

10.

JEANE KIRKPATRICK: THE HOBBS PROBLEM (1981)

El Salvador's political culture does not help with the problem of legitimacy. Like the broader culture, its political culture emphasizes strength and *machismo* and all that implies about the nature of the world and the human traits necessary for survival and success. Competition, courage, honor, shrewdness, assertiveness, a capacity for risk and recklessness, and a certain "manly" disregard for safety are valued. There is a predictable congruity between the cultural traits and political patterns in El Salvador, a congruity expressed in the persistent tendency to schism and violence within the political class. Intermittent disruption and violence make order the highest value in such political systems.

Order, as John Stuart Mill emphasized, is the "preservation of all kinds and amounts of good which already exist." It is also the precondition for all other public goods, as Mill understood better than is generally realized. And, as always, heroes are people who make a special contribution to highly valued goods.

Hernández Martínez is such a hero. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who governed El Salvador from 1931 to 1944, was minister of war in the cabinet of President Arturo Araujo when there occurred widespread uprisings said to be the work of Communist agitators. General Hernández Martínez then staged a coup and ruthlessly suppressed the disorders—wiping out all those who participated and hunting down their leaders. It is said that 30,000 persons lost their lives in the process. To many Salvadoreans the violence of this repression seems less important than the fact of restored order and the thirteen years of civil peace that ensued. The traditionalist death squads that pursue revolutionary activists and leaders in contemporary El Salvador call themselves Hernández Martínez Brigades, seeking thereby to place themselves in El Salvador's political tradition and communicate their purposes.

There is, inevitably, an arbitrary quality about governments which can reform themselves only by force or intrigue. And there is an inevitable brittleness about a polity in which political loyalty means loyalty to particular individuals—not to individuals who have been institutionalized in the fashion that kings and presidents are institutionalized, but to individuals whose claim to power rests ultimately on the fact that they have it.

Where there is no legitimacy, there is also no authority. There is only power, and the habit of obedience to whoever successfully claims the power of government. Under these circumstances, a government's status depends, even more than usually, on its capacity to govern, to secure obedience, to punish those who disobey—in sum, to maintain order. Such a government can command obedience only insofar as it can secure acquiescence in its policies, can rely on habits of obedience, or can impose its commands by force and fear. . . . There are few grounds for thinking that Americans who have shaped U.S. policy toward El Salvador have been aware of the distinctive characteristics and problems of such political systems. Had they understood them, then some aspects of our policy would surely have been different.

What would have been different?

The administration would have been inclined to greet the coup of October 1979, which toppled President Carlos Humberto Romero, with mixed feelings. Instead, Assistant Secretary of State William C. Bowdler greeted it as the dawn of a new era, a "watershed date," in which "young officers broke with the old repressive order" and along with "progressive civilians" formed a government committed to "profound social and economic reforms, respect for human rights and democracy."

A more prudent appraisal of politics in Central America would have left policy makers a little less enthusiastic about the destruction of any constitutional ruler, not because they approved the ruler but because they understood that authority in such systems is weak, stability fragile, and order much easier to destroy than reconstruct.

Second, a fuller understanding of the political system of El Salvador would have left U.S. policy makers a bit less sanguine about the short range contributions of reform to political stability not because reforms are not desirable but because political traditions and cultures change slowly, not rapidly.

Third, clear comprehension of the problem of order in El Salvador would make U.S. policy makers more sympathetic to the inability of the government to control the situation, and less anxious to inhibit the use of force against violent challengers. . . . More than 9,000 persons have been slaughtered in El Salvador during the year since the new day dawned. The reforms that were counted on to provide social justice and vaccinate the masses against communism have been stalled by administrative inefficiency and the sabotage of both communitarians and defenders of the *status quo ante*. The harvests counted on to help El Salvador's acute balance of payments problems are being menaced and destroyed by revolutionaries for whose cause worse is better. Meanwhile violence perpetrated by communists, anticommunists, and simple criminals continues.

What is to be done? It is not a problem to which the American temper

is well suited. The problem confronting El Salvador is Thomas Hobbes's problem: how to establish order and authority in a society where there is none.

In *Leviathan*, an essay first published in 1651, are found an accurate identification and insightful discussion of the essential elements involved in El Salvador's turmoil, laid out in marvelously lucid prose.

First, Hobbes insists on the primacy of order as the basic value of a political system without which no other value can be enjoyed.

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

Second, Hobbes predicts that to escape such pervasive insecurity and fear of death, men will eventually voluntarily submit themselves to a ruler in whom they will vest sovereignty, to whom they will swear obedience on condition that he maintain the civil peace required alike for survival and for civilization.

Third, Hobbes emphasizes that allegiance to a sovereign depends on his ability to maintain the order required to protect life, secure property, and cultivate virtue.

Fourth, Hobbes recognizes the importance of both legitimacy and fear in reinforcing the polity. He insists that the covenant establishing government is to be based on an oath sworn by God and enforced by fear of "some coercive Power."

Fifth, Hobbes argues that the war of each against all, which characterizes a society with no sovereign, grows finally out of the competition for power rooted in the nature of man.

Sixth, Hobbes argues that civil war and anarchy, being political problems, require political solutions. Autocracy is that solution he foresees. It is hardly an ideal one, surely not one acceptable under our human rights program, but wholly in keeping with the priorities stated by that most eloquent of El Salvador's democratic leaders, Napoleón Duarte:

I think it is not important who is in or out. The most important thing is how can we solve the basis of our problems—the violence. Whoever has the capacity to do this should have the power.

Duarte hopes, as we all hope, that El Salvador can still be brought back from the verge of a civil war which promises only destruction and dictatorship. Helping would require a broader understanding of the context and the problem than our policy makers have shown so far.

11.

JEANE KIRKPATRICK: U.S. SECURITY AND LATIN AMERICA (JANUARY 1981)

... Nothing is as important as understanding the relationship between the recent failures of American policy—in Latin America and elsewhere—and the philosophy of foreign affairs that inspired and informed that policy. . . .

The repudiation of our hegemonic past was symbolized by the Panama Canal Treaties, to which the Carter administration—from the President on down—attached great importance and of which it was inordinately proud. As Vice President Mondale put it in Panama City, the treaties symbolized "the commitment of the U.S. to the belief that fairness and not force should lie at the heart of our dealings with the nations of the world."

Anastasio Somoza's Nicaragua had the bad luck to become the second demonstration area for the "fresh start" in Latin America. Just because the regime had been so close and so loyal to the U.S., its elimination would, in exactly the same fashion as the Panama Canal Treaties, dramatize the passing of the old era of "hegemony" in Central America and the arrival of a new era of equity and justice. . . .

Incorporating the nations of Latin America into a "global framework" meant deemphasizing U.S. relations with them. Especially, it meant reducing U.S. assistance to the area, since from the perspective of North-South relations, Latin America's claim to assistance was not nearly as impressive as that of most other nations of the so-called Third World. And, once the strategic perspective was abandoned, there was no reason at all for military assistance.

The global approach involved deemphasizing Latin American relations, not destabilizing governments. But other aspects of the Carter doctrine committed the administration to promoting "change." "Change," indeed, was the favorite word of administration policy-makers. In speeches with titles like "Currents of Change in Latin America," Carter, Vance, and their associates reiterated their conviction that the world was in the grip of an

extraordinary process of transformation which was deep, irresistible, systematic, and desirable. Administration spokesmen reiterated in the fashion of a credo that "our national interests align us naturally and inescapably with the forces of change, of democracy, of human rights, and of equitable development" (Philip Habib). And the belief that the whole world was caught up in a process of modernization moving it toward greater democracy and equality subtly transformed itself into an imperative: the U.S. should throw its power behind the "progressive" forces seeking change, even if they "seemed" anti-American or pro-Soviet.

If commitment to "change" was the rock on which Carter's Latin American policy was built, his human-rights policy was the lever to get change started. Two aspects of the Carter approach to human rights are noteworthy. First, concern was limited to violations of human rights by governments. By definition, activities of terrorists and guerrillas could not qualify as violations of human rights, whereas a government's efforts to repress terrorism would quickly run afoul of Carter human-rights standards.

Secondly, human rights were defined not in terms of personal and legal rights—freedom from torture, arbitrary imprisonment, and arrest, as in the usage of Amnesty International and the U.S. Foreign Assistance Acts of 1961 and 1975—but in accordance with a much broader conception which included the political "rights" available only in democracies and the economic "rights" promised by socialism (shelter, food, health, education). It may be that no country in the world meets these standards; certainly no country in the Third World does. The very broadness of the definition invited an arbitrary and capricious policy of implementation. Panama, for instance, was rather mysteriously exempt from meeting the expansive criteria of the State Department's human-rights office, while at the same time the other major nations of Central America were being censured (and undermined) for violations. . . .

Ignoring the role of ideology had powerful effects on the administration's perception of conflicts and on its ability to make accurate predictions. Although Fidel Castro has loudly and repeatedly proclaimed his revolutionary mission, and backed his stated intentions by training insurgents and providing weapons and advisers, Carter's Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, William Bowdler, described Cuba as "an inefficient and shabby dictatorship"—a description more appropriate to, say, Paraguay, than to an expansionist Soviet client state with troops scattered throughout the world. The refusal to take seriously, or even to take into account, the commitment of Fidel Castro or Nicaragua's Sandinista leadership to Marxist-Leninist goals and expansionist policies made it impossible to distinguish them either from traditional authoritarians or from democratic reformers, impossible to predict their likely attitude toward the

United States and the Soviet Union, impossible to understand why in their view Costa Rica and Mexico as well as Guatemala and Honduras constituted inviting targets. . . .

The Central American countries also share a good many social and economic characteristics. All are "modernizing" nations in the sense that in each, urban, industrial, mobile, "modern" sectors coexist with traditional patterns of life. In each, a large portion of the population is still engaged in agriculture—most often employed as landless laborers on large estates and plantations that have long since made the transition to commercial agriculture. Economic growth rates in Central America have been above the Latin American average and per-capita income is high enough to rank these nations among the "middle-income" countries of the world. But in all of them wealth is heavily concentrated in a small upper class and a thin but growing middle class, and large numbers live as they have always lived—in deep poverty, ill-nourished, ill-housed, illiterate.

Things have been getting better for the people of Central America—infant mortality rates have dropped, years in school have increased—but they have been getting better slowly. It has been easier to break down the myths justifying the old distribution of values in society than to improve access to education, medical care, decent housing, good food, respect, and political power. . . .

The boundaries between the political system, the economy, the military establishment, and the Church are often unclear and unreliable. Weak governments confront strong social groups, and no institution is able to establish its authority over the whole. Economic, ecclesiastical, and social groups influence but do not control the government; the government influences but does not control the economy, the military, the Church, and so on.

A Democratic facade—elections, political parties, and fairly broad participation—is a feature of these systems. But the impact of democratic forms is modified by varying degrees of fraud, intimidation, and restrictions on who may participate. Corruption (the appropriation of public resources for private use) is endemic. Political institutions are not strong enough to channel and contain the claims of various groups to use public power to enforce preferred policies. No procedure is recognized as *the* legitimate route to power. Competition for influence proceeds by whatever means are at hand: the Church manipulates symbols of rectitude; workers resort to strikes; businessmen use bribery; political parties use campaigns and votes; politicians employ persuasion, organization, and demagoguery; military officers use force. Lack of consensus permits political competition of various kinds in various arenas, and gives the last word to those who dispose of the greatest force. That usually turns out to be the leaders of the armed forces; most rulers in the area are generals.

Violence or the threat of violence is an integral, regular, predictable part of these political systems—a fact which is obscured by our way of describing military “interventions” in Latin political systems as if the system were normally peaceable. Coups, demonstrations, political strikes, plots, and counterplots are, in fact, the norm. . . .

Cuba stands ready to succor, bolster, train, equip, and advise revolutionaries produced within these societies and to supply weapons for a general insurgency when that is created. The U.S. is important as a source of economic aid and moral and military support. Traditionally it has also exercised a veto power over governments in the area and reinforced acceptable governments with its tacit approval. Thus, to the objective economic and political dependency of nations in the area has been added a widespread sense of psychological dependency. When aid and comfort from the U.S. in the form of money, arms, logistical support, and the services of counterinsurgency experts are no longer available, governments like those of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala are weakened. And when it finally sinks in that the U.S. desires their elimination and prefers insurgents to incumbents, the blow to the morale and confidence of such weak traditional regimes is devastating.

The case of Nicaragua illustrates to perfection what happens when “affirmative pressures for change” on the part of the U.S. interact with Cuban-backed insurgency and a government especially vulnerable to shifts in U.S. policy.

At the time the Carter administration was inaugurated in January 1977, three groups of unequal strength competed for power in Nicaragua: the President and his loyal lieutenants—who enjoyed the advantages of incumbency, a degree of legitimacy, a nationwide organization, and the unwavering support of the National Guard; the legal opposition parties which had been gathered into a loose coalition headed by Joaquín Chamorro, editor of *La Prensa*; and several small revolutionary groups whose Cuban-trained leaders had finally forged a loose alliance, the FSLN (Sandinist National Liberation Front).

From the moment the FSLN adopted the tactics of a broad alliance, the offensive against Somoza was carried out on a variety of fronts. There was violence in the form of assassinations and assaults on army barracks. When the government reacted, the U.S. condemned it for violations of human rights. The legal opposition put forward demands for greater democracy which had the endorsement of the FSLN, thus making it appear that democracy was the goal of the insurgency.

Violence and counterviolence weakened the regime by demonstrating that it could not maintain order. The combination of impotence and repression in turn emboldened opponents in and out of the country, provoking more reprisals and more hostility in a vicious circle that culminated finally

in the departure of Somoza and the collapse of the National Guard.

What did the Carter administration do in Nicaragua? *It brought down the Somoza regime.* The Carter administration did not “lose” Nicaragua in the sense in which it was once charged Harry Truman had “lost” China, or Eisenhower Cuba, by failing to prevent a given outcome. In the case of Nicaragua, the State Department *acted* repeatedly and at critical junctures to weaken the government of Anastasio Somoza and to strengthen his opponents.

First, it declared “open season” on the Somoza regime. When in the spring of 1977 the State Department announced that shipments of U.S. arms would be halted for human-rights violations, and followed this with announcements in June and October that economic aid would be withheld, it not only deprived the Somoza regime of needed economic and military support but served notice that the regime no longer enjoyed the approval of the United States and could no longer count on its protection. This impression was strongly reinforced when after February 1978 Jimmy Carter treated the two sides in the conflict as more or less equally legitimate contenders—offering repeatedly to help “both sides” find a “peaceful solution.”

Second, the Carter administration’s policies inhibited the Somoza regime in dealing with its opponents while they were weak enough to be dealt with. Fearful of U.S. reproaches and reprisals, Somoza fluctuated between repression and indulgence in his response to FSLN violence. The rules of the Carter human-rights policy made it impossible for Somoza to resist his opponents effectively. As Viron Vaky remarked about the breakdown in negotiations between Somoza and the armed opposition: “. . . when the mediation was suspended we announced that the failure of the mediation had created a situation in which it was clear violence was going to continue, that it would result in repressive measures and therefore our relationships could not continue on the same basis as in the past.” When the National Palace was attacked and hostages were taken, Somoza’s capitulation to FSLN demands enhanced the impression that he could not control the situation and almost certainly stimulated the spread of resistance.

Third, by its “mediation” efforts and its initiatives in the Organization of American States (OAS), the Carter administration encouraged the internationalization of the opposition. Further, it demoralized Somoza and his supporters by insisting that Somoza’s continuation in power was the principal obstacle to a viable, centrist, democratic government. Finally, the State Department deprived the Somoza regime of legitimacy not only by repeated condemnations for human-rights violations but also by publishing a demand for Somoza’s resignation and by negotiating with the opposition. . . .

Since the "real" problem was not Cuban arms but Somoza, obviously the U.S. should not act to reinforce the regime that had proved its political and moral failure by becoming the object of attack. Because the State Department desired not to "add to the partisan factionalism," it declined to supply arms to the regime. . . .

In June 1979, after the U.S. and the OAS had called for Somoza's resignation, and U.S. representatives William Bowdler and Lawrence Pezulo had met with the FSLN, the State Department undertook to apply the final squeeze to the Somoza regime—putting pressure on Israel to end arms sales, and working out an oil embargo to speed the capitulation of Somoza's forces. They were so successful that for the second time in a decade an American ally ran out of gas and ammunition while confronting an opponent well armed by the Soviet bloc.

The FSLN were not the State Department's preferred replacement for Somoza. Nevertheless, from spring 1977, when the State Department announced that it was halting a promised arms shipment to Somoza's government, through the summer of 1980, when the administration secured congressional approval of a \$75-million aid package for Nicaragua, U.S. policy under Jimmy Carter was vastly more supportive of the Sandinistas than it was of the Somoza regime, despite the fact that Somoza and his government were as doggedly friendly and responsive to U.S. interests and desires as the Sandinistas have been hostile and non-responsive.

The Carter administration expected that democracy would emerge in Nicaragua. Their scenario prescribed that the winds of change should blow the outmoded dictator out of office and replace him with a popular government. Even after it had become clear that the FSLN, which was known to harbor powerful anti-democratic tendencies, was the dominant force in the new regime, U.S. spokesmen continued to speak of the events in Nicaragua as a democratic revolution. In December 1979, for example, Warren Christopher attempted to reassure doubting members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "the driving consensus among Nicaraguans" was "to build a new Nicaragua through popular participation that is capable of meeting basic human needs."

The expectation that change would produce progress and that socialism equaled social justice made it difficult for Carter policy-makers to assess Nicaragua's new rulers realistically, even though grounds for concern about their intentions, already numerous before the triumph, continued to multiply in its aftermath. . . .