

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights:” U.S. Strategic Interests in Central America and the Dispossession of the Miskito Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how U.S. strategic interests in Central America motivated by a fierce anti-British sentiment and the imperative to become the regional power in North America led Washington to destroy the Miskito Kingdom, a two and half centuries old, stable, and prosperous indigenous state.¹ I discuss Nicaragua’s ongoing—internationally ignored—genocide of the Miskito Indians and the accompanying exploitation and environmental devastation of their lands. I conclude by urging the U.S. and the U.N. to immediately enforce international laws prohibiting the crime of genocide² and supporting the right of national self-determination³ that have been applied to East Timor and Kosovo to Nicaragua to save the Miskito people and to restore their political independence.

Key Words: MISURASATA, Yapti Tasbia, geopolitics

The title of this article, “that we poor Indians may receive our rights,” comes from a petition, dated October 8, 1929, that the Miskito people sent to U.S. President Herbert Hoover imploring him to rescue them from exploitation and extermination at the hands of Nicaragua. They wrote:

... realizing that our beloved country and ourselves are practically going to ruin, and desiring for ourselves and children and the generations to come the blessings and privileges now enjoyed by modern civilized counties (sic). And that our heartfelt desire is to be released from the yoke of the Nicaraguan Government... we humbly pray that your most esteemed and Honorable Government will interverte (sic) on our poor Indians’ behalf and take up the matter with the Nicaraguan Gov’t and adjust same so that we poor Indians may receive our rights, as are put forth in our despatch (sic) to the Nicaraguan Government. We the Mosquito Indians - hereby too, beg respectfully to express our sincere thanks and heartfelt gratitude to your Excellency and Government for the timely and kind protection offered to us during the recent revolution in this country—for had the United

1. Miskito Kings (Mosquitia), AD 1631 – 1894. (1999-2016). The History Files, The Americas: Central American Native Kingdoms. <http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsAmericas/CentralMiskito.htm>.

2. The Genocide Convention (1948), Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, <http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm>

3. Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960), <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml>; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>; Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (1970), <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm>; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1970), http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf; ILO 169. (1989). International Labor Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/d1cerd.htm>; Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1993), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/d5drm.htm>; Vienna Declaration, World Conference on Human Rights (1993), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/l1viwedc.html>

*States Marines, not been seen here many, yea; many of us poor Indians would not be alive to-day.*⁴

The U.S. government did not release the Miskito from the yoke of Nicaraguan oppression for it was a yoke that Washington had fashioned.

Miskito, Political History

By the mid-nineteenth century, much of the Yucatan Peninsula and Central America constituted a British sphere of influence. There was a British protectorate (the Miskito Kingdom), a British colony (British Honduras, now Belize), and a British-supported independent, indigenous, Mayan state (Chan Santa Cruz). This British presence was unacceptable to the U.S. government.

Since the early days of the American Republic, U.S. Presidents pursued a foreign policy that was more and more aggressively anti-British. It was marked by war (1812) and threats of war (1839⁵, 1844-1848⁶, 1849-1850⁷,

1852⁸, 1854⁹, 1856¹⁰, 1859¹¹, and 1894¹²).

While actual war with Britain was over Canada, most of the threats of war with Britain were over Central America and the British protectorate of the Miskito Kingdom.

The aim of U.S. foreign policy was, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "...the final expulsion of England from the American continent¹³." Its purpose was to insure U.S. political independence from the British, achieve U.S. economic independence from the British, and establish the U.S. as the unrivaled political and economic power in North America

For the U.S., Canada was the political prize, Central America, the economic prize. To this end, the Miskito Kingdom would be a pawn in the geopolitics pursued by Washington. As a Wea Indian ally of the British in the American Revolution said, "In endeavoring to assist you it seems we have wrought our own ruin."¹⁴

It would be echoed by Miskito Indians whose "Miskito kingdom aided Britain during the [American Revolutionary War](#) by attacking Spanish colonies to draw off their forces and

4. Michael Schroeder, PhD., "So that we poor Indians may receive our rights," The Sandino Rebellion, Nicaragua 1927-1934: A Documentary History, the Atlantic Coast, October-December 1929B, p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.sandinorebellion.com/EastCoast/EC1929B-p2.html>

5. Aroostook War (2016). Maine: An Encyclopedia. <http://maineencyclopedia.com/arostook-war/>.

6. Establishing Borders: The Expansion of the United States, 1846-48, The Oregon Question. Smithsonian Center For Education and Museum Studies, http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/borders/essay3.html

7. Spencer C. Tucker (2013). Almanac of American Military History, Volume 1, 1000-1830, Santa Barbara, California, ABC-CLIO, p.761, https://books.google.com/books?id=TO2mx3145T0C&pg=PA761&dq=1850,+us,+uk,+war,+tiger+island&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUwH-PfjvMDKAhUGRIYKHZE_BbYQ6AEIHAA#v=onepage&q=1850%2C%20us%2C%20uk%2C%20war%2C%20tiger%20island&f=false

8. Alan L. McPherson. (2013). Encyclopedia of U.S. Military Interventions in Latin America, Volume 1, A-L, p. 55., https://books.google.com/books?id=utC5YT7wFgAC&pg=PA55&dq=1852,+us,+uk,+war,+miskito+kingdom&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUwH-PfjvMDKAhVBRiYKHdVTB_QQ6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q=1852%2C%20us%2C%20uk%2C%20war%2C%20miskito%20kingdom&f=false

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. The Pig War (2016). National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://www.nps.gov/sajh/learn/historyculture/the-pig-war.htm>

12. Thomas W. Walker and Christine J. Wade (2010). Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle. [Fifth Edition]. p. 24. <https://books.google.com/books?id=6dmRzouzCiMC&pg=PA24&dq=1895,+miskito+coast&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUwH-PfjvMDKAhX14SYKHxO2ClQ6AEIzAB#v=onepage&q=1895%2C%20miskito%20coast&f=false>. Book.

13. National Archives, Founders Online, Thomas Jefferson to William Dunne, 4 August 1812, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-05-02-0231#TJ878033_4

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”



Map 1 CANADA, MEXICO, AND CENTRAL AMERICA

gained several victories alongside the British”¹⁵ only to have their political and cultural independence destroyed by the successful American Revolution decades later. In seeking to expel the British from North America, Washington would adopt two different strategies. They would be shaped by geography and the U.S.’s view of indigenous peoples.

To America’s north lay Canada, which until 1867 consisted of three separate British provinces, Rupert’s Land and the North-Western Territory. Here the U.S. objective was annexation. Canada was that part of the British North American contiguous colonies that did not secede. To Thomas Jefferson and other American Revolutionaries, the American Revolution was incomplete as long as Canada remained independent of the United States.

Since the political and economic centers of Canada (as well as most of the population) were near the U.S. border, it would be relatively easy for Washington to invade and annex Canada (Map 1).¹⁶

To America’s south, however, the situation was dramatically different. The U.S. was separated from British Central America by nearly one thousand miles of Mexican territory (Map 1). There it would be easier for Washington to pursue its objectives through “indirect rule” and a policy of “dual colonialism.”

In addition to geographical constraints, U.S. policy toward the British protectorate of the Miskito Kingdom would be shaped by its policy toward the indigenous nations within its own borders.¹⁷ Washington’s policy toward American Indians consisted of broken treaties¹⁸, expulsions¹⁹, land seizures²⁰, and at the best of times viewing indigenous nations in the words of Chief Justice John Marshall as ‘domestic dependent nations’ whose ‘relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian.’²¹

U.S. policies toward its indigenous populations were based on the conviction that indigenous nations were “uncivilized,” a view shared by Nicaragua. Nicaragua and other Spanish-speaking states had seceded from Spain politically, but not culturally. They had officially abolished the sixteen Spanish legal classifications of racial preference²² in law but

14. Revolutionary Limits: Native Americans (2008-2014), Pre-Columbian to the New Millennium, U.S. History.Org. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/13f.asp>

15. Miskito (2014). New World Encyclopedia, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Miskito>

16. 2011, North America (1842-1860) Manifest Destiny [image], <http://omniatlas.com/maps/northamerica/18470914>

17. Christine Haug (1996-2016). Native American Tribes & U.S. Government. Victoriana Magazine, <http://www.victoriana.com/history/nativeamericans.html>

18. Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. (2008). Treaties Between the United States and Native Americans, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/ntreaty.asp

19. The Library of Congress. Primary Documents in U.S. History (2015). Indian Removal Act. Government Documents, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>

20. The Harvard Project of American Indian Economic Development. (2007). The State of the Native Nations Conditions under U.S. Policies of Self-Determination. p. 99, http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic177572.files/SONN_Final_01_09_07.pdf

21. Andrew Boxer (2009). Native Americans and the Federal Government. History Review, Issue 64, History Today, <http://www.historytoday.com/andrew-boxer/native-americans-and-federal-government>

not in practice. Whites and Mestizos remained at the top of this enduring race pyramid; indigenous peoples were at the bottom, subject to ongoing exploitation and dispossession. This shared view of indigenous nations as uncivilized would enable the U.S. to more easily harmonize its policy toward the Miskito Kingdom with Nicaragua.

Canada and Central America were interrelated. Failure to annex Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century would prompt the U.S. to redirect its energies to ousting the British from Central America, specifically from the Miskito Kingdom. To achieve this Washington would pursue two complementary, diplomatic policies:

1. Internationally, it would align itself with dictators (such as Napoleon²³), autocrats, and Russian Czars, against London.^{24, 25, 26}
2. Locally, it would support the territorial claims of Nicaragua to the British protectorate of the Miskito Kingdom. A “dual colonialism” would be created whereby Washington would exert indirect political, but direct economic control over Nicaragua; in return, Nicaragua would exercise direct political and cultural control, but indirect economic control over the annexed Miskito Kingdom.

By the time of the 1895 Venezuela Bound-

ary Dispute with British Guiana²⁷

, this policy had been so successful, Richard Olney, U.S. Secretary of State, could publicly proclaim “the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”²⁸

But in 1848, the focus of U.S. foreign policy would shift southward with the objective, whenever practicable, of expelling the British presence from Central America and replacing it with an American one. The Miskito Kingdom, an independent indigenous nation under the protection of the United Kingdom, became the center of Washington’s attention.

Contrary to the polemics of the U.S., the Miskito Kingdom was neither a British invention, nor a stalking horse for British imperialism. “The major native figures of the Miskito Kingdom were individuals who filled the position of ‘king.’ These Miskito kings have been portrayed in the literature as puppets of the English, put into and out of office at their whim. During historical research on the Miskito, a different picture of the kings emerged. A single line of succession has been pieced together, from 1655 to 1894, in which the eldest son of their primary wife succeeded most kings. In the few exceptional cases, the succession passed from older to younger brother. For at least the last 239 years of the kingdom, the kingship was controlled by a single family

22. Roland Soong (1999). Racial Classifications in Latin America. <http://www.zonalatina.com/Zldata55.htm>

23. Office of The Historian, U.S. Department of State. War of 1812–1815. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/war-of-1812>. Journal Article.

24. Eufrosina Dvoichenko-Markov (1954). “Americans in the Crimean War”, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 137-145.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/125706?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

25. Webster G. Tarpley (2011). U.S. Civil War: The US-Russian Alliance that Saved the Union. *Voltairenet.org*. <http://www.voltairenet.org/article169488.html>

26. Webster Griffin Tarpley (2013). [Video] “Russia’s Participation in the U.S. Civil War,” C-SPAN, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?315198-1/russias-participation-us-civil-war>

27. Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. Venezuela Boundary Dispute, 1895–1899. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/venezuela>

28. George C. Herring (2008). *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, p. 307, <http://honors290-f12rivera.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/The+War+of+1898,+The+New+Empire+and+the+Dawn+of+the+American+Century+1893-1901.pdf>

group.”²⁹ The Miskito Kingdom was already an independent state when England officially recognized it in 1689. Twenty-one years later, in 1710, London concluded an official treaty of friendship and alliance establishing a protectorate over the kingdom.³⁰ The Miskito Kingdom adopted a flag, royal standard, and royal coat of arms heavily influenced by those of the United Kingdom.

For Washington, the prize in Central America would be the financial rewards of constructing, operating, and owning a proposed inter-oceanic canal stretching from Nicaragua’s Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast of the Miskito Kingdom. To accomplish this, the U.S. objective expanded from just expelling the British from the region to extinguishing the independence of the Miskito Kingdom.

The justification for this U.S. policy was the 1823 Monroe Doctrine.³¹ Its then unenforceable rhetoric articulated the U.S.’s stated position, “The American continents...are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”³² However, as the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian observes, this meant that “The independent lands of the Western Hemisphere would be solely the United States’ domain.”³³ The irony of the Monroe Doctrine was the British Navy defending British trade with Latin America could only enforce it.³⁴

The disingenuousness of the Monroe Doctrine was asserting Latin America was now free and independent of European colonial

control. Latin American states remained European colonies. In most, a European minority ruled an indigenous majority. Instead of power residing in Madrid, it now resided in colonial capitals. Nicaragua, like most of its neighboring Spanish-speaking states, was simply a “Rhodesian republic.” The Miskito Kingdom, whose independence the U.S. opposed, had successfully exploited both geography (the formidable mountains, forests, and deep valleys of the Central Highlands that separated it from Nicaragua) and European technology (the Miskitos had procured muskets) to defend its freedom from the Spanish, which the Spanish acknowledged in their official maps (Map 2).³⁵

In territorial size, the Miskito Kingdom was quite large as the Spanish map of 1780 attests. When Spanish Central America fragmented into five separate countries in 1841, the Miskito Kingdom was larger than either Honduras or Nicaragua. It was nearly as large as Honduras and Nicaragua combined.

Sixty years later, in 1840, Heinrich Berghaus in his map of Central America in *Die Vulkanreihe von Guatemala, die Landengen von Tehuantepec, Nicaragua und Panama, und die Central Vulkane der Sud* depicted the Miskito Kingdom with virtually the same borders.

The size of the Miskito Kingdom was, in fact, even larger than these maps depicted as London’s official borders of the British protectorate included not just the Caribbean Lowlands, but the Central Highlands.³⁶ Together, it encompassed

29. Michael D. Olien (1983). The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2. New World Ethnohistory. p. 198. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3629967?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

30. Miskito Kings (Mosquitia), AD 1631 – 1894. (1999-2016). The History Files, The Americas: Central American Native Kingdoms. Retrieved from <http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsAmericas/CentralMiskito.htm>

31. Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. (2008). Monroe Doctrine. Government Document, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/monroe.asp

32. Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. Monroe Doctrine, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/war-of-1812>

33. Ibid.

34. Monroe Doctrine (2016). Monroe-Doctrine.com, <http://monroe-doctrine.com/>

35. Image from Unwillingly Africanicity: Zambos and their problem of identity in the Central American Caribbean. <http://www.ariadnaticma.com.ar/?p=2312>



Map 2 THE MISKITU KINGDOM - SPANISH MAP 1740. Realizado a partir de Eugenia Ibarra: “Mapa N.o 8. Costa de Mosquito en 1780” del fuente original: Public Record Office Foreign Office 137/78, fol. 148. Cartografía: Luis Pablo Cubero. IBARRA ROJAS Eugenia, *Del arco y la flecha a las armas de fuego. Los indios mosquitos y la historia centroamericana*. Editorial UCR (San José 2011) p. 229. <http://www.ariadnatucma.com.ar/?p=2312>

nearly sixty percent of the territory of present-day Nicaragua. The historic Nicaragua was confined to the Pacific Lowlands and extended only seventy-five kilometers inland from the Pacific Coast.

With the start of the California Gold Rush in 1848, three U.S. geopolitical objectives converged in Nicaragua: 1) expanding American business interests in Central America, 2) evicting the British from Central America, and 3) extinguishing the independence of the Miskito Kingdom. For the Miskito Kingdom, the critical years were 1849-1850. At that time, Ephraim George Squier,³⁷ a key figure in the developing field of American Anthropology, and ardent opponent of the British and the Miskito, had been appointed U.S. Charge d’Affairs for all Central America to negoti-



Map 3 BERGHAUS Miskitu Map 1840

ate treaties with Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador. He adapted the idea of Manifest Destiny to Central America, an adaptation that envisioned “dual colonialism.” Squier adamantly rejected the legal existence of the Miskito Kingdom or any right of Miskitos to have a separate state independent from Honduras and Nicaragua; his views colored subsequent U.S. policy.

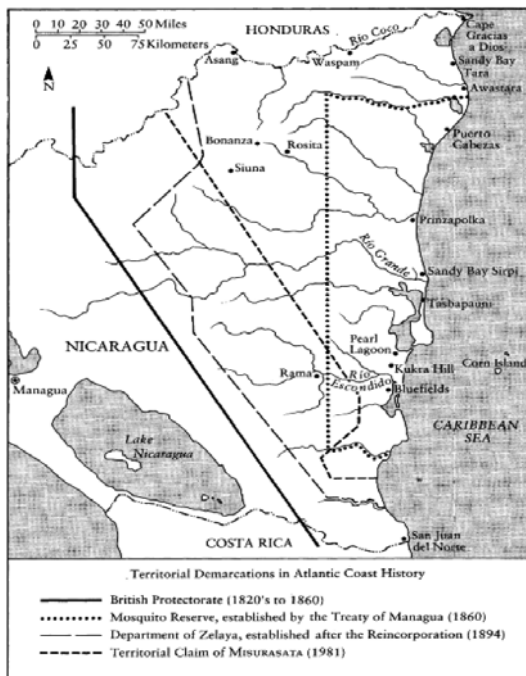
In his book *Notes on Central America*, Squier challenged the legitimacy of existing U.S. maps on Central America:

Nearly one third of Central America is assigned to the ‘Mosquito Shore’, which is represented as a distinct and sovereign state.... The Indians known as ‘Mosquitos’ are only a few thousands of miserable savages.... Even if these savages were entitled to rank as a nation, they have not, nor could they ever have the shadow of pretense of sovereignty over the fractional part of the wide expanse of territory, which this map assigns to them.... The portion of territory assigned

36. Charles R. Hale (1994). *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskito Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987*, p. 3.

37. E.G. Squier, “American Archaeologist,” (2016). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <http://www.britannica.com/biography/E-G-Squier>

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Map 4 MISKITU British Protectorate Territory 1820-1860, Treaty of Managua borders, 1860 and MISURASATA boundary 1981

by this map to the fictitious Mosquito nationality above the Rio Wanks or Segovia belongs to Honduras; the part below pertains to Nicaragua” (p. xi).³⁸

Squier continues, “The nearest approach to a nomad life is found among the mongrel savages of ‘Moscos’ or ‘Mosquitos’, on what

is known as the ‘Mosquito Shore’. They are a mixed breed of negroes and Indians....”³⁹ doomed to extinction.⁴⁰ At that time, 1849-1850, Nicaragua offered a safer, shorter route for Americans wishing to reach California than by traveling overland or sailing around Cape Horn to San Francisco. Ships would depart New York and travel to the Miskito Kingdom’s port of Greytown; from there Americans would sail up the San Juan River to Lake Nicaragua, sail across the lake, then travel by railroad to the Nicaraguan Pacific port of Brito. The sole means of transportation for this trek was Cornelius Vanderbilt’s Atlantic and Pacific Steamship Company.⁴¹

To increase travel and thereby increase revenues for his company, Vanderbilt proposed a canal from Lake Nicaragua to the Pacific Coast. Nicaragua agreed to the terms and conditions submitted by Vanderbilt, but the British government objected to an exclusively U.S. controlled and operated canal. Without the Miskito Kingdom’s port of Greytown as the Atlantic Coast terminus, the proposed canal could not be constructed (Map 3).⁴²

Control of Greytown would become a pretext for Washington to threaten war on the British protectorate of the Miskito Kingdom.

As U.S. Charge d’Affairs, Squier pursued negotiations with Nicaragua over the proposed canal, for which he was a fervent supporter. “Its general benefits to mankind, from the augmentation of commerce, the opening of new markets, the creation of new sources of

38. E. G. Squier (1854). Notes on Central America: particularly the states of Honduras and San Salvador: their geography, topography, climate, population, resources, productions, etc. etc, and the proposed Honduras inter-oceanic railway.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044051113264;view=1up;seq=11>

39. Ibid, p. 48.

40. Terry A. Barnhart (2005). Ephraim George Squier and the Development of American Anthropology. p.241, <https://books.google.com/books?id=PWm-6-ZgHTcC&pg=PA241&dq=ephrain+george+squier,+mosquito+Indians,+%22doomed+for+extinction%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUewjBpcyMh5TLahUEbiYKHRKKCKsQ6AEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=ephrain%20george%20squier%2C%20mosquito%20Indians%2C%20%22doomed%20for%20extinction%22&f=false>

41. “Nicaragua Railway & Canal 1849-1871,” (2011). Global Security.Org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/panama-canal-nicaragua-1.htm> Journal Article.

42. Proposed Route of the Nicaragua Canal, 1849–1902. Image retrieved from. <http://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/10200/10259/10259.htm>

demand, and the cheapening of all articles of import, with the consequent increase in manufactures and agriculture supplies, cannot be calculated by the narrow standard of dollars and cents.”⁴³

Later, Washington exploited its advantages in treaties with Nicaragua and Honduras to persuade London to have the *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty*, which ended their dispute over construction of a transoceanic canal, include the “neutralization” of the Miskito Kingdom. This was set forth in Article I:

The governments of the United States and Great Britain hereby declare, that neither the one nor the other will ever obtain or maintain for itself any exclusive control over the said ship canal; agreeing that neither will ever erect or maintain any fortifications commanding the same or in the vicinity thereof, or occupy, or fortify, or colonize, or assume or exercise any dominion over Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Mosquito coast [the Miskito Kingdom], or any part of Central America... (p. 44).

Although the *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty* clearly “defined Mosquitia [the Miskito Kingdom] as a political entity independent of Nicaragua,”⁴⁵ this was a diplomatic deception. The article on the *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty*, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, 1910, described Washington’s political objective in signing the

treaty:

[A]s the United States had no de facto possessions, while Great Britain had, the clause binding both not to “occupy” any part of Central America or the Mosquito Coast necessitated the abandonment of such territory as Great Britain was already actually occupying or exercising dominion over; and the United States demanded the complete abandonment of the British protectorate over the Mosquito Indians... inasmuch as a protectorate seems certainly to be recognized by the treaty, to demand its absolute abandonment was unwarranted...⁴⁶

The key words are the phrase “...as the United States had no *de facto* possessions.” True. What the U.S. had was a *de facto* alliance with Nicaragua against the British and the Miskito, and the continuing right and ability to trade with and arm Nicaragua. “Abandonment” by Great Britain meant “annihilation” of the Miskito Kingdom.

Without British legal and military protection, the Miskito Kingdom was exposed and vulnerable. The *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty* was the first step in abolishing the independence of that indigenous country. The end of the Miskito Kingdom came within ten years and in two stages. First, in 1859, London, under U.S. pressure, and militarily and financially weakened by the 1857-58 Indian Mutiny,

43. E.G. Squier (1852). Nicaragua, its people, scenery, monument and the proposed interoceanic canal, p. 281. <https://archive.org/stream/nicaraguaitspeo05squigoog#page/n322/mode/2up>. Book.

44. Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy (2008). The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, British-American Diplomacy, Convention Between the United States of America and Her Britannic Majesty, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br1850.asp

45. Marie Leger (1994). Aboriginal Peoples: Toward Self-government. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com/books?id=EGRVxZ0ZAt8C&pg=PA41&lpg=PA41&dq=miskito+kingdom&source=bl&ots=R4-sOLxjE9&sig=Oe241sSaAOo_iH2-3eBUEDNvkw4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBhtKkz7vLAhVIYyYKH1WAw14FBD0AQguMAQ#v=onepage&q=miskito%20kingdom&f=false

46. Clayton-Bulwer Treaty (1910). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, Volume VI, p. 475, <https://archive.org/stream/encyclopediaibrit06chisrich#page/474/mode/1up>

signed a convention officially surrendering the Bay Islands and the northern third of the Miskito Kingdom to Honduras.⁴⁷ Second, in 1860, London signed the *Treaty of Managua* transferring the bulk of the protectorate of the Miskito Kingdom to Nicaraguan control while establishing an extensive autonomy for the Miskitos, but in a drastically reduced enclave—a reservation.⁴⁸

It was now but a sliver of land on Nicaragua’s Atlantic Coast.⁴⁹

London’s abandonment of its traditional ally was due in large part to its weak military position in North America and the Caribbean and fear the U.S. would take advantage of its defenselessness to declare war and seize Canada and the Miskito Kingdom. With Southern States seceding from the Union, the belief in London, and among many in Washington, was that Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William Seward, who had been championing the annexation of Canada since 1850, “was still clinging to the illusion that conflict with foreign nations could bring the South back into the national fold.”

In 1866, H.R. 754 would be introduced in the U.S. Congress to officially annex Canada. In the situation they faced, the British were as exposed and vulnerable as the Miskito Kingdom. “... [N]one of Great Britain’s North American and West Indian possessions was adequately garrisoned. At the end of March 1861 there were rather less than 4,300 regulars in British North America, 2,200 of them in Canada and the rest in Nova Scotia, together with a few weak and scattered garrisons in British Columbia, Bermuda and the West Indies.”

Possessing a severe military disadvantage

at a time the U.S. was hastening toward civil war, London tried to cobble together a treaty that would deny the Americans an excuse for declaring war on the British Empire, while protecting, to some degree, the independence of the Miskitos. It would be a temporary fix.

Nicaragua sought to annul the provisions on Miskito sovereignty established in the 1860 *Treaty of Managua*. Nicaragua and the United Kingdom submitted their conflicting interpretations of the treaty to international arbitration. Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph I was to hear the case. His legal decision rendered July 2, 1881 upheld the British and Miskito interpretation.

The Emperor’s ruling declared:

- ARTICLE I: The sovereignty of the Republic of Nicaragua, which was recognized by Articles I and II of the Treaty of Managua on January 28th, 1860, is not full and unlimited with regard to the territory assigned to the Mosquito Indians, but is limited by the self-government conceded to the Mosquito Indians in Article III of this treaty.
- ARTICLE V. The Republic of Nicaragua is not entitled to grant concessions for the acquisition of natural products in the territory assigned to the Mosquito Indians. That right belongs to the Mosquito Government.
- ARTICLE VI. The Republic of Nicaragua is not entitled to regulate the trade of the Mosquito Indians, or to levy duties on goods imported into or exported from the territory reserved to the Mosquito Indi-

47. Stephen Luscombe, “Bay Islands, Brief History,” The British Empire, <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/bayislands.htm>

48. 1894, The Mosquito Coast. Image retrieved from <http://www.sandinorebellion.com/eastcoast/ATL-1927/LOC-Mosquito-Shore1894.jpg>

49. 1920, Proposed Isthmian Canal Routes, 1848-1884. Image retrieved from. <http://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/3300/3363/3363.pdf>

ans. That right belongs to the Mosquito Indians.

- ARTICLE VII. The Republic of Nicaragua is bound to pay over to the Mosquito Indians the arrears of the yearly sums assured to them by Article V. of the Treaty of Managua, which arrears now amount to \$30,859.
- ARTICLE VIII. The Republic of Nicaragua is not entitled to impose either import or export duties on goods which are either imported into or exported from the territory of the free port of San Juan del Norte (Greytown).

“The Austrian award practically established Mosquito independence of Nicaragua, and after it was given foreign influence increased. Extensive banana plantations were established by American immigrants, and a thriving commerce developed, particularly with the United States.”

U.S. Logging and Gold Mining companies also began establishing themselves in the Miskito Reserve. Within 10 years, these businesses were thriving, run by a “new class of white resident-entrepreneurs.”

Numbering about 300, half came from the United States. “In 1894 it was reported that ninety-four per cent of the wealth, enterprise, and commerce of the reserve was American. Bluefields was ‘American to the core’.”

The U.S. Minister to Nicaragua, Lewis Baker, reported “no Americans here (Miskito Reserve) has denied to Nicaragua the sovereign power over this territory.”

The reason for this was “the attempts of the ‘Reserva’ government to protect [local] small holders and middle-range entrepreneurs clashed with the interests of foreign companies and the growing colony of frequently racist

U.S. whites, who mostly welcomed Nicaragua’s annexation of the ‘Reserva.’”

These Americans, as well as Washington, opposed any British presence or influence in the Miskito Reserve. In 1888, U.S. Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard declared of the Treaty of Managua, “... the stipulations of that instrument relative to the Indians were not made for the benefit of Great Britain nor enforceable by her.”

Secretary Bayard was being duplicitous. He chose to ignore the 1881 International Arbitration Award, which emphatically rejected this contention when it was first raised by Nicaragua. In that ruling the international arbiter declared:

In regard, however, to the affairs of the Mosquito Indians, it is true that England, in the Treaty of Managua, has acknowledged the sovereignty of Nicaragua and renounced the protectorate, but this still only on condition, set forth in the treaty, of certain political and pecuniary advantages for the Mosquitoes (“subject to the conditions and engagements specified in the treaty, Article I.”)

England had an interest of its own in the fulfillment of these conditions stipulated in favor of those who were formerly under its protection, and therefore also a right of its own to insist upon the fulfillment of those promises as well as of all other clauses of the treaty. The Government of Nicaragua was wrong in calling this an inadmissible “intervention,” inasmuch as pressing for the fulfillment of engagements undertaken by treaty on the part of a foreign state is not to be classified as intermeddling with the internal affairs of that state, in which intermeddling has unquestionably been prohibited under penalty. No less unjustly did

the Government of Nicaragua seek to qualify this insistence on treaty claims as a continued exercise of the relinquished protectorate, and on that ground wish to declare England’s interposition inadmissible.

Finally, the Government of the Republic of Nicaragua also expresses the desire (*Réponse*, p. 17) that the award should declare that the Treaty of Nicaragua [Managua], as having accomplished its purpose, is annulled in respect of Mosquitia, and that in future the parties concerned are bound in this respect to comply solely with the decisions adopted and enumerated in the award. This desire militates against universal principles of law, and therefore cannot be acceded to. The interpretation of a treaty can never supersede the treaty interpreted, and the judicial decision creates no new right, but only affirms and establishes the existing right.

The U.S. maintained the position that the Miskitos had to submit to all the laws Nicaragua enacted regardless of Miskito legal rights established in the 1860 Treaty of Managua and confirmed by the ruling of the International Arbitration. Two factors influenced Washington’s policy toward the Miskitos. First was the resurrection of the dream of building a Nicaraguan transoceanic canal. In 1887, the year preceding Secretary Bayard’s letter, Nicaragua had signed a concession with an American firm to build a canal through Nicaragua and the Miskito Reserve. An Act of Congress would incorporate the American firm, the Maritime Canal Company, in 1889, the year following the Secretary’s letter. Second was domestic U.S. legislation, the Dawes Act of 1887.

This act dissolved many tribes as legal entities, wiped out tribal ownership of land, and set up individual Indian family heads with 160 free acres.”

Supporters claimed the legislation was a

progressive and humanitarian act, which would integrate, enable, and enrich American Indians. Colorado Senator Henry M. Teller declared in his opposition to this legislation, “... the real aim [of allotment] was “to get at the Indian lands and open them up to settlement. The provisions for the apparent benefit of the Indians are but the pretext to get at his lands and occupy them. ... If this were done in the name of Greed, it would be bad enough; but to do it in the name of Humanity ... is infinitely worse.

As Senator Teller foretold, “... the result [of the Dawes Act] was the passing of nearly two-thirds of Indian lands—90 million of 138 million acres—into non-Indian ownership between 1887 and 1934. In addition, the land remaining in Indian hands typically was of lower quality, with 20 million of the 48 million acres of Indian lands classified as desert or semi-desert.”

Washington would simply be applying the purpose of the Dawes Act to the Miskito Indians. There would be legal expropriation of the most valuable Miskito land, especially for the canal (as was done in the U.S. for the railroads), which would then be sold to Americans and Nicaraguans, individuals and corporations.

This required the complete elimination of British influence from the Miskito Reserve. In 1894, U.S. Secretary of State, Walter Quintin Gresham wrote to London, without any sense of inconsistency, that the U.S. “‘wanted no foreign intervention in control of the reservation’, nor resident aliens controlling the administration of affairs...Nicaragua had ‘paramount rights’ in the region.”

And by the Secretary’s implication, so did Washington.

Washington’s attitude toward the British pleased Managua, which that year, 1894, repudiated the Arbitration Decision and invaded

the Miskito Reserve. Its annexation of the Miskito Reserve was claimed to be a “reincorporation” of the land into Nicaragua. The area was renamed the “Zelaya Department” after the general/president who had so successfully violated an international treaty, international arbitration, and international law.

Despite disapproval in some quarters of Washington, the U.S. supported the annexation. “American residents [of the Miskito Reserve] indicated their satisfaction with the settlement as two of their numbers entered the [Nicaraguan-controlled] local government.”

Here is the first example of “dual colonialism.” “Thus, the year 1894 not only marked the triumph of Nicaraguan nationalism but also, and possibly even more so, the victory of foreign companies.”

Washington was not interested in the opinions of the indigenous population, which opposed the invasion by Nicaragua. “The Creole leadership of the Miskito Reserve resisted Zelaya’s forces when they occupied Bluefields in 1894 and the ‘Reincorporation’ was always referred to as the ‘overthrow.’ Even in 1924, Creoles complained to a Government Commission that ‘the Atlantic Coast is a conquered, disaffected province ... governed by a hand of iron and obliged to pay tribute ... in certain districts [government administrators] are looked upon by the people as their natural enemy. Establishing a distrust which extends to any person or thing related to government.’”

Without British power or influence to counter its actions in Central America, the U.S. would exert indirect political control over Nicaragua, installing and deposing “presidents,” while exercising direct economic control over its economy including that of the annexed Miskito Kingdom. The extent of control was demonstrated in “the Reyes uprising of 1899, the Emery claim of 1903–1909, and the United States and Nicaragua Mining Company claim

of 1908–1912.”

In return, Nicaragua would exercise political and cultural domination over the Miskitos, and be able to colonize Miskito lands. The “... administrative institutions established by the Nicaraguan government after 1894 ... were held by Mestizos from the Pacific areas of the country... Creole culture and the English language also came under attack from the Nicaraguan government, which tried to generalize the Spanish language and Hispanic culture among the inhabitants of the Mosquitia. In Bluefields, for example, special policemen were sent to scout for school children to put into Spanish public schools.”

The last hope for the Miskitos ended in 1905, when London faced a potential conflict with Germany over Morocco and possible regional instabilities in Europe and the Middle East with the outbreak of revolutions in Russia and Persia, signed the Harrison-Altamirano Treaty and Mosquito Convention.

Article 1, abrogated the nearly half century old *Treaty of Managua*.

Article 2, declared “His Britannic Majesty agrees to recognize the absolute sovereignty of Nicaragua over the territory that constituted the former Mosquito Reserve as defined in the aforesaid Treaty of Nicaragua.”

Article 3, provided the legal cover for Nicaraguan expropriation of Indigenous land. Section b stipulates “The Government will allow the Indians to live in their villages enjoying the concession granted by this convention, and following their own Customs, *in so far as they are not opposed to the laws of the country and to public morality*.”

Section c stipulates “The Nicaraguan Government *will concede a further period of two years for them to legalize their rights to the property acquired in conformity with the regulations in force before 1894 in the Reserve*. The Government will make no charge to the said inhabitants either

for the lands or the measurement thereof, or for the grant of title deeds. For this purpose the title deeds in the possession of the said Indians and Creoles before 1894 will be renewed in conformity with the laws, and, *in cases where no such title-deed exist, the Government will give to each family at their place of residence eight manzanas of land, if the members of the family do not exceed four in number and two manzanas for each person if the family exceeds that number.*”

A manzana is equal to 1.727 acres of land. What Nicaragua offered the Miskitos was notably less than the 160 free acres the U.S. offered “American Indians” under the Dawes Act.

Article 5 established the legal cover for Nicaraguan colonization of Miskito land. “The Mosquito Indians and *other inhabitants* [Nicaraguan colonists] of the former Reserve *will enjoy the same rights as are secured by the laws of Nicaragua to other Nicaraguan citizens.*”

The British had completely surrendered the Miskitos to U.S. “dual colonialism” To insure this system ran smoothly, Washington utilized economic investments and military interventions. The years 1904-1933 saw adoption of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904-5), implementation of “Dollar Diplomacy” (1909-1913) and the outbreak of “Wilsonian Idealism” (1917-1933).

The U.S. impetus for fashioning “dual colonialism” was explained by Woodrow Wilson in 1907 when President of Princeton University. He wrote, “Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Ministers of state must safeguard concessions obtained by financiers, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations become outraged in the process. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful

corner of the world may be overlooked or left used.”

When Washington decided intervention or occupation was necessary, the American public would be assured U.S. motives were noble—opposing an oppressive regime, supporting democracy, or promoting fiscal responsibility. The reality was different. Intervention was simply to protect this “dual colonialism.”

As USMC General Smedley Darlington Butler, one of the most distinguished Marines in Corps History, observed: “War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.... I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. *I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912* (where have I heard that name before?). I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916...” (emphasis added).

U.S. military intervention in 1912 began an occupation that lasted until 1933—often employing a force as small as 100 men. The pretext for the invasion that enabled Washington to assume direct control of Nicaragua’s finances was the execution of two U.S. citizens by the Nicaraguan government. However, U.S. Secretary of State Philander C. Knox, who ordered the intervention, was legal counsel to the U.S.-owned Rosario and Light Mines Company which contributed financially to the exercise and was a major investor in Nicaragua.

In the 83 years since the departure of the

U.S. Marines, Nicaragua has had four different ideological regimes—right, left, center, and left. Each succeeding regime has further assaulted the liberties, the land, and the physical existence of the Miskitos.

Nicaragua, the Somoza Family Project

Washington placed the first, the Somoza family right-wing dictatorship (1933-1979) in power when the U.S. occupation ended and it maintained the dual colonialism. The economic policies the Somoza regime implanted on the Pacific Coast precipitated large-scale colonization and exploitation of the Atlantic Coast by the displaced Nicaraguans. In many ways, Nicaraguan colonists in the former Miskito Kingdom resemble American filibusters in Nicaragua in the 1850s. Since World War II, over 100,000 Nicaraguan Mestizos have moved onto Miskito land. Originally, a spontaneous movement, this colonization was soon supported by Managua.

“Over the past century, the central government, primarily through its agrarian institutions, gave out thousands of hectares of lands in the Caribbean region to colonists. From 1963 to 1979, the Nicaraguan Agrarian Institute (IARN) distributed almost⁷⁷ thousand hectares in private titles to colonists (PNUD 2005). . . . In addition, throughout the country, local judges were permitted to authorise *títulos supletorios* (temporary titles) until recently, meaning, first, that there is no consolidated record of all these titles and, second, there are overlaps among existing claims (Larson and Mendoza-Lewis 2009).”

In addition, companies jointly owned by Somoza and U.S. interests disastrously exploited the environment and the coastal fisheries. Growing resource breakdown accelerated as coastal indigenous peoples were forced to search for new lands along the rivers. “The inevitable friction [between Nicaraguan and

Miskito] resulted in some deaths prior to 1979, *specifically of Indians killed by Spanish-speaking migrants....*” (emphasis added).

In response to the deteriorating situation, Miskitos established organizations to defend their legal rights such as those listed here—without success.

ACARIC – Association of Agricultural Clubs of the Rio Coco: 1967-1972

The second regime was the left-wing Sandinista dictatorship (1979-1989) sympathetic to advancing a “socialist” revolution. Styling itself as “a popular, democratic, anti-imperialist national liberation struggle,” the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (*Sandinista National Liberation Front*) (FLNS) pursued colonization with plans to “integrate” the Miskito people as well as the Sumo and the Rama people and their territories into the Nicaraguan state. When conflict arose with the Miskitos, Sumo, and Rama over such policies and Managua’s growing military presence aided by the Cuban and Russian governments on the Atlantic Coast, the Sandinistas responded with “arrests of the entire Indian leadership; banning of the Indian organization MIS-URASATA; forcible relocation of over 15,000 Miskitos; total destruction of 39 villages, including livestock, personal effects, crops, fruit trees; killing, arrest and torture of hundreds of Indians; and the imposition of harsh military rule on the entire Indian region.”

Confronting threats to its political survival from U.S. economic restrictions, the CIA-backed Contra war, and the Miskito war, the Sandinistas changed its policy toward indigenous peoples and accepted autonomy for the Miskitos. But it would be an autonomy defined and implemented by Managua. In 1987, Autonomy Law 28 was passed.

Autonomy is not an end in itself, but simply a process to facilitate integration into

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”

Nicaragua. It is colonialism by another name. It resembles what Morocco offered the Western Sahara¹ and Indonesia offered Dutch New Guinea.² In all three, the more numerous Nicaraguans, Moroccans, and Indonesians threaten the smaller indigenous populations with dispossession through the colonization of their lands.

“Autonomy” is, therefore, a public relations tool employed by Managua to soothe the conscience of the international community while insuring the dispossession of the Miskito people continues. The nature of Nicaraguan colonialism can be seen in the implementation of “autonomy.” First, autonomy was not given to the former Miskito Kingdom or even to the Miskito Reserve. Instead, the historic territory of the Miskito Kingdom was divided into two parts (Map 5).³ The names bestowed upon these two autonomous regions, and their inhabitants, are devoid of all ethnic connotations. The regions are the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region and the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region. The inhabitants are referred to as “Costeños”—a Spanish term for coast dwellers.

The Sandinistas advanced this autonomy at a time they were a Marxist organization, dependent on support from the Cubans and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union with its equally empty system of self-government for Union Republics and Autonomous Republics still labeled these administrative units after the name of the largest indigenous group. The Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, for example, was

The AUTONOMY STATUTE FOR THE REGIONS OF THE ATLANTIC COAST OF NICARAGUA as it is entitled defines “autonomy” as a:

- “process...whereby the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of its’ inhabitants are recognized, and which ensures equality in diversity, strengthens national unity and the territorial integrity of the nation (Article IV)
- “...enriches our national culture; recognizes and strengthens ethnic identity; respects the particular aspects of the cultures of the different Communities of the Atlantic Coast and preserves their history; recognizes the right to religious freedom; and, without deepening differences, recognizes the different identities which lay the basis for building national unity. (Article V)
- “...to create programs which further their development and ensure the rights of these Communities to organize themselves and to live in the ways which correspond to their legitimate traditions. (Article VIII) (Italics added).

named for the Uzbeks who constitute the largest, indigenous group in that republic. Within Uzbekistan, itself, there is the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan named for the largest, indigenous group in that territory, the Karakalaps. That the Sandinistas refused even this symbolic acknowledgement of the existence of the Miskito, Sumo, and Rama peoples reflects the hostility most Nicaraguans, regardless of ideology, have toward the indigenous population. It expresses itself in many ways including the continual attempt to reduce, if not deny, the existence of the Miskito people as much as possible.

The creation of the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region and Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region not only partitioned

1 Abdelhak El Fadli and Hamid Belhouari (2016). The Autonomy Plan for the Sahara. <http://autonomy-plan.org/the-autonomy-plan-for-sahara>

2 John Ahni Schertow (November 25, 2005). Special Autonomy: Indonesia and the Natives of Papua. IC Magazine, <https://intercontinentalcry.org/special-autonomy-indonesia-and-the-natives-of-papua/>

3 2007, Nicaragua. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20120916224139/http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/mrginicaragua39wg.pdf>

the former Miskito Kingdom; it divided the Miskito people into two different, administrative units, and separated part of them from the other indigenous communities with whom they were historically connected—Rama, Mawangna, and Creole (Map 6).⁴

With the assumption of power by the Sandinistas, the traditional workings of dual colonialism ceased. But the conflict between the U.S. and the Sandinistas highlighted the key component of dual colonialism that transcends all their political and economic differences—it is their shared commitment to colonialism, to the rejection of the Miskitos' right to national self-determination.

In seeking to end the history of pro-American governments in Managua, the Sandinistas did not repudiate the annexation of the Miskito Kingdom by those very governments. Instead, the Sandinistas sought to exploit that annexation to their own advantage. And while the U.S. sought the overthrow of the Sandinistas, arming the Miskitos to that end, Washington would not support Miskito independence. The U.S. is as committed as its adversary, the Sandinistas, and the Sandinistas are as committed as their adversary, the Somocistas, in opposing the restoration of the independence of the Miskito Kingdom. Yet, Washington, the Sandinistas, and non-Sandinista governments of Nicaragua officially recognized the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from the Soviet Union and that of Montenegro from Serbia.

The situation for the Miskitos continued to deteriorate under the next two regimes, the center-right government beginning with Violeta Chamorro (1990-2006) and then the return of the Sandinistas (2006-present). In



Map 5 Miskitu, Sumo and Rama Autonomous areas. Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120916224139/http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/mrgnicaragua39wg.pdf>

2000, Nicaragua's Supreme Electoral Council attempted to prevent the Miskito organization, YATAMA, from running in local elections. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights eventually overturned its decision.⁵ The Court's ruling, however, was a temporary victory that could not disguise the fact the Miskito territory is a colony of Nicaragua.

Overlapping local jurisdictions that require a two-third vote of Nicaragua's National

4. 1993, Mapa demográfico y lingüístico del Caribe nicaragüense. Retrieved from https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021534/Contested_Ideological.pdf

5. Sandra Brunnegger (2007). From Conflict to Autonomy in Nicaragua: Lessons Learnt. *Minority Rights Group International*, p. 7. <http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-105-From-Conflict-to-Autonomy-in-Nicaragua-Lessons-Learnt.pdf>

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”



Adapted by the Center for World Indigenous Studies 2016

Map 6 Atlantic Coast linguistic group locations-
 Source: https://ncela.ed.gov/files/rcd/BE021534/Contested_Ideological.pdf

Assembly to change plagues the autonomous regions. Exacerbating all of this is the fact that “in the 1990s, the National Agrarian Reform Institute (Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria) (INRA) gave out titles in collective blocs to former combatants (some indigenous, some non-indigenous), as well as private titles to non-indigenous households, but specific data are not available.”⁶ This has resulted in confusion, conflict and “intrigues involving the disposition of natural

resource in the territories.”⁷ It is the natural wealth of the Miskitos, land and sea, which all Nicaraguan governments have coveted.

In 2005, nearly twenty years after the adoption of the Autonomy Law, the United National Development Program report avowed “... the central governments did not support the strengthening of autonomy but rather sought to maintain “the political, economic and cultural subordination” of the Caribbean Coast and its existence as a natural resource reserve at the service of primarily national interests... One survey found 66 percent of those interviewed [in the autonomous regions] agreed “the principle problem is that the central government ‘from Managua’ has not wanted to support autonomy.”⁸

Three years later, in 2008, The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights **noted** in its concluding observations that the Atlantic autonomous regions had low rates of food security, literacy and basic services: The Committee expresses its concern at the existence of racial prejudice against indigenous people, especially in the Atlantic Autonomous Regions and in particular against indigenous and Afro-descendant women. The Committee also regrets the many problems affecting indigenous peoples, including serious shortcomings in the health and education services; and the lack of an institutional presence in their territories; and the absence of a consultation process to seek communities’ free, prior and informed consent to the exploitation of natural resources in their territories.⁹

7. Ibid.

8. Anne M. Larson and Jadder Lewis-Mendoza (2012). Decentralisation and devolution in Nicaragua’s North Atlantic autonomous region: Natural resources and indigenous peoples’ rights. *International Journal of the Commons*, pp. 179-199 . <https://www.thecommonsjournal.org/articles/10.18352/ijc.315/>. Journal Article.

9. Poverty in Nicaragua’s Autonomous Regions. (2014). Human Rights and Business Country Guide, Danish Institute for Human Rights. <http://hrbcountryguide.org/2014/03/poverty-in-nicaraguas-autonomous-regions/> Journal Article.

6. Ibid.

Two years after that in 2010, the International Federation for Human Rights reported,

Despite having the title deeds to their lands, the communities involved were not consulted about various projects planned to be built on their territory.

That same year... the Inter-American Court of Human Rights decided that Nicaragua [...] has not adopted the measures needed to ensure the effective participation of the autonomous regions' indigenous and ethnic communities in electoral procedures, taking into account their traditions, usages and customs.¹⁰

Also in 2010 the Nicaraguan organization SIMAS reported "that extensive mono-cropping of export commodities has reduced small-scale diversified food production, impacting food availability in poor communities. The report noted that as a result of poor harvesting and cultivation practices, the possibility of natural disasters increased, endangering food supply to local communities."¹¹ In 2011, The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported "that the right to education was also limited by lack of schools, materials and human resources in the Autonomous Regions..."¹² The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also noted "the autonomous regions are the poorest in Nicaragua."¹³

That same year the Centro para los Derechos Humanos, Ciudadanos y Autóno-

mos reported: "the unemployment rate of Afro-descendants [in Autonomous Regions]... was close to 90 percent."

In 2012, the UN Development Group reported, "Areas more vulnerable to food insecurity are located in the Autonomous Regions."¹⁴ Also in 2012, the U.S. Department of State reported on the situation of the Miskitos and other indigenous peoples of the Autonomous Regions "that their rights to land, natural resources and local autonomy were violated by private firms and government-affiliated businesses that have been granted concessions in violation of national autonomy laws."¹⁵

Nicaragua's exploitation of the natural resources of the Miskitos has been devastating to the people and the environment. The Miskito rainforests constitute nearly 7% of Nicaragua's total land area, "making it the largest rainforest north of the Amazon in Brazil."¹⁶ In 2011, "[t]he news service Indigenous Peoples Issues and Resources reported...that due to leases on pasture to Honduran livestock companies, the protected forest on the Autonomous North Atlantic Region has been reduced by 20 percent in the core zone and 60 percent in the buffer zone, threatening the livelihoods of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean communities in the area, including the caring and management of forests with their ancestral practices."¹⁷

The plight of the Miskitos and their neighbors continues to deteriorate. The 2014 findings of the U.S. Department of State reveal the increasing devastation, discrimination, and death Nicaragua is inflicting upon the Miskito

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nicaragua: Caribbean Lowlands. (2016). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua#Caribbean_lowlands

¹⁷ Nicaragua: Region Profiles. (2014). Human Rights and Business Country Guide, Danish Institute for Human Rights. <http://hrbcountryguide.org/countries/nicaragua/region-profiles/#fn12-4734>. Journal Article.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nicaragua: Region Profiles. (2014). Human Rights and Business Country Guide, Danish Institute for Human Rights. <http://hrbcountryguide.org/countries/nicaragua/region-profiles/#fn14-4734>. Journal Article.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”

people:

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua is plagued by unemployment; over 55 percent of the population is without regular work, and crime. The refusal of Managua to establish any effective law enforcement institutions in the two autonomous regions has allowed international crime cartels to flourish. The Atlantic Coast has become both a major transit route for cocaine flowing from South America to the United States and for the trafficking of indigenous women and girls as sex slaves to foreign “buyers.”

Indigenous peoples in the rural areas of the autonomous regions not only lack the legal protection of official government documents, such as birth certificates, identity cards, and land titles, they lack access to public services. The Nicaraguan government refuses to invest in the local infrastructure resulting in deteriorating roads that place many indigenous lives at risk by making medicine and health care almost unobtainable. Managua, likewise, does not provide educational materials in the indigenous languages, as required by law, insuring high levels of illiteracy in indigenous communities.¹⁸

The indigenous communities are under-represented in the legislative branch and decisions, ensuring that the exploitation of the energy, minerals, timber, and other natural resources of their lands are often reached without their participation or input. Even though the proposed Nicara-

guan Canal will be built on and through indigenous land, indigenous groups are not members of the Grand Canal Authority, which oversees the implementation of the canal project. In violation of the Nicaragua’s Constitution and Autonomy Law, Managua is unwilling to prevent, if it is not actively encouraging, land grabs of indigenous lands by Nicaraguan colonists and illegal logging operations and other exploitation of natural resources of indigenous land by Nicaraguan allied businesses.¹⁹

The Nicaragua Grand Canal, cited by the US Department of State, and billed by its contractor, the Chinese firm, the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND), as “the largest civil earth-moving operation in history,”²⁰ includes numerous sub-projects, including industrial centers, new railways, oil pipelines, two deep water port (Brito on the Pacific Coast and Punta Gorda on the Atlantic Coast), an airport, a free trade zone, upmarket hotels, electricity plant, and cement and explosive factories,²¹ and poses immediate and long-term threats to the environment and to the rights of indigenous peoples of the former Miskito Kingdom, including the Rama, Garifuna, Mayangna, Creole,

18 U.S. Department of State (2014). Nicaragua. <http://paei.state.gov/j/inl/regions/westernhemisphere/219175.htm>

19 U.S. Department of State (2015). Nicaragua: [Trafficking in Persons Report](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243503.htm). <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243503.htm>

20 Josh Ferry Woodard. (October 23, 2015). Waiting for the Canal: A controversial \$50 billion, Chinese-built construction project will upend life in Nicaragua. Slate, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2015/10/a_50_billion_chinese_built_canal_will_transform_life_in_nicaragua.html

21 Nina Lakhani. (November 30, 2014). China’s Nicaragua Canal Could Spark a New Central America Revolution. The Daily Beast. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/30/china-s-nicaragua-canal-could-spark-a-new-central-america-revolution.html>

*Miskito, and Ulwa.*²²

Nicaragua, China, the United States and the Grand Canal

Nicaragua's Grand Canal is being built to accommodate the next generation of super-sized container ships, the Triple-E, which cannot fit through the Panama Canal. Even after the current expansion of the Panama Canal that canal will only be able to accommodate ships carrying a maximum of 13,000 containers. In comparison, Nicaragua's Canal will accommodate ships carrying 23,000 containers. Illustration 123 shows the evolution in the size and carrying capacity of container ships, while Illustration 224 provides a comparison of the handling capacities of the proposed Nicaraguan Grand Canal versus the extended Panama Canal.

For such a monumental engineering project as the Nicaraguan Grand Canal, it is remarkable that questions as to its practicality, feasibility, and legality have not been adequately addressed. First and foremost, the need for building a Nicaraguan canal is dubious. Bruce Carlton, CEO of the shipping industry advocacy group, National Industrial Transportation League, expressed the opinion of many experts when he said "I don't think there's enough ship traffic to warrant the construction of another canal."²⁵ Michael Storgaard, spokesman for

Maersk, the world's largest container-shipping company, stated that for his firm, "It's not something we have a demand for, and we're not able, at this point, to tell whether we will use it."²⁶ As a transportation expert, Professor Jean-Paul Rodrigue of Hofstra University, explained "The shipping industry is bleeding... The current volume is not conducive for this type of investment."²⁷

Second, no ports in North or South America are able to handle the new Triple-E super-container ships.²⁸

As for feasibility, there are three serious problems with constructing a canal through Nicaragua. First, it lies in the middle of the Hurricane belt.²⁹ According to Robert Stallard, a research hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute: "You're likely going to be looking at hurricanes vastly more powerful than anything that ever hit Panama, and ever will;" a storm like Hurricane Mitch, which killed 3,800 people in Nicaragua in 1998, would probably cause the canal to flood, triggering mudslides that would breach locks and dams. Communities, homes, roads and power lines would be swamped."³⁰

Second, the canal will run through Lake Nicaragua, which is home to two active volcanoes. There are 19 volcanoes in Nicaragua, a

22 Rachel Nuwer (February 20, 2014). Nicaragua Plans to Bisect the Country With a Massive Canal. Smithsonian.com. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/nicaragua-plans-bisect-country-massive-canal-180949838/?no-ist> Electronic article.

23 2013, How much bigger can container ships get? Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21432226>

24 2013, The Grand Canal of Nicaragua: A Question of Adding and Subtracting or a Geopolitical Equation? Retrieved from <http://www.oilamerica.com.pa/en/news/2013-08-14.html>

25 Silvana Ordoñez (February 25, 2015). Who's behind the 'Nicaragua Grand Canal'—and why? CNBC. <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/02/25/nicaragua-grand-canal-chinese-built-waterway-generates-lots-of-questions.html>

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Rupert Neate (March 6, 2013). Size matters as Triple E container ships sail for Europe. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/06/triple-e-container-ship-europe>

29 Matthew Shaer (December 2014). A New Canal Through Central America Could Have Devastating Consequences. Smithsonian Magazine. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/new-canal-through-central-america-could-have-devastating-consequences-180953394/?no-ist>

30 Ibid.

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”

total of eight of which are active.^{31,32}

Third, the canal is being built through a land noted for significant seismic activity.³³ Nicaragua has experienced nine major earthquakes since 1931.³⁴ In some cases, the initial damage is exacerbated by the resulting tsunami, which follows in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Then there is the lack of transparency and legality in the awarding of the contract to the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND) to build and operate the canal.

1. “The consortium in charge — the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND) led by Beijing-based telecom billionaire Wang Jing - has little experience with these sorts of projects”³⁵ In addition, “The chairman, Wang Jing, has so far failed to follow through on developing a telephone company he bought concessions for in Nicaragua last year, and there is likewise no signs of progress in 12 of the 20 countries where Wang has committed to other large-scale projects, [the South China Morning Post reports](#).”³⁶

2. The bill authorizing the canal project was pushed through the Nicaraguan Parlia-

ment by President Ortega “with scant debate and no bidding.”³⁷ It grants HKND “exclusive rights to land along the canal route, fifty two percent of which passes through indigenous territories,”³⁸ and “allows HKND to ‘design, develop, engineer, finance, construct, possess, operate, maintain and administer’ the canal project for 50 to 100 years[...] most of the economic gains will be directed to the Chinese investment company rather than the people of Nicaragua.”³⁹ In return, “Nicaragua will receive only \$10 million annually for the first decade while controlling no ownership. Following the first decade of operation Nicaragua will be granted a ten percent increase in ownership stake every 10 years.”⁴⁰ In addition, HKND “is indemnified against any delays caused by protests or legal challenges, but Nicaragua would not be compensated if the canal is abandoned.”⁴¹

31 “Volcanoes of Nicaragua.” Volcano Discovery. <http://www.volcanodiscovery.com/nicaragua.html>

32 1997, Major Volcanoes of Nicaragua. Retrieved from http://www.vulkaner.no/v/volcan/map_nica.html

33 Historic Earthquakes. U.S. Geological Survey. http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/events/1972_12_23.php

34 List of earthquakes in Nicaragua (2015). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_earthquakes_in_Nicaragua

35 Brad Plumer (February 26, 2015). The fiasco that is the Nicaragua Canal, explained (Updated). Vox. <http://www.vox.com/2015/2/26/8114151/nicaragua-canal>

36 Rachel Nuwer (February 20, 2014). Nicaragua Plans to Bisect the Country With a Massive Canal. Smithsonian Magazine. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/nicaragua-plans-bisect-country-massive-canal-180949838/?no-ist>

37 Chris Kraul (May 5, 2015). Nicaragua Canal: A Giant Project With Huge Environmental Costs. Yale Environment 360. Retrieved from <http://e360.yale.edu/feature/nicaragua-canal-a-giant-project-with-huge-environmental-costs/2871/>

38 Eva Hershaw (September 15, 2015). A Mega-Canal In Nicaragua Could Kill Off Jaguars and Indigenous Groups. Vice News. <https://news.vice.com/article/a-mega-canal-in-nicaragua-could-kill-off-jaguars-and-indigenous-groups>

39 Josh Ferry Woodard (October 23, 2015). Waiting for the Canal: A controversial \$50 billion, Chinese-built construction project will upend life in Nicaragua. Slate. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2015/10/a_50_billion_chinese_built_canal_will_transform_life_in_nicaragua.html

40 Daniel Runde (May 26, 2015). Should the U.S. Worry About China’s Canal in Nicaragua? Foreign Policy, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/26/should-the-us-worry-about-chinas-canal-in-nicaragua/>

41 Nina Lakhani. (November 30, 2014). China’s Nicaragua Canal Could Spark a New Central America Revolution. The Daily Beast. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/30/china-s-nicaragua-canal-could-spark-a-new-central-america-revolution.html>

3. “No environmental reviews were conducted beforehand, even though the project runs through Lake Nicaragua, the country’s main source of drinking water.”⁴²
4. “No one knows how HKND will actually finance the project.”⁴³

For the Sandinista Government of President Ortega, the stated purpose for pursuing construction of such a controversial project is the belief it will reduce unemployment and poverty among Nicaraguans by creating 250,000 jobs,⁴⁴ doubling the GDP, ⁴⁵ making Nicaragua the maritime capital of the world⁴⁶ that will eventually account for five percent of global commerce that moves by sea.⁴⁷ AND the canal project will “further integrate Nicaragua’s autonomous regions on the Caribbean coast into its economic and political centers in the Pacific region.”⁴⁸

42 Brad Plumer (February 26, 2015). The fiasco that is the Nicaragua Canal, explained (Updated). Vox. <http://www.vox.com/2015/2/26/8114151/nicaragua-canal>

43 Ibid.

44 Nina Lakhani (November 30, 2014). China’s Nicaragua Canal Could Spark a New Central America Revolution. The Daily Beast. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/30/china-s-nicaragua-canal-could-spark-a-new-central-america-revolution.html> Electronic Article.

45 Greg Miller (February 26, 2014). Why the Plan to Dig a Canal Across Nicaragua Could Be a Very Bad Idea. Science. <http://www.wired.com/2014/02/nicaragua-canal/>

46 Nina Lakhani (November 30, 2014). China’s Nicaragua Canal Could Spark a New Central America Revolution. The Daily Beast. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/11/30/china-s-nicaragua-canal-could-spark-a-new-central-america-revolution.html>

47 Ishaan Tharoor (December 23, 2014). Why the Chinese-backed Nicaragua Canal may be a disaster. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/23/why-the-chinese-backed-nicaragua-canal-may-be-a-disaster/>

48 Florian Doerr (Winter 2014/2015). Peasant Resistance Against Expropriations for Nicaragua’s Great Inter-oceanic Canal. Future of Food: Journal on Food, Agriculture and Society. p. 83. <https://kobra.bibliothek.uni-kassel.de/bitstream/urn:nbn:de:hebis:34-2014082545960/1/fofjVol-2No2S80.pdf>

Add to that admission the estimate by the UN Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) that the number of Nicaraguans, 353,200, who will enter the work force between 2015 and 2020⁴⁹ exceeds the combined population of every man, woman, and child of the indigenous inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast,⁵⁰ and the canal serves to advance the ongoing Nicaraguan colonization and exploitation of the land and natural wealth of the occupied Miskito Kingdom to the detriment of the very existence of the indigenous peoples.

The anti-indigenous sentiment among Nicaraguan officials favoring the canal was given voice by Manuel Coronel Kautz, head of the canal authority. In an interview with *The Guardian* newspaper, he exclaimed, “It’s like when the Spanish came here, they brought a new culture. The same is coming with the canal...It is very difficult to see what will happen later—just as it was difficult for the indigenous people to imagine what would happen when they saw the first [European] boats.”

Guardian reporter, Jonathan Watts, added the history behind Mr. Coronel Kautz’s words. “For the native Americans, of course, that first glimpse of Spanish caravels was the beginning of an apocalypse. Columbus’s ships were soon followed by waves of conquistadores who’s feuding, disease and hunger for gold and slaves led to the annihilation of many indigenous populations.”

Map 7⁵¹ shows how the canal carves up the

49 The Nicaragua Canal and jobs: how many and for whom? (January 15, 2015). Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign..Retrieved from <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/news/article/106/The-Nicaragua-Canal-and-jobs:how-many-and-for-whom>

50 International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) (2015). Indigenous peoples in Nicaragua. <http://www.iwgia.org/regions/latin-america/nicaragua>

51. 2014, Nicaragua Carve-Up. Retrieved from <http://www.wired.com/2014/02/nicaragua-canal/>

two autonomous regions, the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region and the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region, and “will destroy about 400,000 hectares of rainforests and wetlands [approximately one million acres out of a total of 7.9 million acres], including parts of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, which acts as a natural land bridge from South to North America for wandering animals such as ocelots and jaguars.”⁵² This is in violation of the International Convention on Biodiversity, which Nicaragua ratified in 1996.⁵³

Jorge A. Huete-Pérez, vice-president of the Nicaraguan Academy of Sciences, writing in *Nature*, outlines the potential environmental hazards posed by the construction and operation of the canal. “[T]his canal could create an environmental disaster in Nicaragua and beyond.”⁵⁴

Traffic using the canal would endanger the Colombian biosphere reserve and the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve, the second largest coral reef ecosystem in the Caribbean. Professor Pedro Alvarez notes in addition to potential oil spills, and introduction of other containments into Lake Nicaragua by cargo ships, the “Invasive species brought by transoceanic ships...could threaten the extinction of aquatic plants and fish, such as the cichlids that have been evolving since the lake’s formation.”⁵⁵

In addition, there is the question of what toxins the canal dredging will unleash from the bottom of Lake Nicaragua. According to Victor Campos, director of the Humboldt Center, “What could happen is that contaminants like mercury, arsenic, and heavy metals that lie beneath the lake bottom, which were put there by volcanic activity, will be brought to the surface by the digging. This could alter the natural composition of the water.”⁵⁶ Contamination of water and soil risks serious health hazards for people dependent on the water and farming.

An evaluation of the serious threats the canal poses to the environment and the indigenous peoples of the former Miskito Kingdom appeared in *Environmental Science and Technology*, entitled “Scientists Raise Alarms about Fast Tracking of Transoceanic Canal through Nicaragua.” The scientists call attention to the fact “More than 50% of the canal will cut through communal indigenous and Afro-descendant territories...one obvious consequence of the canal and subprojects is the expropriation of a vast amount of land. A likely outcome is forcing indigenous people off their land and the displacement of at least 277 communities and more than a hundred thousand people, including settlements from protected indigenous territories such as the Rama and Creole.”⁵⁷

As currently proposed, the canal project will destroy the cultural, if not the physical, existence of the Rama, the smallest and most

52. Josh Ferry Woodard (October 23, 2015). Waiting for the Canal: A controversial \$50 billion, Chinese-built construction project will upend life in Nicaragua. Slate. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2015/10/a_50_billion_chinese_built_canal_will_transform_life_in_nicaragua.html

53. Convention of Biological Diversity. Nicaragua—Country Profile. <https://www.cbd.int/countries/default.shtml?country=ni>

54. Taylor Butch. (July 20, 2015). Nicaragua Canal: Major Project and Major Impact. International Policy Digest. <http://intpolicydigest.org/2015/07/20/nicaragua-canal-major-project-and-major-impact/> Journal Article.

55. Sumit Passary (March 5, 2015). Scientists Wary About Environmental Effects of Canal-Building Project In Nicaragua. Tech Times. <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/37433/20150305/scientists-wary-about-environmental-effects-of-canal-building-project-in-nicaragua.htm#sthash.szxYPEJa.dpuf>

[scientists-wary-about-environmental-effects-of-canal-building-project-in-nicaragua.htm#sthash.szxYPEJa.dpuf](http://www.techtimes.com/articles/37433/20150305/scientists-wary-about-environmental-effects-of-canal-building-project-in-nicaragua.htm#sthash.szxYPEJa.dpuf) <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/37433/20150305/scientists-wary-about-environmental-effects-of-canal-building-project-in-nicaragua.htm>

56. Chris Kraul (May 5, 2015). Nicaragua Canal: A Giant Project with Huge Environmental Costs. Yale Environment 360. http://e360.yale.edu/feature/nicaragua_canal_a_giant_project_with_huge_environmental_costs/2871/

57. Sumit Passary (March 5, 2015). Scientists Wary About Environmental Effects Of Canal-Building Project In Nicaragua. Tech Times. <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/37433/20150305/scientists-wary-about-environmental-effects-of-canal-building-project-in-nicaragua.htm>

vulnerable of the indigenous peoples of the former Miskito Kingdom. The Rama population is just 2,000 people.⁵⁸ “Only several dozen people still speak the Rama language, one of the most endangered in the world.... If this project gets implemented, there is a strong possibility that the Rama language spoken in Bankukuk Taik will disappear as the last people who speak that tongue get forcibly displaced from their land,” McCray, the Rama tribe’s first lawyer, told the Washington, D.C.-based Inter-American Commission on Human Rights....”⁵⁹

Carlos Billis, president of the Rama community at Bankukuk Taik articulated his people’s concerns: “I’m 100% against the canal. It will destroy the nature that we are as much a part of as the trees that grow here and spread their seeds. The government wants to move us for a project that has nothing to do with us. There’s been no consultation, but they are going ahead regardless. This is discrimination against Indians, the same discrimination that’s been seen all over the world for so long.”⁶⁰

“The Rama’s territory, along Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast, stretches roughly from the Costa Rican border north to just south of Bluefields (Map 8).⁶¹ Their territory is shared

with the Kriols, descendants of Africans who adopted the Rama way of life centuries ago. The Rama-Kriols hold a communal title not only to the nine settlements where community members live, but also to the 4,843-square-kilometer territory where they fish, hunt, and farm. If current construction plans for the canal go ahead, that territory will be severed in two.”⁶² And “[t]he Rama way of life, dependent on small-scale farming, fishing and some hunting, is likely to end forever if the project goes ahead.”⁶³

Map 7⁶⁴ shows the canal project bisecting the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region, includes creation of an artificial lake, Atlanta Lake, new deepwater port, and “new tourist spot or infrastructure.” In addition to endangering the environment, these sub-projects will adversely impact the demographics of the region in two ways. The first is the forced relocation of the Rama and Creole peoples from their homelands. “There are sacred grounds with ancestral burial sites. There are tombs. Hundreds of years ago, the ancestors lived here.”⁶⁵ Remarkably, Managua has “no clear relocation plan to deal with the tens of thousands...who will be displaced by the canal.”⁶⁶ Second is the introduction of Nicaraguan

58 Nicaragua (2014). International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), p.93. Retrieved from <http://www.iwgia.org/images/stories/sections/regions/latin-america/documents/IW2014/NicaraguaW2014.pdf>

59 Tim Rogers (March 17, 2015). Death of a Language: Nicaraguan indigenous group fears Chinese canal will be a death sentence. *Fusion*. <http://fusion.net/story/105156/nicaraguan-indigenous-group-fears-chinese-canal-will-be-a-death-sentence/> Electronic Article.

60 Jonathan Watts (January 20, 2015). Land of opportunity—and fear—along route of Nicaragua’s giant new canal. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/20/sp-nicaragua-canal-land-opportunity-fear-route>

61 2015, Canal, Blind to its Environmental Cost. Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nicaragua-constructs-enormous-canal-blind-to-its-environmental-cost/#>

62 Emily Liedel (August 27, 2015) How an Indigenous Group is Battling Construction of the Nicaragua Canal. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-indigenous-group-battling-construction-nicaragua-canal-180956418/?no-ist>

63 Tim Johnson (June 18, 2015). A Vanishing Culture: Nicaragua’s Rama Indians Face Peril from Canal and Migrants. *McClatchy Report*. <http://media.mcclatchydc.com/static/features/NicaCanal/RAMA.html>

64 2015, Canal, Blind to its Environmental Cost. Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nicaragua-constructs-enormous-canal-blind-to-its-environmental-cost/#>

65 Ibid.

66 Tim Rogers (March 17, 2015). Nicaraguan indigenous group fears Chinese canal will be a death sentence. *Fusion*. <http://fusion.net/story/105156/nicaraguan-indigenous-group-fears-chinese-canal-will-be-a-death-sentence/>

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”



Map 7 NICARAGUA CARVE-UP. Source: <http://www.wired.com/2014/02/nicaragua-canal/>

National Geographic warns “At risk are ‘some of the most fragile, pristine and scientifically important’ regions of Central America...The effects of construction, major roadways, a coast-to-coast railway system and oil pipeline, neighboring industrial free-trade zones, and two international airports will transform wetlands into dry zones, remove hardwood forests, and destroy the habitats of animals including those of the coastal, air, land, and freshwater zones.”¹

¹ Brian Clark Howard (February 22, 2014). Nicaraguan Canal Could Wreck Environment, Scientists Say: A planned rival to the Panama Canal carries environmental consequences. National Geographic.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140220-nicaraguan-canal-environment-conservation/>

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”



Map 9 NICARAGUA/CHINA CANAL THROUGH RAAS

and Creole. Nicaraguan officials unilaterally sidestepped this roadblock in December 2013 by passing Law 840.⁷⁵ This legally permits the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group (HKND), “the ability to expropriate land and resources as the company deems necessary to complete its work, which include among other smaller projects like creation of railways, factories, and an airport....”⁷⁶

“Those displaced by the canal would be paid for their property according to June 2013 assessments of the land’s value; while they can contest the amount offered as compensation, they cannot complain about the land being expropriated from them...”⁷⁷

The Rama, Creole and Miskito peoples sought legal redress, first with the Supreme Court of Nicaragua. According to the IWGIA,

In order to facilitate the [canal] project, Law 840 was approved, published on 14 June 2013. This is the ‘Special Law for the Development of Nicaraguan Infrastructure and Transport Specific to the Canal, Free Trade Zones and Associated Infrastructure’, which repeals

various other legal provisions. Authorities from the Rama-Kriol territory, the Miskitu community of Tasbapounie in the territory of the Cuenca de Laguna de Perlas and the Black Creole Indigenous Community of Bluefields, all in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court of Justice—one of a total of 31 appeals for unconstitutionality—claiming that the law violated 23 articles of the Political Constitution and other international instruments promoting and protecting indigenous peoples ratified by Nicaragua. The Supreme Court of Justice, however, rejected all these appeals in just one ruling, claiming that the consultations of public officials from the autonomous regions supplanted the property rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, thus prioritising the investment of a private equity-backed transnational corporation over the traditional and historic collective ownership of the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua.⁷⁸

The indigenous communities have appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. In the opinion of Thomas Antkowiak, a Seattle University law professor, who is a specialist in the Inter-American human-rights system “the Rama’s case against the canal is, under international and even Nicaraguan law, ironclad. But that doesn’t mean the IACHR [the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights] will halt canal construction, which officially began in December 2014 on the Pacific coast, or order that the concession law be changed or overturned.”⁷⁹

78 Nicaragua. (2014). International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). P. 98. <http://www.iwgia.org/images/stories/sections/regions/latin-america/documents/IW2014/NicaraguaW2014.pdf> Web Page.

79 Emily Liedel (August 27, 2015). How an Indigenous Group Is Battling Construction of the Nicaragua Canal. Smithsonian Magazine. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-indigenous-group-battling-construction-nicaragua-canal-180956418/?no-ist>

75 **Taylor Butch** (July 20, 2015). Nicaragua Canal: Major Project and Major Impact. International Policy Digest. <http://intpolicydigest.org/2015/07/20/nicaragua-canal-major-project-and-major-impact/>

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

Transparency International rates Nicaragua as a highly corrupt country, where the rule of law is problematic.⁸⁰ It is ranked 130 out of 168 with a score of 27 out of 100.⁸¹ What the legislative and judicial process involving the Nicaraguan Grand Canal demonstrated is that the indigenous peoples of the former Miskito Kingdom—including Miskito, Mayangna, Rama, Garifuna, and Creole—have no legal rights or protection to their lands, lives or culture as long as the Nicaraguan occupation of their ancestral homeland continues.

As the conditions of life worsen for the Rama and Creole with the approaching canal, Nicaraguan colonization of Miskito lands in the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region continues as does the exploitation and destruction of their environment. The ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples “harbor some 80% of Nicaragua’s overall wealth of natural resources.”⁸² Brooklyn Rivera, leader of YATAMA explained the “chronology” of this invasion. Nicaraguans “began by first extracting and stockpiling precious timber, especially mahogany and cedar of indigenous territories. Subsequently, these groups involved wealthy settlers (invaders and traffickers of indigenous lands) from the rest of the country for logging to extract all precious woods from indigenous areas of the region. Over time, the presence and activity of the settlers became overwhelming. These settlers came from all areas of the national ter-

ritory, invading ancestral lands, pillaging community property, and preying on the habitats of indigenous peoples...”⁸³

Next came the ranchers and the mining companies. According to the same article,

*[G]roups of invading settlers funded by ranchers and national landowners, have become dedicated to the usurpation of large expanses of indigenous lands by planting grasses, fencing pastures, and introducing large amounts of cattle. Meanwhile, the landowners are accumulating large expanses of indigenous land for the purpose of driving megaprojects and investments in the future. Parallel to the increased livestock activity, other groups of settlers sponsored by the mining company, HEMCO, with an office in the region, has become dedicated to the extraction activity of alluvial gold from rivers and other indigenous areas. Clearly, these extractive activities are executed and have a direct detriment to the rights, and the very existence of, indigenous peoples.*⁸⁴

And in another article the author writes,

[T]he flow of new colonists continues with virtually no effort to stop it by state entities. In fact, in the territory of Tasba Pri, which is in an advanced state of demarcation... municipal government officials continue to authorise changes of residence that allow new colonists to obtain local identity cards and to vote in their district... The territory of Matungbak hired a lawyer to carry out

80 Dr. Jean-Paul Rodrigue (1998-2016). The Geography of Transport Systems: The Nicaragua Canal Project. [Dept. of Global Studies & Geography. Retrieved from https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch1en/appl1en/nicaragua_canal.html](https://people.hofstra.edu/geotrans/eng/ch1en/appl1en/nicaragua_canal.html)

81 Transparency International (2016). Corruption By Country/Territory—Nicaragua. Retrieved from <http://www.transparency.org/country/#NIC>

82 Courtney Parker (May 12, 2016). Miskito Political Leader Brooklyn Rivera Denounces violent 'Pillage and Dispossession in Nicaragua.' *Intercontinental Cry Magazine*. <https://intercontinentalcry.org/miskito-brooklyn-rivera-denounces-pillage-dispossession-nicaragua/>

83 Brooklyn Rivera B. (May 12, 2016). Pillage and Dispossession in Nicaragua. *Intercontinental Cry Magazine*. <https://intercontinentalcry.org/pillage-dispossession-nicaragua/>

84 Ibid.

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”

*a census of the colonists and their legal documents for the land in their possession, but the municipal government forced a halt to the process, arguing that the territorial government did not have jurisdiction... Finally, though the state presumably no longer authorises individual titles in the areas titled or in process of demarcation as indigenous territories, researchers identified pockets of land that had not been included inside the demarcated areas. In at least one case this land had been assigned to a group of colonists by high-level political leaders...*⁸⁵

The objective of Nicaraguan colonization is to alter the demography of the autonomous regions. It is to establish a Nicaraguan “majority,” so if the regions were allowed to vote on independence if could be defeated “democratically.” This is the same strategy being employed by Morocco in the Western Sahara today.⁸⁶ It is the same strategy that was previously employed by Saddam Hussein in his “Arabization” campaign of Iraqi Kurdistan.⁸⁷

Further, In the past 10 years, approximately 100 people—many of them leaders in their communities—have been killed during confrontations with *colonos*, according to

85 Anne M. Larson and Jadder Lewis-Mendoza (2012). Decentralisation and devolution in Nicaragua’s North Atlantic autonomous region: Natural resources and indigenous peoples’ rights. *International Journal of the Commons*, pp. 179-199. X close

IREMADES-URACCAN

<https://www.thecommonsjournal.org/articles/10.18352/ijc.315/>

86 Akbar Ahmed and Harrison Akins (March 14, 2012). Waiting for the Arab Spring in Western Sahara. *Al Jazeera*. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/03/14-western-sahara-ahmed>

87 Hania Mufti and Peter Bouckaert (August 2004). Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq. *Human Rights Watch*. Vol. 16, No. 4(E), www.hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/4.htm

CEJUDHCAN, a human rights organization based in the northeast city of Bilwi, the capital of the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region that is located near the Honduran border and also known as Puerto Cabezas. Over half of the victims—54—were killed in 2015. ‘It’s a form of genocide,’ says Dolene Miller, a member of the National Commission for Demarcation and Titling, which has been fighting for a more stringent method of keeping track of land titles for indigenous and afro-descendent people. ‘Just like the Spaniards came to this land hundreds of years ago and committed genocide against the natives, the mestizos are trying to get rid of us to colonize the land...’

In addition to a rising death toll, people are being displaced from their communities. According to local news reports, armed bandits have stormed into several villages, forcing those residents to flee and seek safety in larger towns waiting until it’s safe to return home. ‘It’s a human rights crisis,’ Lottie Cunningham, director of the Bilwi-based rights group CEJUDHCAN says of the nearly 1,000 displaced people currently living in tent camps in the city. ‘These people are living without sanitation and poor shelter. They can’t keep going on like that and they just want to go home, but they don’t know if it’s safe to go to their own homes.’⁸⁸

The Nicaraguan military has been alleged to be complicit in the activities of the *colonos*.⁸⁹ “Today the Miskito are dissolving [a]s their rainforest home is stripped away by illegal logging and human encroachment...”⁹⁰ “If left

88 Ibid.

89 Courtney Parker (May 12, 2016). Miskito Political Leader Brooklyn Rivera Denounces violent ‘Pillage and Dispossession in Nicaragua’. *Intercontinental Cry Magazine*.

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/miskito-brooklyn-rivera-denounces-pillage-dispossession-nicaragua/>

90 Endangered Living (September 10, 2013). Miskito to Mosquito. Retrieved from endangeredliving.com/2013/09/10/miskito-to-mosquito/

unchecked, this human rights crisis runs the risk of spawning a physical genocide of the Miskito Peoples.”⁹¹

In April 2009, exercising the right to self-preservation, the Miskitos declared their independence.⁹² The words of their 1929 petition to President Hoover are haunting in their relevance today: “...That we Indians, being unable to fight for our rights and could never think of raising up in arms against the Nicaraguan Government, being extremely powerless to do so.... And that our heartfelt desire is to be released from the yoke of the Nicaraguan Government...we humbly pray that your most esteemed and Honorable Government will interverte (sic) on our poor Indians’ behalf....” A defenseless people, seeking to insure their survival, appeal for outside help and received none—then or now. The U.S. and International Community ignore the ongoing genocide of the Miskitos, as both initially ignored the genocides in Bosnia⁹³ and Rwanda.⁹⁴

The death and misery being inflicted by Nicaragua upon the indigenous peoples of the former Miskito Kingdom—Miskitos, Mayangana, Rama, Garífuna, and Creole—is genocide as legally defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Article II, declares “genocide means any of the following acts committed with in-

tent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” Each act listed is an act of genocide by itself.

The acts Nicaragua is perpetrating against Miskitos and indigenous peoples violate the following sections of Article II –

Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.⁹⁵

It is legally and morally incumbent upon the international community, and the U.S. in particular, to stop this genocide and end this colonial occupation through the establishment of a UN Interim Administration to govern the two autonomous territories as was done in East Timor⁹⁶ and in Kosovo.⁹⁷

The UN interim administration must first address the urgent social and economic needs of Miskitos and indigenous peoples. Then after consulting with indigenous organizations and the municipal and territorial governments, the UN Interim Administration must establish the “legal framework, [for the] electoral system and boundary delimitation, election management, voter registration, voter education, candidacy and campaigning, the media, voting operations, vote counting and tabulation, electoral dispute

91 Courtney Parker (May 12, 2016). Miskito Political Leader Brooklyn Rivera Denounces violent ‘Pillage and Dispossession in Nicaragua’. *Intercontinental Cry Magazine*.

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/miskito-brooklyn-rivera-denounces-pillage-dispossession-nicaragua/>
92. Blake Schmidt and Marc Lacey (June 9, 2009). An Independence Claim in Nicaragua. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/10/world/americas/10nicaragua.html?_r=1

93. History.Com. (2016). Bosnian Genocide. Retrieved from <http://www.history.com/topics/bosnian-genocide>

94. Human Rights Watch (March 1999, updated April 1, 2004). Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/10years.htm>

95 The Genocide Convention (1948), Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Retrieved from <http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm>

96. United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/etimor/etimor.htm>

97. United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmik/>

“that we poor Indians may receive our rights”

resolution,”⁹⁸ and provide the security necessary to insure a free and fair election on independence. Nicaraguan colonists must return to Nicaragua. The precedent for reversing Nicaraguan colonization is the international community’s support for reversing Saddam Hussein’s “Arabization” policy of moving Arab colonists into Iraqi Kurdistan.⁹⁹

98 EOS—Election Obligations & Standards Database. The Carter Center. Retrieved from <https://eos.cartercenter.org/>

99 **Roberta Cohen** (January 4, 2009). Disputed Territories in Iraq. Kurdistan Nwe. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interviews/2009/01/04-kurdistan-cohen>.

¹⁹⁴ 2012, History of the Coast. Retrieved from <https://bluefieldsrights.wordpress.com/history-of-the-coast/QQ6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q=1852%2C%20us%2C%20uk%2C%20war%2C%20miskito%20kingdom&f=false>

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Cite this article as:

Fallon, J.E. (2016) "that we poor Indians may receive our rights:" U.S. Strategic Interest in Central America and the Dispossession of the Miskito Kingdom. *Fourth World Journal* 15(1) pp. 5-45.