Nationalism, Dictatorship, Canal Treaties, Invasion, and Contemporary Panama

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Arias Madrid Brothers
President Harmodio Arias
(3 January 1931 – 16 January 1931, June 5, 1932, to October 1, 1936)
Harmodio in Washington, 1932
FDR Visits Panama in 1934
Universidad de Panamá
President Arnulfo Arias
(June 1940–October 1941, November 1949–May 1951, and October 1–12, 1968)
Panameñismo

new coalition of middle-class professionals
Panamanian frustration with U.S. occupation
ardent nationalism
populist politics: “panameñismo”
  “Panama for Panamanians”
  “Speak Spanish and count in balboas.”
defensive nationalism
effective vote-getter – election of 1940
authoritarian and autocratic measures
Arnulfo Part I: First Presidency
Growing Nationalism

1. geopolitical events worldwide
2. “sellout” of Panamanian governments
3. popular outrage at Filos-Hines agreement in 1947
   a. return of over 100 sites
   b. 20-year extensions on others
4. Youth Patriotic Front
5. National Assembly voted to reject U.S. offer
   a. popular movement blocked U.S. intentions
   b. dissatisfaction with status quo
   c. key role of university students
Student Demonstrations
shift in political power toward military
José Antonio Remón – “king-maker”
Arnulfo Arias reinstalled as president
autocratic tendencies reemerge:
  a. jailed former presidents
  b. closed newspapers
  c. suspended constitution
  d. attempted to dissolve National Assembly
shootout in presidential palace
second toppling of Arias = military in politics
José Antonio Remón
El Doctor Arnulfo Arias Madrid levantó su mano derecha y, en un acto de profundo dramatismo, declaró: ‘Ustedes, copartidarios, cumplieron su deber. Yo, como mandatario, cumplí con el mío’.

Y señalando a los guardias que miraban atónitos, levantó el tono de voz y declaró: ‘Estos son unos traidores... Volveremos’.
Armed Attack on Presidential Palace 1951
Trial of Arnulfo Arias
Flag Incident

clash: flying Panamanian flag in Canal Zone
Department of Defense vs. Department of State
Zonian defiance
continued restricted presence of Panamanian flag
Balboa High School incident – January 9, 1964
violence, vandalism, rioting
President Roberto Chiari broke diplomatic relations
  a. “unjustifiable aggression”
  b. “disproportionate amount of firepower”
event served as catalyst ➔ new treaty
1964 Flashpoint

Image of students on a balcony at Balboa High School in what appears to be a protest setting.
Flag Incident 1964
Arnulfo Arias Part III: Presidency 1968

Return of Arnulfo Arias
nationalist Partido Panameñista
election victory in an extremely divided field
purge of National Guard officers: Omar Torrijos, Bolívar Vallarino, José María Pinilla
Arias push for total control

Coup of October 11, 1968
Arias toppled for third time
no United States intervention
rise of Col. Boris Martínez and Lt. Col. Torrijos
Uneasy Alliance: Arnulfo and the Military
Eleven Day Presidency: October 1968
Populist Politics
Monument to Arnulfo Arias
Rise of Omar Torrijos
Shadow of the Military
Enigmatic Dictatorship

Omar Torrijos

1. social justice and fervent nationalism
2. School of Americas (SOA) in Canal Zone
3. Panama’s first military strongman
   a. caudillo + Panamanian nationalist
   b. pragmatism – tempered anti-U.S. stance
4. “I do not want to enter history.
   I want to enter into the Canal Zone.”
5. support of popular groups – lower classes, laborers, students
Reforms

A. Pan o Palo
1. promotion of a leftist, populist agenda
2. aid to poor
3. social programs and skyrocketing spending

B. “Democracy Without Elections”
1. new constitution of 1972
2. power and money to rural areas
3. façade of governmental structure
4. National Guard – free from civilian oversight
5. “Maximum Leader of the Panamanian Revolution”
6. labor code and unions
7. excessive borrowing, consumption, nepotism
8. expansion of commerce and banking sector → high economic cost
   a. liberalized banking regulations
   b. “Switzerland of Latin American banking”
   c. crossroads of illicit trade
Torrijos and Castro
C. Institutionalization of Dictatorship

1. increased presence of National Guard
2. military-related institutions
3. limits on civil liberties
   a. “my gangster” – violence and illicit activities
   b. Torrijos and Noriega – symbiotic relationship
5. maximum fear, minimal collateral damage

Father Héctor Gallego
Negotiations

A. Support in World Community

1. limited antagonism
2. court of world opinion
3. UN call for a “just and equitable” treaty
4. U.S. resistance
   “We built it, we paid for it, and we are going to keep it.”

B. President Jimmy Carter

1. moral righteousness
2. Panamanian economic problems
3. strategic calculations
Treaties

C. Hammering Out Treaties
   1. treaty = continued rule for Torrijos
   2. rhetoric and support among leftist leaders
   3. signing of two new treaties
      a. Panama Canal Commission, 12/31/1999
      b. permanent neutrality of canal with right to defend it
   4. minimal information about treaties in Panama
   5. U.S. Senate debate: DeConcini condition
   6. ratification and aftermath

D. Institutionalization of Rule
   1. Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)
   2. slow democratization
   3. plane crash of July 31, 1981
   4. power vacuum
Panama Canal Treaties
Carter and Torrijos 1978
Torrijos Tomb
The Noriega Years, 1981-1990
Noriega Takes Charge

A. Background
1. poor and illegitimate
2. military training, paid informant of CIA
3. chief of intelligence – “rent-a-colonel”
4. National Guard → Panamanian Defense Force

B. Power Grab
1. U.S. support for stable, brutal dictatorships
2. Noriega cooperation and loyalty
3. protection under a “Pentagon umbrella”
4. violence, vice, corruption, greed

C. Façade Crumbles
1. scrutiny and investigation
2. money laundering and drug trafficking
3. ties to “Iran-Contra Affair”
4. double-dealing
Vice President George H.W. Bush with Gen. Manuel Noriega
A. From Ally to Public Enemy
   1. wavering support in U.S., dissatisfaction at home
   2. Noriega playing both sides – “nuestro hombre”
   3. intransigence and repression

B. Opposition Grows
   1. defection of Col. Roberto Díaz Herrera
   2. National Civic Crusade (NCC)
   3. large-scale labor strikes
   4. criticism of Noriega by Catholic Church
   5. violence of “Dobermans” in the streets
   6. U.S. Congress vote to cut all economic and military aid
   7. economic warfare
Crisis in Panama

C. Crisis Deepens

1. Noriega indicted in Florida in 1988: drug trafficking and money laundering
2. move by Reagan and Bush to end Noriega’s rule
3. Panamanian assets frozen – deep economic depression
4. attempted coups and deals
5. mixed and conflicting messages
6. PDF harassment of U.S. nationals
7. blatant fraud in 1989 election returns
8. protestors beaten and arrested by “Dignity Battalions”
9. Giraldi’s failed coup
10. U.S. military buildup
Invasion

A. Operation Just Cause
1. swearing in of Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón, and Guillermo Ford
2. largest military operation since Vietnam
3. overwhelming firepower
4. destruction of El Chorillo
5. Noriega sought sanctuary in Vatican nunciatura
6. surrender of Noriega

B. Aftermath
1. catastrophic economic damage and loss of life
2. post-invasion looting and vandalism
3. continuing problems of power and legitimacy
“With respect to the United States forces, our report concluded that the tactics and weapons utilized resulted in an inordinate number of civilian victims, in violation of specific obligations under the Geneva Conventions. [...] [Panama's civilian deaths] reveal that the "surgical operation" by American forces inflicted a toll in civilian lives that was at least four-and-a-half times higher than military casualties in the enemy, and twelve or thirteen times higher than the casualties suffered by U.S. troops. By themselves, these ratios suggest that the rule of proportionality and the duty to minimize harm to civilians, where doing so would not compromise a legitimate military objective, were not faithfully observed by the invading U.S. forces. For us, the controversy over the number of civilian casualties should not obscure the important debate on the manner in which those people died.”
Invasion
Destruction of Chorillo
Aftermath
Search for Noriega

The Washington Post

U.S. Forces Crush Panamanian Military; Noriega in Hiding as Fighting Continues

Noriega Headquarters Leveled; City in Chaos

Americans Taken Hostage
Capture of Noriega
Panama Canal Returned December 31, 1999
Third Locks
Canal Expansion

“Post-Panamamax” Ships Signal New Era in Shipping
Panama Canal Expansion Inauguration: June 26, 2016
Panama: Old and New