, Torrijos wanted to learn not what he had already accomplished but what needed to be done. He would say to his advisers "tell me the bad news. The good news I already know."[3] As long as the economy performed well, as it had in the first six years of the dictatorship, the Panamanian Revolution had a sufficient cushion to provide for the poor. The only drawback was that weak countries cannot control their own economic destinies. The Arab Oil Boycott ultimately spoiled Panama's economic expansion.

ECONOMIC POLICY AND PERFORMANCE

The economy of Panama had been growing throughout the 1960s and the rise of international banking certainly gave the economy an additional boost in the early 1970s. Gross National Product was expanding at an average of nearly 7 percent per annum between 1968 and 1974.[4]

The general early on had chosen Ardito Barletta, as his principal eco-

nomic adviser. Technically, he was not like the "Chicago Boys," who later disassembled the socialist reforms of Salvador Allende on the orders of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile. Ardito Barletta had graduated a decade before that kind of neoliberalism became fashionable.

"I'm not so smart," Barletta tells everyone, "but I did have five Nobel laureates as teachers." His statement refers to the economists Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger, among others. Ardito Barletta actually joined the government before the 1968 *golpe de Estado*. He stayed on with the first revolutionary junta and eventually gained appointment as minister of economic planning in the cabinet of President Demetrio Lakas. Such was the confidence that Torrijos placed in Minister Ardito Barletta that the general became accustomed to saying, "Economic planning is the compass that sets the route."[5]

Nelson Rockefeller met the planning minister during the former's 1969 Latin American tour for the Nixon administration. Ardito Barletta served as head of the welcoming committee and interacted with Rockefeller during his stay in Panama. He accompanied the general and Rockefeller on a helicopter flyover of the canal. Torrijos wanted to demonstrate how the Canal Zone was constricting the urban expansion of Panama City. Like all other national capitals in the hemisphere, postwar Panama City was attracting unprecedented rural migration.

Subsequently, Minister Ardito Barletta collaborated with the Rockefellers in arranging General Torrijos's trip to New York. There, Barletta and Governor Rockefeller arranged meetings with Robert McNamara, president of the World Bank, and the leaders of Goldman Sachs, City Bank, and Chase Manhattan. General Torrijos addressed the Council of the Americas, an organization representing businessmen with investments in Latin America. The general also visited the United Nations.[6]

Nelson and his brother David Rockefeller had been enthusiastic proponents of President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and of American investments in Latin America. Nelson had been chief of the Office of Inter-American Affairs in the State Department during World War II. At the time, the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey owned Creole Petroleum Corporation of Venezuela, and Nelson served on its board of directors.

His younger brother David Rockefeller went to work at the Chase Manhattan Bank, which, in the postwar era, became one of the largest US financial firms operating in Latin America. It was already investing in Panama even before Torrijos came to power. In the 1950s, Chase Manhattan channeled the local deposits of its Panamanian branch back into the Panamanian economy. It financed the exports of bananas and sugar and underwrote the shipping of imports as well.[7] This American bank

also accepted cows, bulls, and steers as collateral when it lent money to the ranching families of Chiriquí Province for the expansion of the country's beef production.

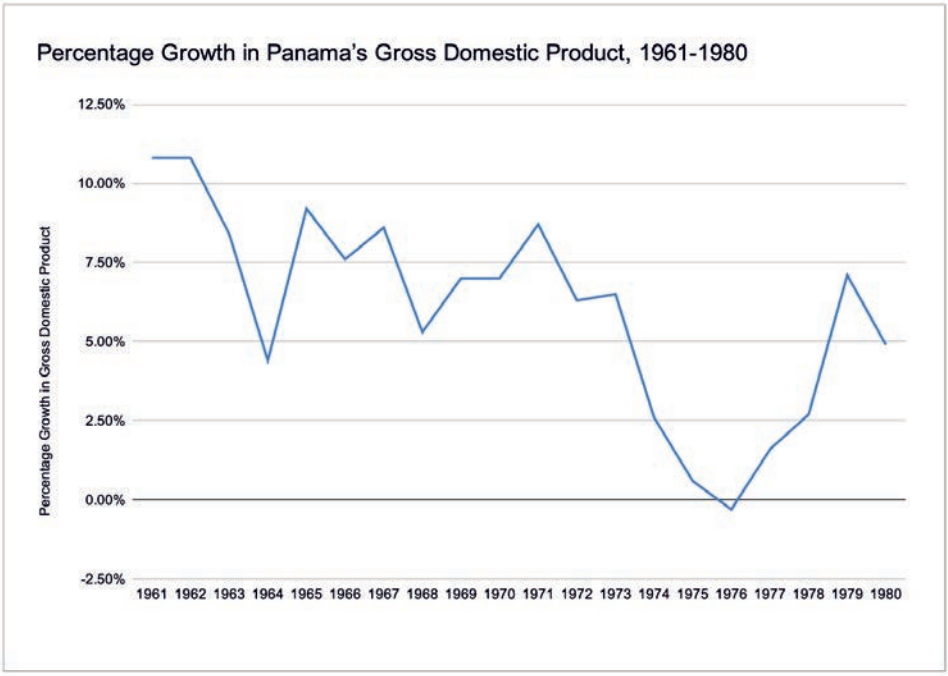
The other attribute Minister Ardito Barletta brought to Panama's economy was his international reputation. He had earned this respect based on his knowledge of classical economics, his fluency in English, and his success in establishing Panama as a banking center. Eventually, Ardito Barletta would also watch over Panama's economy from afar in two international positions, both in Washington, DC. One placed Nicolás Ardito Barletta as a member of the advisory board of the Alliance for Progress (1970–1973).[8] The other employment took him away from Panama as vice president of the World Bank (1976–1980), at the time under the leadership of Robert McNamara.

In his memoir, Minister Barletta cites the results of these banking reforms. Between 1970 and 1982, the number of banks operating in Panama rose from 23 to 125. Bank deposits increased from $800 million to $49 billion.[9] The stimulus could have been even greater. Beginning in 1955, the United States had begun paying the Panamanian government an annuity of nearly $2 million for the canal. Had the proposed Robles–Johnson treaty of 1968 been ratified, that annuity would have amounted to $20 million annually.[10] But in neither country did domestic politics permit ratification.

Even so, American negotiators were later willing to increase the Panama annuity to $20 million without the treaty, which Omar Torrijos rejected out of hand. The sovereign territory of the Panama Canal Zone was not for sale, he said. The general wanted the Americans out, *punto final*.

Gross domestic product (GDP) of the Panamanian economy more than tripled during the thirteen-year rule of Omar Torrijos. According to Ardito Barletta's statistics, the GDP of the country rose from $1.1 billion in 1970 to $3.8 billion in 1982.[11] This banking boom laid the basis for the skyscrapers that dramatically changed the profile of the nation's capital.

British diplomats in Panama confirmed the general outlines of Panama's growth patterns during the rule of Omar Torrijos. "Progress is in practice still evident, largely on the strength of heavy loans either from such organizations as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, or from commercial banks," the embassy reported in 1972. "The panorama from the windows of the [British Embassy] shows new building on every side and the visitor to the city must get the impression of a booming economy."[12] However, neither the banking boom nor the economic growth of the early 1970s shielded Panama from the international oil shocks.



Sources: CIA, Intelligence Memorandum, "Panama's Budget Crunch," May 1971. CIA Reading Room. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001700010042-3.pdf. Accessed 5 Jan 2021; Sharon Phillipps Collazos, Labor and Politics in Panama: The Torrijos Years (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1991), 97.

Figure 7.1. Percentage Growth in Panama's Gross Domestic Product, 1961–1980.

THE RAVAGES OF OPEC

The Arab Oil Boycott of late 1973 dramatically undermined the social impact of these positive economic statistics. Petroleum prices quadrupled, sending all oil importing countries into a tailspin. While the small Central American neighbors of Panama suffered severe dislocation, at least the Panamanians had a cushion with the banking boom. Nevertheless, the economy did not recover materially until the treaties went into effect in 1980 and the United States sent larger subsidies to the government of Panama. Even then, Panama seldom reached the high rates of growth of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Originally the Saudis, Iranians, and Libyans of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) intended to raise oil prices to inflict revenge on the "neo-colonial" powers of Western Europe and North America. Henry Kissinger interpreted it that way too. "We are now living in a never-never land in which tiny, poor, and weak nations can hold

up for ransom some of the industrialized world."[13] He exaggerated the situation. The oil companies merely passed on the high costs of petroleum to consumers. In the United States and Western Europe, the economies eventually absorbed the higher prices and continued to flourish.

The real burden of OPEC price hikes fell on the weak of the world, developing countries such as Panama. True, Mexicans and Venezuelans felt badly for their unfortunate neighbors. Yet the good times were rolling for Latin America's two oil exporters, whose politicians did not want to deprive themselves of the enjoyment thereof.

Having no oil production whatsoever, Panama and its Central American neighbors faced economic stagnation. After 1974, Panama's economy suffered from high energy prices, rising costs of living, expanding international debt, and chronic unemployment.[14] No sooner had OPEC raised international oil prices by 400 percent than Panama experienced its first bout of inflation.

The stagnating economy became President Demetrio Lakas's problem. "The world, including Panama, is going through a period of tough realities that cannot be hidden behind beautiful words," Lakas told members of the National Assembly in 1974. "Price increases have been authorized only when all other avenues were closed." He said that his government had held five plenary meetings in order to discuss all aspects and contingencies of price increases. "I did not do this for personal gain or whim but out of necessity."[15]

Labor especially suffered the consequences of the economic decline. Workers lost jobs, and union membership plummeted nearly to prerevolutionary levels.

The Torrijos government still retained the loyalty of organized workers, except there were fewer of them. The National Confederation of Workers of Panama had a membership of twenty thousand laborers.[16] The OPEC repression eroded all the gains union members had earned under the favorable labor laws of Omar Torrijos.

The weakening of trade unionism positively emboldened the employers—at least those who survived the downturn. The Chamber of Commerce focused its opposition on the 1972 Labor Law. Even General Torrijos had to admit that the economic decline had brought suffering to private businesses in Panama. "I am not saying that the [Labor] Code will be changed. We'll see," he said. "What is true is that more than 300 small businesses have gone broke. I've seen too many refreshment stands, small restaurants and little shops, where the owners have had to give up their dreams of being businessmen."[17]

Employers now recovered some control over workers they had lost to the Labor Law of 1972. Workers abandoned labor unions by the scores.

As chief of the government, Torrijos had to institute some countermeasures in 1976. He backed new legislation, the Law of 95, which ended many legal protections for organized workers.

It also fell to President Lakas to talk to peasant communities about the problems of rising prices. "During the next two years, we will have to tighten our belts in order to come out ahead," he warned rural workers. "Consequently, the peasant sector should not expect concrete high wages or manna to fall from heaven, because there will be none."[18]

In 1975, Panama registered a growth rate of just 2 percent and an inflation rate of 9 percent, the latter a reflection of US inflation at the time. Even the Panama Canal Company was experiencing financial difficulties. International recession had reduced traffic by four ships per day and toll receipts dropped by 10 percent over the previous year.[19]

Torrijos was fully aware of the financial problems of the poor. He once confronted the public official in charge of raising electricity bills to match rising production costs. This bureaucrat argued that the government could not afford to reduce rates to householders without running up the national debt. "Yes, Edwin," the chief of the Panamanian Revolution responded, "you are right. You are absolutely right. But the people need relief. Lower the electricity rates, damn it."[20]

The unemployment funding that had provided relief payments to out-of-work men and women ran out of cash in March 1977. A group of unemployed women came to the office of the president of the republic. "I don't mean to deceive you," Demetrio Lakas told them. "The emergency plan has ended. I am trying to see where we are going to get more funds for it."[21]

Two months later, three hundred unemployed workers gathered at the Presidential Palace. Women in the crowd could not understand why they were dismissed from the unemployment program. Government officials tried to mollify them. The women wanted them to relay a message to the general. "Torrijos: If your children are hungry, who is going to defend the canal?"[22]

From the supply side of the economy, employers and entrepreneurs resented the government's public spending because they had to pay higher taxes to fund it. President Lakas, himself a businessman, regularly met with members of the entrepreneurial community. Yet, at his February 1977 meeting with Panama's Chamber of Commerce, President Lakas got an earful of criticism. "We have offered our sincere cooperation and support, but we have encountered obstacles and also feel left out," one member of the Chamber complained.[23]

Even the general had his limits. Student riots in late September 1976 tested those perimeters. "When it came, the change was abrupt," report-

ed the British Embassy. "Without intermediate recourse to the hoses of the fire brigade, the [National Guard] went into action with tear gas, rifle butts and truncheons. Numbers of students were injured, and some [were] held briefly in prison."[24] His credibility on the line, General Torrijos blamed the unrest on the failure of the United States to advance treaty negotiations. In the time of inflationary pressures, blaming the foreigner proved irresistible.

So it was in November that General Torrijos asked citizens to be patient. He organized a meeting with the residents of Curundú at Panama City's sports stadium. The high command of the National Guard was present. Education minister Arístides Royo and labor minister Adolfo Ahumada also spoke.

Finally, Torrijos took over the microphone. He explained to the audience about the new Saudi labor recruitment program, to which Panamanians could apply for five hundred jobs in Saudi Arabia, an OPEC member. Then he quickly aroused the nationalistic resentments of all Panamanians. He mentioned the problems that Curundú residents were having with the Zonians and with the Canal Zone Police. "They are the final pages of a shameful history," he told the audience, "and because of this, they seek to suspend the [treaty] negotiations with the mere pretext that we are provoking them and that we constitute a threat to the canal's security."

"I know how you feel," the general continued, "when they [use] trained dogs, with a special sense of smell, to hunt down Curundu [*sic*] inhabitants [laughter]; how humiliated you must feel. This humiliation is felt by us, the high-ranking government leaders and the National Guard leaders."[25] Nationalism: the small country's antidote for confronting the world dominated by the great powers.

In December 1977, the agriculture minister, Rubén Darío Paredes, announced a hiring measure committing the government to recruit 1,000 workers weekly. The pay would be $200 per month guaranteed for a sixty-day period.[26] Five months later, the government initiated a second emergency employment plan. The first had paid out $8.4 million to some 25,000 unemployed workers. The second plan raised the allocation to $16 million.[27]

One can visualize a relieved Demetrio Lakas turning over the presidency to his successor on October 11, 1978. He had had to deal with problems of economic stagnation and unemployment during the previous four years. The chief of the Panamanian Revolution appointed Arístides Royo as the new president, perhaps because as education minister, Royo had already experienced students' and teachers' strikes. In fact, unemployment and economic stagnation continued for the next two years until the new canal accords were concluded.

Finally, the economy began to turn around as US reparation began to arrive after the signing of the Torrijos–Carter Treaties. "In 1980, Panama received over $76 million from Canal operations," British diplomats reported. "It was a reasonably good year for the economy. By the end of 1980, 107 different banks had opened offices in Panama."[28]

THE BANANA WARS

Omar Torrijos tried to be someone who could turn adversity into an advantage. Shortly after the New Year of 1974, just as oil prices were rising rapidly, Omar read an article on bananas produced in Panama. The United Brands company was bragging that its Chiquita banana "is the only product that in 20 years had not risen in price." The general's mind immediately compared low-priced bananas to hikes in oil prices. Why not raise the export tax on bananas to boost the government's social spending?[29]

For such a tactic to be effective, the smaller banana-producing countries of Latin America had to band together. If not, the monopoly corporations from the United States would continue to play off one small banana-producing country against another.

Since his days as the Chiriquí zone commander dealing with banana workers, Omar Torrijos had been saying "For the person who works them, bananas enslave, impoverish, and stupefy. For the people in charge of production, transport, and sales, bananas make them immensely wealthy."[30]

The idea of a banana producers' cartel had been around for a while. José "Pepe" Figueres, the legendary Costa Rica politician and leader of that nation's 1948 democratic revolution, had been one of its original intellectual architects. Early in 1973, President Figueres traveled to Panama to confer with Torrijos. They discussed the coming meeting of the UN Security Council, but Figueres also wished to talk about the Guayaquil (Ecuador) Declaration.

That document aimed to bring together all the producer nations to maintain a consistent level of international prices for bananas. The Guayaquil Declaration expressed the need to establish an international banana agreement like the one that already existed for coffee.

General Torrijos told President Figueres that Panama would be eager to sign on to such an agreement. The chief of the Panamanian Revolution also agreed with the Costa Ricans that plantation workers would be better off organizing unions to obtain higher wages for their labors.[31]

A multinational banana agreement would serve several purposes for Panama's strongman. Therefore, he sought to bring all five Central American nations as well as Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador into a cartel similar to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. It would fulfill Omar's promise to workers that they deserved wages and

benefits that guaranteed economic security for their families. Finally, the general wished to raise the international profile of his country while he was demanding that Washington transfer the interoceanic canal to his people.

To these ends, Torrijos invited the president of Honduras, General Oswaldo López Arrellano, to the resort island of Contadora in the Gulf of Panama. With both their nations beset by high gas prices, they concluded that their only choice would be to raise the taxes on their countries' primary export product. Bananas accounted for slightly more than half of the total foreign exchange earnings of both Panama and Honduras but less than 10 percent of government revenues.[32]

Torrijos had enough advantages, he thought, to make up for the difficulties of confronting the banana companies. He had charm. He traveled from country to country with ease. He had the resources of the Panamanian government, over which he presided, and the Panamanian National Guard, which he commanded. Helicopters and planes stood by for the chief's use. Unlike Costa Rican civilian leaders, General Torrijos could speak "soldier to soldier" to all the other colonels and generals who served as Central American presidents.

He encouraged the governments of Costa Rica and Honduras to undertake any measures possible to confront the dominant United Fruit Company. Torrijos had help from his minister of commerce and industries, Fernando Manfredo.[33]

No sooner did Omar begin this quest than he encountered death threats. They began in May 1974 when the general attended the presidential inauguration of Daniel Oduber of Costa Rica. The "Ticos" welcomed the popular strongman even though Torrijos had overturned his own country's voting procedures. After all, the chief proved himself a moderate ruler and a good neighbor.

During the dictator's visit, the Costa Rican Civil Guard in San José arrested three Panamanians and one US citizen. The government charged the men with plotting an assassination attempt on the life of General Torrijos and extradited all four to Panamanian custody.[34]

The Panamanian ambassador in Costa Rica accused American fruit companies of hiring "highly trained" assassins to kill General Torrijos by shooting down his helicopter. The banana companies were also suspected of attempting to overthrow the governments of Honduras and Costa Rica over the export tax controversy. Panama's ambassador called this "the banana war."[35]

"We must defend ourselves," Panama's *La Crítica* newspaper quoted Torrijos as saying. "He who devotes his life to redressing social injustices must know that he is not going to die in bed of old age. He knows that he

will die violently because he leads a violent life. My only concern is that on the day it happens someone will take up the flag, kiss it and carry it forward."[36]

Meanwhile, an American representative of Standard Fruit denied the accusation that his banana corporation wanted to kill Panama's strongman. He requested documentary proof.[37]

Panamanian investigators released a report several months later. They concluded that "the plot to assassinate Torrijos had been financed by shipping companies and that talks in this regard had been held in New York and London." The killers were intending to shoot down the general's helicopter on the way to and from his Río Hato airfield "without leaving any clues, thus making the attack appear an accident." The investigators also reported that the Standard Fruit Company had conspired with managers of the United Fruit Company "to overthrow the governments of Honduras and Costa Rica."[38]

General Somoza of Nicaragua proved to be an uncertain ally throughout this Banana War, and he wielded influence over his neighbors. The Central American nations already had their own common market organization, from which Panama had been excluded. When Somoza hosted the Central American heads of state in Nicaragua, he did not ask General Torrijos to come. Moreover, the dictators of Honduras and El Salvador found it difficult to agree on anything. Each country harbored bitterness toward the other due to their 1969 Soccer War.[39]

Three countries—Costa Rica, Panama, and Honduras—agreed to raise export taxes simultaneously to $1.00 on each twenty-kilo box of bananas. The tax hike was to begin on July 1, 1974. The American companies, using different names for different countries but all connected to United Fruit, acted in unison. They threatened to boycott the three countries and to stop loading their bananas on the companies' ships.

United Fruit and United Brands reacted swiftly to exploit Central American disunity. They halted exports of bananas—but only from Panama, Costa Rica, and Honduras. The companies continued shipping bananas from Guatemala and Nicaragua.

"When the multinational banana companies suspended their production in Costa Rica and Honduras, attempting to break the movement's resistance, Torrijos asked me to go to those countries to witness the situation," Fernando Manfredo told a Spanish journalist. Manfredo was serving as Panama's minister of commerce at the time. Honduran workers "were hungry but they never gave up. They had set up people's kitchens where they cooked meat stew and then distributed it among workers and families."

Minister Manfredo said that Torrijos ordered him to travel to Hon-

duras and Costa Rica to distribute Panamanian funds directly to the banana unions as compensation for the workers' resistance to the US companies. "We can't allow these workers to make such huge sacrifices just because of their solidarity with Panama," the chief told Manfredo.[40]

Controversy between the government of Costa Rica and the United Brands of Boston broke out over the export tax hike to $1.00 per box beginning in July 1974. The new president, Daniel Oduber, placed the net worth of his country's American banana company at $10–20 million. He had a talk in San José with Eli Black, the manager of United Fruit. Oduber then discussed the matter with General Torrijos.[41]

Colombia's president Alfonso López Michelsen lent his backing to Panama and Costa Rica. "In facing up to the occasional abuses by the transnational companies," López said, "all countries, both large and small, must act together." Torrijos responded with gratitude for the Colombian support. "Panama lives within the community of Latin America," he said, "but it sleeps with its neighbors, Costa Rica and Colombia."[42]

Threats of assassination and boycotts offered Omar Torrijos a powerful opportunity to rally the nation behind him. Torrijos spoke to union members working for the Chiriquí Land Company, the United Brands subsidiary in the provincial capital of David. He said, "I am often asked where I get the strength to face all the country's problems because the attitudes of the comrades in the National Guard who have identified with the comrade workers are precisely the fuel which enables me to continue struggling."

The chief accused the banana company of wanting "to break this country which has gone far in the struggle, so far that we have become a symbol of this struggle for the various [labor] unions of the banana producing countries."[43]

In September 1974, however, Omar Torrijos intimated that Panama was winning its Banana War. "Crises serve to make people smaller or taller," he said. "In our case we have paid a high social price, but the Panamanian people grew to giant-size proportions. The struggle for full sovereignty in all our territory, including the Canal Zone, is permanent, and in that struggle we will take no backward step."[44]

However, the campaign against United Fruit was going poorly in Central America. The dictators had a meeting with Torrijos in El Salvador. Both the host Colonel Molina and Guatemala's General Kjell Laugerud García objected to Panama's recent recognition of the Cuban Revolution. Both Central American leaders refused to contemplate recognizing Fidel Castro.[45] Guatemala's military officers still had vivid memories of Castro's support for the 1960s guerrilla uprisings in their country.

As of 1975, nevertheless, five countries had joined the Union of Ba-

nana Exporting Countries, known by its Spanish acronym UPEB. They were Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama. It is noteworthy that Nicaragua had not joined, nor had El Salvador.

Representatives of UPEB member states met in Panama City for two days of discussions. Nicaragua sent an observer as did the Dominican Republic. The group issued a statement promising "to continue the struggle for fairer participation in the sale of bananas and greater participation in the establishment of banana policies."[46] The host of the first UPEB meeting, Omar Torrijos, wanted Ecuador to unite with this regional banana cartel in the making.[47] Ecuadorian participation could bring Latin America's biggest exporter of bananas into the UPEB.

During all this, the Honduran Army rose up and deposed the president who had cooperated with Torrijos in establishing the Union of Banana Exporters. Who instigated the coup? Somoza? United Fruit? Conspirators led by an army colonel overthrew General López. Torrijos bowed to the inevitable. Panama's strongman announced that he expected to have good relations with Honduras's new president.[48]

Some Panamanian news editors speculated that the banana companies were colluding to divide the countries of the UPEB. The editor of the left-leaning *El Panamá América* wrote that the companies spread "lies and half-truths so as to make [Torrijos] appear before the governments of our sister nations as a leader who tries to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries." The American companies would rather play one country off against another to extract greater profits, the editor suggested.[49]

Ecuador, the biggest producer, had not yet joined the UPEB. Nor did the Ecuadorian government charge the export tax on bananas. Omar Torrijos decided in May 1975 to take his Air Force Electra on a two-day journey to Guayaquil to speak with General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara, the Ecuadorian president.[50]

General Rodríguez hosted his visitor at the very site of the famous 1822 Guayaquil meeting between South America's liberators, Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín, which had been acrimonious. For the good of the struggle, Argentina's San Martín turned over his entire army to the Venezuelan-born Bolívar. The latter then went on to defeat the last Spanish forces in Peru and Bolivia.

The modern meeting came off rather more cordially. The lengthy reception for the Panamanians included much liquor and good food. The hosts kept toasting Omar Torrijos with drink after drink. When the Ecuadorian brought out a joint communiqué for a formal signing, Minister of Commerce Manfredo had to inform his boss that Panama was agreeing to (1) grant free passage of Ecuadorian warships through the Panama Canal, and (2) charge Ecuadorian merchant vessels reduced transit fees.

There was nothing in the agreement about the Ecuadorians joining the banana exporters' union.

"Now I understand why they plied me with liquor up to my ears," Torrijos exclaimed. "They wanted to get me drunk so that I would sign that nonsense. Let's forget about Ecuador!"[51]

By July 1975, Omar was nevertheless ready to declare victory in the Banana Wars. The general spoke to the plantation workers of Volcán in Chiriquí Province. "At the present time, the exploitation of bananas holds no hope for you; no hope at all," Torrijos told them. "There you vegetate, grow old, get sick and come out dragging in worse misery than when you started work there."

"The new scheme," he continued, "will offer you hope of housing developments that will truly constitute housing, potable water, schools for the children, good roads and all those additional things that we can imagine." The chief of the Panamanian Revolution promised that soon "a high-level commission" will begin planning for these improvements.[52]

In another meeting with plantation workers, General Torrijos, explained how the Non-Aligned Movement contributed to his victory in the Banana War. "Let me explain to you what the Third World means," Torrijos began. He said that a group of eighty countries were organizing to defend their rights because they were being exploited by the centers of economic and political power. These countries contain riches in raw materials, as Panama had bananas.

The general told the audience that the Non-Aligned Movement "has had a tremendous impact on world opinion." The Third World countries were organizing to take their case to the United Nations.[53]

Then in December 1975 came the news. The government of the Republic of Panama would take over the ownership of the banana plantations belonging to United Brands. The company would continue producing bananas at these properties as a renter for five years. During the lease, the American managers would train Panamanians in "the knowhow to manage all operations." The company will pay Panama $1 million per year during the lease period, plus taxes and fees.[54] Panama now possessed its own banana industry.

The conclusion of Panama's Banana War permitted General Torrijos to declare victory. The multinational companies paid just prices to the independent growers, turned over their banana groves to the government, and converted themselves into tenants of government-owned plantations. As ex-minister Manfredo later reflected, "The banana war must be considered as prologue to national liberation." By that, he meant the canal treaty he hoped to conclude soon with the United States.[55]

In the Banana War, Omar Torrijos practiced the best generalship

one can imagine—winning a decisive victory without violence. Even in triumph, he allowed this multinational to make money transporting and marketing Chiquita bananas worldwide. Apparently, the banana arrangement in Panama worked to the satisfaction of the American corporation. The chairman of United Brands in 1978 testified in favor of the canal treaties in Senate hearings.[56] Omar's reputation as a regional leader rose both at home and abroad.

Yet completion of the larger ambitions eluded the commander of the Panamanian National Guard. All his Central American partners succumbed to the pressure of the American banana corporations by rolling back their export taxes from $1.00 to $0.50 or $0.25 per box.[57] The Union of Banana Exporting Countries never amounted to as much as Torrijos had intended, especially since Ecuador refused to join.

Nor did the so-called Banana War soothe the national rivalries that plagued Central America. Somoza of Nicaragua and Laugerud of Guatemala made separate agreements with the American banana companies, and nothing seemed to bring the Salvadorans together with the Hondurans.

None of Torrijos's fellow military dictators in the region warmed to his ruling philosophy of democratic socialism, which they considered nothing other than a slippery slide into Castro communism. After an earthquake damaged towns and cities in Guatemala, Torrijos immediately flew in to offer General Laugerud financial donations to thousands of its victims. Yet that gesture did not prevent the Guatemalan dictator from breaking diplomat relations with Panama after Torrijos announced that he could not support Guatemala's territorial claim to the British colony of Belize. Many more English-speaking West Indians resided there than did Spanish-speaking Guatemalans, Torrijos reasoned.[58]

No country ruled by a military dictator acted as Torrijos's constant ally in Central American affairs—not even El Salvador, where Torrijos had attended the military academy that produced its military leaders. He could only count on the civilian presidents of democratic Costa Rica, Colombia, and Venezuela—and even that cooperation remained conditional.

General Somoza of Nicaragua seemed to block Torrijos's diplomacy at every turn during the Banana War. However, a few years hence, an armed rebellion in Nicaragua would offer Omar Torrijos an opportunity for revenge.

In sum, the Arab Oil Boycott complicated Omar Torrijos's plan for quick passage from the Banana War to Latin American unity to the Non-Aligned Movement of the Global South. At journey's end lay the US withdrawal from the Canal Zone. All these preconditions ended with

muddled results. Nevertheless, he declared victories along the way and returned to pursue the ultimate objective: to cajole Washington's politicians into renegotiating the Panama Canal Treaty. For that, he needed the help of none other than Fidel Castro.

CHAPTER 8

OMAR, FIDEL, AND TITO

"Each hour that goes by without lifting the economic sanctions on Cuba constitutes sixty minutes of hemispheric shame."[1] Thus spoke Omar Torrijos in his address to the United Nations Security Council during its 1973 meeting in Panama.

He was not referring only to the punitive policies of the United States toward the Cuban people, such as the boycott of diplomatic and trade relations between Cuba and North America. The chief of the Panamanian Revolution was also referencing the cowardice of Latin American countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) that boycotted Cuba in 1962 at the insistence of Washington.[2] Only Mexico refused to go along with ostracizing Fidel Castro.

Omar sought to bring revolutionary Cuba back into concert with the Latin American nations for several reasons. First, such a move would ratify the diversity of ideological regimes in the Third World, including his own "revolution" in Panama. Most important, the reentry of Cuba would uphold the founding principles of two world organizations that Torrijos counted on to assist him in redressing his own "big power" problem. They were the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, the latter of which Cuba had been a charter member since its creation in 1961.[3]

If power mattered more than principles in world affairs, then Omar Torrijos despaired of ever shaking off the colonialism that Panama had endured since the nation's foundation in 1903.

Nonetheless, the Republic of Panama existed in the world of realpolitik, and Omar Torrijos could do nothing bold without international

support. Two Latin American governments, Salvador Allende's in Chile and General Juan Velasco's in Peru, had already reestablished relations with Fidel Castro. Mexico had never broken diplomatic ties to Cuba.[4] Without the cover of these three nations and the Yugoslavia of Marshal Josip Broz Tito, Omar would not have been able to achieve broad international support without triggering the Cold War anticommunism of US foreign policy. Therefore, he had to move deliberately.

PRELIMINARY ACTIONS

An opportunity arose in 1971 for General Torrijos to act as an honest broker between Washington and Havana. Anti-Castro Cuban activists out of Miami had rented two ships of Panamanian ownership. They used the vessels to mount an armed raid on the Cuban coastline and got caught. Castro confiscated the vessels and incarcerated the attackers.

Torrijos sent a professor of international law, the university rector Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt, to negotiate with Fidel Castro for the release of the Panamanian ship and the Miami-based terrorists. After all, Escobar was an ex-member of the Communist Party. He remained in Havana for a month but returned home empty-handed.

Torrijos then sent his chief of intelligence. After just four days of talks with the Cuban leader, Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Noriega explained why the Americans wanted the prisoners extradited and how this would encourage the State Department to start treaty negotiations with Torrijos. For their role in the prisoner release, the United States would owe the Panamanians, Noriega argued.

Finally, Fidel threw up his hands. "Listen, if you really want these pieces of shit, take them," the Cuban leader said. "Tell Torrijos that he can have them." Noriega returned home with the prisoners and the ships. Thereafter, the CIA came to Torrijos and Noriega to help settle other issues between the United States and the only other nation in the Western Hemisphere it did not recognize. As Noriega said later, "Fidel never told me no."[5]

Student radicals, too, influenced Torrijos's policy toward Cuba. Rector Escobar Bethancourt "virtually functions as a Panamanian Ambassador to Cuba," according to the British Embassy. "Under his tutelage the University is increasingly being molded as a nucleus of leftist and nationalistic feelings in Panama[,] and cultural links with Cuba play a key part of these efforts."[6] Ideologically, Escobar may have been close to Cuba. But the relationship also balanced on security issues, which fell under the duties of the G-2, Colonel Noriega.

As another prelude to the renewal of diplomatic relations with Panama, Castro sent a delegation of officials of the National Association of

Small Farmers (ANAP) to Panama. ANAP's director, José Ramírez, also served as a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. He and his entourage visited the banana-growing regions at the invitation of Panama's National Confederation of Peasant Settlements.[7]

Most of all, Panama had begun secret trade with Cuba in US automobile spare parts and other commodities that violated the OAS embargo. Omar Torrijos sponsored students and labor leaders in exchange visits with their Cuban counterparts.[8] Fidel spoke to Panamanian students in Havana.

In return, students from Cuban universities came to Panama in 1973 to attend a conference held at the University of Panama commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Castro's attack on the Moncada Barracks, the event that began the revolution. Torrijos hosted a breakfast for the Cuban students at his military headquarters at Fuerte Cimarrón. Torrijos talked principally about Cuba's assistance to Panamanian peasants. He thanked his guests for sending a team of agronomists to Panama.

Torrijos told them, "I had some ideas about agricultural reforms, but I had doubts about putting them into action." After talking with the Cuban technicians, he was able to confirm those ideas. He also spoke about his difficulties dealing with Nixon's treaty negotiators, who "treated the [Panamanians] like the Viet Cong." However, he took solace in Panama's successes at the United Nations, where the "yanquis" had just vetoed a major vote.[9]

In 1974, Panama's foreign minister, Juan Antonio Tack, outlined the general principles for the formal exchange of ambassadors with Cuba. These included: (1) the freedom for each country to choose its ideology of governance; (2) respect for ideological pluralism; (3) the free determination of peoples; and (4) international cooperation to "permit Latin American countries to develop with justice and dignity."[10]

Moreover, Omar wished to create the illusion that the Panamanian people were demanding their leaders to befriend Cuba. President Demetrio Lakas convened a meeting of high-level public servants. All cabinet ministers, agency managers, and staff officers of the National Guard attended. Everyone at the Palace of the Swans had a chance to speak about the proposal to recognize the Cuban government. The meeting lasted for two and a half hours and resulted in unanimous backing for the renewal of diplomatic and economic relations.[11]

However, Foreign Minister Tack held strong leftist and anti-imperialist views. To the Americans and to moderate Latin American leaders, Torrijos did not want to identify himself as an ideological fellow traveler of Fidel Castro. Therefore, his claim to "ideological diversity" dictated that he make a clear statement. Instead of sending the doctrinaire foreign

minister to head the Panamanian delegation to Cuba, he assigned the job to the economist with a degree from the University of Chicago.

THE ARDITO BARLETTA DELEGATION

Following a cabinet meeting in July 1974, Omar Torrijos approached the minister of economic planning, Nicolás Ardito Barletta. "Nicki," the general said, "I know you don't believe in this, but I would appreciate it if you'd help me by leading a mission in Cuba to formalize the reopening of diplomatic relations. Take a group of businessmen with you."[12]

"Here was a person whom no one would accuse of being a man of the left," Arístides Royo reminisces. "Nicolás, a conservative representative in Panama with a lot of social sense," Royo says. "And [Torrijos] sent people like Eduardo Morgan Jr. and other businessmen. But that was the message: Cuba is a sister nation, but it is not the image other [Latin] Americans want to see when they look in the mirror."[13] Torrijos turned to Ardito Barletta because, as he said, "I don't want people to believe that we are buying in to Fidel."[14]

Minister Ardito Barletta led a delegation of thirty Panamanian public officials and television and print reporters. Many delegates represented the private sector in Panama.[15] Two people in the entourage were ex-members of the Communist Party, but Torrijos jokingly warned them not to make public statements about their ideological preferences. "Do not talk or else I will not let you come back," he said to Adolfo Ahumada and Rómulo Escolar Bethancourt.[16]

"Neither right nor left, Panama!" the chief reminded the delegates before they departed.

On arriving in Havana, Ardito Barletta conveyed warm greetings from the chief of the Panamanian Revolution Omar Torrijos and from President Demetrio Lakas. "We are convinced that without [resolve] we will not find the path to a common well-being," the economic planning minister said.[17]

Ardito Barletta chose his opening speech to highlight the differences between the two countries. He expressed Panama's "desire to restore the traditional bonds of friendship and exchange that have existed between us, strengthening those we have in common and respecting our differences which characterize us as independent peoples."

"Panama cannot forget the strong support that Cuba offered at an important moment in its struggle for the consolidation of its national territory when the UN Security Council meeting was held in Panama in March 1973."

"Our countries have had informal contacts during the past two years . . . demonstrating mutual respect for our systems of government and our

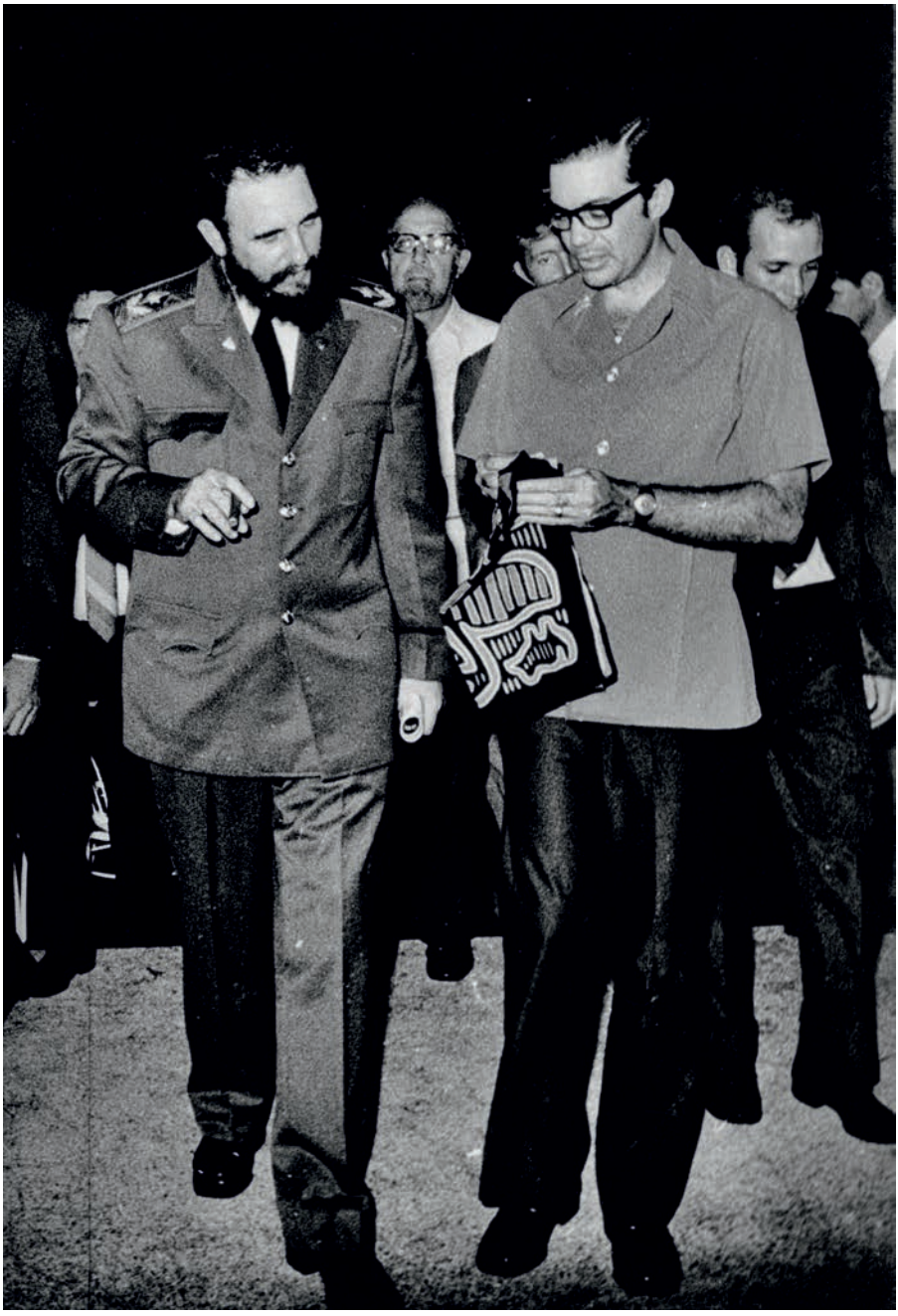


Figure 8.1. Fidel Castro (left) greets Nicolás Ardito Barletta, the pro-private-enterprise economist who led the Panamanian delegation that renewed diplomatic relations with Cuba. General Torrijos chose Ardito Barletta for this mission to demonstrate that Panama was not moving toward radical socialism. Photograph courtesy of Nicolás Ardito Barletta.

traditions," the economics minister concluded.[18] The one thing Ardito Barletta did not mention even once—the 1959 Cuban armed invasion.

The Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós met with the entire Panamanian delegation at the Palace of the Revolution. They had a full discussion of the mutual interests between the two countries. The Panamanian delegation toured a site in which "micro-brigades" of volunteer workers were constructing thousands of dwellings. Hundreds of Cubans turned out to welcome the Panamanians, shouting *vivas* for Panama and for General Torrijos. President Dorticós and his ministers escorted the guests on tours of schools, production centers, and the famous beaches at Varadero.[19]

Castro stood aloof from the official events and signing of documents that formally reestablished diplomatic relations between Cuba and Panama. He may have been disappointed that Omar Torrijos did not come, even though he understood the Panamanian chief's reasons. Fidel did show up at a reception one evening at the guesthouse. He turned to the Panamanians and gave them this advice: "Do not fight with the gringos." Perhaps to illustrate, Fidel took a group of Panamanians into the kitchen. "He showed us the refrigerator and said with disdain 'It's Polish. Polish! I cannot fix my [American-made] Frigidaire because of the embargo,'" recounts Eduardo Morgan Jr. of the Panamanian delegation.[20]

Before boarding the plane for home, Nicolás Ardito Barletta said, "We are profoundly impressed and very grateful for the expressions of love and courtesies accorded us by the Cuban people."[21] Then and there, the two countries renewed diplomatic contact, respected each others' differences, and started a thaw. Eleven months later, at its meeting in San José, Costa Rica, the OAS finally ended its sanctions on the Cuban government of Fidel Castro.[22] The US-induced OAS boycott of Cuba had lasted for thirteen years. The OAS reversal represented the hemispheric solidarity that Omar Torrijos had been seeking. He himself was now free to meet Fidel Castro in person without raising hackles in Washington, DC.

TORRIJOS IN CUBA

Finally, in January 1976, the moment had come for the Panamanian socialist revolutionary to meet the Cuban communist revolutionary. State television carried the arrival of General Omar Torrijos live for all Cubans to see. A crowd of onlookers waited with small Cuban and Panamanian flags in hand. A Panamanian folkloric music and dance group, obviously flown in beforehand, performed for the waiting crowd.

Torrijos's plane landed at the José Martí Airport and he was received according to protocol befitting a visiting head of state. Prime Minister Fidel Castro and President Osvaldo Dorticós approached the plane. Fidel

was wearing battle fatigues with his insignia as commander in chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. The first passenger to appear at the door of the plane was Omar Torrijos also in his fatigues as commander of the Panamanian National Guard. He had a canteen on his belt but not the customary pistol. "To the house of a friend, one does not bear arms," the general told his aide-de-camp, Sergeant Chuchú Martínez.[23]

He stepped out onto the exit ladder and paused as the crowd below applauded. Torrijos waved and descended, embracing Castro and then President Dorticós on the tarmac. The three dignitaries turned around and faced the crowd.

An army band played the national anthems of Cuba and Panama, Fidel and Omar saluted along with the uniformed military personnel in the crowd. A Cuban artillery unit fired off a twenty-one-gun salute, one salvo at a time. The ceremony constituted an exact replica of the one that had honored the arrival of the Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev two years beforehand—minus the battle fatigues and the Panamanian dance troop.[24] The second most renowned Latin American anti-imperialist had come to visit the first.

In the next few days, Fidel escorted Omar to a model breeding farm for milk cows directed by Castro's elder brother, Ramón Castro. After lunch at this facility, Fidel took Omar to a separate room for a private conversation. Affairs of state? No, they discussed growing up in the countryside, Fidel on his father's large estate and Torrijos in the modest home of his schoolteacher parents in an agricultural town.[25]

Another tour took both leaders to a housing project and thence to a clothing factory. The entire group flew together to Santiago de Cuba on the eastern end of the island for a rally at the Moncada Barracks, the site of Fidel and Raúl's first armed attack against Batista's troops on July 26, 1953. The barracks' appearance remained the same as in 1953, including the bullet holes in the walls. Even today, Moncada constitutes the most sacred monument to Fidel's revolution.

Fidel opened the televised ceremony before the seated crowd. "Panama is not the same as Cuba," Fidel proclaimed. "Their struggle is not the same as ours. Torrijos cannot say whatever he wants like me. We fight on our own; they need the solidarity of other countries. Our solidarity towards Panama has to be total, friendly, unconditional and disinterested."[26] The statement suggested that Castro accepted the revolutionary differences between the two countries, just as he had with Chile and Peru beforehand.

"Perhaps you think that I should speak extensively today, but it is the other way," he said. "I must speak briefly because we have come here mainly to express our admiration and love toward the Panamanian peo-

ple, to welcome General Omar Torrijos—and to listen to General Omar Torrijos [applause]."[27]

The distinguished visitor rose to speak before the friendly crowd. "I truly feel moved, quite moved because these people of Santiago and of Cuba are like mine [applause]. This country, by its temperament and temperature is very much ours [laughter] and my emotion is multiplied because I can now tell the 1,610,000 Panamanians that we are not alone in the struggle [applause] and that we have the support of a people [applause] who, in the realm of Latin American dignity, constitute a large number—and these are the Cuban people. [applause]."[28]

Omar continued, "There is no colonialism that lasts a hundred years, nor a people who do not resist it. Negotiation for a new canal treaty with the United States is part of the Panamanian liberation fight; I promise that I will not leave new generations an occupied motherland, because the Panamanian people do not have a vocation for being colonized."[29]

Torrijos returned to Havana, where the entire top echelon of the Cuban government turned out for an award ceremony. President Dorticós presented the chief of the Panamanian Revolution with the medal of the José Martí National Order. The minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, Raúl Castro, attended as did the politburo of the Cuban Communist Party, the Central Committee, the heads of the mass organizations, and the Panamanian delegates. Dorticós said that he was awarding this gold medal "in recognition of Torrijos's firm conduct based on true national independence and militant incorporation in the world struggle against imperialism and neocolonialism."[30]

On the fourth day, more tours keep the Panamanians busy. Fidel and his vice prime minister, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, guided the Panamanians on tours of a sugar mill, a collective farm, and the teaching facility of the Sugar Institute. In the visitors' book of the latter, Omar Torrijos wrote, "Physically capable and mentally prepared youths are formed here."

In the evening of the last day, Fidel accompanied the delegation to a sports stadium in Camagüey to watch the elimination bouts of the national boxing championships. A crowd of several hundred met their plane at the airport. "Fidel! Torrijos! Ustedes son hijos de América," they chanted, "you are sons of America." When Castro and Torrijos entered the sports stadium, the audience stood for prolonged applause. The Olympic heavyweight champion Teófilo Stevenson sat with General Torrijos and Prime Minister Castro and explained the finer points of boxing.[31]

More touring occurred during the fourth day of the visit. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, head of the Cuban Communist Party, and Manuel Piñeiro, Cuba's spy chief, escorted the Panamanians to the Lenin Vocational School. "You will be the leaders of the new social structure that

Cuba proudly shows the world," he told the students.[32] Before returning to the airport for the flight home, General Torrijos held a press conference. He said, "What impressed me the most, was seeing an entire people believe in one leader and one cause. When an entire people decide to believe in one cause, they obtain their objectives."

A journalist asked if Panama would accept volunteers from other countries in its struggle to reclaim the Canal Zone. Mindful of the type of armed intervention that Cuban "volunteers" were carrying out in Angola at the time, Torrijos displayed his best diplomacy. "Blows are struck," he said. "They are not announced [ahead of time]. The Panamanian people have so much desire to liberate themselves that I think there would not be enough room for others."

Panama's broadcast and print journalists gushed over the gracious reception that the general had received from the Castro regime. Speeches and public documents appeared in newspapers and were read on the radio. The Cuban Embassy in Panama City provided television footage of the important events for local Panamanian channels.

Since Omar's visit to Cuba in 1976, the two leaders had respected each other's anticolonialist foreign policies. They cooperated, for the most part, in the diplomacy of the Non-Aligned Movement. Torrijos enjoyed consistently lavish praise in Cuban propaganda networks. Torrijos returned the favor by speaking positively of Fidel's revolution and its impact on international affairs.[33] Not a word of criticism did either leader utter publicly about the other's revolution, and they hid their differences. Omar and Fidel remained friends but not coreligionists.

MARSHAL TITO IN PANAMA

Josip Broz Tito greatly boosted the international status of the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution by visiting his small nation in March 1976. Treaty talks had come to a standstill as Americans engaged in the long ordeal of electing a president of the United States. Marshal Tito was on an abbreviated tour of Latin America. He stopped in Panama between visits with the two oil-exporting powerhouses, Mexico and Venezuela. All three nations had good relations with each other, and Presidents Luís Echeverría and Carlos Andrés Pérez also supported Panama in the treaty talks.

Panamanians now knew enough about Marshal Tito to have a good opinion of him. His struggles against the Nazis and against Stalin made the Yugoslav president an idol of national independence, and Panama's joining the Non-Aligned Movement proved popular. In addition, most Panamanians believed that the Yugoslav construction of the dam on the Bayano River would lower electricity bills and boost the lagging economy.

During his airport reception presided over by President Lakas, the president of Yugoslavia did not disappoint. "Your people's wish to be owners of their own land can rely in the future on the full support of Yugoslavia," Tito said. "We are convinced that a fair solution to the Panama Canal problem is of interest both to the parties involved and to peace and international understanding. That is why we hope that the negotiations between the Panamanian Government and the United States will be accelerated and will end successfully with the signing of a new and just treaty."[34]

Panama's news reporters were impressed with the large, friendly crowds that turned out to cheer for Marshal Tito as his motorcade traveled from the airport to the InterContinental Hotel downtown. *La Crítica* expressed amazement at the "vibrant and jubilant expression of thousands of men and women" who gathered along the route to cheer for "the leader of the Third World."[35] Torrijos and Tito held a long talk in the latter's hotel suite, while Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos and Jovanca Broz visited a children's hospital nearby.[36]

As soon as the Yugoslav president arrived to a robust turnout of Panamanian spectators, the American workers in the Canal Zone began an unprecedented slowdown of canal operations. The Panama Canal had become famous for its round-the-clock efficiency without any stoppages since 1920. That was, until Tito's visit!

Privileged American workers in the Canal Zone had halted traffic until the Panama Canal governor rescinded austerity plans to freeze salaries and eliminate their "tropical differentials." Panamanian employees on the canal neither joined the strike nor benefited from the salary enhancements eventually awarded to US workers.

The slowdown lasted six days and, as a reporter for *El Panamá América* explained, using a mixed metaphor, it "shook international shipping to its roots."[37] General Torrijos could not have orchestrated for Marshal Tito a better demonstration of the difficulties facing treaty negotiators.

The general had come to the marshal's hotel suite, where Yugoslav officials took notes of their conversation.[38] Torrijos began by saying that he needed Tito's advice on various aspects of Panama's struggle for the return of the Canal Zone. Torrijos asked how he might gain success at this moment in the negotiations with the United States.

"In the present circumstances of the United States having lost a whole set of positions in Southeast Asia and in Angola," President Tito replied, "Panama should not challenge Washington directly or take big steps. It would be good to be flexible," the Yugoslav president continued, "which does not mean that the negotiations cannot be advanced. One should take the pre-election campaign into account in order to avoid worsening the

tense situation over the canal issue." Tito advised the general "to inform the world about Panama's cause. I think that the moral support of public opinion is becoming more and more a factor in international life."

General Torrijos said that he agreed with the Marshal's advice and that "his government had come to the same conclusion. But in Panama it is sometimes hard to tame the wishes of the people, especially of the youth, who want quick and radical solutions."

The Panamanian strongman summarized the state of the negotiations between his country and the United States. There had been good progress in the negotiations throughout the year 1975. Torrijos said that he was "in regular contact with General Brown [George S. Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] who had promised him a solution to the Canal Zone issue after the US election."

But with whom would Torrijos reach that solution? "The most critical issue now is the defense of the Canal," General Torrijos said. The Pentagon wanted to keep three military bases near the canal as permanent American installations. This would mean that US Armed Forces would be able to intervene in the internal affairs of Panama at a moment of its own choosing.

"We Panamanians want the American military to abandon all fourteen of its bases and give sole responsibility for the canal's defense to the National Guard of Panama," Torrijos declared.

Marshal Tito listened as the general continued to explain his predicament. "Panama in one night could destroy the infrastructure of the canal," Torrijos continued, "and the drainage of water from the dam [at Gatun Lake] would mean the incapacitation of the canal for a period of five years." However, the damage to world commerce "would be negative to the Panamanian cause." Torrijos cited the trade in bananas that so many of his neighboring Central American countries sent through the Panama Canal. The damage to these economies would only "benefit the United States and the transnational companies."

"This is a rational supposition," President Tito replied.

General Torrijos then brought up Cuba's military intervention in Angola. He warned against Cuba's expeditionary forces advancing toward South Africa. According to the Yugoslav record of the conversation, Torrijos said that "the armies of all Latin America are very much aware of Cuba's capability to send twelve thousand men of its own military forces to places as far away as Africa. It makes Latin Americans apprehensive about Cuba."[39]

Here Torrijos seemed to be testing Tito's opinion of Fidel Castro, a charter member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Marshal Tito appeared to support the Cuban intervention in Africa. Tito said that Cuba first

aided the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola with military instructors and military schools.

When South African forces advanced on these training sites, Tito stated, the Cubans had to react. Tito asserted that Castro did not want greater intervention or to export his revolution to Africa. However, the Cubans were "ready to offer armed support in case progressive forces are endangered by reactionary forces."

Cuba's successes in Africa, Torrijos responded, incited reactionaries in Latin America to threaten progressive leaders with preemptive coups d'état. Obviously, Torrijos and Tito held different views on Fidel Castro. Though the general never publicly expressed his concerns about Castro's foreign policies, he did mention them privately to Marshal Tito. The Yugoslav leader praised Cuba's use of force in Africa. Neither leader dwelled on their disagreement over the issue.

Their conversation reverted again to the 1976 presidential election in the United States. Marshal Tito speculated favorably on the possible candidacy of Senator Ted Kennedy and stated that "the eventual victory of [Ronald] Reagan would be evil not only for Panama but for the whole world." The Non-Aligned Movement today represented "a force for peace and stability," Tito observed. "It is a factor in the struggle for a new economic and political order in international relations." At that point, the two leaders adjourned their discussions until the following day.

"I would like to have your opinion, Marshal Tito, over another hypothetical situation," the general began the next morning.[40] Let us suppose "that our negotiations would not lead to a satisfactory solution to the problem of the canal, and we Panamanians would have to take action to destroy the canal. I have a list of the US military's full arsenal of arms and its organizational structure for the canal's defense. It would be very easy," Torrijos continued, "for our National Guard to destroy the canal and arm ourselves with US weapons."

Torrijos clarified that he would only take such extreme measures if negotiations were to fail. The final collapse of treaty talks would result in a guerrilla war of liberation, he predicted.

The Yugoslav aide taking notes mentioned that the general's voice became very excited as he described to Tito the spirit and determination of the Panamanians. "We feel a personal repulsion as human beings when we see foreign flags, foreign police, and foreign prisons on the soil of our country—when we have to suffer the arrogant behavior of these colonialists. It is as if a knife stabs us in the heart!"

Marshal Tito responded that he understood such feelings, "but all the possibilities of negotiation and the search for a rational solution have to be exhausted."

"I do not want any war materials," General Torrijos said. "I do count on and would expect moral support if a guerrilla war should break out." The marshal thereupon expounded on the origins of Yugoslavia's guerrilla warfare during World War II. Then he asked General Torrijos how he "imagined" the guerrilla war would proceed.

Torrijos responded, "I was hoping that you, Marshal Tito, would enable us to send a group of my National Guardsmen to Yugoslavia in order to investigate the art of guerrilla struggle right there on the spot."

Tito accepted the proposal. He suggested that Torrijos dispatch fifteen Panamanians to Yugoslavia for six months of guerrilla training. Tito promised to speak to his minister of defense when he returned home. The translator added to the notes that at this point in the discussion, General Torrijos accepted Tito's offer with great satisfaction. "It seems to me that General Torrijos's tensions relaxed a bit," the translator added.

As the discussion ended, Torrijos told Tito of his plan to travel later that year to the Colombo, Sri Lanka, conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. He wanted to fulfill the marshal's suggestion of informing the world about the Panamanian cause. Torrijos said that he did not want to burden anyone, because Panama solves its own problems. "But we would certainly like to have the moral support of the progressive forces in the world."

As Marshal Tito's trip to Panama ended, the two leaders expressed satisfaction that they would see each other again in five months in Columbo. The Yugoslav presidential delegation then departed for Caracas, Venezuela, the last stop of Tito's Latin American tour.

TORRIJOS AND TITO IN SRI LANKA

The Sixth Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement convened in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in August 1976. Panama had officially become a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Torrijos intended to use that affiliation to express his grievances for Washington's delay in treaty talks.

Such a speech would not go over well in the Organization of American States. Too many OAS member states—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, and Guatemala—were under the yoke of hard-line military rulers who identified more with US anticommunism than with the democratic socialists who befriended Torrijos. Therefore, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution chose to take his message to the nonaligned countries of the Third World.

The US State Department, suspicious of nationalism and left-of-center movements, tended to belittle politicians like Torrijos. "In reality," the US ambassador to Panama later wrote dismissively, "the Panamanian leader's trip to the Indian Ocean was a contrived political charade. The

astute General had learned enough of world politics by then to know that the backing of the Nonaligned World plus one dollar would buy him a good cigar."[41] No wonder Torrijos felt comfortable speaking at length with someone who took him seriously. Someone like Marshal Tito.

On the afternoon before his speech to the NAM conferees in Sri Lanka, General Torrijos paid a courtesy call on President Tito on the Yugoslav ship of state. The *Seagull* had anchored in Colombo's harbor. The marshal's aides recorded the conversation verbatim, capturing the friendly banter and warmth that had developed between the two leaders.[42]

Tito: *I see there is no agreement yet between you and the United States.*

Torrijos: *No, in fact we need to wait until the elections finish there. . . . [But I can tell you] not fourteen, not twenty [military] bases are worth anything [for the Americans]. In your country, there were 50 to 60 German Divisions, and they could not win and they had to run away. It is an example. . . . One part of the US government thinks like that but General [Brown], with whom I have personally spoken, told me they are slowly handling these things, and he personally guarantees that it will be sorted out after the election. I asked him to give me this in writing. . . . How many minutes did Indira Gandhi speak today?*

A Yugoslav aide: *Briefly. Around 20 minutes, but she had an important speech. She said that "we [Indians]" are not just some Third World country but that we are part of one United World.*

Tito: To je dobro. *This is good.*

Torrijos: *I believe that this conference will be an important experience.*

Tito: Da, mnogo značajno. *Yes, very important.*

Torrijos: *I did not have any idea what this would be like. A statesman has to come and to see and to learn.*

Tito: *There were fewer of us at the first conference. Just 25 members. But almost all of us were heads of state. There were only a couple of ministers. . . .*

Torrijos: *You were telling me on Brioni Island that [the first conference] was where you met Nehru and Nasser.*

Tito. *In 1956, we passed the Declaration. That was the first declaration on the question of nonalignment.*

Aide: *And when the preparation began for the first Belgrade conference in 1961.*

Tito: *Others joined us, such as Sukarno, Kwame Nkrumah, and Bandaranaike.*

Torrijos: *Is that the husband of Mrs. Bandaranaike?*

Tito: *Yes, Solomon.*[43] *He was one very smart man. After that, the movement*

grew every year. The biggest influx was at the Cairo Conference, [when membership rose] from 25 to 56 states.

Aide: *In Cairo there were 56 states; in Lusaka there were 64 states; and in Algiers, 83 states.*

Torrijos: *How many chiefs of state are here in Colombo?*

Tito: *There will surely be around 40. We do not know the total number yet. . . .*

Torrijos: *I need to say that this is the farthest point for all of us.*

Tito: *We are going far, all of us together. . . .*

Torrijos: *I need to tell you, Mr. President, that the Panamanian nation loves you very much. When you visited our country, the people spontaneously came out into the street. As you know, since we are at the crossroads, our people are used to seeing many things. They go out onto the street very seldom. However, on your visit to Panama, [the crowds] were spontaneous.*

Tito: *It is the same here. Yesterday when we went to the conference, it was raining but there were masses of people. It was crazy. When we returned from the assembly, people were all wet with the rain.*

Torrijos: *That is spontaneity. Yesterday I met Gaddafi. What a personality! He is a strong personality "taken right out of the Kor'an." He was very kind. He received me in his room yesterday. I have to say, [Gaddafi] is knowledgeable about everything. I was there from 10 to 11 in the evening.*

Tito: *He is a religious fanatic. I had many conversations with him, but recently he got mad at me. Because, right before I left for this conference, even though we had a lot of work, he summoned me to come and visit him in Libya. But I was not able to go.*

Torrijos: *Do not blame him for that. He had probably seen this in the Kor'an.*

Tito: *When I see him, I will tell him that.*

Torrijos: *You know he is a young man. A boy. An idealist. It would be good that you give him advice.*

Tito: *I have already informed him of many things. He told me in Algiers that I was killing Moslems in my state, destroying mosques and so on. I asked him where he got that information. He told me he read it in the news. I told him that I would immediately invite him to Yugoslavia so he could see firsthand. He came with his wife, and we received them nicely. He went to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have the largest number of Muslims and mosques. When he saw that, he said: "I saw a new mosque that you built, the most modern. I would love that too." When he saw all that, he said: "This is different. I was misinformed."*

Torrijos: *He is a young man. He is an idealist. And he gives full support to*

the subjugated. It would be good that you advise him, because it would be a shame to lose him. This man is worth a lot.

Tito: *When we meet him again, we will see what we can do.*

Aide: *We think he is coming tomorrow.*

Tito: *That would be good. We need to invite him to my ship, the* Seagull.

Torrijos: *I invited him to Panama, and he replied that it is very possible that he will come. In fact, he wants to come out of curiosity just to see a lot of jungles and rivers.*[44]

Tito: *Yes. In his country there is only sand. It is a big desert.*

Aide: *It is a fact that, at this moment, he bothers the United States very much and they will react against him.*

Tito: *I visited his country [Libya] for the first time when [Gaddafi] took power. I went from Aswan, Egypt. While I was saying goodbye to Nasser, he told me, "You should give [Gaddafi] some advice. He is impulsive. He is young." When I went there, [Gaddafi] accepted me nicely and we spoke. I told him how he should take care, because he liquidated the US bases and the US will not take it peacefully. They will not forget it. That is why he needs to be very careful, especially to save his life. He needs to go a bit slower. He does not need to force a conflict with the big powers. Instead of that, he needs to have a goal, a tactic, and to go slow. To have an army, and so on. I told him all that, but he was most impressed with the fact that I told him to "take care."*

Torrijos: *I do not know how it is with the Iranian Shah, but also Gaddafi cannot fight on so many fronts.*

Tito: *The Iranian Shah has even more money than Gaddafi. . . .*

Aide: *He and Gaddafi are buying tanks, thousands of tanks.*

Tito: *When I visited Iran, I asked the Shah why he was arming himself so much. First he spent three billion dollars for arms, and then once again six billion. And now, there will be more [arms purchases] when the price of oil goes higher. The Shah said, "You know how it is. Earlier, Iran was Russian, and the Russians were commanding us. Then Great Britain. We were always dependent on the big powers. We do not want that anymore. I will get arms and we will build up the country." The fact is that [the Iranians] built a lot. Later I came to know that there was a guerrilla war in Oman. These were progressive people. [The Shah] sent his troops there to suppress this guerrilla force, and Iranian troops are still there.* [At this point, Tito launched into a lengthy discussion of the state of affairs in the Middle East and Africa.] *There in Latin America, you have Chile and Brazil, and I do not know how Bolivia is holding on.*[45]

Torrijos: *Pretty bad, but it seems that [Bolivia] is getting out of it.*

Aide: *We also have a feeling that Bolivia is getting out of it a bit. It is again starting to conduct an independent policy.*

Torrijos: *The man who is there in power [General Hugo Banzer] is generally quite independent. He has a lot of social tact. But we need to take into account that a statesman does not always do what he wants, but what he can. I think that he will soon put his stamp on the government. I need to say also that he is a little man, a very small man. He is no taller than a meter and a half. He is a brave man. This man broke the record for staying in power in Bolivia because he has been in office already for five years.*

Tito: *This is [a] long time?*

Torrijos: *In Bolivia, yes.*

Tito: *How is it in Argentina [which had a military coup d'état in March of 1976]? I do not like what is going on there.*

Torrijos: *This is a failure. [The generals in the military junta] are too pretentious. These officers think that they are the natural sons of Napoleon and Josephine. I cannot stand to look at them with my own eyes. Meanwhile, in the medium term, the Montonero guerrilla movement will win and gain success in this country. Most recently, I have been requesting that the generals release Isabelita [former President María Estela Martínez de Perón] to me.*[46] *This woman is not to blame for all this. Nevertheless, they hold her under house arrest and will not let her go. They are in fact judging themselves. We Latin Americans are much more sentimental than we are hungry for justice.*

Tito: *I am sorry that we have to finish. I am very glad that we have spoken. The two of us will speak again.*

Torrijos: *I need to thank you again, Marshal, for the great honor that you have shown me.*

On the following day, the Panamanian strongman invoked Tito's name twice during his speech before the delegates attending the Colombo nonaligned conference. General Torrijos extolled the Yugoslav president as one of the twentieth century's most valiant leaders for having defeated the invasion of German troops into his homeland. He stated, "Each one of our ten thousand members of the Panamanian National Guard should be like Josip Broz Tito."

Speaking of his own inclinations to use violence against the American occupation of his homeland, Torrijos praised Tito, who was "like a father," for introducing him to the "pacifist virtues of Mahatma Gandhi."[47]

On his return trip to Panama, the plane made a fuel stop in the Ankara airport. Turkish reporters took advantage of Torrijos's stopover and interviewed this international newsmaker. As usual, the general did not

disappoint them. He attacked the world's most powerful nation. "My people feel impotent before the fact that a part of their land is being occupied by the United States." He did not rule out resorting to violence for its retrieval.

A reporter asked Torrijos to compare himself to other military leaders of Latin America nations. "Generals Videla [of Argentina] and Pinochet [of Chile] are not the models which inspire my conduct, but rather men like Marshal Tito and Kemal Ataturk."[48] The latter was the founder of modern Turkey. Torrijos knew instinctively when to drop Ataturk's name into the conversation.

He spent a couple of nights in Paris, giving an interview to *Le Monde* and visiting the tomb of Napoleon.[49] Omar Torrijos took a walking tour of Paris with his aide-de-camp, Sergeant Chuchú Martínez. The sergeant had earned a doctorate at the Sorbonne and wanted to show his boss around. They walked by the Paris Opera House.

"Take a look at this, my General," he said, "While you were working in a radio patrol car, settling disputes between neighbors over spilled urine, I was in there, listening to opera."

"Yes," the chief responded, "but that's why you are a sergeant and I am a general."[50]

The diplomacy of Panama's strongman was beginning to raise his name recognition in the Global South. He had brought Cuba back into the concert of Latin American nations, and in Sri Lanka, Omar Torrijos addressed dozens of heads of state from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Marshal Tito himself paid homage to Panama's importance to the NAM by visiting the small nation. As long as he managed to maintain his popularity at home, Torrijos could gradually increase the pressure—like a boa constrictor—on the government of the United States. But he had to calm unrest at home without appearing to be too repressive.

Omar Torrijos needed but a window of several months to make a breakthrough in treaty talks. Would US domestic politics allow him that brief time for the final push? The election of 1976 could make or break his window of opportunity.

CHAPTER 9

DISSIDENTS AND EXILES

Since independence in 1903, Panama maintained an enviable record with regard to human rights, almost on a par with that of Costa Rica. But the 1968 coup d'état marked a brief departure. The takeover itself was bloodless, yet officers of the National Guard dealt harshly with pro-Arnulfo activists as well as student protesters. Guardsmen temporarily shut down the University of Panama. Communists of the pro-Moscow Party of the People were rounded up, jailed, or sent into exile. The National Guard treated the Maoists even more rigorously. Seven of them ended up in the prison camp on Coiba Island. Two died there.

During his first years in power, Omar Torrijos arbitrarily squelched press freedoms, repressed public protests, arrested resisters, outlawed political parties, and concealed the murders of prominent opponents. Human rights reports placed the number of political murders by the thirteen-year regime at thirty-four, a low figure by standards of the day for Latin American military regimes.[1] The Torrijos government gradually mellowed and preferred social alliances rather than outright repression.

However, once Omar Torrijos gained full control of the National Guard and set his sights on a new canal treaty, he did not want to be considered as just another dictator of a banana republic like Anastasio Somoza. Nor a totalitarian one like Fidel Castro.

In the final analysis, Torrijos ran a military regime that ruled far more mildly than all others in the 1970s. He wanted a revolution, but not like that of Fidel Castro. The Panamanian Revolution of Omar Torrijos cov-

eted the Canal Zone with a fully functioning canal. Violence was out of the question.

The only way he could repatriate the waterway in operating condition would be to persuade the US government to give it to him. That required favorable American public opinion, which he would not achieve by making an alliance with the Soviet Union—or by killing all his domestic critics. Luckily for General Torrijos, no Panamanians opposed repatriating the Panama Canal Zone—neither the communists nor the conservatives. They only differed on how to do it. As Omar said on many different occasions, "Regaining sovereignty over the Canal Zone is the religion that unites all Panamanians."

EL GRITO

The first evidence of popular pushback to the regime appeared in December 1968, two months after the *golpe de Estado*. Someone had mimeographed eight pages of uncensored news about political affairs under the military junta. The name *El Grito* appeared on the masthead. In Spanish, *el grito* refers to "the cry" of opposition. There followed four more years of weekly issues until 1972, when the government instituted the new constitution.

Most unusual for clandestine publications during times of dictatorship, no one in authority could discover who was publishing the broadsides. A group of middle-class women—mostly young—composed the news stories, printed the copy, and distributed *El Grito* within the capital city. Some issues of five hundred copies each reached readers in towns up and down the Pan-American Highway. These clandestine journalists intended each copy to be passed from one reader to another. "Threats, persecution, and exile meant little to us," one participant stated. "We demanded the rights of all: democracy, justice, and liberty. We were always there. There came to be lots of us, a willing lot."[2]

Most of the team of eight to ten women who wrote the stories for each edition of *El Grito* had university degrees. One was a medical doctor; a few others, university professors. Some had government employment. Together they had enough money to cover the expenses of producing *El Grito,* and those working in business and government offices had access to photocopiers and mimeograph machines.

El Grito did not advance ideas associated with feminism. It did not seek to raise the status of women in public life. To subscribe to feminism might have blown their cover and reduced the readership. Instead, these dissidents produced political tracts that were read by both women and men. The values they supported included democracy, fair elections, and personal freedoms. They opposed corruption in government, political fa-

voritism and nepotism, violence toward the opposition, arbitrary arrests, and the expulsion of political opponents.

Members of the National Guard were "the main participants in [regime] corruption and its prime beneficiaries," *El Grito* pronounced in 1969. "They managed, among other activities, illegal drug trafficking, the monopoly of the concession of bus and taxi routes, the dirty business of whorehouses and sex trafficking, extortion of industry and commerce, the exploitation of the Coiba penal colony as if it were their personal property, and the profitable business of illegal gambling."[3]

The women journalists who wrote copy for *El Grito* did not hold back in exposing the personal behavior of Omar Torrijos. They described him as an alcoholic, a womanizer, corrupt, cowardly, and foul-mouthed.[4] Those women producing the antimilitary, antidictatorial pamphlet known as *El Grito* suspended its publication in the regime's fourth year. That was when the Torrijos government created the regime's new 505-member General Assembly as well as the 1972 Constitution.

THE CHURCH

Omar Torrijos sought good relations with the Vatican, visiting Pope Paul VI twice, once with his devout mother Doña Joaquina. This did not mean, however, that the Catholic Church in Panama ardently backed the dictatorship. The archbishop of Panama tolerated the general and Torrijos refrained from persecuting the Catholic clergy.

There were strained relations. The disappearance of Father Héctor Gallego set a tone of wariness between the Panamanian Revolution and the Catholic Church. Gallego had emigrated from Colombia and settled in a peasant village in the dictator's home province of Veraguas. Gallego had organized landless peasants into "consumer co-operatives." In other words, the Colombian priest was conforming to some of the revolution's objectives such as championing rural workers. But he had alienated a landowning member of the local gentry, supposedly a cousin of the general. The National Guard in the region had been harassing Father Gallego even before the 1968 coup.[5]

In July 1971, a pair of guardsmen came to the village after dark and arrested Padre Gallego. He then disappeared completely, and no one in authority explained what happened to him. Rumors abounded that the secret police under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Noriega had beaten the priest senseless, loaded his body on a helicopter, and dumped it over the Pacific Ocean.[6] Panamanian Church authorities tried for many years to verify these rumors.

Archbishop McGrath once wrote an article published in English by *Foreign Affairs* in 1973. The Panamanian prelate was careful not to crit-

icize General Torrijos or his government. McGrath did not even mention Gallego by name. He merely stated that the priest was organizing a peasant cooperative so that rural workers could defend "their own rights" from powerful landowners. "Finally, one sad evening toward midnight," Archbishop McGrath concluded, "the priest was dragged from the hut where he was staying, disappeared, and has never been found."[7]

However, McGrath devoted a majority of this article to a defense of Panama's position regarding the replacement of the outdated 1903 Canal Treaty. It was "of dubious moral validity," he said, "since [the treaty] was drafted without the participation of a single Panamanian, and was accepted by Panama under duress."[8] In this instance, he was advancing the very argument of Omar Torrijos.

The chief never spoke publicly about the disappearance of Father Gallego. Not until 1991 did any clarification emerge from a government insider. It came from the retired General Rubén Darío Paredes. During a radio interview, Paredes admitted that Torrijos once confided to him that he had ordered the murder of Father Héctor Gallego. "Noriega carried out the order," Paredes said.[9] This admission came following the American invasion of Panama that overturned the dictatorship of General Manuel Noriega.

Yet the ex-spy chief Noriega wrote from a prison in Florida to deny knowing anything about the death of Father Gallego. "It was the landowners who hated the priest, not the military," Noriega said. He blamed the archbishop for unfounded accusations.[10] One diplomat from that time, Omar Jaén Suárez, writes that the Gallego affair for many years damaged the relationship between the Church and the Torrijos regime.[11]

Moreover, the Church could not staff its rural parishes with enough clergy to minister properly to the faithful in the countryside. "Since the single priest in the district could visit each of these country communities only every two or three months," Archbishop Marcos McGrath admitted, "untrained parishioners themselves had to carry out Sunday services and the religious education of their children."[12] The rural priests, 80 percent of whom, like Gallego, were foreign-born, could not compete against the authority of the National Guard.

Monsignor McGrath, himself had been born in the Canal Zone and grew up the youngest of four brothers. His parents had come to help construct the canal and then stayed on to raise children educated in American schools. McGrath spoke Spanish with a hint of an American accent.[13]

Certainly, not all relations between the Church and Torrijos turned antagonistic. McGrath did support the dictatorship's efforts to conclude a suitable canal treaty with the United States. This stand occasioned General Torrijos to send a gracious letter to Archbishop McGrath.

"We have received the text of the declaration of the prelates who make up the administrative board of the US Catholic Conference which you graciously sent us," Torrijos wrote in 1975. "The declaration issued by the board, made up of two cardinals, four archbishops and 23 bishops who officially represent more than 200 United States Catholic bishops, is a positive document which has aroused the awareness of a world that does not believe in colonial situations such as this one."

"We know, Archbishop McGrath, that the data in this declaration is a result of your tireless effort. This confirms that you are a great Panamanian," Torrijos concluded.[14] On the issue of the Panama Canal, the revolutionary government of Omar Torrijos and the Catholic Church were coreligionists.

THE ARNULFISTAS

The 1968 *golpe de Estado* did not please all constituents in the country. Most particularly, in the 1968 elections, members of the Panameñista Party of President Arnulfo Arias had just achieved their first mandate in nearly two decades. Many were moving into their new bureaucratic offices. Then, boom! The coup d'état left them without a political future. The junta's move to close down the National Assembly ended the paychecks of all the deputies, a majority of whom were *arnulfistas* due to the landslide election they had just won. Many wanted to respond to the call for resistance, but in Panama City their voters did not show up on the streets during the coup. Scores of President Arnulfo Arias's ardent supporters fled westward to Costa Rica.

Their leader escaped to the Canal Zone and then to Miami. There Arnulfo encouraged his followers in Costa Rica to arm themselves for a Castro-style guerrilla struggle in the Panamanian mountains along the border. But guerrilla warfare had long since become a required course of study in cadet classrooms throughout the Spanish-speaking world. The subject was taught at the School of the Americas. Officers of the Panamanian National Guard knew what to do.

Torrijos's guardsmen increased their patrols through the mountains along their border with Costa Rica. The general traveled frequently to San José to speak to government officials and to officers of that nation's Civil Guard. In a series of operations along the border beginning in December 1968, the Civil Guardsmen rounded up thirty-five armed Panamanians dressed in military fatigues. They were wannabe guerrillas preparing to fight for the cause of ex-president Arnulfo Arias. They had no ties to the leftist guerrilla bands supported by revolutionary Cuba in the 1960s.[15]

On the Panamanian side of the border, Los Pumas of Captain Manual Noriega quickly neutralized the *arnulfista* resistance in Chiriquí Prov-

ince. Thereafter, prominent members of Arias's Panameñista Party settled in with its leader for a long exile in Miami, there to be joined by a smattering of other Panamanian political exiles. None shared the political philosophy of the Arnulfistas. The cashiered Colonel Boris Martínez, his accomplices, and the several lieutenant colonels who attempted the December 1969 countercoup ended up in Miami as well. They did not associate with the *arnulfistas*.

Among the exiles was the rising young leader of the Christian Democratic Party, Ricardo Arias Calderón. Despite bearing the name Arias, Ricardo was not a cousin of Arnulfo Arias or of Roberto Arias, the husband of Dame Margot Fonteyn and coconspirator in the 1959 armed uprisings. Ricardo Arias Calderón had been educated at Yale University and in France and accepted a professorship in the philosophy department at the University of Panama.[16]

Ricardo also joined Latin America's rising Christian Democracy movement, which was forming parties to compete in several national elections as right-of-center alternatives guided by linkages to the Catholic Church. He maintained ties with the Christian Democratic movement that sponsored the 1964 election of President Eduardo Frei in Chile and the COPEI party that won the presidency of Venezuela in 1978. Christian Democracy represented center-right political tendencies that privileged electoral politics. It promoted clean government and free-market economic development. It rejected revolution on the left and militarism on the right.

Therefore, Ricardo declined to accept Torrijos's personal offer of government employment while the university was shut down. "The '68 coup was not a revolution," says his widow Doña Teresita Yánis de Arias. "The '68 coup was a *cuartelazo* [military uprising], vulgar, without any ideological embellishments except for the old disputes between the National Guard and Arnulfo Arias."[17] The Cuban-born Teresita had married Ricardo in 1964 not long after her own family had left Castro's Cuba.

Out of a teaching job and unable to speak freely, Professor Arias de Calderón accepted a teaching position while visiting his wife's family in Miami. It was with Florida International University (FIU), founded in 1972, at which time he joined the new philosophy department. When the US Senate ratified the treaties in 1978, Arias de Calderón had been promoted to dean of arts and sciences at FIU.[18] By then, Ricardo Arias de Calderón and Arnulfo Arias had been joined in Miami by other Panamanian exiles.

THE ECUADORIAN THIRTEEN

Groups of conservative business interests worried about the political direction of the Panamanian Revolution of Omar Torrijos. They broke with

other businesspeople who had joined Torrijos's government and accompanied Minister Nicolás Ardito Barletta in renewing diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro. The economic slump attendant upon OPEC price rises troubled them too. But they did not trust the socialist reforms to remedy the problems. Moreover, members of the National Council of Private Enterprise (CONEP) had already been involved in anti-Torrijos activities during the December 1969 countercoup.

CONEP published a newspaper of modest circulation, *La Opinión Pública*, which propagated its viewpoints. This organization charged the revolutionary government of Omar Torrijos with suppression of "one of the most important universal rights such as freedom of thought and expression." These violations must stop, CONEP warned, "if faith in your government's intentions is to continue to exist."[19] In March 1975, the Justice Ministry and National Guard confiscated CONEP's printing press.

Then came General Torrijos's trip to meet Fidel Castro in January 1976, which once again aroused resistance in the business community. It set off a series of events that landed thirteen conservative businessmen in exile. One of them was Roberto Eisenmann. He begins his story this way:

"While Torrijos was on his visit to Cuba, a delegation of businessmen headed out from the capital to a meeting with rice farmers in David, Chiriquí Province. We were assessing the situation [caused by the price freeze on rice]. Someone had taped the meeting [on a reel-to-reel recording machine]." Apparently, Torrijos listened to the tape-recording on his return from Cuba and just before his scheduled visit to Colombia.

General Torrijos and his immediate family set off on a preannounced trip to his father's hometown of Roldanillo in the Cauca Valley of Colombia. They would be unveiling a plaque in honor of the recently deceased José María Torrijos. President Alfonso López Michelsen rendezvoused with the Panamanian dignitaries. Colombia's head of state and Torrijos dedicated a new housing project in the name of his father. News reports recounted that forty thousand Colombians had gathered in Roldanillo for the celebrations and to see the nation's president along with his famous guest visitor.

Introducing Omar Torrijos to the crowd, López Michelsen alluded to the canal issue. "That drop of Colombian blood running through General Torrijos's veins has contributed to the gigantic task of Panama regaining its full sovereignty and of being the only owner of all its territory." Spectators in the central plaza of Roldanillo cheered their approval. General Torrijos too addressed the crowd, saying that he was never ashamed of his modest origins. "I carry my father's name with pride. At his deathbed my father said, 'Omar, I want you to die a poor man.' Can a man whose father asks him to die poor be dishonest?"[20]

Torrijos had ordered Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Antonio Noriega to expel the group of businessmen involved in the David meeting. Their crime? "Subversive activities contrary to the advance of the Panamanian Revolution."[21] The order was to be carried out while Torrijos was in Colombia. In his own words, one member of CONEP, Roberto Eisenmann, explains his expulsion:[22]

> [Guardsmen] arrested twelve of us one by one while General Torrijos had left on the trip to Colombia. I was taking my two kids to school in the morning and a car swerved into my lane, bringing me to an abrupt stop. Another car came up and stopped right behind me.
>
> A guardsman approached the driver's window and says to me, "The Commander wants to talk to you." About what? "About a license for a gun that you have. You have to come down to the Comandancia. So put your kids into my compañero's car and he will take them home."
>
> "You know you will have to kill me," [I replied]. "I will take my kids to my office nearby, then I will come with you."
>
> They ordered me into a police car. I refused and insisted on going in my own car, figuring to leave a trace. We compromised; my car but they would drive. I in the back seat with one of them who held a machine gun and another one driving. I noticed that we were not going to the Comandancia [downtown], but to the outskirts of the city, and I began to worry.
>
> Then the driver says to the guy in the backseat, "Do you have any money?" The guy says "No, why?" "Because we are running out of gas." He turns to me. "Do you have any money?" I do not have any at all, I told him. What are we going to do? "Only one thing to do. Keep driving until we run out of gas."
>
> We drove to the military side of the international airport. They take me out of the car and rough me up, and take me to a room, where I now see others identified with the Chiriquí group. [The police] did their military thing: take your clothes off, take pictures of you, take everything out of the pockets, rip up the family pictures. They put us on a DC-3 with a lot of guards and the plane takes off. I thought we're going to the beach house of Torrijos and he's going to give us hell and that will be the end of it. But the plane goes south. Three hours. I wondered if they were going to throw us out [of] the airplane.
>
> We land in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and they said, "You are in exile. You don't talk about politics any longer." Panama's ambassador is there and takes us to a hotel. But we have no money. We start six weeks of [Ecuadorian] exile. No documents. Nothing.

> It was quite by accident that we got out. The Panamanian ambassador went to a party with the Ecuadorian Foreign Minister. The [commanding] general of the [Ecuadorian] junta hears of [our] plight and sent down thirteen passports. The US consulate wouldn't help Guillermo Ford or Eisenmann who wanted to go to the US, because it would be an embarrassment for the negotiations going on over the canal. Colombia and Costa Rica declined to help because Panama was a bordering country. We went to Venezuela [whose] consular officer [in Ecuador] hated Torrijos. Braniff [Airlines] flight from Caracas to Miami. I called my wife in Panama to bring the kids up to Miami. My son was overnighting with [Ardito] Barletta's son when this was happening. So Barletta [found out]. He called up Noriega who tells him he had no information. [We lived for] three and one-half years in Miami.

The banished men were members of the Panamanian Association of Business Executives (APEDE) and CONEP. News accounts confused the actual number of detainees, listing them as eight, then eleven, then "12 prominent members in banking, commerce, insurance, and cattle."[23] Eisenmann says the expelled eventually numbered thirteen.

Uniformed security police detained the suspects and drove them all, some together, others separately, to Tocumen Airport. Several later explained to foreign new reporters: "We found ourselves in a bus on the way to the airport. . . . We were most surprised by the expulsions. . . . [and] we did not know where we were heading until we landed in the airport in Ecuador." It was in Guayaquil, the very city that Torrijos had visited earlier toward the end of the Banana War. One of the Ecuadorian thirteen said, "It is time to affirm that, behind the much-boasted nationalism of the Torrijos regime hides an evident Marxism."[24]

They became known as the Ecuadorian twelve (even though they numbered thirteen individuals). All of them had attended the meeting in David that the government considered fraught with "political" overtones. They represented cattlemen, rice producers, bankers, lawyers, and radio owners.[25]

Another of the exiles, Alberto Quíroz Guardia, had owned Radio Impacto and used the airways to criticize Torrijo's negotiation tactics with the United States. He especially spoke out against the secrecy of closed-door treaty negotiations. Radio Impacto, a target of leftist students, closed down after the owner was expelled.[26] The businessmen feared that, in secret negotiations, Torrijos was giving in to the Americans. Not everyone in Panama's business community overtly opposed Torrijos, who moved to dialogue with entrepreneurs. Newspapers reported that President Lakas had a "marathon" meeting with the president of APEDE. Colonel

Figure 9.1. Members of the Ecuadorian Thirteen, the Panamanian businessmen expelled by Colonel Noriega, pose for a photograph with the woman who ran the pension in which they took shelter in Guayaquil. Roberto Eisenmann stands next to her, sixth from the left. Alberto Quiróz of Radio Impacto appears fifth from the left; and Guillermo Ford, later the vice president of Panama, is second from the right. Photograph courtesy of Roberto Eisenmann.

Noriega met with directors of the Chamber of Commerce in David, and businesses there began to reopen after having closed down to protest the expulsions.[27]

No one summarized the situation better than Omar Torrijos himself. "I am not going to try to conceal what cannot be concealed," the general exclaimed during a press conference. "This is a strong-man government." Referring to the expulsion of dissidents, he said: "We do not want to imprison anyone, yet there are people who cannot live here because they are a contaminant. They are constantly plotting not against the government but against the Panamanian cause."[28]

Returning from Colombia, General Torrijos resumed normal activities. He met with the US senator Jacob Javits, who had been touring Latin America. Javits came away endorsing the treaty talks, saying "the future of the Panama Canal is the most important problem within the framework of Inter-American relations."[29]

The diplomatic community in Panama realized how moderately the Panamanian Revolution treated its domestic dissidents. "The relative

mildness of measures against opponents has been a strength rather than a weakness," the British Embassy reported. "The fact is [Torrijos] knows his countrymen and how to appeal to or discipline them. And his sympathy for the under-privileged appears entirely genuine."[30]

One news item in 1977 suggested that the Panamanian refugees gathering in Miami numbered eighty-seven persons—a mere fraction of the Cuban émigrés living in south Florida. The exiled Panamanians in Miami, unlike the Cubans, never formed united front organizations and never obtained CIA financial support.[31] Consequently, as the former diplomat Omar Jaén Suárez writes, despite Torrijos's apprehensions, none of the refugees in Miami sought to impede treaty negotiations.[32] As long as the General targeted the canal negotiations, the opposition in exile stayed in line. So too did the far left.

THE COMMUNISTS

From the very first days of the 1968 coup d'état, Panama's two communist parties felt uncomfortable. They did not fear Omar Torrijos as much as Boris Martínez. The latter held the members of both the pro-Soviet communists and the Maoists in contempt. The extreme incarceration protocols at the Coiba Island prison camp owed much to his hard-line attitudes.

One of them was Floyd Britton. This Afro-Panamanian student leader had participated in the 1959 uprisings, which young Captain Torrijos had helped put down. Britton succumbed to beatings and starvation at Coiba Island in 1969. A government coroner declared that Britton had died of natural causes. "He suffered an infarction of the inner wall of the myocardium" and that "the body had no injuries," wrote the doctor.[33] The story was a big lie. No one believed it.

By the time that the repression began to ease up, most communists had left for exile of their own accord. The future sergeant "Chuchú" Martínez was among them. Guardsmen escorted others to airports or to the border of Costa Rica. Some ended up in Europe like Chuchú. Others went to Caracas or to Mexico City. Fidel Castro accepted very few Panamanian exiles in the 1970s.

For those leftists who took refuge in Mexico, the novelist Gabriel García Márquez served as their principal link to General Torrijos. Panamanian communists like Thelma King and Jorge Turner, the latter of whom wrote a letter requesting "a general amnesty that will [permit the] return of these militants, who today suffer long and painful exile." Turner said that the communists too wanted to exercise "their right to fight together with the Panamanian people for our full national sovereignty." The government authorized eighty-two Panamanian exiles to return with the

exception of those in Miami who, the government said, were involved in plotting violence and assassination attempts.[34]

In May 1977, García Márquez took one of his many trips to Farallón, this time with the communist militant Jorge Turner. They discussed with Torrijos the ground rules for the return of the leftist exiles from Mexico. The returning communists were not to mount any anti-American demonstrations that might affect the treaty negotiations, which were then entering a critical stage. They would be able to participate in the plebiscite by which Panamanian citizens would vote on accepting or rejecting the completed treaty.[35] "Doors will be open to all those who have not renounced this religion [Panama's sovereignty over the Canal Zone] which unites and makes us strong before the world," the government decree announced.[36]

Not all communists abroad accepted this limited amnesty. Many still did not consider the 1968 coup d'état as a progressive event that could challenge both the oligarchy and the United States. Instead, their Soviet style ideology interpreted only the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s—meaning the student protests and banana workers' strikes—as authentic struggles against imperialism. Thus the 1968 military *golpe* served as "the establishment of a Military Junta to avoid the course of the popular movement towards revolutionary change."[37] In other words, many communists lumped Panama's military regime with the counterrevolutionary dictatorships of most other Latin American countries, refusing to recognize Torrijos's popular appeal.

In much the same sense of ideological purity, the militants in exile interpreted the treaties that Torrijos was negotiating with the United States more as treason than triumph. "We are fighting against Torrijos, whose bloody dictatorship outstrips that of Pérez Jiménez [Venezuela's hard-line military dictator from 1951 to 1958]," they wrote from exile in Caracas. "This is why we call attention to Omar Torrijos, who is sinking Panama and selling it to the United States."[38] Their pronouncements expressed a longing for home more than a commitment to historical fact.

Panamanian leftists abroad did not support the government back home in its negotiations for a new treaty. They charged that Torrijos would sell out to the Americans. His regime "is a dictatorship imposed and maintained by the United States," said the Panamanian Liberation Command.[39] Their opposition might have benefited Torrijos. If ultraleftists had favored the general, the Americans would have another reason not to negotiate with him.

PANAMA AS A HAVEN

In reality, Omar Torrijos himself opened up Panama as a refuge for exiled leftists from other countries in Central and South America. In the 1970s,

the overwhelming majority of refugees being displaced by political disorder came from the center left of many different national origins. This situation differed from that in the 1960s, when mainly one country, Cuba, produced the principal exodus and largely from the center right.

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution saw himself as "a fighter defending the release of political prisoners." He admitted, "My efforts before the Argentina military junta [1976–1982] for the release of Isabelita Perón have been so far ignored." Torrijos had sought the release from house arrest of his longtime friend, the widow of Juan Perón. María Estela "Isabel" Martínez de Perón had been detained by the Argentinean generals since they deposed her constitutional government in March 1976.

Torrijos wished to establish Panama as a haven. "Panama constitutes a special zone of tranquility in a world shaken by violence," he once said, as long as the refugees did not "prepare acts of hostility or aggression against their countries of origin."[40] The chief pointed to his efforts as a neutral power to save the lives of those Chileans seeking diplomatic protection from the September 11, 1973, *golpe de Estado* of General Augusto Pinochet. The successful release of three thousand Chilean political prisoners had been one of the tasks of Lieutenant Colonel Paredes. "I went to Chile, because the [Panamanian] ambassador there was a friend of mine," says Paredes. "So many asylum seekers had filled the embassy that the ambassador had to rent another house for them."

Colonel Paredes arrived within weeks of the coup, while the junta was still using the soccer stadium in Santiago de Chile for processing prisoners. He talked to some of the people who crowded into the Panamanian Embassy asking why the government of Allende had failed. "What happened was that we were too much in a hurry and it turned out badly for us," one refugee said.[41] General Torrijos eventually negotiated an agreement with the Chilean junta. He engaged an Air Panama passenger plane and extracted the asylum seekers from the Panamanian Embassy.

Though he had his own dissidents in exile, the general himself turned Panama into a haven for refugees from other countries. Many Argentineans too came to escape the military government that seized power from the Peronists in 1976. Among these refugees were former members of the defeated Montonero movement. Several had suffered torture by the junta of General Jorge Videla.[42]

Central American guerrilla fighters also passed in and out of Panama under the protection of General Torrijos. He only asked that they leave their arms at home and that they launch no military operations from Panamanian soil. Thereby, the Panamanian strongman placed himself in position to mediate differences between the leftists and his fellow military

officers in other countries. Sergeant Chuchú Martínez served as his chief coordinator for the coming and going of these left-of-center refugees.

Two factors account for the mostly moderate attitude of Panama's dictator toward domestic political dissidents. First, Torrijos sought the approval of public opinion throughout the world. He wished for the goodwill of Marshal Josip Broz Tito as well as the American treaty negotiators. Severe repression at home would tarnish the nobility of the general's international quest.

Second, treaty negotiations over the one issue supported by every Panamanian served to temper bold exhibitions of political protest at home. Most factions of the left and right united behind the idea of repatriation of the Panama Canal Zone. Most of all, the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution saw himself as a conciliator rather than an avenger. This set him apart from most other dictators of the Global South.

CHAPTER 10

THE RISE AND FALL OF JUAN ANTONIO TACK

"The struggle for full sovereignty in all our territory, including the Canal Zone, is permanent," the general once said, "and in that struggle we will take no backward step."[1] Omar Torrijos could be tough and determined, the "tiger and the mule" in Gabriel García Márquez's description. Besides, Torrijos believed that he could do better than any of his ministers at mobilizing international public opinion in Panama's favor. He turned out to be correct, but he still relied on a trusted set of educated, internationally experienced advisers to work on the details. He did need them, because US delays would have exhausted the chief's energies if he dedicated himself exclusively to negotiating.

Among the first of these treaty experts to emerge was Juan Antonio Tack. For five years, Torrijos and Tack worked effectively in tandem. Tack handled inter-American affairs while Torrijos concentrated on the world at large. Both were good at what they did, but only one was capable of holding on until the Americans came to the table.

HARD-EDGED DIPLOMACY

Juan Antonio Tack had been a professor of philosophy and history at the University of Panama. He first entered public service as a member of the delegation sent to Washington, DC, to denounce US policy during the Flag Riots in January 1964. Tack then served in various capacities in European embassies.[2] He was in Paris when Lieutenant Colonel Torrijos and Major Boris Martínez deposed President Arias.

Tack and Martínez had been secondary school mates at the National

Institute. Martínez brought him back from Europe to Panama and introduced him to Torrijos at the headquarters building in the slum of El Chorrillo, quite a contrast to Tack's previous surroundings in Paris. Boris Martínez asked Tack what Panama's policy should be toward the United States. Juan Antonio expounded for a few minutes, and Martínez exclaimed "this is what we think." Boris turned to Torrijos and said, "Isn't that true, Colonel, we believe the same thing?" Torrijos nodded his head. The military leaders offered Tack the job of vice minister of foreign relations.

Neither the subsequent removal of Boris Martínez nor the attempted countercoup of December 1969 resulted in the dismissal of Tack. Rory González, the general's drinking buddy, called Juan Antonio one day and said "Torrijos wants to see you." The chief appointed him minister of foreign affairs.

Juan Antonio took as the first order of business the scrapping of the text of the never-ratified Robles–Johnson treaty proposal and starting a fresh process of negotiations. Soon thereafter, he first met the US author of that treaty proposal, Robert Anderson. Anderson warned him about the US Senate's aversion to ratifying any treaty that mandates the withdrawal of US forces, to which the new foreign minister replied: "Tell the senators that Panama does not aspire to be either a colony or a protectorate or one more star on the United States flag."[3] Thereafter, Torrijos himself often repeated the phrase "not one more star."

The Pentagon had always been a drag on the diplomatic talks because its top brass could not conceive of the Cold War without the presence of the US military in Panama. General William Westmoreland was one of them. Westmoreland, author of the concepts of "search and destroy" and "body counts," had returned from Vietnam to Washington as Nixon's chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Torrijos was not intimidated by the multiple stars American generals carried on their shoulders. He merely followed this adage: When dealing with the United States, always carry a grenade in your hand.

General Westmoreland arrived for talks on the resort island of Contadora shortly after Christmas 1970. One Panamanian official with Torrijos recalled this chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as complaining about the poor relations between the Panamanian National Guard and the US Southern Command. Torrijos denied the characterization. Then General Westmoreland observed that State Department negotiators tended to give in too much to their Panamanian counterparts. The United States Senate would never accept the treaty that State Department diplomats had in mind, he noted.

"If that were the case," Torrijos replied to Westmoreland, "if a satisfactory agreement could not be reached, it would be better for both sides

to wait for a better opportunity; for my people's disillusionment could generate such civil unrest that the Americans might have to intervene with their tanks" to save the canal.[4]

Thereafter, Torrijos liked to refer frequently to the US experience in Vietnam when he wanted to make a point about the vulnerabilities of great powers.

President Richard Nixon never intended to confront the canal issue, yet hotheads among the Zonians sounded the alarm anyway. "Nixon will give away your Panama Canal unless you stop him," they warned. "Next month will see the Panama Canal behind the iron curtain . . . just like Cuba." The authors of the leaflets charged that President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger were "planning to ramrod a treaty thru the Senate next month that will turn over the Canal—lock, rocks, and cities—to the Revolutionary Government of Panama."[5]

The reelection of President Nixon came and went, without progress on the Panama Canal Treaty. Nonetheless, US diplomats became alarmed when they realized that the next UN Security Council meeting was to be held in Panama City.

The Department of State sent Ambassador William Jorden to spend three days with General Torrijos. They toured the countryside together as Torrijos communicated with his people. They talked about the coming UN Security Council meeting in Panama, and the chief told Jorden that he would tone down the "anti-Americanism." "There will be no violence, no riots." He informed Jorden that he was well-disposed toward Dr. Kissinger. The general handed Jorden a list of twelve issues that could get discussions under way again.

Moreover, General Torrijos had two requests of the US government. First, replace the chief negotiator, Robert Anderson. Under Anderson, Torrijos said, no progress had been made in nine years. Second, Torrijos wanted to buy one UH-1N helicopter, then being used in Vietnam, so that he could fly around the country more safely.[6]

Foreign Minister Juan Antonio Tack demonstrated his usefulness in handling many of the arrangements for the February 1973 meeting in Panama of the United Nations Security Council. The worldwide publicity that Torrijos had obtained for exposing the United States as an imperialist power had made him a hero to many Third World leaders. Moreover, Foreign Minister Tack took it upon himself during the proceedings to rebut US excuses for having used its veto power.

Panamanian newspapers devoted extensive coverage to these debates, including printing the statements verbatim. The speech of John Scali, America's ambassador to the United Nations, reeked of condescension. He praised the Panamanian people for "the bustling economic activity

reflected most visibly in the [rapid] pace of construction we [are used to seeing] around the United States."

Ambassador Scali spoke of US contributions to Latin American development since 1961: $10 billion for economic improvements through the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank in the early 1970s. He attributed Panama's 7 percent growth rates in gross national product in the past four years to US investments. The United Nations should not be taking a "partisan stand" that would only "dilute results already achieved."[7] Nevertheless, the final Security Council vote on the Panama proposal was thirteen in favor, two abstentions, and one (US) veto.

Juan Antonio Tack rose to respond on behalf of Panama. He admitted that his country had benefited from US investments, but these paled in comparison to all the benefits Panama had provided toward US trade since the canal was opened. Moreover, Ambassador Scali had not addressed the causes of the deepest disagreements. These were: (1) the presence of foreign troops in Panama; (2) the existence of judicial procedures in the Canal Zone other than those of the Republic of Panama; and (3) the existence of a second government inside Panama in the form of the Canal Zone governorship. "The United States basically wants to maintain these causes (of disagreement) merely [by] changing their names," Juan Antonio Tack concluded.[8]

Nonetheless, six months after they requested it, Torrijos and Tack had their new American treaty negotiator. He was none other than Ellsworth Bunker. This veteran diplomat had just worked on Vietnam and concluded the 1972 "peace with honor" treaty that allowed the US Armed Forces to leave Southeast Asia.

Foreign Minister Tack went to Washington and met with Kissinger, who introduced him to Bunker. Tack made a request. "It is important that [the talks] be held in Panama, for that instills much needed confidence in our people," Tack said. It would finally show some "seriousness" on the part of Washington.[9]

THE TACK-KISSINGER AGREEMENT

Tack's performance during the UN Security Council meeting drew the praise and admiration of many Panamanians. He followed up almost immediately with an understanding that was to become his signature piece of diplomacy. It had his name attached to it for posterity, along with that of Henry Kissinger, who had just become secretary of state. The Tack–Kissinger agreement resulted from some direct talks in Panama between Tack and Ellsworth Bunker. By no means were the diplomats at each other's throats during the negotiations, judging from the following exchange in the office of the secretary of state.

Secretary Kissinger: *You know, I hope Bunker does not become confused with his Middle East and Panama missions. With his Soviet colleague in Geneva, he has instructions to do absolutely nothing, and with you he has instructions to do absolutely everything. And he travels so much that confusion could result. (Laughter) And what are you drinking?*
Foreign Minister Tack*: Ellsworth, shall we have our Contadora drink?*
Ambassador Bunker: *I believe that would be fitting. (Laughter)*
Secretary Kissinger: *Without the aphrodisiac, I hope. (Laughter)*[10]

The eight principles of the Tack–Kissinger agreement included:

1. The abrogation of the 1903 treaty and elimination of the phrase "in perpetuity"
2. The end of US legal jurisdiction over the Canal Zone
3. Panama to establish its laws and customs within the Canal Zone
4. A phased withdrawal of US civil and military assets
5. A greater share of canal financial benefits going to Panama
6. A phased takeover of canal administration by Panama
7. The Republic of Panama assuming a greater burden of the canal's defense, and
8. Panama and the US to agree on improvements to canal operations in the interim.[11]

The Tack–Kissinger agreement laid out eight broad guidelines that the negotiating teams from the two countries were to flesh out through additional hard bargaining in a full treaty proposal by . . . well, that was the hitch. By when? Panamanians thought that Juan Antonio Tack and Ellsworth Bunker could agree on the finer details by December 1974.

Kissinger agreed to visit Panama for a ceremonial signing of the agreement he had made with Tack. He was to arrive early in the morning and depart early that very afternoon. Foreign Minister Tack sent a message to the Department of State. "General Torrijos is concerned over the shortness of the visit Secretary Kissinger will make to Panama," the message said. "He is planning a 'popular welcome' for Secretary Kissinger and would be disillusioned if he is unable to stay in Panama a full day."[12]

Both General Torrijos and Foreign Minister Tack turned up at Tocumen International Airport to welcome Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for a full eight-hour trip to Panama. Kissinger, four congressmen, and three State Department officials sat down at the Palace of the Swans with the chief of the Panamanian Revolution, President Demetrio Lakas, and

Minister Tack. They engaged in an exchange of pleasantries until the ceremony began for the signing of the Declaration of Principles.[13] The meeting lasted seventy minutes.

Congressional investigations of the Watergate scandal were monopolizing the news cycle, but the Panamanian public hailed Kissinger's presence with warmth. The secretary's limousine traveled easily through the streets, and he was seen in public places. The leaders were able to add a few moments more of discussions when the caravan made an unscheduled restroom stop at Torrijos's home on Calle 50 on the route to the airport. Panama's pro-government press touted the agreement as a success for Torrijos and Tack.[14] But the agreement did not amount to a treaty; there remained much work to be done.

The negotiations between Ellsworth Bunker and Foreign Minister Tack continued off and on through 1974. The two chief negotiators met in Panama City, talked on Contadora Island in the Gulf of Panama, and chatted in Washington.

Again, political events in the United States halted progress on the Panamanian negotiations and on much else as well. President Nixon resigned in August 1974, and his vice president, Gerald Ford, succeeded him. Two weeks later, Ford nominated Nelson Rockefeller as his vice president, adding another advocate for the canal treaty.

Several months passed, and Torrijos moved the expected date of the treaty's finalization forward to "early next year." By way of explanation for the delays, he charged that Secretary Kissinger has gone back to ignoring Latin America, now under President Gerald Ford. The Panamanian strongman suggested that the Organization of American States (OAS) deserves blame for not placing pressure on Kissinger. "The OAS "acts like a tailor," Omar said. "It measures, measures some more, and does nothing."[15] At the time, hard-right military regimes predominated among the OAS member countries, large and small alike.

The most important sticking point remained the dismantlement of US military bases in the Canal Zone. The Panamanians insisted on the evacuation of all American troops beginning on the first day following treaty ratification. The Pentagon was demanding a phased withdrawal for some troops and a permanent presence in Panama for others.

Ellsworth Bunker confirmed shortly after he arrived at Tocumen Airport for yet another round of negotiations that several issues remained. A final treaty might be possible by July 1975. Then the news arrived that Secretary Kissinger was engaged in some serious backtracking. He said "the safe operation of the canal depends exclusively on US control."[16] This statement made in Washington implied that the Panamanians on their own were incapable of operating and defending the canal.

A summit meeting of the heads of state of Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Panama provided the opportunity to respond to US objections. Omar Torrijos hosted the area summit in Panama City. Three elected presidents, López Michelsen, Oduber, and Pérez joined the chief of the Panamanian Revolution in signing a document stating that "military presence of the United States on Panamanian Territory constitutes a serious threat to hemispheric security."[17]

More negotiations transpired between Tack and Bunker. But the lack of substantive progress on the military aspects seemed to be taking a toll on the foreign minister. Then the government of South Vietnam collapsed.

Indeed, Kissinger appeared to be giving up when Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces, and politicians in Washington reacted with outrage. "Our Congress is out of control," Kissinger remarked to aides. "Given the present state of affairs with Congress they wouldn't approve the Declaration of Independence."[18]

In May 1975, the Ford White House held a National Safety Council meeting devoted to a lengthy discussion of the Panama Canal negotiations. Representatives from State and Defense joined the president in listening to a long report from Ellsworth Bunker and Henry Kissinger. In the face of a tough stand for continued US military presence in Panama for anther fifty years, Vice President Rockefeller backed the Panamanian request for a phased withdrawal over twenty-five years.

The vice president also gave Torrijos a strong recommendation. "You know, his mother's a communist and his father's a communist and his sisters and brothers are communists," Rockefeller told a cabinet room filled with the foreign policy elite, "but he's [a] real tough guy. He's crazy about the U.S. military. He's got a real concept of dignity."[19]

Kissinger was more direct sounding the alarm. "The Eight Principles are just platitudes, deliberately designed to be satisfactory to both sides," Kissinger said. "If we say there will be no new treaty, then there will be an uproar. This is no issue to face the world on. It looks like pure colonialism."

"If these [Canal] negotiations fail," Kissinger added, "we will be beaten to death in every international forum and there will be riots all over Latin America."[20] Yet the optimism of 1974 had turned to pessimism in 1975.

DISAPPOINTING SOUTH AMERICAN TOURS

Minister Tack began a period in which he seemed to be seeking the limelight, speaking at length with reporters and venting his exasperation at the American holdups. He returned to Tocumen Airport from Washington,

DC, where President Ford had just pronounced that any canal treaty must defend US interests "over the long term."

Juan Antonio Tack held an impromptu press conference in the terminal. "We have a responsibility to defend the legitimate Panamanian interests in a treaty that will have a reasonably short and acceptable term for Panama," he told reporters. "Without these conditions there will be no treaty."[21]

A few days later, Tack left on a tour to several South American countries, ostensibly to seek support for Panama at the United Nations. Tack wished to convince Mrs. Perón's government to give up its turn as a voting member of the UN Security Council. He thought that the Panama Canal issue trumped Argentina's desire to highlight its dispute with Great Britain over possession of the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands.[22]

In Buenos Aires, Tack met the foreign minister and came away chagrined that Argentina had refused to give its rotating seat on the Security Council to Panama. At noon, he talked to reporters as he waited for a departing flight to Uruguay. He paused at the Montevideo Airport for another lengthy chat with newspeople. He complained incessantly about the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Tack–Kissinger agreement.

A similar impromptu news conference took place when Foreign Minister Tack arrived in Lima, and again when he returned to Panama's Tocumen Airport. Juan Antonio Tack said that the recent fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese had the effect of hardening the US position on the canal.[23] In seven days of making headlines in the newspapers of South America, he rarely mentioned the name of his boss, the chief of government, commander of the National Guard, maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution, the strongman Omar Torrijos.

One observer of Panamanian politics relates that the "celebrity" of Juan Antonio Tack had become an obstacle. Another suggests that Tack had developed "presidential ambitions."[24] Either way, US delays in serious bargaining began to irritate the foreign minister.

Finally, in June 1975, the foreign minister of the Republic of Panama had run out of patience. "Negotiations with the United States have reached a dead end," Tack told an Italian journalist. "North America does not want to remove the Green Berets, but we cannot allow our country to continue to serve as a springboard for the 'Special Forces' every time a revolt which bothers Washington breaks out in Bolivia or the Far East."

He informed *L'Espresso* of Milan that Strom Thurmond's Senate resolution, signed by thirty-four American senators, had brought a halt to negotiations.[25] In effect, more than one-third of the US Senate pledged to vote against any new Panama Canal Treaty.

"Since 1973, I have personally had ten sessions of negotiations with United States Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker," Tack explained. "The main obstacle was the term of the new treaty: 25 years for us, 50 for the other side. But my US colleague [Bunker] recently stated that he had serious doubts about a prompt settlement of the negotiations."[26]

Shortly thereafter, some news took Panamanians by surprise. General Omar Torrijos was granting Juan Antonio Tack "a leave of absence" from his full duties as foreign minister. The chief of the Panamanian Revolution did not sack Tack outright. He appointed him as the "chief negotiator" directing all treaty talks with the US State Department.[27] But he was no longer a minister.

Tack did not drop out of the news completely. He formed part of the Torrijos entourage on a trip to confer with the Mexican president Luis Echeverría. He led delegations for talks in Bogotá and Lima. He flew to Madrid to represent the Republic of Panama at the funeral of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. On radio talk shows, he called in and gave vent to additional conspiracies about US military maneuvers and CIA interventions.[28] When US military brass showed up to speak to General Torrijos, Tack seldom attended the meetings.

Panamanian news outlets seemed to rave about Torrijos rather than Tack. "Nobody doubts that Omar has given our foreign relations a new dynamism, a magic and virtuosity that cannot be denied," intoned the editorial page of *El Panamá América.* "He may act by sheer instinct, but he always reaches his goals."[29]

The resignation of President Richard Nixon in August 1974 offered no boost to the negotiating timetable. In fact, new obstacles intervened over the treaty's most difficult issue—military defense of the canal. The Pentagon's top brass came to Panama in September to survey the situation. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General George Brown, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements (later governor of Texas), and two officials from the Department of State helicoptered to Contadora Island. There they met President Demetrio Lakas and the general staff officers of the National Guard.

Torrijos's conversations with General Brown had left the Panamanian commander with a hopeful impression. "It is significant," the chief told reporters afterward, that this high-level American delegation "have come personally to meet the General Staff, to know our people, to see the canal and the physical installations." They told us that their "position is to recommend . . . a good agreement."[30] Torrijos was upbeat. Therefore, it came as a setback when Secretary of State Kissinger issued a statement to the effect that the United States reserved the right to defend the Panama Canal for an "indefinite" time.[31]

For important speeches by the commander of the National Guard, television channels broadcast the events live. Quite often, the chief's entourage would include staff officers and even a delegation of ministry employees. On one such occasion, General Torrijos spoke to students about the status of negotiations. Torrijos suggested that the interoceanic canal would be easy for Panamanians to operate. "Our national university teaches far more advanced techniques" than the 1906 technology by which Americans now run the canal.

He also told the students that US military in the Canal Zone was counterproductive, because it made "the canal a wartime target." And the United States fights more wars than Panama.[32]

However, the clock was ticking. Omar Torrijos had seized power in 1968 following the failure of the Robles–Johnson treaty negotiations. The general had been in power now for nearly seven full years. Of his people, he had asked for patience, unity, and discipline. Torrijos had already had three more years than any elected president of the republic. Yet he still had not closed on the long-awaited treaty. The Martyrs of 1964 were stirring in their graves.

Finally, Panamanian students rose up in violence. They surrounded the US Embassy and overturned diplomatic vehicles. Secondary and university students attempted to enter the embassy parking lot. Then they went to Panama's Foreign Ministry and painted slogans on the outside walls. "The government that represses students falls!" The rioters threw stones at passing vehicles bearing Canal Zone license plates. They sang the national anthem and then chanted slogans. "Sovereignty or death!" "We shall overcome!" "No to US bases!" "No to joint defense!"

A reporter quoted a student leader as saying: "The next time, if the National Guardsmen do not fire against the Canal Zone, we will take their rifles to shoot against the North Americans ourselves."[33]

Though Tack still headed the treaty negotiations, the strongman Torrijos began to step up his own international campaign to put pressure on the United States. He used his status as commander of the National Guard to hint at the possible consequences of the US refusal to negotiate.

"If the United States does not come to an agreement with us," he told a visiting reporter from Milan, Italy, "Panama could become another Vietnam." He informed the Italian journalist that Ambassador Bunker would soon return for more negotiations. "We hope that a new agreement will be concluded shortly, which will restore the canal to us and allow us to get rid of the Green Berets and the 14 North American military bases. This should be the right time because otherwise . . . [Torrijos paused to light up a Cuban cigar that Fidel Castro sent to him] . . . otherwise there will be no other way left [to] us except the Ho Chi Minh trail."[34]

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In March 1976, Juan Antonio Tack resigned from his job as chief treaty negotiator. His last months on the job were harrowing, as he had fallen out of favor with the chief and ambitious subordinates in the ministry were humiliating him. Aquilino Boyd succeeded Tack as the principal negotiator.[35]

But clearly the anti-imperialism of Tack seemed to infringe on his chief's own diplomacy. In his last year of service to Torrijos, Juan Antonio exhibited a tendency to go off on very undiplomatic rants against the United States. When things did not go Tack's way—Argentina's refusal to give up its seat on the UN Security Council, for instance—Juan Antonio vented his frustration publicly.

Nonetheless, Tack garnered high praise for the outcome of the 1973 UN Security Council meeting and also for the 1974 Tack–Kissinger agreement. It was just that political uncertainties in the world's most powerful democracy made it impossible for this loyal servant of a small nation to follow up these achievements with the definitive breakthrough to a new treaty. As Elsworth Bunker told everyone, "No one in the United States does anything in an election year."[36]

Following his return from the Non-Aligned Summit in Sri Lanka, Torrijos took an interest in the final events of Washington's long electoral season. President Ford was facing a challenge from the right wing of the Republican Party.

The former governor of California, Ronald Reagan, challenged President Ford for the nomination of the Republican Party. Reagan's most popular issue and fundraising tactic was to oppose any new Panama Canal Treaty. Not only did he have Henry Kissinger backtracking on the Tack–Kissinger agreement, but also President Ford had to tone down his support for ongoing negotiations. Campaigning in Peoria, Illinois, Ford pledged that he would not abandon US interests in the Panama Canal. "I can assure you that the United States will never renounce its national defense interest or its interests in the operation of the Panama Canal," Ford said.[37]

Reagan was relentless. Opposing a new canal treaty attracted votes in the primaries and donations to the Republican National Committee. The challenger spent $100,000 for a half-hour TV political ad. "The Canal Zone is not a colonial possession, nor a house rented for a long period," Reagan said, "but instead it is a United States territory over which it has sovereignty, which it bought in the same manner as Louisiana and Alaska."

Reagan's comment occasioned a correction by Henry Kissinger. The

State Department issued a statement that the 1903 Treaty granted the United States only possession of the Canal Zone—not sovereignty.[38]

"Would you invite Reagan to take a tour of the Canal Zone with you?" one reporter asked General Torrijos. "Quicker him than anyone else. If the man is of normal intelligence, he will immediately realize that what he has been saying is not reasonable. The canal is not defensible."[39] In point of fact, Ronald Reagan never did visit the Panama Canal, neither before nor after serving as president of the United States. He skillfully used his opposition to the canal treaty as a wedge issue to take control of the Republican Party from the Ford–Rockefeller–Kissinger wing.[40]

PHOTOGRAPHING THE GENERAL

While people in the Third World were familiar with Omar Torrijos, few in the United States knew anything about him. Photographs of him seldom made the newspapers. He never appeared on American television networks because the general refused to come to the United States until there was a treaty to sign.

Few Americans recognized his name. "Torrijos" did not easily role off the English-language tongue like, say, Tito or Castro. He was just that "tinhorn dictator" of Panama, as Ronald Reagan called him during his speech at the 1976 Republican Convention.

Tom Zimberoff, a young freelance photographer from Los Angeles, attended that political convention in Kansas City, where challenger Reagan had lost the nomination to President Ford in a tight vote. Afterword, Zimberoff made his way to New York and landed a job interview at *Time* magazine. The photo department at *Time* was interested in photos from Panama but could not pay for his trip.

The aspiring West Coast photographer talked his way into photographing army ranger training at Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone. He met the legendary Vietnam soldier Colonel James "Bo" Gritz and told him that he wanted to take photos of Omar Torrijos. "Oh, hell, I can make that happen for ya!" Gritz said. Several days later, Zimberoff traveled to Fuerte Cimarrón, where Torrijos in civilian clothes was meeting with members of the National Assembly.

Someone introduced the two. Zimberoff could not speak Spanish. He pointed to the four cameras slung around his neck, and Torrijos gathered himself up in Napoleonic posture for a photo. Then the commander wheeled around and went into a building. Zimberoff wanted something more, like an action shot of the general in his uniform.

Zimberoff noticed that a Huey helicopter had just landed nearby. Having heard of Torrijos's penchant for air travel, Zimberoff nonchalantly made his way over to the aircraft as if he belonged and jumped in. He sat

in the back. All of a sudden, the commander in fatigues and a few followers entered the aircraft. Torrijos climbed into the middle seat, fastened the seat belt, and put on earphones and mic as the chopper lifted off. It headed for the commander's favorite rural village high in the mountain valley of Coclesito. Torrijos wore a canteen and pistol on his belt.

Torrijos and Zimberoff made eye contact, and the general spoke to his crew on the in-flight communications. The young photographer hoped they were not talking about throwing him overboard. Fifteen minutes later they landed at Coclesito, and Zimberoff hopped off to follow the general. The village kids greeted Torrijos, and he swept several up and kissed them as others hugged his legs. He talked to the villagers. The young photographer snapped dozens of shots walking behind and ahead of his subject. Omar's friend Rory González, who had been on the flight, came up and asked in English "Who are you?" Then later, González said, "No one walks in front of the general."

At the end of the afternoon, the small entourage waded through a fast-moving stream to get back to the helicopter. Children followed Omar Torrijos into the water, and he motioned for a picture. Zimberoff got off one shot on his Leica before falling backward into the stream. Three out of his four cameras got soaked along with all but one of the exposed rolls of film.

The general took a liking to this photographer. Back at the National Guard base that night, he invited Zimberoff to spend the night at the beach house. There he met Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos who made dinner for the crew.

Getting back to New York, he had that one roll of film processed, but he missed the deadline for *Time*. Eventually, *People* magazine picked up the story and the first photographs of Omar Torrijos, one of which showed him in the stream with the children of Coclesito.[41]

A few months later, president-elect Carter was preparing to be inaugurated, and Tom Zimberoff returned to Panama to photograph the general once again. Sergeant Chuchú invited him to Calle 50, where Torrijos was meeting with advisers. Zimberoff still had not learned Spanish, so Sergeant Martínez handled the translation.

"Let's go somewhere so I can take photos of the General," the photographer suggested. The group talked about some obvious vistas like Old Panama, the remnants of the seventeenth-century city. Zimberoff proposed that he and the general go to the Panama Canal. Everyone in the room suddenly fell silent and looked at the chief for his reaction. "You could have heard the proverbial pin drop," Tom Zimberoff remembers. His men knew that the general had vowed never to enter the zone as long as US troops remained there. Finally, Torrijos said, "Vámanos!"[42]

The commander, Chuchú as driver, and Zimberoff climbed into the car. They drove through the front gate and through Albrook Air Force Base to Miraflores Locks. The startled Canal Zone policemen recognized Torrijos immediately and did not prevent his entrance. One of them followed the intruders onto the locks.

Zimberoff snapped one frame after another while the general looked over the ships and the Panamanian and Zonian workers. He stood alone atop one of the original 1914 canal gates, gazing up and down as the water swirled in to lift the vessels. Click, click, click went Zimberoff's shutter.

The photographer ran ahead to get some shots of General Torrijos, Sergeant Chuchú, and the US military policeman coming out single file over the gangplank. Meanwhile, someone had notified the American ambassador. As Omar and his two other interlopers headed back to the city, they saw the US Embassy car, flags fluttering on the front fenders, heading fast toward Miraflores Locks. Zimberoff says the driver, Chuchú, flipped the middle finger as the cars passed each other going in opposite directions. Everyone had a good laugh, except for the Canal Zone police—and possibly Ambassador William Jorden.[43]

In those photos, General Torrijos in his battle fatigues looked resolute, every inch a soldier and with a sidearm in his belt to prove it. He also looked determined, as if he were prepared finally to make a deal with the new American president.

CHAPTER 11

OMAR, JIMMY, AND MUAMMAR

"Ignorance can be good in politics," Omar Torrijos once told Graham Greene. "Carter and I agreed about the Canal Treaty because we were both ignorant of the problems it raised. If we hadn't been ignorant the Treaty would never have been signed."[1]

An avid consumer of the news in the fall of 1976 would not have been able to predict when the United States would ever get around to negotiating a new canal treaty. Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter held a presidential debate on foreign policy in the first week of October. They did not field a question on the canal issue until the last three minutes of the discussion. Neither candidate committed to turning over the canal to Panamanian control. Much less did they agree to withdraw American soldiers.[2]

"I would never give up complete control or practical control of the Panama Canal Zone," Carter said in the presidential debates. The dictator of Panama had a suggestion for the candidates. "That word 'never' is a word that has been erased from the political dictionary by the struggles of liberation," Torrijos reminded them.[3]

Yet General Torrijos had been predicting that 1977 would be the year of decision. He would sign an acceptable treaty for troop withdrawals and for the transition of canal operations. And if not, what? Would he really sabotage canal operations? Would the general mount a guerrilla war against continued American occupation of the Canal Zone? Would he unleash the students? Fortunately, Omar Torrijos did not have to choose any of these options.

Most important, the commander had decided to avoid the errors committed by Panamanian negotiators during the Robles–Johnson treaty talks of 1967–1968. They had involved the negotiations in party politics, arguing over the issues on radio, television, and the print media. The political noise had become so deafening that it had nearly cost President Marcos Robles his job.

Omar Torrijos would recall this debacle later as chief of the Panamanian Revolution. He cautioned his negotiators to maintain discipline and silence for the sake of national unity. Negotiating as a dictator saved Panama's strongman from having to argue over every aspect of the treaty until all was settled.

HOPEFUL SIGNS

Overall, Jimmy Carter's election pleased the general. On learning of the 1976 election results, Torrijos flew to Bogota and Caracas to discuss their implications with Presidents López Michelsen and Pérez. Within the week, Carlos Andrés Pérez was to visit the United Nations and several European nations. Omar Torrijos brought his follow democratic socialists up to date on Panama–United States relations and asked Pérez to "reiterate Venezuela's solidarity" with its sister republic of Panama.[4]

Moreover, Torrijos had detected several "anticolonialist" planks in the Democratic Party platform. Then he heard some good news from his embassy in Washington. The outgoing secretary of state Henry Kissinger introduced Panama's ambassador to Carter's transition team. Early in December, the new foreign minister, Aquilino Boyd, went to Washington to meet the president-elect's foreign policy advisers.[5]

Carter took the Canal Zone situation seriously and, to prove it, assigned his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, to oversee the final rounds of negotiation. No stranger to Panama, the veteran diplomat Vance had visited the country during the 1964 Flag Riots. "It is a good thing that Vance is Carter's Secretary of State," Torrijos said. "He was in Panama City when the rioting began and we had to smuggle him out of his hotel into the Zone, so he knows what a Panamanian riot can be like. He was a very frightened man."[6]

The canal issue also appeared at the top of the agenda for a meeting between Vance and the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), Alejandro Orfila. Afterward, Orfila flew to Panama to confer with General Torrijos at the beach house in Farallón. Within the week, a message signed by eight heads of state arrived at the White House. The presidents of Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico signed the letter. It urged an

early resolution of the Panama Canal controversy. Yes. Even Anastasio Somoza affixed his signature to the petition!

Not one month had passed since President Jimmy Carter had taken the oath of office, when Panama experienced another abrupt changeover at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Minister Aquilino Boyd returned to Panama after meetings in Washington, DC. Carter's advisers had told Boyd that "the year 2000 [was] a reasonable duration date for the new treaty." It meant a twenty-plus-year transition rather than fifty years. Boyd could not contain his triumphal glee.

Returning to Tocumen Airport, he went directly to a radio station and made the announcement to the nation.[7] Boyd said he was "optimistic." He acted as if he had made the breakthrough that not even Juan Antonio Tack could obtain. Boyd made only one mistake. He had not even bothered beforehand to brief the chief of the Panamanian Revolution.

The next day, Panamanians learned that Torrijos had accepted the resignation of Foreign Minister Boyd. The general called in to Televisora Nacional to explain. "The Struggle for national liberation does not allow any Panamanian the historic right to act individually," Torrijos said. "The Panamanian people have never accepted being spectators but are participants."

By that, he meant a "team" of negotiators would refine each of the eight points of the Tack–Kissinger agreement, to make sure that the fine details met the satisfaction of Panama's citizens. The chief also announced that the new foreign minister would be Nicolás González-Revilla, the current ambassador to Washington, DC.[8]

The sacked Aquilino Boyd tried to preserve his integrity. "In view of the fact that I was not consulted and that I do not agree with this new methodology, I hereby resign from the post with which you honored me," he announced.[9]

Torrijos himself now took over the role of chief negotiator, forming teams of highly educated negotiators, conferring frequently with them, telling them what he wanted and then taking each team with him to discuss the negotiations with neighboring heads of state.[10] As before, he confided frequently with Presidents Oduber, López Michelsen, and Pérez.

Meanwhile, certain Canal Zone youth reacted to the return of State Department negotiators led by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. Several bombs exploded inside the zone. The Canal Zone police arrested three young men.[11] Unrest among American workers prompted a visit from the secretary of the army, Clifford Alexander. He arrived on the ides of March 1977 to assure the Zonians that they would not lose their jobs. Torrijos too had said that the Americans could stay on until retirement but that housing vacancies would go to Panamanian employees once the treaty

goes into effect.[12] Not one American worker would be displaced until that person retired voluntarily.

THE LIBYAN INTERLUDE

In no way did Torrijos let up on his international campaign in public relations. He accepted the invitation from Muammar Gaddafi to visit Libya. The two leaders had had a long conversation at the Sri Lanka summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. The dictator of Libya finally extended an invitation for a week in April 1977. It was not a convenient time, as the general's negotiating teams were then digging into the fine details of the treaties with Carter's diplomats. No matter. He was not going to miss this trip to Libya.

The government of Libya defrayed all hotel costs but would not be sponsoring any receptions. For National Guardsmen in the retinue there was a joint training exercise with the Libyan Army and a twelve-kilometer march through the desert. "Marshal Tito once told me that Gaddafi is an interesting political phenomenon," Torrijos said.[13]

Omar Torrijos had a great desire to spend time with Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the revolutionary chairman of the Libyan Arab Republic. The two leaders shared origins in the army and had come to power through military rebellions within a year of each other. Gaddafi professed Islamic socialism.[14] Moreover, Libya belonged to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The Panamanians clambered aboard the Panamanian Air Force Electra airliner. Luz María Noli of Televisora Nacional represented the news media, as Torrijos had long since been accustomed to including press representatives on these trips. Omar usually rewarded his military officers and government officials to show his gratitude for their good work—not to mention loyalty. Colonels Rubén Darío Paredes and Manuel Antonio Noriega joined the entourage, as did the minister of labor, Adolfo Ahumada.

General Torrijos arrived in Tripoli with a large retinue of fifty people. These were work teams, he said, for discussing subjects such as farming, education, public health, housing, economics, labor, and national defense. A few student leaders also came.

The minister of agriculture, Paredes, today remembers the side trip to Benghazi very well. The Libyans had a model farming project there. Benghazi was also Muammar's childhood home. "On one night, Muammar Gaddafi invited us to dinner. He lived at the edge of the desert, in a large tent, Arab style. But when you stepped in, it was no tent, but [furnished like] a New York apartment."

"There was a table with all kinds of fruit on it: dates and citruses,"

Paredes continues. "We were having *cabrito* (lamb) for dinner. Instead of rice, [they served] sorghum, but well done, tasty. A lot of salad. During the conversation Gaddafi and Torrijos . . . both were alike, they looked like brothers, physically, but Gaddafi was a little bit younger by a year or two. Torrijos was more informal, Gaddafi was more formal, even slow-paced."

> Then he says: "Torrijos, have you read the Qur'an?" Torrijos gave him a look, like he was thinking "Damn, what kind of question is that?" But he answered, "No, Colonel Gaddafi, I haven't read it. I promise you that the next time we see each other, I'll have read it."
>
> Gaddafi took us outside to the sand dunes. It was a beautiful night, full of stars. A few palm trees. Then Gaddafi says, "When I was a kid, Rommel and Montgomery's tanks passed through here. My mother and I hid in holes, scared. Battles took place here; war, here."

In Benghazi the Libyans gave the Panamanians a tour of experimental farming meant to reduce the need to import food from abroad. "They had some Italian companies there, experienced in deep well water extraction. With that water, they were transforming the desert into green. We saw wheat fields, corn, rice. It worked, but they said it was expensive because you had to draw out the water with a motor pump. On the other hand, the Libyans had enough petroleum for the motors."[15]

Back in Tripoli, two Libyan officials collaborated with two Panamanians to write the final communiqué highlighting the understandings reached in the Panama–Libya discussions. The Libyans wished to include a paragraph that condemned Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians. According to Minister Adolfo Ahumada, the Panamanians were under strict orders from the chief not to agree to such a denunciation of Israel. Not only was Torrijos's wife Raquel Pauzner of Israeli origin, but the general was thinking of visiting Tel Aviv in the near future. If anything, he favored direct talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Only at the last night's lengthy negotiating session did the exhausted officials finally reach an agreement on a communiqué free of anti-Israeli vitriol.[16]

Torrijos and his delegation made a stop in Madrid upon leaving Libya. He reported that Colonel Gaddafi told him that Libya supported Panama "in peace and war." The Libyan leader also expressed interest in investing in Panamanian economic development. "We expected much from Libya but not that much," the chief of the Panamanian Revolution concluded.[17] In other words, the trip to Libya fulfilled both geopolitical and economic objectives for Torrijos.

BACK TO THE BARGAINING TABLE

On returning from Tripoli, the maximum leader resumed direction of the negotiations from the beach house at Farallón. The question of compensation to Panama during the transition period of some twenty-three years stood as one of the last hurdles to the finish line. President Carter wrote one of his first letters to General Torrijos on this issue. The White House had tasked the Departments of State and Treasury to come up with a proposal.

"It may be that these proposals will be less than you had expected or wished," the president wrote to the chief of the Panamanian Revolution, "but I hope that you will understand that they represent the most that we could undertake to do, based on our consultations with Congress. In my best judgment, the proposals will be generous, fair, and appropriate."[18]

Carter's administration proposed paying Panama an annuity of $150 million per year.[19] Omar Torrijos may have been satisfied with this amount—especially at a time of high energy costs—but he never let on.

Two lawyers on one of the negotiating teams illustrated Omar's bargaining strategy in the late spring of 1977. They were the education minister, Arístides Royo, and the former university rector Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt. The Americans offered to turn over to Panama, within a few months after the treaties' ratification, several jewels of the Canal Zone—Ancón Hill, the ports of Balboa and Cristóbal on either end of the canal, the Albrook airbase, and the Panamanian Railway.

"We had been asking for all of these items but without hope for any result," Royo later told a journalist. Overjoyed with this unexpected US concession, the two Panamanians organized a special ceremony to thank the American negotiators. They then called Omar Torrijos on the phone to inform him of the great news. In a "low and deliberate tone," reported Royo, the chief ordered the two negotiators to return home immediately. Both Escobar Bethancourt and Royo expected a celebration on arrival.

"It was quite the opposite," continued Royo. "The cold bath that met us back home consisted in being advised not to show happy faces, even less to make an effusive thankful gesture over the concessions that we had won. We had to act as if everything that they were conceding was not sufficient for us and that it even showed how ungenerous [the Americans] were."

"If we looked pleased by what they were giving us," Torrijos told them, "we would never get anything more because the American negotiators would think that was enough." Royo remarked that the advice amounted to "a psychology lesson" by someone who knew people better than any other leader Panama ever had.[20]

As his teams were completing the final negotiations, General Torrijos wished to demonstrate Panama's military preparedness. He ordered a battalion of National Guardsmen to engage in tactical exercises in defense of the canal. Commander Torrijos called this "Operation 'Oh, What Fear.'" More than one thousand Panamanian troops deployed over an area one hundred kilometers from the canal.

"Remember that the primary objective of the defense of the canal," the general told the men and women of the press, "is to keep it open 24 hours a day for all flags of the world without any discrimination."[21] He was also showing the Pentagon that his men could concentrate their forces equally to defend the canal as to destroy it.

Toward the end of July, the possibility of an agreement between Carter and Torrijos seemed closer than ever. He called his Council of State to a meeting in his hometown of Santiago in Veraguas Province. The president of Bolivia, General Hugo Banzer, was visiting Panama and went along as his host delivered the keynote address.

"As of today," Torrijos told his council members, "we have attained meaningful advances. Now more than ever we must remain united around our cause."

"If we do not attain our sovereignty over those 1,442 square kilometers, then there is no treaty. It is all or nothing; the negotiation of sovereignty is indivisible. Sovereignty cannot be fragmented," the general continued. "There is only the peculiarity that in a very orderly transfer process each site representing the presence of foreign imperialism is being given its own deadline for its disappearance."[22] In other words, the total transition of the Canal Zone would be complete by the year 2000.

Negotiations concentrated on the final issues in August when both Torrijos and Carter actively engaged in proposal and counterproposal. One team handled "lands and waters," negotiating the time at which different sections of the Canal Zone and its lakes and waterways would revert to Panamanian control. These were tedious, detailed, secret negotiations.[23] No one revealed anything until the president of the United States and the chief of the Panamanian Revolution had come to a final agreement.

The economic planning minister, Nicolás Ardito Barletta, headed up Panama's finance team of four members. They all met directly with President Carter at the White House. Then they carried the president's counterproposal back to Farallón for lengthy discussions with Torrijos. No one stopped to give reporters breathless news of major breakthroughs without consulting the strongman first. Ardito Barletta knew better.

The financial team completed its work in time for the Bogotá Summit. General Torrijos took Ardito Barletta with him to explain the finan-

cial agreement to the heads of state of Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Mexico, and Jamaica (Prime Minister Michael Manley). The United States would pay Panama an initial sum of $450 million, the planning minister informed them, followed by a yearly annuity of $150 million.[24] Torrijos had to admit that Carter would have difficulties with the US Congress over these provisions.

At the summit's end, Torrijos held a news conference carried on Bogotá radio. He brought in Ministers Escobar Bethancourt and Ahumada to report on other aspects of the negotiations. Reporters asked when the treaty would be signed. August, September, or maybe October, the Panamanians said. Why the delay? "Details," said the negotiators.

"It is like dialing a telephone number," General Torrijos explained. "The number consists of six digits, and you dial the first five correctly. But if you get the last one incorrectly, you will definitely get a wrong number. This is the problem with the treaty."[25]

When Torrijos returned to Farallón, he received a visit from Ambassadors Ellsworth Bunker and Sol Linowitz of the State Department. They brought the draft of Carter's statement about the conclusion of the treaty. Afterward, the general told the press that the treaty would amount to the best deal Panama could obtain from a powerful nation. He likened the compact to "a pebble in the shoe which Panamanians will have to endure for 23 more years before they can remove the nail they have in their hearts."[26]

THE SIGNING CEREMONY

Jimmy Carter scheduled the signing of the treaties for September 7. He chose the headquarters building of the Organization of American States in Washington, DC, as the site of the ceremony. It must have struck Omar Torrijos as slightly ironic, for he had been deriding the OAS for a number of years.

But President Carter had other objectives in mind. One was to counter the low opinion other American politicians had of the OAS. The second concerned the fact that he wanted to invite every Latin American head of state—with the exception of Fidel Castro. Carter wished the treaty signing to signal the return of United States policy to the era of the Good Neighbor. No more neocolonialism. No more covert interventions. At least this was the president's vision.

Jimmy Carter knew that some of his guests would be military dictators with blood on their hands. Generals Augusto Pinochet of Chile and Jorge Videla of Argentina were coming. Even Guatemala's General Laugerud accepted, not for Torrijos whom he considered a "traitor" for his stance on Belize, but for "solidarity with the people of Panama."[27]

President Carter intended to chat in the Oval Office with each Latin American leader individually about democracy and human rights.

Carter made a long-distance telephone call to Torrijos about the arrangements for the signing ceremony. There would also be live TV coverage of the event. All would be invited to a reception at the White House following the signing. The general suggested that Canada's prime minister Pierre Trudeau be invited as well. "He is very popular in Latin America," Torrijos said.

"Thank you, President Carter," the general said at the end of one phone conversation. "I want to tell you that you have shown great moral courage by the way you have faced the problems at hand. It was only with great courage that our ends could be achieved."[28]

Twenty heads of state attended the signing. However, the president of Mexico, José López Portillo, refused to attend the ceremony, as he did not want to be associated with any treaty that did not specifically rule out the right of the United States to intervene militarily in Panama.[29] General Ernesto Geisel, president of the Brazilian military government, also found an excuse not to go, and Fidel Castro did not receive an invitation.

For his part, General Torrijos invited leaders of Panama's major student groups to the signing ceremony in Washington, but they declined. They said they were protesting that the US military forces would not be evacuating the Canal Zone within forty-eight hours. However, Ricardo Hurtado, a veteran of the Flag Riots accepted the invitation, as did the mother of the 1964 martyr Ascanio Arosemena.

In the meanwhile, a reporter asked the general what if the US Senate did not ratify the treaties. "That possibility does exist," he replied. "[It] would have to be interpreted as the greatest provocation in this struggle. We must have ready another type of answer, not a violent one."[30]

The signing ceremony drew nigh, and Latin America's presidents began to arrive. As Omar Torrijos flew over Cuban airspace on his way to Washington, he sent his greetings to the one Latin American leader who had not received an invitation, Fidel Castro. "I convey to you my most cordial greetings and reaffirm my respect and friendship," Torrijos said.[31]

It was remarkable that this occasion marked the first time, after nearly a decade in power, that Omar Torrijos traveled to Washington, DC. He had never been to the White House or the State Department or OAS headquarters. The negotiator in him had avoided going to Washington as if he were a supplicant, or worse, a beggar. He made sure not to gawk, which would be undignified. After all, he was a seasoned traveler and had visited other monument cities such as Buenos Aires, Lima, Rome, Madrid, and Paris. What was Washington, DC, compared to these?

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution spent three nights in Wash-

ington, DC, at the home of his ambassador, Gabriel Lewis Galindo. On the morning of the OAS ceremony, a telegram arrived at the Lewis Galindo residence. It was addressed to the commander in chief of the Panamanian National Guard. It read, "There have never existed subordinates who are so proud of a chief who as a military man and as a statesman has obtained such a significant victory for his fatherland."[32] It was signed by every member of the general staff of the National Guard.

The two principals, Carter and Torrijos, had a White House meeting before the signing ceremony and talked of the Panamanian plebiscite and the Senate ratification. Carter was confident about success in the US Senate. He invited the senators to the signing ceremony and mentioned that of the thirty-four who had signed Strom Thurmond's resolution, only four die-hard opponents had not changed their opinions. Carter's observations turned out to be unrealistically optimistic.

Once again, Torrijos praised his counterpart for his "act of valor." Taking on this treaty for Carter must have been "like jumping from an airplane without a parachute," Torrijos said.

But it was finally a time for the Latin American leader to tutor a sitting US president on problems south of the Rio Grande River. He focused on the rising crisis of Central America. Torrijos said many countries were arming themselves against the communists "in the name of the United States, "claiming that they were serving [Washington's] strategic interests." Political factions in Central America were carrying out violence "in the name of the United States."

"In the case of [the 1969 war between] El Salvador and Honduras," Torrijos said, "it was the poorest people who suffered [while] none of the oligarchy suffered at all. The poor go into the Army, but the rich do not."[33]

At the end of the Oval Office meeting, Vice President Walter Mondale presented Torrijos the gift of a baseball bat signed by Rod Karew of the Minnesota Twins. Karew was Panamanian. Mondale said the bat suggested that the Americans no longer had to carry "a big stick."

From these meetings, Carter's staff obtained a better understanding of the Panamanian leader. Robert Pastor of the National Security Council wrote up a report on the character of Omar Torrijos.

"I was deeply impressed by the man, the thinker, and the idealist Omar Torrijos," wrote Pastor. "He has a very fine wit, and a very good sense of himself, his limitations, and his capabilities. He said to me at one point that he would have liked to have been a humorist but 'the design of my face is bad,' he wrote. 'I am actually smiling all the time,' he said 'but you can't tell that by looking at me.' He said that he had asked Jimmy Carter to teach him how to smile properly."

"A very warm and candid person who is at the same time capable of

being very profound," Robert Pastor concluded, "although in a very simple and direct manner. There is no veneer of education around this man, but he has the simple raw intelligence and common sense of a leader."[34]

In their private meetings, Jimmy Carter advised his friend Omar to use his influence to provide for a peaceful transition back to democracy in Panama. Torrijos agreed that he would devote his efforts to a return to elections following the plebiscite that was to take place on the October 23. He said that he would oversee this demonstration of direct democracy with a free and fair vote on the treaties.

Finally, the big moment arrived. Torrijos and Carter spoke and signed the two treaties at the assembly hall of the OAS building a few blocks away from the White House. NBC News carried the TV broadcast live with a simulcast in Panama.

In his remarks, the president of the United States praised the patience of the Panamanians—how they had to endure on-and-off negotiations since 1964. To symbolize that fact, Carter had invited Lady Bird Johnson, Henry Kissinger, and Gerald Ford to the signing ceremony. For good measure, Carter had invited other celebrities: the boxers Muhammad Ali and Roberto Durán; Ted Turner, who would soon organize the Cable News Network (CNN); and Coretta Scott King, the widow of Martin Luther King Jr.[35]

The enormity of this moment—that the ceremony culminated three-quarters of a century of Panama's colonial shame—suddenly dawned on Torrijos. He turned and sobbed on Raquel's shoulder just before sitting down to sign the treaties with Jimmy Carter.

Carter said the treaties would assure "a peaceful, prosperous, and secure future for an international waterway of great importance to us all. But the treaties do more than that. They mark the commitment of the United States to the belief that fairness, and not force, should lie at the heart of our dealing with the nations of the world."

Omar Torrijos had effusive praise for Jimmy Carter. "I return to my country convinced that the future of our relations rests in the hands of excellent statesmen," he said. But he refused to hide little barbs of rancor during his speech. He told the audience that the Panamanians regretted having to endure 23 more years—8,395 days to be precise—of US military occupation, "turning my country into a possible strategic target for reprisals [in the Cold War]." He explained, "What nourished the hopes of Panamanians for the recapture of their sovereignty was their feeling that the North American people fundamentally harbored no colonial aspirations."

The Panamanian strongman saved one zinger "for my dear friends" of the United States Senate. For them, Torrijos quoted Abraham Lincoln:

Figure 11.1. President Carter and General Torrijos prepare to sign the Panama Canal Treaties at the Organization of American States (OAS) Building in Washington, DC, with the OAS secretary general (center). Twenty heads of state from the Americas attended the ceremony to demonstrate solidarity with the agreements and to encourage the US Senate to ratify the treaties by a two-thirds vote. Photograph courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

"A statesman thinks of the future generations, while a politician thinks of the coming election."[36]

In his entourage, General Torrijos had brought two lions of literature, Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia and Graham Greene of England. Both arrived with Panamanian passports.[37] Greene remarked that he had seldom passed through customs so easily, especially in the United States, which considered him a "communist." Both authors as anti-imperialists had been denied visas by the US State Department.

García Márquez gave a reading at the Library of Congress from his novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, which had been published in English translation the year before. The author chose not to attend any of the festivities associated with the treaty signings. Instead, he joined the activists in picket lines protesting the presence of General Augusto Pinochet.

Gabo (as García Márquez's friends called him) said he was spending more time in Panama these days, "at first with the idea of doing a journalistic piece. But now I know too many things that I am not permitted

to write. I'll have to save them for my memoirs." Torrijos is an excellent person, he said, "who has helped me overcome my prejudice against the military."

Graham Greene also admitted to spending time in Panama, because it was one of the few Latin American nations he had visited that allowed him to return. His novels had led to travel bans in Mexico, Haiti, and Paraguay, among others.

Unlike Gabo, Greene attended the reception at the White House. He told a reporter for the *Washington Post* that he had been trying all evening to get close enough to General Pinochet to refuse to shake his hand. Yet the maneuvering crowd always got in his way.[38] Later, in his book, Greene admitted he had prepared some words in his mind just in case he had to address the Chilean dictator. "We have, I believe, an acquaintance in common . . . Doctor Allende," is what he would have said.[39]

General Torrijos later admitted to Graham Greene that he was not at all satisfied with the treaty. He said he signed it only "to save the lives of forty thousand young Panamanians."[40]

As it turned out, Augusto Pinochet was not able to depart from Washington before having to answer some embarrassing questions on the issue of human rights. He met with reporters on the day after the treaty signing. A news reporter asked him point-blank if he had ordered the assassination of one of Allende's former cabinet ministers, Orlando Letelier, who died a year earlier in a car bombing on Georgetown's Embassy Row. "I am a Christian, not an assassin," the dictator answered. "I can swear that nobody in the Chilean government ever planned such a thing."[41] His answer turned out to be a complete lie.

REAGAN'S NEW CAMPAIGN

Governor Ronald Reagan had not ended his opposition to "giving away" the Panama Canal. He gave a speech to the Young Americans for Freedom, saying that the Senate should reject the Panama Canal Treaties.[42] Many in Carter's State Department had the feeling that Reagan did not understand the treaties. They decided to offer the governor a personal briefing. Two veteran negotiators, Ellsworth Bunker and Sol Linowitz, met Reagan on his speaking tour in New York to explain the treaties to the governor. Both diplomats had served Republican as well as Democratic administrations.

They began with a detailed briefing on the negotiations and how the treaties would work. They answered his objections. According to the memorandum of conversation, the governor made the following statements.

Reagan said the Spooner Act of 1902 established US sovereignty over the Canal Zone. Bunker and Linowitz explained the Supreme Court had struck down that provision and that Panama retained sovereignty.

Reagan said every small country in the world would get its way just by "tweaking our nose." The diplomats said that the United States did not negotiate the treaty under duress from Panama.

The governor did not believe every country of Latin America favored the treaty. The diplomats said most Latin American presidents had come to the signing ceremony.

Why are we paying Panama large sums of money for a canal that does not run on profit? Bunker and Linowitz explained that the United States earned $6 per acre yearly on Canal Zone territory, with which we will pay Panama a fair rent.

Reagan suspected that "Communist influence" was behind the "give away." The US will have full control of the canal for 23 more years under this treaty, replied the diplomats.[43]

None of the explanations of these veteran American diplomats influenced Governor Reagan's subsequent remarks about the treaty. This former actor stuck to the script. His continued opposition to the treaties might be useful for his future political career.

The opposition of Ronald Reagan indicated that the Canal Zone dispute still had an uncertain future. In his first foreign policy initiative, President Carter had chosen the least popular issue—to give up the Panama Canal. Nothing but hopeful thinking could have predicted success. Though he had Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, the president did not have a two-thirds margin.

Fortunately, Carter did not have to carry the treaties to ratification on his own. He had a partner in Omar Torrijos. This leader had proved himself time and again capable of accomplishing great things. He had united the people of his small nation, mobilized world opinion against neocolonialism, and negotiated a satisfactory agreement with the world's most powerful military power. Torrijos always had a plan, and he would prove himself once again the man of the hour.

CHAPTER 12

OMAR'S GRAND TOUR

Omar Torrijos had planned to take a grand tour to Europe following the signing of the treaties with Jimmy Carter. Part of the plan consisted of obtaining as much favorable publicity as possible. He wished to show his own people that the whole world was on their side as they voted in the coming plebiscite to ratify the treaties. The chief wanted an overwhelming turnout in that plebiscite as a demonstration to the Americans of Panamanian solidarity on this issue. Torrijos was to get out the message via reports to radio and television stations and newspapers back in Panama. He also hoped that the overwhelming support of European leaders would encourage US senators to ratify the treaties.

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution intended to write these publicity reports himself. "Torrijos was more a man of the spoken word than a speechwriter," President Royo explains. "Nonetheless, many of [the tour notes were] written by him. Let's not forget that Torrijos was the son of two teachers. He was a good writer."[1]

Omar Torrijos himself wrote a dozen reports back to radio, television, and the print media in Panama following his meetings with the heads of state. "Reports are always rendered by those in lower ranks to those in a higher position," said Torrijos. "As I see it, the people have a superior rank. They are the highest hierarchy."[2]

The general never once wore his military uniform on the entire trip. A Swedish reporter told him that he looked lost in a civilian suit. Torrijos responded sadly that European politicians would listen attentively only if he wore civilian clothing.[3]

The trip was to last for twenty-one days and cover nine capitals between Israel and the United Kingdom His calls on eight heads of state and the pope made for a good press everywhere that he visited. The itinerary did not include a final stop back in Washington, DC, which was requested at the last moment by Jimmy Carter. That last, unexpected meeting nearly ruined the whole tour for the Panamanian strongman.

PANAMA TO WASHINGTON

The general's European tour began from Tocumen Airport. On this trip he took Colonel Rubén Darío Parades, the general manager of the National Bank Ricardo de la Espriella, and Torrijos's adviser Rodrigo "Rory" González. Sergeant Chuchú Martínez accompanied the group because his language and editing abilities would be much in demand. Luz María Noli again represented the media.

Even leaving Panama did not go according to script. No newspeople or photographers showed up at Panama's international airport to see the general off. "I must be spending too much time in the international fatherland rather than in the domestic fatherland. The newsmen have sent me a message," Torrijos concluded in Report no. 1, "and I have received it. . . . The only thing I like about leaving is returning."[4]

WASHINGTON

In Report no. 2, written during a travel layover in Washington, DC, Torrijos mentioned that he did not wish to meet any of the United States senators. "The negotiations have ended, they are signed. All we need now is the approval," he said. "Here it is the Senate. In Panama, it can only be our people."[5]

He spoke of his luncheon with the White House adviser Hamilton Jordan and the undersecretary of state for Latin America Terrence Todman. He excused himself and walked into another room past the TV. The Senate hearings had begun. Sol Linowitz was testifying. He told the senators that the United States had the implicit right to act if the canal was threatened. "My position in this regard is clear and public," the general said to his companions. "For there to be intervention, there must be a people who want to be intervened."

"Never has . . . a treaty clause stopped an army."

"I understand that some Panamanian exiles living in the United States will be giving their opinion later. This is good for us. I am sure that they will not attack the neutrality treaty," the chief wrote. "Maybe they do prefer [US intervention] but they are not honest enough to say it publicly." The newswoman Luz María Noli jotted down these remarks for her dispatch back to Panama.[6]

Nelson Rockefeller lent his executive airplane, a Gulfstream jet to the Panamanians just to begin this grand tour. Unexpectedly, Tom Zimberoff, the *Time* magazine photographer jumped on the plane in Washington only to discover that the small jet plane was already full.[7] The general was fond of Zimberoff and figured that his photos could be useful. Another passenger gave up a seat. Torrijos himself flew on the Concorde supersonic jet.

LONDON TO TEL AVIV

Torrijos wrote home as if he were a diarist. From the second-class section on the Concorde flight of three and a half hours, he reported that he actually found the seats comfortable but the windows too narrow to see takeoffs and landings. "The Concord is large on the outside and small inside," the general wrote. The remainder of the delegation arrived on the slower Gulfstream.

"The next day, Tuesday [the] 27th [of September], we woke up in London, a very beautiful city, but sad. Perhaps it's the autumn that has already arrived in this part of the world. The trees lose their leaves and there is a melancholic feeling of gloom, old age and sadness. As if the whole world is fading."[8]

To depart from London on the Tel Aviv flight, the Panamanians arrived at the airport at 2:00 p.m. to find that all flights were delayed. The control tower employees had gone on strike. Torrijos took the initiative to write a message to the control tower, wishing them a successful strike. "Because a strike is the combat weapon of the weak against the powerful." A message came back from the tower thanking Torrijos for his best wishes and promising that the strikers would permit his flight leave without delay.[9]

ISRAEL

The Panamanians had to come see Israel for themselves to justify their lonely votes in favor of the Jewish state in all international forums. The trip included two days of travel around the country. In Jerusalem, they visited the Holy Sepulchre, the Stone of Abraham, the site of the Crucifixion, and the Wailing Wall. They also went to Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem.

"The memory of my mother, who used to remind me of these things by engraving them on me as if with a laser beam, became very present on my mind. She would have loved to see all that. And so in some way, I saw it all through the eyes of my mother and my childhood."[10]

The group also toured the Golan Heights, recently captured by Israeli forces. They toured the kibbutzim where settlers had created socialist ag-

FIGURE 12.1. General Torrijos (left) and Marshal Tito walk together as they enter the latter's country villa in Yugoslavia for what would be their last conversation together. Photograph by Tom Zimberoff, courtesy of the Fundación Omar Torrijos Herrera.

ricultural communities in which money was not used. Everybody received what they needed. He remarked that the rural co-ops employed 3 percent of the population but produced 5 percent of the nation's agricultural product. It appeared that his tour of northern Israel reminded the Panamanian leader of his own kibbutz-like cooperative village of Coclesito.[11]

"Wednesday, I had a long meeting with Prime Minister [Menachem] Begin. The meeting was held at the Parliament, a beautiful building from where one can see the hills where the Jordanian mortars had us within range." Torrijos said that he and Begin discussed many issues about the Middle East and Panama. "Both of us left better prepared to discover new aspects of the contemporary political reality."[12]

BELGRADE

Torrijos had sent orders to the Panamanian Embassy in Belgrade that he wanted "no protocol" when his plane landed. The general believed that protocol had been invented to maintain a distance between people. But protocol did indeed greet him at the Belgrade airport "and in large amounts, with anthems, cannon firings, and all sorts of military displays," the general reported. "Our ambassador later told me, while apologizing, that Tito had issued instructions."

Belgrade was the second stop on Omar Torrijos's triumphal tour. For what would be their final conversation, the aging marshal entertained his guest at the state hunting lodge at Karađorđevo. Tito escorted his guest of honor through the manicured woods together with two of his Yugoslav ministers and two Panamanian officials. The host wore a dark suit, and Torrijos looked resplendent in a white suit and matching white vest. Tito's two white poodles trotting alongside Torrijos appeared to have coats matching that of the Panamanian guest. The two friends walked down the gravel path shoulder to shoulder distracted somewhat by the photographer from *Time* magazine, Tom Zimberoff, running out front with his Leica to snap photographs.

In the villa's sunroom, Tito sat in an easy chair at one end of a coffee table. Torrijos settled on the couch to the left of the marshal. Simultaneously the two leaders took out cigars and lit them. Six others in the entourage smoked cigarettes.

Tito began the discussion with a reflection on international affairs.[13] He said that these were good times especially with the signing of the Panama–United States treaties. It was positive that the two parties managed a solution in a peaceful manner and not with war. True, the treaty would not reach its full effect until the end of the millennium, but twenty-two years was better than a war. In this way, according to the Yugoslav leader, General Torrijos and Panama had gained the sympathy of the international public, which was very important.

Torrijos expressed his satisfaction that President Tito was one of the first heads of state whom he would inform about different aspects of the treaties. "I had to be a realist and suppress my feelings," Torrijos said. "If

we take into account the future, then I accomplished something and future generations should do more."

Torrijos explained that a plebiscite would take place soon in Panama, which would prove that his nation embraced the treaties. Torrijos was sure that they would be accepted by a wide margin because he was always "more radical" than most Panamanians. "On this basis, they will conclude that they could not have done better. I will remind everyone that, a couple of years ago, I intended to solve the problem of the canal with force, with bombs and dynamite. However, President Tito advised me to go the way of peaceful negotiations."

Marshal Tito replied that force would not have been useful either for Panama or for the world. General Torrijos would have lost international sympathy because many countries were using the canal. Tito advised Torrijos to say to his people, "Here, I did what I could do. I'm not completely satisfied either but I could not accomplish more." Therefore, yes, the new generations should continue and go forward, Tito said, "it shows that no local war brings any gain. Not in Africa, not in the Middle East. War only makes the situation worse."

"The conflict in the Middle East is much deeper than I thought," the Panamanian general responded. Because the Jewish lobby has great influence in US politics, Torrijos said, he was motivated to go to Israel for consultations with Prime Minister Menachem Begin. "Therefore, I wanted to explain this strategy to Boumédiène of Algeria and Gaddafi of Libya. Boumédiène refused to accept my envoy, and Gaddafi did not understand the necessity of communicating with Israel. It was as if I was betraying some common belief," Torrijos continued.

"But at the same time, I asked myself why one country, especially if small and burdened with a big problem, cannot speak with another nation? This conversation would only serve the common good. Both the Arabs and the Israelis are irrationally tenacious. They still repeat arguments of two thousand years ago."

Marshal Tito interjected that he believed the Arabs would realize that Torrijos did "the only sensible thing." The Yugoslav president said, "One needs to behave like a statesman." In the recent past, in fact, Tito had to steer nonaligned meetings away from Arab efforts to seek Israel's ouster from the United Nations.

The topic summoned Tito's memory of visiting Cairo after the Israelis defeated Egypt in the Six-Day War of 1967. "I said in front of the whole [Egyptian] government that this was not a war of Arabs against Israel. I told the Egyptian leadership, 'You want to throw Israel into the sea, but you are forgetting that Israel is a member of the United Nations, that

Israel is a real fact of international life, and that you are risking a conflict mainly with the United States.' That was a shock for them," Tito continued his story. "On our way to the airport, Nasser told me in the car that I was right and that they needed to change their opinion. Nasser began to pursue more realistic policies, but Israel remained stubborn."

Having just arrived in Yugoslavia from Israel, Torrijos had more to say about the Middle East. "The Big Powers," meaning Moscow and Washington, were fighting there "until the last Arab and Israeli soldier [died]," he said. That is why Israel is seeking strategic advantage by developing the atomic bomb. Tito observed that soon there would be more than one hundred million Arabs and only a couple of million Jews.

"Whoever first uses the atom bomb is making a very huge mistake," the marshal said. There were countries that in fact conducted policies according to those of nonalignment even though they leaned toward the United States or toward the Soviet Union, President Tito continued. "But it is better that we connect them to ourselves rather than to let them go to the imperial forces. For example, mainland China supports the nonaligned members on many issues and shares common views with them."

General Torrijos changed the subject to the recent treaty-signing ceremony in Washington. He described to Tito how he had wanted a small guest list of selected attendees at the Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters. It was President Carter's idea to invite all the Latin American presidents, including General Augusto Pinochet. "But [Pinochet] and I only took a photograph together," Torrijos joked. "I was afraid [of] what you might conclude from this."

Tito followed with his own humor. "There was a need to be broadminded," he said to laughter, "but Pinochet would never be accepted among the nonaligned."

More seriously, Torrijos explained why he refused to break relations with the Chilean dictator. The Panamanian strongman explained that he had been instrumental in bringing out from Chile some twenty-five hundred refugees seeking asylum abroad.[14] Several hundred ended up in his country, the general said, where "they gave themselves to enjoying life in Panama. There is no fighting spirit except for words. For this reason, these Chileans are repeating the childhood diseases of the left."

General Torrijos then informed the marshal about his views on political conditions in other nations of Latin America. Venezuela had plenty of oil, he said, but it also has "lots of poor people." Tito responded that he had gathered the same impression when he visited Venezuela in 1976. Finally, after speaking briefly about events in Peru, Bolivia, and the Caribbean, General Torrijos concluded that most Latin American countries had amassed huge debts, amounting to a total of "more than 80 billion

dollars." He did not know how his neighbors were going to pay off these international loans.

Tito concluded the meeting with an explanation of how the Yugoslav government managed relations with its neighbors. He expressed pride in the way that multiethnic and multilingual peoples had been living peacefully together in the Balkans since the end of World War II.

"For me," Torrijos concluded in his report back home, "Tito is an historical point of reference, a beacon without which I would not dare to outline any course. So long as Tito is alive, I will never be lost."[15]

Torrijos and his entourage departed Belgrade to continue their official visits to the chiefs of state of Western Europe. The trip marked the final occasion on which these two statesmen, who really had become friends, saw each other.

MADRID

Every time Torrijos arrived in Spain, he said, it felt almost like coming home. A good part of his historical and cultural heritage had originated there. "That is why it is only natural that this chapter in Panama's history that we are living currently would also have support from our mother and sister country."

In Report no. 7 from Madrid, General Torrijos explained his mission as "giving the rulers an explanation of the treaty and of the difficulties still pending, [and] letting them draw their own conclusions and decisions. . . . Neither in Spain nor in any of the other countries visited have we gone to beg for anything. On the contrary, we have gone to give, to offer the opportunity to support the moral loftiness of our cause."[16] Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez endorsed the ratification of the canal treaties following a chat of an hour and a half with Torrijos. "I think it has been a very imaginative accomplishment," Suárez remarked, "to make national dignity compatible with the pragmatism needed to solve a problem that has gone unsolved for many years."[17]

As for solidarity, Spain also has a problem of territorial integrity with which Panamanians could sympathize. The solution to the occupation of Gibraltar by a foreign power may be solved by the same solution that Torrijos just used—that is, direct negotiations. "It is a problem of dignity and of national pride, which for the Spaniard, as for the Panamanian, supersedes any economic consideration," Torrijos informed his readers.

In their discussions, President Suárez and the chief of the Panamanian Revolution came around to Spain's process of democratization following the death of Franco. Torrijos had an opportunity to talk up the human rights initiative of his friend Jimmy Carter. It works, the visitor said. Human rights has saved lives, and they make one "count to ten"

before ordering the murder or torture of others. "Because Human Rights are those of being born, having something to eat, not being tortured, not being racially discriminated against, not being exploited, and being sovereign in one's own territory."

Above all other meetings on this trip, the discussion on democracy and human rights might appear contradictory for a leader like Torrijos. He was after all a dictator. Men did indeed die on his watch and under his orders. Others were forced into exile for opposing his rule. Was Torrijos really committed to democracy and human dignity? It seems that Omar Torrijos wanted to convince the European powers that he would follow up on these commitments as soon as possible following the US Senate's ratification of the treaties.

PARIS

Even today, Rubén Darío Paredes reminisces about Paris with a certain rapture. "On the day that he was going to be received by [President] Giscard d'Estaing, [Torrijos] called me to his suite at the Hotel Crillon." The window of the chief's suite looked out on the obelisk on the Place de la Concorde. It was the obelisk of pink marble standing twenty-five meters high that Egypt had gifted to France. "On that day Torrijos was glowing," Paredes says. "He was a superman, a man at the top. That's how I perceived him [at] the time."[18]

The French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing held an audience with Omar Torrijos at the Élysée Palace. "My conversation with Giscard d'Estaing was programmed to take thirty minutes, but it lasted more than a whole hour," the general wrote home to his people. He said he could appreciate that the president of France wanted to "transmit a heritage rich in culture, maturity and elegance." "If the French had finished the Canal," Torrijos wrote, "the generation of De Gaulle's government, of which Giscard d'Estaing was Minister, would have given it back to us by now."[19]

Torrijos told the reporters that he mentioned these facts to the French president: "The first excavations for our canal were French [Ferdinand de Lesseps], and the person who signed the 1903 treaty [Philippe Bunau-Varilla] was also French. They got us into that mess. It is only fair, then, for France to play a role in the solution of the problem."

A journalist posed a question about the French experiences in Suez and Vietnam. "Governments that heed history do not swim upstream," Torrijos observed.

Speaking of the October 23 plebiscite in Panama, Omar Torrijos said, "All peoples are solidly with us, especially the French. However, no one can be in solidarity with the Panamanian people if we do not decide in favor of our own national reaffirmation."[20]

ROME

Omar Torrijos met for an hour with Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. "I told the Prime Minister that Panama has never threatened the US Government. Only he who has strength threatens. What we do is issue warnings because we are right. We warned that the bomb is about to explode. We have never threatened to drop it. There are very few peoples who are as peaceful as the Panamanian people, and there is no people as interested in protecting their canal."[21]

Torrijos sent to the news media back home a separate report on his meeting with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican. "While still in Rome, on 6 October, I met with the Pope. I told him how the nations of the world have a materialistic and mercantile concept of the canal. They ask how much it costs to transit a ton, how many kilometers are saved in crossing, how many dollars in profits are realized, what contribution does the canal make to their gross national product. They have never asked or even noted why our flag is not [flying] there."

After emerging from his audience with the Pontiff, the Panamanian strongman spoke to reporters that "he had found in the Pope a great understanding for the reasons which motivate Panama in regaining its sovereignty over the Canal Zone." Sources close to the pope said, "The solution to the Panama Canal problem should be considered as an example to humanity as to how problems can be peacefully settled."[22]

STOCKHOLM

The Panamanian leader informed Prime Minister Thorbjörn Fälldin that Panama was fighting with righteousness on its side and had more than enough reasons. "We are not anti-yankee," said Torrijos. "We are anti-colonialists. Because to the Panamanians, colonialism is a concrete fact that is visible, that is seen, and that establishes a defense system that is aimed at the center of our heart."[23]

"Fälldin told me, and I quote: 'If the treaty is not ratified by the U.S. Senate, that would be an act of great irresponsibility toward world peace.'"

In the 1970s, Sweden also had become a haven for Latin American political refugees, including Panamanians. In fact, one of them had made news when he committed suicide by immolating himself in flames in front of the American Embassy in Stockholm. The ostensible reason: Torrijos's treaty concessions giving the Americans twenty-three more years of military occupation. The young man would have preferred an immediate withdrawal of American troops.

Torrijos asked a group of Panamanian exiles to come talk with him at his hotel. The meeting turned tense when the general asked one exiled

youth about his family back in Panama. The young man replied that his father had died, having been tossed into the Pacific Ocean from a National Guard helicopter. This response likely referred to the death of Father Gallego. At the end of the meeting, Torrijos invited the exiles to return to Panama. "Over there you have this alternative," he told them. "Either you pull the cart with me or you suggest a better option."[24] Some exiles agreed to return home.

HELSINKI

In Finland, the Panamanians had separate audiences with Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa and with President Urho Kekkonen. The conversation with the latter turned to plans for the defense of the canal once the Canal Zone passed to the possession of the Republic of Panama. Torrijos replied that the only defense possible would be that all nations of the world "feel an interest in keeping it running in order to have the right to use it, without any discrimination."

"Which means," Omar added, "that the only defense of the Canal is that it remains neutral and, most importantly, that it has the affection and respect of the people in whose territory it is located."[25] President Kekkonen expressed agreement with the opinion of his Panamanian visitors.

GERMANY

Everyone in the Panamanian entourage was struck by the presence of so many security personnel in Bonn. Armored cars, artillery, helicopters. A reaction to "the invisible specter of terrorism" presumably from the communists in East Germany.[26]

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution had a meeting with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a fellow social democrat as it turned out. The German leader told his guest how glad he was that Panama and the United States had reached a peaceful agreement. The Federal Republic of Germany ranked eighth among nations using the canal.[27]

During their conversation, one item of disagreement arose. It was the Non-Aligned Movement. "Commenting on my travels through the Third World," Torrijos wrote, "Schmidt made the observation that between the nonaligned and the oil of the Arabs, we were going to wipe out all the human race." The chancellor's criticism of the world outside the West struck the Panamanian leader as quite pessimistic.

The chancellor's guest was rather more hopeful. "I replied that the movement of the nonaligned countries is the unionization of poverty and the possibility of multiplying our cry to the powerful with 100 [amplified] speakers, to see if they will hear us that way," Torrijos jotted down in his report. "We [of the Third World] are not interested in European

life patterns, where society is designed so that each one has to push aside the other if they want to survive. We are interested in the quality of life and not just its level. Human warmth and not just technological development."[28] The Panamanian delegation's last stop: the United Kingdom.

LONDON

General Torrijos began the report on his visit to 10 Downing Street with some reflections on punctuality among the Brits and the Latins.

"Between the English time and the Panamanian time there are some three hours of difference, three hours in which the English waits for the Panamanian. I did not want [James] Callaghan, the British prime minister, to confirm this truth, and I took every precaution to see him at the exact time he was to receive me," Omar wrote. "Then the unexpected happened. Callahan was 20 minutes late."[29]

President Carter had already contacted the prime minister about General Torrijos's visit to England. Carter wanted to make sure Her Majesty's Government took the Panamanians seriously. One of Callaghan's aides took notes on the meeting.

According to the British memorandum, Torrijos began with a preamble that his visit "was a demonstration of the new responsibility and political maturity of the Panamanian Government. His purpose was to solicit moral support for his country." The solution was in sight, said Torrijos. "He and President Carter were working together to move away from the danger of violence and towards the assurance of peaceful transit of the Panama Canal."

The prime minister told Torrijos that "the United Kingdom, as the second largest customer of the Canal . . . has no hesitation in supporting the Panama Canal Treaty." Callaghan only hoped that the tolls would be kept "to a moderate level." Torrijos concluded "that the lesson of history was that when a people were denied their rights through negotiation, they turned to violence." According to the British minutes of the meeting, "The Prime Minister said that this was a speech which the General should make in Washington, and not in London."[30]

The memo of the British Foreign Office betrays a certain hint of condescension on the part of a once-omnipotent commercial power toward a small, weak country. Here is the shell of a former imperial power that is concerned only that the Third World nation of Panama continue with the generous subsidies that the United States had bequeathed to British commerce. Callaghan did not want the small country to charge too much for its services to his declining world power. No other European government had demanded so much of Torrijos.

Moreover, the Panamanian strongman captured a hint of irony in

Callaghan's admission that it was easy for the British to sympathize with the colonized "because Great Britain still held numerous colonies in the world." The prime minister referred to the British colony of Belize. Callaghan favored granting independence to the English-speaking residents, but he "was determined not to allow Belize to be occupied by Guatemala."[31] On this point, Torrijos agreed. While he was in Number 10 Downing Street, the diplomat in Omar Torrijos played down some principles in favor of others. He did not mention Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands.

Considering his own aims, the Panamanian strongman decided to place his audience with the British prime minister in a positive light. He explained to his Panamanian audience that Callaghan had given him good advice. "Do not worry so much," he quoted the prime minister as saying. "This is so necessary for world peace, for the peaceful coexistence of the merchant marine, that we do not see how this treaty could be rejected."[32]

Before the Panamanians boarded their return flight, an urgent message arrived from President Carter. It said, "Some questions have arisen concerning the interpretations being given in our respective countries to certain portions" of the treaties. Carter knew that Torrijos would be landing in Washington to catch a plane to Panama. "If so, I would like to meet with you privately to discuss this matter."

President Carter consulted with several leading senators of both parties including Robert Byrd, Howard Baker, Frank Church, and Barry Goldwater. They gave him the bad news that the treaties would never gain ratification until senators were satisfied that the United States Armed Forces had the right to intervene to defend the canal, even after the year 2000.[33] Jimmy knew that his friend Omar would not be pleased.

One of Panama's young diplomats, Omar Jaén Suárez, explains why: "Torrijos, who tightly controlled everything in Panama, did not seem to understand the problems Carter suffered with the United States Congress and, deep down, the political management of that vast and complex country."[34]

WASHINGTON AGAIN

Torrijos and the remainder of his entourage departed from London on October 13, 1977, aboard the French Concorde. Colonel Paredes flew with the general, as did Luz María Noli, the bilingual news reporter for Televisora Nacional. She reported that when the Concorde flight landed at Dulles International Airport, American reporters met Omar Torrijos at the terminal. They quizzed him about that old story that had surfaced during Senate hearings about Torrijos's brother, Moises, being involved in drug trafficking. The reporters asked nothing about the European tour.

"I do not believe this?" the irritated Panamanian leader replied. "Do not judge me by what my relatives do. Judge me by what I do." Then he "coldly" asked one of the reporters, "Are you responsible for what your family does?"[35]

General Paredes sets the next day's scene at the White House: Ambassador Gabriel Lewis Galindo took Colonel Paredes and Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt to the White House two hours before the meeting to prepare an agenda for Carter's meeting with Torrijos with the adviser Hamilton Jordan. "I think it was Saturday. It was snowing," Paredes reminisces. The Panamanians entered through the White House kitchen, where the cooks were preparing breakfast. They wrote up the agenda with Jordan in his basement office, "which was like a bachelor's room. He played tennis, and there were his tennis shoes and racket."

Torrijos arrived at the appointed time, and the president convened everyone in the Cabinet Room. It was Carter's first meeting with Paredes, and the president said in "pretty good" Spanish: "Coronel Paredes, usted es Ministro de Agricultura de Panamá. Siéntese aquí en la silla del Secretario de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos."[36]

Carter began the discussion with the discouraging news that public opinion polls indicated that only 35 percent of the American people favored the treaties, and 65 percent opposed. He explained how difficult it would be for senators to ignore such numbers. "We estimate that there are about 55 Senators who will vote for ratification at this time; about 20 are opposed, and the others are still in doubt," the president told the Panamanians. "Important questions have been raised on crucial points: the defense of the Canal and the related question of military intervention."

Carter wanted to head off any amendments on the issue of military rights that the Senate might make at the time of ratification.

Carter and his counselors suggested a statement expressing the following: (1) the United States has a right to use military power against threats to interrupt traffic in the Canal; and (2) the United States acknowledges that it does not intend to intervene in the political affairs of Panama. This exact statement would allay the fears of undecided senators.

Torrijos and his talented treaty writer Escobar Bethancourt, who had flown in from Panama for this meeting, wanted to reverse the order of (1) and (2) to make it appear that the US promises to use military force only at the request of the Panamanian government. This would appeal to the Panama's voters. Then and there, they hammered out compromise language that would be simultaneously announced in Washington and Panama.[37] But even this compromise was too much for Torrijos.

General Torrijos told the president it would not be good for him to sign any new agreement before the coming plebiscite. After all, the gener-

al had been preparing his people for a decisive vote in favor of the treaties as already written and signed. All he could offer was an oral statement.

Immediately after the White House meeting, the chief asked the TV correspondent Luz María Noli to forward the news to Panama. "I have not signed anything. Tell the Panamanians that I have not even given an autograph."[38] Torrijos meant that, as far as he was concerned, the treaties he had signed with Carter five weeks earlier remained valid.

Yet this new twist marred his European triumphs. It gave political opponents and radical students cause to charge Torrijos with bowing to the Americans, just like all the other Panamanian politicians before 1968.

THE PLEBISCITE IN PANAMA

Back home, Torrijos immediately launched a week of public appearances, generating publicity about the coming national vote. He met with a women's group and praised Panamanian mothers for bringing up children who did "not surrender to imperialism." Omar Torrijos addressed a conference of engineers, saying that they would soon form "the first line of administrators and operators of the canal."[39]

In the week following his return from Washington, the general met with students critical of the treaties. Those on the left asked him for a return of the anti-imperialist exiles (but not for the conservatives in Miami), full freedom of expression, and access to the media as the people prepared to vote in three months. At the Law School of the University of Panama, members of the Revolutionary Socialist League and the Popular Vanguard intimated that Torrijos was a traitor. The general temporized with them. He pledged not to take advantage of the treaty signing to install himself permanently in power.[40]

"I know well that deep in your hearts there is some regret because the [canal] solution was negotiated," the strongman continued, "and maybe that regret exists even in the depth of my own heart. [applause] However a government leader is compelled to be realistic. A government leader has to do not only what he feels but also what he thinks he has to." General Torrijos recalled the deaths of individual students in the 1959 and 1964 anti-US protests. "We have 360,000 young Panamanians now and all would have sacrificed for sovereignty. But then we would have a country without leaders."

"I know," he told members of the Student Federation, "that the treaty is not perfect, that it contains traces of colonialism. But also we have set a deadline for the end of each trace of colonialism."[41]

The Student Federation took a pre-plebiscite poll during their Congress. Only 45 percent of the students would vote in favor of the treaties.[42] The youth of Panama remained the chief's most demanding supporters.

The national plebiscite for ratification of the treaties was set to take place on October 23. It came off without too many blemishes, though cries of fraud arose from some opponents. The National Guard had promised "honest" elections, and the UN Human Rights Committee had poll watchers on duty. One radio news commentator reported that he "drove around to many places and there was no pressure, there were no National Guardsmen, there was nothing. Each person came out, voted as he pleased, and returned home."[43]

The results of Panama's referendum on the canal treaties should have been a relief to Omar Torrijos. They were not. Of the 734,706 votes cast, 67 percent of Panamanian voters cast ballots in favor of the accords. The general had been hoping for 70 percent approval. Voters in Panama City and Colón registered the highest percentage of nay votes. The greatest quantity of yes ballots came in the general's home province of Veraguas.[44]

Nonetheless, the ayes had it. Now the US Senate had to turn in the same exact results: two-thirds in favor.

No sooner had Omar Torrijos and his entourage returned home from signing the treaties with President Carter at OAS headquarters than the Inter-American Human Rights Commission informed the chief that it was sending an investigative team to Panama. It had received accusations from certain quarters that the Torrijos regime was abusing human rights.

The chief replied immediately. "There have been a series of unfounded, unfair and irresponsible charges voiced against my government regarding violations of human rights," Torrijos replied. "We invite you to travel through any part of Panama, to talk to anyone and to inform the world. I will give you the keys to our prisons and if you find any political prisoner, you may release him."[45]

The head of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, an appendage of the Organization of American States, arrived for an inspection of Panama toward the end of November 1977. The entourage made a round of interviews, including talks with Archbishop McGrath, President Lakas, the Panamanian Supreme Court, and the chief of the revolutionary government.[46] They left no record of releasing prisoners of conscience from Panamanian jails.

The second gathering of students took place after the nation's plebiscite. This one celebrated Panama's ratification of the treaties. Secondary school students organized a ceremony in which the burning of a copy of the 1903 Treaty signaled the eventual return of effective sovereignty of Panama. Such "acts of patriotic reaffirmation" took place in high schools throughout Panama.

The main event occurred in Panama City. There students had invited the general together with the minister of education, Arístides Royo. The

student body president opened the ceremony by urging "iron unity" in the fatherland until the last US soldier leaves in the country. Twenty-one Panamanian flags flew—one for each martyr who had died during the 1964 riots. Two student leaders escorted the chief of the Panamanian Revolution to the firepit, where he burned a copy of the 1903 Treaty. The ceremony was broadcast live on national TV.

In his speech, Torrijos praised the students for their discipline, forbearance, and unity. "These young people," he told the television audience, "will no longer allow the presence in the heart of their homeland of a colonial enclave which is arrogant, insulting and unjustified."

He also pledged something else. "We would gain nothing by eliminating a military base which says 'no trespassing' and replacing it with a luxurious house which says 'beware of the dog,' which is pretty much the same thing. No! All areas of the canal zone will be used to benefit the entire population."[47]

For sure the commander's trip to Europe picked up yes votes for the plebiscite, as his propaganda machine—if his own writing can be characterized as such—caught the attention of his fellow Panamanians. Probably it meant next to nothing to American public opinion. Fortunately for Torrijos, the American public was not voting in a plebiscite; ratifying treaties remained the task of the elected senators. The demonstration of European support may have made it more difficult for some senators to reject the treaties. But that was not enough. The senators wanted to see Panama and take their measure of its government and particularly of the dictator Omar Torrijos himself.

CHAPTER 13

OMAR AND THE SENATORS

"I am back in the domestic foxhole." With that statement, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution announced to the people of Panama that he had completed his diplomatic onslaught and would return to his domestic agenda. "I am conscious of the national problems and prepared to face them head on, to attack them individually and without shirking." He mentioned concentrating on unemployment, high electricity rates, and primary and secondary education.

Omar Torrijos promised that "the revolutionary government will provide uniforms, books, and shoes for elementary and secondary school students throughout the country." As for the high energy prices consumers were paying, he asked his people to do something for him. "Pray one 'Our Father' every day so that the Bayano Dam will fill up to the 62-meter mark. It is now at the 56.5-meter mark."[1]

However, there remained serious obstacles on the foreign front—the United States Senate and Reagan's anti-treaty campaign. As the Senate debates dragged on into the new year of 1978, the senators also had to confront the Pentagon's concerns about defending the canal from foreign military threats. For these issues, the fact-finding junket came back into style in the United States Congress. But first, there was conflict within the Republican Party.

JOHN WAYNE TO THE RESCUE

At one point during Reagan's campaign to scuttle the canal treaties, Omar Torrijos enlisted his friend John Wayne to counter the arguments of the

California governor and fellow movie actor. Torrijos thought that John Wayne was "a helluva lot better actor than Reagan," and offered to provide "Duke," as Wayne called himself, with materials to counter the governor's arguments.

John Wayne had become familiar with Panama through his investments in the shrimping business. Also, his first wife was Panamanian. Duke turned out to be the perfect antidote to Ronald Reagan's campaign against ratification of the treaties. Both were ideologically conservative. Wayne had filmed political ads for his friend "Ronnie" when Reagan ran for governor of California. It was just that John Wayne knew and loved Panama, while Reagan exploited the hot-button canal controversy as a pathway to the presidency.

The movie star remained loyal to his Panamanian friends and took pleasure later when Torrijos signed the treaty with President Carter, a politician with whom John Wayne would not have agreed on most issues. He put up with Reagan's use of the Panama Canal issue in 1976 to challenge Gerald Ford for the Republican presidential nomination. But Reagan's opposition to the treaties' ratification particularly galled John Wayne. Moreover, Duke once spent a day at the beach house with Omar Torrijos and liked the Panamanian leader. General Torrijos penned a letter to the actor to ask if he could help his "fellow [American] country men . . . know that we have a great future ahead of us as friends and partners."[2]

Omar Torrijos also asked Wayne's Panamanian business partner, Arturo McGowan, if he could enlist Wayne to help convince sixty-seven US senators to back the treaties. At seventy years old, Wayne had just come down with a second bout of lung cancer. His moviemaking career had tapered off after 1969 when he won an Oscar for his portrayal of Marshal Reuben J. "Rooster" Cogburn in the film *True Grit*.

Without hesitation, Wayne agreed to cooperate. McGowan and two young diplomats who had participated in the negotiating teams spent three weeks coaching the actor on the finer points of the treaties. Wayne put up the three Panamanians at a hotel near his seaside home in Newport Beach, California. One of those Panamanian advisers, Omar Jaén Suárez, remembers that Wayne was not a good student. The Panamanians had to spend most of their time correcting Duke's understanding of the finer points of the treaty's articles.[3]

In a general discussion of world affairs on the first evening, Wayne launched into a reactionary diatribe about communism, the United Nations, and the Vietnam War. The Panamanians disagreed. There was a lot of shouting. In the following days, the visiting Panamanians were happier pouring over the details of the treaties. "The actor," Jaén Suárez maintains,

"was committed to support the treaties, but he had not read them and was not familiar with their terms. His desire was to help Panama because he had good memories of the country and enjoyed the friendly and hospitable spirit of the Panamanians."

While the Panamanian advisers stood by, John Wayne put through phone calls to his good friends, Ronald Reagan and Senator Barry Goldwater. They had mighty conversations that did not lack for "loud and strong language," Jaén Suárez recalls.[4]

Finally, the movie star sent a personal letter to Reagan. "The Panamanians have always been a friendly country to us," Duke wrote. "I am sure it is quite embarrassing to General Torrijos to be called a 'tinhorn' dictator, and I didn't feel that was your style. I hope they weren't your words. This is more the style of a liberal punk who doesn't have to answer for his words."[5]

Although his Panamanian tutors stood by to guide him on provisions of the treaties, Duke preferred to use his own voice in composing this letter to Reagan. "I'll show you point by God damn point in the Treaty where you are misinforming people."

"I went to a lot of trouble," he informed Reagan, "and I brought in people to prove to you that the alarming things you are saying are untruths. You have lost a great and unique 'appointment with history.' If you had given time and thought on this issue your attitude would have gained you the image of leadership that I wished for you, rather than, in the long run, a realization by the public that you are merely making statements for political expediency."[6]

Before the Panamanian diplomats left, they helped Wayne to write to every one of the one hundred senators. He tried to convince each senator that his friend Omar Torrijos was no communist and welcomed American investments such as his own. He quoted Torrijos to the effect that "the aspirin for Cuba is not exactly the correct one for Panama." Duke asked the senators to do the right thing.

SENATORS VISIT PANAMA

Ambassador William Jorden wrote that the US Embassy in Panama operated as if it were "the biggest travel bureau in the Western Hemisphere."[7] It had to make travel accommodations for nearly half the members of the Senate, congressional staffers, and Pentagon officials. Representatives of national civic organizations such as the American Legion and the Chamber of Commerce also arrived. They flew into Tocumen Airport one or two at a time and in groups of ten officials. Torrijos entertained forty-two US senators in Panama during the debates over the treaty.

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution developed a routine. Usual-

ly, he guided the visiting senators to rural projects in remoter parts of Panama, accessible only by helicopter. Then he gathered them for a briefing at Rory González's beach house at Farallón or at the nearby Fuerte Cimarrón. He also met them at the resort island of Contadora in the Bay of Panama. He had to be charming and gracious despite the condescending attitudes usually displayed by Americans abroad. Most of all, he did not wish to give his visitors the impression that he would settle for anything less than a full withdrawal from Panama of all US Armed Forces.

The general's first visitor from the United States Senate was none other than its majority leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia. He came with six other senators. They arrived on Air Force flights at Howard Air Base in the Canal Zone. Torrijos took them to the teacher training school he once attended in the San Blas Islands. Senator Byrd warned Torrijos that "he and his colleagues have come to seek information" because there existed much opposition to the treaty.

Torrijos pushed back. "I do not expect the treaties to be ratified by Monday, but neither do I expect to wait for a geological era." Once he informed the senators that he had wanted to introduce them to university students—but the students refused to meet them.[8] The joke was that visitors had already received briefings about Panamanian students being violent.

Three senators broke away from the group and had a meeting with the leader of the oligarchy's Liberal Party, David Samudio. He had lost the 1968 presidential election. Samudio and the senators talked about human rights and Panama's political situation. Samudio informed them that his party supported the treaty and looked forward to twenty-three years of faithful implementation. It was "a step forward in the country's definitive liberation," he told Senators James Sasser of Tennessee, Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, and Walter Huddleston of Kentucky.[9]

The comportment of the senators indicated that they were looking for reasons not to vote "yes" on a treaty unpopular with their constituents. Torrijos told a TV audience as much. "I want to tell you that I had never been submitted to such a heavy and direct line of questioning. They were like 10 pitchers throwing balls at one catcher. Not to worry. Our cause can withstand any type of probing."[10]

Another batch of senators to tour Panama came toward the end of November 1977. The group consisted of Republican Ted Stevens of Alaska and Democrats Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, Malcom Wallop of Wyoming, and George McGovern of North Dakota. The latter had lost the 1972 presidential election to Richard Nixon. They took a boat ride through the canal, and then they met with Torrijos, President Lakas, and US ambassador Jorden.

Torrijos took Senator McGovern on a flight to Coclecito in the mountains and walked with him through the rain forest to a swimming hole, whereupon the general jumped in with his clothes on. McGovern decided not to swim, but he did pose for a photo op sitting with Torrijos on a boulder by the river.[11]

Meanwhile, a group of businesspeople and journalists sponsored by the pro-treaty National Foreign Policy Committee arrived from Washington. They all held meetings with the commanding general of the Southern Command, Archbishop McGrath, the Canal Zone governor, as well as labor leaders from the Canal Zone and Panama. Even members of the Panameñista Party of the exiled ex-president Arnulfo Arias met with this American entourage. Cocktail parties with leading Panamanian citizens and resident Americans ensued.[12]

When Senator Barry Goldwater (who lost the 1964 election to President Johnson) came, he did not even bother to pay his respects to the maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution. He did drop by the residence of Nicolás Ardito Barletta because their mutual friend, the economist Milton Friedman, had suggested they meet.[13] Goldwater spent the rest of the time inside the Canal Zone.[14] Ultimately, he would decide to vote "no" on both treaties.

Even before the above group left, thirty private United States citizens came to see Torrijos at the Veraguas Teachers Day celebration in the commander in chief's hometown of Santiago. This particular group came to Panama to find the arguments to defend the treaties in public discussions in the United States.

"I have to tell you," Torrijos told the Americans "that everybody asks me to do one thing or another, but the only one who tells me what I should not do is Fidel." He also mentioned that his own rather draconian press law had never been applied. "Since certain U.S. senators want to suggest their remedies, we are going to stick to our word and repeal this piece of legislation."[15] The struggle for the canal treaties did encourage the Panamanian dictator to loosen up several draconian features of his regime.

The general also received Republican senators Robert Dole and Paul Laxalt in his home on Calle 50. Minister of Economic Planning Ardito Barletta stopped by to go over—in his flawless English—the national debt figures with the two senators. Dole and Laxalt advanced the idea that perhaps ratification might wait until 1980 or 1981. "I told them that nations, like men, cannot be kept waiting for a decision," Torrijos informed reporters afterward.[16]

Senator Howard Metzenbaum flew to Panama to meet Torrijos. The Democrat from Ohio informed the general that "neither I nor my constit-

uents like dictators." Torrijos took a long puff on his Cuban cigar, blew a circle of smoke into the air, and replied, "Neither do I."[17]

In January 1978, Omar Torrijos escorted Republican senators Howard Baker, John Chafee, and Jake Garn on an inspection tour of the Isabel Herrera Professional School. The general introduced them to an audience of students in training to be teachers. "The idea is that [you] understand that Panama is not a canal," he said to the senators. "Panama is a nation [and] there are youths here who have feelings, think and raise questions."[18]

The strongman and the senators then engaged in talks at the beach house. Televisora Nacional covered the general's subsequent press conference. "They are just men," Torrijos told journalists, "all three of them. They are very much concerned over the United States maintaining a just relationship with weaker countries and they are very proud to live in the world's first democracy. These elements make me think that at the moment of truth we will have in them three militants for the Panamanian cause."[19]

True, they were just men. But they were also senators belonging to the Republican Party whose right wing, led by the charismatic former governor of California, was making a "yes" vote politically very difficult. Moreover, Howard Baker was the Senate minority leader, himself a prospective presidential contender, and famous for asking, "What did the president know, and when did he know it?" at the Watergate hearings.

When seven members of the Foreign Relations Committee came to see Omar Torrijos on Contadora Island, he greeted them on the airport runway. On the short bus ride to the hotel, one senator asked the host if there would be time to take a dip in the ocean. "Certainly," the general answered, "but let us dip into the canal problem first."

It was at this meeting that Torrijos agreed to include a memo of understanding that Carter signed in October. It gave the United States limited rights to defend the canal after the year 2000. These senators of the Foreign Relations Committee were delighted to hear this concession. In truth, Panama's strongman abhorred that memo of understanding. He had agreed to it under duress. A reporter asked Torrijos if he would accept amendments to the treaty. "Every amendment is a plebiscite," he replied. "Do you really expect the Panamanians to spend all their time on plebiscites?"[20] Allowing the US military to intervene in Panamanian affairs using the canal's operation as an excuse was intolerable.

Just as the Contadora meeting was ending, John Wayne himself strolled into the meeting room. Torrijos had arranged the surprise visit. All discussions ended immediately as the senators jostled each other to get a snapshot for the folks back home. Better yet, they wanted a picture together with Duke.

One of the last senators to travel to Panama, Dennis DeConcini, arrived as if on a holiday. His wife, mother, and a younger brother accompanied him. DeConcini remained open-minded on the treaties despite the fact that 70 percent of Arizonans opposed them. After a tour of the Canal Zone, he met for two hours with General Torrijos.

Senator DeConcini had several questions about the neutrality treaty and asked his host about what would happen if some domestic political upheaval or labor strike were to shut down the canal's operations. He asked Torrijos whether the treaty would permit the United States to send in troops to reopen traffic. The question touched upon the prerogative of the most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of its neighbors, which had always frustrated Latin Americans.

As tactfully as possible, Torrijos replied that American troops could indeed intervene, but only "if you come in at my request and on our side."[21] Subsequent events would demonstrate that the answer did not satisfy Senator DeConcini.

DRUGS AND BANKERS

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution went to great lengths to keep the nation's youth informed of the progress of the ratification process. He himself had come to the campus of the University of Panama from time to time to brief students on the negotiations. In his last speech at the university before the Senate's final votes on ratification, Torrijos demonstrated how much he had adopted the policies of the Non-Aligned Movement.

"In every struggle for liberation, which does not have to be associated with upheaval, terrorism or irregular warfare—the manner in which the weak respond to the strong . . . must begin with negotiation so that they may later have the support of the world's moral conscience," Torrijos told the students. Public opinion in the world "is an invisible but existent force."[22]

As the official hearings continued back in Washington, DC, opposition forces in the Senate resuscitated rumors that the Torrijos brothers were involved in running drugs. Omar's elder brother, Moises Torrijos, issued two spirited denunciations of these accusations from his post as ambassador to Spain. "This really is blackmail, a desperate bid to delay ratification of the treaty." Another objection came from Panama's Education Ministry, reminding the senators that Panama will be the site of the next INTERPOL meeting on the interdiction of drugs. Panama, in fact, is one of the countries that clamps down on drugs," the communiqué said.[23]

US diplomats twice previously had absolved the Torrijos family of al-

legations concerning its involvement in drug trafficking. In 1976, American officials heard about possible drug deals between Colombian businessmen and both Omar and Moises Torrijos for the transfer of cocaine. A diplomat at the American Embassy in Bogotá gave his assessment to the State Department. "I personally am very skeptical that General Torrijos himself is involved or would himself 'negotiate,'" such a deal, he cabled to Foggy Bottom. "Nor do I discount possibility story brought to us as provocation."[24]

Moreover, Panama had been cooperating for years with agents of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Their chief contact was the G-2, Colonel Manuel Noriega. Everyone knew that both the drugs and the money passed through Panama. "When [US agents] needed bank information on someone," Noriega told a journalist later, "I opened our books, breaking our own laws, so that they could see our accounts without problems, all based on good faith."[25]

The former attaché also corroborated Noriega's testimony about cooperating with the US Justice Department. After sitting in on a DEA briefing for Panama's intelligence chief, the embassy official reported that the American drug officers expressed gratitude for "Noriega's interest in drug interdiction." One DEA agent used the diminutive of Manuel Antonio's middle name in telling diplomats, "Tony is really on top of drugs."[26]

The Central Intelligence Agency put to rest official US concern that the Torrijos family had been profiting from the drug trade. In one report the CIA stated, "Omar Torrijos instilled an intense fear of drug trafficking in his countrymen. This does not mean that money from the drug trade is no longer circulating among Panamanians," the analysis continued. "Generally, however, the amounts are small."[27]

Colombian drug gangs handled cocaine distribution through Panama without much participation of Panamanian citizens, according to CIA information. They kept drug-related violence out of the transportation of the merchandise. Mainly, the vicious killings of the late 1970s occurred at the production stage and at the final point of distribution.

As the Senate vote approached, word leaked out that an investigative committee had absolved the Torrijos brothers of all charges of dealing in illegal drugs. Democratic Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, chair of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, announced that committee members had discovered no evidence linking Torrijos and his government to the drug trade. The investigation put to rest the accusation "raised by conservatives who oppose the new canal treaties," according to the Panamanian press.[28]

There were other US interests backing the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties—the investment banks of Wall Street. Led by David

Rockefeller, Chase Manhattan, Goldman Sachs, and other East Coast banking establishments with branches already set up in Panama backed the treaties. A Senate vote overturning the treaties might have been detrimental to the operations of these financial institutions in Latin America's foremost banking center.

However, to go on record as pro-treaty proponents would not have given these conservative stalwarts sufficient anonymity with their allies in Congress. Hard right conservatives such as Goldwater and Reagan identified the East Coast Republicans as liberals. Therefore, David Rockefeller's support for the treaties had to be indirect, unobtrusive. The Democratic administration was not their preferred political ally, and Jimmy Carter was not their favored president.[29] Still, these bankers quietly promoted the Panama Canal Treaties.

THE SENATORS VOTE

Following five weeks of debate, the United States Senate finally held its votes on the Panama Canal Treaties. On the first treaty concerning the financials and the transfer of territories, waters, and installations in the Canal Zone, the yes votes numbered sixty-eight and the no votes, thirty-two. It was ratified with one vote to spare. However, the second treaty on military matters caused much more controversy and diplomatic wrangling.

To achieve the final yes votes, Senate leaders proposed an amendment to the neutrality treaty, as Jimmy Carter had warned Omar Torrijos back in October. The DeConcini Amendment was named for its author, Dennis DeConcini, Arizona's junior senator. He had departed from the no vote of his Senate colleague Barry Goldwater. His amendment reserved the right of the United States to intervene militarily in Panama to protect the canal.

Torrijos told one American columnist that the DeConcini Amendment would be exactly like the Brezhnev Doctrine (which the Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev used to overturn the Prague Spring of 1968). Under the doctrine bearing the Soviet leader's name, the East European countries had limited sovereignty and the Kremlin had the right to intervene militarily to protect their satellites' own security interests.[30] The Eastern European satellite had no say in the matter.

On the day before the Senate vote on the neutrality treaty, President Carter called Torrijos long distance to say that he knew the general was "concerned" by the amendment. But Carter pleaded, "I ask you please not to make any public statement on actions which the Senate may take in the future."

"That would be fine," Torrijos responded. "But the root of the problem is basically the following: We consider that we have gone to the limit

of the concessions we can make. A little bit more, and we will have a treaty which will comply with the dictates of formality but which will be no solution to the problem of peaceful and friendly coexistence between our peoples." The general told the president that an amended treaty would "just cause problems" because the Panamanian voters had already approved of one version. He did not want a second plebiscite, which he might lose.

Nevertheless, Omar Torrijos promised not to comment publicly until after the Senate vote. "And to say good-bye, let me say to you what I always say to myself: when you are a leader of men and those around you get bothered and upset, be serene."

"Good advice," replied the president. "Adiós, amigo."[31]

Serenity is what Torrijos needed, for the Senate did approve the neutrality treaty with the DeConcini amendment attached. That reservation gave the United States the right to take unilateral action in Panama, including the use of military force, after the year 2000 if the canal were closed for any reason.

General Torrijos had promised his people that they would be entirely rid of the US Armed Forces within twenty-three years. Moreover, the Panamanian plebiscite had not approved of the amendment. Torrijos did not want to hold a second plebiscite. The general knew that Panamanian voters would not approve. Yet the DeConcini Amendment threatened to diminish the general's political standing in the country. Opposition parties would be circling like the sharks that inhabited the Pacific and Atlantic entrances to the Panama Canal.

His agricultural minister, Rubén Darío Paredes maintains that General Torrijos had sought advice from near and far. He even called Fidel Castro in Havana, and Fidel said to him: "You have traveled with your people 100 years to this moment. And this amendment is not going to set you all the way back. No. Take it. The next generations will do the rest, but take it."[32]

He called his top advisers to Farallón for all-night meetings to ascertain whether the amendments contradicted the treaty principles Panamanian voters had approved in the plebiscite. The Costa Rican president Oduber came to Farallón for two days of the three-day conference on the DeConcini Amendment. The discussions were intensive and secret. As the conferees departed from the beach house, not one of them talked about what transpired.

Only one aide went on TV and told Panamanians that the changes to the treaty were minor but "potable," as if it were a glass of water. The treaties did not measure up to Dom Pérignon champagne, but they were "potable."[33] From Torrijos, there was no statement whatsoever. Silence

would become the official reaction of the Panamanian government to the US Senate's ratification of the neutrality treaty—and its DeConcini amendment.[34]

On April 18, 1978, the Senate voted sixty-eight to thirty-two for the ratification of the second Panama Treaty, the one governing the timetable for the canal's military turnover from American to Panamanian control. Quite likely, the DeConcini Amendment had assured its passage.

That night the general appeared live on radio and television. "I have come here before you to tell you, as a Panamanian, that I am proud of the mission fulfilled. What the senate has just ratified and what we ratified in a solemn plebiscite definitely buries the treaty that was imposed on us in 1903. These treaties will gradually eliminate all the vestiges of colonialism."

"On several occasions we were on the verge of rejecting this treaty," the general said. "I would not have accepted with the crude, imperious and interventionist language that they wanted to impose on us. But with very good judgment I forced myself to establish a radio silence."[35]

While the chief of the Panamanian Revolution was broadcasting his gratitude to all citizens for their contributions to this national victory, he suddenly changed the subject. "To those men who know what I'm talking about, I direct a special word of recognition for the great deed they performed by doing nothing at all."[36] He never did explain publicly what he had meant by that remark.

On that night of the US Senate's ratification, Panamanians spilled into the streets and plazas of the capital city's downtown. The government provided free beverages to revelers celebrating the end of the nightmare of the 1903 treaty. The only show of force materialized in the form of a National Guard cordon around a town square reserved for several hundred university students. They were protesting that General Torrijos had not taken over the Canal Zone and sent home the US military occupiers—immediately.

On the very next evening, televisions in the United States ran an interview that ABC's correspondent Barbara Walters had conducted at Farallón with Omar Torrijos. In it appeared the following exchange:

Walters: *General, when you said you would destroy the canal if the treaty was not ratified, were you serious?*

Torrijos: *Yes, I spoke seriously.*

Walters: *And what would have happened?*

Torrijos: *It is very simple. The canal is as indefensible as a newborn baby. We know a very critical point of the canal.*[37]

As it turns out, the commander of the National Guard might not have been bluffing. According to his G-2, Manuel Noriega, the guard had assembled and trained an elite unit of sappers. The ex-Mossad agent Mike Harari had helped secure Israeli explosives and other materials for an operation the guardsmen called "Huele a Quemado," or "Something is Burning." As the senators were voting, squads of explosives experts had positioned themselves for a series of quick strikes.

They awaited only the order, according to Noriega, for which they tuned in to Radio Libertad. If the disc jockey announced that "the *boleros* of yesterday" would be coming on next, the sappers would go into action. But the announcer said that "los boleros de ayer" would be canceled, which was the signal to stand down.[38] Well, they were canceled.

That being the case, United States senators might have saved the Panama Canal by giving it away.[39]

THE CARTERS COME TO PANAMA

Two months later, President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter came to Panama to celebrate the treaties. The general and his wife Raquel Pauzner de Torrijos met them at the airport, while TV crews televised the arrival live. Approximately 200,000 spectators greeted Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter on the Fifth of May Plaza, which was not named after the Mexican holiday but for the date of Panama's Independence in 1903. Many were there because their attendance was mandatory. They worked in government offices, and their supervisors were checking off their names on clipboards.

Resplendent in his white dress uniform, General Omar Torrijos warmed up the crowd. He alternately joked with the crowd and praised them for their patience and participation in making the treaty a possibility. One could tell that the general was ebullient, and maybe slightly buzzed, for rum and beer were available to all celebrants. He introduced several of the Latin American heads of state standing in the first row of a tightly packed grandstand high above the crowd.

Then he presented Mrs. Carter, and the crowd erupted in a roar of approval as Torrijos offered her a kiss on the cheek. President Carter pleased the crowd when he spoke to them in Spanish. "This day marks the beginning of a new partnership between Panama and the United States. The new treaties embody our mutual commitment to work together to assure that the Panama Canal shall always remain open, secure, and accessible to the vessels of all nations."

"!Viva Panamá!" the American president concluded to the cheers of the crowd below.[40]

Following the events at the Fifth of May Plaza, the president and

First Lady toured the Canal Zone. General Torrijos did not accompany them, for he had resolved long ago never again to enter the Canal Zone while American troops occupied it. The Carters' reception among the American Zonians was less cordial than the one they received in Panama City. They went to the viewing gallery overlooking the operations of Miraflores Locks for a photo opportunity. They waved to the workers below.

Then they entered nearby Fort Clayton, home of the Fourth Battalion of the Twentieth Mechanized Infantry Regiment. The president addressed a mixed crowd of soldiers and Zonians. Applause drowned out a smattering of boos as Carter approached the podium.

"According to the treaties, the Canal will increasingly be a place of Panamanian employment. Some of you might leave very soon; others will remain for many, many years. I am relying on all of you to help make this transition as smooth as possible. That is your duty," President Carter said, appealing to the exaggerated patriotism of the Zonians. "You have never disappointed your country in the past. I am sure you will not do so in the future."[41]

Panamanian students on the left were preparing to stage a protest to the visit of the US president and First Lady. Before the Carters' arrival, a group of students had been spending a few nights together at the University of Panama to keep from being detained as a preventive measure. Traditionally, Latin American police refrained from entering university campuses, though army officers sometimes violated this tradition of "university autonomy." Colonel Manuel Antonio Noriega was about to join them.

His security troops assaulted the university building, with sidearms and rubber truncheons. They murdered two leaders and hospitalized another three hundred students. The protesters were never able to set off from the university for General Torrijos's outdoor rally for the Carters.[42] The incident conformed to a long-standing effort on the part of Commander Torrijos to prevent anti-US demonstrations in the capital city.

But the nonaligned diplomat that Torrijos had become wanted something more. He invited the heads of state of the Caribbean area to share a mini summit with the US president. Mexico's Miguel López Portillo, Costa Rica's newly inaugurated Rodrigo Carazo, Jamaica's Michael Manley, and Venezuela's Carlos Andrés Pérez joined the meeting on the day following the speeches. Soon Carter would travel to the European conference of industrialized countries, and Torrijos wanted him to inform the big powers about the plight of the nonindustrialized world suffering from falling prices for its primary exports.

The final communiqué of the Caribbean group advanced ideas very

much in concert with those of the Non-Aligned Movement. It emphasized international solidarity, international cooperation, and world peace. President López Portillo also let it be known that he opposed the very idea of the DeConcini Amendment. The concept of the United States reserving the "right" to intervene militarily in Latin America reminded Mexicans of the loss of half their national territory to a US military invasion.[43]

The general followed the mini summit by hosting visiting business leaders from the Council of the Americas. The Rockefellers had organized this business association to promote US-Latin American economic cooperation. Torrijos favored such groups. "Nobody is going to be kidnapped here," Torrijos told them, "and their businesses are not going to be nationalized because investors are seen in Panama as associates of the nation."[44]

Archbishop McGrath could take satisfaction too from his own efforts to sway the US Senate. He admitted that Panama had not obtained the best agreements, only the best "that could have been obtained." The prelate called the treaties "a fundamental achievement of the country." Not without a capacity to express a veiled criticism, McGrath called the Senate ratification "a victory over the ignorance of U.S. citizens who still think that they own Panama because their grandparents built the canal." The archbishop rejoiced that negotiations rather than violence had succeeded in gaining the treaties.[45]

Panama's archbishop might also have been pleased that Torrijos kept his promise. A few hours after the Senate finalized the ratification, Omar publicly invited all exiles, "without distinction or preconditions," to return to Panama.[46]

CHAPTER 14

OMAR AND THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION

Within days of the Carters' departure from Tocumen International Airport, two planes filled with Sandinista fighters and freed political prisoners landed at this very complex east of Panama City.

Comandante Cero (Commander Zero) and his female second in command, Comandante Dos (Commander Two), arrived directly from Managua. They brought with them twenty-three armed fighters and fifty-eight political prisoners just released from Anastasio Somoza's prisons. To liberate those captives, Comandantes Cero and Dos and their fighters had dressed as Somoza's National Guardsmen, seized the government palace, and held the officials and bureaucrats inside as hostages.

Comandante Cero was the nom de guerre of Edén Pastora. This forty-two-year-old Nicaraguan had been active in the opposition to the Somoza dictatorship since the 1960s. The international press reported that, from the government palace, Comandante Dos, the twenty-two-year-old Dora María Télles, had negotiated the release of political prisoners over the phone with Somoza in his bunker. She caught everyone's attention with her intelligence, poise, and determination.[1]

The president, General Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza, freed the prisoners, all combatants or activists against his government, in exchange for the hundreds of hostages inside the government palace. Comandante Cero's guerrillas and the liberated prisoners boarded buses that transported them to the Managua airport. Well-wishers and sympathizers lined Managua's streets and cheered as the buses passed by. Freed prisoners and Sandinista fighters boarded a C-130 Hercules plane of the Venezuela Air

Force and a passenger plane of Copa Airlines, both bound for Panama City.[2]

Torrijos dispatched his security chief, Manuel Noriega, to the airport to meet the arriving planes. A crowd of Nicaraguans and Panamanians gathered outside to greet the Sandinistas with raised fists. Television crews arrived to record the event. They interviewed Comandante Cero. He denied Somoza's accusations that the Sandinistas had received financing from Cuba. "We Sandinistas are intelligent and capable of acting on our own," he said.

Comandante Dos told another interviewer she would return to Nicaragua and continue the fight.[3] Both Pastora and Télles claimed that their political orientation conformed not to Marxism but to "Nicaraguan nationalism."

General Torrijos's National Guard put up the entire group of Nicaraguans at its barracks. Twenty-two fighters decided to go on to Havana and left within the week.[4] Pastora and Télles stayed behind in Panama. Their bold attack on the Nicaraguan palace ignited the final phase of the Sandinista Revolution against the Somoza regime.

The visit of the president and First Lady of the United States successfully culminated Omar's ten-year quest for a new Panama Canal Treaty. Torrijos could have chosen to make a transition to elections in one or two years and retire even before he turned fifty years of age. Yet he had already announced publicly that he was not going to relinquish power until 1984, six years hence.

No matter the reason for delaying his retirement, rising levels of violence in Central America now became the chief preoccupation of Omar Torrijos. He devoted the last three years of his life to bringing peace to the small countries of Central America. What was the mayhem of this region to Omar Torrijos, the man who had engineered the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties with the world's greatest military power? He had strong support in the nonaligned world, and he could talk to most Central American leaders as fellow soldiers. If anyone could finally unify these small countries in peace, it was Omar Torrijos.

OMAR'S CASE AGAINST SOMOZA

While these smaller Latin American nations might apply the noninterference clause of the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter to the United States, they always violated that principle among themselves. They had a long history of intervening regularly in each other's domestic affairs. Take Nicaragua, for example.

Omar Torrijos had much to resent when it came to Anastasio Somoza. For one thing, the Nicaraguan dictator acted like the neighbor-

hood bully. "My impression is that Torrijos was very enthusiastic about Somoza's fall, because Somoza [behaved as if he were] the ambassador of the United States in Central America," says Panama's former president, Arístides Royo. "Somoza used to go to the Central American meetings and he would say: 'The president of the United States says that this has to be done and that has to be done.' That's the impression Torrijos kept of him."[5]

Since his family had been in power since 1934, Tachito Somoza had become accustomed to pulling rank on his fellow Central American leaders. Torrijos reacted negatively to the Nicaraguan dictator's arrogance, for the younger Panamanian strongman disliked being lectured to.[6]

The breaking point came in February 1972 during the Nicaragua dictator's visit to Panama. Somoza arrived as if he were an agent of the Nixon administration sent to convince Torrijos to ease up on his treaty demands. The elder Somoza boasted of his friends in the United States Congress and his longtime connections to people in the Nixon administration, including the president himself.

Another reason that Anastasio Somoza provoked the ire of Omar Torrijos had to do with the fact that the Nicaraguan dictator worked behind the scenes to prevent the negotiation and then the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty. Somoza did so in tandem with conservative politicians in the US House of Representatives.

New York's Democratic congressman John Murphy had grown up with Anastasio Somoza. They had been schoolmates at the LaSalle Military Academy on Long Island.[7] Murphy and Somoza subsequently entered the US Military Academy at West Point. Murphy ultimately become the leading advocate in Congress not only for the Somoza family's rule in Nicaragua but also for the cause of Americans working in the Panama Canal Zone. The "Zonians" rabidly opposed Panamanian-US treaty negotiations that threatened their long-term privileges.

"[Somoza] was like an emperor," says Nicolás Ardito Barletta. "He owned everything in Nicaragua."[8] This, too, struck Omar Torrijos as obscene.

In the summer of 1978, Panamanians were only dimly aware of the conflict between Somoza's National Guard and the Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua. Considering all the treaty hubbub in the United States Senate dominating the local news for so long, the civil war in Nicaragua seemed far away—until the end of August.

THE ARMED STRUGGLE

The chief of the Panamanian Revolution, Omar Torrijos, seized the moment. He considered the revived Sandinista Revolution under the lead-

ership of Comandante Cero as an opportunity to fulfill the dream he had pursued in the 1975 Banana War, in which he had failed to unite all the banana-exporting countries into a cartel to fight against United Fruit and other multinational companies. Somoza had supported the North American companies.[9]

Starting in August 1978, General Torrijos became reenergized in pursuit of Central American unity. After all, Guatemala's military government had just renewed diplomatic relations with Panama following the ratification of the canal treaties. It seemed a good omen. Therefore, a rebel victory in Nicaragua, Torrijos hoped, would eliminate the repressive family dynasty of the Somozas and establish a moderate regime open to social democratic reforms.

General Torrijos dedicated his command center to the Sandinista movement. He spent days and nights at the Farallón beach house, meeting with Nicaraguan visitors and other Central Americans. His aide-de-camp Sergeant Jesús de José "Chuchú" Rodríguez slept in the office at the nearby Río Hato military base to receive messages on the phone and on the shortwave radio receiver at all hours. Maps of Nicaragua were placed on the walls of the general's office as well as the beach house. At planning meetings, the commander puffed on Castro's Cohibas, and everyone else, on cigarettes. The meeting rooms filled with smoke. During long afternoons, groups of five and ten responded to his requests for ideas of what should be done. Everyone drank lots of coffee.[10] They put off the booze until later.

From Panama, all signs seemed to indicate that the moderates among the Sandinistas would take control of the Nicaragua liberation movement. Moderates such as Edén Pastora, el Comandante Cero.

Following Pastora's bold raid, Anastasio Somoza did not call his opponents "nationalists." He repeatedly claimed they were communists, Marxist-Leninists, and Castroites. Somoza went on Nicaraguan TV to explain why he had given in to demands for the release of rebel prisoners, including Tomás Borge, a Nicaraguan dissident of long association with Cuba.

Somoza explained that he wanted "to avoid bloodshed perpetrated by the communists." The dictator told his subjects "This is the continuation of a problem that the Nicaraguan Government has had since Castro came to power in 1959." Somoza claimed that he had practically wiped out the Sandinistas, taking many of them as prisoners. Then came Pastora's raid.

"The newcomers who staged this attack are mostly new recruits," Somoza continued. They planned and executed this raid illegally from Costa Rica, the dictator claimed. "One only has to listen to Radio Havana and make an analysis of its broadcasts to realize that it is one of the coordinat-

ing organs of the communists here in Nicaragua." A TV announcer asked Somoza why Panama's General Torrijos was aiding the Nicaraguan rebels, especially "after you helped him return to power in December 1969."

President Somoza maintained that he was a friend of Torrijos. "I helped him at the time of the [National Guard countercoup of 1969 against him] but this has nothing to do with the present situation," he said.[11] Beyond his domestic opponents perpetuating such a story to discredit Torrijos, there is very little evidence that the general accepted any assistance from Nicaragua in his return to power in December 1969.[12]

Meanwhile, Edén Pastora and Tomás Borge were holding their own press conference in Panama. Someone asked Comandante Cero if he was going to organize his armed struggle in Panama. "Certainly not," he responded. "The armed struggle is being organized in Nicaragua. We are here to rest." Borge told interviewers that the Sandinistas wished "to establish a national government in which all the democratic forces of the country are represented."[13]

The Sandinista Revolution did not preoccupy Panama's president Arístides Royo or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Central American affairs continued under the sole purview of the National Guard and its commander, Omar Torrijos. "He gave the Sandinistas a lot of support," says Royo. "People say that he supported them with a few guns. I never witnessed that. Never. Not even when I was a member of the military ministerial team. What I know is that Torrijos was very enthusiastic about [the Sandinistas] and that I, as president, would meet with them."[14]

At this juncture, Hugo Spadafora began to make headlines. Spadafora was a medical doctor with a yen for adventure. He had once been involved in Amilcar Cabral's 1966 guerrilla struggle against Portuguese rule in the West African colony of Guinea Bissau. After the National Guard's *golpe de Estado* in 1968, Hugo joined the Panamanian National Health Service.

Spadafora first served in the Darién jungle. The doctor worked at a rural clinic in the most underdeveloped province in the country, then transferred to another clinic in a Panama City slum. Next Dr. Spadafora gained an appointment as medical director of the National Health Service of Colón, site of the free port and some of the most impoverished urban barrios in the country. Finally, he became vice minister of public health.

In August 1978, Torrijos asked Spadafora to organize a volunteer brigade of Panamanians to fight against Somoza's tyranny. Spadafora's brigade would be named after Victoriano Lorenzo, a Panamanian hero in Colombia's Thousand Days' War, which cost Lorenzo his life. The Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade would join up with Comandante Cero in southern Costa Rica.[15] The initiative indeed came from Torrijos himself. None of

the details about the origins of the volunteer fighters ever appeared in the local news media. They remained a state secret.

Spadafora made the news when he commenced organizing an "international brigade." "At present there are a number of Panamanian volunteers willing to give their support to the Nicaraguan people in their struggle for total and final liberation," Spadafora told reporters.[16]

One of the young men volunteering as a fighter in the brigade was Torrijos's sixteen-year-old son, Martín. "Take care of the boy as if he was your favorite girl, Hugo," the general told him. Spadafora answered him immediately. "If I were you, I wouldn't let Martín hear those words, General. I don't think that taking care of him 'like a girl' would be funny to the boy."[17] Martín last appeared in public earlier in that year standing on the podium behind his father and President Jimmy Carter during the latter's trip to Panama.

At this moment, Comandante Cero had returned to Costa Rica. He told the local media in San José that the Sandinistas had 1,100 rebels fighting against Somoza across the border in Nicaragua. They had enough arms and ammunition "to extend the fighting until the fall of Somoza and the dismantling of the [Nicaraguan] National Guard."[18] One can be sure that knowledgeable consumers of the news might have paused and asked: Enough arms? From where?

THE STRUGGLE BEGINS ANEW

Though Costa Rican officials had warned Pastora not to launch military maneuvers from their nation's territory, everyone knew that President Rodrigo Carazo protected this *comandante*. Though born in Nicaragua, Pastora became a naturalized citizen of Costa Rica, where his family also resided. Comandante Cero slid back and forth across the border at will. His troops did, too.

On the same day that Nicaraguan officials announced that Edén Pastora had been killed in a firefight, for example, he could step into the studio of a San José radio station to correct the "misguided reports."[19] Days after this very incident, journalists in the field reported that Pastora and 150 fighters had overrun a border outpost. They also verified that the attack had commenced from Costa Rican soil. Comandante Cero admitted to them that the assault cost his forces two dead and ten wounded.

"It is one more bit of evidence of what the Nicaraguan people are willing to do to obtain their freedom," he said.[20] He also predicted that Somoza would fall from power within ten days. This statement would not be the last premature prediction Pastora would make to the press.[21]

At about that same moment, President Carter and the Congress suspended $8 million in foreign aid that had been destined for Somo-

za's government during the next year.[22] Nonetheless, Somoza increased the recruitment and rapid training to raise the numbers of Nicaraguan forces to fourteen thousand men. Deprived of US arms deliveries, the dictator purchased weapons from Israel and from Argentina's military government.[23]

By the end of September 1978, the volunteers of the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade had prepared to begin training. Spadafora's volunteers were to muster at the Don Bosco Cathedral in downtown Panama City. Someone claimed that the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez and Senator Ted Kennedy would be there to send them off.[24]

"The brigade will now disappear from sight to begin training," Subcomandante Jorge Aparicio said, "and hundreds of Brigade members will go underground." Spadafora added that the Sandinistas would be providing weapons training and determine what operations the brigade would conduct. Two hundred volunteers boarded buses in Panama City. They departed in civilian clothes. "I'm not telling you how, when, or where we are going," Hugo Spadafora told the men. "I'm just telling you that the time has come."[25] No Colombian novelist and no United States senator showed up to wish them "Godspeed."

However, the Costa Rican government pretended to prohibit the movement of the brigade through its national territory. President Carazo had said he wanted no war between his country and Nicaragua.[26] The warning fooled no one—least of all Anastasio Somoza.

The next public information about the Panamanian volunteers purportedly came from the "Nicaragua Mountains" some three weeks later. The Lorenzo Brigade numbered sixty-five men and one woman who were undertaking training with automatic weapons, fifty-millimeter machine guns, and bazookas. They were on maneuvers with "several thousand" other Sandinistas of the Southern Front.[27]

The rebels operating along the border of Costa Rica and Nicaragua provoked General Somoza to threaten to send his own National Guardsmen into Costa Rican territory. President Carazo said, "We are trying to maintain peaceful coexistence in the region and prevent intervention" of one country into another. Shortly after a face-to-face conference with Carazo, General Torrijos dispatched several helicopters to San José to assist the Civil Guards in patrolling the border.[28] The aircraft returned to Panama within a few days.

ARMS FOR THE SANDINISTAS

Reports of Panama's arms smuggling to the Sandinistas were more difficult to explain away, however. The *Washington Post* came out with an article about weapons trafficking at the end of November. Colonel Noriega

said he would withhold comment until he could study the news article.[29] He really did not have to. Noriega knew full well what was going on. Panama and Costa Rica were reinforcing the Sandinistas with weapons from Cuba and Venezuela.

Fidel Castro joined the anti-Somoza alliance. Cuba's revolutionary leader made his support conditioned on the unification of the three different factions into the Sandinista National Liberation Front (the FSLN) of Nicaragua. Tomás Borge, the elder resistance leader and the longtime exile in Cuba became the main coordinator of this unification process.[30] The three factions organized the Sandinista Directorate composed of most of the commanders fighting inside of Nicaragua. Comandante Cero did not join the Directorate perhaps because Somoza's troops separated the Southern Front from the other Sandinista forces. Once the three "tendencies" of the anti-Somoza fighters unified, Castro prepared to send arms.

Most of all, Torrijos still wished to support the moderates among the Sandinistas. Certainly, the pro-Cuban faction led by Borge had roots in the struggle going back twenty years. However, moderate factions such as that of Edén Pastora, Comandante Cero, now dominated the resistance. The Third Way (Tercerista) faction led by the Ortega brothers, Daniel and Humberto, had grown more influential. There was also the civilian opposition identified with the Chamorro family and a business group led by Alfonso Robelo.

Moreover, the university and even secondary students had mobilized against the Somoza regime since the 1960s and especially since the 1978 murder of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the publisher of the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*. The students had been "central players" protesting against the dictatorship for many years.[31] The success of the Nicaraguan Revolution against the Somoza dictatorship derived from its broad front against the Somoza dynasty. Above all, Torrijos did not want the militant Castroite element to dominate the post-Somoza regime.

Beyond sponsoring the unification, Castro remained in the background during the fight against Somoza. Early on, Pastora had traveled to Havana to plead with the Cuban leader for more direct assistance. "The best help I can give you is not to help you at all," Castro told him.[32] It was better, he reasoned, if one was not tainted as an associate of the Cubans. No one wanted to stir up the anticommunist agitators in Washington.

Only later did concrete evidence of Cuban and Panamanian arms trafficking emerge. News stories began to appear three years after the fact that five Costa Rican pilots had been involved since 1978 in transporting weapons from Cuba. The pilots flew arms for the Sandinistas from Cuba

through Panama into Costa Rica. "We now realize that we were used in the communist strategy to control all the Central American countries," they said later. The fliers testified that they were motivated by the Sandinistas fighting for "democracy" in Nicaragua.

The pilots took turns flying up to twenty-one different sorties in DC-3 transport planes. Many departed from a military airfield in Baracoa in northeastern Cuba. Most flights ended up in the Costa Rican town of Liberia, just a few miles from the Nicaraguan border. They said that Cuban officials such as the minister of defense, Raúl Castro, and the intelligence chief, Manuel Piñeiro, came to observe the operations. Fidel Castro himself arrived on one occasion to inspect the process. Costa Rican officials and Cubans from the consulate in San José often flew along. Cubans paid the private air transport company in American dollars in order to establish this "air bridge" to Costa Rica.[33]

Venezuela's president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, was also involved in running guns through Panama. American diplomats traced some of the weapons to a cache of arms that, years earlier, the United States had provided for the Venezuelan Army. In the 1960s, the elected government (of which Pérez was an official) was fighting against a Cuban-supported guerrilla insurgency. In this crazy fashion, old enemies from the 1960s (Castro and Pérez) teamed up to take down their common enemy in the 1970s, Anastasio Somoza.[34]

General Torrijos took the lead in setting up deliveries of these weapons. He sent Colonel Noriega to Havana to coordinate the regular delivery from Cuban stockpiles of US- and European-made NATO weapons, M16 assault rifles (shipped from communist Vietnam to Cuba), and Belgian FALs. Ammunition for these NATO weapons was readily available everywhere in the Americas.[35]

The Panamanian Air Force coordinated flights through the city of David in Western Panama. From David, the planes headed to the Costa Rican town of Liberia close to Pastora's training camps. Torrijos sent arms to the Sandinistas and supported Comandante Cero to deflect Cuba's influence in Nicaragua.[36] His was a delicate task. General Torrijos needed the weapons Cuba provided while minimizing Fidel's political influence.

Though few citizens of Central America knew precise details, US security agencies certainly had knowledge of deliveries of weapons to the Sandinistas. The CIA collected two dozen field reports on such trafficking. "These reports clearly reveal a direct and official role by Panama in aiding the Sandinist [*sic*] guerrillas. Panama acted as a conduit to facilitate the delivery of weapons and supplies provided to the FSLN by other countries, including Cuba."[37]

At this point, President Jimmy Carter became concerned about a

Sandinista victory that might give Cuba a foothold in Central America. He proposed that the Organization of American States mediate the dispute between the rebels and Somoza. Jimmy called his friend Omar on the phone and asked what he thought of the idea. "The crisis in Nicaragua can be described as a simple problem: a mentally deranged man [Somoza] with an army of criminals is attacking a defenseless population," Torrijos answered. "This is not a problem for the OAS. What we need is a psychiatrist."[38]

In the meantime, the Southern Front under Pastor's command never advanced very far. Somoza knew his enemies. Pastora was the less radical of them. If he was going to lose to anyone, the Nicaragua dictator seemed to think, it would not be to Comandante Cero, but to the more radical Sandinista factions. That way, he could prove his constant charges of "communist subversion."

As the Panamanian volunteers were preparing to reinforce Pastora's fighters, the FSLN Directorate appointed Pastora as chief of the Sandinista Army on the Southern Front. The Ortega brothers, Daniel and Humberto, based this promotion on Pastora's "military aptitude" and on his twenty years of opposing the dictatorship.[39] In addition, his headquarters on the southern borderlands made him the conduit of arms coming into Nicaragua.[40] However, in truth, Pastora had no command and control of the other guerrilla forces, because Somoza's best troops had trapped Pastora's fighters in the south.

At the beginning of November 1978, the Panamanian combatants within Commandante Cero's command issued a proclamation. They reiterated that they were not mercenaries. They offered to fight without pay for their service to the Sandinistas. "Our actions are inspired by the highest ideals of freedom, social justice and democracy," they announced. The Panamanian volunteers said that "internationalism" had recovered their sovereignty over the canal. "The Panamanian struggle is not finished; it gives even greater historical validity to our action as volunteer guerrillas in Nicaraguan territory." All the Panamanian fighters signed this proclamation, including the lone female, Aída Alemán.[41]

Their FSLN chief, Edén Pastora, had a less sanguine opinion of the Panamanian volunteers. He once called out some of the newcomers as "weak and pugnacious, unsuitable for guerrilla fighting." Three-hundred twenty Panamanians had volunteered but many were neither physically nor psychologically prepared for combat.[42] News accounts concluded that two foreign contingents of five thousand Panamanians and Venezuelans had finished basic training in Costa Rica. They crossed into Nicaragua in December.[43] These numbers were vastly inflated. Afterall, part of warfare consists of propaganda and deception.

Occasionally tempers flared between Sandinista factions. The leftist group condemned the Third Way's alliances with Venezuela and Costa Rica. They rated the Southern Front of Edén Pastora as "disappointing and overhyped." Pastora "lacked unity with the masses," the communists charged.[44]

Weaknesses on the Southern Front became public when, at the end of January 1979, Somoza's forces captured one of Pastora's foreign volunteers. He was Chilean. The captive agreed to talk to journalists and told them Comandante Cero's men numbered only six hundred, not one thousand. They trained in two Costa Rican camps, which local Costa Rican Civil Guardsmen patrolled to make sure no one left. Reductions in military personnel occurred on a regular basis due to desertions and dismissals for being unfit. "The conditions to confront a regular army do not exist," the Chilean prisoner said. "Every day some of us get killed. It is madness to fight in this way."[45]

Shortly after New Year's Day 1979, the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade engaged in a firefight with the *somocistas* and lost two Panamanians. Spadafora suffered an injury too. "The members of the brigade have sworn that so long as we are alive, the memory of these fallen brothers will also remain alive," he reported.[46]

CARTER'S UNWILLINGNESS TO INTERVENE

Presidents Pérez and Carazo and General Torrijos had attempted for several months to persuade President Carter to force Somoza to leave power. Neither suggested military force, but clearly the OAS option would not work. The Panamanian strongman proposed to preserve the Nicaraguan National Guard as a non-Somoza institution that might be able to forge an alliance with moderate civilians. The object would have been to counterbalance the radical leftists among the Sandinista combatants.

At Torrijos's suggestion, Robert Pastor from Carter's National Security Council flew down to confer with Panama's strongman on Contadora Island. Torrijos proposed that the United States recognize the new Sandinista government. Somoza would fall within a matter of days, he stated, and "the US always seemed so slow to recognize new realities." Obviously, Torrijos wanted the United States to intervene in Central American affairs to guarantee a moderate solution.

Pastor replied that President Carter favored nonintervention. Anyway, the House of Representatives would soon be voting on funds for the implementation of the canal treaty. Representative John Murphy was linking Torrijos's diplomacy as a factor favorable to a communist outcome in Nicaragua. Murphy also wanted to reverse the canal treaties' ratification by defunding their implementation.

"Torrijos said he was not prepared to make a pact with the devil [to save Somoza]," Pastor reported. "I told him that he didn't have to support Somoza; all we were asking was that he not try to overthrow him."[47]

"I know [Somoza] well," Torrijos responded to Robert Pastor. "I have no rancor against him. The only difference between us is conceptual. [Somoza] says he is consolidating Latin America's oldest democracy. I believe Edén Pastora when he says that [the Sandinistas] are destroying Latin America's oldest dynasty."[48]

By this time, the question on all journalists' minds was whether the Sandinistas were communists or not. Some posed this inquiry to Edén Pastora. "I am a businessman who has been rich on three occasions and poor on four," the *comandante* answered, "but doctrinally we are Sandinistas. We follow Sandino's philosophy, which advocates Nationalism and the defense of the Nicaraguan people's rights."[49]

Comandante Cero and his forces, after ten months of combat, had only secured positions in a Nicaraguan hamlet called El Naranjo. It was just five kilometers from the Costa Rican border. Despite the findings of reporters on the ground, Pastora claimed to have established "one hundred square kilometers of 'free territory' [inside Nicaragua]." Somoza's "hours are numbered," he had been telling the newspeople for several months.[50]

On the very same day that these news items appeared in Costa Rica, Radio Sandino broadcasting from inside Nicaragua provided a different story. It announced that Pastora's forces were engaging in a five-day battle in the southern hills, inflicting forty-six casualties on Somoza's National Guard, helicopters, and armored vehicles.[51]

Radio stations in Costa Rica frequently issued news bulletins about the activities of Spadafora, including Somoza's announcement of the death of the Panamanian guerrilla commander in the battle for Hill 155. Hugo Spadafora actually showed up at one San José radio station to prove he was still very much alive. "The Sandinist [*sic*] Front . . . went from a war of positions to a war of movements," he said. "All the positions around Hill 155 were abandoned to go to other fronts and allow a more rapid advance to the capital of Nicaragua, Managua."[52]

Spadafora responded to Somoza's accusation that the Panamanian "internationalist brigade" consisted of nothing more than communists and mercenaries. "Many of us left homes, good jobs, and what is usually described as a 'good social position' behind. We did so publicly, without masks of any kind, with the understanding that our gesture was a real expression of the popular feeling prevailing in our country, in America and, I dare say, in the entire world."[53]

In the meantime, Omar Torrijos waited to speak up until a Sandinista victory seemed certain. In June 1979, the Organization of American

States had voted in favor of the Sandinistas replacing Somoza. The general took advantage of this rare moment of Latin American solidarity.

"The recognition of Sandinismo as belligerent . . . will force the Sandinistas to act with moderation," General Torrijos said. "I urge the Sandinista combatants . . . not to become radical and make the same mistakes as that great instigator of repression, General Anastasio Somoza. Those of us who have always been on your side know that, just as you are giving a lesson in combat now, you will also give a lesson in moderation and respect in victory."[54]

Somoza responded to the OAS decision with defiance and accusation. He said that the OAS ploy did not surprise him "because we know of the pressures being exerted on those governments by the communists."[55] From his bunker in Managua, Anastasio Somoza seemed to believe that every opponent was a communist.

By the end of June, the Nicaraguan National Guard was beginning to crack. Radio reporters mentioned that "demoralized guardsmen" were abandoning "large numbers of weapons and ammunition" and surrendering to the Sandinistas.[56]

Finally, so it appeared, the White House came around to taking Torrijos's advice. President Carter asked him to fly to Washington to talk over a proposal for a moderate transition in Nicaragua. The general arrived by plane through Miami, sleeping off a bout of hard drinking during the flight. Nevertheless, he showed up at the Oval Office alert and eager. Torrijos later told Robert Pastor that "he felt like a schoolboy being called to the principal's office for a scolding."[57]

The president's advisers had devised a six-step proposal based on discussions with the moderate coalition of Presidents Carazo and Pérez and Torrijos himself. Basically, Carter suggested that the allies seek to preserve Nicaragua's National Guard. The moderates could appoint a new commander thereof and ask Somoza to resign in favor of the exiled government of national reconstruction led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in San José. Carter wanted General Torrijos to be the plan's primary advocate. The United States would provide reconstruction funds but would undertake no other direct intervention. Finally, the American plan called for free elections in post-Somoza Nicaragua.

General Torrijos expressed enthusiasm for the White House's plan and discussed how it might fit in with the situation on the ground. He urged flexibility on everyone's part as the plan contained many moving parts. Most of all, Torrijos expressed satisfaction that the United States had come around to joining a transition plan.

"Yes, we have the responsibility for getting rid of Somoza," said Carter. "Not the responsibility," replied Torrijos. "The honor!"[58]

However, time was running out. The US diplomat William Bowdler met in Costa Rica with Sandinistas Daniel Ortega along with the noncombatants Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo to work out a truce.[59] The moderate outcome seemed to be slipping away as the rebels approached final victory. The United States and several other countries were poised to recognize the new multifaction government in Managua. The government of national reconstruction in San José had even promised to incorporate former Somoza officers who had "demonstrated honest and patriotic conduct" in the civil war.[60]

The other Central American countries refused to support the moderates' plans. The military governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala were sticking with Somoza. They distrusted the Sandinista leadership.

Out of spite perhaps for the embarrassment of Comandante Cero's spectacular 1978 raid on the government palace, Somoza sent his best troops to the Southern Front, and his best commanders too. Pastora's front had advanced to the city of Rivas when the National Guardsmen pushed them back nearly to the Costa Rican border.[61] The Sandinista advance in the south stalled as the fighting elsewhere became intense.

In the meanwhile, the other Sandinista fronts took over Nicaragua's second largest city, León. Then all other fronts advanced toward the capital of Managua.[62] Comandante Dos, Dora María Téllez, now commanded her own troops. She directed the Western Front, which included the cities of Chinandega and León.

The total numbers of Sandinista combatants had risen from nearly a thousand early in 1978 to five thousand in mid-1979.[63] Torrijos and Fidel's air transporters provided them with arms. Towns and cities were falling to the rebels. Most Sandinista units were advancing on Managua. Nonetheless, Comandante Cero's Southern Front had still not taken the city of Rivas, which had been its military objective for nearly a year.[64] Only after Somoza's National Guard abandoned the city did Pastora's men move into Rivas on July 19.

Anastasio Somoza finally fled the country. He and his closest family members and advisers flew on a plane directly to Miami. The military dictatorship of Guatemala also sent three of its air force planes to the Managua airport to evacuate National Guard officers and government officials.[65]

"Thousands of Nicaraguans filled [the] streets today to give an enthusiastic welcome to the guerrillas which this afternoon control all of Managua," newspapers reported.[66] The FSLN now controlled the country.

The Sandinista Directorate ordered the troops of Pastora's Southern

Front to Managua. News accounts in Panama reported that "350 Panamanians of the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade" marched through Managua with the Panamanian flag to the cheers of the crowd.[67] Once again the number of brigade members appeared wildly inflated.

Spadafora soon returned to Panama in glory. "Approximately 300 Panamanians participated [in the brigade], some 20 were killed and dozens were wounded in combat," he said. "From now on all our interests will forever be subordinated to the struggle for the ideals of justice, freedom and revolution which led us to Nicaragua."

"The war in Nicaragua changed everyone who took part in it," Spadafora said on Radio Mía. "The change has been for the better."[68]

THE VICTORY CELEBRATION

Before the moderate civilians could get from San José to Managua, the victorious fighters were occupying the important positions. Tomás Borge took over as the new interior minister. It meant he would control the intelligence apparatus. However, Borge acted with great restraint. For his vice minister, Borge chose the man who had freed him from jail the year before—Comandante Cero, Edén Pastora. His other liberator, Comandante Dos, Dora María Téllez, became the minister of health.

Moreover, Tomás Borge praised General Torrijos for his "unwavering support during the most difficult moments" of the struggle against Somoza.[69] For his part, the Panamanian strongman mobilized additional Panamanian support for the new unity government of national reconstruction. Panamanian trade union workers raised $100,000 to assist the families of organized laborers in Nicaragua.

The Sandinista Front in victory reserved the greatest honors for General Omar Torrijos. The new authorities invited the Panamanian strongman to preside over the grand parade and celebration of victory held in Managua one month after Somoza's flight. Even the radical faction supported the invitation. However, Tomás Borge missed Torrijos's big moment. He was "out of the country on a visit," newspapers reported.[70] That is, he traveled to confer with Fidel.

The Spanish Socialist Party leader Felipe González came to Panama to meet with Torrijos and President Royo. Together they flew to Managua to participate in the victory celebration.[71] Their message encouraged democratic socialism rather than radical ideologies imposed from abroad—in other words, from Cuba!

Torrijos took center stage at the victory parade of several thousand Sandinista followers. Comandante Daniel Ortega of the Directorate spoke first. He said that the struggle for national liberation had claimed the lives of forty thousand Nicaraguans. "When our victory still seemed

remote," Ortega said, "General Omar Torrijos gave us his hand in solidarity on behalf of the supportive Panamanian people."[72]

One of the moderate members of the government of reconstruction, the businessman Alfonso Robelo, introduced Torrijos as the principal speaker. Thousands of citizens who packed the Plaza de la Victoria cheered as Omar Torrijos approached the rostrum.

"Knowing you when you were fighting under so many disadvantages as guerrillas," Torrijos said, "I have become more convinced than ever of the truth of that old military axiom that a weapon is only as strong and as aggressive as the man who is firing it."

"I want to clear up any confusion that might exist regarding my presence here. The confusion stems from the fact that you want to honor me, when I am the one who should be honored to be here. We who were invited to this country feel it is a great honor to be the guest of a brave nation which forced the tyrant to leave the country in a shameless stampede."[73]

On the next day, Minister of Interior Borge returned from his trip. He accompanied Torrijos on a tour of Estelí, whose citizens held their own victory rally. Borge introduced the Panamanian National Guard commander. "General Torrijos is the best friend we have on this continent," he proclaimed. "Not only has he helped us unconditionally, he has also demanded that no one impose conditions on us [applause]." One can be sure that the phrase "on this continent" did not pass Torrijos without notice, Cuba being an island in the Caribbean Sea.

Subsequently, reporters asked Borge the inevitable question: Are you a communist? "This is something United States newsmen always ask" the minister of interior replied. "We have never said we are Marxists. We have said we are Sandinistas." Then he added, "We are friends of Cuba just as we are friends of Panama."[74]

As General Torrijos finished his trip to a Somoza-free Nicaragua, the first contingent of Panamanian police trainers arrived under the command of Colonel Paredes. He and his Panamanian Guardsmen would be training members of the national police force of post-Somoza Nicaragua. Military advisers came in by air transport from Cuba at the same time to establish the new revolutionary army.

General Omar Torrijos's efforts to moderate the Sandinista Revolution had failed because his nemesis, Anastasio Somoza, refused to relinquish power until his Nicaraguan National Guard completely collapsed. Somoza's obstinacy left behind no armed force to counteract the National Directorate. Nothing remained to prevent the militant left among the Sandinista fighters from eliminating the moderates supported by Torrijos. The Ortega brothers joined the hard-liners of Tomás Borges to demo-

bilize the troops of Edén Pastora and to neutralize moderates such as Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo.

The fall of the Somoza regime did not bring about the Central American unity Omar Torrijos had wanted. The lesson is that revolutions seldom end the violence. They intensify it.

CHAPTER 15

OMAR AND THE SHAH

The National Guard commander prepared his troops with care. He spent time with his staff planning the training and deployment of the guardsmen in the decorum he expected of them. Part of their preparation had been to participate in a prior UN peacekeeping mission in the Sinai Desert.

"You are one of the best trained professional combat units of the National Guard, who were tasked with playing the vanguard role for this country and for the Guard in the Middle East," General Torrijos told his men. "Our people expect the National Guard to set the example of courtesy, to defend their interests and to always show affection whenever you have to address a Panamanian citizen, because showing respect will be the exact opposite of what they have received from soldiers, who have addressed Panamanians with contempt."[1]

Omar Torrijos had planned for this moment all his life and he wanted no mishaps. National Guardsmen were complying with the first phase of the Panamanian takeover of the Canal Zone according to the timetable set forth in the 1977 treaties. The transfer also marked the first return of Canal Zone territory—Albrook Air Force Base and Ancon Hill—to Panamanian jurisdiction, the final phase of which was to be completed on the last day of the twentieth century.

Exactly according to plan, at midnight on the last day of September 1979, the US flags on both sides of the Bridge of the Americas were replaced by Panamanian banners. On that day, President Arístides Royo

raised an enormous Panamanian national flag on Ancon Hill. Residents of nearly every neighborhood of Panama City would be able to view it by day and see it illuminated by night. TV broadcasters reported these events live.

These displays invited thousands of Panamanians to venture into "liberated territory," which they did en masse. Hundreds of cars and trucks filled with families from all over the republic drove in and out of the Canal Zone that early morning. Journalists speculated that nearly one-third of the population of Panama ventured into these zones to celebrate and look around unimpeded by Canal Zone policemen.

Six heads of state came to celebrate during the official proceedings at Albrook on the afternoon of October 1. President Royo addressed the thousands of people in attendance. So did Vice President Walter Mondale, who flew in from Washington to represent the United States. Violeta Chamorro came on behalf of the Nicaraguan reconstruction government. The ceremony's program noted the following: "Today is also the birthday of President Jimmy Carter. History will accord him a special place for his contribution to this just cause."[2]

José López Portillo of Mexico had the honor of making the major speech of the day, because his country too had experienced several instances of military occupation by American soldiers. "The north is the formidable power which since Monroe has made all other Americans follow its own model of America. In Panama, it established the conspiracy of the canal," López Portillo told the crowd. "We are here to confirm the appropriate reparation: the victory of Panamanian youth and the strong will of their statesman, Omar Torrijos, to call the man by his name." The boisterous crowd began to chant, "Omar. Omar."[3]

But Omar Torrijos did not attend this, his nation's triumphal celebration. As one commentator put it, "The general's absence made him more evident in the ceremony, the eagerly awaited guest who was not there."[4]

Others attributed the general's absence to his displeasure at US congressional maneuvers to disrupt treaty implementation measures. Many members of the House of Representatives sought to overturn the canal treaties by refusing to fund American withdrawal and delaying promised annuity payments to Panama.

"I do not want to go down in history, I just want to go into the Canal Zone." He said those words to remind himself that he would not enter the Canal Zone until the last US soldiers ended their occupation of Panamanian territory. In other words, on the last day of the twentieth century. He would only be seventy-three years old then. Nonetheless, the Panamanian people had begun the process of repatriating the Canal Zone.

THE SHAH IS COMING

Exactly one month later, a cable from Washington arrived around midday. Hamilton Jordan from the White House was coming to Panama. He requested an audience with Omar Torrijos to deliver a message from President Jimmy Carter. Jordan's commercial jet landed late that very evening, and the general's driver brought him to the Torrijos home on Calle 50. No doubt, the Panamanian strongman figured out the subject of the message well before Ham Jordan arrived. The Iranian Revolution, American Embassy employees held for ransom in Tehran, the inability of the shah and his family to find a haven for exile—these things had already made the news.

Jordan reached the Torrijos home well after dark. The general and his interpreter Chuchú Martínez were waiting in the living room. "What brings you here in the middle of the night?" the general asked. Ham Jordan explained that President López Portillo had decided not to allow the shah of Iran to return to his exile in Mexico. Would Panama give haven to the shah?

The host took a long draw on Fidel Castro's *puro*, blew the smoke into a plume overhead. "Hamilton, the crisis is first and foremost the problem of the United States, because those [hostages] represent your country and your government," he said. "But it is also the problem and the responsibility of the world community. As long as diplomats can be held like those in Tehran, no diplomat is safe anywhere."

He paused a moment before saying, "You can tell the President that we will accept the Shah in Panama. If we can make even a small contribution to peacefully resolving this crisis, we will be happy to do so."[5]

The general's gracious statement seemed the epitome of nonaligned philosophy as well as an example of rapid decision making only possible in a dictatorship. Less than a week later, news broke that the Soviet Armed Forces had invaded Afghanistan, adding yet another foreign policy headache to Jimmy Carter's agenda.

The news media soon alerted the nation that the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was coming to Panama. It showed that Torrijos was still in charge of diplomacy, for the reports caught Foreign Minister Carlos Ozores by surprise. "This issue has not even been mentioned," he said. Two pro-Torrijos newspapers, *La Crítica* and *Matutino*, had published editorials suggesting that Panama could once again contribute to world peace in the best tradition of the Non-Aligned Movement. It could help the United States and Iran resolve the hostage situation.[6] Popular expectations about an economic windfall were sweeping the nation.

General Omar Torrijos felt indebted to President Carter for his co-

operation in signing and obtaining ratification of the Panama Treaties. It concerned him that Iranian mobs had overrun the US Embassy and seized American diplomats just because the White House allowed the exiled shah of Iran to undergo cancer treatment in American hospitals. The hostage situation jeopardized the president's reelection campaign even despite Carter's second major foreign policy triumph, the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty.

Torrijos had been following the story of the shah. Therefore, when he received a rather desperate plea from the White House, the general complied immediately. He hoped Ayatollah Khomeini would let Carter off the hook for banishing the shah from retiring in the United States. After all, reasoned Torrijos, to allow the shah to live in Panama might cure the country's economic woes such as high unemployment and energy costs. Everyone knew that the shah was among the wealthiest men in the world.

Not one official or news commentator mentioned the irony that this member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) had plunged Panama and other small oil-importing countries into economic misery so that he could decorate his palaces and buy Western warplanes. Here is what the shah of Iran, charter member of OPEC, said in 1974: "Of course [the price of oil] is going to rise. . . . You [Westerners] increased the price of wheat you sell us by 300%, and the same for sugar and cement. . . . You buy our crude oil and sell it back to us, refined as petrochemicals at a hundred times the price you've paid to us. . . . It's only fair that, from now on, you should pay more for oil. Let's say . . . 10 times more."[7] But the small non-oil-producing countries of the Third World like Panama suffered more than the industrialized nations.

MISFORTUNES OF A FORMER DESPOT

When he fled Iran in February 1979, the shah encountered enormous difficulties in finding a place of refuge. The revolutionary government of the Ayatollah Khomeini sent out extradition orders throughout Europe and the Middle East. The shah's friend Anwar Sadat of Egypt and other heads of state in the Middle East were relieved when he and Empress Farah took a flight to the Bahamas.

The shah was also unwell and in need of medical treatment for cancer. Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller appealed to the humanitarian side of President Carter. The shah had been a stalwart ally to the United States in the Middle East, they argued; you must not turn him away from medical treatment in New York.

The former ruler's family waited on Paradise Island in the Bahamas, as he applied for a three-month tourist visa from Mexico. The arrival of

this wealthy personage intensified the "air of excitement at the scene." Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary government issued a warning to Mexico not to allow the shah's entry. The shah's representatives investigated other possible havens too, including Panama.[8]

Mexico's secretary of foreign affairs, Jorge Castañeda, finally came through with a six-month visa for the shah, the empress, and their children. But the family would have to provide for their own security, as the ayatollah had already issued a fatwa on the shah's life. After eight weeks on Paradise Island, the family flew off to Mexico. They acquired an eight-bedroom villa in Cuernavaca to serve as a temporary residence until an Acapulco property the family had purchased underwent remodeling.[9] Because of threats to the shah, the Mexican National Police manned around-the-clock security in the barrio where he resided.[10]

Bahamians were not sorry to see the shah leave. He had invested nothing in the local economy, and this Caribbean nation had to bear the cost of security for the fallen monarch. Then, within six weeks of the Shah's exile came another despot to Paradise Island. The Sandinistas overthrew Anastasio Somoza, who escaped to Florida. From there he took a yacht to the Bahamas, whose police force incurred another big expense for security.[11]

A New York endocrinologist made a call on the shah in Cuernavaca, and the former secretary of state Henry Kissinger came to pay his respects. Then rumors circulated of the arrival in Mexico of a "Fedayeen commando squad." Police distributed pictures of the Venezuelan-born professional assassin Carlos the Jackal, said to have been employed to kill the former monarch.

One night two shots rang out at an early morning hour. In a separate incident, Mexican newspapers reported that "an unregistered helicopter . . . overflew and opened fire on the house, but the guards' return fire drove it away."[12] Another ominous threat appeared in the form of paid advertisements in a Mexico City daily newspaper in both Persian and poor Spanish translation. It read in part: "Neither in Mexico nor anywhere else in the world will you be able to escape the punishment that awaits you."[13]

While in Cuernavaca, the shah experienced a sharp deterioration in health. He had already been in Mexico for four months.[14] The Mexican government assured the shah that he could return to Cuernavaca and even extend his visa for a longer stay. With that guarantee, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi departed with his family for his surgery in Houston, Texas.

But now the status of the shah took a wicked turn. Carter's humanitarian gesture brought up bitter memories in Iran of the role played by the United States in the shah's return to power in 1953. The action reminded

the Iranian followers of Ayatollah Khomeini that the United States had been responsible for twenty-five years of the shah's autocratic rule.

In early November 1979, pro-revolution rioters climbed over the walls of the US Embassy in Tehran and captured sixty Americans employed there.

The Iranian Embassy in Mexico City requested that the Mexican government revoke the shah's visa. President José López Portillo himself made the decision, and his foreign secretary carried it out. "The Mexican Government has had to ponder all the basic factors," Secretary Castañeda said, "aware of its duty to protect, above all, the country's vital interests."[15] The Reza Pahlavi family could not return to Mexico.

It was at this juncture that Hamilton Jordan flew to Panama to request General Torrijos's assistance in relocating the royal family to a more welcoming location. Torrijos chose the Contadora Island beach house owned by his friend, Gabriel Lewis Galindo, the former Panamanian ambassador to Washington.

LIFE ON THE ISLAND

The Carter White House managed all the details of the shah's trip. Soon after he left the Houston hospital, the royal family departed on a military plane from Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio directly to Howard Air Force Base in the Canal Zone. From there, a US military helicopter brought him to the seaside villa on Contadora Island in the Bay of Panama.

Torrijos watched TV coverage of the royal family as they exited the helicopter on the Island of Contadora. "Imagine that," he mused, "twenty-five hundred years of the Persian Empire reduced to ten people and two dogs."[16]

The former ruler of Iran spoke briefly in English to reporters on the terrace of the villa. "Although he put on a smiling face during the interview, the shah had the pallor and the haggard appearance of a man who [had] just been released from hospital after anti-cancer treatments. He made a brief statement, then rose and walked slowly into the house."[17]

President Royo and Adela de Royo came visiting on the following day. The president and the monarch chatted together about Ayatollah Khomeini and about banking in Panama. Mrs. Royo had a private conversation with Empress Farah. They sat on the terrace of the Lewis Galindo house overlooking the ocean. Armed guards patrolled the grounds, and electronic monitors could be seen there as well.

Afterward, the shah made a statement to the press. He looked pale and tired but smiled. Dressed in a gray double-breasted suit and with the Empress Farah standing at his side, the shah said, "I want to express my

deep gratitude for the gracious invitation of the Republic of Panama, its president and General Torrijos. In fact, from the moment we set foot on this land, we have felt as if we were at home."

President Royo told the press that the government agreed to extend residence to the shah to contribute to a peaceful solution of the crisis in United States–Iran relations. He said that, at present, Panama did not have diplomatic relations with Iran and obtained its oil supplies from Venezuela rather than from the Middle East.

The shah's spokesperson, Robert Armao, told reporters "Contadora Island is the ideal place for him."[18] Armao was an American public relations consultant, whom the royal family hired at the suggestion of Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller. As chairman of the board of Chase Bank, Rockefeller had had extensive business relations with the Pahlavi family for many years.[19] These two people had also supported Carter and Torrijos in the treaty ratification process.

"How do you feel?" a reporter asked the shah. "Well, I will have to wait a few weeks before I can speak with assurance. But for the present I feel much better."

As the president and First Lady of Panama were leaving the press conference, a newsperson asked him why they did not entertain the shah and empress at the presidential residence in Panama City. "I did it out of deference," President Royo said. "He is not in good health and I am in perfect health."[20]

However, General Torrijos took precautions to make the royal family safe. The National Guard commander assigned responsibility for security to Manuel Noriega. Several highly trained sharpshooters with automatic rifles as well as secret agents and frogmen provided twenty-four-hour, seven-day-per-week protection. Antiaircraft batteries enforced a no-fly zone over Lewis Galindo's villa. Multilingual commandos in camouflage battle gear remained close by in case of emergency, and a "heavily armed" patrol boat cruised offshore while a naval sonar unit guarded the waters fronting the property.

Colonel Noriega told reporters that it would be difficult for suicide commandos to approach the former ruler of Iran. "The shah's protection does not in any way mean that he is a prisoner," the intelligence chief said. "The security system has been so designed to permit the shah to move freely and take short boat trips around the island."[21]

Torrijos also assigned his aide-de-camp to the security detail for the royal family. Sergeant Chuchú Martínez had a doctorate from the Sorbonne, after all. "French not Persian was the natural language of the Shah," Chuchú wrote. "When he spoke on the telephone with his [twin] sister [Ashraf], he spoke in French. The same with [his wife] the Empress

Farah."[22] In one conversation with the Panamanian sergeant, the shah deflected his own culpability in the fall of his reign. "He placed all the blame on the Devil, which was the Soviet Union, and [said] that Khomeini acted merely as an instrument in its diabolical plan."[23]

Public reactions to the shah's residence in the country varied, but no one seemed indifferent. At worst, the general's detractors claimed, "the Carter administration's transfer of the problem of the shah to Panama confirms that General Omar Torrijos is a Pentagon man."[24] Editors at *La Crítica* normally supported the government of Omar Torrijos, yet they expressed reservations about the decision to take in the shah. "It must be noted [that] the prestige [Panama] gained from helping the overthrow of Somoza has been marred by the presence in our country of such a heinous and pro-imperialist figure as Shah Reza Pahlavi."[25] He might have blended in perfectly well with Pinochet of Chile or "Papa Doc" Duvalier of Haiti, they concluded.

Students from the law school went on radio stations to protest the shah's presence in Panama. "Let us hear the newspapers give their opinion; let us hear Radio Libertad speak out against the shah's presence; let us see the revolutions out in the streets to protest the presence of the bloodthirsty shah. We think the teachers should instruct their students [about] what type of person we are receiving in Panama."[26]

Several days later, four hundred students held a rally at the University of Panama and marched downtown. They entered the Don Bosco Church shouting slogans and jamming traffic. A contingent of police shot off a few canisters of tear gas. An officer of the National Guard met with student leaders, and the protestors dispersed peacefully.[27]

Secondary students returned following the 1980 New Year's break, and began to organize addition protests at three *colegios*, including the National Institute that had been so instrumental in the 1964 Flag Riots. Focus of the protest shifted from downtown to the Avenida de los Mártires, the former Fourth of July Avenue that had separated the Canal Zone from Panama City.[28]

Guardsmen again used tear gas on protesting students who were blocking traffic. Twenty-three students reported being affected by the chemicals, and a guardsman received a head wound from a rock. The National Guard put up a cordon around the US Embassy as a precaution.[29] The general's braggadocio of the first years of his Panamanian Revolution that his guardsmen had never fired a single canister of tear gas at anyone no longer held true.

The authorities became alarmed at the continuing student protests as the January 9 national holiday commemorating the 1964 student riots was approaching. Students returned to the streets again two days before the

holiday. On the first day, their parents and teachers joined them to prevent the students from throwing rocks and the guardsmen from using tear gas. But the next day, violence again broke out on the streets. According to one news account, "The [secondary school] students hurled rocks and broken bottles at the guardsmen dressed in battle gear, who responded by firing tear gas and birdshot."[30] Nonetheless, the actual national holiday itself on the following day passed without further incident.

Iranian media had also been keeping up with events in Panama. Students in Tehran learned that the Federation of Panamanian Students (FEP) had expressed strong opposition to the presence of the shah in Panama. Consequently, Iranian student organizations invited the FEP leader, Mario Panther, to visit them as they celebrated the first anniversary of the Iranian Revolution. Panther sent back his decidedly biased impressions of his tour to Panamanian news media.

The Iranian students who had taken over the US Embassy told Panther that it was not a diplomatic post at all but "a house of espionage conspiring against the Iranian Revolution." Panther toured cemeteries filled with the victims of the shah as well as "formerly poor and starving neighborhoods." The FEP leader concluded that he had been allowed "to witness that authentic revolutionary experience inspired by Islam which unites all progressive forces."[31]

Moreover, disruptions were felt on Contadora Island, an important tourist attraction in Panama. The shah began to hear complaints from his relatives who were staying in hotels nearby, because room rates had doubled overnight. Other vacationers stopped coming to Contadora. Armed guards appeared everywhere, checking the identifications of casino and hotel workers and tourists. The news media also reported that Interpol, the international police organization, warned of a four-member hit squad en route to Panama.[32]

In the meantime, the Iranian ambassador at the United Nations issued an extradition request for the shah's crimes against the Iranian people. The government of the Republic of Panama responded negatively. Not having the death penalty, the government of Panama could not legally extradite Reza Pahlavi if the trials might result in execution. President Royo advanced his opinion that Iranians were the ones who were breaching international law. They were holding Americans hostage![33]

In the midst of all this, the shah and Empress Farah took a weekend off for an excursion to Panama City. They left Contadora Island in a helicopter and took a limousine to the Panama Hilton Hotel. After breakfast at the hotel next morning, the couple toured the city and stopped to gaze at the monument of the first Spaniard to discover the Pacific Ocean, Vasco Núñez de Balboa. Television news journalists reported on the visit.

"The former monarch, surrounded by his bodyguards and Panamanian secret agents, was assailed by newsmen upon leaving the hotel," broadcasters reported. "His only answer to their questions was a smile."[34]

The shah's retreat in Panama provided him with little rest. News media reported freely, students expressed themselves loudly, and no one faced judicial proceedings for voicing opinions. Then the shah's spokesperson quit. Robert Armao returned to New York City, where he had worked for the Rockefeller enterprises. Moreover, rumors arose that the shah was looking for another haven.[35] A different story also circulated that the governments of Panama and Iran had been negotiating over the extradition request. President Royo denied the allegation.

EXTRADITION, A HOAX?

Both the president of the republic and the commander of the National Guard had to put another rumor to rest. Iran's Foreign Ministry had issued statements suggesting that the government of Panama was holding Mohammad Reza Pahlavi under house arrest on Contadora Island. President Royo had to correct the rumors. The shah is a guest in Panama, he announced. "He can leave Panama anytime he wishes."[36]

Iran's government indicated in some reports that the release of the fifty-two American hostages was conditioned on Panama's extradition of the shah back to Tehran. Royo said he would wait for proper documentation as well as the hostages' release before acting on the matter. One insider suggested that the president's denial of extradition was "simply a brilliant confusion which will permit the release of the hostages in Tehran. The shah is sleeping well."[37] Finally, the government had to issue a definitive statement: "The Shah of Iran is absolutely free and has never been arrested nor kept under house arrest."[38]

One American television correspondent exposed the ambiguity and drew the ire of authorities. The government expelled Sally Chardy of NBC for reporting that the shah was under house arrest. President Royo denied giving such information to Chardy.[39] More than anything else, the incident proved that Panama's dictatorship set limits on press freedom.

Shortly thereafter, Foreign Minister Ozores corroborated what the American newswoman had reported. "It is definite that he cannot leave Panamanian Territory. He cannot," he said. "The country is his jail."[40] Ozores also confirmed that the government would not deliver the shah to Iranian custody if his conviction would lead to execution. "Two months after Shah Reza Pahlavi's arrival in Panama," one reporter concluded, "his presence in the country is daily becoming more uncomfortable."[41]

But Omar Torrijos had a plan. He once told Hamilton Jordan, "Re-

member, my son, in military battle and political battle, always attack . . . even when you are low on ammunition."[42]

In mid-February, national television reported that the Iranian Foreign Ministry had just hired Juan Materno Vásquez to represent Tehran's interests in the extradition of Shah Reza Pahlavi. Materno was not just any attorney. He had served as minister of the presidency after the 1968 coup d'état. Materno later filled the position of justice minister in 1971, defending the government and the National Guard from culpability in the disappearance of Padre Héctor Gallego. Then he became the chief justice of the Supreme Court.[43]

There is no evidence of a falling out between the general and his former justice minister. In fact, Materno would write a laudatory book about Omar Torrijos in which he would not even mention the shah.[44] Therefore, if Torrijos was becoming tired of caring for the arrogant former ruler of Iran, he himself could not have wished for a clearer hint that the "hour had arrived" for the shah to move on.

A reporter for the Swiss newspaper *24 Heures* conducted an interview with the shah toward the end of February. "I have not tested the attitude of the Panamanian authorities," Reza Pahlavi said, "but by their own admission I continue to be a free man." The monarch did admit that a trial in Iran concerned him, because all the witnesses in his favor "were either assassinated or expelled from that country."[45]

Juan Materno Vásquez had two things going for him: he knew how to drag out international proceedings and he understood Panamanian law. He consumed a month in gaining assurances from the Iranian authorities that they would not put the shah to death. He then told Panama's English-language newspaper, the *Star and Herald*, in mid-March 1980 that the shah indeed faces extradition.[46] Free he may have been, but the shah was under enormous pressure to leave. Materno told reporters, "This gentleman has no documents to stay in Panama. He does not have them because he did not appear at the Immigration Office where all foreigners should be registered."[47]

Another problem arose with the Pahlavi family. The shah assumed that he was the guest under the protection of the United States government rather than Panama. Therefore, family members thought they would be able to use Gorgas Hospital in the Canal Zone. Instead, the US Embassy had to explain to them that the Punta Paitilla Hospital of Panama City was the only one available to him. Anyway, all the doctors there had obtained their training in the United States.[48]

Two days after Materno's statement about the likelihood of extradition, the shah checked into Panama's best hospital. His spleen needed removing. The famous doctor Michael DeBakey of Houston, Texas, had

rearranged his schedule so he could fly Panama City and undertake the surgery. However, hospital personnel would not approve of Dr. DeBakey's use of the facilities. After two days in the hospital, the shah returned to Contadora without having had the operation.[49]

Omar Torrijos expressed frustration with this guest monarch. He took it as an insult that the former monarch disdained Panama's medical facilities. "I have observed this King—he cares about no one but himself. He does not have the right to jeopardize the lives of fifty-two [Americans]. All I care about is helping the President [Carter] solve the problem of the hostages."[50]

At this point, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi decided to return to the Egypt of Anwar Sadat. President Carter did not want his friend to have to accept the shah; Anwar was already experiencing enough trouble with his neighbors for having made peace with Israel's Menachem Begin. The White House again dispatched Hamilton Jordan to Panama with Carter's plea to Torrijos to keep Iran's former ruler in Panama or send him to the United States. The general thought the latter choice would result in the deaths of the American hostages. With that, Torrijos decided to try to keep the shah from leaving Panama, even though the extradition procedure had already been initiated.

Torrijos and two aides flew to Contadora to assure the shah that he would not be extradited. It was a hot day but they found the doors and windows of his beach house entirely closed. Reza Pahlavi "looked very sick," one of the aides reported. "He had on long sleeves, his whole body covered up. His hand was clammy and feverish. The only thing on his mind was Egypt, Egypt."[51]

Finally on March 23, after a stay of almost four months, Shah Reza Pahlavi and Queen Farah Diba Pahlavi departed Panama. Colonel Manuel Noriega made all the arrangements. A small National Guard plane brought the shah and his wife from Contadora Island to Tocumen Airport. There they boarded a private passenger plane that took them to Cairo, Egypt, with eighty boxes of luggage. The flight cost $250,000. The official announcement of the departure read as follows: "Mr. Reza Pahlavi, having received a personal invitation from Egyptian Anwar al-Sadat, preferred to go to Cairo."[52]

The timing of the departure turned out to be perfect. On the day after the Shah's outbound flight, Iran's Panamanian attorney submitted his formal request for extradition. "Panama has violated an international law," Juan Materno Vásquez said. "We can presume [the shah] leaves as a tourist for Egypt . . . or that he has been expelled. I doubt the latter very much because government offices are closed on Sunday."[53]

As usual in Panama during these years, General Omar Torrijos re-

served the last word for himself. "It cost the Shah of Iran $20,000 a week to live in Panama, where he did not want to be operated on because he feared that under anesthesia he would be taken to the holy city of Qom [in Iran]. The Shah has a disease worse than cancer—he is suffering from the immense sadness of a lost kingdom for which in his case, there is no cure because he considers himself king and does not believe that he can stop being one."

"He is a very sad man and is jealous of his wife, who is very good-looking and could become the most desired widow of the world."[54]

The shah finally had his spleen removed in an Egyptian hospital. Reza Pahlavi died in Egypt on July 27, 1980. No one could have suspected at the time that Torrijos himself would have only 369 more days to live.

As for Jimmy Carter, April 1980 presaged the decline of his administration. Shortly afterward, news broke that a United States military operation to rescue the American hostages in Iran had failed. President Royo summarized its meaning for Panama. "Had it been a victory, it is possible that the whole world would have celebrated," he told reporters. "But it was an invasion and a violation of international law." Of course, Iran had violated norms by taking hostages, he concluded, but "one violation of international law does not justify another."[55]

Moreover, the Mariel boatlift of thousands of fleeing Cubans was about to begin with another embassy invasion, the Peruvian Embassy in Havana. Panamanians became aware of the developing story in mid-April 1980. Conservative students at the private University of Santa María La Antigua and the National University requested that President Royo issue visas to many of the eleven thousand Cubans who had just crammed into the Peruvian Embassy in Havana asking for asylum.[56]

This event led to six months of chaotic immigration of 125,000 Cubans to American shores. Men, women, and children made up most of the exodus from Cuba, but Fidel also emptied the jails and asylums of convicted criminals and mentally ill patients.[57]

Meanwhile, the Iranians held the American diplomats hostage until the day of Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration. Jimmy Carter spent the last month of his administration arranging for their release. Following Reagan's oath of office, Carter flew to Germany to greet the returning hostages at the US Air Force Hospital at Wiesbaden, Germany.[58]

Years later, another Panamanian official very much involved in the shah's visit weighed the cost to Panama. "Giving refuge to the Shah," said Manuel Noriega, "was not in our commercial and strategic interests. Besides, for the first time it opened up our nation [to] the possibility of a Middle Eastern terrorist attack."

Noriega also added into the account sheet the cost of his three-

hundred-man security detail and the loss to Contadora Island of tourist dollars—all for the sake of reinforcing relations with the Carter administration.[59] Worst of all for Panama and its regional interests, Carter lost the next presidential election anyway. As in the Bahamas and Mexico beforehand, the costs of harboring a fallen tyrant outweighed the investments.

These events were enough to tarnish Jimmy Carter's two greatest international achievements, the Panama Canal Treaties and the Egypt–Israel peace treaty. Both endure to this very day. Would events in Central America have turned out less violently in the 1980s if Jimmy Carter, the peacemaker, had won the 1980 election? Carter's second term would probably not have been decisive one way or the other. Some political breakdowns in a region populated by intense preconditions for failure lie beyond the hegemonic control of the world's greatest military power. Not even well-meaning mediation by a master diplomat of international stature such as Omar Torrijos could staunch the forces of mayhem among the weak and divided nations of Central America.

CHAPTER 16

OMAR, FIDEL, AND THE SANDINISTA STATE

One day early in 1981, Omar Torrijos was riding through the streets of Panama City in the back seat of his chauffeured car with Jack Hood Vaughn, the former Peace Corps director and ambassador. They were passing a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label between them as they talked about the upsurge of violence in Central America. Torrijos turned to Vaughn and confessed, "Brokering the use of Cubans to depose [Anastasio] Somoza [was] the worst political mistake of [my] career."[1]

Revolutions seldom settle disputes without provoking new ones. The more virulent the disruption brought by revolution, the more brutal the reaction. And Nicaragua had experienced a tumultuous revolution, which Panama under Torrijos had avoided. The difference between them consisted of the intensity of fighting for power and the depth of social change.

Nicaragua's revolutionary struggle consumed some forty thousand lives over the course of several years. It resulted in the destruction of the nation's military establishment. Panama had a bloodless coup d'état carried out by the military establishment. Some changes followed that General Torrijos called "revolutionary" but they really amounted to mild reforms rather than the deep structural transformations the Cubans and Nicaraguans experienced.

Another difference between the Panamanian and Nicaraguan Revolutions concerned their potential disruptiveness to international relationships. Neighboring governments accepted Panama's *golpe de Estado*

and easily reestablished friendly relationships. Elected governments in neighboring countries did not feel at all threatened by Torrijos's coup. On the other hand, the Sandinista uprising positively disrupted the regional order and threatened neighboring governments with the spread of revolutionary violence.

These differences constituted the boiling cauldron of Central America over which Omar Torrijos and Fidel Castro contested influence, each for different ends. Castro wished to fan the revolutionary flames and Torrijos, to tamp them down. Meanwhile, the region careened out of everyone's control.

THE SHOWDOWN IN HAVANA

At the end of his long life, Marshal Tito faced one final struggle. This survivor of combat in two world wars might have benefited from warnings he had heard from Torrijos. His problem concerned Fidel Castro and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In the 1970s, Fidel had attempted to radicalize the platform of the movement and move it toward a pro-Soviet stance. Castro expressed his opinions in favor of the USSR in his message to the 1973 Algiers conference of the NAM. However, several anti-Soviet members interrupted with shouts and walked out of Castro's address, including Muammar Gaddafi and Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk.[2]

Leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement circulated every three years to the nation hosting the forthcoming meeting. The chief executives of Algeria and Sri Lanka hosted the conferences of 1973 and 1976. Fidel Castro succeeded to leadership of the NAM to organize its 1979 meeting in Havana. Two ardent allies of revolutionary Cuba, Sandinista Nicaragua and North Korea, would be joining the NAM during its Havana meeting. It seemed a propitious moment for Fidel to ram through his resolution that the Soviet Union be declared a "natural ally" of nonaligned countries seeking to escape from colonialism.

However, Castro's proposal for the NAM distressed Marshal Josip Broz Tito. The surviving founder had thought of the Non-Aligned Movement as an alliance of nations yearning for independent paths between the two Cold War superpowers. No members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the Warsaw Pact could apply for NAM membership. Yet Castro viewed the nonaligned as future allies of the Soviets. Therefore, Cuban troops fighting in Angola were practicing the doctrine of the "natural alliance."[3]

Marshal Tito wanted to avoid a split between the leftists in his movement and the more moderate powers. "Backlash from concerned moderates could split the movement," as one CIA analyst viewed the situation, "thereby causing it to lose its major source of influence in world affairs—

the breadth and ideological diversity of its membership."[4] Tito was not alone in his opposition.

General Torrijos had already expressed some concern to Marshal Tito about the aggressive pro-Soviet policies of the Cubans. The Panamanians had shared Cuba's support for the Sandinista rebellion against the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza. However, once the revolution had succeeded in July 1979, Torrijos began to worry that Cuba's continued shipments of arms and military advisers to liberated Nicaragua would threaten the autocratic governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Moreover, it would provoke intervention by the United States, he warned, and blood would flow aplenty in Central America.[5]

The new Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, on the other hand, proved to be an enthusiastic proponent of Castro's pro-Soviet proposal at this conference. Daniel Ortega gave a long speech denouncing American intervention in Nicaraguan affairs over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He used Marxist rhetoric extolling the USSR and blaming "Western Imperialism" for the world's ills.[6]

At the 1979 nonaligned meeting, therefore, the Panamanian delegation voiced reservations about Castro's Soviet patrons being the "natural allies" of the Salvadoran liberation movement. Torrijos did not attend that NAM conference in Havana. Yet he did instruct President Arístides Royo to devote a paragraph of his speech in praise of President Jimmy Carter for having concluded the canal treaties.[7] Alas, the aging marshal was unable to travel to Havana. Therefore, Tito depended on selected heads of state like President Royo to represent his interests at the Sixth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement.

"In 1979 I arrived in Havana and Fidel Castro was waiting for me at the airport," says former President Royo. "At the small [visitors] lounge where we were chatting, he told me that I was the delegate for Latin America, because for each continent, for each region of the world there was a person that spoke on behalf of member countries."

"I said to Castro: 'Commander, in this address I'm going to speak about Latin America, about our struggles, etc. We needed support for growth, development, etc. But, in my speech, as a speaker representing Panama and the Non-Aligned Countries, I am going to speak highly of President Carter.'"

Royo continues, "And Fidel told me: 'Don't do that, President. Why in the world would you speak highly of President Carter? Do you know that the United States [has the] embargo, and this, that, and the other?'"

"And I told him: 'Among the presidents that have had to deal with Cuba (and there have been many), I tell you one thing, Commander, Carter is a good one, and he is the one that will treat Cuba the best.' Years

later I had the enormous satisfaction of seeing how Fidel Castro was speaking very highly of Jimmy Carter," Royo says.[8]

In the end, the Cubans did not press the issue in the face of opposition by Yugoslavia, Panama, and the majority of nonaligned members. Subsequently, the Soviet Army's December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, a charter member of the Non-Aligned Movement, proved that the Yugoslav marshal and the Panamanian general had acted presciently. Omar Torrijos did not always outmaneuver Fidel Castro so easily.

TRAINING THE NEW DEFENSE FORCES

As promised by General Torrijos, Panama's contribution to the reconstruction of Nicaragua came in the training of a new revolutionary police force. Instruction commenced in early August 1979. National Guardsmen who specialized in traffic management, public security, and civic action would train 100 Nicaraguans in Panama, and an additional 150 in Nicaragua. The government of reconstruction, an alliance between the moderates and radicals, chose candidates from among veteran guerrillas in the struggle against Somoza.[9] The training differed from the kind that produced terrorist thugs for General Somoza's National Guard.

Colonels Rubén Darío Paredes and Manuel Noriega arrived in Managua at the end of July 1979 with fifteen Panamanian instructors. Not only did Paredes bear the name of Nicaragua's most revered poet, Rubén Darío, but he had also graduated as a cadet at the Nicaraguan military academy.[10] Paredes commanded police training activities for the next three months. Intelligence Chief Noriega came to liaise with the minister of interior, Tomás Borge, and his vice minister, Edén Pastora, Comandante Cero.

Meanwhile, the Sandinistas also began training a new professional army also made up of liberation fighters. As invited guests, Paredes and his Panamanian police instructors attended the inauguration of military training for one thousand future soldiers. The first group of army trainees consisted of many veterans of the Southern Front who had fought under Edén Pastora. Comandante Humberto Ortega, the defense minister, gave the opening speech to the army trainees. "From now on," he pronounced, "the Sandinista army and air force will be the ones defending our sovereignty and our people and banishing the image of terror left in [the people's] minds by the genocidal Somocista National Guard."[11]

Thus began the construction of the new Nicaraguan armed forces. The three foreign allies of the Sandinista struggle against Somoza—Panama, Venezuela, and Cuba—had prearranged the assignments. The Panamanians were to train the revolutionary police force, Venezuela the air force, and Cuba the army. Costa Rica and Cuba too promised to send

teachers for the initial literacy campaign. But the newly elected Christian Democratic government of Venezuela backed out of reconstructing the Nicaraguan air force. In addition, the Costa Ricans did not possess enough trained teachers. Therefore, Cuba provided nearly all the literacy workers, pilot trainers, and doctors and nurses as well. Meanwhile, Fidel Castro still had several thousand troops stationed in Angola.

Cuban military advisers, medical personnel, and teachers began arriving almost immediately on direct flights between Havana and Managua. Cuban security advisers joined the G-2 under the command of Tomás Borge, a man the Cubans knew well from his long years as a resident exile and trainee. Weapons systems too began to arrive from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern European sources.[12]

The one thing Cuba could not offer was hard currency. Therefore, despite his shrill speech in Havana three weeks earlier at the NAM conference, Daniel Ortega accepted Jimmy Carter's invitation to come to the White House to talk about monetary aid for his war-torn country. At Torrijos's suggestion, Carter offered several million dollars to the Sandinistas.

The president and his foreign policy team met in the White House Cabinet Room with the Sandinista fighters Daniel Ortega and Sergio Ramírez and the businessman Alfonso Robelo. The Sandinistas did not behave like gracious supplicants. Comandante Ortega believed that the United States bore sole responsibility for the three and a half decades of Somoza family dictatorship, and he told everyone as much. Carter replied that his administration wanted to help Nicaragua nonetheless.

Ortega made one point very clear. Nicaragua faced an immediate and fundamental task of reconstruction. "It would be irresponsible and adventuristic to involve itself in the problems of other countries," Daniel Ortega said. This statement encouraged President Carter, who wanted to hear that the Sandinistas would not be assisting Salvadoran rebels.

The Nicaraguan delegation also notified the Americans that former officials of Somoza's National Guard had taken refuge in Honduras and were crossing the border to recruit fighters for a counterrevolution.[13] The Contra War was about to begin.

BREAKUP OF THE REGIONAL ALLIANCE

At the time that Torrijos confronted the turmoil of the Sandinista Revolution, the regional unity that he had crafted to pursue the Banana War and the Panama Canal campaigns began to crumble. Central American unity had never been absolute to begin with. Elections in some countries favored political parties unsympathetic to Torrijos's democratic socialist beliefs. Other nations had right-wing military leaders who blamed the Panamanian general for the triumph of the Sandinistas.

Omar Torrijos sent three of his top officers, Colonels Paredes, Noriega, and Díaz Herrera, to talk to the Venezuelans. President Luis Herrera Campíns rebuffed them.[14] His Christian Democrats of the COPEI party had been saying for years that the democratic socialists of Venezuela's previous president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, were communist stooges. Therefore, Herrera Campíns would not provide trainers and materials for a Sandinista air force. The Cubans eagerly filled the breach left behind by Venezuela's withdrawal.

Not only was Venezuela turning away from the policies of Torrijos, but so was the newly elected government of Colombia. Omar's friend López Michelson had finished his term as president. Together with Venezuela's Pérez and Costa Rica's Carazo, the Colombian president had provided political solidarity for Panama. "I go to bed each night with my neighbors," Torrijos used to say. But elections brought opposition politicians to power, and the election of President Julio César Turbay converted Colombia into a disagreeable bunkmate.

Soon the Colombians were blaming Torrijos for their own revolutionary uprising conducted by the M-19 guerrilla band. Colonel Díaz Herrera, in his role as executive secretary of the National Guard, had to deny that any Panamanian guardsmen were involved in running guns to the rebels. "We have not received any other reports from channels which deserve our consideration regarding possible arms traffic through Darien Province on the border," Díaz Herrera stated. Nonetheless, the security chief Manuel Noriega traveled to Bogotá to confer with Colombian officials on the matter.[15]

Colombia's news media, formerly supportive of Omar Torrijos, now featured articles about Panama running arms to the Sandinistas, the Salvadoran rebels, and the new M-19 guerrillas. Torrijos denied the latter two accusations.[16] Nonetheless, the newly elected president Turbay took issue with the foreign policies of Panama.

Furthermore, the Sandinista Revolution as well as the Havana Conference of 1979 were separating the chief of the Panamanian Revolution from another close ally, Fidel Castro. Rubén Darío Paredes sounded the alarm about Fidel Castro's real intentions in Central America. Forty years after the fact, the retired general Paredes recounts the following story of the breech between Omar Torrijos and Fidel Castro.[17]

As lieutenant colonel in the fall of 1979, Paredes was nearing the end of his three months heading up the training in Managua of the new Nicaraguan police force. General Torrijos had sent a Panamanian air detachment to operate two helicopters for the final training exercises.

The officer in charge of Panama's helicopter unit, from his post at the Managua airport, had been noticing unusual nighttime air traffic. Planes

coming in from Havana offloaded *guerrilleros armados* in full battle dress. "They got them off the plane and then they disappeared, seventy or eighty of them." After refueling, the flight crews boarded young men, some very young, sixteen years old, bound for training in Cuba. These flights occurred every two weeks. When Paredes informed Omar Torrijos by telephone, the general reacted with indignation. It violates our agreement, he said, between Cuba, Panama, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Mexico, and the Spanish Socialist Party leader Felipe González.

The next day, Torrijos telephoned back to Colonel Paredes in Managua. "Listen, Paredes. I'm sending you an executive plane, a jet. Go to Havana. I'm asking Castro to agree to meet you. You will deliver a message from me, directly to him, a very important and delicate one. Felipe González will be there."

In Havana, Castro did not receive the delegation right away but put up the Panamanians for several days at a government guest house. The entourage, joined there by the Spanish socialist González, arrived at Fidel's office on the Plaza de la Revolución to "a very long ceremony, very long, with a lot of decorum," Paredes testifies. "But I interpreted that it was the communists' style in order to create a god-like figure for the person that you're about to see; as a way to elevate the leader's character so you are humbled, softened."

The visitors were ushered into a large antechamber, ill lit, with the only ceiling light focused on a marble table with a vase containing a rose. "Mucho silencio." The Panamanians remained there for forty-five minutes before being escorted into Castro's office. Manuel Piñeiro of the Interior Ministry and a few other Cuban officials were seated before a large desk.

Finally, Fidel Castro arrived with a notebook and a pen.

Castro: *Tell me, Paredes. General Torrijos, whom I love and respect, says that you've informed him that we've been infiltrating militias over there, in Managua, in the early morning hours.*

Paredes: *Yes, yes. I informed Commander Torrijos, Doctor . . .*

Castro: *Oh! But, hey! Who informed you about that? Who told you?*

Paredes: *Well, I was informed by Major Santiago Fundora. I put him in charge of the aerial unit that we've posted in Managua. Two choppers.*

[Fidel pauses after each answer and writes in a notebook, while everyone waits tensely.]

Castro: *Hey, Piñeiro! Listen to what Colonel Paredes here is saying. Why wasn't I informed of this?*

Piñeiro: *No, no, no. That's not true; there must be some kind of confusion. It's not like that. Something's not right.*

Castro [turning to Paredes]: *Hey, Listen! I'm telling you, this Major Fundora is lying.*

[With this, Piñeiro and the Cubans shrunk like ants, they seemed scared.]

Paredes: *Listen, Commander, with all due respect, Major Fundora is not a liar. He is an officer of the National Guard of Panama, and our officers don't go around spreading lies, much less one of this magnitude. Can you imagine this kind of lie? To what end?*

[He gave me this look . . . I mean, the guy was starting to get a little uncomfortable, and that's when he tells me.]

Castro: *Paredes. You want me to tell you the truth? I have been at the Sandinistas' side during their struggle for the past twenty years. Twenty! And now? I'm not leaving.*[18]

THE SANDINISTAS MOVE LEFT

Meanwhile, the relations between Panama and the Sandinistas began to fray. Torrijos permitted Paredes to go public about his conversation with Fidel Castro. The commander wanted Panamanians to know about Cuba's intentions.[19] Back in Nicaragua, the Panamanian police trainers under the command of Colonel Paredes stayed the course. He presented his final report to Tomás Borge of the Interior Ministry.[20] Commander Torrijos and President Royo flew to Managua to join the police academy's graduation ceremonies with Colonel Paredes. Seventy-three (out of the original one hundred) Nicaraguan cadets completed police basic training.[21]

Several ranking Sandinistas, including Comandantes Borge, Pastora, and Alfonso Robelo, came to Panama to repair hurt feelings between the Sandinistas and Torrijos. In a news conference, Interior Minister Borge denied the revolutionaries' favoritism toward Cuba over Panama. He cited Panama's training of the Nicaraguan revolutionary police while Cuba sent doctors and teachers. Most informed Panamanians were not fooled.[22] They were reading in the local press that military trainers and Soviet weapons were coming into Nicaragua from Cuba.

Years later, former president Royo elaborates. "We did [much] for the Sandinista Revolution, but we thought it was going to be a Revolution like ours: neither that of the left nor of the right, but for Nicaragua." Royo continues, "[However,] we noticed later that the influence was gravitating, marching towards Fidel, towards the Cuban Revolution. They tended to imitate the Cuban Revolution, and that caused some disappointment in Omar Torrijos. Instead of coming to talk to him, the Sandinistas were going over there, to Cuba. Crafting action plans in Cuba."[23]

Finally, in November 1980, fifteen months since the Sandinista triumph over Somoza, a journalist broke the news. Both Torrijos and the Sandinista commanders denied it, but relations between the two allies were cooling considerably. "Cuba is already too far into the heart of Nicaragua," the reporter wrote.[24] Moreover, for similar reasons, Nicaragua's relations with the military governments of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala were deteriorating. They had little tolerance for the Sandinistas' ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Managua sent another high-level delegation to repair relations with Costa Rica. Tomás Borge and his assistant G-2, Edén Pastora, arrived in San José to speak with Presidents Carazo and Royo as well as General Torrijos.[25] The chief of the Panamanian Revolution later went on TV. He attributed rumors of poor relations to "misinformation which exists with regard to the real situation in Nicaragua." Then he flew to his mountain retreat in Coclesito to meet informally with President Royo and officials from Honduras and Nicaragua.[26] He still believed in the nonaligned principle of dialogue.

As the first anniversary of the fall of Somoza approached, the government of Nicaragua drew up an all-inclusive guest list. But this year, 1980, Fidel Castro would be the guest of honor, as Torrijos had been the year before. The usual cast of early allies of the Sandinista Revolution received invitations. They were Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama. Even Honduras's president, General Paz García, got an invitation, although he had been a partisan of Somoza.[27] Official delegations were to come from as far away as the Soviet Union and the People's Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The National Directorate member Sergio Ramírez then held a news conference in Managua to publicize the celebration. Members of the press asked him about Sandinista accomplishments during their first year in power. Ramírez spoke of internal stability, personal safety, control over inflation, and the reduction of unemployment. Reporters asked the *comandante* if the country would now be a haven for Salvadoran guerrillas as Costa Rica once was for Sandinista rebels. Comandante Ramírez answered with one word: "No."[28]

Nevertheless, the Salvadoran leftists did receive arms from Cuba through Nicaragua. They also set up a unified command center in Managua, there to be advised by Cubans and Nicaraguans.[29] Salvadoran rebels found a haven in Nicaragua, despite there being no common border between the two Central American nations.

Venezuela's new Christian Democratic leaders declined to attend, being right of center and already suspicious of the Sandinistas for the company they kept. President Arístides Royo was planning to travel to

the celebrations in the company of the ex-president of Venezuela, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and the Spanish socialist, Felipe González. General Omar Torrijos, the guest of honor at the previous year's celebration, decided to make himself conspicuous in his absence from the anniversary festivities.

Havana TV covered the second celebration event live from Managua. When Castro stepped up to the microphone, thousands of voices began chanting "FI-DEL, FI-DEL, FI-DEL." On this occasion, Fidel Castro could not help but reminisce about the history of Nicaragua–Cuba relations since his own revolution had come to power in 1959.

Fidel recalled Cuba's sponsorship of the July 1959 incursion of young Nicaraguan revolutionaries arriving by boat from Cuba. They landed north of the Coco River, along the Honduras–Nicaragua border, there to be ambushed and imprisoned not by Somoza's National Guard but by the Honduran military.[30] This event occurred just three months after Cuba's amphibious assault on Panama. "The Sandinistas fought for 20 years to overthrow the tyranny and set free their people," Castro said.

Cuba's revolutionary leader also reminisced about the CIA's sponsorship of a counterrevolutionary assault at the Bay of Pigs in April of 1961. "We could not forget our sister republic because it was precisely Nicaragua territory, Puerto Cabezas, from which the mercenary invasion departed," he said. "It has been said that the tyrant Somoza, when bidding farewell to the [Cuban émigré expedition], asked them to at least bring him a hair from Castro's beard. [applause] I have come here with a full beard [applause] to offer it to the victorious Nicaraguan people, even if only symbolically [applause]."[31]

Before Fidel Castro had departed from Nicaragua, Comandante Cero, Edén Pastora, escorted the Cuban leader to the battlefields of the Southern Front. Pastora explained to Castro the combat in which the Sandinistas had engaged around the city of Rivas.

Following the anniversary ceremonies, the Panamanian military plane returned from Nicaragua with President Royo, ex-president Carlos Andrés Pérez, Felipe González of Spain, and the novelist Gabriel García Márquez on board. They stayed in Farallón as guests of the Panamanian strongman. The news from Managua spoke of an exaggerated show of Soviet armament during the military parade. The pro-Torrijos *Matutino* newspaper ran a headline saying, "The Great Treason: Nicaragua Is Now in Marxist-Leninist Hands."[32]

Editors at *La Crítica* interpreted General Torrijos's nonattendance as a "warning to the leaders of that revolution not to allow themselves to be seduced by the dangerous temptations involved in a drastic turn toward ideological extremes." News editors were predicting that the Sandinistas' actions "could lead to bloody and prolonged rightist reaction."[33]

Nevertheless, the chief decried the exaggerated anticommunist hysteria of Panamanian reports on the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. Torrijos remarked, "The Sandinistas are not my enemies. I love them as a father. The problem is that anticommunism is often mistaken for a witch hunt." Torrijos tried to put the issue to rest. "It was just Fidel's turn to go to Nicaragua. I had mine last year."[34]

Nonetheless, one news item tended to predominate over others. The international news services buzzed with stories of the assassination of the ex-dictator of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza. It occurred in Asunción, Paraguay. After he fell from power, Somoza had to endure—like Perón and the shah of Iran—a peripatetic journey in exile. Somoza first flew directly from Managua to Miami. Soon enough, the Carter administration informed Somoza that he was not welcome in the United States. He then took a yacht to Paradise Island in the Bahamas, site of Reza Pahlavi's brief stay.

Eventually, Somoza found a haven in Paraguay protected by its durable ruler, General Alfredo Stroessner. Somoza lived on a ranch just outside the capital city, feeling quite secure in this landlocked South American country. He frequently traveled to Asunción in his chauffeur-driven Mercedes-Benz.

On September 17, 1980, a squad of hitmen ambushed his car with assault rifles and a bazooka. His mistress could identify his body only by his wristwatch. Remnants of a Trotskyist guerrilla group from Argentina took credit for the assassination.[35] Some had returned home after fighting with the Sandinistas the year before.

The Panamanians did not approve of the assassination. "The most desirable thing would have been to bring that man to trial in Nicaragua," President Royo commented, "as the Nicaragua people and the Sandinista government had wanted."[36]

As Cuba's influence rose among Central American leftists, Omar Torrijos decided to distance himself from Fidel. He turned over relations with Cuba to President Royo.[37] Probably with the general's approval, a "high-ranking official" anonymously criticized Fidel Castro. The person said that Panama–Cuba relations had descended to "the lowest level in recent years." President Royo's government was reviewing those relations "in view of Castro's insistence on stimulating armed struggles on the continent and in view of his manifest contempt for the international rules of political coexistence."

"The confrontation between Panama and Cuba has been particularly visible in Central America," the anonymous official reported. "Fidel Castro has repeatedly [ignored] Torrijos's calls for dialogue and for a political understanding without bloodshed."[38] Instead, the Cuban leader increased

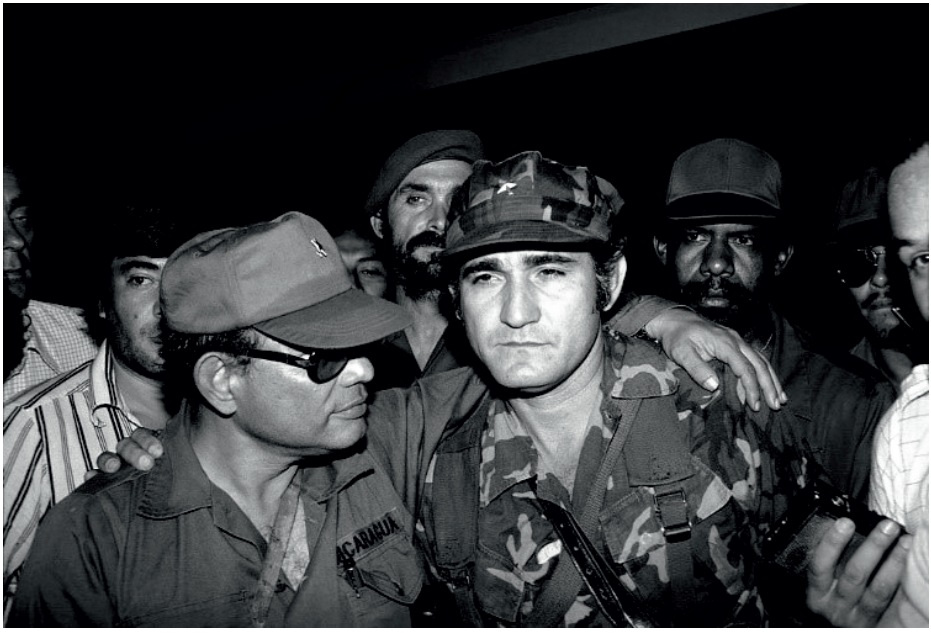


Figure 16.1. Tomás Borge (left) and Edén Pastora, known as Comandante Cero, were among the elders of the Sandinista movement. Both collaborated with Panama's strongman, but Omar Torrijos preferred the moderate ideology of Pastora to the pro-Castro leanings of Borge. Comandante Cero eventually defected from the revolutionary government of Nicaragua. Courtesy of Getty Images.

arms supplies and warlike acts. The ingratitude of the Cubans especially offended the Panamanians, in view of the fact that Omar Torrijos, at considerable risk to himself and his foreign policy, had extended the hand of friendship to Castro in 1974. Panama was one of the first members of the Organization of American States to do so.

THE DEFECTION OF COMANDANTE CERO

Nothing illustrates the course of the Sandinista Revolution like the career of its most prominent hero—Edén Pastora, Comandante Cero. His political life ended up in the same way that he described his business career: it was rich on three occasions and poor on four.

Once Managua had fallen to the rebels in July 1979, the Sandinista National Directorate ordered Edén Pastora to bring his entire command—the Southern Front, including the Panama Brigade—to the capital. Although he had just occupied the town of Rivas, he complied immediately. "I am just another front member," he told reporters. "I followed orders and that is why I came to Managua."[39]

He encamped his two thousand fighters—the biggest and best-armed unit among the rebels at the time—outside of Managua and headed into a meeting of the Sandinista commanders. His fellow *comandantes*, especially the Ortega brothers, could hardly believe his gullibility. They immediately send out officers to disperse his troops to other commanders.[40] They permitted Hugo Spadafora and the Panamanian volunteers to march victoriously through the streets of Managua. Then the National Directorate told them to go home.

With his troop command broken up, Pastora had no leverage to demand a greater share of postrevolutionary influence. His high name recognition yielded much respect but little power.

As he was excluded from the National Directorate as well, Comandante Cero began a long descent from taking orders to dissidence. He accepted the job as vice minister of intelligence to Minister of Interior Tomás Borge, the man whom he freed from Somoza's prison during that August 1978 raid on the government palace.[41] His new boss, everyone knew, was the one Sandinista who had spent the most time in Cuba.

His duties at the Interior Ministry bordered on the ceremonious—as Comandante Cero, he was the most famous Sandinista of all. Pastora accompanied Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and two other moderates of the reconstruction government to Ecuador's presidential inauguration. There followed a meeting between US and Nicaraguan delegations. Pastora, still in his olive green battle dress and Che Guevara–like black beret, stood for a photo opportunity next to the US secretary of state Cyrus Vance. "Who will be in more trouble back home when this photo gets out?" he asked the secretary of state. "I will," Vance answered.[42]

Just a few days later, the Revolutionary Directorate in Managua announced that it had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.[43] Journalists brought up the obvious questions. During a press conference, Interior Minister Borge was asked if he identified himself as a Marxist. "We have said we are Sandinistas, and we repeat that now," he replied. "We are friends of Cuba . . . and we are special friends of Panama and of our great friend and brother—so close to our hearts—General Omar Torrijos."[44]

The Sandinista leadership sent Pastora to Italy in November 1979, and he stayed on message. There Comandante Cero spoke of the "sinister, pernicious, and reactionary forces in the US" that were threatening the revolutionary process. The Sandinista veteran added that the "support of Europe, the Arab World and the socialist countries is vital to Nicaragua."[45]

Pastora also accompanied his boss, Tomás Borge, on a visit to Panama "to belie international press reports that Nicaraguan relations with Costa Rica and Panama had 'cooled.'"[46] As late as spring 1981, Edén Pastora

remained steadfast in propagating the official Sandinista line. He made a diplomatic trip to Peru and claimed that American intelligence was lying about saying Cuba and Nicaragua were sending weapons to El Salvador.[47] Like Borge, Comandante Cero also equivocated on the issue of Nicaragua becoming a communist state. "If communism is a struggle against hunger, exploitation, lack of health and ignorance and the staging of a revolution, then communism is welcome in our country."[48]

Then, in a significant restructuring of the Sandinista leadership in January 1980, Edén Pastora left the Interior Ministry and took the position of vice minister of defense. He became the second in command to Minister Humberto Ortega, Daniel's brother. Pastora's new assignment was to organize and command the revolutionary militias for the defense of the revolution. Edén Pastora's job had become critical once the first armed incursions of the Contras had begun along the Honduran border. These "contras," short for *contrarevolucionarios*, consisted of former members of Somoza's old National Guard. They escaped abroad to neighboring countries after Somoza's resignation. From Honduras, the Somocistas mounted raids on targets in Nicaragua's northern mountains. The Sandinistas therefore built up the revolutionary army commanded by Humberto Ortega to about thirty-five thousand men. It became the largest armed force in Central America.

To combat the Contras' menace to the revolution, the Sandinistas created militias based on Fidel Castro's defense forces of the 1960s.[49] Militiamen and women occupied the first line of border defense against raids coming from the north—and the south.

By April 1980, Comandante Cero found himself in the ironic position of having to request that Costa Rican authorities control their borders more rigorously to prevent the incursions of the Nicaraguan government's enemies.[50] As a guerrilla fighter one year earlier, Comandante Cero himself had been the most active violator of these border restrictions.

In fall 1980, Comandante Cero led five hundred of his Nicaraguan militia fighters in a sweep of the northern, mountainous border with Honduras. They ended up "tired and dirty," Pastor told the press, but his militias had pushed the "counterrevolutionary bands" back into Honduras. He said he had to restrain his troops "because they wanted to enter Honduran territory in pursuit of the former Somocista guardsmen." In mid-December 1980, Comandante Cero decommissioned his militiamen and militiawomen at Masaya and sent them home to their families and jobs.[51]

Few knew at the time that Argentinean military advisers were training the Contras in Honduras. The military government of Argentina reasoned that its presence in Honduras was necessitated by the fact that sur-

viving remnants of that country's leftist guerrillas, the Montoneros, had taken refuge in Nicaragua.[52] Officers connected to the infamous Battalion 601 of the Argentinean Army's security forces were providing training to former Somoza guardsmen in Honduras.

Argentina's generals were not on speaking terms with Jimmy Carter because of human rights issues. They did not seek Washington's permission to send military advisers to Honduras.

Some 150 Argentinean military advisers, who had just defeated their own leftist rebellion at home in the vicious Dirty War, had arrived months before Ronald Reagan won the US election. They were operating with as many as 1,000 anti-Sandinista fighters in Honduras. This occurred well before the CIA took over financing the Contra rebellion in the Honduras–Nicaragua borderlands.[53]

The worst fears of Omar Torrijos about bloodshed in Central America were coming true. Six months later, the Sandinista government distributed a second appeal for 200,000 new volunteers. They were to train as militiamen to fight the counterrevolutionaries in the very mountains where Augusto Sandino had held out against the US Marines from 1929 to 1933.[54] But Comandante Cero would not be commanding them.

In summer 1981 the news came that Edén Pastora had finally broken with the Sandinista National Directorate. Because of "the ever-increasing presence of Cubans-Fidelists-communists," Pastora proclaimed that he had to defect from his position as commander of the Nicaraguan militias.[55] He and nine followers crossed the border into Costa Rica. When his boss at the Defense Ministry learned of the betrayal, General Humberto Ortega suggested that Edén Pastora had resigned in order "to follow the smell of gunpowder."[56]

Most civilian moderates in the Sandinista government had already separated themselves from the National Directorate of Sandinista commanders. Violeta Chamorro and the businessman Alfonso Robelo had quit the regime and moved abroad to Costa Rica.[57]

Pastora's presence in Panama was unknown for many days. By mid-July 1981, the independent newspaper *La Prensa* reported that Pastora had crossed the border into Panama in a green-and-white brewery truck. Pastora told friends that he was fed up with "communist arrogance, arbitrary actions, immorality, and servility to Fidel and the USSR." A TV news crew next sighted Pastora, his beard shaven, in downtown Panama with Hugo Spadafora. The two sped away in a car before broadcasters could question these ex-Sandinista fighters.[58]

Pastora's defection prompted the journey of Interior Minister Borge to Panama. He arrived at the end of July 1981 to confer with General Omar Torrijos and President Arístides Royo. "Our brother Edén, loved

by the Nicaraguan people, an excellent friend of mine, made that decision without consulting with us," Borge told journalists. "Is he here in Panama?" the interior minister asked. "We respect his decision. . . . [Pastora] was an extraordinarily useful man in the Nicaraguan Revolution."[59] On this occasion, Tomás Borge did not have an opportunity to talk to Omar Torrijos, for events intervened.

Every revolution contains a period of early readjustments, consolidations, and defections. One faction comes to eliminate weaker ones from power. In this case, the Sandinista fighters first eased out their more moderate supporters, such as Doña Violeta, Alfonso Robelo, and Edén Pastora. Those pushed aside suffered fewer deaths or imprisonments than in the Cuban Revolution. Instead, they succeeded in finding refuge abroad. The Somocistas escaped to Honduras and the ex-Sandinistas, to Costa Rica. Then the remaining combatants consolidated power among themselves, the brothers Daniel and Humberto Ortega reaching a level much in the Cuban revolutionary fashion of Fidel and Raúl Castro—though without the mass executions. The Sandinistas followed a more moderate version of this consolidation, approximating that of Omar Torrijos's amalgamation of authority following Panama's 1968 coup d'état.

However, the Sandinistas committed an error that the Panamanian strongman had avoided. They followed the Cuban example of attempting to spread the revolution to their neighbors, especially to El Salvador.

Therefore, the reactionaries in Central America and Washington were not so tolerant. The Sandinistas faced much the same fierce opposition from the United States government as did the Cuban revolutionaries. The Reagan administration in the 1980s mobilized the CIA to support the Nicaraguan counterrevolution in much the same way that the Kennedy brothers, John and Bobby, had done in the 1960s to overturn Castro. Ideological contestation of the Cold War intensified and spread to other countries following Comandante Cero's defection in summer 1981, multiplying the potential for widespread killing and destruction in Central America.

In his final days, Omar Torrijos would work tirelessly to prevent the bloodbath in his own neighborhood. Unlike his success with the treaty issues, however, the Panamanian strongman failed to mobilize sufficient international outrage to prevent Central America's descent into violence. His failure owed to the tendency of many weak countries fearing the spread of leftist radicalism inspired by the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua. In this case, many of Torrijos's small power allies in the struggle against territorial colonialism did not buy into the idea of ideological diversity.

CHAPTER 17

THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY AND EL SALVADOR

Following ratification of the canal treaties, General Torrijos did not slow down. He juggled several problems in the next three years—Nicaragua, Fidel Castro, and the shah of Iran, among others. At the same time, he turned his attention to fulfilling his promise to Jimmy Carter to democratize Panama. He began thinking about the country's transition from dictatorship to elections. But the one challenge that weighed most on the chief concerned the nation that had supported him in his cadet years—El Salvador.

In a way, the general compounded the possibility of a gracious exit from office by announcing in 1978 that he would not relinquish power until the Orwellian year 1984. Why a six-year transition to presidential elections? First, Torrijos did not want the aging Arnulfo Arias to return to power. He was Panama's most effective campaigner but also, in Omar's opinion, its least effective administrator. In the past, Arnulfo's narcissism too often clouded his judgment.

Second, Torrijos had made his decision on giving up power in the time of his greatest—almost impossible—achievement, the treaties' ratification. If he could extract such a victory at the expense of the greatest military power in the world, he probably thought about what he might accomplish in just six more years—forging perpetual peace and prosperity in his neighborhood if not among the nonaligned of the world. Was it out of the question to contemplate succeeding his idol, Josip Broz Tito, on the international scene?

Third, Omar Torrijos was confident that he would have a good friend in the White House during the entire time of this long transition. In 1978, when he chose the year 1984 as the transition date, he could not conceive of a great American leader such as Jimmy Carter failing to win reelection for a second term. The general might have dreamed about what he and Carter together could achieve for world peace in that time frame.

Six years! Then Omar Torrijos could preside over democratic elections and retire in his fifty-fifth year of life.

EXILES RETURN

Omar Torrijos had promised Archbishop McGrath that within an hour following the Senate's ratification of the canal treaties, he would invite all Panamanian exiles to return home. The commander kept his word. Flights landing at Tocumen Airport brought back increasing numbers of outspoken anti-Torrijos activists: Thelma King of the pro-Moscow Communist Party from eight years living abroad, the last two in Caracas; the communist Jorge Turner from Mexico; and the conservative businessmen Guillermo Ford and Roberto Eisenmann from Miami.[1]

The general also allowed them access to the news media. They could appear on television, talk to reporters, write articles, and even found newspapers. Four members of the "Ecuadorian 13" expelled by Colonel Manual Noriega in 1976 were even able to tell their stories on television shortly after they returned.[2] Several of them pooled investments to start the newspaper *La Prensa*. "Life was not normal on return, but at least Torrijos was not like the Chilean and Argentine dictators," says Roberto Eisenmann.[3]

The return of the exiles in 1978 raised mild concerns because they had brought back their political organizations with them. In particular, Arnulfo Arias returned from Florida as if he were running a political campaign. He began a speaking tour throughout the country, drawing large audiences, and he was not generous in his views of the Panamanian Revolution.

Arias publicly attacked the man who had removed him from office. "This fellow, this dictator must go," he said. The former president began barnstorming the country, addressing overflow crowds. "The People will not suffer longer than necessary," Arias said. He associated *torrijismo* with *comunismo* and called for a nationwide general strike to overthrow the dictator.[4] No one in the labor movement responded.

The Catholic Church began openly criticizing the government of Omar Torrijos. Catholic spokespeople denounced "the hate between groups or classes which some persons promote as the power and mech-

anism of their struggle for political power." Church spokespeople renounced "Marxist cadres," which acted as government supporters. It also backed the idea of having a second plebiscite to clear up the "ambiguities which overshadowed the final phase" of the treaties.[5]

The accusations of the Church prompted the commander in chief to defend his National Guardsmen from the charge of being an agency of repression. Ten years ago, we "refused to continue to be the guardians of the corrupt oligarchy," Torrijos told members of the National Guard. "I am very proud of you boys."[6]

As distasteful as political parties were to him, the general decided that his Panamanian Revolution could only survive if it had its own party. Therefore, he began to think about the formation of the party of the revolution. He admired the Mexican PRI, the Institutional Revolution Party. He knew and admired two of its prominent leaders, Presidents Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo, both of whom strongly supported the Panama Canal Treaties.

Therefore, the chief of the Panamanian Revolution took the PRI as a model. "[Our] party should be organized from the bottom up," Torrijos announced. "That is, to start first with the people's participation then move upward to include the upper sectors of political operatives. It should not be imposed on the people by the upper ranks because it will not work that way."[7]

Almost as soon as the exiles returned and began politicking, the general's public servants had been talking about forming a party of the revolution. In a secret organizational meeting, a group of Omar's partisans gathered to discuss the future. Vice President Gerardo González, Education Minister Arístides Royo, Ambassador Gabriel Lewis Galindo, Labor Minister Adolfo Ahumada, and a few members of the general staff of the National Guard attended. "We will be at a disadvantage as long as we do not have a political organization," they concluded.[8] Torrijos announced the party's formation in mid-1978.

Political leaders integrated their Torrijista party into the Democratic Socialist International. The party's name reflected others in the Iberian world. They called it the PRD, the Democratic Revolutionary Party. In November 1978, several party members traveled to Vancouver, Canada, for the International Congress of Democratic Socialists. The affiliation gave the Panamanian Revolution's party a linkage to European and other Latin American democratic socialist parties, with which Torrijos had already associated.

His friends Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela, Daniel Oduber of Costa Rica, and Felipe González in Spain were members of the Socialist International. That organization also included leaders such as Shimon

Peres of Israel, Willy Brandt of Germany, and Mário Soares of Portugal. The chief's partisans thanked these members "for their support of our liberation efforts and General Torrijos during that difficult stage of our history."[9]

Then the general decided that he needed to appoint a commission to "regulate" all political parties on their journey to the "genuine, new democracy." He did not want the political organizations to repeat the mistakes of the 1960s, when the corruption and election fraud of the oligarchy discredited democracy in the eyes of the Panamanian people. For this task, he appointed some of his longtime allies including his civilian advisers ex-rector Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt, Education Minister Royo, and Foreign Minister Nicolás González-Revilla.[10] Therefore, many PRD members also participated in setting up the election laws.

The government arranged for a limited test run of free and fair elections in 1980. The 505 members of the National Assembly of Representatives had a smaller leadership and organizational panel called the National Legislative Council. The 1980 election was set to determine just one-third of this legislative council of some 36 members. That voting would determine just 1 out of every 3 council members, for Torrijos himself had already appointed two-thirds of the membership.[11]

Political parties could run candidates in the elections if they met the Election Commission's standards. The government party, the PRD, had to compete with the Christian Democrats, the old Liberal Party of the oligarchy, and one or two others. The Christian Democrats were particularly aggressive in campaigning. These candidates criticized General Torrijos and President Royo for condoning "corruption that has reached the highest levels."[12] The Panameñista Party withdrew from the election, as ex-president Arnulfo Arias had fallen ill and stopped campaigning.

The 1980 election results disappointed the general, as his PRD did not dominate as expected. Voting in Panama was mandatory, as it is in other Latin American countries. Nonetheless, only 60 percent of eligible voters turned out. The PRD campaigned for all nineteen of the council seats and won only ten. Omar felt as if his PRD had lost when the party of the revolution could not command two-thirds of the vote.[13]

As the political winds seemed to be shifting, the assistant chief of staff of the National Guard, Lieutenant Colonel Rubén Darío Paredes, made several philosophical observations during a television interview. "All regimes become exhausted after a time. Leadership is exhausting," he observed. "It seems that the people have been demanding changes. It was in the air." He advocated opening up the political system. "If you deprive the people of their right to vote, they will explode sooner or later," Paredes said.[14]

These sentiments appeared to motivate the chief of the Panamanian Revolution too. Torrijos once told Colonel Paredes, "Look, if I run for president, I am going to lose, because I'm already worn out. If you run, you will win, because you are fresh and you have just done a tremendous job in the agricultural sector. We must start thinking about it."[15]

At every interview about the upcoming 1984 presidential election, Omar Torrijos told reporters that he would not be a candidate. "I will not run in the 1984 elections," he responded to reporters. "If I return, the revolution will have failed because it has been unable to produce someone to take charge of it."[16] In private, he began to search for that someone to head the PRD ticket—even someone with a University of Chicago PhD.

Nicolás Ardito Barletta saw his former boss General Torrijos for the last time in April 1981. The ex-minister for economic planning was working in Washington as vice president of the World Bank. At the time, the former US defense secretary Robert McNamara was serving as the World Bank president. On a vacation trip back home to Panama, Ardito Barletta stopped by the general's home on Calle 50. They talked about the 1984 elections, and Torrijos suggested that Ardito Barletta run as the presidential candidate of the PRD. Barletta responded that he, Torrijos, should retire from the military and run as a civilian, thus raising the prestige of the office.

Torrijos rejected the suggestion. "I want to retire the senior staff of the Guard and replace them with younger officers, so that the National Guard could never again do what I did in 1968," the general told the World Bank's vice president. "Then I will retire."[17]

General Torrijos could not be certain that his longtime staff officers would support his plans to transfer power to an elected president, even from the PRD. He complained about his military staff to his closest friends. To Rory González, he confided that the National Guard was too corrupt and out of control. To others, the general said, "We are too accustomed to being dictators." In June, over drinks at the Contadora beach house of Gabriel Lewis Galindo, the commander seemed in despair. "I first have to do something about the National Guard. I can't let those who are next in line take over the organization."[18]

Turning the government back to an electoral regime depended to a degree on how well Torrijos managed the senior officers of the National Guard. In 1978, he reorganized the general staff. His chief of staff took early retirement under suspicion of being excessively corrupt. Torrijos as commander in chief chose Colonel Florencio Flórez as his new chief of staff. He was the most senior ranking officer who had supported Omar in the 1969 showdown. Lieutenant Colonel Rubén Darío Paredes became

the deputy chief of staff, the number-three ranking officer in the hierarchy. "A tough and agreeable soldier," the British Embassy said, "Paredes is the longest serving and most experienced."[19]

Therein lay the problem. Every one of the senior staff officers had been around since 1968, blocking the rise of younger officers who did not have such personal ties to Omar Torrijos. The lack of circulation of new talent meant that the officer corps remained more loyal to the commander in chief than to the military institution itself. None of them but Paredes, as the former agriculture minister, owed anything at all to the government.

When Omar Torrijos was deciding who would lead the government during the last presidency of the dictatorship, 1978–1984, he discussed the credentials of the civilian candidates with his senior military staff members. They agreed with the commander that Arístides Royo and Ricardo de la Espriella, would serve as president and vice president.

Therefore, the military decided who would manage the government. "No one was campaigning for [the presidency]. There was no struggle for it," Royo told listeners of Radio Libertad at the time of his nomination. "We were all aware that it had to be [General Torrijos] who . . . would settle the matter."[20] Little wonder that the colonels of the National Guard thought of themselves as the legitimate arbiters of the nation.

His advocacy for students and teachers had made Royo somewhat controversial ideologically. Panama's right wing called him a communist. Royo defended himself during a TV interview. He supported entrepreneurs playing "a major role in economic development," Royo said. "I also believe in social justice. I would say that I view myself as a Panamanian. I am not a communist."[21] In these statements, the future president was aligning himself with the general's adage "Neither left nor right, Panama."

What is more, the presidential change of 1978 gave Torrijos the opportunity to withdraw from responsibility for the day-to-day domestic affairs. He had an excuse to ignore issues in which he did not want to become involved. As Ardito Barletta says, "People would come to Torrijos and he would say, 'No. Go to Royo. He's the president.'"[22]

The tenth anniversary of the 1968 *golpe de Estado*, October 11, was the date of the presidential inauguration. "We (of the general staff) have also agreed to pull back the armed institution from the primary role in the government, to operate on a secondary level, always guaranteeing that the revolutionary process will remain irreversible."[23] Torrijos relinquished his title as chief of the government. He remained commander in chief of the National Guard, which he called the "true guardian" of the 1968 Revolution.

EL SALVADOR INTERVENES

General Omar Torrijos felt a fraternal tie to El Salvador because he had received his introduction to military life through a scholarship at that nation's cadet academy. His former schoolmates had assisted him during the stopover in San Salvador on his return to suppress the attempted countercoup in December 1969. A few years later, his former academy graduated a younger generation of Salvadoran officers with no ties to Torrijos.

Moreover, the Salvadoran military exhibited major factional rivalries in a nation racked by social and economic inequality. Fourteen interrelated families owned the major coffee-producing estates, while nearly 90 percent of the peasants were landless or owned too little for subsistence. Population density amounted to six hundred people per square mile, the highest in all Latin America.

The rising violence in El Salvador greatly troubled Omar Torrijos. Few Salvadoran officers had come around to the reformist ideas of the chief of the Panamanian Revolution. "Many cadets, sergeants, lieutenants, men who live in the very same misery in which people live," Torrijos argued, "are quickly realizing that the directional fire of their guns must be pointed at those who enslave, not at those being freed."[24] Still, most of his former cadet colleagues in El Salvador hued to right-wing ideas.

One of them, Colonel Adolfo Arnoldo Majano, on the other hand, advocated for reform. Majano had participated in El Salvador's coup d'état of 1979 and joined the new ruling junta. Shortly thereafter, he spoke by phone with Panamanian journalists. "Torrijos gave us moral support," he told them, "and expressed faith in the changes that are occurring in El Salvador."[25]

Colonel Majano and his coleaders were speaking of "Panamanianizing" their takeover of the government. The moderates conferred directly with General Torrijos, whom they called "El Salvador's eternal friend." They had come to Panama to gain "insights into the "Panamanian Model."[26] They wanted to steer a course between the left and the right.

The government junta, according to its foreign minister, proposed an "anti-oligarchic project" to reduce the power of the ruling families. He identified land reform as the primary means for the redistribution of income in El Salvador.[27] This moderate junta encountered opposition from powerful families who refused to give up their privileges. Within the Salvadoran Army, the G-2 security forces served as the hired guns of the wealthy elite and operated independently from most military leaders.

Research reveals that several foreign powers armed and advised the Salvadoran right wing. While the Carter administration withheld its support of both the right and left extremists, the military regimes of Ar-

gentina and especially Chile contributed weapons and advice to Central America's extreme right. Generals Jorge Rafael Videla from Buenos Aires and Augusto Pinochet from Santiago de Chile believed that Jimmy Carter's refusal to support the right wing played into the hands of Cuba.[28] Furthermore, the moderates received no help at all from the military presidents of Guatemala and Honduras.

Nonetheless, Colonel Majano's membership in the1979 junta encouraged Torrijos to mediate between this moderate military officer and the two main factions of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement. One represented democratic socialism. The other main rebel faction professed the ideals of the Cuban Revolution and found encouragement in the Sandinistas' move to the left. Torrijos found himself between Latin America's hard right and hard left. Yet he persevered.

Torrijos wished to have a dialogue with all factions and gave them haven in Panama—as long as they launched no attacks from its territory. The CIA reported that Torrijos was hoping the rebels would take his advice and "give the progressive military [of El Salvador] a chance to pursue a political rather than a repressive solution to the civil strife."[29]

The Panamanian strongman nurtured relationships with both the Salvadoran Army and the leftists, which placed him in a unique situation to bring the two sides together in dialogue. With the socialist guerrillas, the general had an open relationship. They frequently came to Panama as a refuge. He would invite them for conferences, and they sought to confer with him when they felt the need. His staff arranged housing, meals, transportation.[30] However, by 1979, too much blood had been spilled on both sides in El Salvador. The success of the Sandinistas emboldened the extremists on both the left and the right. Yet Torrijos kept trying.

Moreover, very few soldiers expressed any desire to engage the left in negotiations. Colonel Majano was the exception.

In June 1980, Majano returned to Panama on the plane Torrijos had sent to fetch him. The reason: The first shipment of arms to the hard-line Salvadoran leftists had arrived. A plane rented in Panama City, stopped in Nicaragua to pick up arms, and crashed at a rural airstrip in El Salvador. The army took the pilot and his shipment into custody.[31] These developments motivated the military hard-liners to threaten the moderate officers.

Fidel Castro had been engaging in his own unifying diplomacy in El Salvador as well. He succeeded in working out a deal to unite the socialist and communist factions into one guerrilla front, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, or the FMLN. The Cuban leader had also united the Sandinistas two years earlier with the same reward—Cuban weapons.

Castro no longer needed Torrijos to deliver the arms. "In just one month," Colonel Majano told the Panamanians, "from mid-August to mid-September [1980], Cuba imported into El Salvador, via Nicaragua, 130 tons of weapons, half of them of North American manufacture captured [by the North Vietnamese] during the Vietnam War." Fidel temporarily suspended the shipments, for fear of disrupting the US elections in favor of Ronald Reagan.[32] Of course, the suspension did not result in Reagan's defeat at the ballot box.

This time, however, Torrijos opposed the scheme. Formation of the FMLN signaled the decline of Omar's influence in Salvadoran affairs. He said that he noticed "a total lack of people who want to hold a dialogue in El Salvador. There is a group of leaders in that country who believe that the protest groups can be silenced by murdering, harassing, and repressing them. There is, but to a lesser degree, a certain trend within the leftist groups who think they can destroy the armed forces," Torrijos observed. "Those who believe this are mistaken and are only prolonging both the killing and a trend toward crime that is becoming almost pathological."[33]

Omar was referring to the notorious assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero, who died in March 1980 when he was shot by a rifle fired during the evening service in a neighborhood chapel. He had become an outspoken critic of the right-wing terror campaign against the Salvadoran Catholic Church. "Not any and every priest has been persecuted, not any and every institution has been attacked," the Salvadoran archbishop had said shortly before his murder. "That part of the church has been attacked and persecuted that put itself on the side of the people and went to the people's defense."[34]

El Salvador was falling into a vicious cycle. Therefore, General Torrijos dispatched one of his trusted advisers to discuss Central America with Jimmy Carter. Well known in the White House for his work on the canal negotiations, Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt, informed the president of Torrijos's attempt to mediate between the guerrilla groups and the government junta in El Salvador. Escobar Bethancourt explained how the military members of that country's unity junta were disagreeing over whether to negotiate with or fight against the leftist rebels. Escobar told President Carter that Torrijos had advised the junta to curb the violence of the right wing, especially the assassination squads forming among the Treasury Police.

Escobar told the president that the United States would be dragged more and more into the whirlwind of Central America. The more powerful the right wing becomes in El Salvador—and Guatemala and Honduras too—the more the guerrillas will suspect that the United States favors

those on the right. Already the Treasury Police and the terrorist group called El Orden "are taking advantage of the US political campaign and hoping that Ronald Reagan will be elected." If this happens, "the repression will worsen dramatically."

Carter asked what General Torrijos wanted him to do about the situation. "When intervention has to be taken," Escobar suggested, "it should be by the United Nations, not by the United States or by the OAS [Organization of American States], but by the Security Council of the United Nations."[35] Carter really had no time to devote to Central American affairs. He was behind in election polling; the Iranians were still holding American diplomats as hostages; and American voters would be casting ballots in just one week.

Central America absorbed so much of the energy of the chief of the Panamanian Revolution that he had to miss the funeral of his mentor and *pater político* Josip Broz Tito. The marshal died in May 1980, just days before his eighty-eighth birthday. Torrijos dispatched President Royo to lead the Panamanian delegation to Tito's state funeral in Belgrade.[36]

Nonetheless, Omar Torrijos issued a heartfelt memorial for his friend. "My deepest condolences go to all the children of the earth, to all the peoples of the world, to the Government of Yugoslavia and to the family of this great man for the loss of someone who won for us [Panamanians] one of the most important battles of history." The commander's eulogy concluded: "Tito has died, but he will live on in the thoughts of those who hate humiliation and love liberty."[37]

THE FINAL OFFENSIVE

Once it appeared that Ronald Reagan would win the US presidential election, Central American leaders on the right and the left made their calculations. The Sandinistas decided to cooperate fully with Fidel Castro's plan to supply weapons to the Salvadoran guerrillas. They merely funneled caches of assault rifles from the Soviet Union and Cuba through Central America.[38] The Sandinistas backed a desperate plan of the FMLN to launch the "final offensive." Castro convinced the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran revolutionaries to win at all costs before Reagan took office.

Likewise, after Reagan's electoral victory, "Fidel Castro lost all interest in peace. The transfer of arms from Cuba to El Salvador resumed relentlessly," Colonel Majano reported. "There arrived American M-16 rifles, Belgian FALs, German G-3s and Israeli Galil assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, rocket launchers, explosives, etc. The supply of weapons exceeded 800 tons, creating logistical problems for the Salvadoran guerrillas."[39]

Reagan's election victory also fortified the right wing in Central America. They placed pressure on Colonel Majano, Omar's moderate ally on the Salvadoran junta, to resign from the government for advocating social reforms. The Salvadoran right wing denounced Majano as a "communist." The junta member defended himself as a "democratic, a revolutionary, and a professional military officer."

Nonetheless, the accusation of "communism" amounted to a death threat. The Panamanians would not allow Majano, for his own safety, to return to El Salvador. José Napoleón Duarte and two other civilians remained in the junta as well.[40] Duarte had been a former teacher of Cadet Torrijos at the Salvadoran military academy. Yet, as a Christian Democrat, Duarte tended to align himself with the anticommunist factions in the junta.

The discovery of the "bullet-riddled" bodies of three American nuns and a missionary prompted President Carter, now a "lame duck," to suspend $20 million in foreign aid funding for El Salvador. In 1980 alone, an estimated nine thousand Salvadorans lost their lives in the political violence.[41]

In late December 1980, Torrijos held peace talks at the beach house in Farallón. The Spanish socialist Felipe González arrived from Havana, where Castro had told him the Cubans had already advised the Salvadoran rebels to fight on to victory. Attendees at the talks included Tomás Borge of the Sandinistas and democratic socialists from Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Venezuela, and Spain. Colonel Majano and associates represented the Salvadoran junta, and leaders of the FMLN. Peacemakers Omar Torrijos and Felipe González advised the rebels to reach an agreement with Majano and the army while Carter was still in the White House.

FMLN representatives said that they preferred to follow Castro's advice to fight on. "If you fail in the offensive," Torrijos warned them, "then you will have to negotiate with Reagan on your knees." The talks continued all night and into the morning for twenty hours straight, but the guerrillas remained steadfast. They said that their final offensive would continue and additional peace talks would have to wait.[42]

Back in El Salvador, rebel fighters renewed their "Final Offensive," but by the middle of January 1981, even before Reagan took the oath of office, the army and police had defeated the guerrillas on the streets of San Salvador. The FMLN fighters dispersed to the countryside, defeated but not eliminated.

Shortly afterward, the Sandinista Daniel Ortega vowed to end the supply of arms to El Salvador. He did not want to jeopardize the Nicaraguan revolution over this issue.[43] A captured lieutenant of the Salvadoran

Figure 17.1. Torrijos's American photographer, Tom Zimberoff (left), posed with president-elect and Mrs. Reagan at the ranch in Santa Barbara. He was photographing the happy couple until he informed Reagan of a message from Panama. It was that General Torrijos was no "tin-horn dictator." Upon receiving this communication, Reagan called off the rest of the photo shoot. Photograph by Michael Evan, courtesy of Tom Zimberoff.

FMLN identified Cuba as the source of support for the uprising. He spoke to the press in San Salvador, providing information in exchange for "good treatment" on the part of his army captors.

"Cuba sends money to the guerrillas. It also sends arms, but it gives more money than arms so that the government does not get implicated," the prisoner testified. "Although 12 tons of arms have been sent to El Salvador, this represents only one percent of what is at the disposal of the guerrillas outside the country."[44]

REAGAN IN OFFICE

In this episode of the perennial struggle between the weak and the powerful, the incoming Reagan administration seemed to have benefited from local allies already gaining the upper hand in Central America. Reagan's occupancy of the Oval Office only made matters worse as the counterrevolutionaries had already anticipated the wishes of the faraway imperial

power. When Reagan took the oath of office, the Salvadoran Army had already defeated the rebels' offensive with blunt force.

Omar Torrijos did not give up his quest to bring the warring parties of Central America together for peace talks in Panama. He said as much to the first emissaries sent his way by the new Reagan administration. The new US ambassador to Panama, Ambler Moss, soon arranged an audience with the commander in chief on the crisis in Central America. "So that your conscience may be clear," General Torrijos told the ambassador. "No arms are passing through Panama to El Salvador, not even one revolver."

The failure of January's "Final Offensive" had convinced the left that it was time to talk, Torrijos said. He urged US officials to negotiate with the more moderate factions of Central America before it became too late.[45] The commander also told a visiting delegation of military officers that Panama remained an island of relative stability in the roiling waters of the region. His audience consisted of mid-career military officers who were studying international affairs at the Inter-American Defense College.

General Torrijos said that Panama supported the junta of President Duarte, who was proposing an ambitious land reform project. But the left refused to join the reforms and started a generalized civil war. "A long time has passed and the armed forces have not been able to eradicate terrorism," he said, "and the leftists have not been able to destroy the armed forces."

The commander offered Panama's services in seeking an end to the violence. "All groups converge here," Torrijos said.[46] "Reagan is going to be decisive, but in the opposite sense. I think things are looking bleak for Central America, but in the end the rights of the people will prevail."[47] Torrijos did not know, of course, that the new chief executive at the White House had already issued a top-secret directive that the United States would facilitate "paramilitary operations" against the Cuban presence in Central America.[48] There was nothing in the document about the rights of the people.

A couple of months after Reagan's inauguration, the new emissaries of the State Department were gathering facts about what was really happening in Central America. Two of them made special trips to Panama to confer with General Torrijos and President Royo on the situation. The first was General Vernon Walters, who stopped over in Panama on the way back to Washington, DC, from South America. The Reagan White House had just appointed Walters as its roving ambassador.

Walters had accompanied Vice President and Mrs. Nixon during the Caracas riots that threatened their lives in 1958. Walters subsequently acted as a liaison officer between the US Embassy and Brazil's coup leader General Humberto Castelo Branco in 1964.[49] Walters then served as assistant director of the CIA under President Nixon. His knowledge of

Latin America and mastery of Spanish and Portuguese certainly qualified him for this mission to Panama.

General Walters met with President Royo and sought Panama's assessment in the conflict in El Salvador. Walters spoke especially about regional problems in human rights and freedom of speech. Royo responded that the Panamanians were attempting to organize a Latin American summit meeting to deal with Central America and other international issues.[50]

On that same day, General Torrijos sent a plane to bring Walters to Farallón. They sat around on the veranda of the beach house chatting with members of his inner circle, including Colonel Noriega. Then the two, Torrijos and Walters, went to another room for a private conversation. Apparently, the host spoke about his differences with Fidel Castro over Central American affairs.[51]

Once reports of the Torrijos–Walters conversation reached the White House, National Security Adviser Richard Allen sent a memorandum to President Reagan. The memo was titled "Panama's Anti-Castro Turn: How Can We Use It?" The National Security Council chief obviously did not know Torrijos, for he proposed that the Americans should "recruit" the Panamanian strongman to join in Reagan's goal of "getting the Russians out of Cuba."[52] After six weeks in the White House, Ronald Reagan gave no indication of overturning the Torrijos–Carter treaties. In fact, he wrote a note to President Royo that he would uphold the treaties as written.[53]

In June, the general's activities appear to have fallen off. His name dropped out of the daily news cycles, and President Royo seemed to be talking to most of the international visitors. Was Omar sick? Depressed? Exhausted? He seemed to rely more and more on the president. "Whoever messes with President Royo," he used to say, "messes with me."[54]

Then a brief ray of sunlight burst through the storm clouds in the second week of July 1981. News arrived that an Argentine court had released the former president, Isabel Perón, after five years of house arrest. The military government there had fallen on hard times. Inflation was running at 100 percent and the peso had lost two-thirds of its value. Omar Torrijos took comfort that he had been among the few who had championed the release of Isabelita, whom he had known since 1956. The others who had requested amnesty included the pope and the sister of the late Francisco Franco.[55]

But in confronting the problem of El Salvador, Torrijos no longer championed an issue sufficient to unite a broad front of "weak" nations. Mediating tensions within and between Central America nations proved to be much more difficult than getting rid of the notorious Somoza dy-

nasty or ending the American military occupation of Panama. Torrijos tried but could not prevent the escalating death toll in the region.

The killing in Central America would continue from 1978 to 1990, when the total number of victims had risen to 79,000 in El Salvador and 150,000 in Guatemala.[56] Additionally, church bells rang for Nicaragua's 40,000 fatalities in the insurrection against Somoza and for another 60,000 dead in the so-called Contra War.

Omar Torrijos had warned of the probability of "rivers of blood" in Central America. Granted, Ronald Reagan sponsored the right wing in Central America by word and by deed. But Fidel Castro, too, bears responsibility for running arms to the leftists.

Pancho, one of the Salvadoran guerrilla leaders, paid a visit to General Torrijos at the family home on Calle 50. "I found him very sad and a little drunk," Pancho writes. "He hugged me excitedly and said: 'Pancho, my brother, I'm very sad. My Sandinista brothers do not trust me. I swear to you, Pancho, that never in my life am I signing a blank check again like I did with Nicaragua.'"[57]

Obviously, Torrijos felt remorse for his own part in introducing Cuba's influence into Central American affairs.

THE CRASH

Some of his associates had noted that a sense of melancholy had befallen the chief of the Panamanian Revolution toward the end of his life. Hs friend, the attorney Juan Materno Vásquez wrote, "Omar lived the last months of his life in solitude."[58] The final meeting between Colonel Paredes and his commander in chief took place at lunch at Calle 50. It was just the two of them. "There I sensed that he was, let's say, like a man who was living his last days," Paredes testifies. "I began to notice that he was wearing out, that he was physically declining."[59]

However, his closest associate offered a different assessment of the mood of the general. "The last fifteen days in the life of General Torrijos consisted of the usual swirl of political business," Chuchú Martínez wrote.[60] Gabriel García Márquez arrived from Mexico City on one of his periodic visits with his "favorite general officer." He stayed at the family home on Calle 50 in the capital city.[61] Some top commanders of the Guatemalan guerrilla movement had come to Panama for conferences with Torrijos. He also conducted multiple meetings at the beachfront home with the likes of Comandante Cero (Edén Pastora), Comandante Dos (Dora María Télles), and Hugo Spadafora.

The general's helicopters and light planes flew visitors back and forth between Fuerte Cimarrón and a small airfield at the edge of the capital city. Military personnel drove them to their lodgings at a government

guesthouse close to the Torrijos family home on Calle 50. Life had returned to normal. That is to say, it was full of meetings and comings and goings. Torrijos may have snapped out of his depression.

Another visitor who had come for talks with President Royo and General Torrijos was the Nicaraguan minister of the interior, Tomás Borge. In fact, he arrived in Panama on the very morning of the plane crash. He told news reporters that the Sandinista government was now adopting a policy of nonintervention in El Salvador and wanted to bring peace to Central America.[62] Leaders from the Salvadoran FMLN and the Sandinista state came, but no one had yet arrived to represent the hard right in Guatemala, Honduras, or El Salvador.

The general continued his peripatetic practices, never traveling by car but by small planes and helicopters operated by the air force. "On a couple of occasions," as Arístides Royo relates, "when I had meetings with Fidel Castro, he would say, 'Tell Torrijos not to travel by helicopter and plane so much. This is how we lost Camilo Cienfuegos, and we never knew what happened to Camilo.'"[63] During their last meeting in Belgrade, Marshal Tito had cautioned his friend Omar about this very same danger.

On Saturday morning, July 30, the commander of the Panamanian National Guard arose early at Rory's beach house at Farallón. He decided to fly for the weekend to his country retreat at Coclesito. In the dual-engine Twin Otter, a Canadian-built aircraft, known for its reliability and stability, the flight into the high mountain valley took just twelve minutes. There was the usual bustle of his staff at the beach house to prepare breakfast, make last-minute phone calls to family members, and order the air force crew to prepare the flight.

Torrijos complained of a toothache. The dentist, Dr. Teresa Ferreira had a dental practice at Coclesito. She hitched a ride with him on the Twin Otter. The general's usual pilot for this aircraft had taken a leave from duty so that he and his bride could spend their honeymoon together. Captain Adames, a seasoned pilot, took over the controls.

The weather was clear when the plane took off. But a sudden thunderstorm blew through the saddle between two peaks on the approach to the airfield at Coclesito. Somehow, the plane veered to the left and crashed into the mountain a few meters below its crest.

General Omar Torrijos Herrera died instantaneously, together with the pilot, five other guardsmen, and the dentist.

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

THE QUESTION OF POWER REVISITED

The saga of Omar Torrijos cannot be complete without answering two obvious questions concerning the death of the strongman and legacy of his rule. Finally, readers may want to understand what the historical relationship between Panama and the United States might say about the weak and the powerful in the world.

WHO KILLED OMAR TORRIJOS?

Fidel Castro first spread the story that the Central Intelligence Agency killed the Panamanian strongman. With Fidel, it was automatic, no investigation needed, and the Cuban state still sustains this big supposition. No one in Havana has admitted publicly that Fidel and Omar disagreed over Central American affairs in the two years before the latter's death. Torrijos had become an obstacle to Reagan-era policies in Central America, the Cubans claimed.

Others suggest that Manuel Noriega arranged the accident with the Twin Otter airplane. Some Panamanians say he did so in conjunction with the CIA. These explanations gained traction when Noriega became dictator in his own right.

Former colleagues of the chief interviewed for this book believe the official story—that sudden bad weather and pilot error caused the plane crash. Experts discovered no evidence of explosives at the crash site, and the Canadian manufacturer of the Twin Otter sent out technicians who found no signs of sabotage to the flight instruments.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the official explanation can-

Figure E.1. Eduardo Morgan Jr., a longtime adviser to Omar Torrijos, hiked to the site of the air crash within weeks of the general's death. He snapped this photograph and reported that he found no evidence of an explosion or fire in the wreckage. Photograph courtesy of Eduardo Morgan Jr.

not be refuted. This is what former president Royo told the author while he drew an outline of the saddle of a mountain on a piece of paper. "Coclesito is here," Royo says. "The plane came from here. There was fog, rain, no visibility. Even though the pilot had instruments, he didn't rely on them very much, but on his instinct. The plane crashed here, about six or seven meters from the crest. I went to see [the wreckage]. The pilot changed course and he crashed here. There was no bomb or anything like that."[1]

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DOES OMAR TORRIJOS BEAR FOR THE NORIEGA DICTATORSHIP THAT OCCURRED AFTER HIS DEATH?

Certainly, the general's creation of a powerful internal security unit within the National Guard played a role in Noriega's rise to power. Yet it is also undeniable that the formidable G-2 allowed Torrijos to travel so as to fashion an international campaign shaming the world's foremost democracy for taking advantage of a weak nation.

Yes. Torrijos did have a solution to the possibility that Manuel Noriega or any other senior officer of the National Guard might succeed him as dictator. He intended to retire the entire general staff and separate these longtime colonels from the National Guard. In their place, he intended to promote younger officers, who could prevent the old-timers from seizing power. It might have worked as planned. But maybe not. Especially, if some new element slipped into the equation, such as rising drug trade and expanding civil wars in the neighborhood.

However, the chief's death spoiled the transition plan and set up a leadership struggle within in the National Guard. Clearly, Noriega was able to outmaneuver all other contenders for power within both the military and the government. Between 1981 and his eventual fall in 1989, while engaging in drug trafficking and gunrunning, Colonel Noriega was able to push aside, one by one, the following political and military competitors for power:

February 1982. Colonel Noriega meets with cartel leaders in Medellín, Colombia.
March 1982. Rubén Darío Paredes replaces Colonel Florencio Flórez as commandant of the National Guard.
July 1982. Vice President Ricardo de la Espriella replaces President Arístides Royo.
February 1983. Jorge Illueca replaces President de la Espriella.
August 1983, General Paredes resigns from the National Guard to run for the presidency; General Noriega becomes commander.
February 1984. General Noriega backs Nicolás Ardito Barletta as the PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) presidential candidate.
May 1984. Ardito Barletta defeats both Arnulfo Arias and General Paredes in presidential elections.
September 1985. Hugo Spadafora is murdered (suspicion falls on Noriega).
November 1985. CIA director William Casey discusses Panama's assistance to Contras in Nicaragua with Noriega.
September 1986. Ardito Barletta resigns the presidency under pressure from the military.
July 1987. *La Prensa* is closed down; Roberto Eisenmann again goes into exile.
May 1987. Colonel Roberto Díaz Herrera is dismissed as chief of staff.
February 1988. US attorney indicts Noriega for drug trafficking.
May 1989. Noriega overturns results of presidential elections with military repression.

December 1989. US Armed Forces invade Panama and arrest Noriega.
January 1990. A functioning democracy is restored.
December 31, 1999. Panama assumes full control of the canal and the last US troops withdraw.[2]

Understandably, the Panamanians today harbor mixed feelings about the military invasion that President George H. W. Bush launched to dislodge the Noriega dictatorship. On the one hand, some Panamanians are grateful, because the US invasion did bring about the transition to democracy—but at a cost. The bombing of the National Guard headquarters caused untold deaths and destruction in the barrio of El Chorrillo.

One can conclude the real national misfortune lies in the premature death of Omar Torrijos. Two civilian victims of Noriega's rise to power, ex-presidents Royo and Ardito Barletta, each mention the word "tragedy."[3] It was a tragedy that Torrijos needed to govern as a dictator to secure the canal for the Panamanian people. The second element of tragedy was that the air crash took the general before he could reconstitute the leadership of the very institution—the National Guard—that had kept him in power long enough to conclude the treaties.

HAS PANAMA SUCCEEDED IN MANAGING THIS VITAL INTERNATIONAL WATERWAY?

Those who survived the Noriega dictatorship and the US invasion today can claim much gratification for their own ingenuity. With the long-overdue improvements that Panama carried out to increase the capacity of the canal's locks, the waterway functions more efficiently today than when the Americans operated it.

The eventual transfer of the Panama Canal and the final withdrawal of American troops proceeded according to provisions of the 1977 treaties. On December 31, 1999, the Americans lowered the last Stars and Stripes flying in the Canal Zone. The Republic of Panama assumed total possession of the waterway in those final hours of the millennium.

One must acknowledge that over the last decades of Panamanian control, the canal has continued to operate with the same punctuality as when 40,000 Americans were operating it. It still operates 365 days per year, 24 hours per day. Panamanian canal workers have not initiated anything like the slowdown the Zonians declared during Marshal Tito's visit.

The Panamanian Canal Authority has also undertaken improvements that permit larger ships to pass through the canal. They have constructed new locks parallel to the original ones. Consequently, annual tonnage transiting the canal has increased from 205 million long tons in 2010 to 252 million in 2019.[4]

The old Canal Zone is now completely demilitarized. Fort Amador at the southern end of the canal contains a new convention center. The Panamanians have converted Fort Kobbe and Howard Air Force Base into a tourist zone. Albrook Air Force Base has become a shopping mall and a regional airport. Fort Clayton now serves as an educational complex. Panamanian capitalism generates billions of dollars per year in the zone once dominated by American governmental paternalism. The US Army moved the School of the Americas from Fort Gulick, the Canal Zone, to Fort Benning, Georgia.

WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE WEAK AND THE POWERFUL?

The asymmetry of power in the world originates not only from the military and economic might of bigger countries and the lack thereof in others. Asymmetry exists internally in smaller nations of the Global South as well. Central America in the time of Omar Torrijos demonstrated that powerful families dominated and army officers of the middle class protected the wealthy from the impoverished masses.

In addition, the narrow elites of weak countries also tend to ally themselves with outside powers to bolster their economic domination at home. Social injustice in such societies leads to political instability because the haves are so few and the have-nots, so very many. In a way, weak powers suffer from internal as well as external exploitation, and exploitation leads to top-down violence.

The wealthy and powerful within small countries such as Latin America can only sustain unity among themselves over great matters. Imperialism in the Third World and the Panama Canal Treaties were issues of this magnitude. Postwar decolonization worldwide nurtured the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

Otherwise, ideological contestation in the time of the Cold War divided and weakened small countries. The philosophical differences between Castro's Cuba and Pinochet's Chile, for example, undermined Omar Torrijos's efforts to unify Latin America. The analysis in this book suggests that Panama's moderate dictatorship had more in common with electoral systems than with the hard-line authoritarian regimes. Moreover, internal competitors for power in countries undergoing political stress often seek and accept outside assistance, as the Salvadoran right wing appealed to the Reagan administration while the left wing sought arms from Cuba.

What remains to be explained is why Washington, representing the world's number one democracy, got along better with right-wing dictatorships than with moderate regimes. Certainly, there is something to say

about the tendency of the right in Latin America to brutalize domestic dissidents who tended to criticize US policies. Therefore, the White House viewed Augusto Pinochet, but not Salvador Allende, as a "friend."

International organizations such as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of American States that attempt to mediate relations between the weak and the powerful cannot function as designed in times of political, religious, or economic upheaval. Why? Because that is when the struggles within the small countries become intense. Countries experiencing internal disunity find it difficult to unite internationally.

General Torrijos became a commanding figure in the Third World during the 1970s because he recognized that the struggle against neocolonialism could unify weak nations in support of Panama's effective sovereignty over the Canal Zone. Certainly, the election of Jimmy Carter provided this weak nation with a brief window of opportunity to complete the treaty. Yet, for sure, Panama would not have been poised to take advantage of that fleeting moment without the leadership of Omar Torrijos. From 1968 to 1977, he prepared his nation to take advantage of that opening. It is unlikely that a functioning, but messy democracy could have succeeded so well.

Yet here is where leadership matters and grand conclusions do not. Omar Torrijos did not govern like most Latin American dictators of the late twentieth century. No model of international relations can explain his accomplishments.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF POWER

1. Iturbide and García Márquez, *Torrijos*, 14.

2. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 295. Translations in this book are the author's unless otherwise noted.

3. Chief, Panama Bureau, FBIS, "Monthly Report, Panama Bureau, July 1981," August 7, 1981, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

4. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 10, 2020.

5. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 28.

CHAPTER 1: THE END AND THE BEGINNING

1. "Communique [*sic*] on Crash, Remains," August 1, 1981, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS). The victims were Teresa Ferreira; Captain Azael Adames, the pilot; Second Lieutenant Víctor Rangel, the copilot; Sergeant Ricardo Machazek and Corporal Jaime Correa, escorts; and Carlos Eric Rivera, a mechanic.

2. "Names of Persons Killed," August 1, 1981, FBIS. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 235.

3. "Duarte Comments on the Death of Torrijos," August 2, 1981, FBIS.

4. Rico Mira, *En silencio tenía que ser*, 251.

5. "CONEP President," August 2, 1981, FBIS.

6. "Reactions to Torrijos's Death, Delegations Arrive," August 4, 1981, FBIS.

7. "Foreign Delegations Arriving," August 2, 1981, FBIS.

8. S. Rocyn-Jones, "Cuba-Panama," September 29, 1981, FCO 99/763, British National Archives.

9. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 117.

10. Raymond Bonner, "Thousands Mourn Torrijos at Funeral in Panama," August 5, 1981, FBIS.

11. Bonner, "Thousands Mourn"; and Roger W. Fontaine to Richard V. Allen, August, 1981, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA, National Security Council Papers, Nicaragua-Panama, box 33.

12. "Funeral Services," August 5, 1981, FBIS.

13. "Foreign Minister Illueca Speech," August 4, 1981, FBIS.

14. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 15.

15. "President Royo Speech," August 4, 1981, FBIS.

16. "Colonel Florez Speech," August 4, 1981, FBIS.

17. "Pena Fears Premeditation" and "Details of the Crash," August 4, 1981, FBIS.

18. "Communique on Crash, Remains," August 1, 1981, FBIS.

19. Martínez de Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 450.

20. "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting," May 15, 1975, doc. 77, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 22.

21. Author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, February 1, 2019.

22. Torrijos, *La batalla de Panamá*, 106; and CIA, "Latin American Trends," June 11, 1975, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

23. Author's Interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 4, 2019.

24. "The Mossad Agent Who Was Second Fiddle to Panama's Dictator," https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/americas/the-mossad-agent-behind-panama-s-dictator-1.5479170.

25. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 73–74.

26. Guevara Mann, *Panamanian Militarism*, 103.

27. "Juan Domingo Peron [*sic*]," May 8, 1956, FBIS.

CHAPTER 2: THE SKIRMISH AT MOUNT TUTE

1. The following story of the MAR comes from Cuestas G., *Hijos de la rebeldía*.

2. Cuestas G., *Hijos de la rebeldía*, 208–9.

3. R. M. Koster and Guillermo Sánchez Borbón note that Lieutenant Boris Martínez was the unit's executive officer, and that Torrijos ran away during the firefight and was wounded in the buttocks with "shotgun pellets." My research does not corroborate either fact. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 71.

4. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 290; author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, December 2, 2020. The MAR's ostensible leader, Polidoro Pinzón, who never caught up to the main group at Cerro Tute, also decided to flee Veraguas Province. He and two others tried to get out on foot

and walked into an ambush set up by a squad of National Guardsmen. Pinzón's two friends died and he got away. He too found asylum at the Chilean Embassy, then went to Chile and afterward to Cuba. Back in Panama City two years later under a government amnesty, Pinzón died in an explosion at his apartment.

5. Torrijos, *La batalla de Panamá*, 107.

6. "Interview with César Vega," *Alcance* (Miami), December 2, 1960.

7. "For Prima Ballerina, 1950s Coup Attempt Was All but Graceful," *New York Times*, September 10, 2010.

8. "For Prima Ballerina"; and Cuestas G., *Hijos de la rebeldía*, 254–67. The resourceful Roberto Arias later attempted to rehabilitate his image by meeting Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and hobnobbing in Washington's social circles. The Panamanian government again appointed him as ambassador to the Court of St. James, then "fired him from that job in 1962. See C. K., "Memorandum for Mr. Ralph Dungan," January 21, 1963, National Security File (hereafter NSF), box 150, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter JFKPL).

9. "Interview with César Vega."

10. Cablegram from Cuban Embassy in Panama, April 26, 1959, Fondo Panamá, Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana (hereafter MINREX); John C. Shillock Jr., "Comments on Recent Invasion Crisis," May 6, 1959. 719.00/5-659; Henry C. Reed, "Meeting of the COAS," May 11, 1959. 719.00/5-1159; and R. Austin Acly, "Review of Selected Political Developments," May 13, 1959, 719.00/5-1359. Records of the US Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of Panama, 1955–1959. Decimal files 719, 819, and 919, Microfilm. Enrique Morales Brid's father served as president of Panama's Supreme Court of Justice, additionally solidifying the oligarchic leadership of the invasion forces.

11. CIA, "Central Intelligence Bulletin," April 27, 1959, CIA Records Search Tool, National Archives, College Park, MD.

12. Author's interview with Paredes, November 2, 2020.

13. "Revolutionaries Surrender Unconditionally," May 2, 1959, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

14. "Warning to Strikers," March 31, 1964, FBIS; and "Minister Hears Chiriqui Workers' Complaints," January 8, 1965, FBIS.

15. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 45.

16. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 221–22.

17. Vaughn and Constantineau, *Kill the Gringo*, 183. On the origins of Civic Action, see Schoultz, *In Their Own Best Interest*, 225–27.

18. Torrijos, *La batalla de Panamá*, 107.

CHAPTER 3: THE BREAKDOWN OF DEMOCRACY

1. The balboa derived its name from Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the first European to set eyes on the Pacific Ocean during the Spanish Conquest of Panama in 1519.

2. Lasso, *Erased*, 2–3, 146–48.

3. Howarth, *Panama*, 215. The masterwork of canal history remains McCullough, *Path between the Seas*.

4. Maurer and Yu, *Big Ditch*, chap. 3.

5. Weeks and Gunson, *Panama*, 34–35.

6. Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 47, 207; and McPherson, *Yankee No!* 89.

7. Weeks and Gunson, *Panama*, 26. See also Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones sobre el Canal de Panamá*, 270–71.

8. The following came from the author's own experience living in the Canal Zone as an army lieutenant from 1968 to 1970. See also Biesanz and Biesanz, *People of Panama*, 231, 234, 376; and McPherson, "Courts of World Opinion," 108.

9. Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus*, 69–73.

10. See "Interview with Ambler H. Ross Jr.," Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress.

11. Biesanz and Biesanz, *People of Panama*, 68, 81, 92; and Conniff, *Black Labor*, 110, 118, 122.

12. Ryan, *Panama Canal Controversy*, 42.

13. Ryan, *Panama Canal Controversy*, 43; Harding, *Military Foundations*, 44; and McPherson, "Courts of World Opinion," 90–91.

14. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 5, 910 (hereafter *FRUS*), vol. 5.

15. Knapp and Knapp, *Red, White, and Blue Paradise*, 258.

16. "Panamá, Informe Especial Sobre el Rompimiento de Relaciones con Cuba," n.d., Fondo Panama, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana.

17. Roberto F. Chiari to John F. Kennedy, February 22, 1963; William H. Brubeck to McGeorge Bundy, March 2, 1963, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), box 150, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter JFKPL); Ryan, *Panama Canal Controversy*, 80–81; Harding, *Military Foundations*, 111; and LaFeber, "Latin American Policy," 69.

18. "United States-Panamanian Relations," June 12, 1962, NFS, box 149ª, JFKPL; Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America*, 141–48, 150; and Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones sobre el Canal de Panamá*, 72.

19. "Chronology of Events Relating to Flag Controversy," n.d.; "Panamanian Situation Report for the President of the United States," January 10, 1964, in Kesaris, *Crisis in Panama*. See also Mauer and Yu, *Big Ditch*, 236–38; and Biesanz and Biesanz, *People of Panama*, 340.

20. Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 66–67.

21. CIA, "Cuban Proposal to the Partido del Pueblo," December 17, 1962, NSF, box 52, JFKPL.

22. Parker was in charge, because the Canal Zone governor, General Robert Fleming Jr., was visiting in the United States at the time. For descriptions of

these events, see "Background and Chronology of the Events in Panama and the Canal Zone on the Ninth, Tenth, and Subsequent Days in January 1964," in Kesaris, *Crisis in Panama*; and Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, chap. 3. See also McPherson, "Courts of World Opinion," 86–88; McPherson, *Yankee No!* 88; and Harding, *Military Foundations*, 48–49.

23. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 771; McPherson, *Yankee No!* 97–98; and Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 63.

24. Calileo Solís to Dean Rusk, January 10, 1964, in Kesaris, *Crisis in Panama.*

25. Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 33; and McPherson, *Yankee No!* 97.

26. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 788.

27. Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 180–82; and Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 39.

28. "U.S. Southern Command After-Action Report of Panama Disorders," January 9–16, 1964, NSF, Country Files (hereafter NSF, CF), box 63; Office of Special Investigations, US Air Force, "Special Report: Panama—An Analysis of Castro/Communist Subversive Activity," February 1964, NSF, box 65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (hereafter LBJPL.)

29. *Rabiblanco* refers to the "white-tailed" songbird of Panama and also to the oligarchic families that proudly traced their racial heritage to European ancestry. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 839; and Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 59.

30. Stuart, "IAPA Monthly Report for August 1963," September 13, 1963, NSF, box 150A, JFKPL; Charles W. Adair Jr., "Annual Politico-Economic Assessment," June 4, 1965, NSF, CF, box 67, LBJPL; and Agee, *Inside the Company*, 62.

31. W. W. Rostow, "Where We Stand on Panama," July 1, 1966, NSF, CF, box 67, LBJPL.

32. "Country Analysis, Panama," 70–391, in the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "The Military Establishment in Latin America," August 1969, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Policy Papers (1969–1974), National Security Decision Memorandums, box H-159, Richard Millhouse Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA (hereafter RMNPL); Torrijos, *Nuestra Revolución*, 24; Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 50; and Guevara Mann, *Ilegitimidad y hegemonía*, 19–21, 71–73.

33. CIA, "Communist Control of Panamanian Student Groups," July 18, 1966, NSF, CF, box 67, LBJPL.

34. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 60–63.

35. "National Guard Pledges Impartiality," May 2, 1964, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

36. "Arias Statement," May 13, 1964, FBIS; and "Possible Vallarino Candidacy Condemned," November 13, 1967, FBIS.

37. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 925–28, 929–31.

38. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 925–28, 929–31. See also Major, *Prize Possession*, 339–40.

39. CIA, Central Intelligence Bulletin, "Panama," August 5, 1967, Free-

dom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

40. Author's interview with Eduardo Morgan Jr., February 11, 2019.

41. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 934–35, 937–39; and Jordan, *Panama Odyssey*, 118–19.

42. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 941–42.

43. *FRUS,* vol. 31, 943–44.

44. CIA, Intelligence Report, "The Evolution of US-Panamanian Relations," June 30, 1971, CIA Reading Room. See also LaFeber, "Latin American Policy," 70–71; and author's interview with Omar Jaén Suárez, January 13, 2010.

45. Adair, "Minotto-Vallarino Conversation," May 20, 1968; and American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State, July 18, 1968, NSF, CF, box 69, LBJPL.

46. CIA, "SITREP As of 1130 Hours Local Time, Panama," May 17, 1968; and CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Postelection Outlook in Panama," August 5, 1968, NSF, CF, Panama, box 6, LBJPL.

47. Ricord, *Los clanes de la oligarquía panameña*, 105–6.

48. Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 124

49. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones sobre el Canal de Panamá*, 2:238.

50. Adair to Secretary of State, September 30, 1968, NSF, CF, box 69, LBJPL.

51. Author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, March 4, 2019. This informant, then a major in the guard, had served as Torrijos's executive officer at the Mount Tute skirmish. He had come from his command post in Colón to the retirement ceremony for General Vallarino. After the ceremony, Major Paredes rushed over to Colonel Torrijos, who advised Paredes to avoid being seen in his presence. The major's own career might also be in jeopardy, Torrijos informed him.

52. Adair to Secretary of State, October 9, 1968, NSF, CF, box 6, LBJPL. See also Koster and Sánchez, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 67–79.

53. Rusk to American Embassy Panama, October 10, 1968, NSF, CF, box 6; and S. W. Lewis, "Possible Coup in Panama," October 9, 1968, NSF, CF, Panama, box 69, LBJPL.

54. Jordan, *Crisis*, 214.

CHAPTER 4: *EL GOLPE DE ESTADO*

1. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 33.

2. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 134.

3. American Embassy Panama to Secretary of State, October 12, 1968, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Country Files (hereafter CF), box 69, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (hereafter LBJPL); Materno Vázquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 56–57; Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 62–64; and Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*, 36–37. A less credible version of the coup comes from Lieutenant Luis Carlos Müller, who led the platoon that took the presidential mansion, called

the Palace of the Swans. Ereida Prieto-Barreiro, "Torrijos Was Drunk at the Time of the Military Coup," *Panamá América*, October 11, 2007, https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/nacion/torrijos-estaba-ebrio-al-momento-del-golpe-militar-luis-mller-297717. See also R. M. Koster and Guillermo Sánchez Borbón who describe, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, the first five months of military rule as the Revolution of Boris Martínez.

4. Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 136, 188.

5. "Actions and Decisions of the Department of State in the Panama Crisis of October–November 1968," White House Central Files, Subject Files, CF, AIT, box 69, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter RMNPL).

6. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 300; Harmer, *Allende's Chile*; and Burns, "Dictatorship across Borders."

7. Adair to Secretary of State, October 13, 14, 15, 1968, NSF, CF, box 6, LBJPL.

8. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, December 30, 2020.

9. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 31 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 31), 953.

10. "Boris Martínez's Moral Crusade," *La Estrella de Panamá*, September 22, 2020, https://www.laestrella.com.pa/nacional/181011/191003-boris-moral-cruzada-martinez.

11. Author's interview with Eduardo Morgan Jr., February 11, 2019.

12. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 316.

13. *FRUS*, vol. 31, 956–57.

14. Adair to Secretary of State, November 8, 1968, NSF, CF, box 69, LBJPL.

15. Rusk to American Embassy Panama, November 5, 1968, NSF, CF, box 69, LBJPL; and "Actions and Decisions of the Department of State in the Panama Crisis of October–November 1968," White House Central Files, Subject Files, CF, box 69, RMNPL.

16. Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*, 48–49; Noriega and Eisner, *Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 36–37; and Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 166–71.

17. H. A. A. Hankey to Foreign Office, May 22, 1969, FCO 7/1282, Foreign Office Records for Panama, British National Archives, London (hereafter FOR BNA). The source of this information was the former foreign minister Fernando Eleta. See also Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:48–55; and Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 80–117. The latter authors contend that Colonel Martínez had been more dominant in the first junta than his senior, Omar Torrijos.

18. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 319.

19. "Biographical Data: Col Amado Silvio SANJUR Atencio," July 1969, White House Special Files, SHCF, Subject Files, TS Files, 1969–74, RMNPL.

20. "Biographical Data: Col Ramiro SILVERA."

21. "Report Prepared by the Governor of New York (Rockefeller)," August 30, 1969, doc. 523, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. E-10 (hereafter

FRUS, vol. E-10). Rockefeller visited Panama on May 19–20 during his Latin American tour.

22. CIA, "Panama One Year after the Coup," October 10, 1969; CIA, Central Intelligence Bulletin, August 15, 1970, NSC Files, CF—Latin America, boxes 768–99, RMNPL. See also Jeanne W. Davis, "Panama Canal: NSSM 86," January 27, 1970, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Policy Papers (1969–1974) National Security Decision Memoranda, box H-169, RMNPL.

23. "Coup Leaders' Statements," December 15, 1969, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

24. Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 67.

25. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

26. Yet there were detractors of Torrijos who claim that Anastasio Somoza lent Omar the Nicaraguan dictator's own plane for the trip into David, Chiriquí Province. See Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 402.

27. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

28. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

29. Dinges, *Our Man in Havana*, 46.

30. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

31. Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 47.

32. "Major Díaz Herrera Explains Coup Developments," December 16, 1969, FBIS.

33. Michael Stewart, "Coup and Counter-coup in Panama," December 23, 1969, FCO 7/1284, FOR BNA.

34. "General Torrijos Holds Press Conference," December 17, 1969, FBIS.

35. "Torrijos Discusses Coup, Planning with Press," December 19, 1969, FBIS. See also Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 126–27; and Harding, *Military Foundations*, 86–87.

36. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

37. Hersh, "Our Man in Panama," 83, 85.

38. "Comments on Possible 1970 Elections," October 2, 1969, White House Special Files, SHCF, Subject Files, TS Files, 1969–74, RMNPL.

39. "Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (Hurwitch) to Secretary of State Rogers," Washington, January 2, 1970, *FRUS*, vol. E-10.

40. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020; and CIA, "Ambassador-Designate to the United States: José DE LA OSSA," July 7, 1970, NSC Files, CF, Latin America, boxes 768–99, RMNPL.

41. "Colonels in Canal Zone," and "Panama City Radio MIA Network," June 8, 1970, NSC Files, CF, Latin America, boxes 768–99, RMNPL; and CIA, Memorandum, "Torrijos and US: More Trouble Ahead," October 1, 1970.

42. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

43. Noriega and Eisner, *Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 43.

CHAPTER 5: REVOLUTION, PANAMANIAN STYLE

1. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 284.

2. "Guard Officer Explains Government's Role," April 14, 1976, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

3. Author's interview with Eduardo Morgan Jr., February 11, 2019.

4. "Brief No. 3: Non-Aligned Summit Conference," FCO 7/3161, Foreign Office Records for Panama, British National Archives, London (hereafter FOR BNA).

5. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 194.

6. "Torrijos Closes 13th UN FAO Conference," August 13, 1974, FBIS.

7. "Torrijos's Sister Charges Threats," January 24, 1975, FBIS.

8. "Torrios's Sister Heading Panamanian Delegation in Cuba," March 29, 1975, FBIS.

9. "Torrijos's Sister Opens Seminar, Blasts U.S. 'Occupation,'" January 27, 1977, FBIS.

10. "U.S. Senate Absolves Torrijos of Drug Charges," February 22, 1978, FBIS; and "Moises Torrijos Replacement Not Caused by 'Unproven' Drug Charges," March 2, 1978, FBIS.

11. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, December 30, 2020.

12. CIA, "Situation in Panama," March 13, 1975, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

13. "Brief No. 3: Non-Aligned Summit Conference," n.d. (circa 1973) FCO 7/3161, folio 5059, FOR BNA.

14. "Memorandum of Meeting," October 25, 1970, doc. no. 126, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. E-10, (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. E-10).

15. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, February 9, 2019.

16. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 175.

17. Harding, *Military Foundations*, 96–97, 104; and Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 129.

18. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, November 2, 2020.

19. Author's interview with Paredes, November 2, 2020.

20. "Torrijos Visits Boquete, Examines Land Use," August 10, 1974, FBIS.

21. Author's interview with Paredes, December 30, 2020.

22. Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics*, 74.

23. Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics*, 65.

24. CIA, National Intelligence Survey, *Panama* (March 1974), 2, CIA Reading Room.

25. Conniff, *Black Labor*, 150,165–66.

26. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 4, 2019.

27. "Torrijos Optimistic on Problems of Colon," November 13, 1972, FBIS.

28. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 162.

29. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 67

30. Guevara Mann, *Panamanian Militarism*, 118–19.

31. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 37.

32. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 41.

33. "Student Groups Score Demonstration," May 23, 1975, FBIS.

34. "FEP Leader Defends Attack," May 24, 1973, FBIS; and "Radio Libertad Airs Student Communique [*sic*]," May 24, 1975, FBIS.

35. "Students Demonstrate, Meet with Lakas," September 13, 1976, FBIS; and "Lakas Refers Student Petitions to Torrijos," September 15, 1976, FBIS.

36. CIA, "Torrijos and the Treaty: A Crucial Year," September 13, 1976, CIA Reading Room.

37. "Students Demonstrate for School Improvements," May 19, 1974, FBIS; and "Suspended Student Demonstrators Reinstated," September 24, 1974, FBIS.

38. "Central American Student Congress Back Banana Zone Stand," July 22, 1975, FBIS.

39. "Dominical Applauds Torrijos's Threat of Force," May 11, 1975, FBIS.

40. "Text of General Torrijos' Speech," October 11, 1971, FCO 7/2044, FOR BNA.

41. "Panama Treaty Negotiations," March 29, 1971, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Policy Papers (1969–1974) National Security Decision Memorandums, box H-216, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter RMNPL).

42. "Peace Corps Pullout Requested by Panama," *Washington Post*, February 12, 1971; and "Peace Corps Role Ending in Panama," *New York Times*, April 25, 1971.

43. Díaz Herrera, *Omar*, 67–68, 81.

44. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 225.

45. "Torrijos Addresses Military Promotion Ceremony," June 15, 1978, FBIS.

46. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 71.

47. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 72.

48. Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 75, 234.

49. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 45.

50. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 19.

51. Ropp, *Panamanian Politics*, 157.

52. The following section comes from interviews of the prisoner General Manuel Noriega at the Curundu jailhouse in 2017 conducted by Ángel Ricardo Martínez. He wrote an unpublished essay based on the interviews, "Manuel Antonio Noriega."

53. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega," 5.

54. Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 60. Kempe interviewed Martínez at the Miami International Airport, where the interviewee worked for Taca Airline of El Salvador.

55. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega."

56. CIA,"Latin American Trends," June 11, 1975, CIA Reading Room.

57. Author's interview with Roberto Eisenmann, February 25, 2019.

58. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 20.

59. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 28.

60. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 25.

61. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 242.

62. Author's interview with Royo, January 13, 2020.

63. On the curriculum of the School of the Americas, see Lyles, "Demystifying Counterinsurgency," 61–90.

64. An observation said to have come from President Jimmy Carter.

CHAPTER 6: OMAR ENGAGES THE THIRD WORLD

1. "Torrijos Interviewed on TV; Threatens United States," March 7, 1976, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

2. Villanueva, "Third Worldism," 350–54.

3. Carter, *Marshal Tito*, 35–47. See also Jakovina and Previšić, *Tito-Stalin Split*.

4. Westad, *Global Cold War*, 103–9; and Lawrence, "Rise and Fall of Nonalignment." Odd Arne Westad and Mark Atwood Lawrence suggest that the passing of Nehru and Nasser had greatly eviscerated the NAM's influence in world affairs by 1970, the very date that Torrijos was seeking to contact Tito.

5. Omar Torrijos to Josep Broz Tito, May 24, 1971, Collection 837, I-5-6/92, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade, Serbia (hereafter Arhiv Jugoslavije); and author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, Panama City, March 11, 2019. The Panamanian minister of economic planning at the time tells the author that Torrijos played no role at all in actually awarding this bid to EnergoProjekt. Author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, January 7, 2020. See also Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 250–51.

6. "Torrijos Favors Economic Relations with Yugoslavia," March 3, 1971, FBIS.

7. "[Note on the Discussion between Ćolović, Mišković, and Torrijos]," October 30, 1972, Collection 837, I-5-6/92, Arhiv Jugoslavije. The Yugoslavs began construction of the dam in 1972 and completed the project in 1976.

8. "Torrijos Comments on Panama-Yugoslav Relations," September 27, 1974, FBIS.

9. T. W. Hunter to Julian Filochowski, April 2, 1973, FCO 7/2506, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives (hereafter FOR BNA).

10. Parsons to E. Youde, March 2, 1973, and Security Council Committee of Council Meetings, January 23, 1973, FCO 7/2505, FOR BNA. This British report mentions the Peruvian representative, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, seconding the resolution. The British member abstained because his country had its own

"colonial problems" in Latin America such as the Falkland Islands and British Honduras. Pérez de Cuellar later went on to become the secretary-general of the United Nations in the 1980s.

11. "Omar Torrijos' Opening Speech," March 15, 1973, FBIS.

12. "U.S. Ambassador," March 20, 1973, Addendum 23, FBIS. See also Lawrence, "History from Below," 282–83.

13. "General Torrijos Interviewed on Council Results," March 12, 1973, FBIS. See also Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:248–50; Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 188–96; and Long, "Putting the Canal on the Map."

14. "FEB Calls for Redoubled Struggle against Imperialism," March 22, 1973, FBIS.

15. "Yugoslav Delegate," March 19, 1973, FBIS.

16. "Panama Leader Receives UN Delegate Mojsov," March 23, 1973, FBIS.

17. "Panamanian Leader Receives UN Delegate Mojsov."

18. Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Jamaica joined the NAM in 1970; Peru, Ecuador, and Chile in 1973; Panama and Belize in 1976; and Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Grenada in 1979. Most hard-line military governments closely aligned with Washington in the 1970s refused to become members of the NAM. Venezuela's democratic governments, which resented Cuba's involvement in the country's 1960s struggle with domestic armed rebels, did not join until 1989. Mexico only had observer status. On Mexico's early relations with Tito, see Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor*, 220–25.

19. See "Cuban Foreign Minister's Address," September 4, 1973, FBIS; "Peruvian Foreign Minister Speaks at the Algiers Nonalined [*sic*] Conference," September 5, 1973, FBIS; and Etinger, *NAM History and Reality*, 46, 74.

20. "Unity Called Key of Success for Latin America," September 26, 1973, FBIS.

21. "Tito's Speech at 6 Sep Session of the Nonalined [*sic*] Conference," September 6, 1973, FBIS.

22. "Boumédiène Announces Torrijos Visit," September 9, 1973, FBIS. In fact, Torrijos did not hold the title of president but chief of government and maximum leader of the Panamanian Revolution.

23. "Visita Privada del Jefe del Estado, General Torrijos" 1973; Protocolo a Subsecretario, September 12, 1973; and Protocolo, "Desarrollo de la visita a Espana del General Torrijos, Jese de Estado de Panamá," September 15, 1973, Fondo Asuntos Extranjeros, Legajo 11813, expediente 33, Archivo General de la Administracion (Alcalá de Henares), Spain.

24. [Tito-Torrijos Meeting at Brioni Island]," September 24, 1973, Collection 837, doc. I-3-a/92-5, Arhiv Jugoslavije.

25. That Pinochet's troops killed Allende was also Castro's propaganda line in an effort to render Allende a martyr for the revolutionary cause. Historians now know that Allende held a rifle with which he killed himself while under

siege at the presidential palace. See Harmer, *Allende's Chile*, 237–38; Davis, *Last Two Years of Salvador Allende*, 171–75; and Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin Archive II*, 85.

26. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 198.

27. "General Torrijos Grants Interview to Cuban Newsmen," March 27, 1973, FBIS.

28. "Meeting in La Palma," April 12, 1973, FBIS.

29. "General Torrijos Grants Interview to Madrid Paper," January 8, 1974, FBIS.

30. "Torrijos Expresses Thanks for Franco's Help," October 27, 1975, FBIS.

31. "Moscow Hails Panamanian, Argentine Stand on Cuba," January 22, 1974, FBIS.

32. Brown, *Brief History of Argentina*, 195–200.

33. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 419.

34. "Mrs. Perón, Torrijos Speak at Airport Ceremony," January 14, 1974, FBIS.

35. While a Fulbright-Hayes student in Buenos Aires, the author witnessed the Torrijos visit firsthand.

36. US Embassy Buenos Aires, "President Torrijos Visits Argentina," January 17, 1974, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=8969&dt=2474&dl=1345.

37. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 192.

38. "Invites Youth Leaders to Panama," January 17, 1974, FBIS.

39. US Embassy Buenos Aires, "Peron [*sic*] and Torrijos Sign Joint Declaration," January 18, 1974, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=2531&dt=2474&dl=1345.

40. Torrijos, *Nuestra Revolución*, 169.

41. "Government Declares Official Mourning for Peron [*sic*]," July 1, 1974, FBIS.

42. "Entourage Announced," January 8, 1974, FBIS.

43. See DeWind, "Continuing to be Peasants."

44. Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*; and personal email from Michael Gonzales to the author, August 27, 2021.

45. "Torrijos Addresses Sugar Workers at Casa Grande," January 23, 1974. See also Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 334–41; and Aguirre and Drinot, *Peculiar Revolution*.

46. "Peru, Panama Vow to Pursue New Policies," January 27, 1974, FBIS.

47. "Torrijos Honored," April 26, 1974.

48. "Torrijos Calls Latin American Presidents," December 26, 1974, FBIS; and "Ayacucho Participants Ratify Call to 1975 Latin American Summit," December 14, 1974, FBIS.

49. "Torrijos Discusses Canal, Rockefeller, Other Topics," December 21, 1974, FBIS.

50. "Panama's Canal Stand to Be Endorsed at March Summit," February 24, 1975, FBIS; and "Cuba Reportedly to Attend Latin American Mini Summit in Panama," February 25, 1975, FBIS.

51. "Latin American Leaders Sign Inter-American Relations Declaration," March 24, 1975, FBIS.

52. "Lopez [*sic*] Discusses International, Domestic Topics," March 21, 1975, FBIS.

53. "Latin Leaders in Panama Meet with Reporters," March 23, 1975, FBIS; and "Foreign Minister May Deliver President's Message to Ford," April 1, 1975, FBIS.

54. "Panamanian Envoy Describes Torrijos's Visit," October 16, 1975, FBIS.

55. "Arrival Statements," October 25, 1975, FBIS.

56. "Panamanian Envoy Describes Torrijos's Visit"; and "Comment on Landlocked Situation," October 26, 1975, FBIS.

57. "Panama Even Invites Pinochet to 150th Meeting," November 17, 1975, FBIS.

58. "Comments on Torrijos's Visit to Venezuela," March 24, 1976, FBIS; and "Summit Canceled," March 27, 1976, FBIS.

CHAPTER 7: BANKS, OIL, AND BANANAS

1. Torrijos, *Nuestra Revolución*, 33–37.

2. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 117.

3. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 162.

4. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 38.

5. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 84.

6. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 110–11. See also Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones sobre el Canal de Panamá*, 2:242–43.

7. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 130–31.

8. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 93.

9. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 80. See also Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 181–210.

10. CIA, Intelligence Report, "The Evolution of US-Panamanian Relations," June 30, 1971, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

11. As measured in 1982 dollars. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 99.

12. See C. D. Sanderson, "Panama: Annual Review for 1970," January 11, 1971, FCO 7/2043 Foreign Office Records, British National Archives (hereafter FOR BNA); and D. Malcolm, "Panama" Annual Review for 1972," January 15, 1973, FCO 7/2503, FOR BNA.

13. Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 152–56.

14. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 40; and Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 162–63.

15. "President Lakas' Speech," October 11, 1974, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

16. "Pro-Torrijos Resolution Adopted," October 6, 1975, FBIS.

17. As quoted in Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics*, 102.

18. "President Says Economic Situation Not Good," April 26, 1976, FBIS.

19. Mr. John to James Callaghan, January 2, 1976, FCO 7/3157, FOR BNA.

20. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 120.

21. "President Indicates Emergency Plan Bankrupt," March 1, 1978, FBIS.

22. "Dismisses Emergency Plan Workers Stage Demonstration," April 26, 1978, FBIS.

23. "Chamber of Commerce Demands State's Guarantees," February 12, 1977, FBIS. See also CIA, "Weekly Summary," October 15, 1976, CIA Reading Room.

24. R. N. John, "Panama Internal Situation," October 4, 1976, FCO 7/3158, FOR BNA.

25. "Torrijos Sees Zonians 'Desperate' at Losing Privileges," November 18, 1976, FBIS; and "Torrijos Urges Curundu [*sic*] Citizens to Be Patient," November 19, 1976, FBIS.

26. "Agriculture Minister Announces Hiring of 1,000 Weekly," December 8, 1977, FBIS.

27. "$16 Million Allocated for Emergency Employment Plan," April 26, 1978, FBIS.

28. "Panama: Annual Review for 1981," January 8, 1981, FCO 99/761, FOR BNA.

29. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 273.

30. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 133.

31. "Figueres Supports Panama's Position on Canal Zone," January 20, 1973, FBIS.

32. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 146.

33. "Torrijos to Support Banana Policies 'Unconditionally,'" May 17, 1974, FBIS.

34. "Torrijos Attends Inauguration Speech of Pres Oduber Quiros of Costa Rica," May 8, 1974, FBIS; and "Authorities Uncover Plot Against Panama's Torrijos," May 11, 1974, FBIS.

35. "Envoy in Costa Rica Announces Plot against Torrijos," June 4, 1974, FBIS; and "Foreign Ministry Confirms Reports on Plot to Kill Torrijos," June 6, 1974, FBIS. See also Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work*, 21, 246.

36. "Torrijos's Life Fraught with Murder Plots, Says *Crítica*," June 8, 1974, FBIS.

37. "Oduber, Standard Official Discuss Plot Charges," June 5, 1974, FBIS.

38. "Official Report on Plot by Banana Transnationals," April 10, 1975, FBIS.

39. "Torrijos Not to Attend Presidents' Meeting in Nicaragua," May 25, 1974, FBIS.

40. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 151.

41. "Oduber, Standard Official Discuss Plot Charges," June 5, 1974, FBIS; and "Newspaper in Costa Rica Praises Torrijos Stand on Banana Issue," August 2, 1974, FBIS.

42. "Heads of State Answer Questions after Summit Meeting," June 8, 1974, FBIS.

43. "Torrijos Speaks on Struggle with United Fruit," August 1, 1974, FBIS; and "Organizations Support Torrijos in Banana Dispute," August 7, 1974, FBIS.

44. "Torrijos Hopes to Improve Citrus Prices," September 22, 1974, FBIS.

45. "Meeting of Three Presidents Described as Fruitful," November 24, 1974, FBIS. The leaders were Colonel Arturo Armando Molina of El Salvador and General Kjell Laugerud García. On Castro's support for Guatemalan guerrilla fighters, see Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 196, 209–10, 218.

46. "Banana Exporters End Panama Talks, Brief Torrijos," April 6, 1975, FBIS.

47. "Torrijos Invites Ecuadorian President to Stop in Panama," March 8, 1975, FBIS.

48. "Government to Maintain Normal Relations with Honduras," April 22, 1975, FBIS. The coup was led by Colonel Juan Alberto Melgar Castro.

49. "Banana Companies Anti-Torrijos Campaign Discussed," May 6, 1975, FBIS.

50. "Torrijos to Meet with Ecuador's Rodriguez on Banana Issue," May 9, 1975, FBIS.

51. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 166.

52. "Torrijos Promises Banana Workers Great Future," July 27, 1975, FBIS; and "President Reports on Meeting with Torrijos," August 8, 1975, FBIS.

53. "Torrijos Explains the Third World Concept," August 24, 1975, FBIS.

54. Torrijos Announces Deal with Banana Company," December 27, 1975, FBIS.

55. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 163.

56. "Torrijos Meets United Brands Company Executive," April 26, 1978, FBIS. Its chairman was Seymour Milstein.

57. "Cancellation of Torrijos Visit Reported," November 18, 1976, FBIS; and J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 276.

58. "Torrijos Pays Visit," February 13, 1976, FBIS; and "Cooling Panama-Guatemala Ties Delay Central American Summit," March 25, 1977, FBIS.

CHAPTER 8: OMAR, FIDEL, AND TITO

1. "Radio Libertad Support," August 22, 1974, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

2. On the 1962 OAS foreign ministers meeting that made this decision, see Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 283–85; Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 133; and Hershberg, "Showdown at Punta del Este."

3. Gettig, "Cuba, the United States, and the Uses of the Third World Project," 252–56; and Getchell, "Cuba, the USSR, and the Non-Aligned Movement," 148–51.

4. See Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 164–67.

5. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega, 17; and Noriega and Eisner, *America's Prisoner*, 85–91.

6. D. Malcolm, "Panama: Annual Review for 1972," January 15, 1973, FCO 7/2503, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives (hereafter FOR BNA).

7. "ANAP Leader Visits Panamanian Peasant Settlements," August 8, 1974, FBIS.

8. "Síntesis chronológica de los principales momentos de las relaciones bilaterales Cuba-Panama después de 1959," n.d., Fondo Panamá, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba (hereafter MINREX); and Guevara Mann, *Panamanian Militarism*, 118–19.

9. "Informe de la Delegación a los Actos Conmemorativos del XX Anniversario del Asaulto al Cuartel Moncada en Panamá," July 18–27, 1973, MINREX.

10. "Foreign Minister Tack Discusses Renewed Ties with Cuba," August 20, 1974, FBIS.

11. "Communique [*sic*] Issued on Relations with Cuba," August 20, 1974, FBIS.

12. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 125–26.

13. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 13, 2020.

14. Author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, February 1, 2019.

15. "Partial Panamanian Delegation List," August 21, 1974, FBIS; and Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 126.

16. Author's interview with Eduardo Morgan Jr., February 11, 2019; and author's interview with Adolfo Ahumada, January 14, 2020.

17. "Minister's Comments," August 22, 1974, FBIS.

18. "Minister Barletta's Speech," August 22, 1974, FBIS.

19. "Dorticos [*sic*] Receives Delegation," August 25, 1974, FBIS; and "Rally Hails Panamanian Relations," August 26, 1974, FBIS.

20. Author's interview with Morgan, February 19, 2019.

21. "Panamanian Delegation Concludes Diplomatic Visit," August 26, 1974, FBIS.

22. "Matutino: Justice Prevailing in Cuba Case," July 30, 1975, FBIS.

23. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 347.

24. Panamanian Leader Arrives," January 12, 1976, FBIS.

25. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 346.

26. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 115.

27. "Fidel Addresses Rally," January 12, 1976, FBIS.

28. "Torrijos Speaks at Rally," January 12, 1976, FBIS.

29. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 115.

30. "Torrijos Awarded Decoration," January 12, 1976, FBIS.

31. "Torrijos Statements to the Press," January 14, 1976, FBIS; and "Torrijos, Castro Visit Sugar Mill," January 14, 1976, FBIS.

32. "Torrijos Visits School," January 15, 1976, FBIS.

33. "Torrijos on French TV Reiterates Admiration for Castro," August 16, 1977, FBIS ; and "Torrijos on Role of Nonalined [*sic*] Group in Canal Problem," October 1, 1977, FBIS.

34. "Reception Held," March 15, 1976, FBIS.

35. "Warm Welcome Lauded," March 15, 1976, FBIS.

36. "Talks Begin," March 15, 1976, FBIS.

37. "Arrival Reported," March 15, 1976, FBIS; "Citizens' Attitude Noted," March 17, 1976, FBIS; "Attempts to Wreck Treaty Talks," March 20, 1976, FBIS; "CNTP Scores Strikers," March 20, 1976, FBIS; and "Paper Feels Canal Strike Settlement Temporary," March 24, 1976, FBIS.

38. "[Meeting between President Tito and General Torrijos]," March 15, 1976, Collection 837, document I-2/64-2, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade, Serbia (hereafter Arhiv Jugoslavije).

39. On the apprehensions of Latin American democratic leaders about Cuba's military operations abroad, see "Panamanian, Venezuelan, Costa Rican Leaders to Meet Soon," March 24, 1976, FBIS. President Carlos Andrés Pérez was a close ally of Torrijos. Both abhorred the hard-line military governments of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil and did not want the generals to form a similar regime in Venezuela because of Cuban adventurism.

40. "[Meeting between Tito and Torrijos]," March 16, 1976, Collection 837, I 2/64-2, Arhiv Jugoslavije.

41. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 327.

42. "[Conversation between Tito and Torrijos]," August 17, 1976, Collection 837, document I-4-a, Arhiv Jugoslavije.

43. Solomon Bandaranaike was the fourth prime minister of Ceylon (today Sri Lanka). He was prime minister from 1956 to 1959, when he was assassinated. His wife, Sirimaro Bandaranaike, served as prime minister from 1960 to 1965, 1970 to 1977, and 1994 to 2000.]

44. Gaddafi never did visit Panama.

45. See *Visita del Presidente Josip Broz Tito*.

46. Vice President María Estela Martínez de Perón became president of Argentina in July 1974 when her husband President Juan Domingo Perón died. The military overthrow of her presidency took place in March 1976.

47. For the full text of his speech of August 17, 1976, see Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 35–38.

48. "Torrijos Does Not Rule Out War with United States," August 21, 1976, FBIS.

49. "Torrijos Reports on Activities at Sri Lanka Meeting," August 31, 1976, FBIS.

50. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 110.

CHAPTER 9: DISSIDENTS AND EXILES

1. Harding, *Military Foundations*, 89.

2. Guevara Mann and Janson Pérez, "Four Years of Female Clandestine Journalism," 11.

3. *El Grito*, no. 33 (August 1969), in Guevara Mann and Janson Pérez, "Four Years of Female Clandestine Journalism," 17–18.

4. *El Grito*, no. 25 (June 1969), in Guevara Mann and Janson Pérez, "Four Years of Female Clandestine Journalism," 24.

5. D. Malcolm to J. M. Hunter, July 6, 1971, FCO 7/2508, folio 5028, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives (hereafter FOR BNA); and Vierba, *Singer's Needle*, chap. 6.

6. "Panama: Annual Review for 1971," FCO 7/2289, FOR BNA; and Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 160–67.

7. McGrath, "Ariel or Caliban?" 79.

8. McGrath, "Ariel or Caliban?" 92.

9. "Torrijos Reportedly Ordered Gallego Killed," May 27, 1991, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

10. Noriega and Eisner, *America's Prisoner*, 149.

11. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:133–34. See also Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 255–64.

12. McGrath, "Ariel or Caliban?" 78.

13. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 92.

14. "Torrijos Thanks United States Bishops for Support on Canal Issue," March 5, 1975, FBIS.

15. "Panamanians Arrested," December 3, 1968, FBIS.

16. According to Omar Jaén Suárez, the family of Ricardo arrived in Panama from Asturias, Spain, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Arnulfo and Roberto Arias descended from a Costa Rican family settling in rural Western Panama in the mid-nineteenth century. Email from Jaén Suárez to Jonathan Brown, January 5, 2022.

17. Author's interview with Teresita Yániz de Arias, January 13, 2020.

18. Bermúdez Valdéz, *Ricardo Arias Calderón*.

19. "CONEP Sends Torrijos Letter Protesting Newspaper Closure," March 19, 1975, FBIS. See also Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics*, 95.

20. "Torrijos to Dedicate Cali Housing Development," January 12, 1976, FBIS; and "Lopez Stresses Support for Panama on Canal," January 20, 1976, FBIS.

21. "Torrijos Discusses Deportations," January 21, 1976, FBIS.

22. Author's interview with Roberto Eisenmann, February 25, 2019.

23. "CONEP Seeks Release," January 20, 1976, FBIS; "Panama Exiles Request Lopez to Intercede," January 21, 1976, FBIS; APEDE Decides to Strike," January 21, 1976, FBIS; and CIA, "Torrijos and the Treaty: A Crucial Year," September 13, 1976, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

24. "Exiles from Panama Arrive in Guayaquil," January 21, 1976, FBIS. Government officials announced the names of those exiled: Alberto Quiros Guardia, Iván Robles, Winston Robles, Antonio Domínguez, Porfirio Samudia, Darío Santamaría, Jaime Aizpurúa, Gilberto Alvarez, Rubén Darío Carles Jr., and Roberto Eisenmann. "Arrests in Panama City, David," January 20, 1976, FBIS; and "Official Source Reports Expulsion," January 21, 1976, FBIS.

25. "Exiled Panamanians Apply for Asylum," February 4, 1976, FBIS.

26. "Quiroz [*sic*] Guardia Rebuts Radio Libertad's Subversion Charges," January 14, 1975, FBIS.

27. "Further Report," January 23, 1976, FBIS. At the time, the president of ARPEDE was Carlos Gonzáles de la Lastra.

28. "Torrijos Reaffirms Patience Will Run Out," June 23, 1976, FBIS.

29. "*Critica* Welcomes Javits Speech on Canal Negotiations," January 24, 1976, FBIS.

30. J. L. Y. Sanders to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, December 20, 1978, FO 99/179, FOR BNA.

31. "Independent Lawyers Issue Manifesto on Treaties," August 16, 1977, FBIS.

32. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:46.

33. "Communist Floyd Dies in Prison," December 3, 1969, FBIS. See also Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 88. The other prisoner who died at Coiba Island was José Tuñón.

34. "Torrijos Willing to Permit Return of 82 Political Exiles," May 26, 1977, FBIS. García Márquez himself had long experience with leftist exiles. See Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*.

35. "Writer Warns against Anti-American Extremists," July 4, 1977, FBIS; and "Students Demonstrate on Exile Amnesty," July 6, 1977, FBIS.

36. "Torrijos's Letter of Reply," May 27, 1977, FBIS.

37. Souza et al., *Panamá, 1903–1970*, 106, 108.

38. "Exiles Criticize Torrijos Government in Caracas," October 11, 1977, FBIS. This document was signed by Carlos González de la Lastra, Dr. Thelma King, and Humberto López Tirone of the Panamanian Social Democratic Party.

39. "Radicals Impugn Validity of Torrijos Regime," May 13, 1975, FBIS.

40. "National Guard Order of the Day on Political Refugees," March 24, 1981, FBIS.

41. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 4, 2020. "Lo que pasa es que nos precipitamos, nos apuramos y nos fue mal. Ese es un aspect," one of them told Paredes.

42. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 312, 315–16; and author's interview with Cheché Martínez, November 2, 2020.

CHAPTER 10: THE RISE AND FALL OF JUAN ANTONIO TACK

1. "Torrijos Hopes to Improve Citrus Prices," September 22, 1974, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

2. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:754–55.

3. Juan Luis Batista and Lina Vega Abad, "Juan Antonio Tack, el negociador," *La Prensa*, October 9, 2005, https://www.prensa.com/politica/Juan-Antonio-Tack-negociador_0_1580841904.html.

4. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:178–79. The source of this story is Fernando Manfredo, the former minister of commerce and industry, in an interview with Jaén Suárez.

5. "Canal Treaty Negotiations Reportedly Being Sabotaged," September 19, 1971, FBIS.

6. William J. Jorden to National Security Council, February 23, 1973, doc. 3, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 22 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 22).

7. "Foreign Minister Tack's Response," Addendum 23–25, US Ambassador, March 20, 1973, FBIS.

8. "Foreign Minister Tack's Response," Addendum, 26, 28–29, March 20, 1973.

9. "Memorandum of Conversation," New York, October 5, 1973, doc. 21, *FRUS*, vol. 22.

10. "Memorandum of Conversation," April 23, 1974, doc 40, *FRUS*, vol. 22.

11. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 696–97. For the full development of this accord, see Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:261–31.

12. "Message from General Omar Torrijos for Dr. Henry A. Kissinger," January 29, 1974, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

13. "Editorial Note," February 7, 1974, doc. 32, *FRUS*, vol. 22.

14. "Journalist Views Canal Agreement as Torrijos Victory," February 8, 1974, FBIS.

15. "Torrijos Reaffirms New Treaty in Early 1975," December 12, 1974, FBIS.

16. "Interview with Foreign Minister Tack on Canal Negotiations," February 7, 1975, FBIS.

17. "Tack: Panama Will Not Make Concessions," March 2, 1975, FBIS.

18. "Central Intelligence Information Cable," April 25, 1975, doc. 74, *FRUS*, vol. 22.

19. "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting," May 15, 1975, doc. 77, *FRUS*, vol. 22.

20. Office of the Historian, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties," https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal.

21. "Foreign Minister Tack Says Treaty Span Must Be Short," April 28, 1975, FBIS.

22. "Tack Leaves for Second South American Tour," May 1, 1975, FBIS.

23. "Matutino Reports on OAS Prospects, Tack Statement," May 6, 1975, FBIS; and "Tack's Negotiation Impasse, Report Expanded," May 6, 1975, FBIS.

24. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:295; and author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, March 11, 2019.

25. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 1:355.

26. "Rome's *L'Espresso* Interviews Tack on Canal," June 1, 1975, FBIS.

27. "Torrijos Grants Leave of Absence to Tack," June 19, 1975, FBIS. Dr. Carlos Ozores replaced Tack as the minister of foreign affairs, by order of General Torrijos.

28. "Tack Discusses Panama Canal Negotiations," September 21, 1975, FBIS; and "Tack Comments on Change," September 27, 1975, FBIS.

29. "El Panama America Lauds Torrijos's Foreign Policy," March 20, 1975, FBIS.

30. "Torrijos Meets Officials," September 3, 1975, FBIS.

31. "'Martyrs' Movement' Statement," September 19, 1975, FBIS.

32. "Torrijos Talks with Students Summarized," July 9, 1975, FBIS.

33. "Extremist Students Riot in Downtown Panama," September 23, 1975, FBIS.

34. "Torrijos: 58 Years Is an Eternity," June 28, 1975, FBIS.

35. "Tack Resigns, Boyd Named as Successor," April 1, 1976, FBIS; "Torrijos Cabinet Changes Analyzed," April 2, 1976, FBIS; "Tack to Geneva," April 7, 1976, FBIS; Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torres-Carter*, 1:368–70 and 2:509; and Omar Jaén Suárez, email to author, July 23, 2021.

36. "Torrijos Comments on Canal Negotiations," November 16, 1976, FBIS.

37. "Ford Reaffirms Interest in Occupying Panama Canal," March 6, 1976, FBIS. See also Jáen Suárez, *Negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:511–16.

38. "Reagan Statements on Canal Zone Scored," April 2, 1976, FBIS; and Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny*, 56–58.

39. "Torrijos Reaffirms Patience Will Run Out," June 23, 1976, FBIS.

40. See VanSise, "Reaganites and Rosa-golpistas," 550–56.

41. Tom Zimberoff, "Stowaway: On theDictator's Helicopter," *Storius Magazine*, https://zimberoff.medium.com/stowaway-on-the-dictators-helicopter-a8cb920a2bdd.

42. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 250–53.

43. Zimberoff, "Stowaway."

CHAPTER 11: OMAR, JIMMY, AND MUAMMAR

1. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 197.

2. "*Critica* 8 October Editorial," October 8, 1976, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

3. Hogan, *Panama Canal*, 86–87.

4. "Panama's Torrijos, Perez Hold 'Closed Door' Meeting," November 7, 1976, FBIS.

5. "Panama's Torrijos Arrives, Meets Oduber, Molina," November 14, 1976, FBIS; and "Boyd Leaves for Washington to Meet Kissinger," December 2, 1976, FBIS.

6. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 37.

7. "Boyd Says 'Considerable Progress' Made in Treaty Talks," February 7, 1977, FBIS.

8. "Torrijos Announces Change," February 8, 1974, FBIS; and "New Foreign Minister Named," February 9, 1977, FBIS.

9. "Boyd Resigns, Explains Resignation," February 9, 1977, FBIS. On the full story of Boyd's fall from grace, see Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:574–77.

10. For the composition of personnel for each team, see Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:766–54. In fact, the author of this history of the treaty negotiations served on one of those teams.

11. "U.S. Plot to Harm Relations Scored," November 6, 1976, FBIS.

12. "15 Guarantees Announced for Canal Employees," March 15, 1977, FBIS.

13. "Torrijos in Madrid Highly Satisfied with Libyan Visit," April 16, 1977, FBIS.

14. Author's interview with Adolfo Ahumada, January 14, 2020.

15. Author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, January 8, 2020.

16. Author's interview with Ahumada, January 14, 2020.

17. "Torrijos in Madrid Highly Satisfied with Libyan Visit," April 16, 1977, FBIS.

18. Letter from President Carter to General Torrijos, July 29, 1977, doc. 72, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 29 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 29).

19. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 112, 115, 116. Ardito Barletta estimates that Panama received a total of $1.8 billion between 1980 and 1999. In the sixty-five years before the treaties' ratification, the republic received a total of just $69 million in annuity payments from the United States.

20. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 228.

21. "Torrijos Explains Purpose of Military Exercises," May 12, 1977, FBIS.

22. "Torrijos Gives Speech on Canal Treaty Possibilities," July 26, 1977, FBIS.

23. "Delegates to Brief Torrijos on United States Counterproposal," August 4, 1977, FBIS. Members of the financial team were Ardito Barletta, Lieutenant Colonel Armando Abel Contreras, Rodrigo González Jurado, and Carlos López Guevara. The lands and waters team consisted of Edwin Fábrega, Omar Jaén Suárez, and three others.

24. "Torrijos: 'New Treaty Almost Ready,'" August 6, 1977, FBIS.

25. "Panamanian Leaders Press Conference," August 6, 1977, FBIS.

26. "Conclusion of Negotiations," August 11, 1977, FBIS.

27. "Carter Phones Torrijos: Treaty to be Signed 7 September," August 24, 1977, FBIS; and "Laugerud Says Will Attend," August 26, 1977, FBIS.

28. "Memorandum of Conversation," August 24, 1977, doc. 85, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

29. "Memorandum of Conversation," August 24, 1977, doc. 85, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

30. "Torrijos Comments on Canal Treaty, Other Issues," August 26, 1977, FBIS.

31. "Latin Leaders Send Greetings to Castro," September 6, 1977, FBIS.

32. "Colonels Send Message to Torrijos in Washington," September 7, 1977, FBIS. The signers were Colonel Rodrigo García R., and Lieutenant Colonels Florencio Flórez, Rubén Darío Paredes, Cecilio Fischer, Manuel J. Araúz, Pedro Ayala, and Roberto Díaz Herrera.

33. "Memorandum of Conversation," September 6, 1977, doc. 94, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

34. "Memorandum of Conversation," September 25–26, 1977, doc. 102, *FRUS*, vol. 29. Also participating in these conversations were the Panamanian ambassador to the US, Gabriel Lewis Galindo, the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, Terence A. Todman, the US ambassador to Panama, William Jorden, and the assistant to the president, Hamilton Jordan.

35. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:657.

36. John M. Goshko, "Carter, Torrijos Sign Panama Canal Treaties," *Washington Post*, September 8, 1977; and Graham Hovey, "Carter, Torrijos Sign Canal Packs in the Presence of Latin Leaders," *New York Times*, September 8, 1977.

37. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*. On García Márquez's difficulties with the US government, see Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*.

38. Lewis H. Dinguid, "A Literary Arsenal: The Authors in the Strongman's Entourage," *Washington Post*, September 8, 1977.

39. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 134.

40. Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 139.

41. As quoted in McPherson, *Ghosts of Sheridan Circle*, 120.

42. "Reagan Opposes Ratifying Canal Pact," *Washington Post*, August 26, 1977.

43. "Memorandum of Conversation," August 25, 1977, doc. 87, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

CHAPTER 12: OMAR'S GRAND TOUR

1. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 13, 2020.

2. "Torrijos Comments on Intervention Issue," October 1, 1977, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

3. "Swedish Paper Interviews Torrijos," October 8, 1977, FBIS.

4. "Sends Message to Nation," September 25, 1977, FBIS.

5. "Sends Second Message," September 26, 1977, FBIS.

6. "Torrijos Comments on Intervention Issue," October 1, 1977, FBIS.

7. Author's interview with Tom Zimberoff, October 23, 2020.

8. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 62.

9. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 63.

10. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 66.

11. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 65.

12. "Torrijos Draws Similarities between Middle East, Canal Issues," October 2, 1977, FBIS.

13. "Discussion between Tito and Torrijos," October 1, 1977, Collection 837, 1–3-a/92–8, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade, Serbia.

14. The author corroborated this fact with Rubén Darío Paredes, who accompanied the Panamanian planes that retrieved a large number of Chileans who had taken asylum in the Panamanian Embassy in Santiago de Chile. Author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, January 8, 2020.

15. "Torrijos Reports on Meeting with Tito," October 5, 1977, FBIS.

16. "Torrijos Submits Report to Panamanian People," October 8, 1977, FBIS.

17. "Report on Torrijos's Visit to Spain," October 3, 1977, FBIS; and "Panama TV Report on Spanish Premier's Interview," October 5, 1977, FBIS.

18. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, November 2, 2020.

19. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 79; and "Circuito RPC on Torrijos-Giscard D'Estaing Meeting," October 7, 1977, FBIS.

20. "Torrijos Sends Report No. 8 to People," October 10, 1977, FBIS.

21. "Torrijos Sends Report to the Nation," October 11, 1977, FBIS.

22. "Torrijos Discusses Canal Issue with Pope," October 6, 1977, FBIS; and Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:661–62.

23. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 85; and "Swedish Paper Interviews Torrijos," October 8, 1977, FBIS.

24. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 297; and Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 88. The exact phrase was: "Empujar la carreta o me serruchan la mesa."

25. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 90; and "Report on Torrijos Visit to Finland," October 10, 1977, FBIS.

26. "Arrives in Bonn," October 10, 1977, FBIS; and Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 93.

27. "Torrijos Explains Canal Treaty to FRG's Schmidt," October 11, 1977, FBIS.

28. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 95

29. Torrijos, *Papeles del General*, 94.

30. Bryan Carledge, "The Panama Canal Treaties," October 13, 1977, FCO 99/36, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives.

31. For more Torrijos–Callaghan discussions over the independence of Belize, see Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 398–99.

32. "Torrijos Returns, Says Nothing Signed in U.S.," October 15, 1977, FBIS.

33. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:662.

34. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:664.

35. "Torrijos's Arrival in Washington," October 13, 1977, FBIS.

36. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 11, 1919.

37. "Memorandum of Conversation," October 14, 1977, doc. 113, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 29. Present at the Cabinet Room meeting were Paredes, Escobar Bethancourt, Manfredo, and Lewis Galindo for Panama and Brzezinski, Linowitz as the translator, and Pastor as notetaker.

38. "Torrijos Meets Press after Carter Interview," October 14, 1977, FBIS; and "Torrijos Returns, Says Nothing Signed in U.S.," October 15, 1977, FBIS.

39. "Torrijos Addresses Women's Meeting," October 19, 1977, FBIS; and Meeting of Professionals," October 20, 1977, FBIS.

40. "Torrijos Meets with Students Opposed to Treaty," September 15, 1977, FBIS; and "Called Traitor by Leftists," September 15, 1977, FBIS.

41. "Torrijos Addresses Students Federation Congress," September 15, 1977, FBIS.

42. "College Students Polled, Will Ratify Treaty," September 15, 1977, FBIS.

43. "National Guard Officers Call for Honest Plebiscite," October 20, 1977, FBIS; "Commentator Discusses Plebiscite Results," October 25, 1977, FBIS; and "Foreign Minister: Time Right for Treaty Ratification," January 20, 1978, FBIS.

44. "Election Board Gives Treaty Vote Results," October 25, 1977, FBIS.

45. "Human Rights Commission Director," September 13, 1977, FBIS.

46. "Inter-American Human Rights Commission Head Arrives," November 29, 1977, FBIS.

47. "Torrijos Attends Students' Ceremony Burning 1903 Treaty," November 18, 1977, FBIS; and "Torrijos's Speech," November 18, 1977, FBIS.

CHAPTER 13: OMAR AND THE SENATORS

1. "Torrijos Promises to Tackle Domestic Problems," November 1, 1977, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

2. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 487.

3. Author's interview with Omar Jaén Suárez, February 27, 2019. The other young diplomat was Flavio Velásquez.

4. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:688; and Mónica Guardia, "John Wayne: su importante misión a favor de Panamá," *La Estrella de Panamá*, October 9, 2020.

5. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 479.

6. Pastor, *Whirlpool*, 9

7. Pastor, *Whirlpool*, 459; and Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:700–703.

8. "Torrijos, Senators Visit Provinces," November 10, 1977, FBIS.

9. "Meeting with Liberal Party Officials," November 10, 1977, FBIS.

10. "Torrijos's 12 November News Conference," November 12, 1977, FBIS.

11. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 199.

12. "US Senators Arrive for First-Hand Information on Canal," November 29, 1977, FBIS.

13. Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 120.

14. "McGovern Meets with Panamanian Leader Torrijos," December 6, 1977, FBIS.

15. "Torrijos Meets with Visiting Group of U.S. Citizens," December 1, 1977, FBIS.

16. "Torrijos Reports on Meeting with Dole, Laxalt," December 30, 1977, FBIS.

17. Pastor, *Whirlpool*, 6.

18. "Torrijos Speaks before Visiting U.S. Senators," January 4, 1978, FBIS.

19. "Torrijos Addresses Press after Meeting U.S. Senators," January 4, 1978, FBIS.

20. "Further Report," January 18, 1978, FBIS.

21. Strong, *Working in the World*, 162.

22. "Torrijos Delivers Speech at the University," January 17, 1978, FBIS.

23. "Torrijos's Brother Denies Drug Traffic Charges," February 17, 1978, FBIS; "Education Ministry Denies Charges," February 17, 1978, FBIS; and "Torrijos's Brother Denies Involvement," February 21, 1978, FBIS. See also Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:697.

24. Telegram from the Embassy in Colombia to the Department of State, June 11, 1976, doc. 146. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 22 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 22).

25. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega," 16–17.

26. "Interview with Melville Blake," August 25, 1999, p. 92, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress.

27. CIA translation, John Alius, "Routes, Methods of Colombian Cocaine Traffickers Discussed," *O Estado de São Paulo*, March 7, 1982, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room); and "Drug Charges against Torrijos Prompt Press Reactions," February 14, 1978.

28. "U.S. Senate Absolves Torrijos of Drug Charges," February 22, 1978, FBIS.

29. Janson Pérez, *Golpes y tratados*, 293–306.

30. "Report on Torrijos Interview with Carl Rowan," April 10, 1978, FBIS.

31. "Transcript of a Telephone Conversation between President Carter and General Torrijos," March 15, 1978, doc. 159, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

32. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, December 30, 2020.

33. "Senate Approval of Treaty, Panamanian Reaction Reported," March 17, 1978, FBIS; "Torrijos Calls for Meeting to Study Treaty Situation," March 18, 1978, FBIS; and "Costa Rica's Oduber Departs after 43-Hour Visit," March 18, 1978, FBIS. See also "Interview with Ambler H. Moss Jr.," Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress.

34. Dr. Roberto Escobar Bethancourt, a friend of Fidel Castro and valued member of the treaty-negotiating team, seemed to have played a key role in persuading Torrijos to swallow the DeConcini amendment. See "Leading Personalities in Panama, 1979/1980," September 23, 1980, Fen CO 99/547, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives.

35. "Torrijos Speaks to Nation following Treaty Ratification," April 18, 1978, FBIS; "Letter from President Carter to General Torrijos," April 18, 1978, doc. 168, *FRUS*, vol. 29; and Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:711–21.

36. Noriega and Eisner, *Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 51–53.

37. "Torrijos Grants Interview with Barbara Walters," April 19, 1978, FBIS; and Walters, *Audition*, 354.

38. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega," 19. The name of Radio Libertad's popular disc jockey is Danilo Caballero. See also J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 240–41.

39. Seven senators who voted for the treaty lost their next reelection bids. Their number included Senator Frank Church, who was famous for the Church Committee investigations of the mid-1970s into allegations of the CIA's assassination attempts on foreign leaders. Moffet, *Limits of Victory*, 41. See also Strong, *Working in the World*, 167–82.

40. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 648–49.

41. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey*, 655.

42. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 209. The murdered leaders were Jorge Camacho and Demóstenes Rodríguez.

43. "Mexican President Criticizes Treaties," June 16, 1978, FBIS; "Torrijos Discusses Minisummit," June 17, 1978, FBIS; and "Minisummit Communique [*sic*]," June 17, 1978, FBIS.

44. "Torrijos Meets with United States Investors," June 26, 1978, FBIS.

45. Panama's Archbishop Says Canal Treaties Best Possible," June 25, 1978, FBIS.

46. Jaén Suárez, *Las negociaciones de los Tratados Torrijos-Carter*, 2:722.

CHAPTER 14: OMAR AND THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION

1. "Somoza Addresses Nation," August 24, 1978, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS); "FSLN Commandos Arrive Panama," August 25, 1978, FBIS; and "Further Reportage," April 17, 1978, FBIS. See also Christian, *Nicaragua*, 72–77.

2. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 40–42.

3. "FSLN Commanders Arrive in Panama, Interviewed by Local TV," August 25, 1978, FBIS; and "Somoza Addresses Nation," August 24, 1978, FBIS.

4. "National Guard Agrees to Return of 3 FSLN," September 12, 1978, FBIS.

5. Author's interview with President Royo, Panama, January 10, 2020.

6. Author's interview with General Rubén Darío Paredes, Panama, March 11, 2019; and Christian, *Nicaragua*, 63.

7. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 19–20.

8. Author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, Panama, February 1, 2019.

9. Martínez de la Vega, *Las guerras del General Omar Torrijos*, 133.

10. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 106–7.

11. "Somoza Addresses Nation," August 24, 1978. On Cuba and Somoza, see Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 57–63.

12. Koster and Sánchez Borbón, *In the Time of the Tyrants*, 80–117; and author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, December 30, 2020.

13. "Interview with Sandinist [*sic*] Military, Political Leaders," August 25, 1978, FBIS.

14. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 10, 2020.

15. Valle, *Hugo Spadafora*, 276–77; and Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 102–3.

16. "Two Officials Resign to Join 'Nicaraguan Peoples Struggle,'" September 15, 1978, FBIS.

17. Valle, *Hugo Spadafora*, 309.

18. "FSLN's Pastora Says 1,100 Guerrillas Opposing Somoza," September 11, 1978, FBIS.

19. "Commander Zero [Comandante Cero] Reported Killed on Southern Border," and "Reports Denied by 'Cero,'" September 14, 1978, FBIS.

20. "Radio Reporter Updates Situation at Border," September 17, 1978, FBIS; and "Pastora Comments on Attack," September 19, 1978, FBIS.

21. "Commander Cero Predicts Somoza's Fall within Ten Days," September 24, 1978, FBIS.

22. Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 167.

23. Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 169.

24. "Volunteer Brigade Ready to Depart for Nicaragua," September 25, 1978, FBIS.

25. Valle, *Hugo Spadafora*, 283.

26. "Volunteers from Panama Will Not Be Granted Passage," September 26,1978, FBIS; and "Leave for Undisclosed Destination," September 28, 1978, FBIS.

27. "Panamanian Brigade Said Ready to Enter into Action," October 16,1978, FBIS; "Panamanian Brigade Incorporates into FSLN," October 23, 1978, FBIS; and "Panamanian Guerrilla Reports on Fighting in Nicaragua," January 28, 1979, FBIS.

28. "Government Denies Action by Its Planes in Nicaragua," September 18, 1978, FBIS; "Carazo, Torrijos Meet," September 24, 1978, FBIS; "Interior Minister Comments on Border Situation," September 25, 1978, FBIS; "5 Panamanian Helicopters Depart From Home," September 28, 1978, FBIS; and "Torrijos Says No Panamanian Troops in Costa Rica," November 25, 1978, FBIS.

29. "Government Denies Providing Military Aid to Sandinistas," November 28, 1978, FBIS.

30. Christian, *Nicaragua*, 97.

31. Rueda, *Students of Revolution*, 196–97, 209.

32. Christian, *Nicaragua*, 107; and Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 134.

33. "Pilots Detail Arms Traffic," March 25, 1981, FBIS. See also Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 127, 143; and Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 112–15.

34. Christian, *Nicaragua*, 93–94, 106; and Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, chap. 9.

35. Author's interview with Cheché Martínez, November 2, 2020.

36. Author's interview with Martínez, November 2, 2020; author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, Panama, February 1, 2019; and Greene, *Getting to Know the General*, 168.

37. "Memorandum from the Chief of the Latin America Division, Central Intelligence Agency," June 8, 1979, doc. 228, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 29 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 29).

38. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 77, 88–89.

39. "Eden [*sic*] Pastora Appointed Chief of New FSLN Army," October 23, 1978, FBIS.

40. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 67.

41. "Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade Issues Proclamation," November 5, 1978, FBIS.

42. "Eden [*sic*] Pastora's Remarks on Panamanians Defended," November 7, 1978, FBIS.

43. "'Mercenaries' Massing to Invade Nicaragua," December 6, 1978, FBIS.

44. "Disagreements among Sandinista Factions," December 7, 1978, FBIS.

45. "Captured Chilean Describes Sandinista Mission as 'Suicidal,'" January 20, 1979, FBIS.

46. "Spadafora Confirms Deaths of Panamanian Brigade Members," January 3, 1979, FBIS.

47. "Memorandum from Robert Pastor of the National Security Council Staff to Brzezinski," June 5, 1979, doc. 230, vol. 29, *FRUS*.

48. "Torrijos Discusses Treaty Implementation, Nicaragua," June 7, 1979, FBIS.

49. "Sandinist [*sic*] Commander Cero Discusses Various Issues," April 26, 1979, FBIS.

50. "FSLN Leader Pastora Interviewed by Newsmen" and "FSLN Leader Calls for 'Total Insurrection,'" June 4, 1979, FBIS.

51. "FSLN Leader Daniel Ortega Reports on Operations," June 4, 1979, FBIS.

52. "Denial of Spadafora's Death," June 11, 1979, FBIS; and "Sandinista Spadafora Charges Somoza Lying about Hill 155," June 11, 1979, FBIS.

53. "Spadafora Comments on Panamanian Participation in FSLN," June 11, 1979, FBIS.

54. "Torrijos Sends Message of Support to Sandinists," June 24, 1979, FBIS.

55. "Somoza Gives Interview," June 26, 1979, FBIS.

56. "Radio Reports on Progress of Fighting," June 20, 1979, FBIS.

57. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 159.

58. "Memorandum of Conversation," July 3, 1979, doc. 258, vol. 25, *FRUS*.

59. "Negotiations with U.S., FSLN for End to War in Nicaragua," July 7, 1979, FBIS.

60. "AFP Reports US Recognition of Junta," July 13, 1979, FBIS.

61. Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 176.

62. Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 111.

63. Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 150–51.

64. "Pastora Views Progress of War," July 3, 1979, FBIS; and "Meeting to Discuss Move on Managua," July 17, 1979, FBIS.

65. Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 182.

66. "Managua Residents Celebrate Rebel Victory," July 20, 1979, FBIS.

67. "Brigade to Return from Nicaragua," July 21, 1979, FBIS.

68. "Spadafora Gives Speech on Return from Nicaragua," July 27, 1979, FBIS; and "Hugo Spadafora Interviewed on Nicaragua Domestic Issues," August 14, 1979, FBIS.

69. "Borge Issues Statement of Support to Panama Canal Issue," July 21, 1979, FBIS.

70. "Borge Reportedly out of Country, Torrijos to Visit," August 13, 1979, FBIS.

71. "PSOE Leader Arrives, Trade Union Leaders Meet with Torrijos, Discuss Nicaragua," July 28,1979, FBIS; "Country as Example for Neighbors," August 1, 1979, FBIS; and Van Ommen, "Isolating Nicaragua's Somoza," 380–86.

72. "Ortega Speech at Managua Rally," August 19, 1979, FBIS; and "Reportage on Visit of Panama's General Omar Torrijos," August 18, 1979, FBIS.

73. "Torrijos Military Parade Address" and "Torrijos's Rally Speech," August 18, 1979, FBIS.

74. "Borge Address at Esteli [*sic*] Rally," August 19, 1979, FBIS.

CHAPTER 15: OMAR AND THE SHAH

1. "Torrijos Addresses Troops to Serve in Canal Area," September 27, 1979, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS). This former military officer stationed at Fort Amador takes issue with the general's characterization of American soldiers. Perhaps he was referring to Canal Zone policemen.

2. "Panamanians Enter Canal Zone," October 1, 1979, FBIS.

3. "Lopez Portillo Speech at Canal Transition Ceremonies," October 1, 1979, FBIS.

4. "Speculation Surrounds Torrijos's Absence from Ceremonies," October 3, 1979, FBIS.

5. Jordan, *Crisis*, 83–84. For the general's memo on the meeting drawn up by his aide Chuchú, see J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 290–92.

6. "Matutino Urges Readiness to Help U.S. against Iran," December 1, 1979, FBIS; "Foreign Minister Denies Rumor," December 3, 1979, FBIS; and "*Critica* Reports 'Imminent' Arrival of Former Shah," December 3, 1979, FBIS.

7. *New York Times*, December 12, 1973, as quoted in LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, 292. See also Shawcross, *Shah's Last Ride*, 171–75.

8. "Shah of Iran Arrives for Private Visit," March 30, 1979, FBIS; Bird, *Outlier*, 269; "Iran's Warning Not to Admit Shah Rejected," April 23, 1979, FBIS; and "Shah Negotiating Residence in Panama," April 24, 1979, FBIS.

9. "Visa Granted to Shah, Possible Visit to Acapulco," June 1, 1979, FBIS; and "Shah's Safety 'His Own Responsibility,'" June 4, 1979, FBIS.

10. "Shah to Stay in Cuernavaca," June 12, 1979, FBIS.

11. "No Resident Visit to Be Granted to Somoza," June 22, 1979, FBIS.

12. "Helicopter Attack Foiled," June 17, 1979, FBIS; and "Shah of Iran's Health Described as 'Delicate,'" June 19, 1979, FBIS.

13. "Paper Publishes Threat against Shah of Iran's Life," August 8, 1979, FBIS.

14. "Government Says Shah of Iran Can Return 'Anytime,'" November 7, 1979, FBIS.

15. "Government Will Not Renew Shah's Tourist Visa," November 30, 1979, FBIS; and "Acapulco House Reportedly Being Prepared for Shah," December 5, 1979, FBIS.

16. Jordan, *Crisis*, 204; and Pastor, *Whirlpool*, 12.

17. "Reportage on Shah's Arrival on Contadora Island," December 16, 1979, FBIS.

18. "President Royo Meets Shah," December 16, 1979, FBIS; "Shah Speaks to Newsmen," December 16, 1979, FBIS; "Shah, Royo, News Conference," December 17, 1979, FBIS; and "Interview with Melville Blake," Library of Congress, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, August 25, 1999, p. 79.

19. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 356–75.

20. "President Royo Meets Shah," December 16, 1979, FBIS.

21. "National Guard Sets up Security System for Shah," December 17, 1979, FBIS. For more on the Shah's life on Contadora, see Shawcross, *Shah's Last Ride*, 310–26.

22. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 299, 307.

23. J. Martínez, *Mi General Torrijos*, 308.

24. "Country Has Mixed Reactions to Shah's Arrival," December 17, 1979, FBIS.

25. "Columnist Sees Shah's Asylum as Rightwing Escalation," December 28, 1979, FBIS.

26. "Students Voice Opposition to Shah Arrival," December 17, 1979, FBIS.

27. "Further Anti-Shah, Anti-Government Demonstrations," December 20, 1979, FBIS.

28. "Further Reportage on Demonstration," January 3, 1980, FBIS.

29. "National Guard Reports Wounded," January 3, 1980, FBIS.

30. "Students Hold Demonstration, Parents Prevent Violence," January 7, 1980, FBIS; and "Newspaper Details 7 January Anti-Shah Demonstrations," January 8, 1980, FBIS.

31. "FEP Secretary General Discusses Visit to Iran," January 16, 1980, FBIS.

32. "Shah Worried about Family," December 20, 1979, FBIS; and "Interpol to Try to Intercept Iranian Comando Team," December 27, 1979, FBIS.

33. "Government Receives Extradition Request from Iran," December 27, 1979, FBIS; "Royo Discusses Iran's Request for Shah's Extradition," December 31, 1979, FBIS; and "Panamanian Law Preventing Extradition Explained," January 5, 1980, FBIS.

34. Shah Leaves Contadora Island to Visit Panama City," and "Returns to Contadora," January 5, 1980, FBIS.

35. "Shah's Spokesman Quits, Rumors Abound," January 12, 1980, FBIS; and "Rumors of Shah's Extradition Continue Despite Official Denials," January 17, 1980, FBIS.

36. "Further Reportage on Status of Shah," February 8, 1980, FBIS; and "Shah Reportedly to Leave upon Release of Hostages," February 15, 1980, FBIS.

37. "Royo Seeks Documents from Iran, Denies Shah's Arrest," January 24, 1980, FBIS; and "Qotzadeh Believes Arrest Reports," January 24, 1980, FBIS.

38. "Official Sources Explain Confusion," January 24, 1980, FBIS; and "General Torrijos Says Shah Not under Arrest," February 1, 1980, FBIS.

39. "NBC TV Correspondent Expelled by Authorities," January 28, 1980, FBIS.

40. "Ozores Says Shah 'Cannot Leave Panamanian Territory,'" February 6, 1980, FBIS.

41. "Shah Reportedly to Leave upon Release of Hostages," February 15, 1980, FBIS.

42. Jordan, *Crisis*, 221.

43. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 57–58, 115–28; Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 317; and "Iran Hires Prominent Attorney for Shah Extradition Case," February 14, 1980, FBIS. See also Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 35, 51.

44. See Materno Vázquez, *Omar Torrijos*.

45. "Shah Tells Swiss Paper Freedom Not Restricted," February 21, 1980, FBIS.

46. "Iran's Lawyer Vasquez Says Shah to Be Extradited," March 13, 1980, FBIS.

47. "Iran Legal Representative Holds News Conference," March 12, 1980, FBIS.

48. "Interview with Melville Blake," Library of Congress, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, August 25, 1999, pp. 80–83.

49. "United States Medical Team Forbidden to Assist in Shah's Surgery," March 14, 1980, FBIS; and "Operation Postponed," March 16, 1980, FBIS. For more information on the Shah's illness and the quarrel between his doctors, see Shawcross, *Shah's Last Ride*, 346–75.

50. Jordan, *Crisis*, 214.

51. Karen DeYoung, "Panamanians: Flight Was Mistake," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1980.

52. "Departs from Tocumen" and "Official Announcement Made," March 23, 1980, FBIS.

53. "Iran's Legal Representative Comments," March 23, 1980, FBIS; and "Vasquez Formally Submits Extradition Request," March 24, 1980, FBIS.

54. "Torrijos Discusses Shah's Stay, Fears of Extradition," April 19, 1980, FBIS.

55. "Royo Terms U.S. Rescue Operation 'Flagrant Violation,'" April 18, 1980, FBIS.

56. "Students Ask President Royo to Accept Cuban Refugees," April 16, 1980, FBIS.

57. See Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*, chap. 4; and Fischer, "Sinking Jimmy's Ship."

58. See Strong, *Working in the World*, chap. 9.

59. Á. Martínez, "Manuel Antonio Noriega," 20. See also Noriega and Eisner, *America's Prisoner*, 97–103.

CHAPTER 16: OMAR, FIDEL, AND THE SANDINISTA STATE

1. Jack Hood Vaughn, "Cuba, Mexico: Who's Coopting Whom?" *Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 1983.

2. Central Intelligence Agency, "International Issues Monthly Review," July 29, 1978; CIA, "Latin America Review," February 15, 1979; CIA, "The Nonaligned Movement: Dynamics and Prospects," March 30, 1979, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room); Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin Archive II*, 90–91, 115, 119; and Getchell, "Cuba, the USSR, and the Non-Aligned Movement," 164.

3. Irwin, "Untold Stories of Yugoslavia," 152–54; Rajan, *Nonalignment and Nonaligned Movement*, 102–3; Andrew, "Intelligence in the Cold War," 2:426; and Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 204–5.

4. CIA, "International Issues Monthly Review," July 26, 1978, CIA Reading Room; and Getchell, "Cuba, the USSR, and the Non-Aligned Movement," 165. See also Willetts, *Non-Aligned in Havana*.

5. Interviews with General Rubén Darío Paredes, Panama City, March 11, 2019, and January 8, 2020; Díaz Herrera, *Omar*, 159; and "Officers Blame Venezuela for Strong Cuba," November 13, 1979, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

6. Christian, *Nicaragua*, 166.

7. "Report on Royo Speech," September 5, 1979, FBIS; "Vice President's Conversation with President Royo of Panama," September 30, 1979, doc. 247, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 29 (hereafter *FRUS*, vol. 29); and author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 10, 2019. Researchers to date have not created a compelling historiography of this international organization, the NAM. The deaths of Nasser, Nehru, and Kwame Nkrumah and the overthrow of other influential members of the NAM such as Sukarno of Indonesia and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria had led one prominent historian of the Third World to end discussion of the NAM in about 1970. This is the precise date from which Gen-

eral Torrijos began his quest to take advantage of Marshal Tito's experience. See Westad, *Global Cold War*, 108–9.

8. Author's interview with Arístides Royo, January 13, 2020.

9. "First Group of Nicaraguans Arrive for Police Training," August 22, 1979, FBIS.

10. "Panamanian Military Group Arrives to Advise Militia," July 30, 1979, FBIS.

11. "Sandinista Guerrillas Begin Professional Military Training," August 2, 1979, FBIS.

12. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 77–78.

13. "Memorandum of Conversation," September 24, 1979, doc. 308, *FRUS*, vol. 29.

14. "Officers Blame Venezuela for Strong Cuba," November 13, 1979, FBIS.

15. "Denial of Involvement," March 24, 1981, FBIS.

16. "Costa Rica, Panama Linked to Cuban Arms Traffic," May 10, 1981, FBIS; and "Anti-Torrijos Group Named," April 19, 1981, FBIS.

17. The whole following story of Paredes's trip to Havana comes from the author's interviews with General Rubén Darío Paredes, March 11, 2019, and January 10, 2020. Torrijos also sent the chief of military intelligence Manuel Noriega; the Panamanian ambassador in Managua Marcel Salamín; and Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt, a socialist and one of the first contacts between Castro and Torrijos.

18. Author's interview with Paredes, March 11, 2019.

19. "Officers Blame Venezuela for Strong Cuba," November 13, 1979, FBIS; "Spadafora Continued Friendship with Nicaragua," December 1, 1979, FBIS; and "Effort to Maintain Relations," December 4, 1979, FBIS.

20. "Panamanian Team Reports on Police Training," August 16, 1979, FBIS.

21. "Sandinistas Complete Military Training, Torrijos Present," October 6, 1979, FBIS; and "National Guard Reaffirms Support for Royo Polices," October 7, 1979, FBIS.

22. "Holds News Conference," December 7, 1979, FBIS.

23. Author's Interview with Royo, January 10, 2020.

24. Francisco Rubiales, "Relations with Nicaragua Seen as Cooling," November 19, 1979, FBIS.

25. "Borge, Arce, Cero Leave on Costa Rican-Panamanian Visit," November 28, 1979, FBIS.

26. "FSLN Leaders, Junta Members to Visit Costa Rica, Panama," December 4, 1979, FBIS; and "Meet with Royo," December 7, 1979, FBIS.

27. "Honduran Junta Head to Be Invited to 19 July Events," June 12, 1980, FBIS.

28. "Invitation to Royo, Press Conference," June 13, 1980, FBIS.

29. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 84–85; and Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 265.

30. See Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*.

31. "Havana TV Coverage," July 21, 1980, FBIS.

32. "Torrijos Reportedly to Attend Nicaraguan Ceremony," July 17, 1980, FBIS; "Denial of Previous Report," July 17, 1980, FBIS; and "Papers Discuss, Criticize Events in Nicaragua," July 21, 1980, FBIS.

33. "*Critica* Comments on July 19 Anniversary Events in Managua," July 21, 1980, FBIS.

34. "Torrijos Upset over Reported Friction with Nicaragua," July 29, 1980, FBIS.

35. Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 82–83; Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 410; and Armony, *Argentina*, 79.

36. "President Royo's Comments on Somoza's Death," September 18, 1980, FBIS.

37. "Joint Communique [*sic*] Issued," January 15, 1981, FBIS.

38. "Official Says Differences Estrange Panama, Cuba," March 24, 1981, FBIS.

39. "Pastora Speaks on Arrival in Managua," July 20, 1979, FBIS.

40. Cite Pastor, *Whirlpool*, 198–99; and Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos*, 70–71.

41. "Comandante Cero Named Vice Minister of Interior," July 25, 1979, FBIS.

42. "Vance Holds Talks with Nicaragua Officials," August 13, 1979, FBIS.

43. "Sandinista Leaders Cited on Ties to USSR," August 16, 1979, FBIS.

44. "Interior Minister Borge Explains Friendship with Cuba," August 20, 1979, FBIS.

45. "Eden [*sic*] Pastora Interviewed on Sandinista Unity," November 6, 1979, FBIS; and "Notes Importance of Foreign Support," November 8, 1979, FBIS.

46. "Borge, Arce, Cero Leave on Costa Rican-Panama Visit," November 28, 1979, FBIS.

47. "Nicaragua's Eden [*sic*] Pastora Warns of U.S. Invasion," April 6, 1981, FBIS.

48. "Pastora Comments on Communism," April 25, 1981, FBIS.

49. Christian, *Nicaragua*, 228–35; and Booth, *End and the Beginning*, 263.

50. "Pastora Says Counterrevolution 'Possible,'" April 11, 1980, FBIS; and "Commander Pastora Warns Counterrevolutionaries," July 5, 1980, FBIS.

51. "Militiamen Return from 2-Month Mountain Patrol," December 14, 1980, FBIS.

52. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 237–38.

53. Among the Argentineans were Colonel José Osvaldo Ribeiro and Captain Mohamed Alí Seineldín, the latter was to become a Carapintada on returning to Argentina. See Armony, *Argentina*, 27, 61, 100; and Brown, *Brief History of Argentina*, 259.

54. "New Militia Battalions Formed in Managua, Esteli," January 14, 1981, FBIS.

55. "Pastora Arrives, Scores Cuban Presence," July 9, 1981, FBIS.

56. "Pastora Crosses Costa Rican Border," July 9, 1981, FBIS. On Pastora's defection, see Christian, *Nicaragua*, 310–17; and Valle, *Hugo Spadafora*, 348–49.

57. "Officers Meet Press on Relations with Honduras," April 30, 1981, FBIS.

58. "Panama City *La Prensa* Reports," July 12, 1981, FBIS; and "Pastora, Spadafora Discovered by Local Newsmen," July 24, 1981, FBIS.

59. "Nicaraguan Interior Minister Borge Interviewed," July 30, 1981, FBIS.

CHAPTER 17: THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY AND EL SALVADOR

1. "Returning Exiles to Assess Restoration of Human Rights," April 24, 1978, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).

2. They were Carlos González de la Lastra, Guillermo Ford, Iván Robles, and Alvin Turner. "Report on News Conference," April 27, 1978, FBIS.

3. Author's interview with Roberto Eisenmann, February 25, 2019;

4. "Panamanist Party Blames Deaths on Torrijos," June 16, 1978, FBIS; "Arnulfo Arias Says Torrijos Must Go," June 18, 1978, FBIS; and "Torrijos Refutes Accusations of Communism," July 10, 1978, FBIS.

5. "Catholic Church Calls for Democracy, Criticizes Government," July 7, 1978, FBIS.

6. "Torrijos Refutes Accusations of Communism," July 10, 1978, FBIS.

7. "Torrijos on Formation of Single Party," November 17, 1976, FBIS. But of course, this bottom-up organization does not at all describe the PRI's origins. Its forerunner in Mexico had been organized in 1928 to represent the political interests of the surviving revolutionary generals. In the late 1930s, under President Lázaro Cárdenas, the labor and peasant organizations made up the broad popular base the official party of the Mexican Revolution.

8. "Government Leaders Vote to Form Party of Revolution," July 8, 1978, FBIS; and "Torrijos Announces Creation of Revolutionary Party," July 8, 1978, FBIS.

9. "PRD Leaders Attend Vancouver Social Democracy Meeting," November 6, 1978, FBIS; and Van Ommen, "Isolating Nicaragua's Somoza," 380–82.

10. "Torrijos Appoints Commission on Political Parties," July 18, 1978, FBIS.

11. CIA, "Latin America Review," October 19, 1978, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA Reading Room).

12. "Opposition Candidate Charges Administration of Corruption," September 22, 1980, FBIS.

13. "Electoral Tribunal Announces Results of Election," October 14, 1980, FBIS; and Scranton, *Noriega Years*, 56.

14. "National Guard Officer Views Political Problems," January 31, 1981, FBIS.

15. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 4, 2019.

16. "Torrijos Comments on His Role in Central America," July 11, 1980, FBIS.

17. Author's interview with Nicolás Ardito Barletta, February 1, 2019. See also Ardito Barletta, *Huellas*, 300, 332.

18. Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 111. General Paredes corroborates the misgivings of his commander. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, March 13, 2019.

19. "New Agricultural Development Minister Appointed," October 5, 1978, FBIS; "Colonel García Retires, National Guard Reorganized," October 16, 1978, FBIS; and "Leading Personalities in Panama, 1979/1980," September 23, 1980, FCO 99/547, Foreign Office Records, British National Archives (hereafter FOR BNA).

20. "Royo Comments on Nomination," September 1, 1968, FBIS.

21. "Royo Interviewed on National Affairs," September 6, 1978, FBIS.

22. Author's interview with Ardito Barletta, February 1, 2019.

23. "Torrijos to Relinquish Government Role, Retain Military Post," September 1, 1978, FBIS; and "Nicaraguan Situation Influenced Torrijos," September 2, 1978, FBIS.

24. Torrijos, *Soy un soldado*, 35.

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57. Rico Mira, *En silencio tenía que ser*, 250.

58. Materno Vásquez, *Omar Torrijos*, 243, 262.

59. Author's interview with Rubén Darío Paredes, January 8, 2020.

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