Modern Peacemakers

Oscar Arias Sánchez

Bringing Peace to Central America

Vicki Cox

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MODERN PEACEMAKERS

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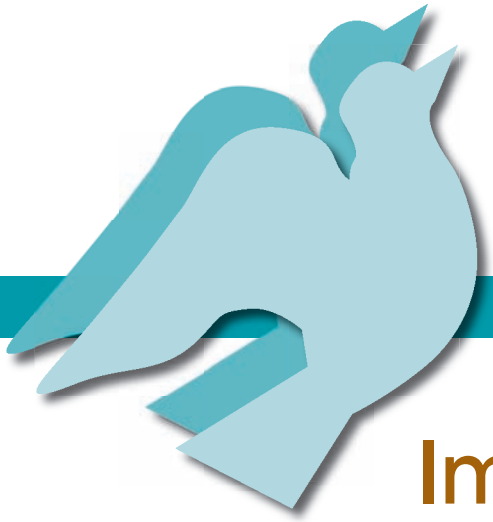


CHAPTER 1

Impossible Dream

"They signed!"[1] the people of Costa Rica yelled. Church bells rang, and motorists honked their horns. Their president, Oscar Arias Sánchez, had accomplished something that neither the United States, nor the Soviet Union, nor the Organization of American States, nor the United Nations had been able to do. The slender, serious leader of a tiny nation had brought the possibility of peace to Central America. On August 7, 1987, Costa Ricans celebrated everywhere.

Arias's triumph did not affect Costa Ricans directly. He accomplished his monumental victory in Guatemala, four countries to the north. Arias had brought together four Central American presidents whose countries had been fighting internally and with each other for decades.

"We Central Americans have to begin to solve our own problems," Arias had said.[2] This was a startling and unsettling idea to world leaders—especially to the United States. To protect its business interests in the region, the United States had been influencing (others might call it controlling or bullying) Central American

From left to right, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Salvadoran President José Napoléon Duarte, Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo Arevlao, Honduran President José Azcona Hoyo, and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sánchez meet on August 1, 1987, to discuss a regional peace plan.

countries for centuries. If a government cooperated, and granted preferential treatment to industries such as the United Fruit Company, it received American military and foreign aid. If a country did not protect American interests, however, the government was soon overthrown—with the help of American military and foreign aid. This rule of thumb resulted in a terrible irony. The United States often ended up supporting "friendly" but repressive dictatorships that completely ignored the principals of democracy that America held so dear. In turn, the United States often tried to crush rebels who wanted their country to have the freedoms Americans enjoyed.

The region's troubles were made more difficult by a diplomatic duel between the superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. Since World War II, the Soviet Union had been taking over countries, trying to spread communism throughout the

world. The United States used its money, its counterintelligence, and sometimes its military to oppose the spread of communism. Neither country, each with its own enormous supply of weapons, wanted a war with the other. Instead, they engaged in a "cold war," a war of words and influence over and through other countries. For example, Cuba, an island nation located just 90 miles from the United States, had become a communist nation. Consequently, determined to prevent the communists from taking over any other nation in Latin America, the United States supported anyone, either government or guerrilla group, that opposed left-wing ideas.

Like a pinpoint of sunlight through a magnifying glass, all these conflicts came together in Nicaragua, the country bordering Costa Rica to the north. The Sandinistas, a leftist group, were embroiled in bitter and intense warfare with rebels called Contras. The Contras were not strong enough to defeat the Sandinistas, but because they were supplied and supported by millions of U.S. dollars, the Sandinistas weren't able to defeat them, either. The conflict had spread to neighboring countries. Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador had been helping the Contras, allowing them to establish bases and to train inside their borders. For that matter, until Arias had become president, the Contras had sometimes operated out of Costa Rica. When Arias brought these countries together, there were more reasons for the four leaders to regard each other as enemies than as fellow Central Americans.

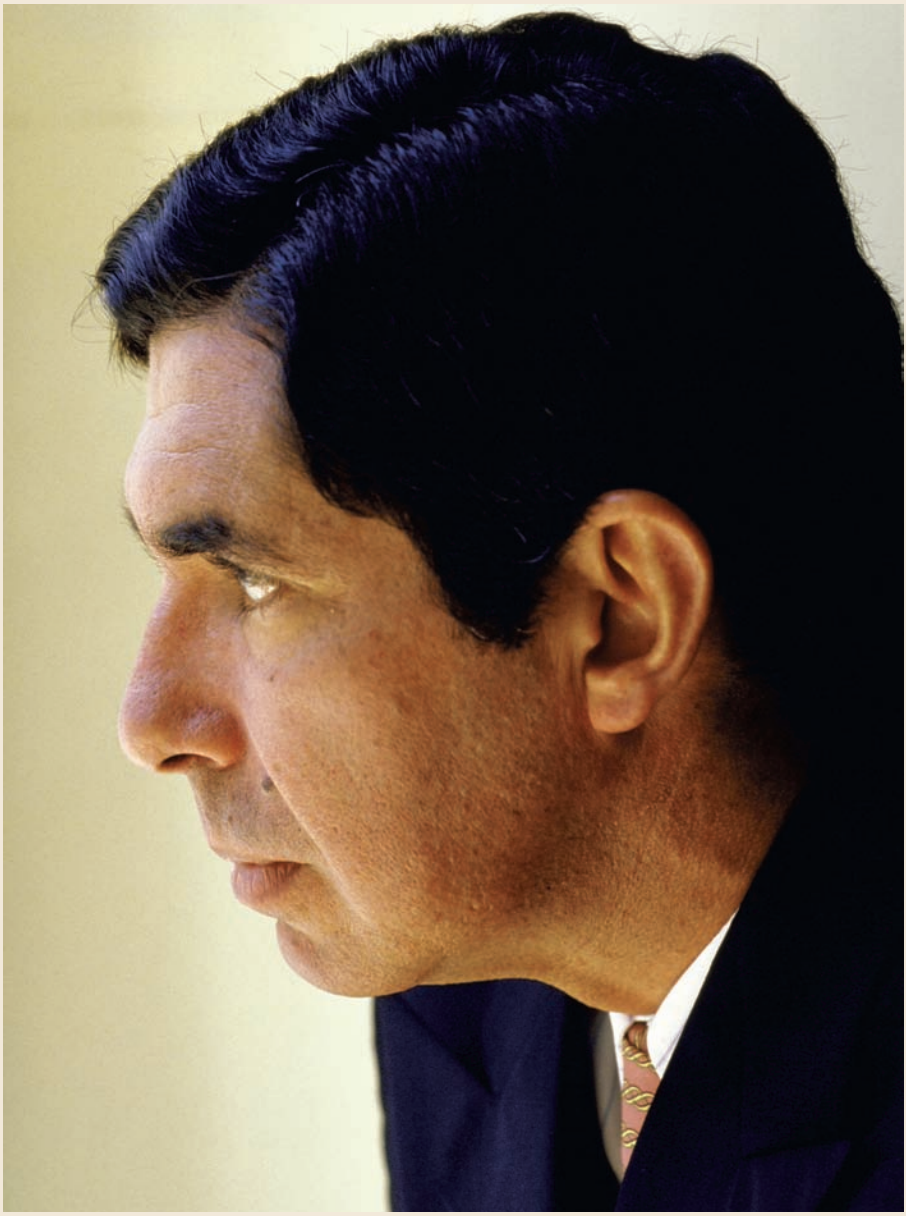
Others, from as far away as Sweden and as close as Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama, had proposed various plans for all four governments to accept. All had failed. No one expected Arias's efforts to be any different. No one, of course, except Arias himself. They did not realize how determined he was. When he was in high school, he decided to become president of Costa Rica. The 46-year-old had accomplished his goal, becoming his country's youngest president. Skeptics underestimated Arias's resolve. His unswerving belief in peace and an unshakable confidence that he could achieve it brought these enemies together.

Arias did not have much choice. He had to do something for his own country. In the first place, Costa Rica had been a democracy since 1948, and its constitution prohibited the formation of an army. Its civilian government did not have to worry about a military takeover or outside invasions, and it ran a nation where its citizens were safe, its children were educated, and enemies inside its borders were few. Elsewhere in the region, however, to walk down the street could be dangerous for ordinary citizens and fatal for a national leader. In Costa Rica, without using armored cars or bodyguards, Arias could drive his Jeep or Honda to dine in a restaurant.

Unfortunately, although the country was not engaged in civil war nor at odds with any other nation, Costa Rica was sliding down the slippery slope into the Sandinista–Contra war. In addition, Arias knew very well that Costa Rica depended on massive amounts of foreign aid to survive. Peace needed to come to the region because investors refused to pour money into either a country or a region where people could just as easily be working one day and dead in their own beds the next.

The Esquipulas II Peace Treaty did not happen overnight. Arias approached the other leaders about peace in May 1986, when they arrived in Costa Rica for his inauguration. In February 1987, Arias circulated among the participants an outline for peace—which he had sketched on a paper napkin in a Washington, D.C., cafeteria. Many discussions and six months afterward, he invited Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, José Azcona Hoyo of Honduras, José Napoleón Duarte of El Salvador, and Mario Vinicio Cerezo of Guatemala to join him again at the Camino Real Hotel in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

The key person to the success of the meeting was Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega. A tough-looking man with glossy, black hair, a bushy mustache, and aviator glasses, Ortega entered the room with a dozen aides, some carrying suitcases thought to contain machine guns. He had grown up with the violence of Nicaragua. His parents were often arrested in the struggle against the repressive (and U.S.–backed) Somoza government. At 15, he was arrested for joining the



Arias, above, was photographed at the Plaza Hotel in New York City on June 1, 1987. At the time, he was in the midst of formalizing his plans to bring together the leaders of the countries of Central America, in an attempt to form a peace plan that would bring an end to violence in the region.

Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FMNL), which wanted to overthrow his country's cruel dictator. Captured in 1967, he was imprisoned for seven years, until fellow rebels helped him escape.

When the Sandinistas overran the Somoza government in 1979, Ortega was one of a five-person council that ruled Nicaragua. The group turned to the Soviet Union for advice and aid, and the United States immediately regarded them as a communist threat to the region. A new group of rebels (supporters of the Somoza administration) fought a guerrilla war against the Sandinistas, trying to regain control of the country. These Contras received massive amounts of money and supplies from the United States. Unless Ortega cooperated, the peace talks among the leaders of the Central American nations would end abruptly.

While Costa Rica is located south of Nicaragua, Honduras borders Nicaragua to the north. The white-haired president of Honduras, José Azcona Hoyo, had been elected by a narrow margin earlier in 1986. Nicaragua and Honduras stood toe-to-toe and sometimes gun-to-gun. Backed by the United States, Honduras was deeply involved in the Contra war; 15,000 Contra soldiers were based in Honduras, and Honduras allowed the Contras to build an airstrip inside its borders. Several thousand Contra family members lived there, as well.

Nicaragua's Sandinista army often crossed the border to attack Contra positions in Honduras. Nine months before the Arias summit, in December 1986, the Sandinistas had actually attacked a Honduran army position (instead of a Contra one). In retaliation, the Hondurans riddled Sandinista positions in its own country with machine-gun fire, then crossed the Nicaraguan border to bomb Nicaraguan villages. Arias had accomplished a miracle just to get the leaders of these two countries in the same room.

José Napoleón Duarte from El Salvador presided over a country drowning in blood. Civil war between tyrannical, U.S.–supported dictatorships and guerillas had been waged since the 1970s. Between 1979 and 1981, government or military *escuadrones de la muerte*, or death squads, had murdered

between 30,000 and 75,000 people. Civilians and leaders alike were killed. Archbishop Romero, who had asked the United States to withdraw aid from El Salvador's government, was assassinated in 1980 as he conducted mass. Other atrocities were the stuff of horror movies: fingernails being ripped off during questioning, men being disemboweled, woman raped, and children being pulled across barbed wire or bashed against walls.

Chosen by the military generals and elected in 1984, Duarte had pledged, "We will change this society! My friends, the days of the death squads will end when we are in power!"[3] Sadly, this did not prove to be true. Early in his presidency, Duarte offered to meet with the guerrillas of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), but the talks broke down and the violence continued. Responding to Arias's invitation, Duarte sat next to Ortega, knowing Ortega's Sandinistas had supported the FMLN, the very organization that had kidnapped his daughter, Ines, just 11 months earlier.

El Salvador and Honduras were not on good terms, either. They had fought the "Football War" in 1969. The five-day conflict began during preliminaries for the World Cup, but it was not at all about soccer. Honduras had expelled 300,000 Salvadoran peasants from Honduran land they had held for centuries and sent them back to their native country. Salvadorans feared the masses of peasants would increase demands for land reform and would create a new brand of guerrillas with a new cause. The brief war served only to spotlight unresolved disagreements between the two countries over disputed land near their borders.

Mario Vinicio Cerezo was elected president of Guatemala in 1985. At the time, the politics in Guatemala had been so violent that he had campaigned with a Browning 9 mm pistol under his suits. During the 36 years of civil war, the government kept the peasants under control by arresting labor union organizers, students, and professors, and by employing both terror tactics and death squads. The squads concentrated on native Mayan Indians, exterminating an estimated 100,000. Cerezo himself had

survived several assassination attempts by Guatemalan death squads. The strife in his country was so extreme that in 1985, the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group reported that 100,000 Guatemalans had been killed, 500,000 were homeless, and 100,000 children were orphaned.

The leaders gathered together again on April 7, 1987, to discuss peace. "I told them twenty-four million people in Central America want and deserve peace," Arias recalled.[4] Arias had earned the right to lead the discussions by demonstrating Costa Rica's dedication to the peace process. Shortly after becoming president in 1986, Arias closed a secret airstrip in Costa Rica that the Contras had been using as a base from which to attack Ortega's government. He had ordered Contras to cease operating in his country. Ortega surely had noticed.

As the leaders sat down, Arias immediately singled out Ortega, the most powerful of the presidents. Arias wanted to know if Ortega was serious about negotiating for peace. If so, Arias supposedly suggested, they should get to work. Otherwise, if Ortega was not serious, they would just visit among themselves for a while, pose for the press, and then head home. When Ortega indicated he was ready to talk seriously, the group commenced negotiations.

Asked later how he had gotten Ortega to consider such dramatic changes, Arias said smiling, "My powers of persuasion."[5] As the day progressed, the leaders spoke bluntly and sharply about the many issues that divided them. Speeches were made without agreements. Some progress was made, but the participants wanted to stop for supper. Arias recalled how he kept the talk going. "I recalled reading in a biography of Franklin Roosevelt that the President would lock his advisers in a room until they reached agreement. So when my colleagues wanted to break for dinner, I suggested room service."[6] Sending their aids, foreign ministers, and observers from the room, the men talked on for three hours, into the early morning of August 7. At 4 A.M., a peace plan had been accepted by everyone. The plan applied to all five nations. Each, following a specific timetable, would:

1. Free all people in their custody and grant them amnesty.
2. Talk to any group that agreed to the amnesty.
3. Order a cease-fire.
4. Restore freedom of the press, radio, and television.
5. Hold free and honest elections, monitored by outside observers.
6. Stop the flow of military aid, arms, and equipment to guerrillas from other countries.
7. Keep foreigners from using their countries to destabilize others in the region.
8. Form an international committee to monitor the proceedings.
9. Negotiate arms control.
10. Discuss problems concerning refugees.

In other words, cruel dictatorships and repressive military governing councils agreed to voluntarily give up their authority to allow democracy in their country. In keeping with the spirit of their newly declared trust, they would turn their governments topsy-turvy without any other nation pressuring them with either foreign aid money or military threats. The entire plan defied all logic. "We have committed ourselves to fight for peace and to eradicate war,"[7] Arias said when it was signed.

Signing the accord would not resolve all the complex problems the governments brought to the table. The hard work lay ahead of them in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Arias would shuttle back and forth between the Central American countries and the United States. Standing together before the cameras that day was a first step toward peace in a region too long afflicted by war. It was a first step for Central Americans to work together, to solve their own problems without foreign help. The press had called peace in Central America an "impossible dream."[8] When Oscar Arias Sánchez stepped in front of the microphones to announce the agreement, though, it looked like it could become reality.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the Stage

Oscar Arias Sánchez was born September 13, 1941, into a family of great wealth. Costa Rica is one of seven Central American countries located on the isthmus (strip of land) between North America and South America. It is bordered on the east by the Caribbean Sea and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. A little bigger than New Hampshire and a little smaller than West Virginia, Costa Rica is 75 miles across at its narrowest point and 175 miles across at its widest.

Spanish explorers noticed the gold jewelry the natives wore when they greeted them in the early 1500s. They hoped the country would be rich in gold, like the other civilizations in the Americas. They named the area "Costa Rica" meaning "rich coast."

Oscar Arias's country is not rich because of what the Spanish sought, however. Costa Rica's real treasure is green and black and blue instead of yellow. Its wealth lies in the lush forests, which house 1,000 species of butterflies, 850 species of birds, 900 varieties of trees, 1,500 varieties of orchids, 208 mammals, 330 reptiles, and 34,000 insects. The black volcanic soil and mild seasons are perfect for growing coffee.

Above is a view of a coffee plantation in San José Valley, Costa Rica. Costa Rica's fertile land and temperate climate make it one of the best environments in the world for growing coffee.

Coffee is so important to Costa Rica that it is thought of almost religiously, rather than merely as a crop. After it was brought to Costa Rica from Cuba in 1779, coffee became what many called *grano de oro,* or "grain of gold." At first, the beans were grown by small farmers who sometimes tilled plots of land as small as tennis courts. They handed their beans over to larger plantation owners, who processed, distributed, and exported them.

Though best known for its predilection for tea, Great Britain was Costa Rica's primary coffee customer. As British money, as well as other European currency, passed to plantation owners, they became more and more powerful. They had so much influence that they almost ruled the country. Although tourism now brings in more foreign money, in 2003, Costa Rica's Central Valley produced 343,200,000 pounds of coffee.

Oscar Arias's father, Juan Arias, headed the Costa Rican Central Bank. His mother, Lillian Arias Sánchez, came from a coffee-growing family. Arias's grandfather had worked hard all his life, bought land for a coffee plantation, and became very rich. As a result, Arias's family was among the country's wealthiest coffee growers. Everyone assumed that Oscar Arias, as the eldest son, would carry on family traditions—running a coffee plantation or perhaps following his father into banking.

Farming or business were not part of Arias's plans, however. He knew what he wanted to do ever since he was six years old. When his parents asked, "What do you want to be when you grow

Coffee

Getting coffee to the cup is a complicated process. The coffee tree grows 14–20 feet high in the wild, but is kept to a height of about 6 feet when cultivated, to make picking the beans easier. Coffee beans do not ripen at the same time, so workers must go over a branch several times to pick the bright, cherry-red berries. Each berry contains two coffee beans (seeds). The berries are picked, then the two coffee beans are removed, dried, and roasted. Costa Rican coffee, described as rich and hardy, is grown primarily in the districts surrounding San José, the national capital. Harvesting is done mostly by hand. When harvest season comes, many temporary workers are needed to pick the beans. Heredia, where Oscar Arias grew up, is one of the most famous coffee-growing districts.

More than 400 million cups of coffee are drunk each year. The United States consumes nearly half of the coffee exported throughout the world. Brazil grows 75 percent of the world's coffee. In Central America, Guatemala produces the most. Costa Rica and El Salvador produce about half as much as Guatemala. Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama also export coffee.

up?" he promptly replied, "President."[9] No one dreamed he would actually grow up to serve as Costa Rica's president—twice.

Oscar Arias's country prospered because of its geography and natural resources. In 1948, when Oscar was seven years old, Costa Rica became a democracy.

Dr. Raphael Angel Calderon, a member of the United Social Christian Party, had served as president in 1940 and worked hard for the poor and the laborers. He amended the constitution to include a workers' bill of rights, established a minimum wage, and created a health program. After the election of 1948, Calderon's party and then-president Teodoro Picado refused to hand over the government to Otilio Ulate Blanco, an opposition candidate the people had elected. The government claimed the election was fraudulent because the building that housed the ballots burned.

José Figueres Ferrer was a 42-year-old coffee farmer who had been exiled to Mexico because he had criticized Calderon on a radio talk show. In 1948, Figueres's National Liberation army, backed by Cuba and Guatemala, fought against Calderon's forces for control of Costa Rica. The soldiers captured the cities of Cartago and Puerto Limon, as well as the airport. When the army closed in on the capital, San José, Calderon's supporters surrendered. About 2,000 people died in Costa Rica's 44-day War of National Liberation (also known as the Costa Rica Civil War).

As a temporary measure, Figueres assumed the presidency. Oscar's parents supported Figueres and opposed Calderon. They joined Figueres's party, the Partido Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Party, or PLN). During the 18 months Figueres was president, he restored Costa Rica's constitution and set up elections. He gave women the right to vote. He limited the president's term to one four-year period. He turned banks and insurance companies over to the government, a tradition that survives to the present day. Most important, he dismantled the military. Costa Rica became "the country without an army."[10] Had he been hungry for power, Figueres could have continued

as president. Instead, he turned the government over to Ulate Blanco, the people's first choice in the next election. Both the Calderon and Figueres families would continue vying for control of the country for six decades. Figueres would be elected president in the 1950s and again in the 1970s. He would be a hero to Oscar Arias as well as to most Costa Ricans.

Because of Figueres's actions, Costa Ricans felt secure. Without a powerful army like those in other Central American countries, Costa Rica did not have to worry about a military takeover or a violent overthrow of its presidents by rebels who didn't like either the military or the government. The Arias family, with Oscar and his two siblings, lived quietly in Heredia, a few miles from San José, without worrying that their land would be taken from them.

Costa Ricans are proud that their country has no army. Unlike neighboring countries, they know that even after hard-fought campaigns, the government changes hands peaceably. No wonder, then, that Costa Ricans nicknamed themselves "Ticos," a term that comes from the expression, "we are all *hermaniticos* (little brothers)."[11]

Tico children are quite active. Holidays such as Easter, Independence Day, Labor Day, or Columbus Day are perfect excuses for dances and parades. Bicycling, basketball, tennis, and baseball are favorites, but the Ticos save their biggest enthusiasm for soccer.

As a young boy, Oscar Arias was less concerned about going to bullfights or watching fireworks celebrations than were other Costa Ricans, however. Chronic asthma squeezed him for air during the day and made sleeping difficult at night. Instead of playing outside, Oscar spent most of his time with books. His parents read him many stories, and later he would stay up late reading into the night. Arias was studious and very serious. He seemed lonely and shy. For a 14-year-old in 1955, his world was, as author Seth Rolbein wrote, a "life of the mind."[12]

His family's great wealth made it possible for Oscar to attend private Catholic schools. Like many children of the upper class, Arias was sent out of the country to continue his education and

Above, Costa Rican workers are paid for the coffee beans they picked over the course of one day in 2002. Just as laboring on a coffee plantation was common when Oscar Arias was a child, it has remained a common job well into the twenty-first century.

see the world. Like Figueres, his country's hero, Oscar Arias went to Boston, where he enrolled in Boston University in 1959. Like Calderon, the patriarch of Costa Rica's other political family, Oscar Arias thought he would become a doctor. He took pre-med courses in chemistry, botany, and zoology, but quickly discovered that he liked history and politics more. Other university students relaxed by heading to the local bar or going to football games, but Oscar rode the subway into downtown Boston. He attended classical music concerts at Boston's Symphony Hall and followed the Boston Symphony Orchestra to their summer home for outdoor concerts at Tanglewood, in western Massachusetts. "All the money I could save was for music, theater, and opera," he said.[13]

It is not hard to surmise that Oscar Arias was lonely in a strange city. Heredia is a rural town with a few thousand people. Boston, on the other hand, is twice as big as Costa Rica's largest city. Arias lived in a temperate climate in Costa Rica. Boston receives about 42 inches of snow each winter. Back then, the Spanish-speaking community would have been small in a New England city. Arias frequented a coffeehouse near Harvard University in Cambridge. "I remember going into a bar, I guess you'd call it, where a singer who knew Spanish used to sing. She was quite unknown at the time, 1959, and all I knew about her was she

Influences on the Peacemaker

John F. Kennedy swept onto America's political scene like a movie star. As a military officer, he had commanded a PT boat in World War II. When it was run down by a Japanese destroyer, he and his men swam to a small island. Kennedy pulled a badly injured crewman through the water by a strap held between his teeth.

Handsome and quick-witted, Kennedy's style and personality charmed the public during the first-ever televised presidential debates. After eight years of a Republican administration headed by the revered, but elderly, President Eisenhower, Kennedy appealed to the nation's young and gave them a vision of a strong, progressive America. More than that, the young Democrat gave Americans a sense of ownership in the nation and a feeling that each person could contribute to the future. During the presidential debates Kennedy said, "I want people all over the world to look to the United States again, to feel that we're on the move . . . . I want Mr. Khrushchev [leader of the Soviet Union] to know that a new generation of Americans who fought in Europe and Italy and the Pacific for freedom in World War II have now taken over in the United States, and that they're going to put this country back to work again. I don't believe that there is anything this country cannot do. I don't believe there's any burden, or any responsibility, that any American would not assume to protect his country, to protect our security, to advance the cause of freedom."*

knew Spanish, so I could talk Spanish with her."[14] That unknown performer went on to become famous folk singer Joan Baez.

The 1960s were a period of great change in America. The presidential candidates that year were Vice President Richard M. Nixon and the charming, charismatic Democratic challenger, John F. Kennedy. Massachusetts was Kennedy country; he had represented it both in House of Representatives and as a senator. The campaign was controversial because many feared the Catholic Kennedy would be controlled by the pope in the Vatican. Analysts sometimes believe the crucial moment in the campaign came

The debates between Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon are often seen as crucial to Kennedy's win. Nixon, who represented Old Guard Republicans, did not make a good showing. He was underweight by 20 pounds, recovering from an injured knee. He wore ill-fitting clothing and refused television makeup. Kennedy, on the other hand, was tanned, immaculately dressed, and confident.

At his inauguration on a cold January day in 1961, Kennedy challenged Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

One of the first things he did as president was establish the Peace Corps, which operated on the assumption that nonmilitary organizations could improve the world, an idea that Oscar Arias embraced. Americans volunteered to help underdeveloped nations with education, farming, health care, and construction.

Kennedy's "New Frontier" policies gave federal funding to education and health care for the elderly. He dreamed big. In September of 1962, Kennedy pledged the United States would put a man on the Moon "before the end of this decade." Seven years later, in July 1969, U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong walked on the surface of the Moon.

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*"1960 Debate Transcript," available at http://www.debates.org/pages/trans60a.html.

during the presidential debates. Radio listeners, without seeing the candidates, believed Nixon had won. Those who watched on television were taken by the youthful, handsome, and witty Kennedy and concluded that he had bested the Republican.

Oscar Arias watched the televised presidential debates and was taken by Kennedy's new vision of America. Years later, he would repeat Kennedy's inaugural words, "The torch has been passed,"[15] except that he was referring to his own role in Costa Rica's future.

"I saw the campaign. I saw the debates. This had a tremendous impact on me," he later said.[16] By the end of 1961, Oscar abandoned his pre-med studies.

"I found out I was in the wrong field. I was too smart to be a doctor," he has said with characteristic confidence.[17]

Attending summer school to study economics only strengthened Oscar Arias's interest in politics and government. His friends noticed his newfound destiny. They nicknamed him "El Presidente"[18] because he announced he wanted to become president of Costa Rica.

After Kennedy won the election, Arias wrote the new president a long letter/essay called, "This Is How I See It." In it, Arias told the president how Central Americans wanted new leadership from the United States. He explained his view that Kennedy's predecessor, President Eisenhower, had miscalculated and paved the way for Fidel Castro to take over Cuba. The Boston University paper later published Arias's writing. Suprisingly, Arias received an invitation to meet Kennedy in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, as a result of the letter.

Kennedy and Arias were similar in many ways. Both were liberals, both came from wealthy families who had worked hard to make their fortunes. Both families were involved in politics. Twenty-five years later, Arias would pattern his own campaign after Kennedy's. When he became president, he would, like Kennedy, ask his younger brother, Rodrigo Arias, to advise him.

Having discovered his destiny, Oscar Arias went back to Costa Rica and enrolled in the University of Costa Rica, in San

José, to study Costa Rica's economic and legal systems. He would write in the University of Costa Rica's yearbook, "I am studying to be President."[19]

Arias graduated in 1967 and left Costa Rica again to study in England. He attended the London School of Economics, and, in 1974, received his doctorate degree in political science from the University of Essex in England.

Perhaps Arias's most valuable education came from outside his textbooks, as he realized how the British viewed the United States. Like other Central American countries, Costa Rica had always lived in the shadow of the superpower to the north. American influence in the region is proportional to the amount of aid it gives. In Central America, the United States gives a lot of aid and exerts a lot of influence. England, however, which is not dependent on America's goodwill or its dollars, is not always so impressed by U.S. opinions. Arias picked up on this. Later, as president of only two million people, he would stand up to his big-dog neighbor and quickly bark back at it when it tried to pressure him. He also learned the value of diplomacy, realizing negotiation and compromise might accomplish what chest-beating speeches and cocky posturing might not. These skills would be put to use in the delicate discussions during the peace accords two decades later.

Arias's doctoral thesis, "Who Governs Costa Rica?" naturally concerned his native country. He returned home to become professor of political science at the University of Costa Rica, a post he would keep until 1972. He wrote his first book, *Pressure Groups in Costa Rica,* during this time.

Arias's ideas fit easily with the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN). The party's head was none other than José Figueres, who had abolished Costa Rica's army two decades earlier. Figueres, elected to the presidency once again in 1970, quickly saw Oscar Arias's potential. He appointed Arias economic adviser to the president and then promoted him in 1972 to the cabinet-level position of minister of national planning. Oscar Arias Sánchez was only 31 years old.

CHAPTER 3

"If I Wanted to Lose, It Wouldn't Be Possible"

Just 25 years after six-year-old Oscar Arias Sánchez declared he wanted to be president of Costa Rica, Arias was on his way up the political ladder. His "Grupos de Presion en Costa Rica" ("Pressure Groups in Costa Rica") won a national essay prize, establishing him as a political thinker. Being promoted to Figueres's minister of national planning in 1972 provided Arias with opportunities to make political contacts, meet Ticos firsthand, and get to know more about the country he wanted to govern.

Tico concerns had less to do with political science and more to do with practical issues, like driving from one place to another over damaged roads and squeezing into overcrowded schools. Arias's job put him in the position to decide which roads would be improved and what locations needed new schools. The ordinary Tico noticed that Oscar Arias Sánchez was a fair-minded man.

In 1973, Arias met Margarita Penón Góngora. Her family was in the furniture business rather than the coffee industry, but, like the Arias Sánchez family, the Penón Góngoras were quite wealthy. Margarita, too, had gone to the United States for her education;

As the minister of national planning under Figueres, Arias was forced to confront the many infrastructural challenges facing ordinary Costa Ricans. Above, a man walks to the shack he shares with two other families in a shantytown outside the city of Alajuela, Costa Rica.

she graduated from Vassar College in New York with a degree in biochemistry. Her friends discouraged her from dating Oscar Arias, however. They hoped she would not get involved with that "lunatic who wants to be president."[20] Penón's brother saw Arias this way: "He rarely laughs, and it takes a lot to make him smile. Oscar didn't have charisma, yet everybody followed him anyway."[21] Nonetheless, Arias and Margarita married in 1973. Margarita's beauty and education lead to the logical comparison to Jacqueline Kennedy, although Margarita was more involved in politics than her American counterpart. In fact, two decades later, she would run for the PLN presidential nomination herself.

Politicians cannot make progress without a party to support them. Arias made his contacts within the Partido Liberación

Nacional party carefully. In 1975, he was appointed its international secretary, a powerful position that put him in contact with the dealmakers within the party.

In 1976, Arias sponsored a conference in San José, where experts discussed Costa Rica's economical, social, and political development. He compiled their reports into a book called *Costa Rica in the Year 2000.* He was also responsible for the construction of the Plaza de la Cultura, a large park in the center of San José. In his private life, his daughter, Silvia Eugenia, was born.

In July 1977, Arias left the cabinet position he maintained under José "Don Pepe" Figueres Ferrer and his successor, Daniel Oduber Quirós, to campaign for a seat in the National Assembly. Seven months later, he was elected deputy for Heredia, his hometown. He served in the assembly for three years. His special area of interest was constitutional and election reforms. He was known for making government more accessible and responsive to the common people.

Arias's political career advanced without much fanfare. In 1979, he was elected general secretary, the top post in the PLN. The party regulars had not paid much attention to his bid for the position. He lacked the polish of an accomplished, hand-shaking, kiss-the-babies politician, and heads were not turned by his personality when he entered a room. In July, though, when the votes were counted, the 37-year-old had won by a wide margin. Party professionals were surprised.

"He really started working the party at this point," said Eduardo Ulibarri, editor in chief of *La Nación,* Costa Rica's most influential newspaper. "He was very quiet, but very strong, ambitious, and constant."[22]

Two years later, in 1981, Arias resigned from the National Assembly to help elect the PLN presidential candidate, Luis Alberto Monge. In exchange for U.S. economic aid, Monge would allow the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to use Costa Rica in its fight against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. As Monge struggled with the war to Costa Rica's north, as well as

the country's economic problems within, Arias positioned himself for the presidency.

Arias announced his intention to run as the PLN presidential candidate in the 1986 election. The party elders, such as President Monge and former president Daniel Oduber Quirós, were not pleased. They believed Arias was too young. Figueres, Arias's hero and mentor, wanted the nomination himself, for one last run for the presidency. He counseled Arias to wait until 1990 to run.

Arias had not dreamed of Costa Rica's top job all his life to be put off, however. For one thing, he had developed his own political contacts. For another, he believed the Old Guard was out of touch with the country's needs. Three-quarters of Costa Rica's voters were under 40 years old, younger than Arias. Still, opposing Figueres, such an important man to Costa Rica's history, was difficult. "It was very tough for me to become a candidate," he said later. "It was a very tough internal campaign."[23]

Figueres declared he would not run without unanimous backing, and when Arias opposed him, Figueres honored his pledge. He then supported another candidate instead of Arias. Like it or not, the battle lines were drawn on the age issue. Figueres and his candidate represented the past; Arias spoke for Costa Rica's future.

His detractors scornfully called Arias's campaign workers "young Turks" and "the miniskirts."[24] Instead of accepting his youth as a liability, though, Arias used it as "a show of personal force."[25] Arias also benefited from changes in primary voting procedures. In the past, a few politicians inside the party decided the nominee. The new reforms allowed any registered party member to vote for the party's nominee.

On February 1, 1985, Arias beat Figueres's candidate by 50,000 votes. A *New York Times* reporter wrote that Arias,

> rolled up his unusually carefully pressed sleeves and bruised his way through the opposition of the party's aging bosses to win the presidential nomination. The fight left damaging divisions in the . . . party until the prospect of a likely defeat late in the campaign rallied party leaders behind Mr. Arias.[26]

"It was a dramatic success," said a Costa Rican newspaper editor. ". . . almost better than the general election."[27]

Arias didn't agree. He was still one step away from becoming Costa Rica's forty-eighth president. As he said on the campaign trail, "Since I was in my mother's womb I prepared myself for this. Even if I wanted to lose, it wouldn't be possible."[28]

The race turned out to be more difficult than Arias thought, however. His opponent was none other than the son of Rafael Angel Calderon, the man who had inspired Costa Rica's civil war. "Junior," despite his father's unpleasant past, was the odds-on front-runner to win the presidency. Arias was the underdog.

For one thing, Arias was his own worst enemy. His idea of a state-of-the-art campaign ad showed him seated behind his desk, lecturing people on the six things he intended to do as president. He released a 155-page report, "The People's Mandate for Building the Future," explaining his ideas, but no newspaper wanted, or was able, to print it. Arias had admired the charming, photogenic Jack Kennedy on the campaign trail, but his critics ridiculed his seriousness, much like others had done to Richard Nixon in 1960.

Running a campaign of ideas appeared to be the intelligent thing to do. Arias used the PLN motto, "Growth with Justice"[29] as a campaign theme. He stressed his education, his experience, and his interests as qualifications for president. Arias also used "Roofs, jobs, and peace"[30] as an attention-getting slogan. He promised more access to and more jobs in his administration for women. He promised 20,000 more housing units and 25,000 more jobs each year of his term. He promised to work to strengthen cooperatives and improve exports.

Corruption often rose to the nation's top offices. Seth Rolbein wrote that Arias pointed out he was too rich to be tempted by money and too principled to be touched by it. A campaign song described him as a person with "A sincere heart, an intelligent mind, a firm and certain hand."[31] Arias's sense of fair play required him to say unpopular things. He reminded the public that cutting down the government would be cutting down jobs. Since 20 percent of the

population worked for the government, it seemed likely that many of the people he was addressing would be the ones to go.

"We had a choice between a welfare state and a garrison state," Arias said, "and we chose the former. But it does have its disadvantages."[32] These were all good points, but they neither made for a very exciting campaign nor produced throngs of cheering admirers.

Costa Rican Government

The 1949 Costa Rican constitution guarantees that all citizens are equal and have the right to own property, to petition and assemble, to speak freely, and to seek relief from unjust imprisonment. The constitution also divides the government into independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The executive branch is composed of the president, two vice presidents, and a 15-member cabinet. The president is elected by the people, provided the candidate receives at least 40 percent of the vote. The president is assisted by two vice presidents, who are elected by the people, and a cabinet that is selected by the president. One vice president is included in the cabinet. Women have held several government positions, including vice president.

The legislature is the National Assembly. It is composed of 57 members (*diputados*). They also are elected for four years and may serve two terms.

National elections are held on the first Sunday of February. A 1969 constitutional amendment limited the president to one four-year term. Oscar Arias challenged that in 2001 and eventually won a change in the ruling. The largest political party is the National Liberation Party (Partido Liberación Nacional or PLN). It was founded by José Figueres in 1948. Its main rival is the more conservative and business-oriented Social Christian Unity Party. Traditionally, Costa Rican voting alternates between the political parties in power. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal is in charge of elections.

On the other hand, Arias's opponent, Calderon the younger, was everything Arias was not. He was charming, outgoing, and dynamic. He could inspire crowds with his speeches. He had the backing of influential newspapers and party politicians. He ran against Monge four years before, so he was an experienced campaigner. As Seth Rolbein noted, "His purpose was to win votes, and this was something he had spent all of his life doing, literally since adolescence, going after votes. No one taught him how to speak. It is simply something he does very well."[33]

Calderon told the people what they wanted to hear. Like President Reagan, and many Ticos, he was against Nicaragua's Sandinista government. He favored allowing American Green Berets to operate against the Sandinistas from inside Costa Rica. "I am not neutral, and I am definitely on the side of the United States," he said.[34] Representing the party out of power, Calderon declared he would reduce the size of government and make its bureaucracy more efficient. He quickly made headway in the polls.

Even Arias knew he was in trouble. In October, he changed his strategy. All the other issues aside, he became the peace candidate. He appealed to Ticos' national pride. He reminded them of Costa Rica's reputation for being a country without an army. He attacked Calderon's plan to expand the Rural Guard into an unofficial army. He said that the way to stay out of Nicaragua's Sandinista/Contra war was for Costa Rica to remain neutral. "Costa Rica," he said, "will not be converted into a dormitory for the contras."[35] He acknowledged the close relationship between United States and Costa Rica, but at the same time, he believed Costa Rica should not always bow down to the United States' demands.

Though traditionally the Pardito Liberación Nacional was strong outside the cities, Arias impressed the young, the middle class, and women in urban areas. Those who lived in the cities worried that Calderon's proposals of reducing the government would affect their jobs—that they would be the ones to go.

In November, Figueres finally threw his influence behind Arias. His hate for the Calderon family was stronger than his

bitterness at Arias's rebellion in the Liberación primaries. "As long as there's a Calderon looking to be elected, he'll find me ready to oppose him,"[36] Figueres said.

In December, Arias pulled ahead in the polls for the first time. Campaigning then stopped for celebration of the Christmas holidays. Afterward, each party's advertising campaign turned truly nasty. Calderon's forces ran photos of Arias smiling that said, "Only he who has a lot can laugh at the high cost of living."[37] They showed two photos of Arias looking in opposite directions saying, "You can't trust a man who won't look you in the eye."[38] They tried to link the PLN with communism by showing a man wearing the hat of a communist-linked organization and a t-shirt endorsing Arias. "What commitments will Arias make to get communist support?"[39] it said. Calderon's camp pointed out that Arias's promise of 20,000 housing units could only be accomplished by building 12 houses every hour.

Arias's ad people were not without their smears. They showed an unflattering photo of Calderon with the caption, "Would you trust this man?"[40] and introduced a new campaign slogan, labeling Arias "A man who always says and does what he thinks."[41]

Still, Arias remained the underdog. The editor of *La Nación* said, "I never thought Arias would win the election, right up until the last fifteen days."[42]

To say that Election Day in Costa Rica is a national holiday is an understatement. Voting has been mandatory since 1959, although few penalties are given for neglecting to cast a ballot. Instead, Ticos vote to express their national pride. Costa Rica, after all, is a democracy surrounded by countries with repressive governments. Ticos are also proud that they have no standing army.

People displayed flags of their favored political party—red and blue for Calderon's party, green and white for Arias. Some houses sported multiple flags, depending on the politics of those inside.

Monumental traffic jams clogged the streets. Drivers honked twice for Oscar and three times for Calderon, and shouted campaign slogans. Of the 1.4 million eligible voters, 1.2 million

received three ballots: one for president, one for congress, and one for local offices. The ballots had each candidate's name, photograph, and party colors. Costa Ricans voted by sticking their thumb into purple ink and pressing it next to their choices.

Voter fraud was nonexistent. The ink has to wear off, so no one could vote more than once. There was no violence and no hint of tampering at the polls. There was no possibility of "chad" controversy, like that encountered by vote counters in America's 2000 presidential election.

On February 2, 1986, Arias attended mass in the morning, breakfasted with outgoing President Monge, lunched with his parents at their home in San Joaquin, and then voted. Arias's campaign strategy worked. He got the expected rural vote and, more important, pulled support from the cities. Calderon won in economically depressed port towns. In the end, Arias won 52 percent of the vote to Calderon's 46 percent.

Oscar Arias Sánchez made his childhood ambition come true. He was the youngest president Costa Rica had ever had. After the results were known, the new president elect quoted Robert Frost's famous poem, "But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep."[43] Arias took the oath of office on May 8, 1986. Ahead, there would be many sleepless nights and many miles to travel.

CHAPTER 4

Tangled Web

In Central America, Costa Rica's peaceful transfer of power from one president to another was quite remarkable. Neighboring countries rarely changed regimes without violence and bloodshed. The United States, unfortunately, was responsible for much of that pattern.

Nicaragua, about the size of the state of New York, threatened the stability of the entire region. Because Costa Rica shared its northern border with Nicaragua, it was pressured financially and politically to take an active role in the conflict between the leftist Sandinistas and the Contras who had once controlled Nicaragua. Before Arias became president, Costa Rica's highly prized neutrality was at risk.

The key players in Nicaragua's troubles emerged long before the Sandinistas took power in 1979. In 1912, the conservative Nicaraguan government asked for American help in settling an internal dispute. This provided an opening for the United States to expand its influence in the region; the U.S. military occupied Nicaragua for two decades. In 1926, rebel leader Augusto Cesar Sandino led a revolt against the U.S.–backed government. Sandino agreed to lay down his arms if the Americans left. A new liberal president was elected, and

Nicaragua, shown in the map above, is about the size of New York State. Nicaragua's history of instability affected the whole region, especially Costa Rica, its southern neighbor.

American troops departed in 1933. Before leaving, though, the Americans created the Nicaraguan National Guard, supposedly to stabilize the country after the civil war, under the leadership of Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Sandino believed the National Guard was unconstitutional, and he told the new president he would not give up his weapons until Somoza's power was reduced. Somoza had Sandino assassinated and took control of Nicaragua's government, turning it into a military dictatorship.

Somoza was cruel and corrupt. He seized lands owned by Sandino's rebels and German immigrants during World War II, making him Nicaragua's largest landowner. He controlled the railroads, leased military facilities to the United States, and took "presidential commissions" for favoring foreign countries (primarily the United States) in oil, rubber, and timber deals.[44] President Franklin Roosevelt said that Somoza "may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."[45] After Somoza was assassinated in 1956, his two sons ruled. The United States backed them. Despite their corrupt practices, they were anti-communist, and the United States wanted Nicaragua free of communism.

Somoza's second son, Anastasio Somoza DeBayle, courted the United States just as his father did. He allowed the CIA to train anti-communist Cuban exiles in Nicaragua. In 1962, he offered military facilities for the CIA-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba.

Anastasio Somoza and the Nicaraguan National Guard, now numbering 10,000, were opposed by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (usually called the Sandinistas, or FSLN). Like Sandino before them, the Sandinistas fought guerrilla style. The National Guard retaliated viciously, murdering men and raping women and children in towns that harbored the guerrillas. The Sandinistas needed more than machetes, outdated rifles, and rocks to fight the U.S.-supported regime. They asked for funds and arms from Cuba and the Soviet Union. When the National Guard shot an ABC journalist in the head while a cameraman filmed it, the U.S. withdrew support from Somoza, and the Sandinistas finally seized power in July 1979.

Above, Anastasio Somoza DeBayle talks to reporters outside of his residence in Miami, Florida, just a few hours after resigning the presidency of Nicaragua in 1979. Somoza attempted to lead his military forces against the Sandinistas, but when the United States withdrew its support of his regime, the Sandinistas were able to seize power quickly.

Within the year, the Sandinistas censored the media, canceled elections until 1985, prevented an opposition party from holding rallies, and murdered an opposition leader. Communists from Cuba, Russia, and Bulgaria appeared in Nicaragua as advisers to the Sandinistas. The government took over private property, as well as slaughterhouses and supermarkets. It issued ration cards and confiscated produce not sold in state markets. It helped Salvadoran rebels who wanted to topple El Salvador's U.S.–backed government, breaking an agreement with Washington that Nicaragua would not participate in any neighboring rebellions. These actions turned the United States against the Sandinistas.

Somoza's National Guardsmen never truly disbanded; instead, they joined in Guatemalan, El Salvadoran, and Honduran death

Above, soldiers of the Sandinista army hold captive members of the Contra revolutionaries in northern Nicaragua. The conflict between the Contras and the Sandinistas continued for many years, virtually tearing the country of Nicaragua apart.

squads. Honduras organized some of them to patrol the border between it and Nicaragua. The Sandinistas called the mercenaries *contras,* meaning "counterrevolutionaries."[46]

Enter the final player in Nicaragua's bloody war. President Ronald Reagan regarded Nicaragua's socialist Sandinista government under Daniel Ortega as a threat to the United States' existence, and by December 1980, he realized the Contras could be used against the Marxist Sandinistas. On November 16, 1981, Reagan signed a bill authorizing $19.5 million for the CIA to hire the Contras to stop arms going from Nicaragua to El Salvador.

"The government of Nicaragua has treated us as an enemy," Reagan said. "It has rejected our repeated peace efforts . . . . The national security of all the Americas is at stake in Central

America," he said. "If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere."[47] Congress eventually approved $300 million in aid for the Contras.

The United States and the Contras made strange allies. The Contras were known for their violence against Nicaraguans. Their targets included teachers, coffee pickers, health workers, and other civilians. Murders and rapes were common. On the other hand, some Contra sympathizers were simply Nicaraguans, fed up with Ortega's socialism. One villager said, "We want to work our own land . . . and the Contras were "the only defense we have for democracy . . ." To ordinary Nicaraguans, this meant the right "to own your own animals and food and nobody can take them away."[48]

By 1987, when Oscar Arias Sánchez suggested his Peace Accord, Ortega's Sandinistas were in a fix. The Catholic Church opposed them for their Marxist theology that Jesus Christ was a revolutionary, and it wouldn't condemn the Contras. When the Sandinistas tried to initiate a draft to counter the permanent bases the Contras had built, there was a civilian rebellion. Increasing numbers of professionals were leaving the country. Crime, disease, and hunger were common. People rummaged through garbage dumps for food. Thousands of Nicaraguans reentered the country from Honduras, which burdened the economy. The Soviets were not sending enough money. The U.S. Congress, however reluctantly, supported the Contras. Ortega had plenty of reasons to listen to Arias's ideas for peace in Central America.

EL SALVADOR

A South American poet compared Central America's five republics to a hand, with El Salvador being the *pulgarcito*—the little thumb—because it is the smallest.[49] About the size of Massachusetts, El Salvador is located north and west of Nicaragua. Its state of affairs when Arias proposed his peace plan was horrifying. The principal players in its tragedy were a weak government, an all-powerful army, leftist rebels, and the United States.

El Salvador, shown in the map above, is the smallest nation in Central America. When Arias proposed his peace plan in the mid 1980s, the state of affairs within El Salvador was horrifying, with a proliferation of death squads that killed innocent civilians.

Salvadorans say, "The people here drop like flies no matter who is president."[50] Whichever junta (council), dictator, or president claimed to head the government, Salvadorans counted on three things: the army, its death squads, and Salvadorans slaughtering Salvadorans.

Although the United States supported the Contra rebels in Nicaragua, in El Salvador, the superpower backed the government. The army maintained by this government sponsored death squads that shot 12-year-olds and cut off their ears, forced peasants to dig their own graves before cutting their throats as they lay in them, attacked pregnant women, and castrated men. More than 75,000 Salvadorans would die in the death squads' blood

bath. Though appalled by El Salvador's human rights violations, the United States gave billions of dollars to the government because it was an anti-communist regime.

In 1964, José Napoleón Duarte was elected mayor of the capital, San Salvador. He improved public transportation, organized community committees to pick up garbage, paved local streets, and provided ambulance services. Enormously popular, he was reelected twice. When he ran for president in 1972, however, he was up against the ruling elite and the military. Mysteriously, his party's legislative candidates disappeared off the ballot, and the Central Elections Council, while counting the ballots in secret, declared that Duarte had lost. Reformist army officers protested the fraud, but the air force squashed their rebellion, captured Duarte, and broke his cheekbones with rifle butts. American intervention saved his life, but he was exiled in Venezuela for seven years.

Those who thought reform could be achieved through politics gave up hope and turned to other measures. By 1979, the opposition staged strikes and sit-ins, during which they occupied United Nations offices and factories. Electoral workers turned off the entire country's electricity for 23 hours. The army responded with brutality. It even executed priests who criticized the government. An army leaflet urged the population, "Be a Patriot! Kill a Priest."[51] Those who pressed the government for land to farm were lined up and executed by firing squads. Roberto D'Aubuisson, the death squad leader, even read names on television of people who were targeted to die.

In 1980, civil war broke out between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (which was funded by Cuba, Nicaragua, and Russia) and the army's death squads. The war would eventually claim tens of thousands of victims, including four American nuns who were raped and murdered and two U.S. land reform advisers who were shot in the head. Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, responding to a death squad massacre of 23 people demonstrating outside a church, urged soldiers to disobey their orders. "I beseech you," he said, "I beg you, I order you to the name of

God. Stop the repression."[52] The next day, an assassin stepped out of the congregation during mass and shot Romero through the heart. Expressing no sympathy for the leftist guerrillas or government critics, the U.S. ambassador remarked, "People who choose to live by the sword can expect to die by it."[53]

Still, the Reagan administration denied that such atrocities had been committed. It sent $91 million in aid and 56 Green Beret advisers to squash the rebellion. "If, after Nicaragua, El Salvador is captured by a violent minority, what state in Central America will be able to resist, how long would it be before the major strategic U.S. interests—the [Panama] canal, sea lanes, oil supplies—were at risk?" said a U.S. government official in 1981.[54]

In 1984, the ruling military junta asked Duarte to join them in order to give the impression of reform. Despite his good intentions, though, Duarte was powerless to improve his country. He was unable to stop the human rights abuses because the ruling group controlled the courts, and evidence against the army mysteriously disappeared. He began to encourage talks with the guerrillas, but the rebels made impossible demands and killed a high-ranking army officer, and he had to break off the discussions. In September 1985, the guerrillas kidnapped Duarte's oldest daughter, demanding the release of political prisoners and wounded rebels. Party officials secretly sent government contracts to their own businesses and stole international aid that was sent to help after an October 1996 earthquake.

"There is hate in the hearts of people on all sides," Duarte said. "The structure of the society has been based on the culture of terror."[55] Such was the state of El Salvador when Oscar Arias suggested his peace proposal in 1987.

GUATEMALA

In the 1870s, Guatemala's president picked up a horsewhip and said, "This is the constitution I govern by."[56] A century later, Guatemala's military rulers had added terror, torture, and death

squads. In January 1986, Vinicio Cerezo took office as Guatemala's first civilian head of government, but he did not live up to his campaign reform promises. Before his inauguration, he agreed to a general amnesty for any political or criminal crimes committed by the government's security forces. "We are not going to be able to investigate the past," he said. "We would have to put the entire army in jail."[57] He was right.

Guatemala was another Central American victim of the cold war. The country's long history of mutilation and torture began in 1954 after Jacobo Arbenz was deposed. Democratically elected as president in 1951, Arbenz wanted to fortify Guatemala's democratic ideals but make it independent of the United States's control. Ironically, he used the American Homestead Act as a model for a reform law to help peasants obtain land. In 1945,

The United Fruit Company

The United Fruit Company was known as *El Pulpo* ("the Octopus") for its long reach into Central American politics. It exerted so much influence that it was nearly a government by itself.

The United Fruit Company took root in 1871. An American, Minor Cooper Keith, began to build a railroad from the Costa Rican capital, San José, to the port city of Limón. Alongside the railroad, Keith established banana plantations. When the Costa Rican government could not make payments on loans it owed, it signed an agreement whereby Keith took over the debt in exchange for 800,000 acres of tax-free land near the railroad and a 99-year lease on the use of the railroad. In 1899, Keith merged his fast-growing banana company with another American firm, establishing the United Fruit Company.

The company controlled the railroads, shipping, and communications throughout the region. Holding vast amounts of unused land, supposedly in reserve for natural catastrophes, it prevented peasants (and competitors) from capitalizing on the banana trade.

only 2 percent of the population owned 72 percent of the land. Arbenz's plan was to buy unused acreage from large landowners, paying them what they claimed the land was worth on their tax returns. The unused land was divided up among individual peasants who, at the time, were working for 5 to 20 cents a day. Arbenz's law resulted in about 1,500,000 acres being distributed among 100,000 peasants.

The United Fruit Company, one of Guatemala's largest landowners, was not happy with the reforms. The government paid it $3.00 an acre, exactly what the company's income tax return reported. But United Fruit changed its mind when it was forced to sell the land, claiming it was worth $75.00 per acre. When Arbenz refused to up the ante, United Fruit lobbied the Eisenhower administration to topple Arbenz. Having formed

The company did build schools, clinics, hospitals, and stores for its workers. If a union formed for better wages, however, United Fruit simply went elsewhere, after destroying all its buildings and leaving the local workforce empty-handed. Although the company reaped high profits from bananas and pineapples, United Fruit paid little in taxes to the occupied country. In addition, it pressured Central American governments to protect its interests. In 1954, Guatemalan President Arbenz's land reform proposals included taking 240,000 acres of the company's uncultivated land for the value it declared on its tax returns. In response, 150 mercenaries, trained by the CIA in Honduras and Nicaragua and aided by Americans flying air support, toppled Arbenz's government and replaced him with Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Armas returned the disputed land to United Fruit, abolished the secret ballot, and jailed thousands of dissidents.

United Fruit Company eventually became United Brands. It was bought by Del Monte, which today operates in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama. Del Monte is not involved in politics, however, unlike United Fruit.

an alliance with communists to gain the presidency, Arbenz was vulnerable to America's obsession with stopping a communist takeover of the world. In 1954, when Czechoslovakian weapons showed up in Guatemala (primarily because no Western country would sell arms to Guatemala), the CIA used the weapons as an excuse to remove a democratically elected president.

President Eisenhower, however, told the CIA, "You've averted a Soviet beachhead in our hemisphere."[58] Costa Rica's president José Figueres, had other ideas. He called the overthrow one of the United States' "worst blunders."[59]

The government that replaced Arbenz was brutal. It threw peasants off their land and put down their protests by jailing or killing them. Supported for a time by the United States, it killed, tortured, and imprisoned leftist rebels in the longest civil war in Latin American history. Death squads murdered students, union activists, and priests who stirred up the population.

In 1977, the United States realized it had created a human rights monster and cut off military aid. The killing did not stop. Indigenous Mayan Indians especially were singled out. In one instance in 1980, 27 Ixil Indians protested by taking over the Spanish embassy. Troopers broke into the embassy (even though it was theoretically Spanish territory) and burned the building with Indians and embassy workers inside. The one survivor was kidnapped from his hospital bed, tortured, and killed. Many Indians suspected of being or supporting guerrillas were herded into "model villages" to be supervised by the military. By the end of the war, 200,000 citizens were dead. Cerezo needed peace in his country as badly as the other Peace Accord participants.

HONDURAS

Honduras, located north of Nicaragua and east of El Salvador, was the victim of geography. Author Clifford Krauss wrote of it, "Honduras had become a country for lease in Washington's cold war."[60] Its landlord was the United States.

In 1954, a general strike of 55,000 workers from the United Fruit Company was initiated by the Honduran Communist Party. Above, workers and their families gather in a workers' compound on a plantation during the strike.

U.S. manipulation of this nation began in the 1820s. Lacking volcanic soil to cultivate coffee, Honduras turned to growing bananas. American fruit companies bought large tracts of land in Honduras. They built railroads to connect their land to their ships in the ports they built. For taxes, the fruit companies paid the government only one cent per stem of bananas. Hondurans liked working for these companies, which built their own stores, hospitals, and schools. They did not like the low wages they were paid or the company forces that broke up fledgling strikes. The fruit companies were more influential than the government itself.

In 1954, a general strike of 55,000 workers was started by the Honduran Communist Party and labor leaders (trained in Guatemala) because the United Fruit Company would not pay double

time for working on Easter Sunday (as directed by law). Though the strike ended, the Honduran government worried that communism would spread from Guatemala into Honduras.

At the same time, the United States was orchestrating the overthrow of Guatemala's Arbenz. Although Honduras would not overtly join the CIA plot, it allowed the National Liberation Movement army to train inside its borders. Planes that bombed Guatemala City took off from inside Honduras. Later, Honduras allowed the CIA to use Swan Island to transmit propaganda and combat instructions by radio before and during its 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

In 1979, the region was in turmoil. In Nicaragua, to the south, the Sandinistas seized control. At the invitation of an army officer, General Gustavo Alverez Martinez, what was left of the Somoza National Guard organized in Honduras. The Contras set up camp there and agreed to find and turn over to the death squads suspected Honduran Marxists. They were also supposed to stop weapons going to El Salvador from Nicaragua.

The U.S. military also made its presence known; it ran maneuvers, which included dropping American soldiers 25 miles from the Nicaraguan border and building an 8,000-foot runway that resupplied the Contras.

In essence, Honduras became an occupied country. More than 13,000 Contras and members of their families, settled in camps inside its borders. Unfortunately, they were not the only ones living in Honduras. About 13,000 to 14,000 El Salvadoran refugees fled a repressive regime and settled there, as well. Hundreds of Guatemalans came, too. "For a small country like Honduras," said a government official, "receiving such a high number of refugees is a burden that goes beyond its capacity."[61]

Grateful that they were supplying the Contras with an operating base, the United States pumped more than a billion dollars in aid into Honduras. The disadvantage was that a war hovering over Honduras discouraged foreign investors. The country remained chained primarily to U.S. aid. In addition, Honduras

became a major point for cocaine trade between South America and the United States, with three-fourths of a ton of cocaine leaving Honduras every month.

President José Azcona Hoyo took office in January 1986. Three months later, the Sandinistas again crossed into Honduras to fight the Contras. In June, the Contras countered with an invasion of their own. The Sandinistas put troops along the border to stop them. Then, on December 8, 1986, the Sandinistas crossed into Honduras and attacked a Honduran army position, killing two soldiers. Goaded on by the United States, the Hondurans fought back. Using American-made supersonic bombers, they strafed and bombed Sandinista positions inside both Honduras and Nicaragua. Somehow, the two countries avoided starting another war. "This is not really our battle," said a Honduran to an American journalist. "It's yours."[62]

No wonder Arias was desperate to gain some measure of peace in Central America. Except for his tiny nation, Central America was going up in smoke.

CHAPTER 5

His Own Man

Shortly after the election in 1986, Costa Rica and the United States got a good look at Oscar Arias Sánchez, the man who would lead the only democracy in Central America. Under his trim, neat, and conservative appearance was a man with definite opinions about what was best for Costa Rica and the region. His opinions meant that he would not be another yes-man to United States foreign policy.

The president-elect appeared on an American public broadcasting program in February 1986. Asked about the $100 million in aid President Reagan wanted for the Contras, Arias told the program host, "If I were Mr. Reagan, I would give that money to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica for economic aid, not military aid to the contras . . . . The result of the aid to the contras has been a more dictatorial, more totalitarian government in the north."[63] When the host persisted, Arias snapped back, "Why don't you accept my answer?"[64]

Reagan administration officials were surprised at Arias's attitude. They were accustomed to more agreeable and cooperative Costa Rican presidents. Arias was, in effect, biting the hand that fed

Above, U.S. President Ronald Reagan meets with Costa Rican president Luis Alberto Monge, Arias's predecessor, in 1982. When Arias was elected president, Americans were surprised by his criticism of the Reagan administration.

Costa Rica. Between 1981 and 1986, the United States had provided half a billion dollars in aid to Arias's country. After Arias's television interview, the U.S. ambassador suggested on Costa Rican radio that Ticos might not need so much U.S. aid. Then, $25 million was delayed in arriving.

Arias did not bend. Three months later, in his inauguration speech of May 8, 1986, he reminded the heads of 10 Latin American countries and an American delegation attending that Costa Rica was a sovereign country and not a satellite of some larger power. "We will never negotiate when it comes to our national dignity," he said. "We tolerate no threats, offense or any other act that would compromise that dignity. We are a nation of reasonable citizens and lovers of peace, but nobody

should believe that these virtues . . . weaken our resolve to defend Costa Rica."[65]

To Arias, words were more powerful as weapons. He gave both Nicaragua and Washington a preview of how the Central American conflict could be resolved. "We will keep Costa Rica out of the armed conflicts of Central America and we will endeavor through diplomatic and political means to keep our Central American brothers from killing each other," he said.[66]

Later, during the inaugural festivities, Arias invited the American delegation, including Vice President George Bush, to his home. Bush told him, "Nicaragua is a real danger to Costa Rica. There is no limit to the help we can give you if you help us." Arias did not budge. "I've made my position clear," he said. "Please don't insist."[67]

When he took the Sash of Office, Arias found himself in a precarious situation. His predecessor, Luis Alberto Monge, had passed two elephant-sized problems onto Arias's lap. One was the seemingly unending war between Nicaraguans. The other was Costa Rica's crushing national debt. It was not impossible for Arias to resolve these issues, but it was going to take a lot of effort.

The most obvious problem was the war across Costa Rica's border. To be fair, Costa Rica had been contending with Nicaragua since the Sandinistas rebelled in 1979. Clashes between the Sandinistas and Somoza's National Guard had often crossed into Costa Rica, despite warnings of then-president Rodrigo Carazo Odio.

The border seemed like Swiss cheese, with holes anyone could pass through. U.S. helicopters had landed in Costa Rica to help Somoza escape, and Carazo allowed the U.S.–backed Central American Democratic Community to operate out of San José, trying to isolate Nicaragua from other countries. Contras tried to blow up a short-wave radio station that was Costa Rican–owned and transmitted revolutionary messages into Argentina.

Critics of the Peacemaker

It was abundantly clear that the Reagan administration was not happy with Arias's peace plan. Reagan believed that only a military overthrow could save Nicaragua from communism and called the plan "fatally flawed" because there were no harsh punishments to those who did not abide by it. The peace plan, in effect, told the United States, "Words are more important than war; we'll take it from here." It was a blow to Reagan's request to Congress for millions more in military funding.

Though officially denying revenge was the motive, the Reagan administration delayed appointing a new ambassador to Costa Rica. When Costa Rica approached U.S. banks, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and European investors for help with its foreign debts, the United States, which could have put in a good word to influence them, was silent. Most obviously, Arias's administration (which shut down the secret U.S.-sponsored Contra airstrip and kicked the Contras out of Costa Rica) lost $40 million from the $200 million sent to Monge's administration (which had allowed U.S. activity against the Contras inside Costa Rica). About $85 million additional aid was also suspended.

Said one concerned Arias aide, "The Reagan Administration is blind, obsessed with Nicaragua. But they are not going to succeed in overthrowing the Sandinistas; in the end they are going to destroy Costa Rica's democracy instead."* The unofficial harassment continued when Arias's closest adviser was forced to resign his position because he lobbied against Contra aid while holding a position with the United Nations. The Costa Rican ambassador was also charged with lobbying against the Contras. In addition, officials also published an audit charging that American aid had been mismanaged in Costa Rica.

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*Tony Avirgan, "Leaning on Arias," *The Nation*, Sept. 12, 1987, p. 22.

In 1982, Luis Alberto Monge replaced Carazo. Staggering under the $5 billion debt that was passed on to him, Monge reluctantly turned to the United States for aid. Washington coughed up $125 million in 1983 alone, along with a $100 million standby loan from the International Monetary Fund. Over the next two years, U.S. funds made up more than 30 percent of Costa Rica's operating expenses. Dollars saved the Costa Rican economy but weakened in its sovereignty. Contras used Costa Rica as a base

Iran-Contra Affair

The Iran–Contra scandal spread across two hemispheres and three continents. It began in 1983, when an anti-Iraq group was imprisoned after staging truck bombings in Kuwait. In retaliation, the Lebanese Hezbollah organization kidnapped 30 hostages. Six were Americans. In the meantime, Iran, locked in a war with Iraq, needed weapons, and few nations would sell any to it. The United States had weapons. A plan was devised to sell arms to Iran in exchange for help in getting the hostages released. The plan failed after the arms were delivered and only one hostage was released.

Enter Lt. Colonel Oliver North, an aide in the U.S. National Security Council. He proposed, in December 1985, to secretly sell weapons to Iran again. The money the Iranians paid, he suggested, should be directed to aiding the Contras fighting the Nicaraguan government. His boss, Admiral John Poindexter, approved the plan. In 1986, Iran began secretly receiving shipments of antitank missiles. In return, the National Security Council funneled the money to the Contras.

The affair was made public when a Lebanese newspaper revealed the arms deal with Iran. Shortly afterward, the Nicaraguans shot down a U.S. plane and discovered the secret support of the Contras by the Americans.

The Reagan administration was scandalized. In the first place, Reagan had pledged not to deal with terrorists; Iran was considered a terrorist country. Second, he (or his subordinates)

and supply route. They passed by Costa Rican border patrols, took food and supplies into Nicaragua, and brought wounded rebels back across the border.

A Contra leader later said, "The rules of the game were, more or less, complete freedom for the contras to pursue political, humanitarian, and non-lethal activities like buying food, treating the wounded, communications. Contra military activities—Yes, but very clandestinely, very discreetly, very cautiously."[68]

had broken the Boland Amendment. It specifically banned the Defense Department, the CIA, and any other government agency from secretly trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. It also banned the CIA from giving money to the Contras. Third, the administration neglected its Constitutional obligation to notify Congress about covert operations and foreign funding.

The administration's defense was that the National Security Council had not been forbidden by Congress to do anything. This reasoning was like a child telling his parents, "You only said Bobby, Mike, and Sean couldn't come over when you were gone. You didn't say anything about Billy."

Although not specifically condemning President Reagan for being involved in the affair, the Tower Commission that investigated the scandal criticized the president for not having better knowledge of the activities of and control over his staff.

North and Poindexter were indicted. North was convicted on 3 of 12 counts, but the convictions were overturned on the grounds that his Fifth Amendment rights had been violated. Poindexter was convicted of felony counts of lying to Congress, conspiracy, altering evidence, and obstruction of justice. His convictions were also overturned on Fifth Amendment violations. Other CIA and State Department officials were found guilty of withholding information from Congress, but President George H.W. Bush, who had been vice president during the scandal, pardoned them. The decision to break the law was never directly linked to the president.

Pressured by members of the Partido Liberación Nacional, including Arias, Monge made an effort to restore Costa Rican sovereignty. On November 17, 1983, he declared Costa Rica's "Perpetual, active and unarmed neutrality."[69] Monge fired his pro–Contra foreign minister and declined a U.S. offer of 1,000 army engineers to build roads and bridges near Nicaragua.

No one paid much attention. The CIA bribed border patrols to give Contras free passage. They paid journalists to write articles favoring the Contras. They directed the Contras to attack from inside Costa Rica, hoping the Sandinistas would invade Costa Rica and give them reason to directly attack the Sandinistas.

Two months before Monge left office, he gave permission to open a communication station run by Americans for the Contras and to build a secret mile-long airstrip to refuel Contra planes. Monge's "going away present"[70] was built between September 1985 and February 1986.

Then, Oscar Arias was elected. He wrote in a newspaper column,

> My opposition to Washington's policy has surprised some people. I propose to show the entire world that well-founded friendship between two brother peoples allows us to agree at times but also to differ; that when the small one always does what the big one wants, that is not friendship, but slavery.[71]

He set upon his own course. Shortly after his inauguration, Arias refused asylum to the corrupt Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos had fled his country in February 1986; his wife, the infamous Imelda Marcos, was forced to leave her 3,000 pairs of shoes behind. Marcos was a friend of the United States, but Arias refused to admit him anyway.

When Arias learned of the Contras' activities in Costa Rica, he began to clean house. He arrested several Contra activists and dismissed officials who had permitted a secret Contra hospital to

operate in Costa Rica. "We're going to throw them out no matter who they are if we catch them helping the contras," he said.[72]

The mile-long dirt airstrip the Contras had been using to supply their own in Nicaragua was, of course, the biggest issue. "I told Mr. Lewis Tambs [then U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica] that from now on, that would be changed," Arias later recalled. "I would never accept that. I asked him to close the airstrip and stop all logistic support to the contras.[73]

After four months, however, the airstrip was still not closed down. By September 1986, Arias was tired of waiting. He scheduled a press conference to announce the existence of the Santa Elena airstrip. U.S. officials telephoned, and, simply put, blackmailed him: If you talk about the airstrip, $80 million in aid will disappear and an invitation to speak to President Reagan will be withdrawn. Arias backed off and held no press conference. Interestingly, though, shortly afterward, both the Costa Rican and American press somehow "discovered" the airstrip themselves. Arias got his way. The strip was closed down; logs and trees were dragged across it and guards were posted to keep it inoperable. He also got his U.S. aid and his meeting with Reagan.

People wondered why Arias refused to help the Contras, supposedly an anti-communist organization fighting to overthrow a communist government just across Costa Rica's border. Arias said,

> The Communist party in Costa Rica is smaller today than four years ago. Why is that? Because the people in Costa Rica have seen what has happened in Nicaragua. The best propaganda against communism in Costa Rica is to put [Costa Ricans] on a bus and send them to Managua.[74]

The Costa Ricans who elected Arias expected him to make good on his campaign promises. His vision of government was much different than that of his predecessors. Arias was only 45 years old, and his administration was made up of youthful

experts and university intellectuals, not necessarily professional politicians within the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) structure. Like John F. Kennedy, he asked his brother to advise him. Rodrigo Arias Sánchez became his minister of security.

Costa Ricans were concerned with the Sandinista–Contra war, but they were also worried about housing shortages and finding jobs. Arias had promised 80,000 new homes during his presidency. To make good on that promise, his advisers stretched the truth a bit by changing the word "houses" to "housing solutions,"[75] so that remodeling and renovating could count in the tally. Even so, about 16,000 new homes were constructed in 1986. Arias further encouraged housing construction by granting loans for business projects that included some kind of public housing. The goal was to get rid of the cardboard and corrugated tin slums that could be seen even in San José, Costa Rica's capital city. A positive side effect of housing projects was that they provided employment. The work may not have been high-tech or required high skill, but at least they were jobs.

One of Arias's goals was to expand the number of cooperatives within his country. He viewed them as an alternative to state ownership in farming, housing, and consumer distribution, despite the opposition of a U.S. program that gave $200 million annually to state-owned operations. Still, by 1988, 550 cooperatives had hired 260,000 people (from a labor force of 900,000), and almost half the national exports came from cooperatives, not government-owned businesses.

Arias wanted to allow more local input in decision making, and he also wanted to improve education. He succeeded in instituting achievement tests at the end of primary and secondary school. Again, he stepped away from mimicking America. "We cannot use the U.S. as a guide," he said. "We have to have technical vocational schools. We have to combine them with the cooperative movement for a kind of work study program."[76]

The second elephant-sized problem that Monge had left to Arias was a national debt of $5 billion. Despite its image as a

productive democracy, Costa Rica's government spent more money than it had. It, even more than the other Central American countries, depended on foreign aid to survive. The primary source for its aid was the United States. Costa Rica is second only to Israel in its dependency on America's goodwill.

"I made a lot of pledges and commitments to Costa Rica, and in order to fulfill those commitments, we must maintain our peace," said Arias.[77] With a war raging next door, and sometimes within Costa Rica itself, Costa Rica staggered under the influx of immigrants and was isolated from potential investors. Moving the gigantic national debt required both peace in the region and foreign aid.

Clearly, peace in the region was Arias's top priority. He later said, "I argued that none of our other goals for the region—education, development, health—could be achieved without peace. Thus it was this resolve from my campaign that I followed during my term. And it was this that led to the peace plan and regional negotiations."[78]

Arias already had the outline of the Peace Accord sketched out by his May inauguration. He put off introducing the Peace Accord to the presidents of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, however, until February of the following year. When the negotiations were held, he did not invite the Contras. He believed that they were part of the problem, not the solution. In theory, the presidents agreed that all military aid from outside countries would stop, an immediate cease-fire would occur, free elections would be held with international observers watching, amnesty would be granted to all political prisoners, human rights would be guaranteed, military forces would be reduced, and each country would establish a commission to settle disputes and guarantee human rights.

Peace in Central America, according to the Arias plan, would come at a great price. By accepting the terms, the leaders were taking gigantic steps. They were saying they'd give up power to let the people decide. They were saying they would quit taking

millions of dollars in aid from both the United States and Soviet Union. In return, the leaders and their countries would improve their public images. That would persuade foreign investors to come to their countries. Most important, their countries could have peace.

In March, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua indicated he would also accept the plan. In June 1987, Arias was summoned to the American White House for what he thought would be a 15-minute photo opportunity. It turned into something like an ambush. The vice president, the White House chief of staff, the national security adviser, and other administration officials were present. Reagan lectured Arias for a quarter hour, trying to convince him to support the Contras.

Reagan should have known better. Instead, Arias lectured right back. For 30 minutes, he explained his views. "You're totally isolated," Arias said. "Nobody is backing Washington . . . . By no one, I mean Contadora, the Latin American Support Group, Western Europe. You're betting on war. Why don't we bet on peace?"[79]

Reagan retorted that military force was the only way to remove the Sandinistas. Arias said the Contras were too weak. Reagan said that communists never gave up power voluntarily. Arias replied, "We all know history, Mr. President, but no one is obliged to repeat it."[80] Someone later told the story, unconfirmed, that when Arias left the office Reagan shouted, "Who let that midget in here?"[81]

If the United States was not trying to change history, at least Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras agreed to try. They met in Esquipulas, Guatemala, for two days in order to hammer out the details of the Arias accord, adding a timetable to it. The wonder of it was that the accord included no consequences if the countries did not live up to their part of the bargain. There was no military retaliation and no penalties. The Reagan administration refused to accept anything so peaceful, calling it "fatally flawed,"[82] having "no teeth,"[83] and being full of "loopholes and omissions."[84]

Arias, however, insisted the only thing that the countries might do to retaliate for noncompliance was to cut off trade with the offending peace breaker. When he returned to Costa Rica from Guatemala, he was met by cheering crowds at the San José airport.

Arias proved cautious about the signing. Attending a Thanksgiving Mass the next day, he told the congregation, "If today we are raising a hope, there are also a thousand obstacles before us. Each time we think we have completed a task, we find a greater challenge ahead."[85]

The next step was to wait and see if Nicaragua's Ortega, El Salvador's Duarte, Guatemala's Cerezo, and Honduras's Azcona could deliver on their promises. Despite Arias's refusal to be manipulated by United States' opinion, he firmly supported democracy. The peace plan that he had been formulating since before his election was grounded in it.

"We totally identify with Western values, democracy and what the United States represents," Arias said. "I have said that there will be no perpetual peace, long-term in Central America unless there are democratic governments."[86]

CHAPTER 6

Nobel Laureate

"They've given you the Nobel Peace Prize," Rodrigo Arias shouted over the radio. The president and his family had taken a family vacation, to celebrate his wife Margarita's birthday. There were no telephones or televisions.

"No, no, I don't believe it," President Arias said. "They're probably just saying I'm being considered for it."

"Oscar, I'm telling you, they did," said his brother.[87]

Arias, Margarita, and their children, Oscar Philipe and Eugenie Sylvia, hurried back to the capital to news conferences, microphones, bright lights, and questions. After holding the news conference, Arias met with school children at his office. "Part of our basic curriculum is teaching kids the importance of peace," said a teacher. "Costa Ricans are often accused of being cowards because we are pacifists. Now, with this prize, we are going to be able to show our young people that peace has its rewards."[88]

Costa Ricans celebrated their president's honor. When Arias arrived at the theater one night shortly after the award was announced, he was greeted with applause, outstretched hands, embraces, and

Arias sits next to his wife, Margarita Penón, at a 1987 ceremony in San José, Costa Rica. When Arias and Penón first met in 1973, her friends tried to convince her not to associate with that "lunatic who wants to be president."

shouts of "Oscar, Oscar!"[89] Then someone began singing the national anthem.

"I am happy, immeasurably happy about this news," Arias said after being told he had won the Nobel Peace Prize. "I have no idea what the committee based the decision on. As an individual I have not earned this prize. I believe that the academy intended the prize for Costa Rica, the people of Costa Rica."[90]

In fact, the Nobel Prize Committee was very aware of Arias's determined crusade for peace. He was cited for his "outstanding contribution to the possible return of stability and peace to a region long torn by strife and civil war," the Norwegian Nobel Committee said.[91]

To choose the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, a committee of five decides who has done the most to promote peace in the world. When Arias was chosen, the committee included a politician and writer, a former labor prime minister, a former head of the World Council of Churches, a journalist, and a history professor.

In September, shortly after the Arias peace plan had been signed, the committee contacted qualified individuals and groups to solicit their nominations for the prize recipient. Those contacted included national assemblies and governments; members of international courts; university professors in history, philosophy, law, and theology; directors of peace research institutes; former Nobel Peace Prize winners; former committee members; and former Norwegian Nobel Institute advisors. The nomination process traditionally ends on February 1. From March to August, the committee examines the nominees' qualifications.

Arias's selection, taken from among 93 other nominees, was unusual. He was nominated by just one person, a member of the Swedish Parliament who, every year, nominated the president of Costa Rica (no matter who was in office) because of Costa Rica's long tradition of peacefulness and democracy. The legislator appreciated that Costa Rica did not keep large, poverty-stricken masses enslaved to a few rich, elite landowners. He noted Costa Rica's stability, which was marred by only a brief (44-day) war in 1948, as well as the free and compulsory education that had been in force for more than a century.

A *New York Times* editorial agreed with the choice, saying, "The prize goes to the elected leader of an exemplary democracy whose citizens decided four decades ago to abolish their armed forces. Costa Ricans as a people have long since earned this prize."[92] In a way, Arias was right in claiming the award for the people of Costa Rica.

Others, however, seemed more likely candidates: the president of the Philippines, who had led her country from dictatorship to democracy; a negotiator who had tried to get the Lebanon hostages released; and the Dalai Lama, who wanted to free Tibet from

Peace in Progress

One criticism for giving Oscar Arias Sánchez the Nobel Peace Prize was that peace was not yet a reality in Central America. His was not the first award given for a peace in progress, however.

In 1971, Chancellor Willy Brandt of the Federal Republic of Germany was honored for trying to improve relations with Eastern Europe. East and West Germany had been divided after World War II, and each regarded the other as an enemy until Brandt began his *Ostpolitick* policy. Over time, the two opposing regimes were able to exchange ambassadors, enact trade treaties, and develop a new attitude of respect and cooperation.

In 1973, the United States' Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho were given the Nobel Peace Prize after they negotiated a cease-fire during the Vietnam War. The chair of the Nobel Committee acknowledged that the two were from opposite political worlds, but that the committee wanted to recognize the four years of negotiating that had resulted in the cease-fire. Although American troops were able to get out of the combat, the war did not end until 1975, when the North Vietnamese took over South Vietnam and created the United Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Tho would not accept the award, saying his country was not yet at peace. Kissinger did accept the award but did not appear at the ceremony because his duties as secretary of state prevented it. Two members of the Nobel Committee were so outraged by the decision that they resigned in protest.

In 1978, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel were honored for signing the Camp David Accords. Both had made extraordinary efforts to negotiate a peace between Egypt and Israel. Six months after their agreement, the two did sign a peace treaty. Unfortunately, after Begin promised to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, he increased Israeli settlements on the Gaza and West Bank. This so angered Sadat that he refused to attend the ceremony in Oslo.

Chinese control (and who was eventually chosen in 1989) were in the running. Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned South African and outspoken opponent to apartheid; the president of Argentina; and the head of the World Health Organization also seemed ahead of Arias. The committee named an organization in 1985 and a writer in 1986, though, so its members agreed that they needed a political person for the 1987 award.

The committee expected some surprise, if not opposition, in reaction to their choice of Arias. The Peace Accord, after all, was not in any way close to being completed. In addition, Arias's contribution, although admirable, was not really a lifetime achievement. "A young process is not a bad process, and this is a process we want to encourage," a committee spokesman said, defending their choice. "We have a long history—68 years—where the prize has been given to all kinds of people."[93]

Arias's Nobel Peace Prize was a stunning blow to the Reagan administration's efforts to get more aid for the Contra "freedom fighters." Its request for $270 million, waiting for congressional approval, was doomed. House of Representatives Speaker Jim Wright said, "I can't conceive of providing any military aid in a time of peace."[94] Democrats in Congress agreed that Contra aid funding had no chance of passing. "This kills it," one said. "It's dead."[95]

U.S. Republican leaders grumbled about the award. One administration official called the award "premature."[96] Another referred to the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to Henry Kissinger of the United States and a North Vietnamese negotiator trying to end the Vietnam War. "This is the same committee that gave the award to Le Duc Tho two years before he turned South Vietnam into a communist prison."[97] Congressman Jack Kemp of New York thought the committee "ought to save the peace prize until they see what happens in the future."[98] For a man known as "the Great Communicator" while he was in office, all President Reagan could muster when he heard of Arias's award was, "I congratulate him."[99]

Arias took the political bad sportsmanship in stride. "There will always be people with small spirits,"[100] he said. Still, the fact of the matter was that the Peace Prize gave him additional standing at the peace table and in influencing the U.S. Congress against the Contra aid package. Congress drafted a resolution that enthusiastically congratulated Arias and pledged the Senate's "firm support and full cooperation"[101] to his peace plan. "Prior to the Arias Nobel Peace Prize," said an important Democratic congressman, "it was a question of whether Ortega screwed up. Today, it's a question of what Arias thinks."[102]

For their part, the members of the countries negotiating the Peace Accord were also happy about the award. Daniel Ortega was the first to telephone his congratulations. "Your initiative and efforts have brought us closer to peace," he said.[103] El Salvador's Duarte said, "He wanted peace, not for himself. He was thinking of all the people who had died through the years."[104]

The committee knew peace was not actually in place and that much work still had to be done by the five Central American countries. "We in the committee do not operate in a vacuum," one said. "We saw that the Central American problem has been in focus over the last month and the past year. I think it is important that the Peace Prize can be given to a person who is currently active, that the prize can have an influence."[105]

The committee also noted that Arias was not alone in his quest for peace. It acknowledged that five nations' presidents signed the accord. The committee said that the accord,

> lays solid foundations for the further development of democracy and for open cooperation between peoples and states. A prerequisite for lasting peace is the realization of democratic ideals, with freedom and equality for all. In the opinion of the committee, Oscar Arias is a strong spokesman for those ideas. The importance of his work for peace will extend beyond Central America.[106]

Above, Oscar Arias poses with his Nobel Peace Prize medal and diploma shortly after receiving them on December 10, 1987. According to the Nobel Committee, Arias was awarded the prize for "his work for peace in Central America, efforts which led to the accord signed in Guatemala."

Arias traveled with his family to Oslo for the ceremony. He invited his mentor and former political rival, José Figueres, to go with him, but the 81-year-old's failing health prevented it. The three-day Nobel Prize affair included a press conference, the acceptance speech ceremony, and then a later lecture given by the Nobel laureate. The ceremony was set at the University of Oslo for December 10, the anniversary of the death of Alfred Nobel, the award's creator. The chairperson of the Nobel Committee presented Arias with a medal, a citation, and a certificate in front of 700 guests, including the Norwegian king, parliament, and members of the government.

Unlike other winners who were present, who wore the formal attire of tails and white ties, Arias merely wore a dark blue suit. His speech was shorter and less formal by most standards, fewer than 800 words. With the world watching and listening, he did not squander the chance to speak his mind, especially to the superpowers shadowing the conflict in Central America. President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev of the Soviet Union were meeting in Washington the very day of the awards ceremony. Addressing those present, Arias began:

> When you decided to honour me with this prize, you decided to honour a country of peace, you decided to honour Costa Rica. When in this year, 1987, you carried out the will of Alfred E. Nobel to encourage peace efforts in the world, you decided to encourage the efforts to secure peace in Central America. I am grateful for the recognition of our search for peace. We are all grateful in Central America…[107]

The next day, Arias gave his Nobel lecture, "Only Peace Can Write the New History." This time he spoke in Spanish, so those listening in Latin America could understand him. He claimed the Peace Prize as member of several groups. He said he was one of 400 million Latin Americans, one of 27 million Central Americans, one of 2.7 million Costa Ricans, and one of 5 presidents committed to peace "with all one's soul."[108]

The Nobel Prize accomplished much for Arias, for the Peace Accord, and for Costa Rica. Instead of being just a little country in Central America, Costa Rica became a force to be reckoned with. It had, after all, produced a Nobel Peace Prize winner. "When I used to talk about Costa Rica in England," said an Arias associate, "people would giggle. Who cared? Who cared if this little country doesn't have an army? But now, with the Nobel, people care."[109]

Tourism in Costa Rica picked up as well. More people wanted to see this peaceful little tropical paradise than before. "Before

the prize, many of the people on the cruise didn't get off the boat. They were scared," said a tour guide who handled cruise ship passengers. "They thought they might get shot. But now, everyone gets off, everyone wants to see peaceful Costa Rica. And everyone buys something."[110]

On the other hand, politicians inside Costa Rica wanted Arias to get back to solving Costa Rica's problems. "The Nobel Peace Prize counts zip in domestic politics," one government official said.[111] One of San José's newspapers simply could not put down its disagreements with its president long enough to give him the space in the newspaper that the prize deserved. Although Arias acknowledged winning the Nobel Peace Prize was "the happiest day of my life,"[112] the hard work of achieving any kind of peace lay ahead.

CHAPTER 7

Not as Easy as It Looks

"Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions by many people in many countries," Oscar Arias Sánchez said in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. "It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and of resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation, nor enforced by the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together."[113]

Arias was right. Peace was not going to fall like confetti after the five Central American countries signed the Peace Accord treaty and laid down their pens in August 1987. Bringing peace to just one country was enough of a task after decades of fighting and rivers of blood lost. Arias proposed simultaneously mending three countries that had been self-destructing for decades. Resolving tensions between four countries was an even bigger complication. On top of that, Arias was on the clock. He had only a four-year term as president to achieve his goals.

The backbone of the Peace Accord included a cease-fire, amnesty for armed rebels, political and press freedoms, and

restoring civil liberties to the countries. Most important, it set deadlines to test the progress towards peace made by the countries involved. The first deadline was November 5, 1987. It seemed every time someone took one step forward, someone else would take two steps back.

A few days after the accord was signed, Arias was on the offensive, declaring,

> For many years, it has been alleged that we Central Americans are unable to resolve our own problems. Now we have shown that we have the capacity to be flexible and to make concessions in order to reach a consensus. Both the United States and Cuba have a moral obligation to support what we are doing.[114]

A key player in making the peace happen was Nicaragua's Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega. Arias declared that Ortega had to allow freedom of the press if the plan was to succeed. "The language of the agreement is very explicit and not open to interpretation on this point," Arias said. "Fortunately Spanish is not an ambiguous language."[115]

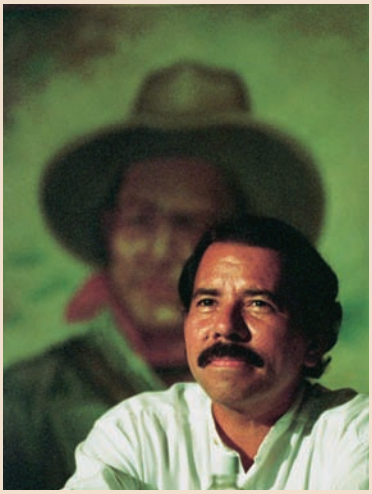
The announcement of Arias's Nobel Prize came on October 14, 1987. Two days later, Nicaragua's president, Daniel Ortega, announced he would not negotiate directly with Contra political leaders, only with individual Contra leaders in the field. He argued that such face-to-face discussions would make them appear to be Nicaragua's equal. Instead, he wanted to negotiate directly with the United States.

Arias tried to prod him back in the right direction. "Now more than ever, I am going to insist that a negotiated cease-fire in Nicaragua is indispensable if we are to achieve lasting peace in Central America," he said. "I strongly believe that Daniel Ortega should take my advice and accept Cardinal Obando's offer to help negotiate a cease-fire."[116]

Ortega also announced he was allowing *La Prensa,* an opposition newspaper, to reopen and a Catholic radio station to begin

Daniel Ortega

Daniel Ortega was not a penniless peasant, but rather the son of a chemical and textile import broker. He went to an upscale private parochial school. Ortega began his career as a revolutionary by vandalizing cars outside the United States Embassy and by robbing banks. When his father's business went bankrupt, his upper-class friends snubbed him, and he joined a radical activist group begun by the Cuban ambassador to Managua. He joined the underground organization of the FSLN when he attended the University of Central America.



Daniel Ortega, pictured above, was the president of Nicaragua from 1985 to 1990. Ortega was a key player in the success of the Peace Accord; when Arias insisted that he had to allow freedom of speech in Nicaragua, Ortega allowed the reopening of an opposition newspaper.

Ortega was caught robbing a dairy company and was imprisoned by the Somoza government for seven years. In prison, he was repeatedly tortured and nearly lost an eye. His brother, Humberto, was trained by Cubans and lost the use of his right arm when Costa Rican police shot him during an attempt to free a Sandinista from jail. Daniel Ortega was freed in a prisoner exchange in 1974.

When the Sandinistas seized control, Ortega was part of a five-person junta ("council") that ruled the country until the 1985 elections made him president. The world was surprised when Ortega and his FSLN lost the 1990 elections. He tried unsuccessfully in the 1996 and 2001 elections to

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(continued)

return to power. Scandal touched Ortega in 1996: "The Pinata" laws gave government land to FSLN officials and fattened Ortega's bank account. He again was in the news in 1998 when his stepdaughter accused him of sexual abuse, harassment, and rape. Still, as head of the country's second largest party, Ortega was once again elected as president in 2006.

to air programs again. Never mind the thousands imprisoned in Nicaragua; Ortega released a handful of prisoners.

On the important issue of amnesty, Arias said, "I hope that in both El Salvador and Nicaragua the amnesty will be as broad as possible, covering the largest number of political prisoners. If that doesn't happen, we will not be on the road to the peace and democracy that we all want in Central America."[117] In El Salvador, President José Napoleón Duarte and the leftist guerrillas did not meet. Duarte had insisted the rebels put down their arms. The rebels counseled with Arias to get the talks going again. By the end of October, the talks among the Nicaraguans were at an impasse. "We haven't advanced much," Arias said.[118]

World leaders watched as the November deadline neared, thinking the Nicaraguans would not live up to their part of the bargain. The Reagan administration anticipated a breakdown between the Nicaraguans and pressed Congress for more Contra aid before the November deadline. Threats by the Contras to continue fighting, according to the Reagan administration, were the only way to "force" the Sandinistas toward peace.

Arias hoped Congress would wait. "I am obliged to be an optimist," he said. "I really hope that the Americans will give us the opportunity until November 7 to show that we have the will to find peace in Central America."[119] Just in time, Ortega agreed to indirect talks with the Contras through an intermediary, a Catholic cardinal respected by the Contras. Again, Arias was not too impressed, calling the concession, "a positive step toward peace

José Napoleón Duarte, above, was mayor of San Salvador before being elected as president of El Salvador. Duarte would not meet with the leftist guerrillas plaguing his country after they refused his requirement that they put down their arms.

in Central America. Rhetoric is one thing, and commitment to peace is another."[120]

He had good reason to be skeptical. By early December, the Sandinista–Contra talks in the Dominican Republic had reached an impasse again. The Sandinistas insisted that the Contras should no longer accept foreign aid from the United States. The Contras wanted a commitment to complete "democratization."

Three days later, on December 10, 1987, Arias accepted his Nobel Peace Prize in Norway, but peace was not quite yet at hand. While Arias was on an eight-day tour of Scandinavia after the Nobel awards ceremony, Ortega announced he was going to build up the Sandinista army to between 60,000 and 80,000 and create a reserve of 600,000. It was a stunning blow to the peace progress. Talks between the Contras and Sandinistas collapsed.

Arias replied,

> When we met in Guatemala City on the 7th of August, in our minds and in our heart, our aim was to limit and reduce the size of armies—and never for any reason to increase the sizes. I regret that the Sandinistas might be thinking about increasing their already powerful army. What they need now are agricultural tools, tractors, hospitals, schools, and roads.[121]

The presidents of the five Peace Accord nations were to meet on January 15, 1988, to evaluate the progress towards peace. Arias decided to set a strong example. He kicked out the Contras who had maintained a political office in Costa Rica. He sent a letter to Ortega, criticizing him for not doing more to negotiate with the Contras and for enlarging the army. He called on Ortega to give more freedom to the press and his political opposition, to offer political amnesty, and to lift the state of siege over Nicaragua. He criticized the United States and Honduras for their continuing aid to the Contras. Just before the summit, Arias seemed depressed about the prospects of the meeting that would be held in his

Critics of the Peacemaker

The world watched Oscar Arias Sánchez manage the Peace Accord that would settle Central America's civil wars. At home, however, Costa Ricans were less than enthusiastic about his long absences from the country and seeming lack of concentration on domestic affairs. In 1988, after Arias had received his Nobel Peace Prize, one Costa Rican said, "He may have done great things, but I can't eat the prize. It gets harder to feed my family every day. Prizes help the heart, but they do nothing to fill the stomach."* Arias's approval rating dropped from 57 percent just before he announced the peace plan to 19 percent afterward.

Arias got the message. He cut down on his traveling, on time devoted to the peace plan, and on the number of invitations he accepted to speak or attend ceremonies. Instead, he worked on controlling the 22 percent inflation in Costa Rica. He stayed away from the inauguration of Mexico's new president. Some thought he wanted to avoid calling a summit meeting that would surely fail; others believed Arias stayed home to avoid more criticism from unhappy citizens. As a result, he was unable to speak with Fidel Castro of Cuba about reducing tensions in the region.

It was difficult for the man who was once the hero of his country to be booed at a concert and or to be acknowledged with merely polite applause when a performer asked the audience to recognize Arias's presence at the theater. *La Nación*, the country's largest newspaper, frequently at odds with Arias, published articles about increases in the cost of basic goods, cigarettes, beer, and electricity.

Ticos seemed more critical of what their president did—or did not do—than who and what he was as a person. They did not hold a grudge, though; by the time he left office, he enjoyed an 80 percent approval rating—so high, in fact, that his successors dared not attack him personally during the 1990 campaign. They concentrated instead on the party he headed—the Liberación Party.

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*Lindsey Gruson, "Nobel Notwithstanding, at Home the Cheers Die," *New York Times*, December 1, 1988, A4.

country. "This might be the last opportunity to reach peace in the region," Arias said.[122]

Honduras was still harboring Contras who attacked Nicaragua; Nicaragua was still training Guatemalan rebels who attacked their government forces. And then there was the Nicaraguan–Contra mess. The Contras maintained they wanted direct talks with the Sandinistas, but the Sandinistas steadfastly refused.

Then came a breakthrough. Ortega conceded the direct negotiations with the Contras concerning the cease-fire and promised that the two groups could face off on political matters after the Contras applied for amnesty. At the end of January, the two groups met in Costa Rica. At the same time, they both kept an eye on the foreign aid bill in the U.S. Congress. The Sandinistas wanted to show they were being cooperative (and therefore no new money to the Contras was needed). The Contras wanted to demonstrate they were effective, hoping to convince Congress to give them more aid. "You don't kill Dracula with a bullet, but rather with a cross,"[123] Arias said to explain how political pressure was more successful than armed conflict in managing the Sandinistas.

By March 23, 1988, the two Nicaraguan groups recognized each other as legitimate political forces for the first time. Once again, though, the principal players in the talks disagreed. The Contras refused to go to the next stage of negotiations unless Ortega himself led the delegations, the discussions were held somewhere other than Nicaragua, and the five Peace Accord presidents monitored compliance to the agreements. The talks broke up again on June 9.

Arias, the politician, did not immediately criticize the two groups. He counseled that both had to make large concessions if the plan was to work. He advised that the Sandinistas should give political freedom to the opposition parties and that they cease to control the Nicaraguan press. He told the Contras that if they wanted the talks to go on, they needed to lower their demands for immediate political changes in their country. "The negotiating

process has not been exhausted," he said "Both sides have cards up their sleeve that they should play now."[124]

Then, typically, Arias would not let the United States and the Soviet Union off the hook for their part in creating the Central American problems. Nor would he completely let the blame fall on Nicaragua. "If the superpowers had put as much effort into resolving Central American problems as they have put into the Middle East, we would have peace in Central America," he said, "We should be careful not to blame any one party."[125]

The hope was that talks would resume at the end of July. In the meantime, the United States wanted to use an August 1 meeting of Central American foreign ministers to denounce the Sandinistas. Costa Rica and Guatemala would not sign the condemnation. Honduras and El Salvador, who received millions in United States aid, did.

Before the accord talks could resume, the Sandinistas sabotaged them again. They kicked the American ambassador out of Nicaragua, arrested protesters (who were not allowed to see lawyers or told the charges against them), and shut down the opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, for two weeks. The Contras, for their part, insisted any further talks take place outside of Nicaragua, possibly in Costa Rica or Guatemala. Bickering continued. Arias responded harshly. "While in Costa Rica we give our children computers, the Sandinistas give children machine guns," he said. "They have taken off their mask. They were not really honest when they promised to democratize and advance towards a pluralist society."[126]

Four of the five Peace Accord countries agreed to meet in a summit meeting in August. Honduras said it would not attend until Nicaragua dropped its case in the International Court of Justice. Nicaragua had gone to the court to force the Contras out of Honduras, saying that the Contra camps were against international law.

By mid September, Arias was once again campaigning to resume the talks. "A new summit meeting is urgently needed," he said. He continued,

> We need to discuss why our peace plan has not advanced more rapidly. It has been 13 months since the signing of the peace plan . . . . It is the responsibility of the five Presidents not to let this hope die. That is the spirit that should guide our upcoming summit.[127]

The bickering over where the Sandinistas and Contras should meet was finally settled when they agreed to talk in Guatemala instead of in the Nicaraguan capital, Managua. The January 12 and 13, 1989, meeting the presidents had scheduled, however, was postponed by Arias—indefinitely.

Finally, and interestingly, Nicaragua broke the logjam by offering a plan to verify the compliance of the participating countries. The plan proposed that small groups of independent observers from the United Nations and the Organization of American States watch over the Peace Accord countries. It further conceded it would release 3,000 Contras and Somoza National Guardsmen and agreed to cooperate with the United States in fighting drug trafficking. Honduras insisted that another peacekeeping force was needed to monitor the border between Honduras and El Salvador. It feared the Contras would simply settle down in Honduras. It wanted a way to get them out of the country and back to Nicaragua. It wanted the Sandinistas to give the Contras land and help in getting back into civilian life.

The presidents who met at El Salvador set a calendar for Nicaraguan elections. The Sandinistas agreed that opposition parties could campaign from April to August. Then the vote would be held no later than February 25, 1990.

In August 1989, the presidents agreed to get the rebel base camps out of Honduras no later than December 8. The rebels were to give up their guns and return to Nicaragua. After that time, they would be prevented from returning by security forces. More important, they would receive no American aid from the new Bush administration, which had followed President Reagan. On Nicaragua's side, the Sandinistas had to suspend the draft

In the elections in Nicaragua in 1990, presidential challenger Violeta Chamorro crushed the incumbent, Daniel Ortega. At left, Chamorro greets Pope John Paul II during his visit to her country in 1996.

during the elections, relax controls on the press, and reduce police powers.

By October 1989, Arias had personally mediated an impasse between the El Salvadoran government and its rebels. Arias intervened at their negotiating conference, asking them to continue a little longer. He acknowledged that they had been fighting for 10 years and making amends would be difficult.

Then, just as progress seemed to be moving, the peace process received another blow from Daniel Ortega. He told the 16 presidents gathered in Costa Rica to celebrate the centennial of its democracy that he was ending the 19-month-old cease-fire within three days. Citing terrorist attacks by the Contras, he said he was protecting the electoral process by fighting the Contras again.

Arias, who was hosting the two-day conference, said, "Something like this would be lamentable," he said. "The ball is in the political court, not the military court."[128] World opinion was immediate. Ortega was greeted with many criticisms and much outrage. He seemed almost puzzled by the uproar and told Arias that he had the backing of some of the Sandinistas' American supporters. Arias's advice was blunt. "Get rid of them," he said.[129]

Nicaraguan elections proceeded on February 27, 1990, and were carefully watched throughout the world. The question was whether or not Daniel Ortega and his Sandinistas had the support of the people of Nicaragua. Arias felt he knew the answer. "If Ortega wins, I'm going to have to go back to school and relearn everything I know about voter behavior," he said.[130] He was right again.

Ortega was crushed in the polls. Nicaraguans voted more to reject him and his Sandinistas than for the winner, Violeta Chamorro. She had put together a coalition of 14 political parties. The Contras were outraged when she offered very few places for them in her government and named Humberto Ortega as head of the security forces.

Arias had ended his presidency in early February as Costa Rica voted in a new president. Some American officials praised him for his efforts; they credited his belief in diplomacy for bringing about the election in Nicaragua.

"The biggest factor in moving Ortega to a more acceptable position was that the other countries of Central America, through the Arias plan, put pressure on Ortega and led him to decide that he would be well served by moving toward a fair and free election," said one official.[131] The former deputy assistant secretary of state, who lost his job over Contra policy, put it more bluntly: "We all ought to polish the medal Oscar Arias got."[132]

CHAPTER 8

Actions Speak as Loudly as Words

President Oscar Arias Sánchez became private citizen Oscar Arias Sánchez on February 6, 1990. Although not everything in the Peace Accord had been implemented by every country, its most shining accomplishment was free elections in Nicaragua. The smashing defeat of the leftist Sandinistas sent a message to the other leftist guerrilla rebels: The people of Nicaragua did not support leftist efforts. The people in your country might not support you.

The question for Arias was what to do on after he left office. Others had pointed to goals he had set for himself: to become president of Costa Rica, to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and to become secretary-general of the United Nations. By the age of 46, he had already accomplished two of them.

Because the words "Oscar Arias Sánchez" and the phrase "who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 . . ." were forever joined together, Arias had direction in his professional life. He was a sought-after speaker on the subjects of Central America, peace, and economics. He traveled to many colleges and universities to deliver speeches, participate in workshops, and talk to students about their roles in shaping the

future. Some of his speeches included, "Demilitarization: A Major Factor for Development," "Latin America Facing New Challenges," and "How Much Poverty Can Democracy Endure?" Such appearances proved to be opportunities for Arias to explain his new global interests: demilitarization, a regulatory treaty to guide arms selling, an end to poverty, and the conservation of natural resources. He was asked to lend his name and his designation as Nobel laureate by joining other peacekeeping and humanitarian organizations. One such group was the student-oriented PeaceJam, which sponsors activities that center on the Nobel Peace laureates. In 1992, he traveled to Bangkok, Thailand, with other laureates to publicize the

PeaceJam

PeaceJam is an international educational program built around Nobel Peace laureates. Students in the organization learn about what it takes to become a peacemaker and compare their values to the lives of Nobel Peace laureates. They study the laureates' views on racism, violence, tolerance, community, and culture. They participate as problem solvers in school- or neighborhood-based service projects. Laureates work personally with students to pass on the spirit, skills, and wisdom they embody.

Anyone of elementary-school through college age can join PeaceJam. They form a PeaceJam club, complete the curriculum, create a PeacePlan to help in the community, and raise money so they can travel to meet a Nobel Peace Prize laureate at a conference. PeaceJam operates in five countries: South Africa, India, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and the United States. A two-day conference enables PeaceJam members to work, talk, and think with the Nobel laureate about critical issues concerning peace. After 2006's PeaceJam in St. Paul, Minnesota, participants returned home to establish teen centers, diversity programs, AIDS prevention projects, conflict resolution workshops, aid for the homeless, violence prevention programs, and meal services for senior citizens.

plight of one of their own: Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 laureate, was under house arrest for her opposition to Burma's government.

In 1988, Arias gave his Nobel Peace Prize money, $340,000, to set up a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. The Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress aimed to achieve "just and peaceful societies in Central America." By 1990, the foundation had two departments: the Center for Human Progress, which aimed to eliminate gender discrimination in Central America, and the Center for Peace and Reconciliation, which promoted pluralistic participation in building peace in Central America. In 1993, it added the Center for Organized Participation to strengthen citizen participation in Central America.

One of the organization's activities was to provide yearlong internships for university students. Some interns researched what factors affect peace and security. Some studied gender identity in security forces, how soldiers blend back into the community after they leave the army, and how army personnel accept authority other than their own when they leave the army. Another Arias Foundation project examined the 1987 conflicts in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. It aimed to study and improve women's lives in Central America by helping peasant women develop small businesses. It also helped develop a breast- and cervical-cancer prevention center for Costa Rican indigenous women.

One of Arias's fundamental beliefs had always been that military options do not serve the best interests of a country. Coming from a nation that has been without an army for a half century, he knew well the benefits of being without one. He approached Panama about the idea.

In 1989, Panama's notorious General Manuel Antonio Noriega declared war on the United States. A U.S. soldier was killed and the United States responded with 25,000 soldiers, deployed to remove Noriega from power. The fighting was intense, and Panama City was badly damaged. After Noriega surrendered and was moved to the United States and charged with drug trafficking, Arias wrote a public letter to the Panamanian people. He

In 1989, Panama's notorious General Manuel Antonio Noriega (pictured above) declared war on the United States. When Noriega surrendered to U.S. troops, Arias wrote a public letter to the Panamanian people, suggesting they abolish their army.

suggested that, like Costa Rica, Panama should abolish its army. The Arias Foundation's Center for Peace and Reconciliation set up a permanent office in Panama City. It worked with politicians and other nongovernmental organizations to pave the way for demilitarizing Panama. It was a five-year process of informing the public, passing a referendum, debating the opposition, and voting by congress. Progress was complicated by the accusation that the foundation was not violating any Panamanian laws. In October 1994, the Panamanian Parliament amended the political constitution and voted to abolish the armed forces.

Arias and his foundation then turned their attention to Haiti. Haiti was like other Central American countries that suffered horrible atrocities at the hands of the military. The army had overthrown Bertrand Aristide, a popular president, in 1991. Citizens resisted, and 3,000–5,000 Haitians were killed. Even human rights monitors were kicked out of the country. More than 41,000 Haitians were rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard as they tried to get to the United States and freedom by boat. With American troops en route to Haiti to force the military to hand over the government, the military stepped down. Aristide returned in October 1994. With the army weakened, Arias thought it might be possible to abolish the Haitian army.

The next month, November 1994, Arias and the center's staff visited Haiti. Arias said at a news conference at the National Palace, "The Haitian people should not miss this opportunity to get rid of the armed forces, which since 1804, the year Haiti won independence, have been responsible for more than 24 coups. The Haitian Constitution is not like the Ten Commandments," he said. "It can be changed."[133]

In March 1995, the center polled Haitians, in the first public survey in the country's history, to see what they thought about demilitarization. Sixty-two percent of the Haitian people wanted the army to go. In April, President Aristide announced he would abolish the army. Arias's Center for Peace and Reconciliation established an office in Haiti and began educating the population over the radio and in the media about the importance and benefits of abolishing the army. In November, the center brought 20 prominent Haitian leaders to Costa Rica and Panama for a close-up look at countries that were demilitarized.

The visit made a big difference. On February 6, 1996, one day before the transfer of power from Aristide to the next president, the Haitian senate passed a resolution to eradicate their armed forces. The Arias Foundation continued to work there while the idea made its way through the four-year legislative process.

"Progress in these two nations has shown the world that Costa Rica is not a unique case," said Arias. "The abolition of national armed forces is truly a viable option for many countries."[134] Since then, the island states of Dominica and Saint Kitts and Nevis have been added to the list of demilitarized countries.

In October 1995, Arias took on another project. He asked other Nobel laureates to form a commission to study the sale of conventional arms. He approached South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú Tum, East Timorese leader José Ramos-Horta, the Dalai Lama from Tibet, and the organization Amnesty International. They drafted the Nobel Peace Laureates International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers, now known as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), with the intention of presenting it to the United Nations. The UN had a system for arms exporters to list what weapons they send to which countries, but it included nothing to limit trade of small arms. Arias announced his idea in Berlin, Germany, at a peace conference. The plan would accomplish two things. First, if acted upon, it would limit weapons. Second, it would free up money badly needed for domestic improvements in the purchasing country.

"Too many poor countries spend their limited resources on militaries that serve only to oppress their own people," Arias said. "Where can poor countries find the money to pay for things like schools, clinics, seeds, potable water? The military budget is the obvious place."[135] Arias thought that by reducing the arms trade, countries could enact programs that do away with things that ultimately cause wars.

On December 14, 1995, Arias asked the United Nations to help convince countries (and their citizens) to redirect military spending to human needs programs. With UN-sponsored and supervised regional meetings, Arias hoped neighboring countries could mutually agree on reducing their armed forces to a mere peacekeeping and security force. "If everybody cuts, everybody wins," he said.[136]

The plan proposed that savings from a reduced military be earmarked for community development, destruction of land mines, and helping soldiers reenter civilian life. It also called for acceptance of the Arms Trade Treaty by the year 2000. The campaign was supported by more than 100 groups concerned with human rights, as well as religious and women's rights groups in a dozen countries. On May 27, 1997, Arias presented it in New York with the backing of many other Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

The plan was not unique. Bans were already in place for chemical and biological weapons. A ban on nuclear weapons signed by 186 governments has been in place since 1968. The Arms Trade Treaty focused on conventional small arms weapons, however. These weapons include battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, military aircraft, artillery systems, military helicopters, missiles, mortars, machine guns and submachine guns, rifles, pistols, antitank weapons, mines, grenades, cluster bombs, and ammunition.

The ATT was unusual in the detailed requirements it suggested. First of all, it stipulated that the arms-producing countries keep weapons from dictators, military aggressors, and areas in conflict. Second, it asked that arms should go only to countries or groups that promote democracy. The ATT defined a democracy as a country that has free and fair elections and that allows freedom of speech and the press.

According to the ATT, buyer countries had to show they spent more on health and education than on military expenditures. Buyers were also required to protect human rights. The treaty quite specifically mentioned human rights violations as genocide, crimes against humanity, arbitrary executions, and enforced disappearances. The buyer country had to have the means to investigate human rights violations. The ATT wanted seller nations to prohibit sales to those who support terrorism or who are in conflict with another country, a group, or its own people. Perhaps as a reference to the Iran–Contra deals the United States made without its citizens knowing, the ATT required buyers to

allow investigation of military spending and required them to give public notice prior to the purchase of weapons.

The report pointed out that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United States, France, Great Britain, Soviet Union, and China) were responsible for 85 percent of weapons exports.

In June 1998, countries of the European Union agreed to a separate regional Code of Conduct. Though criticized as too vague, it showed there was great interest in Arias's ideas.

Arias's Arms Trade Treaty was not meant to have instant results. Instead, it included a long process during which individual countries, especially the main suppliers of arms, needed to sign the treaty, then enact legislation within their borders to support it. The goal was that the United Nations General Assembly would adopt it.

In his speech introducing his Code of Conduct in May 1997, Arias reported that world military spending totaled $800 billion. He theorized that if only $40 billion of that amount were redirected from the military every year for 10 years, the entire world's population could have education, health care and nutrition, clean water, and sanitation. Another $40 billion over 10 years would provide all people on the planet with an income above the poverty line for their country. Though the code was jointly signed by 8 Nobel laureates in New York City, 20 Nobel laureates have since come forward to support the plan.

Although Arias is still quiet and serious as a private citizen, he lost none of his fiery criticism for the United States. He has been quick to point out the United States sells arms to developing nations, 90 percent of which are not democracies and are described by the U.S. Department of State as human rights abusers.

In 1999, he told an interviewer, "I tell my friends in Washington that it is time for the United States not only to be the military superpower it is, or the economic superpower it is, but also the moral superpower that it should be . . . . And it is not [a moral superpower] because its value system is wrong."[137]

In many of his interviews and speeches, Arias hits again on the idea that salvaged funds from reduced military spending could be channeled into other areas. He believes military spending is not necessary, that there are better ways than using the military for countries to protect themselves or to force other nations to do something. "We need to understand that the best way, the civilized way to solve conflicts, is at the negotiating table," he said.[138] This is not a surprising statement from a man who brought leaders from five quarreling nations together to talk out their problems.

The crusade to limit arms, to reduce military spending, and to redirect funds to social services continues to be a slow one. World affairs change little concerning these matters. In 1999, the South African purchase of submarines, aircraft, and helicopters could have bought $6 million in care for 5 million South African AIDS sufferers for two years. In 2001, Tanzania spent $40 billion on a radar system, money that could have given health care to 3.5 million people. In 2004, two international amnesty groups reported that an average $22 billion was spent on arms by countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. The same amount could have put every child in school and reduced the child mortality rate.

Even progress at the United Nations proceeds at a snail's pace. Part of the 1997 ATT package required public disclosure about arms trade. In 2001, an agreement was reached in which all nations reveal information about the manufacture and transfer of arms. This agreement was not legally binding, but by 2005, 133 of 191 UN members had an office to record sales of small arms. In September 2005, the UN General Assembly called on nations to link small arms control to fighting poverty, another Arms Trade Treaty idea.

In June 2006, 2,000 representatives of UN member nations and international organizations met to discuss the 600 million small arms in circulation. The conference was controversial because the manufacture of small arms means big business and

big money. Citizen groups in the United States were concerned about their constitutional right to bear arms. The United States also wanted to be able to sell arms to antiterrorist groups. The conference ended without even a plan to meet again.

Arias's efforts on behalf of human development, democracy, and demilitarization have earned him honorary doctorate degrees from Harvard, Dartmouth, and other universities and colleges. He has also received other honors, including the Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Award and the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Prize.

Arias has been active in the Carter Center, an Atlanta-based organization founded by former President Jimmy Carter, the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. In 1996, Arias helped President Carter and former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker during Nicaragua's election. Five years later, Arias supervised the 2001 Nicaraguan elections. He visited polling stations, observed voting procedures, inspected ballots, listened to voters, and questioned election officials.

Arias has participated in two departments of the Carter Center. The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government consists of current and former heads of government in the Western Hemisphere. It mediated and monitored voting in Latin America, including Nicaragua. In 1998, Arias cosigned a letter with former President Carter and the former president of Bolivia, calling on the 34 presidents and prime ministers attending the Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile, to include a discussion on reducing arms spending at their conference. The International Negotiation Network, another Carter Center department, is made up of former heads of state and prominent people who mediate in peace negotiations, monitor elections, and work behind the scenes to achieve peace.

CHAPTER 9

The Second Time Around

According to the Costa Rican constitution, presidents cannot succeed themselves. When Oscar Arias left the presidency in 1990, it seemed he would never hold that office again. Raphael Ángel Calderón followed Oscar Arias in 1990. Calderón, in turn, was followed by José Maria Figueres Ferrer and Miguel Ángel Rodriguez Echeverría.

Eleven years later, however, in 2001, Arias asked the Sala IV, Costa Rica's constitutional court, to change the ruling. At first it refused to do so, but two years later, after the judges in the court had changed, it reversed its decision. In 2003, the court ruled that it was unconstitutional to deny a Costa Rican citizen the chance to run for office. It further ruled that an ex-president could run for reelection after six years. With the legal door swung open, Arias declared he was a precandidate for the Liberación Party's nomination in the 2006 elections.

Times changed after Arias was elected president in 1986. Some changes were good. The population had doubled, the birth rate decreased by half, infant deaths declined by nearly half. The per

capita income more than doubled; it was up to $4,580.10. The number of automobiles in Costa Rica doubled, to almost 800,000. Some changes were not as good, however. In 2004, scandal rocked both of Costa Rica's political parties. Whereas bribery and corruption might be more expected in other Central American countries, Ticos hardly expected them in Costa Rica. In what was later called "Black October," newspapers broke the story that three former presidents, Raphael Ángel Calderón, Miguel Rodriguez, and José Maria Figueres, had taken bribes to influence the awarding of

Black October

"Black October" created Costa Rica's biggest sensation of 2004. Newspapers broke stories that three former presidents, Raphael Ángel Calderón, José Maria Figueres, and Miguel Rodriguez, had taken money to influence the awarding of government contracts. Following Arias, Calderón was president from 1990 to 1994. He allegedly took about a half million dollars to ensure that a Finnish company got a contract for medical supplies. Rodriguez, president from 1998 to 2002, had just become general secretary to the Organization of American States when his scandal broke. He resigned and returned to Costa Rica to defend himself of charges that he had taken money from Alcatel. The French cellular phone company won a $148 million contract to install 400,000 cell phone lines for the state-owned telecommunications company. According to another person involved in the scandal, money was to be transferred from his wife's bank accounts to Rodriguez's wife's bank accounts. Rodriguez was met at the airport and handcuffed. After a time in jail, he was released to house arrest.

Figueres was president from 1994 to 1998. He confessed to accepting almost a million dollars in "consulting fees" from Alcatel after he left office. He resigned from the World Economic Forum, located in Switzerland. He has not returned to Costa Rica, living instead in either Switzerland or Spain.

government contracts. The kickbacks to the men totaled millions of dollars. Calderón and Rodriguez were jailed; Figueres fled to Europe. The country was staggered by the betrayal of its officials.

Outside Costa Rica, the four leaders of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras, who signed the Arias peace agreement in 1986, were all gone. El Salvador's Duarte had died; Nicaragua's Ortega, once voted out of office, had tried unsuccessfully to get back in, and the presidents of Honduras and Guatemala left office.

What had not changed was the delicate balance of Costa Rica's economy. The country was still spending more than it took in. By 2006, its national debt was $10 billion and almost half of its 2006 budget was earmarked for old debt. Its 2005 income was $2.72 billion and its expenses were $3.195 billion. Simply put, Costa Rica still spent more than it made—and almost always has.

Arias won the Partido Liberación Nacional nomination for president. Even with 13 other candidates, the campaign narrowed to a race between Arias and Otton Solis, who ran as the Acción Ciudadana candidate. He created the new party when he left Arias's Liberación Party in 2002. Arias ran on his past reputation and would not participate in televised debates, saying "It wouldn't interest me even if the Holy Father asked me himself."[139] The campaign mostly hinged on one issue: whether or not Costa Rica should sign a free trade treaty with the United States, like its Central American neighbors had. The treaty had already been ratified by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

The Central American Free Trade Treaty (CAFTA) proposed to eliminate barriers to trade, investment, and business between the United States and 45 million people in the Central American countries. American goods coming into the countries would be exempt from a tariff (a tax) on more than 80 percent of their goods. Without a tax to drive the prices higher, American goods could compete with Costa Rican goods on a more equal footing. That would open new markets for the United States.

The Central American Free Trade Treaty (CAFTA) proposed the elimination of trade, investment, and business barriers between the United States and the Central American countries. The proposal was met with numerous protests, including the one shown above, when thousands of government workers marched in San José, Costa Rica.

President George W. Bush told an audience of the Hispanic Alliance for Free Trade that with lowered prices on imported goods, CAFTA consumers could have more choices to buy at lower prices. He pointed out that CAFTA country manufacturers would be able to purchase equipment they needed at lower prices. More important, perhaps, CAFTA helped the nation as a whole. Bush said, "CAFTA will help nations attract investment they need for their economies to grow. In other words, with a stable trading agreement with the United States, it will make it much easier for investment to flow to our CAFTA friends. And investment means growth and opportunity."[140]

Understandably, some Costa Rican workers were not excited about Costa Rican goods competing with American goods. Those in the government-owned monopolies involving electricity, telecommunications, and insurance feared the treaty would cause them to lose benefits, and perhaps their jobs, if their companies had to compete with private American businesses. Some teachers' unions and hospital workers were also concerned about the effects of the treaty. Small businesses and small farmers, particularly rice, chicken, pig, dairy products, and vegetable oil growers were fearful that massive imports from the United States would hurt them, as well. One union leader said he opposed the treaty so much that he would not recognize Arias as president even if he were elected.

Arias's opponent, Solis, opposed portions of the treaty, putting himself at some distance from business and foreign investors. Backed by big business campaign contributors, however, Arias, on the other hand, supported the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) when the United States, Canada, and Mexico launched it. Back in 1999, he called for a similar Central American treaty. Not surprisingly, then, Arias supported the CAFTA proposal and even traveled to the United States to lobby for it.

The February 5, 2006, election was a close one. Early on, polls predicted Arias, regarded as the most popular figure in

Oscar Arias Sánchez was elected as president of Costa Rica once again in 2006. In the photograph above, he is shown addressing the sixty-first session of the UN General Assembly in September 2006.

Costa Rican history, to win by wide margins. Instead, he barely squeaked out a win over Solis. With fewer than 4,000 votes separating the two candidates, the electoral authorities demanded a vote-by-vote hand recount. The recount determined Arias won over Solis by a little more than 18,000 votes and only a little more than one percent of the 1,623,959 votes that were cast. If the candidates both received less than 40 percent of the total vote, the Costa Rican constitution would have required a runoff between the candidates. The constitution further directs that if candidates

ever received the same number of votes, the oldest candidate is elected president. Had that happened, Arias, at 65, would have become president; Solis was only 51 years old. As it was, the final recount gave the election to Arias.

The CAFTA controversy was not solved by Arias's election, however. Because he won by such a small margin, and without his party as a majority in the legislature, Arias's second administration could have difficulties changing laws that are obstacles to CAFTA and then ratifying the treaty.

The inauguration of Costa Rica's forty-seventh president and his two vice presidents was a two-day celebration beginning May 7, 2006. The ceremonies were held on May 8, before 15,000 people, who gathered in the Estadio Naciónal. Arias walked less than a mile from his Rohrmoser home to the stadium. Now divorced, he was accompanied by his children, Oscar Philipe and Eugenie Sylvia, both educated in the United States. The walk took a half hour longer than scheduled because of the crush of well-wishers who wanted to greet their new president.

The Costa Rican flag and its colors, (red, white, and blue), appeared throughout the stadium. Among the invited foreign delegations were First Lady Laura Bush and former Polish president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Lech Walesa. The presidents of Mexico, Taiwan, Colombia, and Panama, and other Central American leaders watched Arias accept the Sash of Office. Arias told the gathering:

> We have come here today to celebrate an act that renews our faith in the creed of democracy and in the spirit of the people of Costa Rica. Today, once more, a president who Costa Rica freely elected will transfer his authority to another president who was also chosen through the votes of our citizens. And just as the repetitive nature of the sun's rise every morning does not detract from the miracle of light, the repetition of this ceremony does not diminish its value but rather confirms its transcendent character.[141]

In his inaugural address, Arias outlined his new administration's goals:

- He pledged to address Costa Rica's long-running financial crisis while keeping universal health care.
- He said he wanted to make Costa Rica internationally competitive by creating more jobs. He pledged to spend 8 percent of the nation's gross domestic product on public education. (Costa Rica's efforts toward education have resulted in literacy for more than 90 percent of the country.)
- He said his government would address crime and drugs by improving ways to report crime and domestic violence, "the most insidious and widespread type of crime."[142]
- He pledged to improve the nation's roads and highways so that "nevermore will our highways, ports and airports be a cause of national embarrassment."[143]
- He reaffirmed Costa Rica's commitment to democracy, human rights, and peace. With an eye on Costa Rica's unusual natural resources, he pledged to protect the environment.
- Undoubtedly referring to the corruption scandal involving the three ex-presidents, Arias promised to maintain honesty in public office.

By late afternoon on his first day in office, Arias issued three decrees addressing his inaugural goals. In education, he created a financial program of $480–$1,000 per family to encourage potential high-school dropouts to stay in school. The program proposed to deposit in individual bank accounts funds that students could withdraw upon graduation. His second decree updated government bureaucracy by forming a digital government and simplifying paperwork.

One concern Arias had yet to address was problems in the tourist industry. Crime around tourist areas resulted in campaign promises to increase security by creating tourist police. The Arias government hoped to increase the number of tourists, add $400 million in tourist income, and create 80,000 new jobs in the process.

Other countries involved in the tourist industry have multilingual tourist security, although it was not clear if the Arias administration would create a completely separate force or make use of existing security. It did begin to quickly propose additional police, to make good on Arias's promise of 4,000 new law enforcement officers during his term.

Critics of the previous administration linked fewer tourists to the condition of the nation's highways. Tourism officials said that visitors were hesitant to rent cars or venture out of docking areas because of the poor quality of the roads.

Ecotourism is another Costa Rican asset. The national parks bring in 300,000 visitors a year. Arias's government proposed that fees collected at each park should make the parks self-supporting.

Arias, whose strength includes his international reputation, still faces stiff opposition at home on the CAFTA treaty. Stubborn and single-minded, he promised that the treaty would be passed through the legislature within the first six months of his administration. Having formed alliances with other parties in the Costa Rican congress, Arias's party may have enough votes to get CAFTA approved in the legislature. His political opponents, labor union leaders, and some civic groups, however, strongly oppose both CAFTA and Arias.

Oscar Arias has faced opposition and overwhelming odds before. "Courage," he has said,

> begins with one voice . . . . Courage means standing with your values, principles, convictions, and ideals under all circumstances—no matter what. If you stick to your principles, you will often have to confront powerful interests. Having courage means doing this without fear. It means having the courage to change things.[144]

With these words, President Oscar Arias Sánchez, Nobel laureate and devoted Costa Rican, was surely describing himself.

APPENDIX

Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech: Oscar Arias Sánchez

When you decided to honour me with this prize, you decided to honour a country of peace, you decided to honour Costa Rica. When in this year, 1987, you carried out the will of Alfred E. Nobel to encourage peace efforts in the world, you decided to encourage the efforts to secure peace in Central America. I am grateful for the recognition of our search for peace. We are all grateful in Central America.

Nobody knows better than the honourable members of this Committee, that this prize is a sign to let the world know that you want to foster the Central American peace initiative. With your decision you are enhancing the possibilities of success. You are declaring how well you know the search for peace can never end, and how it is a permanent cause, always in need of true support from real friends, from people with courage to promote change in favour of peace, even against all odds.

Peace is not a matter of prizes or trophies. It is not the product of a victory or command. It has no finishing line, no final deadline, no fixed definition of achievement.

Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions by many people in many countries. It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation or enforced by the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together.

Peace is not only a matter of noble words and Nobel lectures. We have ample words, glorious words, inscribed in the charters of the United Nations, the World Court, the Organization of American States and a network of international treaties and laws.

We need deeds that will respect those words, honour those commitments, abide by those laws. We need to strengthen our institutions of peace like the United Nations, making certain they are fully used by the weak as well as the strong.

I pay no attention to those doubters and detractors unwilling to believe that a lasting peace can be genuinely embraced by those who march under a different ideological banner or those who are more accustomed to cannons of war than to councils of peace.

We seek in Central America not peace alone, not peace to be followed some day by political progress, but peace and democracy, together, indivisible, an end to the shedding of human blood, which is inseparable from an end to the suppression of human rights. We do not judge, much less condemn, any other nation's political or ideological system, freely chosen and never exported. We cannot require sovereign states to conform to patterns of government not of their own choosing. But we can and do insist that every government respect those universal rights of man that have meaning beyond national boundaries and ideological labels. We believe that justice and peace can only thrive together, never apart. A nation that mistreats its own citizens is more likely to mistreat its neighbours.

To receive this Nobel prize on the 10th of December is for me a marvellous coincidence. My son Oscar Felipe, here present, is eight years old today. I say to him, and through him to all the children of my country, that we shall never resort to violence, we shall never support military solutions to the problems of Central America. It is for the new generation that we must understand more than ever that peace can only be achieved through its own instruments: dialogue and understanding; tolerance and forgiveness; freedom and democracy.

I know well you share what we say to all members of the international community, and particularly to those in the East and the West, with far greater power and resources than my small nation could never hope to possess, I say to them, with the utmost urgency: let Central Americans decide the future of Central America. Leave the interpretation and implementation of our peace plan to us. Support the efforts for peace instead of the forces of war in our region. Send our people ploughshares instead of swords, pruning hooks instead of spears. If they, for their own purposes, cannot refrain from amassing the weapons of war, then, in the name of God, at least they should leave us in peace.

I say here to His Majesty and to the honourable members of the Nobel Peace Committee, to the wonderful people of Norway, that I accept this prize because I know how passionately you share our quest for peace, our eagerness for success. If, in the years to come peace prevails, and violence and war are thus avoided; a large part of that peace will be due to the faith of the people of Norway, and will be theirs forever.

From *Nobel Lectures, Peace 1981-1990,* Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Irwin Abrams, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1997.

CHRONOLOGY

1941	***September 13*** Oscar Arias Sánchez is born in Heredia, Costa Rica.
1967	He graduates from the University of Costa Rica and studies in England for his master's and doctorate degrees.
1969–1972	Arias teaches political science at the University of Costa Rica.
1970	He is appointed to ceremonial post of economic adviser to the president for José Figueres.
1972–1977	Arias serves as minister of national planning.
1973	He marries Margarita Penón Góngora.
1974	He receives doctorate degree from the University of Essex.
1975	Arias is appointed Liberación Nacional Party (PLN) secretary.
1978	He is elected deputy to the National Assembly for hometown of Heredia.
1979–1984	He serves as general secretary of the PLN, the party's top post.
1981	Arias gives up parliamentary seat to campaign for Luis Alberto Monge.
1984	He seeks nomination for president.
1985	He wins the Liberación Nacional presidential nomination.
1986	***February 2*** Arias is elected president of Costa Rica. ***May 8*** He takes office. ***August*** Leaders of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua sign Peace Accord.

1987	***October 14*** Arias is named Nobel Peace Prize winner. ***December 10*** He receives the Nobel Peace Prize.
1988	He establishes the Arias Foundation for Peace and Progress.
1989–1994	He assists Panama in abolishing its army.
1990	***February 5*** Arias leaves office of presidency.
1995	***October*** Arias and Nobel laureates begin campaign for Arms Transfer Treaty.
2006	***May 8*** Arias is elected to second term as president of Costa Rica.

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