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USA

US Intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean - a Chronology

"I spent thirty three years and four months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks, from a second lieutenant to major-general. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism...I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank to collect revenues in...I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking house of Brown Brothers...I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916..."

US General, Smedley D Butler, 1935

- 1823: The Monroe Doctrine declares that Latin America is within the United States' "sphere of influence".
- 1846: The US goes to war with Mexico and the latter is forced to cede half its national territory to its northern "neighbour", including present-day Texas and California.
- 1854: The US navy bombards and destroys the Nicaraguan port town of San Juan del Norte. The attack occurred after US millionaire Cornelius Vanderbilt sailed his yacht into the port and an official attempted to levy charges on his boat. The navy attack was to pave the way for William Walker.
- 1855: William Walker, operating on behalf of bankers Morgan & Garrison, invades Nicaragua and proclaims himself President. During his two year rule, Walker also invaded neighbouring El Salvador and Honduras (proclaiming himself head of state in each of these countries also). Walker restored slavery in areas under his occupation.
- 1898: The US declares war on Spain and annexes Guam, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Hawaii. US forces also occupied Cuba, another former Spanish colony, after the war.
- 1901: US forces leave Cuba and the country gains its "independence" only after passage of the infamous Platt Amendment, under which the US abrogated to itself the "right" to intervene in Cuba's internal affairs at any time. Cuba was also forced to cede Gauntanamo Bay to the US, in perpetuity.
- 1903: The US "encourages" the creation of the separate state of Panama, then a part of Colombia and acquires rights to the Panama Canal. In later years, former President Theodore Roosevelt - the effective creator of Panama - was to remark: "I took the Canal Zone and let Congress debate". Colombia was later paid \$25 million in compensation.
- 1905: US President Theodore Roosevelt declares the United States to be "the policeman" of the Caribbean; the Dominican Republic (then part of Hispaniola) is then found to have committed an offence and is placed under a "customs receivership".
- 1912: U.S. marines invade Nicaragua, beginning an occupation that was to last almost continuously until 1933. In the same year, President Taft declares: "The day is not far distant when three Stars & Stripes at three equidistant points will mark our territory: one at the North

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- Pole, another at the Panama Canal and the third at the South Pole. The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it already is ours morally."
- 1914: The US navy shells the port city of Veracruz, an attack apparently caused by the refusal of some Mexicans to salute the Stars & Stripes. During World War I, the US also invaded Mexico and Hispaniola (present day Dominican Republic and Haiti). They stayed for 20 years.
- 1933: US forces leave Nicaragua leaving dictator Anastasio Somoza and his National Guard in control.
- 1954: The CIA orchestrates the overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Jacobo Arbenz, in Guatemala. A Guatemalan poet described the Arbenz government as "years of spring in a country of eternal tyranny." Almost 40 years of violence and repression followed, culminating in the "scorched earth" government terror of the 1980s. Over 150,000 people lost their lives.
- 1961: US-backed forces invade Cuba but suffer defeat at the Bay of Pigs.
- 1965: 23,000 troops sent to the Dominican Republic to "restore order", following a popular uprising against the country's military regime.
- 1973: A US-backed coup overthrows the elected government of Salvador Allende, ushering in the regime of General Augusto Pinochet.
- 1981: The Reagan Administration initiates the "contra war" against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.
- 1983: US invasion of Grenada.
- 1989: US invasion of Panama to arrest one-time protégé, Manuel Noriega. The operation leaves thousands of civilian casualties.
- 1990: Massive US intervention in the Nicaraguan election process through covert and overt means. Washington openly funded the opposition coalition, yet such foreign funding of US parties would be illegal under US law.
- 2000: As part of the "War on Drugs", the US launches Plan Colombia, a massive civil and military aid programme for a country with perhaps the worst human rights record in the hemisphere. Total US funding is \$1.3 bn, with 83 percent of that going to the military. Plan Colombia later becomes subsumed into the War on Terror.
- 2002: The US supports and funds elements that organised the unsuccessful April 11 coup in Venezuela.