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MIND THE DARIEN GAP

by

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This thesis has a geopolitical focus, establishing U.S. interests and indigenous protectionism as factors that explain why the Darien Gap remains undeveloped. An analysis of U.S. influence on the development of the Darien Gap establishes a correlation between U.S. interests and the progress of constructing the Pan-American Highway and railroad across time and space. Heightened U.S. interest was influenced by the presence of extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere and the timing correlated with the construction's progression and obstruction. The lack of extra-hemispheric threat caused the decline of U.S. support for the infrastructure projects that would have otherwise developed the Darien Gap and gave political space and maneuverability for Panamanian indigenous groups to exert their political pressure and prevent the development of the Darien Gap. The research uncovers the amount of political power the Panamanian indigenous groups have in preventing infrastructure developments. In the end, the thesis proves these two hypotheses to be true: U.S. interest in the region and the Panamanian indigenous communities' political power have prevented the development of infrastructure in the Darien Gap.

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MIND THE DARIEN GAP

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ABSTRACT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMD	Foot-and-Mouth Disease
OAS	Organization of American States
PANAFTOSA	Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SENAFRONT	Servicio Nacional de Fronteras [Panama's National Service for Borders]
STRAHNET	Strategic Highway Corridor Network
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WWII	World War II
WWF	World Wildlife for Nature

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DEDICATION

Luis Alberto Moreno, Capitan, Panamá PD
1983-2016

A mi amigo y compañero de armas, Luis Alberto Moreno. Aun amado por tu esposa, Jeanet Estevez de Moreno, sus hijas, Khloy Alejandra y Sofia Victoria, y su hijo, Luis Alberto Jr. Todos sintieron tu amor y afecto por tu familia y tu compromiso con el servicio y la protección de Panamá.

Gracias Luis, por el conocimiento y la inspiración para esta tesis. Me enteré por primera vez de la existencia del Tapón del Darién cuando compartiste tus experiencias de tus misiones. Esas misiones en las que te llevaban a lo profundo de la jungla de Darién, previniendo que entraran actividades de la FARC y de narcotráfico a Panamá. Mi próximo Ron Abuelo, mientras escucho Los Rabanes, estará dedicado a ti. Siempre se te recuerda. Descansa en paz.

[To my friend and brother-in-arms, Luis Alberto Moreno. Beloved by your wife, Jeanet Estevez de Moreno; daughters, Khloy Alejandra and Sofia Victoria; and son, Luis Alberto Jr. Your enduring love and affection for your family and commitment to the service and protection of Panama were felt by all.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis answers the following question: What factors have kept the Darien Gap undeveloped?

B. PROBLEM STATEMENT

> *Les routes, les chemins de fer, ces grands moteurs de la civilisation*. [Roads, railways, these great engines of civilization.]
>
> —Imperial Prosecutor, Agen, 1867[1]

Throughout modern history, land-based transportation infrastructure has played a crucial role in national communication, economic development, and strategic security. The Incan empire built more than 15,000 miles of roads, allowing the Inca rulers to maintain control over their empire by enabling running messengers to carry their mandates over long distances and transmit political intelligence.[2] In France, Napoleon saw roads as a military and strategic necessity, as these facilitated his armies' movement. However, Napoleon's roads failed to accommodate the growing French general populace and its demand for mobility. Later, in the second half of the 19th century, France improved and expanded its roads and railways, extending its reach to rural areas. As a result, once isolated peasants now had access to new technology, broader markets, and government services, thus improving their regional economies and quality of life.[3]

Understanding how vital road infrastructure is for a nation's economy, defense, and mobility, U.S. policymakers established the National Highway System, consisting of the Strategic Highway Corridor Network (STRAHNET) and the Interstate Highway System.[4]

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[1] Eugen Joseph Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads," in Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), 195.

[2] Peter V. N. Henderson, "The Inka and the Late Horizon, 1400–1532," in The Course of Andean History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), Chap. 3, Para. 15.

[3] Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads."

[4] "National Highway System - Planning," Federal Highway Administration, June 29, 2017, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/national_highway_system/.

In World War I, U.S. military leaders recognized the nation's road system's inadequacy in meeting national defense requirements. As a result, the War Department (now the Department of Defense [DOD]) and the Bureau of Public Roads (now the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA]), developed the Pershing Map (now STRAHNET). STRAHNET became critical in DOD's domestic operations, for both peacetime and in emergencies, to the point that it received $100 million for maintenance in 2001 alone.[5]

In the 1950s, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower expressed his support for the Interstate Highway System, saying that "a modern, efficient highway system is essential to meet the needs of our growing population, our expanding economy, and our national security."[6] He believed that the Interstate Highway System was crucial for economic development, motorists' safety, less traffic congestion, and efficient strategic defense. Amid the Cold War, and with cities under the threat of a nuclear attack, President Eisenhower understood that the highway system would be indispensable during an evacuation.[7] He supported funding the Interstate Highway System construction, which ultimately cost $119 billion, with 46,876 miles of roads across all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico.[8] As in the Incan Empire and France, the U.S. case demonstrates the transportation infrastructure's capacity to impact regional development has implications on states' domestic politics, economy, and security.

In addition to the state's internal applications, land-based transportation infrastructure also has transnational significance, as it facilitates international trade and cooperation, resulting in the connections between bordering states. For these same reasons,

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[5] Darcel Collins and Darryl D. Hampton, "Public Roads - Defense Access Roads," United States Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration, June 2012, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/12mayjune/02.cfm; "Defense Access Road Program (DAR)," Federal Highway Administration, January 7, 2020, https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs/defense; "2004 Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions and Performance Report," Federal Highway Administration, 2004, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/2004cpr/chap18.cfm.

[6] "Original Intent: Purpose of the Interstate System 1954–1956," Federal Highway Administration, June 27, 2017, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/originalintent.cfm.

[7] "Interstate Highway System - The Myths," Federal Highway Administration, November 20, 2019, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/interstatemyths.cfm.

[8] "Interstate Frequently Asked Questions," Federal Highway Administration, December 18, 2018, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/faq.cfm#question3.

in 1889, the United States convened the first International American Conference, meeting with Latin American representatives to guarantee regional security and improve trade.[9] One of the items discussed in the conference was the construction of 10,471 miles of transcontinental railroads in North and South America, from New York to Buenos Aires. However, even before discussing the transcontinental railroad in the International American Conference of 1889, it was Hinton Rowan Helper, caught in a storm on November 30, 1866, while sailing from Buenos Aires to New York, who sparked the idea of uniting the two continents when he questioned, "Why not by rail?"[10] In the spirit of economic development and international relations, Helper's idea would receive unified support of the American countries, who would work together in trying to achieve the transcontinental railroad, and later in 1923, the Pan-American Highway.[11] For more than a century, connecting the American countries through a land-based transportation infrastructure progressed. Today, the Pan-American Highway has 19,000 miles of roads, stretching from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, to Ushuaia, Argentina's tip.[12]

However, since the construction's abrupt stop in 1975, and for almost 50 years, the Pan-American Highway has been missing a 60-mile stretch of road at the Panama–Colombia border (see Figure 1), a section known as the Darien Gap. The Darien Gap has no other roads or railways nor does it have an official point of entry between the countries.[13]

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[9] Teresa Maya Sotomayor, "Estados Unidos y el Panamericanismo: el Caso de la Conferencia Internacional Americana (1889-1890) [United States and Panamericanism: The Case of the International American Conference (1889-1890)]," Historia Mexicana [Mexican History] 45, no. 4 (April 1, 1996): 759–81, https://historiamexicana.colmex.mx/index.php/RHM/article/view/2370.

[10] Eric Rutkow, The Longest Line on the Map: The United States, the Pan-American Highway, and the Quest to Link the Americas (New York: Scribner, 2019), 7.

[11] Warren Kelchner, "The Pan American Highway," Foreign Affairs 16, no. 4 (July 1938): 723–27, http://www.jstor.com/stable/20028891.

[12] Maureen Harmon, "World's Longest Road: Story Behind the Pan-American Highway," Pegasus Magazine, Summer 2019, Par. 12, https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/Pan-American-highway/.

[13] Daniel Suman, "Globalization and the Pan-American Highway: Converns for the Panama-Columbia Border Region of Darién-Chocó and Its Peoples," U. Miami Inter-Am. L. Rev 38 no. 3 (April 1, 2007): 574–77, https://repository.law.miami.edu/umialr/vol38/iss3/3/.

Figure 1. Darien Gap Map[14]

The lack of development of the Darien Gap and with no signs the construction of the Pan-American Highway will ever resume is extremely peculiar for two reasons. First, the initiative for Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure has stalled multiple times before, only to overcome the challenges and continue. For example, the transcontinental railroad overcame legislative challenges in 1892, when the U.S. Congress debated the constitutionality of this unprecedented funding of overseas projects. The railroad construction continued through the 1884 depression and the 1907 conflicts and interstate meddling between Nicaragua and Guatemala, which also involved El Salvador and Mexico and instigated a revolution in Honduras. The construction of the Pan-American Highway also had to overcome political challenges. In the 1930s, Costa Rica and Mexico became unsupportive and cautious that the highway was a sort of Trojan Horse for U.S. imperialism. In that same decade, the construction also had to overcome direct attacks and

[14] Adapted from Panama, Google Maps, accessed March 21, 2021, https://www.google.com/maps/@6.9846438,-78.1785026,5.01z; Adapted from Darien Gap, Google Maps, accessed March 21, 2021, https://www.google.com/maps/@7.0161385,-78.0015801,7.62z/data=!5m1!1e4; Suman, "Globalization and the Pan-American Highway: Converns for the Panama-Columbia Border Region of Darién-Chocó and Its Peoples," 556.

regional instability as the Sandino's anti-U.S. insurgency in Nicaragua targeted Pan-American Highway laborers.[15]

Second, the existence of an undeveloped Darien Gap is a geopolitical abnormality since land-bordering countries typically have connecting roads and railways. Even big and longtime state rivals share connecting roads. For example, India and Pakistan, involved in multiple conflicts and wars since their independence in 1947, share border-crossing transportation infrastructure at Khokhrapar Railway Station and Hussainiwala Border Gate. Other similar feuding countries with roads between them are North and South Korea and Saudi Arabia and Yemen. However, Colombia and Panama, with friendly and cooperative relations, are among the few adjoining countries and the only Latin American countries with no connecting ground-based transportation.

The sui generis Darien Gap at the Panama–Colombia border continues to be the only break in the Pan-American road, which stretches from Alaska to Argentina. Understanding why the Darien Gap has been kept undeveloped may help determine the challenges and obstacles that keep countries with friendly and cooperative relationships from establishing seemingly mutually beneficial policies.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on rural development, including the development of transportation infrastructure in rural areas, mostly focuses on the benefits these projects bring to the state, civil society, and commerce. According to the literature, states and urban planners develop rural areas' whenever benefits outweigh the costs associated with the lack of development, such as more expensive trips due to longer distances and prolonged travel time.[16] Scholars measure the benefits of development and transportation infrastructure by modernizing society and providing economic advantages. According to the literature on microeconomics, macroeconomics, Von Thunen's model for land use, and Eugene

[15] Rutkow, The Longest Line on the Map, 36, 71, 101, 226, 235–36.

[16] T.R. Lakshmanan, "The Broader Economic Consequences of Transport Infrastructure Investments," Journal of Transport Geography 19, no. 1 (January 2011): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2010.01.001.

Weber's argument for modernization theory, there are economic and social incentives to develop the Darien Gap and complete the Pan-American Highway.[17] However, this literature does not incorporate external pressures from institutions and international relations and thus fails to explain the area's complete absence of development. For this reason, the Darien Gap may be explained using realist and structuralist theories.

Some scholars argue that Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) is the primary tool for states and urban planners in determining transportation infrastructure development based on its microeconomic benefits.[18] Since the 1940s, CBA methodology has been the preferred method to determine the feasibility of developing physical environments, including the construction of transportation infrastructure in the United States. The CBA methodology in transportation infrastructure uses an analytical process to compare the benefits of transportation infrastructure development with the generalized costs of trips between the areas that the new infrastructure would unite. Urban planners and economists measure the benefits by quantifying the reduction of generalized costs resulting from the transportation infrastructure's ability to reduce distance and travel time between two locations. If CBA determines benefits outweigh trips' generalized costs, transportation infrastructure development is feasible and even preferable. The analysis also considers the availability of user demand for the transportation infrastructure. The higher the demand, in conjunction with the infrastructure's capability to accommodate the demand, the more the generalized costs can be divided per trip, lowering individual trip costs for each user.[19]

Though the CBA model could have been relevant a couple of decades ago, this model cannot explain the continued existence of the Darien Gap and a stalled Pan-American Highway project. In 1977, the individual trip cost to travel through the Darien Gap using a Pan-American Highway would have been high, making the overall benefits

[17] Lakshmanan; Masahisa Fujita, Paul Krugman, and Anthony Venables, "Antecedents I: Urban Economics," in The Spatial Economy Cities, Regions, and International Trade (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); "The Von Thunen Model: A Very Cool Lesson in Agricultural Geography," The Irresistible Fleet of Bicycles, August 8, 2014, https://thegreenhorns.wordpress.com/2014/08/08/the-von-thunen-model-a-very-cool-lesson-in-agricultural-geography/; Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads."

[18] Lakshmanan, "The Broader Economic Consequences of Transport Infrastructure Investments," 2.

[19] Lakshmanan, "The Broader Economic Consequences of Transport Infrastructure Investments."

low. For example, during this time, most Panamanians did not own personal vehicles. With only 6,000 registered motor vehicles out of a population of 1.6 million people, less than 1%, the demand for traveling on the highway would have been low.[20] However, vehicles are now owned by a more significant share of the Panamanian population, as seen in 2017, when the population was at four million with 840,000 registered vehicles in Panama, approximately one vehicle for every five people.[21] Assuming a similar increases of motorists in Colombia and the added demand created in the transportation of trading goods during the second wave of globalization in the 1980s, the CBA model fails to explain why the Pan-American Highway has not yet continued developing the Darien Gap.[22] According to the CBA criteria, the increase in demand by individual motorists and trade-based transportation makes construction feasible and even desirable, with the benefits shared by a larger number of users and dispersing the total cost among them, therefore lowering individual trip costs.

Also, arguments based on microeconomics explaining the Darien Gap's existence on the unfeasibility of the construction of a highway, insufficient capital, and lack of technical knowledge are irrelevant.[23] Advances in construction technology and the existence of similar projects, both in magnitude and complexity, such as the Panama Canal, challenges the argument of lack of development based on technical difficulties and economic unfeasibility.

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[20] Robert Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," Nordic Society Oikos 29, no. 2 (1977): 199, https://doi.org/10.2307/3543604.

[21] Erick Burgueño Salas, "Automobiles Total Number in Panama," Statista, last modified January 10, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/720229/panama-number-automobiles/; "Panama Population (2020)," Worldometer, accessed September 7, 2020, https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/panama-population/.

[22] Yunus Kaya, "Globalization and Industrialization in 64 Developing Countries, 1980–2003," Social Forces 88, no. 3 (March 2010): 1153–82, https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0300.

[23] Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," i; Carlos Orozco Cuello, Eliana Sanandres Campiz, and Ivonne Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe Colombiano [History and Archaeology from the Colombian Caribbean] 9, no. 16 (May 2012): 116; A. R. Hanbury-Tenison, "The Cuna and the Road," The Geographical Journal 139, no. 1 (February 1973): 52, https://doi.org/10.2307/1795794.

Similar to microeconomics' CBA model, where the desirability for transportation infrastructure is determined by the analysis of the user's cost-benefit trade-off, other scholarly arguments using macroeconomics to determine the benefits transportation infrastructure brings to a geographical area or societal sector, likewise fail to explain the absence of transportation infrastructure in the Darien Gap. The macroeconomics argument establishes that the state's investment in and development of transportation infrastructure, which is available to all users in the area, benefits the conglomerates of firms and residents. All firms share the benefits of increased efficiency; cost reduction, such as skilled labor and material assembly; and improved service quality.[24] With the second wave of globalization and the increase of international trade, these benefits are further extended to a larger number of firms at farther distances. In addition to efficiency, costs, and quality incentives, safer and faster means of transportations increase the demand for the development of transportation infrastructure near high-economic activity areas.[25] Based on macroeconomic expectations, the Pan-American Highway would have continued into the Darien Gap with continued support from firms and civil society, mostly due to its proximity to the Panama Canal, a global trade hub.

Other economic factors driving rural areas' development come from the Von Thunen model, established in 1826 and used by some economists to explain how states organize the use of geographical space. In his model, Von Thunen explains how society allocates the land around urban areas to minimize production and transportation costs (see Figure 2).[26] The model assumes crops differ in yield per acre and their costs of transportation. In this scenario, commercial agriculture has trade-offs between land rent and transportation costs. In turn, these trade-offs will establish rents farmers of a specific crop would be willing to pay at any given distance, creating land-use circles with expanding radiuses from the urban center. The land adjoining the urban centers, containing the market, will be used for dairy farming, followed by forests, grains and field crops, ranching and

[24] Lakshmanan, "The Broader Economic Consequences of Transport Infrastructure Investments."

[25] Lakshmanan.

[26] Fujita, Krugman, and Venables, "Antecedents I: Urban Economics," 15–18.

livestock, and in the outer limits, wilderness. Von Thunen explains that the wilderness is located too far from the urban center to make commercial agricultural land use profitable.[27]

Figure 2. Von Thunen Model[28]

The Von Thunen model may account for the absence of extensive development of agricultural land use in the Darien Gap but does not explain the complete lack of development. Panama City is Panama's main urban center, more than 150 miles west of the Darien Gap, and with no other significant concentration of population in between. According to the Von Thunen model, the Darien Gap would fall in the wilderness land use category, making it unprofitable for commercial agriculture. However, Von Thunen established his model before the industrial revolution and significant advances in technology, such as refrigeration. In addition, one assumption for the Von Thunen model

[27] Fujita, Krugman, and Venables, 15–18.

[28] Source: The Irresistible Fleet of Bicycles, "The Von Thunen Model."

is the bid-rent theory, which states that land rent is inversely proportional to its distance from the urban center.[29] Based on the bid-rent theory, land in the Darien Gap is cheaper than the land in proximity to Panama City. The advances in technology such as refrigeration and more efficient vehicles continually reduce transportation costs, expanding the profitability radius out from the urban Panama City and into the farther and cheaper lands of the Darien Gap, making development in the region feasible and desirable.

Less of a quantitative economic measure such as the microeconomics, macroeconomics, and Von Thunen model, Eugene Weber, who examines France's experience in the late 19th century and into the 20th century in his book *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*, provides a qualitative reason for the development and modernization of rural areas, specifically in the form of road and railroads, and how it is effective state governance, economic prosperity, and nation-building.[30] He states, "historical geography is in large part the tale of men struggling against space, and of the efforts made to tame space by creating ever more efficient, more reliable means of communication…Gradually space is conquered, distances are tamed, brought to heel or, rather, increasingly to wheel."[31] As Weber explains, countries tame the wilderness and develop rural areas with transportation infrastructure to shorten distances and facilitate trade, communication, and security. Roads and railroads also allow for communities once isolated to participate in a more liberal economy, allowing for the transportation of goods over long distances, trading beyond the adjacent geographical space, participating in a competitive and free trade, and providing a greater variety of products at a cheaper cost. According to Weber, another reason states develop transportation infrastructure in rural areas is to help the government control and civilize rural areas and perform nation-building.[32] Developing roads and railways in rural areas enables the government to provide security and control over the land. The infrastructure allows the government to deploy the military across the country for national security and

[29] Fujita, Krugman, and Venables, "Antecedents I: Urban Economics," 15–18.

[30] Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads."

[31] Weber, 195.

[32] Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads."

facilitates transportation for tax collectors and messengers. Weber also explains that roads and railroads have significance in "not only civilization, but national unity too. There could be no national unity before there was national circulation."[33] He argues that roads and railroads facilitate exchanging ideas, bringing civilization to rural areas and its citizens through access to education, culture, and language. This exchange between communities erodes their differences and starts the unification of different nationalities under one identity.[34]

Based on Weber's explanation, one would expect the Panamanian government to have incentives to continue to develop the Darien Gap, allowing the Panamanian government to have more control over its land and the indigenous population residing in the area. Development of the gap would encourage national identity and unity by facilitating the merging of culture and ideas between urban Panamanians and Panama's indigenous group. The Kuna, one of the indigenous groups residing in the Darien Gap, and possibly one of the first groups to come in contact with western culture, greeting Christopher Columbus himself, still resists full integration into the Panamanian nation.[35] Furthermore, they have been successful in obtaining partial autonomy from the Panamanian government.[36]

Unlike economic and modernization explanations that do not factor international and institutional influence on rural areas' development, realist's explanation for states' quest for power and structural theories can account for them. As realist Kenneth Waltz explains, power is measured as a distribution of capabilities between states in a system.[37] He also states, "in a self-help system each of the units spends a portion of its effort, not in

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[33] Weber, 218.

[34] Weber, "Roads, Roads, and Still More Roads."

[35] A. R. Hanbury-Tenison, "The Indian Dilemma," The Geographical Journal 139, no. 1 (February 1973): 47, https://doi.org/10.2307/1795792.

[36] "Kuna," Minority Rights Group, accessed September 7, 2020, https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kuna/.

[37] Robert O. Keohane, "Political Structures," in Neorealism and Its Critics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 93.

forwarding its own good, but in providing the means of protecting itself against others."[38] Besides seeking additional capabilities, states also maintain relative power by preventing other states from increasing their capabilities. Even more so, when the increase of the other states' capabilities decreases the original state's capabilities or adversely affects its security. Another way a state maintains relative power over other states is to refuse to cooperate with the other states even if collaboration is advantageous for both of the states involved. The opposition to cooperation happens when the collaboration benefits alter the distribution of capabilities, favoring one side more than the other.[39]

States may have seen the Darien Gap's development as a threat to their national security and thus adversely affecting their balance of capabilities compared to other states in the region. For example, the Pan-American Highway construction initially stopped in 1977 to maintain the Darien Gap as a natural barrier against a northbound spread of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease plaguing Colombia. The spread of the disease northward would have impacted the United States and Central American states' economies and reduced their global power politics capabilities.[40]

Waltz's explanation of why states refuse to collaborate to maintain relative capabilities and, ultimately, relative power over others can help explain why the Darien Gap is still undeveloped. Panama and Colombia still have not been able to finish the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the Darien Gap, which has the potential to be a lifeline for the Latin American economy. Based on Waltz's explanation, Panama, though it could benefit from lower transportation and trade costs to South America, may refuse to collaborate to maintain its relative capabilities over others. Panama owning the only Atlantic-Pacific oceanic cross through its canal may have less benefit from a land-based transportation infrastructure connecting North and South America than other Latin American states.

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[38] Keohane, 101.

[39] Keohane, 101.

[40] Comptroller General of the United States, Linking the Americas Progress and Problems of The Darien, PSAD-78-65 (Washington, DC, 1978), HeinOnline.

In addition, the United States, a western-hemispheric hegemony, may be applying political pressure against the construction of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap. As a regional hegemony, benefits from the Darien Gap development may be insignificant to the United States compared to its benefits to other states in the region. The international trade routes that would result from the Darien Gap's development with the Pan-American Highway would not give significant benefits to the United States compared to the Central American and northern South American states. Furthermore, bridging the Darien Gap goes against the current U.S. immigration policies and initiatives centered on slowing and impeding immigration destined to the U.S. southern border with Mexico.[41] Some policymakers may believe that the Darien Gap is preventing immigrants from reaching the United States. The little benefit the United States may receive from developing the Darien Gap in international trade and the apparent threat to its immigration stance provides the potential to shift the balance of capabilities away from the United States and more to the regional Latin American states.

Similar to the realist's explanations factoring states' actions based on international political pressures and their relation to power, Max Weber's structuralists argument accounts for the power institutions have in effecting policy. Weber explains that power lies in institutions and larger groups of individuals sharing similar interests in a highly structured bureaucratic government. In his structuralist argument, there is a strong relationship between political culture and institutions. And through institutions, can the collective interests of a group of people influence policy.

Based on Max Weber's structuralist argument, conservationist groups and institutions have the capabilities of impeding the development of the Darien Gap. One of these societal institutions is the indigenous residents of the Darien region. The indigenous group, with rights to the lands in the region and some partial autonomy from Panama and has already publicly opposed development in the Darien Gap, demonstrating this group of indigenous people may have the power to influence state policy.

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41 "Yielding to U.S. Pressure, Mexico Clamps Down on Migrants," November 11, 2020, PBS, video, 8:53, https://www.pbs.org/video/yielding-to-u-s-pressure-mexico-clamps-down-on-migrants-1578761257/.

In summary, the literature on rural development—based on modernization theory, microeconomics, macroeconomics, and Von Thunen's model for land use—cannot account for the complete absence of development. In particular, all of these models are restricted by utilitarian assumptions in their analysis, assessing the more significant benefits for the largest amount of people. Due to this restriction, it fails to incorporate sociopolitical pressures from different groups who would benefit from keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped and without the Pan-American Highway, regardless of its broader economic and modernizing benefits. For this reason, the thesis approaches the question of why the undeveloped Darien Gap persists by analyzing actions taken by interest groups, such as the U.S. government and Panamanian indigenous movements.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

Explanations of rural development to determine what factors have kept the Darien Gap are not suitable since these suggest that there are many incentives for the development of the region and thus fail to account for the uniqueness of the Darien Gap's existence. As an example, microeconomic explanations fail to support the arguments for the lack of development of the Darien Gap due to economic unfeasibility, insufficient capital, and lack of technical knowledge. However, realist and structuralist explanations, accounting for international and institutional political pressures, are more appropriate to address the undeveloped Darien Gap question. Within realism, sources explain the existence of the Darien Gap as a natural barrier to disease, narcotrafficking, immigrants, or invading forces; as a consequence of Colombia's focus on insurgency and failing to advance strategic foreign and domestic policy; and as U.S. interests and its distribution of capabilities as conducive to an undeveloped Darien Gap. Furthermore, addressing the Darien Gap's question with structuralism, where power lies in institutions, sources have argued that civil society groups, such as the local indigenous group, the Kuna, and Non-Government Organizations, have applied institutional measure to protect cultural and environmental resources, thus preventing development in the Darien Gap. As Chapter II further explains, the natural barrier, economic unfeasibility, lack of capital or technical knowledge, and Colombia's policy fails to thoroughly explain why the Darien Gap exists. Therefore, of these, the two most plausible hypotheses are the Darien Gap exists as a result of U.S.

interest and institutional measure to protect indigenous lands has kept an undeveloped Darien Gap.

The remaining two reasons that U.S. interests have kept the undeveloped Darien Gap and that Darien Gap as an institutional measure to protect indigenous resources provide the most plausible explanations as to why the Darien Gap remains undeveloped. There is a correlation between the Pan-American Highway construction's progress and regional U.S. interests. For example, the United States supported and funded the Pan-American Highway's construction when the Panama Canal, under U.S. control, was threatened by a Japanese attack in World War II. Furthermore, U.S. support and funding decreased once the threat disappeared.[42]

As for the second reason, conservationists have stalled development in the Darien Gap multiple times. Such was the case in 1974, where environmentalists were successful in temporarily halting the Pan-American Highway construction across the Darien Gap.[43] Similarly, in 1997 and 2012, indigenous groups opposed plans to complete the Pan-American Highway and to construct an electrical infrastructure through the Darien Gap, respectively.[44]

This thesis hypothesizes the Darien Gap's unique situation, with the lack of development and an incomplete Pan-American Highway, is based on the projection of a great power's foreign policy and its national security interests in the region and on socio-political pressures from internationally recognized interests groups.

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[42] Rutkow, The Longest Line on the Map, 274.

[43] Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 116.

[44] Diana Villiers Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," Americas Quarterly, July 24, 2013, https://www.americasquarterly.org/will-the-darien-gap-stop-the-regions-electrical-integration/. https://www.americasquarterly.org/will-the-darien-gap-stop-the-regions-electrical-integration/

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis is a geopolitical analysis focusing on analyzing U.S. interests and indigenous protectionism as possible explanations for why the Darien Gap is kept undeveloped.

In analyzing the first hypothesis, Chapter III thesis explores U.S. influence on the development of the Darien Gap; this thesis will relate U.S. interests to the progress in constructing the transcontinental railroad and highway across time and space. It does so by first determining if there is a correlation between the times when the construction of both infrastructures progressed or stalled and heightened U.S. interest in the region.

For the second hypothesis, Chapter IV thesis determines to what extent indigenous influence has stopped the Pan-American Highway construction and kept the Darien Gap undeveloped. The thesis focuses on the ascensions of the indigenous political power in Panama.

The thesis seeks to establish a pattern between U.S. interests and the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the Pan-American Highway. It also will try to uncover the amount of political power the Panamanian indigenous groups have in preventing infrastructure developments. In the end, the thesis concludes the accuracy of these two hypotheses: Darien Gap kept based on U.S. interest, and the Panamanian indigenous communities have kept the development of infrastructure from happening in the Darien Gap.

II. EXPLORATION OF PREVALENT EXPLANATIONS

The construction of a Pan-American railroad and the Pan-American Highway is met with many challenges to its progress in connecting North and South America, especially in the Darien Gap. After various periods of stasis and advancement, once the construction of the Pan-American Highway stopped in the 1970s, it was never able to resume, keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped.[45] Only a few sources attempt to explicitly explain why the Darien Gap remains undeveloped; nevertheless, some reason can be inferred from existing literature. These reasons include the notion that the Darien Gap is a natural barrier to disease, immigrants, or invading forces; that the development of the Darien Gap is economically infeasible; that developers lacked adequate capital or technical knowledge to develop the Darien Gap; that Colombia's strategic foreign and domestic policy did not prioritize the development of the Darien Gap; that the U.S. interest keeps the Darien Gap undeveloped; and that the Darien Gap is a result of conservationists pressure to protect cultural and environmental resources.

This chapter evaluates these six potential explanations for why the Darien Gap remains undeveloped and identifies which are unlikely and which of these possible explanations are plausible, requiring further analysis. It finds that the explanations of the Darien Gap as a natural barrier, its economic infeasibility, developers' lack of capital or technical knowledge, and Colombia's strategic failure in developing the Darien Gap are not convincing; therefore, this thesis does not investigate them further. By contrast, these two are plausible: The undeveloped Darien Gap as a result of shifts in U.S. regional interests and conservationists' pressure to protect cultural and environmental resources. The thesis further evaluates the former two in Chapters III and IV, respectively.

A. DARIEN GAP AS A NATURAL BARRIER

One argument for why the Darien Gap remains undeveloped is that it is a natural barrier against disease transmission, invading forces, narcotrafficking, or illegal

[45] Suman, "Globalization and the Pan-American Highway: Converns for the Panama-Columbia Border Region of Darién-Chocó and Its Peoples," 574–77.

immigration protecting the countries north of Colombia, including the United States from threats from the south. According to this argument, Panama, and the United States, have therefore influenced in preventing the Darien Gap's development. However, by evaluating each threat by itself, the explanations for the Darien Gap as an obstacle to help fight disease transmission, invading forces, narcotrafficking, and illegal immigration do not explain the perseverance of the Darien Gap.

One piece of evidence offered for the barrier explanation is that, in the 1970s, the U.S.–Panama–Colombia plan to bridge the Darien Gap with the construction of the Pan-American Highway stopped because of U.S. concerns over aftosa, better known as "foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)... a highly transmissible and economically devastating disease [affecting] cloven-hoofed livestock."[46] However, the explanation that the Darien Gap was not developed because of the FMD threat to the United States is not sufficient since there was a precedence of the construction of other similar infrastructure projects between the United States and areas with known FMD cases. Furthermore, though FMD concerns may have temporarily delayed the construction of the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap, this explanation alone cannot justify the project's complete abandonment since state governments developed plans and dedicated resources for FMD control and eradication, eliminating FMD's threat to the United States.

By 1971, only the 250 miles linking Colombia and Panama remained unfinished in the Pan-American Highway, which would have allowed motorists to travel between Alaska and Chile. That same year, a trilateral pact that seemed to overcome the last obstacle in completing the highway was made between the United States, Colombia, and Panama, which agreed to make the final push in closing the gap. In this pact, the U.S. agreed to contribute two-thirds of the construction costs, while Panama and Colombia would cover the rest of the expenses.[47]

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[46] José Naranjo and Ottorino Cosivi, "Elimination of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in South America: Lessons and Challenges," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 368, no. 1623 (August 5, 2013): 1, https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2012.0381.

[47] Comptroller General of the United States, Linking the Americas Progress and Problems of The Darien, i.

Despite the consensus between the three countries, the construction of the Pan-American Highway halted because of concerns over FMD. In 1975, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia issued a judicial order stopping the U.S. government from contracting, investing, and constructing on the Darien Gap Highway until developers complied with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requirement for an environmental impact statement.[48] In 1977, with a completed environmental impact statement, the court allowed construction to resume; however, the court order limited all work to Panama until Colombia had successfully implemented a 5-year program to control and eradicate FMD, a concern brought up in the environmental impact statement. The modification to the judicial order allowed for construction to continue up to Yaviza, Panama, just 37 miles from the Colombian border, since the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) wanted to keep a buffer zone until Colombia could enforce the FMD control and eradication plan. The Colombian government was not able to implement these measures in a reasonable time, and this last stretch of road is where all construction came to a dead end.[49]

However, while the Darien Gap as a natural barrier can impede the movement of cattle and guard against a pandemic outbreak such as one caused by FMD, this account is not sufficient to explain why the project of the Pan-American Highway construction was abandoned allowing for the infrastructure gap to remain since the U.S. government allowed developers to construct roads connecting the United States to FMD-infected countries long before 1977, and Colombia did eventually implement FMD control measures. The first American cases of FMD were reported in 1870 in the United States, Argentina, and Uruguay.[50] Though eradicated in the U.S. in 1929, the USDA still today considers FMD a serious threat to U.S. agriculture, with the potential of causing up to $20 billion in losses.[51] However, construction of roads connecting the United States to Canada and Mexico had

[48] Comptroller General of the United States, 8.

[49] Comptroller General of the United States, 9.

[50] Naranjo and Cosivi, "Elimination of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in South America," 1.

[51] Sandra Avant, "Study Reveals Pigs Can Transmit FMD Prior to Signs of Sickness," USDA Agriculture Research Service, last modified March 6, 2019, https://www.ars.usda.gov/news-events/news/research-news/2019/study-reveals-pigs-can-transmit-fmd-prior-to-signs-of-sickness/.

continued before those countries could eradicate FMD in 1952.[52] Also, the head of Colombia's National Planning Department, Eduardo Wiesner Duran, communicated to the U.S. ambassador that Colombia was ready to comply with the USDA's requirements, committing more than $1 million to FMD control measures in its 1979 budget.[53]

Another reason why the FMD threat is not sufficient to explain an incomplete Pan-American Highway and the Darien Gap is that the FMD problem had international awareness with Latin American states joining efforts and resources to eradicate FMD in the Western Hemisphere. In 1951, the Organization of American States (OAS) created the Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center (PANAFTOSA) for the purpose of eradicating FMD in the Western Hemisphere. Since then, the PANAFTOSA has executed two iterations of the Plan of Action for a Hemispheric Program for the Eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, 1988–2010 and 2011–2020. The plans called for mass vaccination in South America. By 2012, Colombia had a considerable supply of vaccines and became an FMD-free zone (see Figure 3).[54] Furthermore, South America is in its final stage of FMD control and on track to completely eradicate it in the continent.[55] Therefore, given the FMD control and eradication measures in South America and the existence of road-building projects between the United States and locations with active FMD cases, the lack of development of the Darien Gap cannot be explained in terms of its capability to act as a natural barrier to diseases.

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[52] Naranjo and Cosivi, "Elimination of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in South America."

[53] Eduardo Wiesner Duran, "Foot-and-Mouth Disease: GOC Letter Concerning Contribution to Aftosa Project" (official memorandum, Bogota, Colombia, Department of State, 1978), https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=317032&dt=2694&dl=2009.

[54] Michel Lombard, "Vaccine Use for Foot and Mouth Disease Control," in *2012 World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Proceedings of the Bangkok, 27–29 June 2012 Thailand FAO/OIE Global Conference on Foot and Mouth Disease Control* (Bangkok: World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), 2012), 182–94, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299633934_Vaccine_use_for_foot_and_mouth_disease_control_MF_Lombard.

[55] A. Clavijo et al., "Current Status and Future Prospects to Achieve Foot-and-Mouth Disease Eradication in South America," *Transboundary and Emerging Diseases* 64, no. 1 (2017): 31–36, https://doi.org/10.1111/tbed.12345.

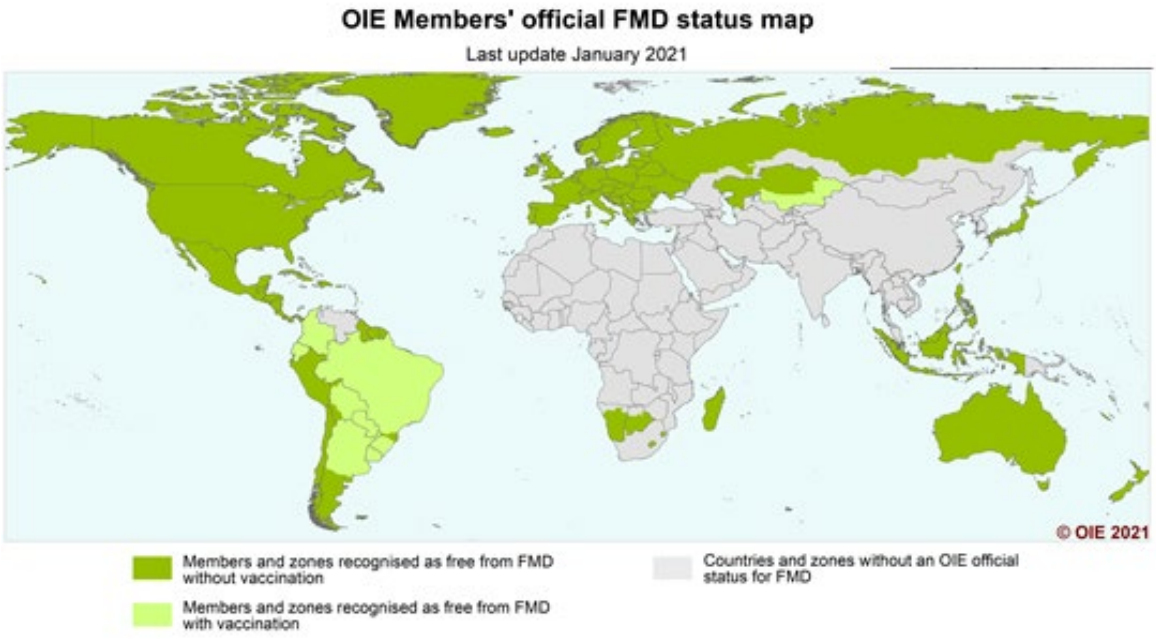

Figure 3. FMD Status (2021)[56]

Another improbable reason for Panama maintaining an undeveloped Darien Gap is it serves as a natural bulwark against invading forces from Colombia, and though it had some historical validity as an explanation for the lack of development in the region, the warming of foreign relations between these states has made this argument null. In 1903, the U.S., to secure its interest in building a Panama Canal, assisted Panama in securing its independence from Colombia. After the Hay-Bunan Varilla Treaty, which granted exclusive canal rights to the U.S., the U.S. Navy deployed warships along the Atlantic side of Panama to prevent Colombian reinforcements from subduing the revolution. For the next 20 years, Colombia refused to recognize its loss of Panama, and during that time, the Darien Gap continued to serve as a strategic geological defensive feature.[57]

[56] Source: "Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)," The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), January 2021, https://www.oie.int/en/animal-health-in-the-world/official-disease-status/fmd/en-fmd-carte/.

[57] Kenneth Houston Jones, "Will the Darien Gap Be Closed? Views on Economic Development, Environmental Protection and the Behavior of Organizations" (master's thesis, University of Southern Florida, 1977), 8–9.

However, since the 1920s, the political relations between Panama and Colombia have improved and thereby reducing the threat of invading Colombian forces and eliminating Panama's need to retain the Darien Gap as a defensive border. In 1924, Colombia and Panama signed the Victoria-Vélez Treaty, defining the borders between the two countries and re-establishing diplomatic relations.[58] It is also worth to point out that both countries are staunch U.S. allies which provides additional venues for diplomatic and peaceful resolution of conflict, with the U.S. government as a mediator. In light of these dealings, Panama and Colombia have transcended the need to resort to armed conflict between each other, obviating the need for a physical barrier, and making the economic costs for a closed border between the two countries grossly outweigh the security benefits.

There are three main developments that demonstrate that the Panama–Colombia relation is strong enough to enable cooperation and resolution of disagreement through democratic means. The first example that shows a strong partnership between Panama and Colombia is the trilateral U.S.–Panama–Colombia agreement of 1971 to build the Pan-American highway.[59] By agreeing to build a road that would link it to Colombia, Panama demonstrated that it no longer saw a significant security threat from the Colombian forces. The second example is the resolution of a dispute between Colombia and Panama in 2014. During the dispute, diplomatic relations between the two governments became extremely tense when Panama set an ultimatum for "Colombia to remove it from a list of tax havens or face possible retaliation."[60] However, diplomacy prevailed, and the countries saw a peaceful resolution within a week of the ultimatum.[61] The third example happened in a meeting between Panamanian president Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez and Colombian president Iván Duque. In that meeting, held in March 2019, they reaffirmed their governments' commitment to developing bilateral policies and to work together in facing

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[58] "Panamá," Cancilleria de Colombia [Colombian Chancellery], November 11, 2020, https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/internacional/politica/regiones/america/panama.

[59] Jones, "Will the Darien Gap Be Closed?," 140–55.

[60] "Panama Sets Seven Day Ultimatum in Tax Haven Dispute with Colombia," *Reuters*, October 15, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/colombia-panama-taxavoidance-idUSL2N0SA04G20141015.

[61] "Colombia and Panama Smooth Relations After 'Tax Haven' Spat," *TeleSUR*, October 17, 2014, https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Colombia-and-Panama-Smooth-Relations-After-Tax-Haven-Spat-20141017-0055.html.

the challenges of tourism, public health, energy, commerce, security, and immigration.[62] Both governments acting favorably towards building the Pan-American Highway to connect their countries with transportation infrastructure and the multiple cases of cooperation and diplomatic resolution between them demonstrates a negligible threat of invading forces, an unlikely probability to recourse to the military actions for conflict resolution, and an unnecessary need to maintain the Darien Gap for defensive measures.

An additional explanation that some literature hints at is that the lack of development of the Darien Gap is a consequence of the fight against narcotrafficking and armed groups such as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia]. However, this hypothesis alone fails to account for the 40 years of lack of development in the region. Director of Panama's National Police Gustavo Perez, who is against the building of the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap, shares the notion of the Darien Gap's ability to stop narcotrafficking and armed groups. He believes that bridging the gap would allow violence and narcotrafficking to spill over from Colombian armed groups such as right-wing paramilitary groups and the left-wing FARC guerrillas.[63]

However, Panama did not join the U.S.-led fight against narcotrafficking until the 1990s, 13 years after the Pan-American Highway construction stopped, meaning this explanation fails to explain the lack of development the Darien Gap prior to that time. Before 1990, General Manuel Antonio Noriega as Panama's de-facto head of state, did not prioritize combating illicit narcotrafficking. On the contrary, the United States government deemed Panama, under General Noriega's rule, a haven for illicit narcotics traffickers. According to U.S. President George H. Bush's administration, "a major goal of the strike in Panama was not just to oust Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega but to eliminate the nation

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62 "Panamá y Colombia Fortalecen sus Relaciones, tras Reunión de Varela y Duque [Panama and Colombia Strengthen their Relationship after Varela and Duque Meet]," *ECO*, March 19, 2019, https://www.ecotvpanama.com/actualidad/panama-y-colombia-fortalecen-sus-relaciones-consolidando-una-politica-bilateral-con-vision-compartida_0_31634/.

63 Suman, "Globalization and the Pan-American Highway: Converns for the Panama-Columbia Border Region of Darién-Chocó and Its Peoples," 590.

as a haven for illicit narcotics traffickers."[64] Based on General Noriega's ties with narcotraffickers, it is to be expected that he would favor easier transportation and the development of the Darien Gap. It took a U.S. military intervention in the 1990s to force President Noriega out of power, and under the new government, Panama agreed to aid the United States in its War on Drugs.[65]

Related to narcotrafficking is the FARC's activity in the region, which was not active near the Darien Gap until the 1990s, which also fails to explain for the undeveloped Darien Gap prior to that time. The 57th Front, established in the 1990s, was the FARC's unit that operated in the Darien Gap (see Figure 4). From there, the 57th Front, active along the Colombia-Panama border, trafficked drugs into Central America and weapons into Colombia. The earliest records of activity by Colombian guerrillas in Panama were in 1993, when the FARC kidnapped U.S. citizens Ricardo Tenenoff, David Mankins, and Marcos Rich.[66]

[64] Richard L Berke, "Fighting in Panama: The Drug War; Washington Hopes to Close a Trafficking Haven," *New York Times*, December 21, 1999, A.25, ProQuest.

[65] David E Pitt, "The U.S. and Panama; Panama to Assist U.S. on Drug War," *New York Times*, January 11, 1990.

[66] Mimi Yagoub, "FARC 57th Front in Panama," *InSight Crime*, November 4, 2016, https://www.insightcrime.org/panama-organized-crime-news/farc-57th-front-in-panama/.

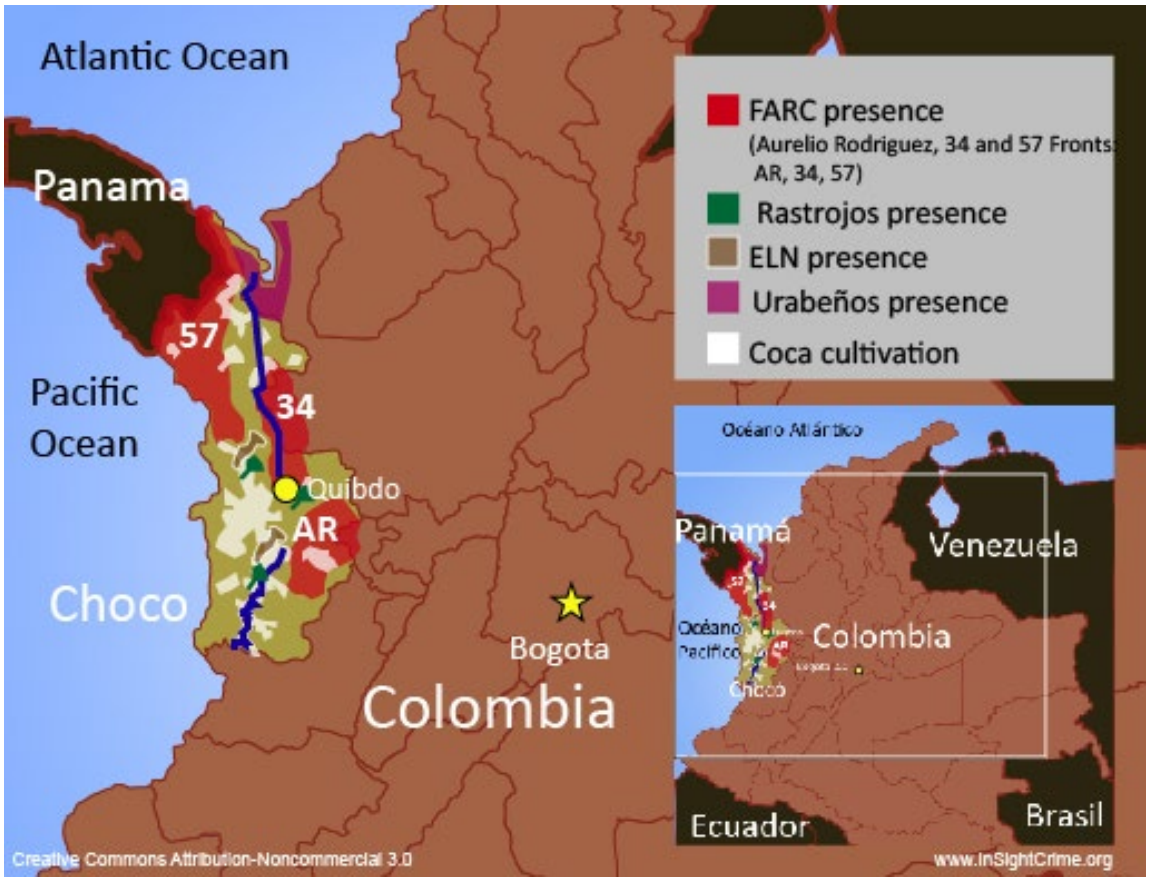

Figure 4. FARC Presence in the Darien Gap (2014)[67]

It is still more difficult to explain the lack of development in the Darien Gap due to drug interdiction and counterinsurgency policy since there is evidence that maintaining areas undeveloped is counterproductive to those efforts. Groups such as the FARC's 57th Front used in their favor the Darien Gap's undeveloped jungle and the absence of the government this lack of development created to establish a foothold in and operate from the region. For example, U.S. authorities acknowledge that, due to an increase in surveillance of traditional air and sea routes, the FARC modified its routes and increased northbound arms and drug trafficking in the Darien Gap.[68] In 2007, Panamanian president

[67] Source: David Gagne, "Why Is Choco a Haven for Colombia's Criminal Groups?," *InSight Crime*, November 27, 2014, https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/choco-colombia-criminal-haven/.

[68] Jason Motlagh, "A Terrifying Journey Through the World's Most Dangerous Jungle," *Outside Online*, July 19, 2016, https://www.outsideonline.com/2098801/skull-stake-darien-gap.

Martín Torrijos claimed that "one-third of the Darien was in the hands of the narco-guerrillas," who had co-opted the local indigenous population into trafficking cocaine northward through the Darien Gap.[69] Indeed, an international crisis group reported that the region is an ideal corridor for drug and arms trafficking and serves as a strategic haven for the FARC, the *Bloque Ivan Rios* rebel group, and local paramilitaries.[70] These armed groups, using the cover of the jungle of the Darien Gap, have moved further north. In December of 2008, Colombian intelligence confirmed that FARC guerrilla groups were retreating into Panama.[71] Years later, in 2015, *Servicio Nacional de Fronteras* (SENAFRONT) forces dismantled FARC camps within the Panamanian borders.[72] Given these developments, there is also the argument that the construction of the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap would be favorable for security since the road "would facilitate law enforcement in the region…Accessible only by the broad Atrato River [from the Colombian side] …the Darien is a haven for coca growers, drug smugglers, and guerrilla groups."[73] All that being said, the explanation for the lack of development in the Darien Gap as a method to prevent the FARC from crossing the border is now even less relevant since the FARC and the Colombian government signed a peace deal in 2016, ending the five-decade hostility.

Another explanation put forth in the literature for the undeveloped Darien Gap is pressure from policymakers who favor the Darien Gap status quo, believing that it blocks northbound immigration. However, similar to the narcotrafficking argument, this explanation alone is inadequate because immigration from South America was not a concern that Panama and the United States needed to address until the 2000s. That said,

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69 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," 112.

70 Juan Camilo Mesa Bedoya, Carlos Hernán González Parias, and Dusan Praj, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-Conflict Context," *Institución Universitaria ESUMER* 6, no. 7 (July 26, 2017): 112, https://doi.org/10.31469/escenarios.v6n7a5.

71 "Colombia Confirms FARC Rebel Incursion into Panama," *BBC*, December 15, 2008, ProQuest.

72 "Panama Police Dismantle FARC Camp," *BBC*, January 19, 2015, ProQuest.

73 Logan Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire: Latin America: Controversial Project Would Span the 60-Mile Darien Gap, the Only Missing Segment in the 16,000-Mile Pan-American Highway Linking Alaska to Chile. Environmentalists and Native Peoples Object," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1995, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-08-20-mn-36988-story.html.

some policymakers favor the current situation, such as Director of Immigration Ramon Lima in Panama, who stated that monitoring the completed road would consume many of the government's resources to address illegal immigration.[74] The U.S. immigration policies, which recently has been based on obstruction and the slowing the immigrant flow to the United Sates also extends to this region. As has been seen in Mexico, the United States has pressured countries to enforce its immigration policy on those traveling towards the United States to complicate and slow their journey.[75] U.S. security and border enforcement officials work with Panamanian migration at La Penita camp in Panama, addressing illegal immigrant crossing at the Darien Gap.[76] According to the arguments for these policies, leaders would favor in keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped, making immigration from Colombia to Panama difficult and be against the construction of the Pan-American Highway that would remove the jungle's stopping power.

However, the explanation of keeping the Darien Gap as an extension of immigration control alone is also not sufficient to account for its more than 40 years of lack of development since immigration policies did not focus in this area until significantly later after the construction stopped. For a period of 20 years, from 1977, when the construction of the Pan-American Highway stopped, and 1997, when the Panamanian government created the Batallón Occidental [Western Battalion] within its police force as a special unit responsible for the security of the southern border, Panama did not have security concerns at the southern border, making the explanation for the Darien Gap as a measure against immigration inadequate. Another ten years had passed when in 2008, Panama created the Servicio Nacional de Fronteras (SENAFRONT) [National Service for Borders], an independent agency dedicated to border security. Even then, SENAFRONT was not focused on immigration control. Their vast mission included protecting lives, human rights, and liberties; the conservation of public order; and preventing and prosecuting illicit

74 Suman, "Globalization and the Pan-American Highway: Converns for the Panama-Columbia Border Region of Darién-Chocó and Its Peoples," 590.

75 PBS, "Yielding to U.S. Pressure, Mexico Clamps Down on Migrants."

76 "How U.S. Immigration Policy Can Seal Fate of Darien Gap Migrants," August 13,2020, PBS, video, 12:16, https://www.pbs.org/video/desperate-journey-1597353978/.

activities along the borders of Panama.[77] For almost 40 years, the absence of Panamanian immigration enforcement policies refutes the notion that the Darien Gap solely exists to control immigration flows.

Furthermore, U.S. immigration control policies did not extend to Panama until years after the Pan-American Highway construction stopped. For one, U.S. border enforcement did not start being part of the U.S. national policy until the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. At that time, immigrants originating from South America were not of concern since most Latin American immigrants arriving in the United States came from Mexico and Cuba.[78] It was not until 2019, under President Trump's administration, which enacted strict immigration control policies, that U.S. immigration policy extended to Panama. That year, acting U.S. secretary of homeland security Chad F. Wolf and Panamanian minister of public security Rolando Mirones signed an official agreement promising to increase collaboration on border security and "impede irregular migration flows."[79] That same year, U.S. provided SENAFRONT units at the Darien region with processing devices to capture fingerprints, photographs, and iris scans of immigrants arriving from the Darien Gap.[80] This geographic extension of U.S. immigration policy to Panama only developed only after the Gap had remained undeveloped for decades, which is more reason in supporting other explanations to the existence of the Darien Gap besides that of immigration control.

Moreover, the influx of immigrants arriving in Panama from the Darien Gap calls into question how effective keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped even is for immigration control. The Darien Gap is already a popular route for immigrants coming from nearby countries or even from Africa (see Figure 5). Immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. take

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77 "Batallion Occidental [Western Battalion]," SENAFRONT, accessed November 12, 2020, http://www.senafront.gob.pa/batallones/occidental.html#.

78 Marta Tienda and Susana M. Sánchez, "Latin American Immigration to the United States," *Daedalus* 142, no. 3 (July 2013): 48–64, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00218.

79 "U.S. and Panama Sign a Letter of Intent to Increase Security Cooperation," Homeland Security, December 17, 2019, https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/12/17/us-and-panama-sign-letter-intent-increase-security-cooperation.

80 Homeland Security.

advantage of lax South American visa and asylum requirements and apathetic immigration enforcement to enter the continent. From there, they begin their voyage north to the United States often passing through the Darien Gap.[81] In 2016, according to Panamanian authorities, "nearly 24,000 migrants, 4,000 children among them, from outside South America …[crossed] the Darien Gap, three times as many as 2017."[82] These numbers, which have continued to rise throughout the years, has made the immigratory paths through the Darien Gap more transited regardless of its hardships, decreasing the potential security benefits of keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped to stop immigration, while increasing the cost of lost economic opportunity.

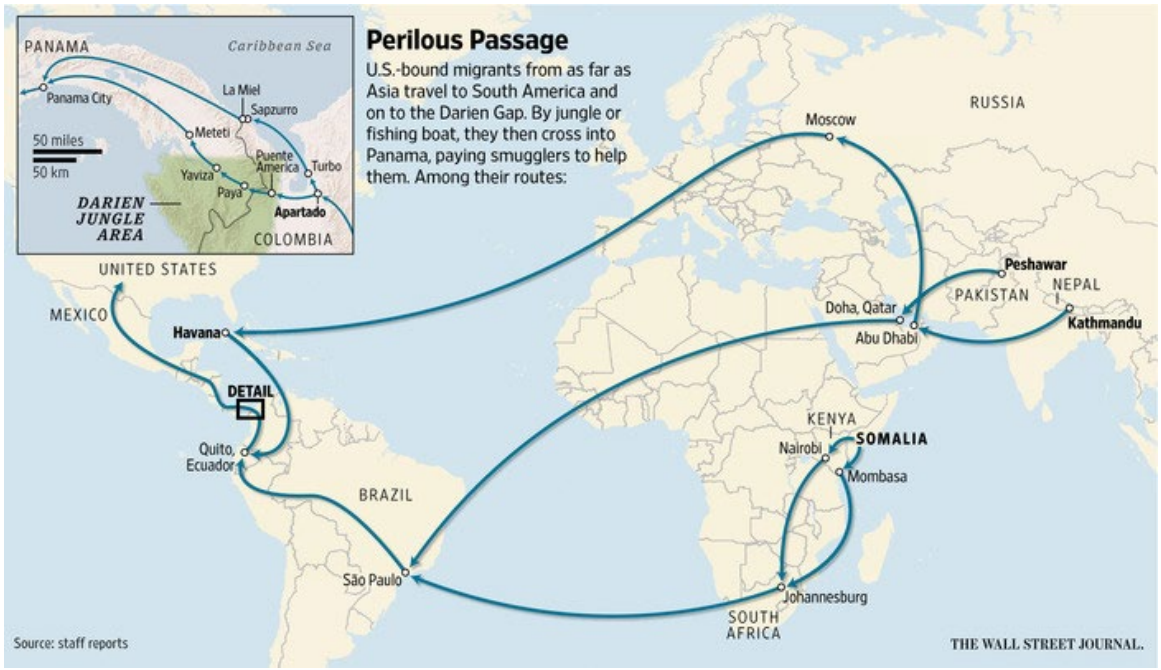

Figure 5. Immigration Routes at the Darien Region[83]

[81] Motlagh, "A Terrifying Journey Through the World's Most Dangerous Jungle."

[82] Source: PBS, "How U.S. Immigration Policy Can Seal Fate of Darien Gap Migrants."

[83] Sara Schaefer Muñoz, "Global Migrants Brave Panama's Vipers, Bats, Bandits to Reach U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-u-s-bound-migrants-brave-panamas-brutal-jungle-1432914231.

Regardless of the Darien Gap's ineffectiveness in preventing illicit travel between Colombia and Panama, an argument can be made that policymakers still *believe* that the absence of transportation infrastructure in the Darien Gap prevents, or at least reduces, the northbound encroachment of immigration, narcotrafficking, and armed guerrilla groups. Even if this is the case, and policies to combat these threats have prevented the completion of the Pan-American Highway, it does not account for most of the 40 years of nondevelopment in the Darien Gap. Panama and the United States were not concerned with immigration originating from South America for the first 20 years after the construction stopped in 1977, and they did not start addressing narcotrafficking and armed groups in the Darien Region for at least another 13 years. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore more comprehensive explanations for why the Darien Gap has remained with no development and as the last section of Chapter III explains, illicit travel between Colombia and Panama of immigration, narcotrafficking, and armed guerrilla groups are only partial manifestations of a larger pattern of U.S. interests in Latin America.

B. DARIEN GAP AS A RESULT OF ECONOMIC INFEASIBILITY

Another set of explanations for the lack of development in the Darien Gap that emerged in the earlier stages of the construction of the Pan-American Highway claims that alternative means of transportation made the Pan-American Highway economically infeasible; however, studies and developmental planners agree that completing the Pan-American Highway across the Darien Gap would now be economically beneficial to the area and to Panama. In 1977, in Panama, the demand for and the return on investment from the Pan-American Highway would have been low: with only 6,000 registered motor vehicles out of a population of 1.6 million people, the road would only have benefited a limited number of Panamanians. In addition, an already-operational ferry route from Colon, Panama to Cartagena, Colombia, provided a viable alternative to the road at that time. Besides carrying passengers, the ferry was a faster and cheaper means to transport goods compared to what it would had been to travel with a truck on a road through the gap.[84]

[84] Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," 199.

However, the argument in 1977 of the economic infeasibility of developing the Darien Gap in 1977 does not take into account progress in technology and the potential of economic development in the region. Today, vehicle ownership is more common among the general population, while technology has made vehicles more efficient than their 1970s predecessors. Both increases in vehicle ownership and vehicle efficiency reduces the operating costs per highway user, increasing the demand for the Pan-American Highway and making it more profitable. The infeasibility argument also fails to account for the fact that the completion of the Pan-American Highway would act as a stimulus for economic development in Latin America. A study conducted by the Technical Unit for the Panama Project for the Organization of American States concluded that the deficiency of the current transportation infrastructure was one of the most influential factors in the suboptimal physical integration, productivity, commercialization of the region. Also, according to this study, the continued construction of the Pan-American Highway is crucial in the economic development of the area facilitating the productivity and the transportation of goods.[85] Because of the efficiency in transportation that would be provided by the Pan-American Highway, most urban and economic developers agree that developing the Darien Gap with a transportation infrastructure is economically feasible and desirable.

C. DARIEN GAP KEPT UNDEVELOPED BY INSUFFICIENT CAPITAL AND TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

Some anecdotes from the literature mention that the reason for the halted construction of the Pan-American Highway to close the Darien Gap has been due to the would-be developer's insufficient capital and the construction project's technical challenges. However, engineers have been able to achieve greater overcomplicated and costly construction projects, but the lack of political will to overcome engineering and capital challenges prevents the realization of the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap. By 1970, the estimated construction cost for the completion of the road had risen,

[85] Organización de los Estados Americanos [Organization of American States], *República de Panamá - Proyecto de Desarrollo Integrado de La Región Oriental de Panamá - Darién [Panama Republic - Project for the Integrated Development of Panama's Eastern Region- Darien]* (Washington, D.C.: Unidad Técnica del Proyecto Panamá - Darién [Technical Unit for the Panama Project - Darien], 1978), para. 4.4.1.1, 2.3.3.4, https://www.oas.org/dsd/publications/Unit/oea30s/oea30s.pdf.

from $150 million in 1968 to $251 million—the U.S. responsible for $84 million—with the potential of further increases due to the terrain challenges, administrative delays, and inflation.[86] Furthermore, in 1973, there were still cynics who doubted that the construction was technically possible, believing that even a completed road through the Darien Gap was likely to be washed away within a couple of years.[87]

Ostensibly in favor of this argument is the fact that even smaller projects, with less construction cost and fewer technical challenges, have not been able to bridge the Darien Gap. One such project was an energy initiative announced in 2009 by the Panamanian Empresa de Transmisión Eléctrica [Electric Transmission Business] S.A. and the Colombian Interconexión Eléctrica [Electric Interconnection] S.A. The goal was the integration of regional power markets to boost sustainable development in the region. The project required the installation of electrical transmission lines, with its proposed infrastructure passing through the Darien Gap. All efforts for the project ceased in August 2012 when Panamanian government officials announced that the project "was suspended indefinitely, blaming the lack of capital as well as technical and environmental problems."[88]

However, the project's suspension coincided with political pressure from indigenous communities and a high disapproval rating from the Panamanian population, suggesting that the government's stated reason to halt the project was just an excuse to save face. After winning the Panamanian presidency by a landslide in 2009, Ricardo Martinelli had engaged in many large and expensive infrastructure programs, demonstrating his keenness to invest in mega projects. President Martinelli's ambitious behavior changed after 2012 when 55% of the Panamanian population disapproved of his policies.[89] Shortly after, the Panamanian government announced that it would no longer continue with the

[86] Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," 198; Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 116.

[87] Hanbury-Tenison, "The Cuna and the Road," 52.

[88] Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," 112.

[89] Negroponte, 112.

energy project.[90] Thus, the Panamanian governments backpedaling on its intent to complete an unpopular project is an indication that it was not the technical challenges that prevented the Darien Gap's development but the government succumbing to civil society's political pressure.

Just as with the energy project, the instances when the Panamanian and Colombian governments attempted to complete the construction of the Pan-American Highway on the Darien Gap proves that it is the political willingness and not lack of capital or technical expertise that has kept the Darien Gap undeveloped. In 1997, with the advances in technology since 1977, the Colombian and Panamanian governments renewed their interest in restarting the construction of the Pan-American Highway, the estimated cost of which had at that time increased to $300 million.[91] Then, in 1995, much as would happen 17 years later with the energy project, environmentalists and native people objected, causing the project to lose political backing.[92]

The 1997 initiative to continue the road demonstrates that the governments have the capital and the drive to overcome technical difficulties presented by the construction of the Pan-American Road, suggesting that cost and technical hurdles are ultimately not responsible for the lack of development in the Darien Gap. The 2018 Colombian ambassador to Panama, Juan Claudio Morales, summarized the difficulty in bridging the Darien Gap when he stated, "los argumentos de algunos ingenieros, es debido al factor natural que no alcanza a levantar los cimientos de un lugar a otro, adicional saldría muy costoso, pero básicamente es voluntad política." [The arguments of some engineers, is the factor of natural geography which does not allow for the raising of the foundations from place to place, and in addition, it would be very expensive, but basically it is political will.]

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[90] Negroponte, 112.

[91] Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire."

[92] Ward.

D. DARIEN GAP AS A COLOMBIAN STRATEGIC FAILURE

Another proposed explanation, as presented in an article conducted by the faculty of International Studies of the Institución Universitaria [University Institution] Esumera at Medellin, Colombia, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-conflict Context," is the Colombian government's lack of strategic planning and ineffective foreign policy that has continually undermined the Pan-American Highway connection between Panama and Colombia.[93] The article first points out that Colombia failed to plan the measures needed to be compliant with the FMD mitigation criteria imposed by the international community in order to extend the Pan-American Highway into Colombia. It then argues that in the years that followed, Colombia's foreign policy was completely focused on obtaining foreign aid for combating violent domestic groups, treating the construction of the Pan-American Highway into Panama as a low priority.[94] However, this explanation is inadequate since subsequent attempts by Colombia to restart the construction of the Pan-American Highway and other construction projects at the Darien Gap were derailed by the Panamanian government and not by the Colombian government's lack of interests in or mishandling of the project.

It is true that, in 1977, Colombia's initial lack of compliance with the FMD initiative halted the construction. Reports to the U.S. Congress and the USDA state that the Colombian government had failed to implement FMD control measures per its agreement with the United States made in 1973. As recorded in one of the reports, the Colombian government showed a lack of ability and willingness to control FMD. The reports further indicate that the Colombian FMD control zones had "not been legally nor physically secured because of legal and potential social and financial problems"; thus, the Colombian officials did not have the legal authority to prevent farm establishments or animals' movement in the area.[95]

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[93] Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-Conflict Context."

[94] Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj.

[95] Henry Eschwege, *Construction Progress and Problems of the Darien Gap*, PSAD-77-154; B-118653 (Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, 1977), 3, https://www.gao.gov/assets/120/119680.pdf.

It is also true that, after the Colombian government demonstrated its prioritization of FMD control in 1978, its foreign policy then shifted to being an extension of domestic policy, using its relations with the United States to address domestic problems, such as drug trafficking organizations and left-wing insurgencies. By focusing its foreign policy on linking the drug cartels and left-wing insurgent groups to the United States' interests in the Cold War, the War against Drugs, and later the War against Terrorism, Colombia could receive foreign and military aid to address domestic problems.[96] Therefore, Colombia's foreign policy has lacked a "strategy that includes geopolitical interests [such as the development of the Pan-American Highway], taking advantage of strategic zones converging in the Colombian territory in accordance with external interests."[97]

However, the argument that the undeveloped Darien Gap is a result of Colombia's lack of strategic planning and ineffective foreign policy is deficient since there is evidence that Colombia did attempt multiple times to bridge the gap, but Panama's political immobility kept the governments from developing the region. One example is the 1997 Panama–Colombia bilateral initiative to restart the construction of the Pan-American Highway, which met resistance from ecologists and Panamanian indigenous people.[98] Other similar attempts culminated with the same outcome. Such was the case in 2009 when Colombian president Alvaro Uribe insisted on the need for a highway connecting Panama and Colombia in the Panamanian Association of Business Executives Conference.[99] Similarly, in 2012, the Panamanian government withdrew from the energy project that would interconnect the Panamanian and Colombian electrical infrastructure through the Darien Gap.[100]

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[96] Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-Conflict Context," 104–6.

[97] Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj, 105.

[98] Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire."

[99] "Uribe Insiste en Vía para Unir Panamá y Colombia [Uribe Insists on a Highway to Join Panama and Colombia]," *La Nación*, April 4, 2009, https://www.nacion.com/el-mundo/uribe-insiste-en-via-para-unir-panama-y-colombia/LO3UMQNE3BG5DM6D4VYRES42F4/story/.

[100] Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," 112.

Thus, Colombia's prior use of foreign policy to address domestic concerns did not stop the development of the Darien Gap. Though the Colombian government was slow to implement FMD control measures, in 1991, the USDA declared that FMD was eradicated in the Darien region.[101] Ever since, there have been multiple attempts by the Colombian government, including having the president advocate for the development of the Darien Gap. All of these proposals from the Colombian government, however, have been dismissed by the Panamanian government.

E. U.S. INTERESTS HAVE KEPT THE DARIEN GAP UNDEVELOPED

While many reasons that have been put forth do not provide a strong explanation for the undeveloped Darien Gap, there are some more plausible explanations worth further investigating such as the one provided by Carlos Orozco Cuello in his *article "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentro y Desencuentros"* [Colombia, Panama, and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements], where he claims that U.S. interests have kept the Darien Gap undeveloped. He points out that the United States has meddled in the region when such action has been beneficial for itself, such as it did in the 1850 when if infringed on Panama's sovereignty so it could construct a trans-isthmus railroad; the intervention in favor of Panama's Independence movement in 1903; and the construction of the Panama Canal.[102] Orozco Cuello finally points out that it was 1974 U.S. legislation, with concerns over possible adverse environmental impact according to U.S. standards, that stopped the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[103] Thus, he asserts that U.S. foreign policy in Latin America best explains the existence of the undeveloped Darien Gap including the lack of transportation infrastructure in the Darien Gap.

All of these examples cue a strong tie between U.S. interests and the development of Panama that has affected the construction of the Pan-American Highway and the

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[101] Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire."

[102] Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 108, 112.

[103] Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, 114.

development of the Darien Gap. To understand how U.S. interests factors into the development of the Darien Gap, it is necessary to analyze trends between U.S. interests in the region and the development of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure.

The idea for the construction of a Pan-American transportation infrastructure, and with it, the development of the Darien Gap, was conceived and mostly led by U.S. leaders, U.S. companies, and the U.S. government. This idea was devised as a measure to counteract colonial extra-hemispheric threat from European powers and their navies in the Western Hemisphere. The United States, lacking a strong navy at the time, hoped a Pan-American railroad, isolated from European naval threat, would give uncontested access to the Latin American markets.[104] Since then, and until 1977, when the last attempts to construct the Pan-American Highway and develop the Darien gap were made, the U.S. government applied its political influence and resources capable of overcoming local political obstacles to the construction of a Pan-American land-based infrastructure during periods of extra-hemispheric threat and regional hegemonic challenges to the United States. As U.S. interest in the region changed based on the threat to its national defense and its ability to counteract extra-hemispherical powers in Latin America, so did the amount of progress in the construction of the Pan-American railroad and highway. As Chapter III exposes, the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure increased during the presence of extra-hemispheric threat to the United States, and decreased in absence of those threats, accompanied by lack of U.S. support for the construction that allowed for local challenges, such as lack of finance and cooperation between Latin American states, to keep the projects from ever developing the Darien Gap. After 1977, with the decline of the Soviet Union's menace, the latest extra-hemispheric threat to United Sates, and with the United States agreeing to transfer of the Panama Canal from U.S. control to Panama, the U.S. interests in the area began to change from regional development to isolationism and protectionism, halting further construction of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap, and giving political space and

104 Rutkow, The Longest Line on the Map, 1–10.

maneuverability, free of U.S. influence, for local challenges to prevent the development of the Darien Gap

F. DARIEN GAP AS A CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIVE MEASURE

Finally, another plausible contemporary argument claims that environmentalist and indigenous groups' seeming sociopolitical power in affecting Panama's domestic policy have caused the lack of development at the Darien Gap by contending for the application of its cultural and environmental protections. Even though, historically, opposition movements from indigenous groups across the globe hardly are successful in stopping development, there is a track record of the Panamanian government safeguarding the civil rights of the 35,000 indigenous people of the Kuna-Tule and Emberá-Katio Cholos (also known as Chocó) tribes that inhabit the Darien Gap.[105] For example, in 1920, the indigenous population's right to their land was guaranteed by a presidential decree.[106] Later in 1971, this right to their lands was upheld in the Pan-American Highway trilateral agreement between the U.S., Colombia, and Panama, which exempted the indigenous population and their livestock from relocation as part of the FMD control measures.[107] Finally, in 1997, plans to complete the Pan-American Highway ran into opposition by 1,700 members of the Kuna-Tule and Chocó tribes.[108] Their opposition to the road construction centered on the argument that the intact ecosystems provide the indigenous population self-sustaining livelihood and that the "removal of habitat consigns this highly individualistic tribe and all their unique knowledge of their environment, to the oblivion of illiterate and destitute peasantry."[109]

Similarly, the Darien Gap, the largest protected nature reserve in Central America and the Caribbean, and with a *Cultural Worldwide Heritage* and *Biodiversity Reserve*

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[105] Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-Conflict Context."

[106] Hanbury-Tenison, "The Cuna and the Road."

[107] Eschwege, Construction Progress and Problems of the Darien Gap.

[108] Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?"

[109] Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," 199.

designation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has environmentalists advocating its conservation.[110] Though resolved in 1976, a lawsuit by U.S. environmentalist groups halted the construction of the Pan-American Highway in 1974, claiming that the FHWA had not complied with the National Environmental Protection Act of 1969 in its requirement to conduct an environmental impact study.[111] Conservationists still argue that in addition to the direct and immediate destructive effects the road construction would have on Darien's flora and fauna, the easier access to virgin land provided by a new road will attract immigrants and farmers, clearing additional land for their use and accelerating the deforestation.[112]

However, world events continually demonstrate that when confronting development, cultural and environmental conservationists are politically challenged and constantly oppressed. Such is the case in Argentina, where fracking companies have encroached on the lands of the indigenous Mapuche.[113] Similarly, in the U.S., tribes like the Tlingit in Alaska and the native Hawaiians are engaged in protecting their ancestral lands from construction projects.[114] Not only are local indigenous communities often overpowered, but even institutions with an international reputation and status, such as Greenpeace, struggle in conserving the environment and stopping development projects.

In addition, there are uncertainties surrounding the political persuasiveness that the supposed benefits of conserving the Darien Gap undeveloped have in affecting Panamanian domestic policy. An example of the uncertainty surrounding the conservationist

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110 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?"

111 Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 116.

112 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," 112.

113 Uki Goñi, "Indigenous Mapuche Pay High Price for Argentina's Fracking Dream," The Guardian, October 14, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/14/indigenous-mapuche-argentina-fracking-communities.

114 Lauren Shamo and Anneke Ball, "How 3 Native American Tribes Are Fighting to Protect Sacred Land from Logging, Oil Pipelines, and a Billion-Dollar Telescope," Business Insider, September 26, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/native-americans-fight-for-environment-and-their-culture-2019-9; Severin Carrell, "Judge Fines Greenpeace £80,000 Over North Sea Oil Rig Occupation," The Guardian, July 3, 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/03/judge-fines-greenpeace-80000-over-north-sea-oil-rig-occupation.

explanation is that although there are indigenous communities that oppose the development of the Darien Gap and the construction of the Pan-American Highway, there are other indigenous residents defending the construction of the Pan-American Highway. Some of those who do agree with the construction are the local farmers forced to transport their goods by the river due to the lack of roads, which makes it impossible for them to get their products to the market during the dry season. Others that approve infrastructure development in the areas are some doctors within the Kuna indigenous community, who have difficulties transporting severely ill patients to hospitals for advanced care, who sometimes die during the six- to seven-hour trip.[115]

Furthermore, the cultural and environmental argument for the Darien Gap is challenged by the fact that keeping it undeveloped, with no state presence, has provided criminal organizations the opportunity to take control of the region and threaten the indigenous population and their land. These criminal organizations coerce local indigenous residents into drug trafficking. Those who are not coerced are forcibly displaced from their region, either by violence, abandonment, or selling land under pressure. In turn, the drug traffickers clear the expropriated fertile lands to grow illicit crops.[116]

Because there are various instances where the construction of the Pan-American Highway was possibly thwarted by indigenous and conservationist opposition, the environmental and cultural protectionist argument may be plausible. On this basis, explaining the existence of the Darien Gap, especially when considering the historical precedent of similar construction projects, requires further investigation. As an example, the building of the Panama Canal, under the same circumstances as the Darien Gap, is inconsistent with the explanation of the Darien Gap's existence based on cultural and

115 "El Tapón Del Darién, Una de Las Zonas Más Intransitables de América Latina [The Darien Gap, One of the Most Impassable Zones in Latin America]," 2018, BBC, video, 15:59, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCXa2gRXlcM.

116 Luz Stella Carmona Londoño, "Tapón Del Darién: En Disputa Por La Unión de Las Américas [Darien Gap: In Dispute by the American Union]," Revista de La Facultad de Trabajo Social UPB {Magazine for de Social Work Faculty UPB] 23, no. 26 (2010): 13–27.

environmental protection.[117] Another example is the Mayan Train in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. In the Mayan Train case, though conservationists resist the construction, fearing that tourism development and a real estate construction boom would disrupt the local Mayan community, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has continued to press for completion of the project.[118] Therefore, Chapter IV further investigates the hypothesis of the undeveloped Darien Gap as a cultural and environmental protectionist measure.

[117] Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 124.

[118] Emilio Godoy, "Mexico: Mayan Train Threatens to Alter the Environment and Communities - Analysis," Eurasia Review, August 27, 2020, http://www.eurasiareview.com/27082020-mexico-mayan-train-threatens-to-alter-the-environment-and-communities-analysis/.

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III. U.S. INTERESTS, THE PAN-AMERICAN RAILROAD AND HIGHWAY, AND THE DARIEN GAP

The right of our manifest destiny is to spread over this whole continent.

—Robert C. Winthrop, Representative of Massachusetts, 1846[119]

Figure 6. American Progress (1872)[120]

Early U.S. expansion, first in the form of seizing territory and pushing its western frontier, and then by political and economic influence on the southern countries, was often followed by the construction of transportation infrastructure. These U.S. expansionist policies primed the United States to become the leader in the construction of a land-based transportation infrastructure aimed to develop the Darien Gap at Panama and connect the United States with the Central and South American countries. Since the 1850s, have been various examples of the connection between U.S. interests and Panama's infrastructure development. These examples include the construction of the trans-isthmus railway, the

[119] Julius W. Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny,'" The American Historical Review 32, no. 4 (1927): 795, https://doi.org/10.2307/1837859.

[120] Source: Martha Sandweiss, "John Gast, American Progress, 1872," Amherst College, accessed January 10, 2021, https://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/john-gast-american-progress-1872/.

Panama Canal, and the Pan-American Highway. The history of U.S. expansionism and U.S.-led construction projects in Panama indicates of a strong tie between U.S. interests and the development of Panama—a tie that determined the course of the construction of the Pan-American Highway and, consequently, the development of the Darien Gap.

U.S. expansionist policies have roots in the early 19th century when the newly formed United States of America proclaimed a right and responsibility to expand its territory—"Manifest Destiny." The expression "Manifest Destiny" may derive from the emergence of the United States as a democratic nation after defeating Great Britain and winning its independence. Because of the U.S. triumph over the tyranny of monarchs, some U.S. leaders argued that the United States was destined to manifest its ideals across space and time. This concept later evolved into a philosophy of state expansion, holding that the United States was fated to extend its territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.[121] In 1846, this westward U.S. expansion led to the Mexican-American War. After its defeat, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico conceded its territories located in present-day California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Arizona.[122] With the newly acquired territory, the United States fulfilled its goal of western expansion, opening a vast amount of land for U.S. development.

After the Mexican-American war eliminated the U.S.–Mexican western frontier, the new borders yielded to U.S. progress in the West. In January 1848, a month before the Mexican and U.S. governments signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, miners discovered gold in California.[123] The discovery of gold led to the Gold Rush boom, mass migration, and a rapid increase in the western population. The U.S. migrants that populated areas along the Pacific coast developed local economies. The explosive growth of the west resulted in California's population reaching more than 300,000, almost tripling its residents

[121] Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny.'"

[122] "The Mexican American War," PBS, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/grant-mexican-american-war/.

[123] "Gold Rush Overview," California Department of Parks and Recreations, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.parks.ca.gov/.

in a decade, and the emergence of new markets, such as agriculture.[124] This rapid increase in population and economies demanded the development of transportation infrastructure to facilitate travel and trade within the United States. As a result, entrepreneurs extended the nation's railway across the continent.[125] After its completion, the U.S. transcontinental railroad allowed trains to travel between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.[126] John Gast allegorically represented western modernization in his artwork *American Progress,* illustrating westward American advancement and the institution of new economies being facilitated with railways (see Figure 6).[127]

Similarly, the U.S. drive to extend land-based transportation infrastructure to facilitate travel and trade provided the basis for the formulation of a Pan-American Railroad, connecting the U.S. and Latin American countries. Since the United States won its independence, and until the late 19th century, Great Britain possessed naval hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, while the United States, lacked a developed Navy and commercial marine transportation, unable to challenge the British at sea. Since British-flagged ships dominated the sea transport of passengers and trade, the United States was not able to fully expand into the Latin American markets.[128] From this challenge arose the U.S.-led economic and political endeavor which eventually became the most extensive U.S. foreign development project, to build a Pan-American land-based infrastructure that would develop the Darien Gap, thus connecting the United States, Central America, and South America.[129]

The combination of U.S. expansionist policies and the construction of these policies' supporting infrastructures influenced Panama's development. In 1855, the United

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[124] "California as I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849–1900," Library of Congress, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/from-gold-rush-to-golden-state/.

[125] Library of Congress.

[126] Kate Chelsey, "First Transcontinental Railroad and Stanford Forever Linked," *Stanford News*, May 8, 2019, https://news.stanford.edu/2019/05/08/first-transcontinental-railroad-stanford-forever-linked/.

[127] Sandweiss, "John Gast, American Progress, 1872."

[128] Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 7–10.

[129] Rutkow, 1.

States infringed on Panamanian sovereignty to construct the Panama Canal Railway and facilitate Americans traveling between the U.S. east and west coast during the Gold Rush boom. The Panama Canal Railway provided a sea-land-sea route which was faster and safer than traveling solely by land across the United States or by exclusively sailing around South America.[130] Then, in 1903, the United States assisted Panama in gaining its independence from Colombia, and shortly after, the United States took over the construction of the Panama Canal, having jurisdiction over it until 1999.[131] Finally, in 1974, it was U.S. legislation regarding adverse environmental impact according to U.S.-based standards that stopped the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[132] Since then, all U.S. development on a land-based Pan-American transportation infrastructure stopped only 60 miles short of completion at Panama.

From the 19th century to the late 20th century, the plan to develop the Darien Gap was included in the U.S.-led project of a land-based transportation infrastructure connecting the Americas. To understand how U.S. interests drove the development of the Darien Gap, it is necessary to correlate U.S. interests in the region with the rate of development of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. This chapter looks into history of U.S. expansionism in Latin America and establishes a connection between the existence of an extra-hemispheric threat to the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere and the development of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. Starting in the 19th century when European navies prevented the freedom of movement of U.S. sea-based commerce in the Western Hemisphere, this chapter shows that the development of U.S.-led land-based construction projects accelerated with the threat of the colonial powers, the Axis Powers, and the Soviet influence in the region. These extra-hemispheric threats incentivized the U.S. government to provide the leadership, resources, and capital

130 Canal Zone Government., "The Last Rail Was Laid and the Following Day a Locomotive Passed from Ocean to Ocean," *Panama Canal Review*, January 28, 1955.

131 "Policy & History," U.S. Embassy in Panama, accessed December 9, 2020, http://pa.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/.

132 Orozco Cuello, Sanandres Campiz, and Molinares Guerrero, "Colombia, Panamá y la Ruta Panamericana: Encuentros y Desencuentros [Colombia, Panama and the Pan-American Highway: Agreements and Disagreements]," 114.

needed to overcome the obstacles to the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. However, as the threat dissipated, so did U.S. enthusiasm, allowing Latin American domestic obstacles hinder the progress of a land-based transportation infrastructure; the Darien Gap is the result.

The idea and development of a Pan-American transportation infrastructure were conceived and mostly led by U.S. leaders, U.S. companies, and the U.S. government. As regional U.S. interest in the region changed based on the threat to its national defense and its ability to counteract extra-hemispherical powers in Latin America, so did the amount of progress in the construction of the Pan-American railroad and highway. Therefore, starting in 1977, after the United States agreed to transfer of the Panama Canal from U.S. control to Panama, U.S. interests in the area began to change from regional development to isolationism and protectionism, halting further construction of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap.

A. 1800s. COUNTERACTING EUROPEAN IMPERIAL POWERS: THE PAN-AMERICAN RAILROAD RESPONSE

The first manifestation of the correlation of U.S. involvement in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and extra-hemispheric threat occurred in the 1800s. During that time, U.S. interests in Latin America, in response to the extra-hemispheric threat from the European colonial powers in the Western Hemisphere, led to an increase in U.S. support for a land-based transportation infrastructure. To counteract European naval hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. government provided the leadership to temporarily overcome regional obstacles preventing the construction of a Pan-American Railroad and its plan to develop the Darien Gap and link the United States economy to Latin American markets.

The idea of a Pan-American Railroad in 1866 is attributed to a U.S. diplomat. The U.S. congressional support for the project was also propelled by U.S. ideals such as the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny. Therefore, it is no surprise that the United States took a leadership role in promoting and developing the concept of a railway that would go between New York City and Buenos Aires. However, within 15 years, shifts in the

international balance of power caused the U.S. government to shift from being an ardent supporter of the railroad to an indifferent participant. The initial support can be attributed to a weak U.S. naval presence in the Western Hemisphere. The Pan-American Railroad provided a safe alternative to reach Latin American markets with a convenient and reliable mode of transportation to promote U.S. commerce and suppress European naval trade in the Western Hemisphere; however, at the end of the 19th century, the shift in the balance of naval power away from European states, and in favor of the United States, obviated the U.S. incentive to build the railroad, and with it, its potential to come to fruition and develop the Darien Gap.

In the early years after its independence, and up to the end of the 19th century, the United States lacked a strong naval presence in the Western Hemisphere. Though a Continental Navy was created in 1775 to fight the British naval forces during the American Revolution, it was soon disbanded after the war ended. The newly established American government had weak central powers and was unable to collect sufficient tax income to be able to maintain a national navy. Without the British naval threat, the U.S. government decided to demobilize the Continental Navy.[133]

However, the emergence of new naval threats, such as piracy and conflicts with France and Britain, convinced the U.S. government that for the United States to be prosperous, it needed a naval force to protect its merchant vessels. As a result, in 1794, the U.S. Navy was created; however, the United States did not attain total naval supremacy until the beginning of the 20th century, and U.S. merchant ships continued to be harassed in the Western Hemisphere.[134] The inadequate protection provided by the U.S. government to U.S. vessels may have also contributed to the unavailability of commercial U.S.-flagged ships in the Western Hemisphere. Even as late as the 1860s, the United States was not competitive in western-hemispheric naval commerce; at the time, most transatlantic transportation was done by European ships, specifically British ones. Indeed,

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[133] Adam Bisno, "Birth of the U.S. Navy," Naval History and Heritage Command Communication and Outreach Division, last modified February 2019, http://public1.nhhcaws.local/browse-by-topic/heritage/origins-of-the-navy/birth-of-the-us-navy.html.

[134] Charles Race, "The Rise of the American Navy 1775 - 1914," HistoryNet, last modified September 7, 2016, https://www.historynet.com/the-rise-of-the-american-navy-1775-1914.htm.

during that period, only two U.S.-flagged ships provided transportation between New York and Buenos Aires, a voyage that could take up to 100 days.[135]

Simultaneously, in the 19th century, the United States government, aware of economic opportunities in Latin America, which was at that time contested by imperial powers, adopted a foreign policy to repel European influence in the Western Hemisphere. In addition to the presence of European colonies in the Americas, European control over the Latin American economy challenged the United States government's intent to increase its own influence and economic relationships in the area. In 1823, during his annual message to the U.S. Congress, President James Monroe declared that the United States would be taking a stand against European powers meddling in the Western Hemisphere.[136] The statement became a U.S. foreign policy principle, delineating the spheres of influence between European states and the U.S. and condemning European intervention and colonization in Latin America. The Monroe Doctrine, and the ideas of Manifest Destiny of the mid-1800s, established the basis for U.S. expansion in the upcoming years.

However, in the immediate term, the contested waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea prevented the U.S. government from enforcing its policy.[137] In the absence of U.S. naval supremacy, and in their desire to reach Latin American markets while denying them to European powers, U.S. leaders saw a Pan-American railroad, an impervious mode of American transportation insulated from extra-hemispheric naval threats, as a promising alternative.

The Pan-American Railroad concept was envisioned in 1866 by Hinton Rowan Helper, a U.S. consul in Argentina at the time, who saw the potential for U.S. economic growth in the Latin American market and the comparative advantage a direct railroad to the region would provide to U.S. commerce. Helper was one of many Americans who

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135 The Senate, "Projected Intercontinental Railway Through the Three Americas," The Senate, 59th Cong. 1 (1906), ProQuest Congressional.

136 "Monroe Doctrine (1823)," Our Documents, accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=23.

137 "The Monroe Doctrine," The Library of Congress, accessed January 12, 2021, http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/monroe/aa_monroe_doctrine_3.html; "Monroe Doctrine, 1823," Office of the Historian, accessed January 12, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/monroe.

traveled to the Californian coast during the Gold Rush boom in search of economic opportunities. In order to do so, he traveled by ship from the U.S. east coast to Central America, made a land crossing, and sailed again north to the Californian coast. A few years later, he again experienced similar sea travel challenges when he was assigned as a U.S. consul in Argentina and had to take ships from Buenos Aires to New York City. During that time, Great Britain still possessed naval hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and the United States still lacked a developed Navy and commercial marine transportation.[138] These experiences led to his question, "Why not by Rail?"[139] From this question arose the U.S.-led economic and political endeavor to build a Pan-American land-based infrastructure that would have developed the Darien Gap and connect the United States, Central America, and South America.[140]

Soon after his inspiration, Helper petitioned the U.S. Congress and lobbied for its support of the construction of a Pan-American Railroad. He declared that the total annual profits on Latin American trade were $600 million, of which 75% was controlled by European powers.[141] Therefore, in 1884, the U.S. Congress approved a bill to start promoting commercial relationships for railway connections between Latin American states and the United States, stating:

> The idea of building a railway from the United States to the Argentine Republic is somewhat startling to those who have never given the subject a thought, but a little reflection will convince any one [*sic*] that no insuperable obstacle is in the way of such an enterprise. A railroad from some point in Texas, or elsewhere in this country where a connection is formed with the railroad system of the United States to the City of Mexico, and thence through the Republic of Mexico and Central America, and along the ***Isthmus of Darien***, passing east of the Andes through South America to the Argentine Republic, would meet with but few natural obstacles in the way of its construction…Distance and natural obstacles have never thwarted American enterprise in the construction of railways. Already have several lines of railway been stretched across this continent, either of which, from ocean to ocean…it is believed that the obstacles to its [Pan-American

138 Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 7–10.

139 Rutkow, 7.

140 Rutkow, 1.

141 "The 'Three Americas' Railway," *Washington Post*, March 20, 1884, ProQuest.

> Railroad] completion are no more formidable than were encountered eighteen or twenty years ago in the construction of our first trans-continental line.[142] [emphasis added]

Meanwhile, as the bill was approved, U.S. politicians sought to exert what they believed to be the United States' role of the hemispheric leader by hosting an international conference in Washington, DC and inviting the government heads of the American states. The theme of the 1889 International American Conference, the genesis of future Pan-American Conferences, was economic cooperation between American states. Though very few actionable items were agreed upon by the attending members, the conference did achieve consensus on the formation of an Intercontinental Railway Commission, including members of every nation, responsible for planning the Pan-American Railroad's route, originating from the United States, across Central America and the Darien Gap, and ending at South America (see Figure 7).[143]

In 1891, at the conclusion of the First International American Conference, and under the leadership of the U.S. government, U.S. surveyors set out to perform their site surveys. During the field assessment, unfamiliarity with the region, cultural and intrateam friction, over-expenditure, and, more significantly, the unexpected difficulty in traversing the natural features caused delays. Surveyors finally finished their fieldwork in 1893, but because of the time it took to write the report, the completed results were not presented to the U.S. leadership until 1898.[144] By the time surveyors completed the field report, U.S. attention had shifted away from land-based transportation to water-based.[145] Though the Pan-American Railroad had achieved U.S. political support, in the following years, while the project was still in its initial phases of planning and site selection, U.S. interests shifted from enthusiastically supporting the construction of the railroad to become indifferent to

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142 H.R, *Commercial Relations with South and Central America*, House of Representative, 48th Cong. 1 (1884), 1884, 1, 5, ProQuest Congressional.

143 Committee on Railway Communication, *Report of the International American Conference Relative to an Intercontinental Railway Line* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1890), 11, ProQuest Congressional.

144 Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 32–39.

145 "The Nicaragua Canal: Commissioners Said to Be Agreed on All Important Points -- Political Questions Not Considered.," *New York Times*, November 5, 1898.

it, causing the leadership of the U.S. government to wean off the railroad initiative, and facing the project to stop dead in its tracks, keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped.

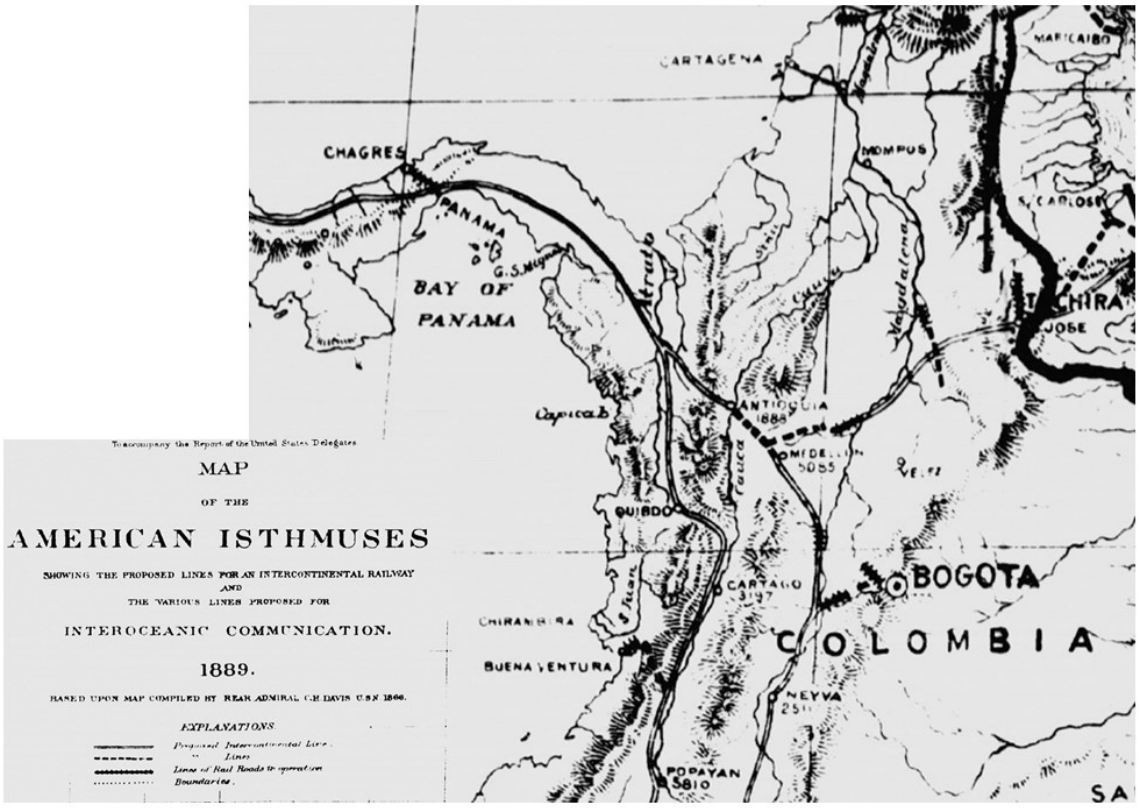

Figure 7. International American Conference–Intercontinental Railway Proposed Route[146]

Thus, the extra-hemispheric threat to the United States from the European colonial powers in the 1800s influenced U.S. interests in Latin America in providing the leadership needed to overcome political and financial obstacles preventing the construction of the Pan-American Railroad. At the beginning of the 19th century, European empires challenged U.S. naval power, economic development, and political influence in the region. Under those conditions, U.S. leaders conceived and supported the idea of a Pan-American Railroad that would provide a direct line of access between the United States and Latin

146 Source: Committee on Railway Communication, *Report of the International American Conference Relative to an Intercontinental Railway Line*.

America and that would be impervious to European threat. The U.S. support for the American railway project provided the leadership needed to overcome the obstacles presented by Latin American burdensome coordination and financial shortfalls.[147]

However, soon after the 1889 International American Conference, where all members agreed to cooperate towards building a railway, the U.S. turned its interest away from the Pan-American Railroad leaving the American states without strong leadership to accomplish the project. After the sudden U.S. backpedaling from the Pan-American Railroad project, Central American states supported and continued the project. At the Central American Peace Conference of 1907, the Costa Rican delegates were successful in unifying the other Central American states and committing to constructing the Pan-American Railroad.[148] However, soon after the conference, Nicaragua's president, Jose Santos Zelaya, broke the peace treaty by fomenting belligerent actions in the region.[149] In other Central American states, only nominal amounts of tracks continued to be laid, mostly by U.S. companies.[150] By 1925, there was no longer significant political or commercial will to build the Pan-American Railroad and develop the Darien Gap.[151] From then on, Central American states were never able to come together and complete the Pan-American Railroad.

As the next section of this chapter demonstrates, the U.S. government's sudden detachment from the construction of the Pan-American Railroad resulted from the reduction in extra-hemispheric threats which allowed U.S. interests to shift away from the railroad project to the construction of a trans-isthmus canal, eliminating the possibility to develop the Darien Gap with the railroad infrastructure. Leading into the 20th century, regional power shifted away from European states and towards the United States. This shift

147 Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 89, 97.

148 James Brown Scott, "The Central American Peace Conference of 1907," *Cambridge University Press* 2, no. 1 (January 1908): 19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2186562.

149 Mary Wilhelmine Williams, "The New Central America," *University of Northern Iowa* 214, no. 790 (September 1921): 298, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25120820.

150 James McCreary, *Continental Railway to Connect American Nations*, Report No. 2243 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 1890), 2–3, ProQuest Congressional.

151 Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 140.

in the balance of power allowed the United States to embark on global imperialistic endeavors. Without strong U.S. involvement to provide the U.S. leadership required to facilitate American interstate cooperation and the U.S. capital to compensate for the lack of Latin American finances, the Pan-American Railroad project could not make significant progress in the construction of its infrastructure that was intended to develop the Darien Gap.

B. 1898-1918. U.S. GLOBAL IMPERIALISM AND THEODORE ROOSEVELT: ABANDONMENT OF THE RAILWAY

The second manifestation of the pattern of U.S. involvement in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and its correlation with extra-hemispheric threat occurred as the United States achieved regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, removing its support for the Pan-American Railroad. The U.S. government's sudden detachment from the construction of the Pan-American Railroad coincided with shifts in the balance of power in the region away from European powers and towards the United States. These shifts are best noted in four instances, Britain's conceding the rights for a building a Nicaraguan Canal to the United States; Britain accepting U.S. arbitration and decision on Britain's territorial dispute with Venezuela; France transferring its Panama Canal project to the United States; and the United States annexing Spanish Caribbean territories to the United States after Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. These instances marked sudden reduction in European influence in Latin America that provided the opportunity for the U.S. government to enter into its own imperialist era while abandoning Pan-Americanism and therefore its interest in building an interstate land-based transportation infrastructure that would have develop the Darien Gap.

Britain's weakening geopolitical power in Latin America, which allowed the United States to claim regional hegemony in the region, occurred between 1885 and 1900, as the British government was preoccupied with 12 uprisings in its eastern-hemispheric

colonies.[152] Its allocation of military assets to Eastern counterinsurgency campaigns diverted resources away from the Western Hemisphere, relinquishing its naval hegemony to the United States.[153] Prior to that, before the mid-1800s, the absence of political and military power of non-European nations left the Britain Empire unchecked, and free to exert global supremacy. However, during the 19th century and into the 20th, Great Britain, confronted with emerging threats in the Eastern Hemisphere. The rise of a Japanese empire in East Asia and India's independence movements created new menaces to the British empire. Britain's need to address instability in the Eastern Hemisphere made it too costly to maintain a significant geopolitical presence in the Western Hemisphere; consequently, it lost its naval supremacy and geopolitical power in the Western Hemisphere to the United States.

One critical instance that demonstrates the transfer of power between Britain and the United States that happened during the time the United States lost its interest in the construction of the Pan-American Railroad occurred over the control of a trans-isthmus canal. In the mid-1800, Britain and the United States were competing for control of a potential trans-isthmus canal, which would give the holder a geopolitical advantage by providing it the ability to project political, economic, and military power across the globe. Even without a canal, Britain was in a superior strategic location, since it was closer to San Francisco and China by sea from London than it was from New York. Initially, the stronger British government had the upper hand, claiming Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, the site which the United States and Britain believed had high prospects for the construction of a canal. The years of struggle for control of the prospective canal site that ensued, each state concurrently denying it to the other, and the increase in U.S. political power led to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850. In the treaty, both governments agreed that neither would build a canal without the other. However, this treaty only lasted until 1901.[154] At this time,

[152] Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Liveright, 2013), 576–77.

[153] Walter Russell Mead and Richard C. Leone, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 57.

[154] Mead and Leone, 119–22.

Britain was engaged in multiple political and military efforts in its eastern-hemispheric colonies, giving the U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt the political maneuverability to replace the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty with the Hay–Pauncefote Treaty, authorizing the United States to construct, manage, and defend a canal without British participation.

Another instance that demonstrates hemispheric power transfer from Britain to the United States was during the Venezuelan crisis of 1895, when the governments of Venezuela and Britain feuded over territory at the northern coast of South America. Ultimately, the United States government, enforcing the Monroe Doctrine, intervened, and the British government reluctantly accepted the U.S. arbitration of the case in favor of Venezuela.[155]

A third instance that demonstrates hemispheric power transfer from European colonial powers to the United States during the time the United States lost its interest in the construction of the Pan-American Railroad was with France, and the U.S. acquisition of the French canal project. The United States did not only compete against the British Empire in its attempt to control a trans-isthmus canal in Central America but also needed to gain on the progress already made by a French canal construction project at Panama; however, the subsequent French failure provided the United States the opportunity to build its own canal, furthering U.S. geopolitical power. Like Britain and the United States, France was looking for its own trans-isthmus canal in Central America but differed in selecting Panama for its location. In 1880, under an agreement with the Colombian government, the French started the construction of a Panamanian canal. By 1889, difficulties in developing the area had cost the French government $262 million, bankrupting the project, and the death of approximately 30,000 people, mostly due to tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever.[156] The enormous loss of capital and life caused all French-led undertakings to come

[155] Bertha Ann Reuter, "Anglo-American Relations during the Spanish-American War" (Doctor of Philosophy, University of Iowa, 1923), III-6-III–7, https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.bea4deq3.

[156] Jennifer Monger, "Panama Canal Centennial: The French Debacle | Institute Archives and Special Collections," Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute History, last modified September 23, 2014, https://archives.rpi.edu/blog/2014/09/23/panama-canal-centennial-the-french-debacle; "The French Era," Panama Canal Museum, accessed January 14, 2021, https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/pcm/timeline/frenchera.aspx.

to a devastating end and caused France to abandon any further attempts to construct a canal in the Americas.

The existing French construction, with its supporting infrastructure and equipment, provided a lucrative opportunity for the U.S. canal initiative. The U.S. government attempted to come to an agreement with the Colombian government so it could acquire all French construction assets and the right to the Panamanian canal. The Colombian government refused the initial U.S. propositions, hoping to negotiate a more favorable deal for Colombia. Refusing to accommodate the Colombians, President Roosevelt almost unilaterally conspired with Panamanian independence movements, which were seeking to break away from Colombia, and sent U.S. warships to the region, preventing Colombian forces from quelling the revolt. On November 6, 1903, within three days of the Panamanian uprising, the U.S. government recognized Panama's independence. Soon after, the Panamanian and U.S. governments signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, authorizing a U.S. canal in Panama, and in 1904, the United States was able to purchase all canal assets for just $40 million, down from the initial $109 million offer from France.[157] In light of these events, President Roosevelt reportedly declared, "I took the Canal Zone."[158] The aiding of Panama's independence for its own interests and the switch of the rights to a canal from French to U.S. ownership reinforces the rise of U.S. regional and global geopolitical power.

One final instance that indicates hemispheric power transfer from European colonial powers to the United States, taking away from the U.S. motivation for supporting the construction of the Pan-American Railroad, was with the Spanish-American War. In 1898, in contrast to the U.S. behavior toward France and Britain, the United States engaged in open hostilities with Spain, resulting in the U.S. annexation of Spanish territories and

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[157] Monger, "Panama Canal Centennial: The French Debacle | Institute Archives and Special Collections"; Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 38; "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Panama," Office of the Historian, accessed January 14, 2021, https://history.state.gov/countries/panama; "The American Era: Roosevelt and the Panama Canal Treaty," Panama Canal Museum, accessed January 14, 2021, https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/pcm/timeline/americanerarooseveltaspx; "The French Era."

[158] Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 38.

further expanding U.S. territories in its global empire. By the end of the 1890s, U.S. investment in Cuba surpassed $30 million.[159] Concurrently, a strong anti-Spanish and pro-independence movement emerged there. U.S. recognition of Cuba's independence did not mean it was free of U.S. influence, since its sovereignty was limited by the Platt Amendment, providing the United States power over Cuba's ability to make treaties, conduct foreign policy, and engage in commercial relations, while authorizing U.S. intervention in the island.[160] U.S. concerns over the political unrest on the island were sufficient for the U.S. congress to justify involvement to protect U.S. citizens and interests, sending the U.S. Navy ship *Maine* off the coast of Cuba. A mysterious explosion that caused the *Maine* to sink, to which the United States accused Spain, set off political and diplomatic ripples that lead to the United States declaring war on Spain.[161] The war lasted only a year, but as a result of Spain's defeat, the United States acquired the Spanish territories of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.[162] The territories seized from Spain, the control over the Canal connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean, and the elimination of European threat in the Western Hemisphere, transcended the U.S. regional interests of securing Latin American markets to a global interest of U.S. imperialism.

The decrease of extra-hegemonic threat and the increase of U.S. western-hemispheric hegemony discouraged U.S. leaders to continue supporting the construction of the Pan-American Railroad. One such leader was President Theodore Roosevelt. The increase in U.S. regional security and dominance favored President Roosevelt's hard-politics and global imperialistic policies, further diverting U.S. political support away from the Pan-American Railroad.

Starting with his participation in the Spanish-American war, Theodore Roosevelt, at the time Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, would emerge as a war hero, allowing

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159 Smith, 35.

160 Smith, 34–38.

161 "'Remember the Maine': The Beginnings of War," Library of Congress, accessed March 22, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/articles-and-essays/the-motion-picture-camera-goes-to-war/remember-the-main-the-beginnings-of-war/.

162 "The Spanish-American War, 1898," Office of the Historian, accessed March 22, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/spanish-american-war.

him to climb the political hierarchy, become president, and take a central role in the United States becoming a global power and distancing itself from the Pan-American Railroad. But even before the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt was active in U.S. politics, serving as the assistant secretary of the navy in 1897, a position that explains his inclination towards favoring sea-based power and transportation over that of land. Soon after, he volunteered to fight in the Spanish-American war, taking command of the renowned Rough Riders cavalry unit, famous for its charge at the battle of San Juan Hill, a decisive engagement contributing to the U.S. victory. Emerging from the conflict as a war hero, Roosevelt continued his political career. In 1901, after a series of events that included the assassination of President William McKinley, Roosevelt, who was U.S. vice president at the time, became the 26th, and the youngest ever, president of the United States.[163]

As president, Roosevelt, a realist, approached U.S. foreign policy in terms of power balance.[164] One of his favorite aphorisms, s*peak softly and carry a big stick*, can be seen as an expression of his predilection for hard-power politics over soft power.[165] In 1904, President Roosevelt added the *big stick* to the mostly passive and idealistic Monroe Doctrine with the Roosevelt Corollary, in which he asserted the U.S. role as the western-hemispheric police power, deterring any further European involvement in Latin America.[166]

As the United States displaced European powers in the Western Hemisphere, becoming the regional hegemon and eliminating the extra-hemispheric threat, President's Roosevelt's realist ideologies, partly responsible for U.S. global imperialism and expansion, and representative of U.S. government's stance for a land-based transportation

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163 "The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War: Theodore Roosevelt," Library of Congress, Hispanic Division, June 22, 2011, https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/roosevelt.html.

164 Stephen G. Walker and Mark Schafer, "Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as Cultural Icons of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 6 (2007): 747–76, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447086.

165 Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, "The Presidents of the United States of America: Theodore Roosevelt," The White House, last modified 2006, https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/theodore-roosevelt/.

166 "Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904," Office of the Historian, accessed January 14, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/roosevelt-and-monroe-doctrine.

infrastructure, doomed the construction of the Pan-American Railroad, which he considered an idealistic tool. In addition, some of his domestic policies already made him appear anti-railroad and in favor of regulating commercial business. His antitrust laws, which caused the dissolution of a grand Northwestern railroad conglomerate, earned him the nickname *trust buster*.[167] These actions placed him at odds with the U.S. railroad businesses, which, at the time, were still attempting to maintain the ongoing Pan-American construction. One of the businessmen advocating for U.S. government support for the Pan-American Railroad was Andrew Carnegie, the steel baron, responsible for leading the expansion of the steel industry.[168] In 1905, Carnegie, who believed U.S. power projection should remain confined to the Western Hemisphere, conveyed to the Pan-American Railway Committee:

> Against [Roosevelt's] big navy programme… let us put the Pan-American Railway, which would cost less money in the next twenty years. . . . If the United States gave the $100,000,000 toward the railway now spent yearly on the navy . . . we should do more to eliminate the element of danger, which at best is small, than we shall with all the warships we can build.[169]

Later, he declared in the *New York Tribune,* "The ships are always subject to attack by foes, the railway is immune . . . thus settling this Monroe Doctrine for all time."[170]

However, President Roosevelt never came around to supporting the Pan-American Railroad. He once wrote to Henry G. Davis, a wealthy railway-builder of West Virginia, former United States senator, and at that time a member of the Committee on Railroad Communication, that "I am fully awake to the importance of the All-American Railway…I have to deal with so many matters … that I do not want to add another unless there is

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167 Freidel and Sidey, "The Presidents of the United States of America: Theodore Roosevelt."

168 "Biography: Andrew Carnegie," PBS, accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/carnegie-biography/.

169 "No Big Navy--Carnegie: Put $100,000,000 in Pan-American Railway Instead, He Says.," *New York Times*, March 16, 1905.

170 Andrew Carnegie, "Carnegie and the Monroe Doctrine: Why the Famous Philanthropists Prefers the Pan-American Highway to a Great Navy for Defensive Purposes," *New-York Daily Tribune*, March 26, 1905, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1905-03-26/ed-1/seq-53/.

something immediate that I can gain by it."[171] In 1906, President Roosevelt virtually removed the U.S. government from leading the construction of the Pan-American Railroad by refusing to appoint any U.S. delegate for the construction project to the 3rd Pan-American Conference in Rio, Brazil.[172]

In summary, the decrease in extra-hemispheric threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere gave way to U.S. global imperial expansion, dependent on naval power, and resulted in the U.S. government's withdrawal from its leading role in the Pan-American Railroad construction, removing the leadership Latin American countries needed to overcome the obstacles preventing its completion. As the previous section proves, in 1889, when extra-hemispheric threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere was high, U.S. representatives at the International American Conference and the U.S. Congress asserted that with U.S. leadership, the American states were going to build a railroad from New York to Buenos Aires, emphasizing that not even the jungles of the Darien region would stop progress. However, by 1898, when site surveyors turned in their field reports to U.S. government leaders, global events and regional developments altered the U.S. position in the international ranking and on its support for the Pan-American Railroad. In between those two years, the shift in the balance of power favoring the United States is marked by the following instances of concessions by European powers: the United States obtaining full rights for a Nicaraguan canal, independent of British claim; the United States successfully exerting the Monroe Doctrine in the Venezuelan Crisis, signaling U.S. dominance over Britain in the region; the French canal project going bankrupt, providing the opportunity for a U.S. canal in Panama; and the United States defeating Spain and seizing its remaining American colonies. These shifts in the balance of power cemented the United States as a regional hegemon and the removal of extra-hemispheric threats, resulting in a loss of interest for the construction of a Pan-American land-based infrastructure. The U.S. government's indifference for the Pan-American Railroad was best reflected in the years of President Roosevelt's administration, which favored realist

[171] John Anthony Caruso, "The Pan American Railway," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 31, no. 4 (1951): 624, https://doi.org/10.2307/2509357.

[172] Rutkow, *The Longest Line on the Map*, 89.

policies and naval power. As time progressed, the U.S. would never retake interest in the railroad and without U.S. leadership, the Pan-American Railroad project fizzled under the Latin American states' domestic challenges, thwarting the development of the Darien Gap.

C. 1914-1940. WWI AND U.S. ISOLATIONISM: THE LULL IN BETWEEN

The third manifestation of the pattern of U.S. involvement in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and its correlation with extra-hemispheric threat occurred during World War I and the years of U.S. isolationism before World War II. This third manifestation is a continuation of the second manifestation's trend of little U.S. support for a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure during a time of no extra-hemispheric threat. As the previous section explains, the initial decrease of extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere allowed the United States to become a regional hegemon, decreasing U.S. incentives to support a land-based transportation infrastructure. This section demonstrates that, during the first 40 years of the 20th century, the United States, as the established Western Hemisphere hegemon, continued to be indifferent to the construction of the land-based transportation infrastructure that would have develop the Darien Gap.

For the first four decades of the 20th century, uncontested U.S. naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere coincided with the lack of U.S. government leadership on any Pan-American land-based transportation project and without the Latin American states making any significant progress on its construction. Even the battles of the World War I, mostly confined to a European theater, did not present the United States an extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere that might have prompted it to retake its leadership role in the Pan-American Railroad project. In the post-World War I era, the United States, after being dragged into protecting its interests overseas, went into isolationism. During its isolation phase, and even with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policies, the United States continued to be devoid of the political will and to abstain from the international entanglements that would have been required to advance a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. Even though during the World War and U.S. isolationism technology advancement in automobiles and

highways replaced the efforts for a Pan-American Railroad with an also U.S.-originated Pan-American Highway, it was the U.S. commerce sector, and not the U.S. government, that led the inadequate attempts during this period to complete a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure that would allow motorists to traverse the Darien Gap and reach the southern tip of South America. Therefore, for most of the 20th century's first half, the absence of extra-hemispheric threat to U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere failed to prompt the U.S. government to take a more active role in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure that would develop the Darien Gap; consequently, without U.S. leadership and capital to assist in Latin American interstate cooperation and help in financing the construction, the projects of a Pan-American railroad and highway did not achieve significant milestones.

Though the United States fought in World War I in order to protect its interests from extra-hemispheric threats, the conflict was fought in the Eastern Hemisphere, and the U.S. western-hemispheric hegemony was not only unthreatened but also strengthened by the war. There were two factors that aided in strengthening U.S. regional dominance during the war. First, the ongoing war interrupted European commerce in Latin America when both sides in the conflict established naval blockades against each other. The dueling blockades, established by the British and the Germans, were intended to apply economic pressure on the other and gain an advantage in the war. The allied blockade blacklisted German commerce in Latin America, forcing many Germans to abandon their businesses there.[173] The vacuum in supply of German goods provided a lucrative opportunity for U.S. companies, which consequently boomed in Latin America.[174] On the other hand, Germans used U-boats for unrestricted torpedoing in Europe, putting Allied merchant ships headed to Latin America at risk, disrupting trade between European Allied nations and Latin America, removing the competition they gave to U.S. commerce.[175] These circumstances

[173] Phillip Dehne, "How Important Was Latin America to the First World War?," *Iberoamericana* 14, no. 53 (2014): 155, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24368641.

[174] John Barrett, "South America-Our Manufacturers' Greatest Opportunity," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 34, no. 3 (1909): 82–93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1011529.

[175] Dehne, "How Important Was Latin America to the First World War?," 155.

gave U.S. companies an even greater lock on Latin American markets, cementing the United States economic dominance in the Western Hemisphere. Second, the decline in commerce between European and Latin America was in conjunction with the absence of naval threat in the region. After the British defeated German Admiral Graf von Spee's naval units at the Battle of the Falklands on 8 December 1914, no naval battles happened near Latin America. Even German U-boats did not threaten U.S. naval supremacy in the region since the U-boats attacks were restricted to the northeast Atlantic (see Figure 8).[176]

The resulting U.S. political dominance and influence is evidenced by the trend set forth by Latin American countries in their decision to fight in the World War. Latin American countries either refused to take an active part in the war or favored the United States and the Allies. The trend set by all Latin America in either severing ties with Germany or entering the war on the side of the Allies after the United States in April 1917 is an indication of the strong U.S. hegemonic influence in the region (see Figure 9 and Table 1).[177] Not even Germany's attempt to lure the Mexican government into joining it and declare war on the United States, as the Zimmerman telegram demonstrated, succeeded in breaking the U.S. hegemony in the region.[178]

[176] Dehne, 152.

[177] Percy Alvin Martin, *Latin America and the War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1925), 1.

[178] "The Zimmermann Telegram," National Archives, August 15, 2016, https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/zimmermann.

Figure 8. German U-Boat Attacks in World War I[179]

[179] Source: Esri Zhou Li, "This Map Shows the Full Extent of the Devastation Wrought by U-Boats in World War I," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 7, 2015, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/map-shows-full-extent-devastation-wrought-uboats-world-war-i-180955191/.

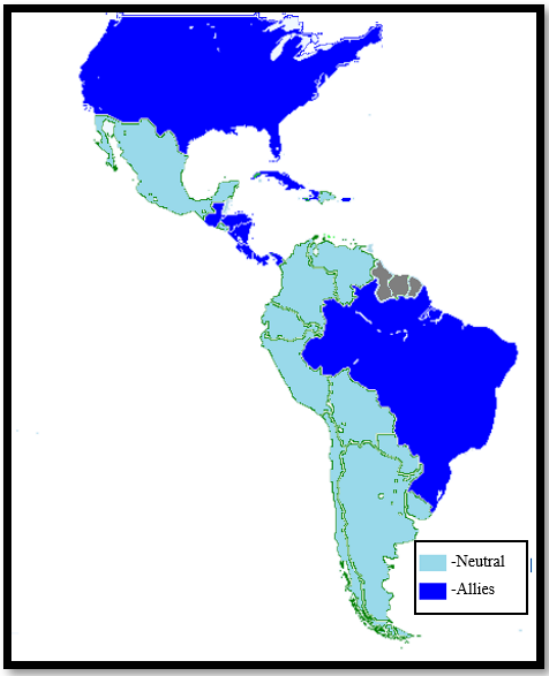

Figure 9. U.S. and Latin American Stance in World War I[180]

Table 1. Latin American Stance in World War I[181]

Latin American Country	Neutral	Severing of Relationships with Germany	Entry into war
Argentina	X		
Bolivia		13-Apr-17	
Brazil		11-Apr-17	26-Oct-17
Chile	X		
Ecuador		7-Dec-17	
Colombia	X		
Paraguay	X		
Peru		6-Oct-17	
Uruguay		7-Oct-17	
Venezuela	X		
Costa Rica		21-Sep-17	23-May-18
El Salvador	X		
Guatemala		27-Apr-17	23-Apr-18
Haiti		17-Jun-17	12-Jul-18
Honduras		17-May-17	19-Jul-18
Cuba		7-Apr-17	7-Apr-17
Mexico	X		
Nicaragua		18-May-17	7-May-18
Panama		7-Apr-17	7-Apr-17

[180] Adapted from Martin, *Latin America and the War*, 1.

[181] Adapted from Martin, 1.

At the end of the war, in 1918, the war-torn European nations, with devastated economies, were still incapable to present a near-term threat to the United States; thus, without an extra-hemispheric threat abroad, the U.S. government went into isolationism, and without an extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. continued its indifference in its support for a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. The war inflicted huge costs on the European nations, causing 9.4 million deaths and costing an estimated $208 billion, resulting in the 20th century's greatest global depression.[182] With the exception of the United States, all major combatants accrued debts. The European conditions was not favorable for any of those states to challenge U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere. With no longer a European threat abroad or in the Western Hemisphere, the war wearied United States avoided further interstate entanglements and entered into isolationism.

In addition to European nations inability to challenge U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere, the World War provide the United States additional resources that would continue to divert U.S. support away from the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and the subsequent development of the Darien Gap. The end of the war provided the United States a large number of ships to be repurposed from its war efforts to be used for trade and transportation.[183] The absence of extra-hemispheric naval threat to U.S. merchant ships, the isolationist policies, and the increase of naval capabilities, incentivized the U.S. to not support the construction of the Pan-American Railroad and provide the diplomatic leadership needed for conducive international relations, while the U.S. commerce opted to use the repurposed ships to breach the gaps between railroads.

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182 "First World War: Aftermath," The National Archives, January 17, 2021, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/aftermath/counting_cost.htm.

183 Edward N. Hurley, "Our Railroads Go to Sea: Our New Merchant Marine, Linked with Railways, Will Find, After the War, New Trade Routes and Make the World Our Market," *Nation's Business (Pre-1986)* 6, no. 9 (September 1918): 18, https://doi.org/ProQuest; Edward N. Hurley, "What America's New Merchant Marine Means to the World," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 83, no. 1 (May 1, 1919): 141–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/000271621908300110.

In the midst of this period of isolationism, the idea of a Pan-American Highway replaced that of the railroad. In 1923, U.S. commerce representatives, sent as U.S. delegates to the 5th Pan-American Conference, which had been delayed nearly a decade on account of the Great War, first presented the idea of the Pan-American Highway to government representatives of the American states. The idea of a Pan-American Highway—most likely driven by an expanding capacity of the U.S. automobile industry, which originated from World War I's high demand for building war material and now sought to commercialize its capability by converting it to the production of consumer goods—emerged as a way to sell automobiles in the Latin American markets. Based on the increase in U.S. motor registration, going from 4.9 million in 1917 to 15 million by 1923, Businessmen worried that the market for vehicles in the United States was getting saturated.[184] Businessmen and motorist enthusiasts envisioned a Pan-American road that would allow people to drive from the United States, across the Darien Gap, and up to the southern tip of South America, and that would impassion the populace in both continents to buy and use automobiles. U.S. businessmen pitched their ideas to the American states and hosted several promotional tours, the Latin American governments became receptive to the project.[185] In 1928, at the 6th Pan-American Conference, at Havana, Cuba, Latin American states adopted a resolution, calling for a Pan-American Congress of Highways that would consider and adopt agreements on the construction of a Pan-American road. However, the Pan-American Congress of Highways later decided that Latin American states would become responsible for deciding the highway's route within their borders and where it would connect with adjoining states. This decision diluted the project's international objective and made merely the sum of domestic matters. With each state having its own goals, international cooperation faltered, and not much progress was made in the construction of the highway.[186]

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[184] Roger Stephens, *Down That Pan American Highway* (Miami: HardPress Publishing, 2014), 13.

[185] Stephens, 13–15.

[186] Herbert C. Lanks, "The Pan American Highway. II," *The Scientific Monthly* 49, no. 5 (1939): 429–30, http://www.jstor.org/stable/16887.

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, though the Pan-American Highway was sanctioned by the U.S. government, with no extra-hemispheric threat, U.S. government support for the project was irresolute at best. After the Pan-American Conference in Havana, U.S. advocates for the Pan-American Highway asked the U.S. congress to fund a U.S.-led construction project for the entirety of the Pan-American Highway, to include the development of the Darien Gap. However, without an extra-hemispheric threat to motivate a consensus with the U.S. lawmakers, there was little political will for such a large investment. Within two years, advocates, instead of receiving the U.S. Congress's support for a fully funded construction project, had to accept the reduced aid of just a U.S.-led site survey going from Mexico's southern border to the Panama Canal. Furthermore, it took those same two years for the U.S. Congress to overcome an impasse in its decision for funding part of the survey project.[187]

With the absence of extra-hemispheric threat, Even President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's support for the Pan-American Highway as part of his Good Neighbor Policy was not sufficient in itself for the Pan-American Highway to make significant strides. On March 4, 1933, in his inaugural address, Roosevelt stated: "In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others."[188] His Good Neighbor Policy distanced U.S. foreign policy from the military interventionist ideals of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary and established a policy of cooperation and trade with Latin American countries.[189] In June 1934, and in the spirit of Pan-American cooperation, President Roosevelt communicated to the Senate:

> I have the honor to transmit herewith … a proposed provision of legislation so as to make available the funds necessary to cooperate with the several

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187 Joint Resolution Authorizing Assistance in the Construction of an Inter-American Highway on the Western Hemisphere, Public Res. 40, 7th Cong. (1928), https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/70th-congress/c70.pdf; Joseph T. Cotton, *Survey for Construction of Proposed Pan American Highway*, 71st Cong. 2 (1930) (statement of Joseph T. Cotton, Undersecretary of State), 17–22, ProQuest Congressional.

188 "Good Neighbor Policy, 1933," Office of the Historian, accessed January 18, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor.

189 Office of the Historian.

governments, members of the Pan American Union, in connection with the survey and construction of a proposed InterAmerican Highway.[190]

In the spirit of the Good Neighbor policy and interstate cooperation, the U.S. Congress soon approved the $5 million not only for the survey but also for the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[191] However, without an extra-hemispheric threat to unite lawmakers in supporting the construction of the Pan-American Highway, support for it faltered. Not even with the President's affiliated Democratic Party controlling both houses in the U.S. Congress was sufficient to overcome U.S. indifference over the Pan-American Highway. As in 1929, some U.S. politicians delayed allocating project funds as they waited for all the Latin American countries to approve receiving the aid.[192] Concurrently, some Latin American countries were still skeptical of U.S. intentions, believing the Pan-American Highway would facilitate U.S. control over Latin American markets or future military interventions.[193] The half-hearted U.S. support was not sufficient to overcome the Latin American challenges to finance the Pan-American Highway and the distrust of the United States government; consequently, it kept the American states from making steady progress in the construction of the Pan-American Highway.

In sum, the technological advancements in the automobiles and highways made during the first half of the 19th century evolved the concept of a Pan-American Railroad into a Pan-American Highway. Like the conception of the railroad, the idea of the Pan-American Highway originated in the United States. Initially, representatives of U.S. commerce, and not the U.S. government, led the efforts for the Pan-American Highway. Years later, President Roosevelt attempted to provide full U.S. government support for its construction. However, in both time periods, without an extra-hemispheric threat, the U.S.

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190 Roosevelt, *Survey and Construction of Inter-American Highway*, The Senate, 73rd Cong. 2 (1934) (Statement of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt), ProQuest Congressional.

191 *Inter-American Highway*, The Senate, 73rd Cong. 2 (1934), 11615, ProQuest Congressional.

192 The Senate, 11613; Franklin Roosevelt, "Letter from Roosevelt to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State: [Approves Request for Transfer of Funds to Bureau of Public Roads for Inter-American Highway Construction]," March 3, 1936, ProQuest Congressional.

193 "Yanqui Imperialismo," *The New Republic* 77 (1933): 90.

government lacked the political will for and delayed any possibility of completing the Pan-American Highway.

D. 1940-1970. WORLD WAR II AND THE COLD WAR: THE PAN-AMERICAN HIGHWAY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The next series of manifestations of the pattern of U.S. involvement in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and its correlation with extra-hemispheric threat occurred in World War II and the Cold War. As U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere became contested, specifically with extra-hemispheric naval threats during World War II, the U.S. again increased its support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway, reigniting the probability of development in the Darien Gap. However, once World War II concluded, the United States regained its regional hegemony and naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere. Immediately afterwards, a temporary absence of an extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere removed the motivating force for U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway. However, the decline in U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway quickly reversed as the U.S. government perceived a new Soviet extra-hemispheric threat during the Cold War in Latin America. Though the U.S. maintained naval supremacy in the Western Hemisphere during the Cold War, the extra-hemispheric Soviet threat, based on the Soviet Union's ability to influence Latin American governments, provided the political incentives to prompt U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap.

In the late 1930s, the years leading to World War II, the U.S. government started to perceive a European and Asian threat to its western-hemispheric hegemony, causing it to strengthen diplomatic relations with the rest of the American states. In November 1938, during a press conference, President Roosevelt addressed the German threat and its impact on national defense by stating, "the first thing we realize is the fact that any possible attack has been brought infinitely closer than it was five years or twenty years or fifty years ago. ... We are therefore studying national defense and ***continental solidarity*** against possible

attacks from other hemispheres" [emphasis added].[194] The following month, President Roosevelt, concerned about the European and Asian threat, dispatched U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull to the 8th Pan-American Conference in Lima, Peru, to convince the American states to become U.S. partners in defense of the Western Hemisphere from foreign threat.[195] Secretary Hull was successful, and as a result, the American states adopted the Declaration of Lima, which provided for collective deliberation by the Pan-American states in the case that any of their peace, security, or territorial integrity came under threat.[196] In the subsequent years, continued Japanese aggression in the Pacific was enough to give the United States some pause and prompted it to diplomatically distance itself from Japan. In January 1940, the United States government did not renew a U.S.–Japan commercial treaty, and in July it established an embargo on scrap iron. The diplomatic tensions continued to increase, and in January 1941, the U.S. ambassador in Tokyo, Joseph Grew, warned of an impending Japanese attack on the United States.[197] At this point, the extra-hemispheric threats emanated from the Pacific and from the German Nazis across the Atlantic.

Subsequently, in the 1940s, U.S. naval supremacy and hegemony in the Western Hemisphere were seriously tested. In the first years of the 1940s, the United States, still in isolation, held back from entering another European conflict. However, the United States was eventually forced to enter the conflict under circumstances that differed completely from those in the first World War. On December 9, 1941, the Japanese caught the U.S. military flat-footed and carried out a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The strike not only was successful in attacking a military base on U.S. territory but severely damaged the Pacific Fleet. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese won time and space to

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194 Gerhard Peters and John T Woolley, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, The Five Hundredth Press Conference (Excerpts) Online," The American Presidency Project, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209356.

195 "Continental Solidarity," *New York Times*, November 25, 1938, https://www.nytimes.com/1938/11/25/archives/continental-solidarity.html.

196 Charles G. Fenwick, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Declaration of Lima," *American Journal of International Law* 33, no. 2 (April 1939): 264, https://doi.org/10.2307/2190332.

197 Bruce Robinson, "Pearl Harbor: A Rude Awakening," BBC History, last modified January 11, 2001, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo/pearl_harbour_01.shtml.

maneuver in Southeast Asia without U.S. interference. After the attack, Japan was able to invade territories from Manchuria to the East Indies, and from India's borders to deep into the Pacific, winning every major battle with the United States until Midway in June 1942 (see Figure 10).[198] Concurrently, the German U-boats attacked merchant ships as deep into the Western Hemisphere as the Caribbean Sea, threatening the Panama Canal shipping lanes (see Figure 11). In contrast to the first World War, the U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere became contested.

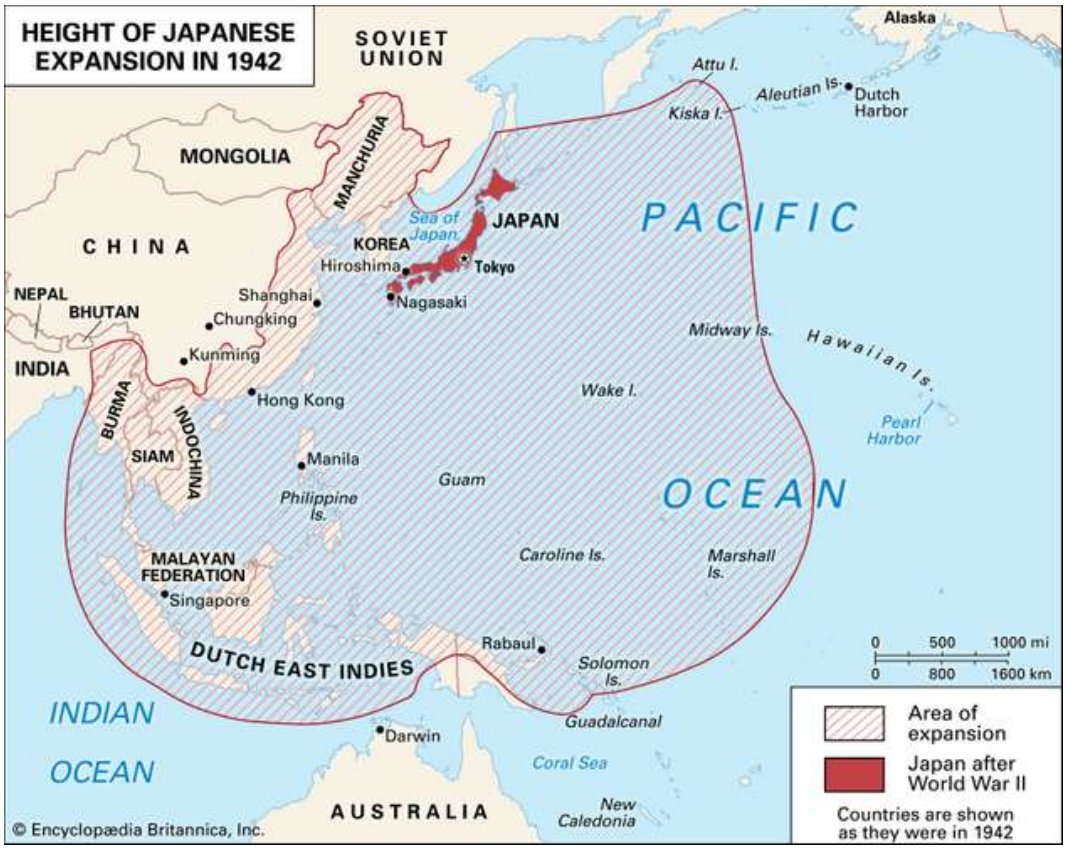

Figure 10. Height of Japanese Expansion (1942)[199]

[198] Robinson.

[199] Source: "Empire of Japan - The Demise of Imperial Japan," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/place/Empire-of-Japan.

Figure 11. The Battle of the Atlantic (IV), January–July 1942[200]

200 Source: *The Battle of the Atlantic (IV), January - July 1942*, HMSO, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.alamy.com/battle-of-the-atlantic-january-july-1942-world-war-2-raf-convoys-1954-map-image337304337.html.

The extra-hemispheric threat from the Japanese and the Germans prompted the political will and the increased U.S. support for the Pan-American Highway as a national defense measure. Earlier in 1941, before the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt again sought support from the U.S. Congress for the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[201] Because the extra-hemispheric threat was still not evident, the resulting bill, authorizing funding for the construction of the Pan-American Highway, stalled for a couple of months. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, causing the United States to enter the world war, it only took 15 days for the U.S. government to approve the bill authorizing $20 million for the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[202] In defending the bill, U.S. congressmen compared the strategic use of the prospective Pan-American Highway for the United States to that of the Burma road that helped the Chinese fight the Japanese invaders in their homeland.[203] While advocating for the bill, Wilburn Cartwright, U.S. Representative from Oklahoma, stated "the Pan-American Highway is the Burma Road of the Western Hemisphere, an integral part of the defense mechanism of the North American Continent, and vital to the economy, safety, and well-being of the people of the New World."[204] The bill stipulated that each of the countries south of Mexico to Panama would contribute one-third of the construction costs within its borders. Mexico opted to be solely responsible for the construction of the highway within its borders. Furthermore, the limited capital of the Latin American countries was not an impediment to the U.S. urgency to build the highway.[205] Costa Rica was exempted from funding heavy mountainous construction south of the city of San Jose because matching the one-third

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201 John G. Norris, "Pan American Highway Is America's 'Greatest Road Project,'" *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1941.

202 "Inter-American Highway Fund Bill Is Signed," *Washington Post*, December 27, 1941.

203 *Inter-American Highway*, House of Representatives 77th Cong. 1 (1941), 9878, ProQuest Congressional; "Burma, 1942," The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II, accessed January 19, 2021, https://history.army.mil/brochures/burma42/burma42.htm.

204 H.R., *Inter-American Highway*, 9878.

205 Dennis Chavez, *Report on Progress on Inter-American Highway*, 80206 O (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 2.

requirement "would have been beyond the reasonable economic capacity of that country."[206]

Following the passage of the bill, during World War II, and with U.S. government leadership's support, major progress was made on the construction of the Pan-American Highway that would have led to the development of the Darien Gap. In 1942, after U.S. military leaders decided to extend the Pan-American Highway north to make Alaska more defendable, it only took seven months to construct the 1,645-mile Alaska-Canada Highway.[207] The summer of that same year, the U.S. uncertainty about a positive outcome in the U.S. anti-submarine campaign in the Atlantic and the resulting sense of urgency for a Pan-American Highway to defend the Panama Canal caused state leaders to request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' assistance in the Central American segments.[208] Thus, the southern segments of the construction of the Pan-American Highway became a civil-military joint venture between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Public Roads Administration.

The U.S. government's newfound interest in the construction of the Pan-American Highway, as a means to counteract extra-hemispheric threats, resulted in a massive expansion of work, requiring 25,000 laborers, most locally hired.[209] The military component of the project was responsible for constructing 1,559 miles of road between the Mexico's southern border and David, Panama, bringing the road ever so closer to developing the Darien Gap. Earlier attempts had completed 314 miles of suitable road, leaving 1,245 miles for the U.S. Army engineers to complete.[210] In the only 16 months in

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[206] Chavez, 2.

[207] Frederick E. Nelson, "'America's Glory Road' … On Ice: Permafrost and the Development of the Alcan Highway, 1942–1943," in *Engineering Earth: The Impacts of Megaengineering Projects*, ed. Stanley D. Brunn (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 643–61, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9920-4_37.

[208] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program*, The Senate, 88th Cong. 1 (1947), 20896.

[209] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program*, 20940.

[210] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program,* 20921.

which the Corps of Engineer worked on the highway, they constructed close to 700 miles of all-weather road (see Figure 12).[211]

However, in October 1943, after an updated analysis by the U.S. military of the Western Hemisphere strategic situation concluded that there was no longer a credible threat in the region, U.S. military leaders ordered the Army engineers to cease construction.[212] This was confirmed by the Director of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during a hearing investigating the national defense program during World War II. In his testimony he declared that, once U.S. military analysis concluded the Axis threat in the Western Hemisphere dissipated, military engineers discontinued the construction of the Pan-American Highway.[213]

[211] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program,* 21518.

[212] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program,* 20898.

[213] The Senate, *Investigation of the National Defense Program* 20897.

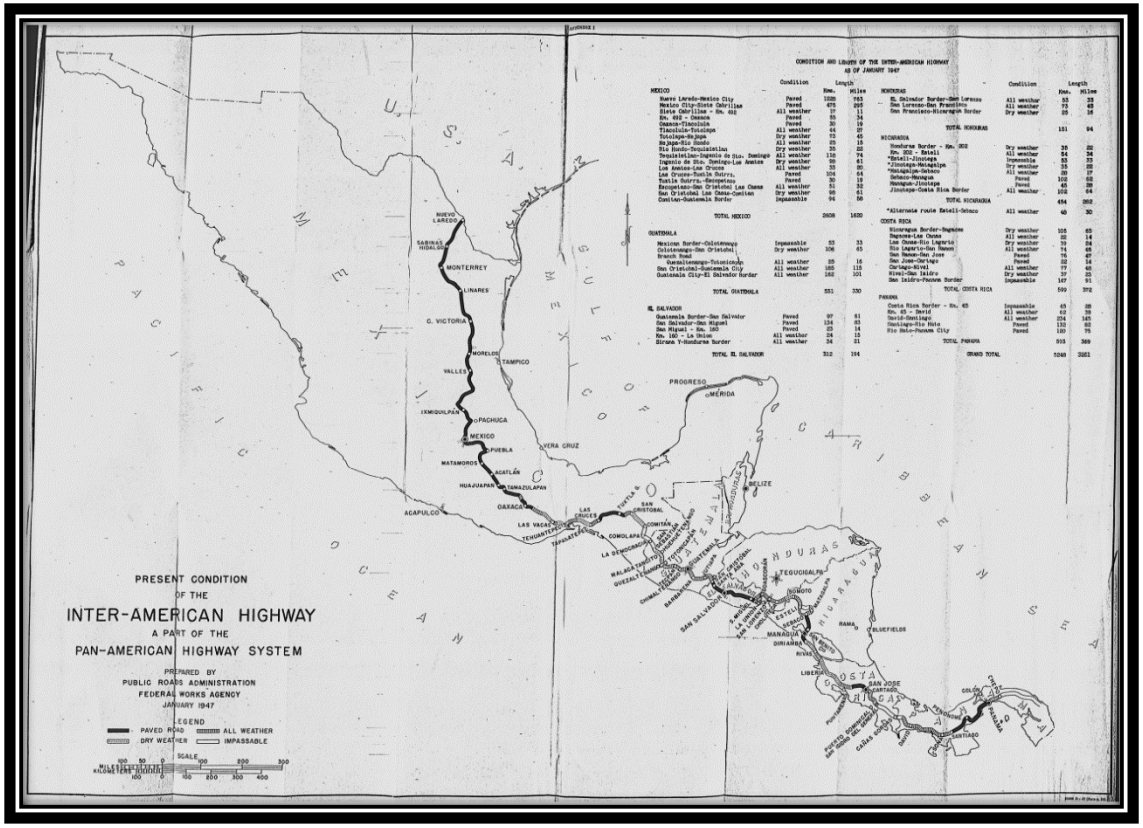

Figure 12. The Inter-American Highway, January 1947[214]

214 Source: *Present Condition of the Inter-American Highway*, Public Roads Administration, January 1947; Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, *Inter-American Highway*, 63996 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1947), Appendix 1, ProQuest Congressional.

The defeat of the Axis Powers momentarily eliminated the extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere, yet it commenced a global communist threat, evolving into the Cold War, that the United States initially attempted to contain in Europe and in Asia. The effect of World War II left the European countries in economic devastation. The U.S. government assessed that this economic situation made European countries vulnerable to exploitation by the Soviet Union's communist and anti-United States government. In 1948, as a response to the Soviet threat in Europe, the U.S. government adopted the Marshall Plan, which prioritized aid solely for western European countries, passing the Economic Cooperation Act and authorizing $12 billion for reconstruction in that region.[215] In 1951, with the continued Soviet threat, the U.S. government extended the Marshall Plan as part of the Mutual Security Act and authorized an additional $7.5 million in aid to U.S. allies, particularly western European states.[216]

At that time, Latin America sought to strengthen its economic and military relations with the United States; however, the U.S. government did not consider Latin America a Cold War strategic area. The U.S. government also believed that the Soviet Union did not have the capability nor the intent to establish a foothold in the Western Hemisphere.[217] Having re-established its dominance and regional hegemony, the United States separated itself from the Good Neighbor Policy, focused on western European affairs, and became indifferent to Latin American matters. The U.S. naval supremacy in the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean and the U.S. government's reduced perception of extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere that stemmed from the end of World War II caused the U.S. government to withdraw its support from the construction of the Pan-American Highway, slowing again its progress, keeping the Darien Gap without any transportation infrastructure. Though the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers withdrew from the Pan-

215 "Marshall Plan, 1948," Office of the Historian, accessed January 21, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/marshall-plan.

216 "Historical Highlights: The Mutual Security Act of 1951," U.S. House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives, accessed January 21, 2021, https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/The-Mutual-Security-Act-of-1951/.

217 Margarita López-Maya, "The Change in the Discourse of US-Latin American Relations from the End of the Second World War to the Beginning of the Cold War," *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 1 (1995): 142, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4177138.

American Highway construction efforts in 1943, the Bureau of Public Roads, still determined to develop the Darien Gap with the construction of the highway, continued to work on the project uninterruptedly until 1951, depleting the remaining funds that the U.S. Congress had approved for the project in 1942.[218]After 1951, once the Bureau of Public Roads had exhausted the funds appropriated during World War II, the U.S. Congress allowed it to continue with minimal and unreliable U.S. government support. The year prior, Congress had authorized the continuation of funding for the Pan-American Highway; however, it delayed the authorizations. From 1951 to 1955, lack of U.S. funds and the unreliability of the U.S. government's support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway adversely affected the project and limited the extent of construction.[219]

Later, at the height of the Cold War, the U.S. government perceived an extra-hemispheric threat in Latin America from the communist Soviet Union, resulting in the final era of U.S. support for the Pan-American Highway. In 1954, U.S. concerns about Soviet influence in Latin America first arose with Guatemala's President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Two years earlier, President Arbenz Guzman had implemented a reform program that undercut the profits of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala. Unhappy with the measures, company officials, through smearing propaganda, succeeded in persuading the U.S. government to label President Arbenz Guzman a communist, bringing the U.S. gaze back to Latin America. The U.S. government, motivated by its Cold War-based apprehension, forced President Arbenz Guzman to resign through a coup backed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).[220]

The reemergence of heightened U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway coincided with further escalations between the United States and the Soviet Union and the rise of pro-Soviet communist governments in Latin America. A year after the CIA-backed removal and replacement of President Arbenz Guzman and his

218 Chavez, *Report on Progress on Inter-American Highway*, 2.

219 Chavez, 2.

220 Stephen M. Streeter, "Interpreting the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala: Realist, Revisionist, and Postrevisionist Perspectives," *The History Teacher* 34, no. 1 (2000): 61–74, https://doi.org/10.2307/3054375.

purportedly communist Guatemalan government, the U.S. government, for the last time, renewed its overwhelming support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway. The realization of an apparent Soviet-backed communism in Latin America caused U.S. political will to favor the Pan-American Highway. A clear indication of U.S. shift from indifferent to supportive of the Pan-American Highway came on February 26, 1955, when, then-U.S. Vice-President Richard Nixon, on a tour at Panama City, said:

> The present program for United States participation in the construction of the Pan American Highway is inadequate, uneconomical, and completely unrealistic. For 15 years our Government has been publicly committed in the foreign policy to support and aid in the construction of the highway. At present rate…it will take—unless an accelerated program for completion is adopted—15 years to a quarter of a century to complete it…Since the United States is committed to contribute its share of the cost of the highway eventually, we should move up the completion date…we have no assurance that the absence of overland communication from the U.S. to the Canal Zone would not be disastrous if, despite all efforts, another war should come.[221]

Later that year, the U.S. Congress decided to expedite the construction, appropriating approximately $63 million, which was soon followed by $12 million in 1957 and another $10 million in 1958.[222] Just as in previous bills, U.S. government was to fund two-thirds of the construction cost, with the Latin American countries covering the remaining costs, but with the caveat that this condition could be waived if the Secretary of State found the funding amount that Latin American countries had to match was beyond their capacity to bear.[223] The bill made the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the Darien Gap and its funding a U.S. law.

In the years that followed, political tension rose between the U.S. and the Soviet Union as Fidel Castro successfully led the Cuban Revolution, ousting the pro-U.S. government of Fulgencio Batista. Castro's new regime deviated from the previous government's pro-U.S. inclinations and strengthened Cuba's international relations with

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[221] Richard Nixon "Statement by the Vice President," in *Department of State Publication: Inter-American Series* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1929), 596–97.

[222] Chavez, *Report on Progress on Inter-American Highway*, 2.

[223] Chavez, 2.

the Soviet Union. These events aggravated the Cold War escalation between the United States and the Soviet Union, reaching its climax during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.[224] That fall, during the U.S.–Soviet escalation, U.S. Congress approved an additional $32 million in funding for the Pan-American Highway.[225] This was the last U.S. funding that the Pan-American Highway project received.

Though the Cold war did not officially end until 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, substantial de-escalation occurred in the 1970s, leading to a significant reduction in the U.S. extra-hemispheric threat perception in Latin America. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union fiercely competed for nuclear superiority. Both governments attempted to curtail aggression in 1958 with negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty, and again in 1961, through diplomatic talks led by the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. In those times, the United States and the Soviet Union were not prepared to make significant concessions and all resolutions failed. However, soon after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, fear of nuclear proliferation spurred the United States and the Soviet Union to enter into nuclear arms control agreements. In 1963, "the Limited Test Ban Treaty was signed by the United States, [and] the Soviet Union… and it banned all nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in space, or underwater."[226]

After the Limited Test Ban Treaty 1963, more de-escalatory treaties and agreements ensued. The following are U.S.–Soviet agreements that continued to de-escalate Cold War international tensions:

- 1968's Non-Proliferation Treaty
- 1972's the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

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224 "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Cuba," Office of the Historian, accessed January 22, 2021, https://history.state.gov/countries/cuba; "The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962," Office of the Historian, accessed January 22, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis.

225 *Amendment of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, The Senate, 87th Cong. 2 (1962), 9873, ProQuest.

226 "The Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1963," Office of the Historian, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/limited-ban.

- 1972's Strategic Arms Limitation Talks I (SALT)
- 1974's SALT II
- 1974's Threshold Test Ban Treaty returned

In addition, periods of U.S.–Soviet cooperative behavior accompanied these agreements. The de-escalatory trend in the U.S.–Soviet relations encouraged President Richard Nixon to attempt détente.[227] With a favorable outcome for the U.S. in the Cuban Missile Crisis and the de-escalation measures that soon followed, the U.S. perceived the extra-western-hemispheric threat to have dissipated, prompting the last manifestation of the pattern of U.S. interest in the region and the construction of the Pan-American Highway, where the U.S. government, once again, removed its support of the construction of the highway and the development of the Darien Gap.

In sum, World War II, and subsequently the Cold War, was the last time that U.S. regional hegemony was contested in the Western Hemisphere, which exerted the force that drove the political will and U.S. support for the Pan-American Highway that was needed to overcome domestic challenges in Latin America preventing the construction. After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, a series of events signaled de-escalation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War. As a result of the significant de-escalations in hostilities in the Cold War, U.S. interests in Latin America shifted and caused U.S. abandonment of the Pan-American Highway project. And though the appropriated funds allowed the construction to continue for more than a decade, in 1977, the construction stopped at the Darien region with only 60 miles still to complete and consequently, left an

[227] Louis Kriesberg, "Social Theory and the De-Escalation of International Conflict," *The Sociological Review* 32, no. 3 (August 1984): 479–80, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1984.tb00823.x; "The Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1963"; "The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968," Office of the Historian, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/npt; "Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on The Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty)," U.S. Department of State, accessed January 26, 2021, //2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/101888.htm; "Strategic Arms Limitations Talks/Treaty (SALT) I and II," Office of the Historian, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt; "Threshold Test Ban Treaty," U.S. Department of State, accessed January 26, 2021, //2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/5204.htm; "Détente and Arms Control, 1969–1979," Office of the Historian, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/detente.

undeveloped Darien Gap. This U.S. backstepping from the project in the 1970s coincided with a reduction in the perceived extra-hemispheric Soviet threat. It also coincides with the United States agreeing to turn the Panama Canal over to the local government and the menace of possible aftosa outbreak. Thereafter, the emergence of new regional insecurities continued to discourage U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway and development of the Darien Gap. Hence, shifts in U.S. interests, from counteracting the Soviet extra-hemispheric threat and protecting the Panama Canal to, as briefly mentioned in Chapter II, safeguarding its territory from disease, insurgent violence, narcotrafficking, terrorism, and illegal immigration, caused the U.S. government to abandon the Pan-American Highway construction and favor maintaining the Darien Gap undeveloped. This chapter's next section will further analyze these regional insecurities keeping the development of the Darien Gap as manifestation of the larger pattern of U.S. interests in Latin America.

E. DARIEN GAP: A CONSEQUENCE OF WALLS AND NOT BRIDGES

The most recent manifestation of the pattern of U.S. involvement in the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure and its correlation with extra-hemispheric threat started in the 1970s, with the decline of the Soviet extra-hemispheric threat. As hostilities between the Soviet Union and the United States decreased, the U.S. interests in Latin America shifted once more, to a position not conducive to the completion of the Pan-American Highway and its development of the Darien Gap. The absence of an extra-hemispheric threat, and the loss of U.S. ownership of the Panama Canal, weakened U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway and did not allow for political will to overcome the challenges of U.S. regional insecurities, such as those presented by concerns over disease, insurgent violence, narcotrafficking, terrorism, and illegal immigration. Concurrently, as Chapter IV analyzes, without a strong U.S. backing for the construction of the Pan-American Highway and its development of the Darien Gap, domestic conservationist groups, such as the Panamanian indigenous groups, had the political space and maneuverability to influence in preventing the development of the Darien Gap.

The decline of the Soviet extra-hemispheric threat that occurred during the first half of the 70s was quickly followed in the second half by the renewed non-interventionist U.S. policies in Latin America and the U.S.–Panama agreement for the transfer of the Panama Canal's ownership. After his election in 1977, President Jimmy Carter adopted non-intervention policies in Latin America. With less than three months in office, President Carter addressed the Pan American Union, stating that the U.S. "new approach [to Latin America would be based on] high regard for the individuality and the sovereignty of each Latin American and Caribbean nation…[The U.S. government] will not act abroad in ways that we would not tolerate at home in our own country."[228] President Carter stayed true to his non-interventionist agenda in Latin America, even when the pro-U.S. Nicaraguan president Anastasio Samoza was threatened and eventually overthrown by the socialist Sandinistas National Liberation Front insurgent group.[229] Similarly, in Panama, rising tensions between the local government and the United States caused by U.S. presence at and control of the Canal Zone obligated President Carter to take a position on the canal's future ownership. Instead of intervening and tightening U.S. control of the Panama Canal, Carter was able to appease members of the U.S. government and accommodate the Panamanian government by signing the Torrijos-Carter Treaties and agreeing to transfer control of the Panama Canal over to the local government by 1999.[230] The loss of the Panama Canal virtually erased the remaining U.S. incentive for funding and supporting the completion of a land-based transportation infrastructure. Continuing the Pan-American Highway south of the canal and across the Darien Gap would no longer serve to benefit the U.S. interests in the region.

The loss of U.S. support for the construction of the Pan-American Highway across the Darien Gap, initially caused by the absence of extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere and the loss of the Panama Canal's ownership, was reinforced by the emergence

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[228] Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, "Jimmy Carter, Organization of American States Address Before the Permanent Council. Online," The American Presidency Project, accessed January 27, 2021, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/243298.

[229] "Central America, 1977–1980," Office of the Historian, accessed January 28, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/central-america-carter.

[230] "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties," Office of the Historian, accessed January 28, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal.

of regional insecurities, such as the spread of disease, insurgency, narcotrafficking, terrorism, and immigration. These insecurities encouraged the U.S. government to use Panama and the Darien Gap's stopping power as a buffer zone.[231]

The first of these regional insecurities was the concern over the FMD, "a highly transmissible and economically devastating disease [affecting] cloven-hoofed livestock."[232] In 1977, U.S.-led construction of the Pan-American Highway stopped at Yaviza, Panama, just 37 miles from the Colombian border. The U.S. government did not allow for construction to continue further south into the Darien Gap until the Colombian government succeeding in controlling and eradicating the disease.[233]

By 2012, when the Organization of American States declared Colombia aftosa disease-free, additional regional insecurities emerged that would further push the U.S. position to be against the development of the Darien Gap. The second insecurity was the rise of the FARC leftist insurgent group. Formed in the mid-1960s, the FARC was at the source of rising civil unrest and violence in Colombia. Since the early years, the U.S. government supported the Colombian government's fight against the FARC with funds, training, and resources. From the 1960s up until their dissolution in 2017, the United States and Colombia classified the FARC as Marxist insurgent groups, narcotraffickers, and a terrorist organization.[234] These labels coincided with the Cold War in the 1960s, the U.S. War on Drugs in the 1970s, and the War against Terrorism in the 2000s.[235]

In the 1990s, U.S. interest in protecting itself from the insecurities originating in South America materialized in making Panama a buffer zone. Making Panama an extension

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231 The idea of Panama as a U.S. buffer zone has some standing when considering the curious geopolitical abnormality that though there have been U.S.-supported interventions in South America, there has never been unwelcomed and direct U.S. military interventions and invasions south of Panama and the Darien Gap. "Before Venezuela, U.S. Had Long Involvement in Latin America," AP NEWS, January 25, 2019, https://apnews.com/article/2ded14659982426c9b2552827734be83.

232 Naranjo and Cosivi, "Elimination of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in South America," 1.

233 Comptroller General of the United States, *Linking the Americas Progress and Problems of The Darien*.

234 June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, R43813 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 1–4, 28, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43813.

235 Mesa Bedoya, González Parias, and Praj, "Geopolitical Importance of the Darien Gap in the Colombian Post-Conflict Context," 104–6.

of the U.S. fight against its regional insecurities was evidenced by the fact that U.S. President George H. Bush sought to eliminate Panama as a haven for narcotics traffickers, and soon after U.S. military intervention forced President Noriega out of power, and under the new government, Panama agreeing to aid the United States in its War on Drugs.[236] Attempts to restrain the insurgent groups and narcotrafficking organizations, such as the FARC, did not favor the construction of the American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap.

Moreover, since 1986, the U.S. government has increased the amount of policy to address its latest regional insecurity, immigration. Though in the mid-80s the U.S. government was more concerned with immigration from Cuba and Mexico, in the 2010s, immigration from South America started to become relevant.[237] Even before his election in 2016, President Donald J. Trump campaigned on the promise to enact stricter immigration control. Once in office, President Trump had the U.S. federal government designate $15 billion towards an 800-mile wall at the U.S.–Mexico border.[238] Then, in 2019, his immigration policy extended to Panama, when acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Chad F. Wolf and Panamanian Minister of Public Security Rolando Mirones signed an official agreement promising increased collaboration in border security to "impede irregular migration flows."[239] That same year, the U.S. provided SENAFRONT units at the Darien region with processing devices to capture fingerprints, photographs, and iris scans of immigrants arriving from the Darien Gap.[240] Similar to its own domestic policies to control immigration, where the U.S. government deliberately deflects illegal border traffic to more inaccessible and impassable sections of the border, such as mountains and deserts, immigration control measures effects U.S. interests was to keep the terrain as difficult to traverse at this geographic bottleneck by not developing the Darien Gap.[241]

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[236] Berke, "Fighting in Panama: The Drug War; Washington Hopes to Close a Trafficking Haven"; Pitt, "The U.S. and Panama; Panama to Assist U.S. on Drug War."

[237] Tienda and Sánchez, "Latin American Immigration to the United States."

[238] Jasmine Aguilera, "What to Know About the Legacy of Trump's Border Wall," *Time*, January 12, 2021, https://time.com/5928808/trump-border-wall-what-to-know/.

[239] Homeland Security, "U.S. and Panama Sign a Letter of Intent to Increase Security Cooperation."

[240] PBS, *How U.S. Immigration Policy Can Seal Fate of Darien Gap Migrants*.

[241] Klaus Dodds, "Objects," in *Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 136.

In summary, since the concept of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure was first introduced in the mid-19th century, and until the late 20th century, it was U.S. counteractions, in response to the extra-hemispheric threat to its regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, that caused significant progress in the construction of the Pan-American railroad and highway, that would eventually develop the Darien Gap. As demonstrated in this chapter, major advances in those projects happened in the following periods:

- 1800-1898: Imperial European powers controlled naval trade in Latin America, (for the Pan-American Railroad)
- 1940-1945: WWII, U.S. Navy threatened by Japanese Navy and German U-Boats
- 1955-1970: Cold War, Soviet Union's perceived influence in Latin America

Every other period in between those times, the U.S. had naval supremacy and hemispheric hegemony, accompanied by indifference for the Pan-American infrastructure project, and a decrease in the advancement of the project (see Figure 13). The interaction between Michigan Senator Homer Ferguson and Lieutenant General Eugene Rebold, Director of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, during a hearing investigating the national defense program during World War II best captures the ebb and flow of U.S. support for the Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure project. After the General stated that an updated threat assessment of enemy naval forces resulted in the Japanese Navy and German U-Boats no longer presenting a credible threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere, the senator asked: "General, as I understand it, if the Army had known how the war was going in the Pacific and how the war was going in the Atlantic, you would not have started the highway. Is that a fair interpretation of your statement?" To which the General responded, "Yes; that is correct."[242]

[242] The Senate, 20897.

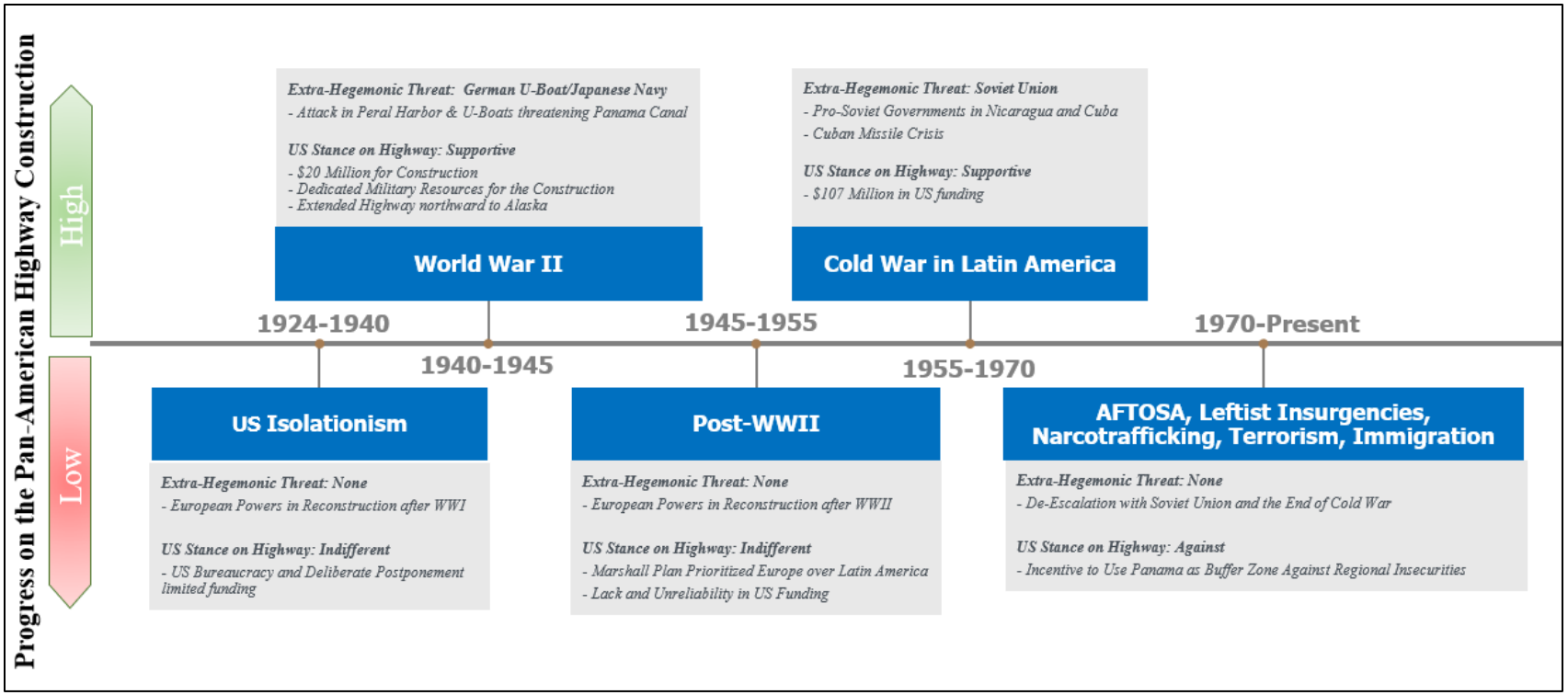

Figure 13. Summary of the Relationship Between Pan-American Highway Construction and U.S. Interests

All that said, in modern times, with Latin American countries exerting more sovereign rights and autonomy, all the while having more capital and technological resources at their disposal, the U.S. interests in Latin America cannot be the only factor in keeping the undeveloped Darien Gap. Since the Torrijos-Carter agreement in 1977, and then the U.S. departure from the Canal Zone in 1999, Panama has become truly democratic, with more agency in its domestic policies. It would be expected that with a Panamanian government historically enthused for the Pan-American Highway, with its potential to facilitate economic growth, the Panamanian government would have developed the Darien Gap, regardless of U.S. interests. However, at the time that the United States lost its political will for the construction of the Pan-American Highway, which if continued, would have bridged the Darien Gap, and started to demonstrate a preference for no further development of the region, Panama's indigenous groups started to rise in the country's political environment. As Chapter IV demonstrates, the ascension of indigenous domestic political power, specifically in the 1970s, and their struggle for land protection and rights arose during the time U.S. political will for a land-based transportation infrastructure declined, giving the indigenous the ability to have a larger political influence in contributing to the undeveloped Darien Gap.

IV. INDIGENOUS PANAMANIANS' POLITICAL POWER

In addition to U.S. interests in Latin America affecting the construction of the Pan-American Highway and development of the Darien Gap, another variable that accounts for the Darien Gap's current state is the political power that Panamanian indigenous groups have in preventing development in their native lands. As Chapter III argues, there is a correlation between the presence of extra-hemispheric threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere and U.S. support for the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure that would develop the Darien Gap As the threat dissipated, the U.S. support for and political will in favor of the construction decreased, and without strong U.S. backing to provide the leadership and resources needed to overcome political obstacles within the Latin American states preventing the construction of the Pan-American Highway, challenges at their domestic level were able to prevent the development of the Darien Gap. This was the case for the Panamanian indigenous groups' ability to prevent development of the Darien Gap to protect their native lands—an effort that began in the 1970s with the reduction of the Soviet threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere. When the U.S. government removed its support and political influence from the construction of the Pan-American Highway, the Panamanian indigenous groups had the political space and maneuverability to influence Panama's domestic policies and prevent the development of the Darien Gap.

In their achievements in securing land rights, the indigenous population in Panama has a long history of struggling against modernization attempts by Western forces and local elites. Through their strivings, the indigenous communities adapted to the Panamanian political environment by making alliances, learning from the elites, using diplomacy, and seeking international aid. Furthermore, they accomplished the political unification of the Panamanian indigenous communities, won the government's recognition of the autonomous, self-governing comarcas, some with district-level status, and established representative governmental organizations at the national level. Even though, since 1990, the Panamanian government, adopting neoliberal policies, continues to challenge the indigenous political power, the indigenous community has staved off governmental

infringements on their rights and development on their lands. Such was the case in 1995, when 8,000 indigenous people from five tribes opposed the latest significant effort to finish the Darien gap's Pan-American Highway.[243] These advancements in indigenous political power in Panama helps explain the undeveloped Darien Gap.

This chapter examines the history of the ascension of Panamanian indigenous political power and how it was used to secure land rights and prevent the development of the Darien Gap. The chapter first provides general background information on the population and location of the different indigenous tribes currently recognized in Panama. The next four sections, starting with the colonial period, analyze how the Panamanian indigenous groups have employed their political savvy in using international alliances and institutions; take advantage of certain political leaders' influence; unite efforts among members of the same and other tribes; and gain recognition and representation in Panama's national government to maneuver the domestic political environment. It will also analyze how the indigenous groups were able to operate outside and within the Panamanian legal framework to secure land rights. The final two sections will focus on the Darien Region and analyze the application of the political influence ascensions described in the first sections of this chapter in preventing the development of the Darien Gap.

A. BACKGROUND ON THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF PANAMA

The natives who lived in the Darien region were among the first in the New World who came in contact with European influences. In 1510, only 18 years after Christopher Columbus's arrival to the Americas, Vasco Núñez de Balboa founded Santa María la Antigua del Darién, the Europeans' first permanent mainland settlement in the New World, at the Gulf of Urabá, (see Figure 14).[244] In part, Balboa picked this location because of the knowledge of and experiences he had with its native population. Later, in 1513, from Santa Maria la Antigua del Darién, and with information obtained from the natives, Balboa led

243 Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire."

244 Gustavo Arango, "La Increíble y Triste Historia de Santa María de la Antigua del Darién, la Primera Ciudad Fundada por los Españoles en 'Tierra Firme' de América [The Incredible and Sad History of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien, the First City Founded by the Spaniards in Firm American Soil]," *BBC News Mundo*, January 29, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46961742.

the famous expedition to the west and became the first European to reach the Pacific Ocean from the Americas.[245] The settlement continued to develop into a site for indigenous commerce, accumulating riches and increasing its population past that of many Spanish cities at the time. However, the city deteriorated due to rivalries between European political leaders, and fifteen years after its establishment, the indigenous population set fire to and destroyed Santa María la Antigua del Darién.[246] Despite this turbulent history, the fact that one of America's first-ever exposures to the Western World happened in the Darien region makes it very peculiar that the Darien Gap remains undeveloped and that the local indigenous people have not entirely assimilated into European and Western culture.

Figure 14. America's First European Settlement in the Mainland: Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien[247]

[245] Franz Lidz, "Following in the Footsteps of Balboa," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2013, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/following-in-the-footsteps-of-balboa-803409/.

[246] Arango, "La Increíble y Triste Historia de Santa María de la Antigua del Darién, la Primera Ciudad Fundada por los Españoles en 'Tierra Firme' de América [The Incredible and Sad History of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien, the First City Founded by the Spaniards in Firm American Soil]."

[247] Source: Arango.

Nevertheless, since those times of first European settlements at the Darien region, there has been great improvement in understanding Panama's diverse indigenous tribes and the areas they populate. The first two Panamanian national censuses, of 1911 and 1920, counted the indigenous population as a whole and did not distinguish between the tribes. The censuses conducted between 1930 and 1980 calculated the indigenous population based on location of residence. This geographic-based counting still did not account for the ethnic diversity of the indigenous Panamanian population since it did not consider migration and areas with a mixed tribal population.[248] Furthermore, the census at that time only considered the people as indigenous if they lived in the periphery of urban society, holding that the people living in urban areas were in the modernization process and therefore they did not qualify as ethnically indigenous, degrading the indigenous representation in Panamanian government and civil society.[249] In 1990, international organizations recommended changes to the methodology for counting the indigenous population, providing indigenous Panamanians the choice to self-identify with a specific tribal group. Still, the inaccurate census of 1990 only captured six indigenous groups: Kuna, Guaymi, Teribe, Waunana, Emberá, and Bokota. Further changes in the following two iterations of censuses made the classification more inclusive. In 2010, the Panamanian government recognized eight official tribes within Panama: Ngäbe, Kuna (also known as Tule and Dule), Emberá, Buglé, Wounaan, Naso Tjër Di, Bri Bri, and Bokota.[250] Based on results of the 2010 census, there are 417,559 indigenous people of the 3,405,813 total Panamanian population, or 12.26% of the population. The results also show the population

[248] Enriqueta Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]" (Panama City, Panama: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo (INEC) de la Contraloría General de la República y de Martha Icaza del Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas [National Institute of Statistic and Census of the General Comptroller of the Republic and of the United Nations' Martha Icaza Funds for the Population], 2010), Introduction, https://www.inec.gob.pa/archivos/P6571INDIGENA_FINAL_FINAL.pdf.

[249] Francisco Herrera, "La Evolución de las Demandas Indígenas Sobre la Tierra y Las Respuestas del Estado [The Evolution of Indigenous Lawsuits on Land and State Responses]," *Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos "Justo Arosemena" [Center of Latin American Studies "Justo Arosemena"]* no. 150 (2015): 41, http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=535055499005.

[250] Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]," Introduction.

of the indigenous groups as follows: 62.38% Ngäbe, 19.28% Kuna, 7.49% Emberá, 5.97% Buglé, 1.74% Wounaan, 0.97% Naso Tjër di (also known as Teribes), 0.26% Bri Bri, and 0.23% Bokota.[251]

The members of the eight tribes are scattered throughout Panama, despite the indigenous communities' attempts to secure land rights. As a product of their ongoing struggle for rights over their own lands, the Panamanian government has designated semiautonomous reservations called *comarcas*. Under the Panamanian constitution, the comarcas has special laws that allow it to be administered by indigenous leaders while still functioning with the Panamanian national government.[252] There are six comarcas dispersed across Panama: Ngäbe Buglé, the Kuna Madugandí comarca, the Kuna Yala (also known as Gunayala) comarca, the Naso Tjër Di comarca, the Kuna Wargandi comarca, and the Emberá-Wounaan comarca (see Figure 15). The comarcas Kuna Yala, Emberá-Wounaan and Ngäbe Buglé are the only ones the Panamanian government recognizes with provincial-level status, while Kuna Madugandi, Kuna Wargandi, and Naso Tjër Di are sub-districts.[253] However, though these comarcas are the results of the indigenous tribes' long socio-political battle for land rights, they are not monoethnic. Moreover, thousands of indigenous people reside outside of the comarcas in indigenous areas without legal recognition, facing expropriations of ancestral lands, forced migration, and economic challenges.[254]

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[251] Julie Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá: una Bibliografía [Indigenous Population: A Bibliography]*, 1 ed (Panama: Acción Cultural Ngóbe [Cultural Action Ngobe], 2011), 12.

[252] Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]."

[253] Daniel M. Alarco, "Naso Tjër Di: Panamá Convierte el Último Reino Indígena de América en Comarca [Naso Tjër Di: Panama Converts the Last Indigenous Kingdom of America into a Comarca]," *La Estrella de Panamá*, April 4, 2020, https://www.laestrella.com.pa/nacional/201204/naso-tjer-di-panama-convierte-ultimo-reino-indigena-america-comarca; "Panamá Tendrá Una Nueva Comarca [Panama Will Have a New Comarca]," Asamblea Nacional de Panamá [Panama's National Assembly], October 25, 2018, https://www.asamblea.gob.pa/noticias/panama-tendra-una-nueva-comarca.

[254] Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 13.

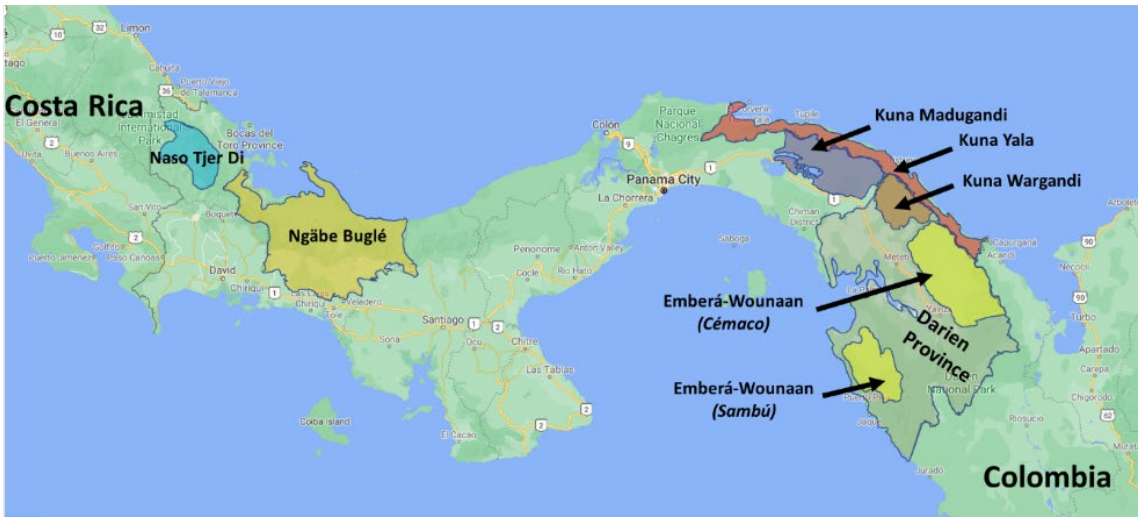

Figure 15. Comarcas[255]

This pattern holds true in the Darien province, where indigenous inhabitants belong to different tribes. Within the Darien province is the Kuna Wargandi comarca and the Emberá-Wounaan comarca. Emberá-Wounaan, the southernmost comarca and the one closest to the Darien Gap, is divided into two geographically separated areas, the Cémaco district and the Sambú district. The population of the Emberá-Wounaan comarca is 9,121, of which 7,360 are indigenous people. The Emberá and the Wounaan have the largest number of members living in the comarca with 6,286 and 1,291 people, respectively. There are also some members of the Kuna, Ngäbe, Bokota, and Bri Bri tribes.[256]

Despite the Darien National Park and the Darien Gap being outside any of the designated comarcas, the presence of the indigenous population still influences development in that area. The entire Darien Province has a more diverse population than the comarcas: 9,630 of the 43,3457 non-comarca Darien residents are indigenous people from all eight tribes, 7,323 members from the Emberá tribe and 1,906 from the Wounaan tribe.[257]

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255 Adapted from Panama, Google Maps, accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.google.com/maps/@8.4379577,-81.4027071,7.82z; "Lenguas y Culturas de Panamá [Panama's Languages and Cultures]," Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero [National Library Ernesto J. Castillero], accessed December 17, 2020, http://www.binal.ac.pa/panal/mapa.php?lang=es.

256 Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero [National Library Ernesto J. Castillero], "Lenguas y Culturas de Panamá [Panama's Languages and Cultures]."

257 Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero [National Library Ernesto J. Castillero].

Furthermore, some of these indigenous people live at the Darien National Park and the Darien Gap. The Darien National Park was first put under governmental protection in 1972 and reclassified as a national park by presidential decree in 1980.[258] Later, "It was declared a World Heritage site in 1981 and a Biosphere Reserve in 1983, in recognition not only of it diverse neotropical ecosystems but of its potential to protect the cultural heritage of the…Kuna, Emberá, and Wounaan populations living there."[259] Therefore, though the Panamanian Ministry of the Environment administers it, the indigenous communities stay politically active in matters that affect the park because of their proximity and dependency on the national park.[260]

B. EARLY RESISTANCE TO WESTERN POWERS: COLONIAL PERIOD

The first series of events in the ascension of Panamanian indigenous political power and its use to secure land rights and prevent the development of the Darien Gap occurred during the colonial period, when Europeans attempted to establish settlements in the Darien Region. Even at such early stages of contact with people outside of their known world, the indigenous people of the Darien Region were politically savvy enough to create foreign alliances to fight off Spanish advances into their lands. In addition, the indigenous groups' use of territory in their living arrangements protected their culture from European influences. These abilities to establish diplomatic relationships with foreign groups and to use living conditions to protect their way of life were skills that eventually enabled the Panamanian indigenous groups to secure land rights and keep the Darien Gap undeveloped.

Since colonial times, the Kuna indigenous people have successfully resisted governmental authorities' attempts to encroach on their lands and westernize their culture. In 1510, when the Europeans first arrived in Panama, the Kuna indigenous people, not the Emberá and Wounaan, controlled the Darien region. By the 18th century, the Spanish

258 "Darien National Park," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed December 24, 2020, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/159/.

259 Peter H. Herlihy, "Participatory Research Mapping of Indigenous Lands in Darién, Panama," *Human Organization* 62, no. 4 (December 2003): 318, https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.62.4.fu05tgkbvn2yvk8p.

260 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Darien National Park."

conquistadors had established several settlements and mines in the Darien region. The Spanish settlers, trying to force the local indigenous people to work their mines as was done in other Spanish colonies, experienced heavy resistance from the Kuna. In 1719, the Kuna initiated a revolt against the Spaniards and destroyed their missions. The Kuna aggression spread across the whole Darien region; they even recruited pirates' help against the Spaniards. By the 1780s, the Spaniards were still unable to conquer and control the Darien region because of the Kuna's determination to protect their lands and way of life and their political astuteness in allying with the pirates.[261]

Therefore, in 1783, the Spanish government sought to reduce or eradicate the Darien's Kuna population by enlisting the Emberá and Wounaan, known collectively as the Chocó due to their common language. Initially, the Spanish tried to convert the Chocó while the Chocó were in Colombia to Catholicism. However, they were unsuccessful since the Chocó lived too dispersed along rivers' side. The Chocó's dispersed living arrangements was ultimately beneficial for them, preventing European influence on their way of life and keeping the Chocó from assimilating foreign cultures. Being stretched out for miles along the river within the jungles made it difficult for the Spaniards to reach and gather them and attempts to relocate the Chocó into missions failed. Nevertheless, the Spaniards used their relationship with the Chocó and capitalized on the hostilities between the two groups to drive out the Kuna from the Darien region. Eventually, the Chocó pushed many of the Kuna out of Darien, occupying the abandoned lands. However, by 1789, the Spaniards, their attempts to colonize the area continually frustrated by the indigenous resistance, retreated from the Darien region, leaving it in full control of the indigenous people.[262]

In the end, the Darien indigenous people resisted Western colonial powers and maintained control over their lands. Still, the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in Panama took a toll on the indigenous population. Estimates claim that the indigenous

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261 Peter Harry Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification" (Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1986), 75–77, https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/4299.

262 Herlihy, 78.

population living in the isthmus was somewhere between 150,000 to 2,000,000, but by 1522, it was down to 13,000 people.[263] Despite the astronomical reduction in their population, the indigenous tribes survived attempts at colonization. Furthermore, even though the Chocó forced many of the Kuna to relocate from the Darien, the Kuna were never conquered and later established political relationships with the Spaniards, English, French, Dutch, and Scots.[264] This ability to establish diplomatic relationships with foreign groups and quickly adapt to the Panamanian political environment continued in the future struggles to obtain indigenous land rights, keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped.

C. KUNA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PANAMANIAN INDIGENOUS RIGHTS: POLITCAL ASCENSION OUTSIDE THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Another series of events in the analysis of the ascension of the Panamanian indigenous political power outside the legal framework and how it was used to secure land rights and prevent the development of the Darien Gap was of the Kuna's struggle for land rights, which included the Tule Rebellion, and the recognition of their comarca, that would set the precedence for other indigenous groups in Panama to follow. After thwarting the Spanish attempts at conquest, the Kuna people continued to develop and use their skills and knowledge to adapt to the new political environments. Some of these political maneuvers included seeking arbitration for the U.S. government during the Tule Rebellion and securing political representations in the Panamanian government. Ultimately, these political abilities provided the Kuna with the opportunity to gain concessions from the Colombian and the Panamanian governments, allowing them to obtain land rights and some national political representation, which would ultimately benefit all Panamanian indigenous tribes, including those in the Darien Region, and help prevent the development of the Darien Gap.

When Spain lost its claim to the Panamanian territory, the Kuna people secured their land rights with the new Colombian government. In 1819, Panama was still part of

263 Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 34.

264 Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*.

the Colombian federation.[265] At that time, most of the Kuna, driven from the Darien region by the Chocó under Spanish influence, had migrated to the Caribbean coast and settled in the San Blas islands.[266] In 1871, as during the Spanish colonial era, the Kuna people's adeptness at making alliances and relationships helped them negotiate with the Colombian government to gain land rights and establish Tulenega comarca.[267]

However, after Panama separated from Colombia, the Kuna's land and culture were once again threatened by the Western world. In 1903, with U.S. aid, Panama declared its independence from Colombia, splitting the Tulenega comarca.[268] The new independent Panamanian government did not honor the previous agreement between the Kunas and the Colombian government. Soon after Panamanian independence, entrepreneurs in search of exploitable resources intruded on the Kuna's land. Also, the Panamanian government stationed border police on the indigenous lands to counteract the Colombian security threat.[269] The Panamanian government continued to impose on the indigenous population with actions that it deemed would "civilize" the Kuna people. In San Blas, the government's campaign included "attacks on indigenous dress, religion, and customs and the imposition of the Spanish language, social dancing and intermarriage."[270] Settlers and governmental authorities abused the indigenous population through extortion, coercing women to dance or be fined, and even forcing indigenous people to buy liquor.[271]

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265 "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Colombia," Office of the Historian, accessed December 25, 2020, https://history.state.gov/countries/colombia.

266 Stefanie Wickstrom, "The Politics of Development in Indigenous Panama," *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (July 2003): 6, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X03030004006.

267 Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*.

268 Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]."

269 "The History of Guna Yala and Its People," Gunayala, accessed December 25, 2020, https://www.gunayala.com/history/.

270 Peter Szok, "Beyond the Canal: Recent Scholarship on Panama," *Latin American Research Review; Pittsburgh* 37, no. 3 (2002): 256–57, https://doi.org/ProQuest.

271 "Panamanian Indians Ask Our Protection: San Blas People, Where Rising Took Place, Appeal for American Intervention.," *New York Times*, February 27, 1925, ProQuest.

With their land and culture under siege by the settlers and the Panamanian government, the Kuna fought for land rights while using their political skills to obtain international support. On February 25, 1925, with the help of the American explorer Richard O. Marsh, 30,000 Kuna people declared independence from Panama, starting the Tule Rebellion and attacking several Panamanian police posts located on their lands.[272] In asking for U.S. assistance for their movement, the Kuna sent an English version of their declaration of independence, translated by Marsh, to U.S. officials.[273] Part of the text states, "the Tule nation petitions the Government of the United States of America to accept a protectorate over the people of its territory and to grant the Tule people such degree of autonomous local government as we may prove capable of properly exercising."[274] It further argued that "America cannot, in equity, assume the role of a protectorate over the Republic of Panama, regard our people the same measure of guaranteed protection and justice it accords other humane elements in the country."[275]

The indigenous movement successfully obtained U.S. support, with U.S. Minister in Panama John Glover South agreeing that the "uprising was inevitable, just, and reasonable."[276] He also advised the U.S. government against aiding in the Panamanian government's re-subjugation of and retaliatory and punitive measures against the indigenous people, stating, "any effort to subdue them by force will be protracted and expensive and if undertaken by Panamanians will be doomed to failure."[277] Hostilities ended on the 5th of March with U.S. arbitration, when indigenous chiefs and Panamanian authorities signed a peace agreement onboard the USS Cleveland.[278] Though the agreement did not resolve the issue of land ownership, the government of Panama agreed

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272 John Glover South, telegram, February 27, 1925, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1925v02/d513.

273 South; New York Times, "Panamanian Indians Ask Our Protection."

274 South, telegram, February 27, 1925.

275 New York Times, "Panamanian Indians Ask Our Protection."

276 John Glover South, telegram, March 2, 1925, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1925v02/d520.

277 South.

278 "Indian Uprising in Panama Ends in Peace Parley," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1925.

to respect the indigenous people's right to follow their customs, maintain order among themselves, and not be forced to attend state-sponsored schools. The indigenous leaders agreed to follow the Panamanian government's laws and allow just enough Panamanian officials' presence in their territory necessary to represent the national authority.[279]

The Tule Rebellion placed the Kuna people in a position to secure land rights and political representation that would be the model for other Panamanian indigenous groups. In 1938, after an essentially successful revolt and years of negotiations, the Panamanian government granted the Kuna people the San Blas comarca, in 1998 renamed Kuna Yala. Though at that time the comarcas did not have the autonomy that they do now, as the first state-approved comarca, Kuna Yala established precedence for the following five comarcas of different indigenous tribes.[280]

The Kuna people continued to develop and strengthen their position in national politics, educating young tribal members in diplomatic relations and establishing political organizations, such as the Kuna General Congress, a representative government organization. In 1969, the Kuna General Congress served as a model for other indigenous groups, such as the Ngäbe, Buglé, Emberá, and Wounaan.[281] The Emberá and the Wounaan established the First Indigenous Regional Congress of the Darien. From then on, the Panamanian government adopted indigenous representation in future national developments, as seen in their integration in the 1972 constitution.[282] The recognition, representation, and legal inclusion of the indigenous people in the Panamanian government established the legal framework needed for the indigenous people's fight for land rights and prevent the Darien's Gap development.

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[279] John Glover South, telegram, March 4, 1925, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1925v02/d521; "Explorer Praises San Blas Treaty: Marsh Says the Indians Have Gained Essential Demands from Panama Government.," *New York Times*, March 8, 1925.

[280] Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 20–21.

[281] Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]," 2.

[282] Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]."

D. GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS. THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH BORDER AND THE INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION: POLITICAL ACCENSION WITH ALLIANCES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT

The third series of events in the ascension of the Panamanian indigenous political power occurred during General Omar Torrijos' de facto governance of Panama. Torrijos would become a crucial ally for the indigenous movement within the government. Torrijos' sympathy for and populist approach to the Panamanian indigenous people facilitated the rise of the indigenous political power. He enabled the exchange of political knowledge among the indigenous tribes and supported Indigenous representation in government, which were crucial for indigenous groups to secure land rights.

As the de facto Panamanian head-of-state, one of General Torrijos greatest achievements, that also helped in the Panamanian indigenous groups' political rise, was the renegotiation of ownership of the Panama Canal. As a result of the U.S.-backing of Panamanian independence from Colombia and the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, the United States retained the rights to own and operate the Panama Canal.[283] Since then, exacerbated by the Panama Canal construction, the U.S. presence in Panama created tensions between the two governments and the Panamanian people. During the canal's construction, Panamanians resented the composition of the project's labor force of thousands of immigrants instead of local hires.[284] Once completed, the Panama Canal and the U.S. Panama Canal Zone geographically split the country in two. Afterwards, the continued U.S. presence in Panama caused friction with the local population. In 1964, disputes over Panamanian rights to display their national flag in the Canal Zone caused a riot between U.S. personnel and Panamanian students to break out, resulting in a temporarily suspending diplomatic relations between the two governments.[285] In 1968, influenced by Panamanian civil society's less-than-favorable sentiment toward the United States, General Torrijos executed a coup, took over the Panamanian government, and replaced it with his

283 Office of the Historian, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties."

284 Szok, "Beyond the Canal," 257.

285 Office of the Historian, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties."

administration. Torrijos quickly sought to unify Panama geographically by turning ownership of the Panama Canal and its lands to Panama, eliminating, what he called, the "fifth border".[286] Torrijos was able to renegotiate ownership of the Panama Canal, culminating in the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977. In the treaty, the United States agreed to turn over ownership of the Panama Canal and its lands to the Panamanian government at the end of 1999.[287] Eliminating the fifth border removed the territorial separation caused by canal, and provided geo-political continuity and inclusion, especially to the tribes located east of the canal, separated from the capital.

As a populist leader, General Torrijos promoted political rights for the Panamanian indigenous people. Torrijos, who had a modest rural upbringing, empathized with Panama's traditionally disenfranchised people, such as the poor and the indigenous. He was particularly sympathetic to the Darien region's indigenous people, making five visits to the Emberá's and Wounaan's political organizations, inviting them to define their regional political structure and facilitating cooperation with the Kuna, who had already established the San Blas comarca.[288] In 1969, Torrijos supported the formation of the congressional governmental bodies of the Emberá, Wounaan, Ngäbe, and Buglé tribes.[289] He further incorporated the Ngäbe into national politics by promising to work towards a Ngäbe comarca in exchange for the tribe's political support for his regime. Torrijos's regime recognized the political authority of the Ngäbe tribe and even allowed Ngäbe elected officials in some of the voting districts with Ngäbe presence. However, the infighting within the Ngäbe members prevented them from capitalizing on these new political opportunities.[290]

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[286] Michael E. Donoghue, "Imperial Sunset: Race, Identity, and Gender in the Panama Canal Zone, 1939-- 1979" (dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2006), 2, ProQuest.

[287] Office of the Historian, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties."

[288] Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification," 168, 275.

[289] Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 37–38.

[290] Wickstrom, "The Politics of Development in Indigenous Panama," 19.

In 1972, General Torrijos allowed 44 indigenous leaders to be part of the drafting of Panama's new constitution, resulting in provisions in the new Panamanian constitution that recognized indigenous leaders and facilitated indigenous representation in the legislature. The constitution also guaranteed that the state would recognize the indigenous communities' land rights and collective property.[291] Taking part in drafting the national constitution gave the tribal leaders the ability to make indigenous rights into law and gave them the political experience to help future negotiations.[292] In 1977, after the Torrijos-Carter treaties, General Torrijos promoted Panamanian diplomatic relationships with the indigenous tribes, including discussions on land ownership.[293]

On the 2nd of August 1981, General Torrijos's rule came to an end after his death in an airplane crash. However, his strategy for Panamanian unification, both geographically and socially, helped turn ownership of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians and indigenous lands to the tribes.[294] Also as a consequence of General Torrijos's negotiations over the Panama Canal, the United States lost political influence in Panama and, as Chapter III explains, its interest in building the Pan-American Highway.

General Torrijos's populist regime provided the indigenous Panamanian population with many opportunities to ascend in the national political realm. This new political status placed the indigenous population and its leaders in a better position to advocate for land rights and indigenous land use. The added indigenous political power was crucial in establishing the new comarcas after failing for 45 years since establishing the first comarca. It also allowed to exert political pressure against the development of the Darien gap.

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[291] Wickstrom, 45.

[292] Herrera, "La Evolución de las Demandas Indígenas Sobre la Tierra y Las Respuestas del Estado [The Evolution of Indigenous Lawsuits on Land and State Responses]," 51.

[293] Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 37–38.

[294] "Panama Leader Killed in Crash in Bad Weather," *New York Times*, August 2, 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/02/obituaries/panama-leader-killed-in-crash-in-bad-weather.html.

E. COMARCAS AND LAND RIGHTS: POLITICAL ACCENSION WITHIN THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT

The next series of events in the analysis of the ascension of the Panamanian indigenous political power is the indigenous community's legal struggles with the Panamanian government. This section analyzes the indigenous groups' employment of the legal rights they obtained in earlier years to secure land rights from the Panamanian government opposing continual attempts to encroach on their land and protecting it from economic exploitation. This ability to protect their land was later extended to the protection of the Darien Gap, which has kept it undeveloped.

Currently, the Panamanian government recognizes six comarcas where the land is owned and administered by the indigenous tribes, with two at the provincial level.[295] Under the Panamanian constitution, the comarcas have special laws that allow them to be administered by indigenous leaders while still functioning with the Panamanian national government.[296] In addition to the comarcas, Panamanian law gives some protection to those indigenous groups living in their native lands outside the comarcas, allowing the indigenous residents to apply for collective lands rights.[297] Therefore, the Panamanian indigenous groups have been more successful in securing land rights than other Latin American indigenous group, and they did so by continually opposing elites and taking advantage of political opportunities which gave the indigenous people the political means to prevent development of the Darien Gap.

Soon after Panama's independence, the government sought to control and exploit the indigenous lands for economic purposes. In 1912, Law 56 intended to attract European immigrants to settle and agriculturally develop indigenous lands. In 1913, Law 20 promoted these lands' privatization to increase state presence in remote areas, encourage foreign investment, and increase tax revenues. However, in 1914, the inauguration of the

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295 Alarco, "Naso Tjër Di"; Asamblea Nacional de Panamá [Panama's National Assembly], "Panamá Tendrá Una Nueva Comarca [Panama Will Have a New Comarca]."

296 Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]."

297 Davis, 22.

Panama Canal increased business in the transportation industry, reducing the priority given the Panamanian government to agriculture development for economic purposes.[298]

Its reduced prioritization of agriculture gave leeway to the Panamanian government to create non-autonomous reservations, a concept inspired by the U.S. The first reservation was the Coclé Reserve, which the government saw as a reward to the indigenous people of Coclé, who, under Victoriano Lorenzo's leadership, had supported the liberal party in the Thousand Days War years earlier.[299] Throughout the years, the Panamanian government established additional reservations, like the Kusapín-Bluefields in 1934 and the Tabasará 1967, to appease the indigenous population. However, the reservations lacked autonomy and self-governance and were considered by the Panamanian government as being part of a district. Though designating reservations gave indigenous some lands rights, non-indigenous groups could still extract the land's natural resources.[300] The limited legislation undercut the indigenous people's ability to protect their lands and exposed them to constant encroachment, causing tension between the indigenous and non-indigenous people. This eventually led to tensions during the Agrarian Reform of 1962, when hostilities reached heightened levels, resulting in farmers' and indigenous people's deaths.[301]

Dissatisfied with the authority reservation provided them, the indigenous groups engaged in a long battle for the Panamanian government's legal recognition of the autonomy of comarcas. Even when the Panamanian government recognized the first comarca in 1938, the Kuna's San Blas comarca, now named Kuna Yala, the indigenous people still did not benefit from the political and legal status the comarcas have today. It was not until 1945, with the Carta Orgánica de la Comarca [Comarca's Organic Letter], that the Panamanian government recognized the local Kuna government. Moreover, it took until 1953 for the San Blas comarca's boundaries and government to become law. It also

298 Herrera, "La Evolución de las Demandas Indígenas Sobre la Tierra y Las Respuestas del Estado [The Evolution of Indigenous Lawsuits on Land and State Responses]," 46.

299 Herrera, 45–47.

300 Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*.

301 Herrera, "La Evolución de las Demandas Indígenas Sobre la Tierra y Las Respuestas del Estado [The Evolution of Indigenous Lawsuits on Land and State Responses]," 48.

took 45 years, from the time the Panamanian government recognized the San Blas comarca to finally approve the second comarca.[302] In 1972, the indigenous people made much headway in their legal land rights when General Omar Torrijos allowed 44 indigenous leaders to help draft Panama's new constitution. In the constitution, the indigenous leaders applied political pressure on the government to abandon the establishment of reservations and adopt the comarcas.[303] The indigenous communities continued to capitalize on changes in the political arena to support their position on land rights. The ratification of the constitution in 1972 positioned the indigenous tribes to demand new comarcas, and soon after General Torrijos signed the constitution, the Emberá-Wounaan comarca was created. However, Torrijos's death in 1981 empowered groups to oppose the creation of new comarca.

The Panamanian government also attempted to undermine indigenous political ascension and the achievements in land rights by relaxing some of the comarca laws to allow investment, such as hydroelectric dams construction, opening areas for tourism, and mining natural resources.[304] Nevertheless, the democratization that happened as a result of the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama created additional political opportunities for the indigenous people. Filling the power vacuum left behind after the United States disposed the previous government, emerging political parties sought control of the country.[305] In their power struggle, the parties competed for the indigenous vote, allowing the indigenous communities to advance the re-implementation of pro-comarca initiatives in the new government.

Also, indigenous groups successfully obtained legal land rights for those living outside of designated comarcas through collective property. In 2008, the Emberá-Wounaan Congress for Collective Lands successfully advocated for Law 72, which establishes the legal avenues for indigenous people to claim the collective property. Subsequently, the

302 Herrera, 42.

303 Herrera, 51.

304 Herrera, 44.

305 Herrera, 55–56.

Panamanian government delivered two property titles for 382 acres of land within the Darien province to the Wounaan tribes.[306]

Since Panama's independence, the indigenous tribes have been continually searching for ways to legally secure their land rights. Their ability to apply political pressure while benefiting from opportunities, such as the ones provided by the regime of General Torrijos and the U.S. invasion, proved to be successful. However, their achievements are frequently at odds with economic forces. When General Torrijos died, the Panamanian government relaxed some of the comarca laws to allow the exploitation of natural resources. That being said, the issues of Panamanian indigenous land rights continue to be present in contemporary politics. Even as of 2020, the Panamanian government approved Naso Tjër Di comarca. The creation of this latest comarca was not without a fierce two-year-long legal struggle between the indigenous groups and factions of the Panamanian government. After years of struggle, in 2018, the Naso Tjër Di tribe was able to get legislative approval for their comarca. However, in the last step of legalizing the comarca, the Panamanian president vetoed the legislation, suspending the creation of the comarca. After the 2019 presidential elections, with a new Panamanian president, the comarca was finally created.[307] As the last section of this chapter explains, the result of the 2019 presidential election is a testament of the importance of indigenous land rights policies in contemporary Panamanian politics, and the strength of the current indigenous political power, both items leading to the undeveloped Darien Gap.

F. THE EMBERÁ-WOUNAAN OF THE DARIEN

The next series of events in the analysis of the ascension of the Panamanian indigenous political power analyzes the effects of the political advances in land rights discussed in this chapter on the political ascension of the Emberá and the Wounaan, who are mostly located in the Darien province and are the indigenous groups most affected by

306 Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]," 15; Velásquez Runk et al., *Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population]*, 25.

307 Alarco, "Naso Tjër Di."

and most influential with respect to any development of the Darien region. Since they migrated from Colombia into Panama, the Emberá and the Wounaan have had to develop their social structure to improve their political influence at the national level. Their ability and openness to learn and work with outside influences and adapt to the political environment have proved successful in securing land rights and protecting their lands, including the prevention of Darien Gap's development.

The Emberá and the Wounaan people are often referred to as the Chocó since they migrated from the Chocó district of Colombia. The term Chocó, which the Emberá and the Wounaan never accepted, was used by Western adventurers to cluster both groups unaware of their ethnic and cultural difference.[308] In 1990, Panama's government began to better understand the Emberá and the Wounaan as a result of the change in the Panamanian census methodology for counting the indigenous population, allowing them to self-identify. Now, records better reflect the Emberá and the Wounaan's populations and location. In the 2010 census, the results show 417,559 indigenous people of the 3,405,813-total population of Panama, 12.26% of the population, with the Emberá and the Wounaan's populations at 7.49% and 1.74%, respectively.[309] Most of the Emberá and Wounaan live in the Darien province and the Emberá-Wounaan comarca. The Emberá and the Wounaan have the greatest number of members living in the comarca at 6,286 and 1,291 people, respectively.[310] in the Darien region Outside of the comarca, there are 7,323 Emberá and 1,906 Wounaan, some living in the Darien National Park.[311] Some Emberá and Wounaan have secured collective lands in the Chepigana and Pinogana districts, at the Colombian border and the Darien Gap. (see Figure 16)[312]

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[308] Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification," 62–63.

[309] Velásquez Runk et al., Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population], 12.

[310] Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero [National Library Ernesto J. Castillero], "Lenguas y Culturas de Panamá [Panama's Languages and Cultures]."

[311] Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castillero [National Library Ernesto J. Castillero]; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Darien National Park."

[312] Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]," 24.

Figure 16. Chepigana and Pinogan Districts, Darien[313]

In their history of political ascension in Panama, the Emberá and Wounaan have adapted their living arrangements, from dispersed single-family living arrangements to forming communities, which help them protect their way of life. Historically, the Emberá and Wounaan did not have political organizations higher than the individual family. Each family was economically self-sufficient and led by the eldest male.[314] The families lived separate from one another, dispersed along the rivers, which successfully thwarted the Spanish missionaries' attempt to relocate them into communities to convert them to Catholicism. The same living patterns were adopted by both tribes when they first migrated into the Darien region, as they displaced the Kuna people.[315]

313 Source: "Distrito Chepigana," EcuRed, October 20, 2015, https://www.ecured.cu/Distrito_de_Chepigana_(Panam%C3%A1)#/media/File:Distrito_Chepigana.JPG.

314 Davis, "Diagnóstico de La Población Indígena de Panamá Con Base En Los Censos de Población y Vivienda de 2010 [Diagnosis of the Indigenous Population of Panama Based on Censuses of 2010 Population and Housing]," 24.

315 Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification," 78–91.

However, starting in the 1950s, the Emberá and the Wounaan, influenced by external factors, changed their way of life. One of these factors was missionaries' visits to the Darien region to teach the indigenous population to read and write. Missionaries believed that literacy would help protect the natives from the schemes of entrepreneurs. The missionaries were successful in teaching 800 indigenous members and taught them how to instruct others.[316] Adding to the missionaries' efforts, the Emberá and Wounaan prioritized schooling when they eventually realized that illiteracy impaired their ability to claim their rights to land because they could not read legal documents or apply for land titles, forcing them to relocate. The new importance of education motivated the Emberá and Wounaan to move into villages within their lands, making it easier to teach many people.[317]

In the 1960s, one of the most influential missionaries, Harold A. Fernandez, nicknamed Perú, decided to live among the Darien indigenous people and improve their political position. Like other missionaries, he believed that literacy would give the indigenous people more leverage to resolve social and economic problems, including securing lands. Perú also convinced the Emberá and Wounaan that only by legally securing land rights could they successfully counteract the agriculturalists' advances in their territory. Traveling along the Darien rivers, he motivated the Emberá and Wounaan to continue forming villages, which he understood allowed for more efficient education and concentrated effort to secure lands. Perú then aided the Emberá and Wounaan in submitting petitions to the Panamanian government for teachers and medical supplies. The Panamanian government, which already wanted to implement indigenous educational programs, was inclined to accept the requests, even more when villages provided the government the benefits of conglomerates, by concentrating people in a one location, making it easier and more cost efficient to provide social programs to a large amount of people.[318] In turn, the proximity between members that resulted from the formation of villages and the knowledge provided by governmental social programs, indigenous

316 Herlihy, 151–52.

317 Herlihy, 162.

318 Herlihy, 166.

communities were able to become educated in legal processes and coordinate and concentrate unity in effort to better apply political pressure and protect the Darien Region from non-indigenous advances and development.

In the late 1960s, Perú's activism in helping the Emberá and Wounaan ascend in their political power coincided with General Omar Torrijos's populist and pro-indigenous regime. Before Torrijos became Panama's head-of-state, the Emberá's and Wounaan's political development was predominantly grassroots. His modest rural upbringing made him particularly sympathetic to the Darien region's indigenous people. Torrijos invited them to define their regional political structure, and put them in contact with Kuna leaders, who had already been successful in establishing the San Blas comarca.[319] In 1969, Torrijos supported the formation of the congressional governmental bodies for the Emberá and Wounaan tribes.[320]

As a result of the Kuna's influence, facilitated by General Torrijos, the Emberá and Wounaan formed political organizations to secure lands. Torrijos appointed the Kuna chief Estanislao Lopez to be a political advisor to the Emberá and Wounaan tribes. Under the guidance of Chief Lopez, the Darien indigenous people got their first chief, Temistocles Ortega. The Panamanian government also allowed for the indigenous people to select additional regional leaders, accounting for geographic and cultural considerations of Darien's tribes. Chief Lopez also used the Kuna General Congress as a model to establish the First Indigenous Regional Congress of the Darien. Facilitated by Torrijos, the incorporation of the Darien Congress into the Panamanian government eventually became part of the 1972 Panamanian constitution, which also required the state to recognize the indigenous communities' rights to lands and collective property.[321] Establishing political figureheads and the congresses gave the Emberá and Wounaan tribes a foothold in national politics and the opportunity to advocate for land rights. One of the legal prerequisites to establish a comarca is to have formally appointed officials who will serve as a liaison

319 Herlihy, 168, 275.

320 Velásquez Runk et al., Pueblos indígenas en Panamá [Indigenous Population], 37–38.

321 Wickstrom, "The Politics of Development in Indigenous Panama," 45.

between the national government and the comarcas' indigenous people. Because the Emberá and Wounaan had already adopted the Kuna political structure years earlier, the Emberá and Wounaan were able to fulfill the government's stipulation quickly. Thus, in 1983, the government recognized the Emberá-Wounaan comarca.[322]

Though the comarca's formation was a great success for the Emberá and Wounaan tribes, some of their members, still disenfranchised, sought to secure land rights in areas not protected by the comarca status. When created in 1983, the Emberá-Wounaan comarca only protected half of the Darien's Emberá and Wounaan communities. In 1987, as a result of the political boundaries of the comarca, the Emberá and Wounaan left outside the protection of the comarca formed the political organization *Organización Indígena de Tierras Colectivas Emberá – Wounaan* [Indigenous Organization of Collective Lands Emberá-Wounaan], representing 52 Emberá and Wounaan communities. In 1999, the Wounaan tribe separated and formed Congreso Nacional Wounaan [Wounaan National Congress], representing communities within and outside the Comarca.[323]

Despite the separation of the two tribes, members still worked together to have the Panamanian government recognize their collective lands' rights. From the late 1990s to 2000s, through their collective effort in securing collective property rights, the Emberá and Wounaan indigenous congresses made the following political achievements:

- Secured financing from the Danish non-government organization Nepenthes to fund for the indigenous legal campaign for land rights
- Obtained support from Panamanian and U.S. NGOs, like the Dobbo Yala, the Rainforest Foundation, and the Native Futures

322 Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification," 168–71, 185–86.

323 Julie Velásquez Runk, "Indigenous Land and Environmental Conflicts in Panama: Neoliberal Multiculturalism, Changing Legislation, and Human Rights," Journal of Latin American Geography 11, no. 2 (2012): 31–33, https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2012.0036.

- Sought legal mediation for disagreements between the indigenous groups and the Panamanian government with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- Coordinated with other Panamanian indigenous groups, such as the Kuna and the Ngäbe, who were, at the time, opposing the construction of the Changuinola Dam in their territory

In 2012, the Wounaan communities achieved enough political pressure to convince the Panamanian government to grant two Wounaan communities, Puerto Lara and Caña Blanca, the country's first collective titles.[324]

The Darien's Emberá and Wounaan have had the ability and skills to adapt to the political environment to save their way of life. Their initial dispersed living arrangements, which protected them from Spanish missionaries' influence, evolved to villages' formation so they could concentrate social-political power. The Emberá's and Wounaan's concentration in villages facilitated the election of leaders and political organizations that would represent the communities in national politics. Ultimately, it was the skills acquired in the history of Panamanian indigenous political ascension that gave the Emberá and Wounaan the adeptness and flexibility to learn from elites, make domestic and international political alliances, and navigate the legislatorial bureaucracies that succeeded in securing land rights. These same skills and experiences have allowed the Darien communities to thwart the Darien region's development.

G. OPPOSITION TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE DARIEN REGION

As this chapter has argued, the ascension of indigenous political power in Panama, including of the Emeberá and Wounaan tribe, has allowed them to gain land rights and protect their lands from exploitation—a protection that is extended to the undeveloped Darien Gap. The U.S. government abandoning the Pan-American Highway project in 1977 gave indigenous groups political space and maneuverability, as they were not competing

[324] Velásquez Runk, 31–33.

with U.S. influence in Panama, to affect domestic policies. The skills the indigenous population acquired and the concessions the government made in legal lands rights were successfully employed by the indigenous people in the protection of the Darien Gap. However, even though the indigenous people have achieved concessions in land rights from the Panamanian government, their lands are still under a continual threat of incursion, exploitation, and appropriation by the government and commerce. The indigenous community, to include those who live in the Darien Region, still utilize the same political skills and legal rights they have gathered throughout their history of political ascension to protect their lands, which, to date, has been successful in keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped.

Though the construction of the Pan-American Highway initially stopped because the U.S. government abandoned the effort, the indigenous people, with accrued political power and previous experiences, exerted enough political power to stop any further construction of the Pan-American Highway and all development of the Darien Gap. As Chapter III reveals, the U.S. government, with no extra-hemispheric threat, had no incentive to overcome the challenge presented by a possible FMD outbreak in the United States that could result from the continuation of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap. With the United States no longer exerting political force to complete the construction of the Pan-American Highway, the indigenous community, unchallenged by U.S. political dominance, successfully influenced domestic policies.

Though there was no strong Panamanian indigenous resistance to the Pan-American Highway in the beginning, opposition grew during the construction at the Darien region. Up to 1975, indigenous sentiment towards the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the Darien region seemed favorable, and despite developers' concerns about strong indigenous opposition to the project, the indigenous people of the Darien "would serve as scouts, guides, and laborers."[325] However, concurrently, tension between the indigenous people and the project would lead to a stronger opposition to the highway. In

[325] S. W. Miller, "Minding the Gap: Pan-Americanism's Highway, American Environmentalism, and Remembering the Failure to Close the Darien Gap," Environmental History 19, no. 2 (April 1, 2014): 200, https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emu002.

the 1960s, the Panamanian government removed many indigenous people from their lands to make space for the Pan-American Highway construction. Subsequently, the completed sections of the Pan-American Highway continued to affect the indigenous communities. They continued to lose lands as the government issued titles to non-indigenous people for land along the highway.[326] Furthermore, the highway and its connecting roads contributed to logging and deforestation when they extended access to vegetation-rich land, worsening the environmental impact on indigenous lands, forcing more indigenous people to relocate, since they had to abandon their hunting and fishing grounds that were altered by the construction of the highway.[327] The highway also altered their trade routes and increased their exposure to Western influences threatening the preservation of their cultures.[328]

All of these experiences increased indigenous animosity and opposition against the construction of the Pan-American Highway, which led to heavy indigenous resistance to the project that used their political power and prevented the construction of the highway in the Darien Gap. In 1997, after the United States abandoned its efforts to complete the Pan-American Highway, the indigenous groups opposed the latest significant effort to complete the Pan-American Highway. At this time, drawing from past experiences, indigenous groups applied the political power that comes from gathering in large numbers and the unification of the various tribes when 1,700 members of the Kuna, Emberá, and Wounaan tribes gathered in protest.[329]

Legal mechanisms reinforced the civil demonstrations and protest. The constitution that Panama, ratified in 1972, incorporated the indigenous-led Darien Congress into the Panamanian government and also required the state to recognize the indigenous communities' rights to lands and collective property.[330] The indigenous representation

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[326] Michelle Watts, Kate Brannum, and Kimberly Dannels Ruff, "Game of Norms: Panama, the International Community, and Indigenous Rights," Latin American Policy 5, no. 1 (2014): 6, https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12019.

[327] Velásquez Runk, "Indigenous Land and Environmental Conflicts in Panama," 31.

[328] Herlihy, "A Cultural Geography of the Embera and Wounan (Choco) Indians of Darien, Panama, with Emphasis on Recent Village Formation and Economic Diversification," 153–55.

[329] Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?"

[330] Wickstrom, "The Politics of Development in Indigenous Panama," 45.

opposed the road construction and the potential impact it could have on the intact ecosystems that provided the indigenous population self-sustaining livelihood. As Robert Goodland explains, "[r]emoval of habitat consigns this highly individualistic tribe and all their unique knowledge of their environment, to the oblivion of illiterate and destitute peasantry."[331]

Moreover, just as they had done in the Spanish colonial era and in the Tule Rebellion, the indigenous groups had international alliances that strengthened their political position to stop the construction of the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap. Years earlier, The U.S.-based Sierra Club applied U.S. environmental law to sued to halt the construction of the Pan-American Highway, to protect the Darien's forests, flora, and fauna, and argued for indigenous rights and protections.[332] In 1981 and 1983, UNESCO categorized the Darien National Park as World Heritage Site and a Biosphere Reserve, respectively. These international recognitions were not on only for the conservation of the Darien's natural state and biodiversity but also for its "potential to protect the indigenous population's cultural heritage."[333] These earlier efforts in recognizing the Darien region its international environmental and cultural significance aided conservationists in supporting the indigenous opposition to the construction of the Pan-American Highway. Conservationists argued that "completing the highway would increase deforestation, attract thousands of poor immigrants looking for land and accelerate a process that has already stripped timber on both sides of the road elsewhere in Panama."[334]

Ultimately, the indigenous movement's opposition was successful, and while developers where still acquiring funds and permits for the construction of the Pan-American Highway, the government gave in to the indigenous political pressure and completely abandoned the construction of the Pan-American Highway intended to develop the Darien Gap. Even maintenance projects, such as resurfacing, that can give the

331 Goodland, "Panamanian Development and the Global Environment," 199.

332 Miller, "Minding the Gap," 192.

333 Herlihy, "Participatory Research Mapping of Indigenous Lands in Darién, Panama," 318.

334 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?"

impression of extending the Pan-American Highway are distrusted by the indigenous groups, prompting government officials to reassure them otherwise.[335]

Besides the Pan-American Highway, indigenous groups have protected the Darien region from other development or exploitation of its natural resources, such as the installation of powerlines and logging. In 2012, the Panamanian government proposed an energy project that required the installation of electrical transmission lines passing through the Darien Gap. The goal was to integrate regional power markets to boost sustainable development in the region, connecting the Colombian electrical infrastructure to Panama. The project met with indigenous resistance, protesting the construction at the Darien Gap. Soon after the protests, the Panamanian government abandoned the project.[336]

The successful application of indigenous political power in preventing development and deforestation is further supported by examining the amount of forest cover in indigenous lands versus those without indigenous protection, including those under government environmental protection. In 2013, using mapping techniques, researchers found that the preservation of land in its natural state was higher in comarcas and indigenous-claimed lands compared to non-indigenous Panamanian areas, even if they were legally "protected" by the state government. The research demonstrated that 77% of Panama's total mature forest area was on indigenous protected lands, which had the highest percentage of forest cover (see Figure 17).[337] The researchers conclude by stating:

> The question at the heart of our paper is: are protected areas and indigenous territories effective in reducing deforestation in Panama? We developed an empirical test to answer this question, and the result is an unequivocal [sic]. Yes, protected areas and claimed indigenous territories of Panama are the most effective tenure regimes for avoiding deforestation.[338]

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335 Velásquez Runk, "Indigenous Land and Environmental Conflicts in Panama," 31.

336 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?," 112.

337 Gerardo Vergara-Asenjo and Catherine Potvin, "Forest Protection and Tenure Status: The Key Role of Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas in Panama," Global Environmental Change 28 (September 2014): 205–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.07.002.

338 Vergara-Asenjo and Potvin, 211.

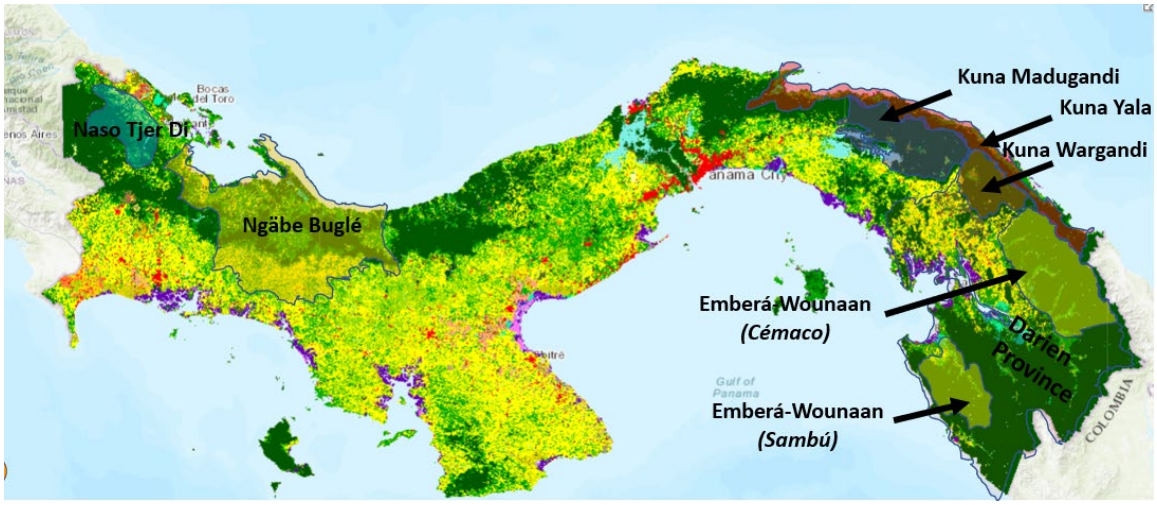

Figure 17. 2012 Forest Cover and Land Use[339]

More recently, deforestation has been the biggest concern for the indigenous people of the Darien, and as a response, they have been able to pressure the Panamanian government into establishing regulations and limits and enforcing compliance; thus, reducing the amount of legal and illegal logging. In 2018, the Emberá Wounaan General Congress denounced the *aprovechamiento sostenible* [sustainable exploitation] policy, under which the Panamanian government has given communal logging permits, authorizing the cutting of trees on 60,000 acres of the Darien region, including in the Emberá-Wounaan comarca and the Darien National Park. At the time, the government administration defended the policy by stating that the selective logging spared the protected areas and trees established by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). Nevertheless, news organizations noted irregularities in the issuance of permits, including issuing communal logging permits for 25 years, giving extensions for outdated reasons, and renewing permits to communities that had been logging illegally.

[339] Adapted from *Panama's Forest Cover and Land Use 2012 Webmap*, Ministry of the Environment (MIAMBIENTE) of Panama, October 23, 2018, https://si.maps.arcgis.com/sharing/rest/content/items/4782c2ef3f3b44e6aded397bdc6c937a.

Indigenous leaders blamed the past three government administrations, from 2004 to 2019, all of which have implemented neoliberal policies, influencing the indigenous vote in the 2019 presidential election and the results.[340]

During his presidential campaign, Laurentino Cortizo released his national strategic plan for his administration, Plan de Acción: Uniendo Fuerzas [Action Plan: Joining Forces]. In his plan, he promised to address the indigenous communities' concerns and revert previous administrations' disenfranchisement of them. In addition, he condemned the widespread logging and deforestation, explicitly mentioning the Darien region.[341] Then, in the 2019 presidential elections, the closest Panamanian electoral race in decades, Cortizo won by just two points over the candidate Romulo Roux, who was closely associated with the incumbent president Ricardo Martinelli. The indigenous communities and the rural vote played a crucial role in the narrow win. Cortizo predominantly won in the peripheral provinces and all the comarcas, including the Emberá-Wounaan comarca and the Darien Province (see Figure 18).[342]

Once in office, President Cortizo stayed faithful to his campaign promises, and within two months in office, he issued a national moratorium on all logging to start controlling deforestation.[343] He also created a special commission to investigate illegal

[340] Mary Triny Zea, "Tala se Toma Área Protegida en Darién [Logging Takes Protected Area in Darien]," *La Prensa Panamá*, August 29, 2018, https://www.prensa.com/impresa/panorama/Tala-toma-area-protegida-Darien_0_5109989047.html.

[341] Laurentino Cortizo, Plan de Acción: Uniendo Fuerzas [Action Plan: Uniting Efforts] (Panama City, Panama: Partido Revolucionario Democrático, 2019), 69, https://www.senacyt.gob.pa/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PLAN-DE-ACCIO%CC%81N-2019-2024.pdf.

[342] Elizabeth N. Gonzalez, "3 Charts on Panama's General Elections," Americas Society/Council of the Americas (AS/COA), last modified May 6, 2019, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/3-charts-panamas-general-elections; Elida Moreno, "Panama's New President Takes Office, Pledges End to Corruption," *Reuters*, July 1, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-panama-politics-idUSKCN1TW3ZN.

[343] "Ministro de Ambiente Anuncia Moratoria por un Año de Permiso de Tala a Nivel Nacional [Minister of the Environment Announces Moratorium for a Year of Logging Permit at the National Level]," Republica de Panamá: Ministro de Ambiente [Panama Republic: Ministry of the Environment], September 4, 2019, https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/ministro-de-ambiente-anuncia-moratoria-por-un-ano-de-permiso-de-tala-a-nivel-nacional/.

logging in the Emberá-Wounaan comarca.[344] Thus, President Cortizo's presidential victory is another reflection of the Panamanian indigenous people's political power to stop the development of the Darien Gap.

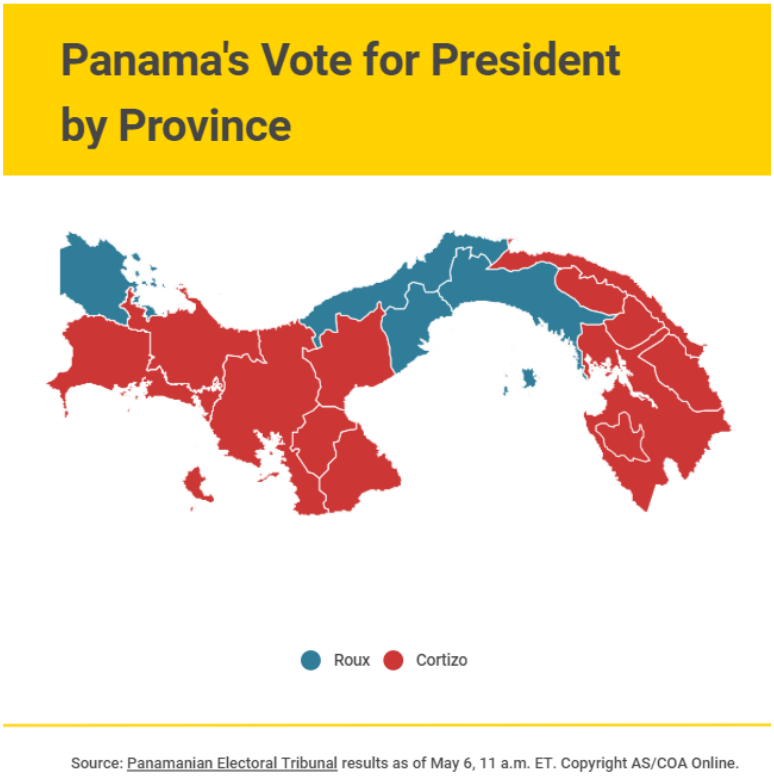

Figure 18. 2019 Panama's Vote for President by Province[345]

In summary, since colonial times, and especially within the years of General Torrijos's regime, the indigenous communities increasingly gained land rights. They accomplished the political unification of the Panamanian indigenous communities and the government's recognition of the autonomous, self-governing comarcas, some with district-level status and established representative governmental organizations at the national level.

344 "Crean Comisión que Investigará la Tala de Árboles en la Comarca Emberá Wounaan [Commission Created to Investigate Tree Logging in the Emberá Wounaan Comarca]," República de Panamá: Ministro de Ambiente [Panama Republic: Ministry of the Environment], last modifed January 27, 2020, https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/crean-comision-que-investigara-la-tala-de-arboles-en-la-comarca-embera-wounaan/.

345 Source: Gonzalez, "3 Charts on Panama's General Elections."

As a result, the indigenous communities have been able to apply intense political pressure and oppose governmental and commercial encroachment on their lands and way of life. However, Since the 1990s, the newly independent Panamanian government, free from a strongman or U.S. influence, adopted neoliberal policies, attempted to limit and erode indigenous political power and challenged indigenous land rights. So far, indigenous communities have prevailed against the government's infringements, sustaining political pressure, opposing the government's assaults on their rights, protecting their native lands, and thus preventing further development at the Darien Gap. As a result, the ascendance of indigenous political power in Panama, in conjunction with the decrease in U.S. influence, made the undeveloped Darien Gap a protectorate of the indigenous nation.

As a whole, the Panamanian indigenous communities' political adaptability and ability to capitalize on opportune moments have made their significant achievements in securing land rights possible. The Kuna's armed resistance and their ability to make foreign alliances, such as their alliance with pirates in their opposition to the Spanish conquistadors and with U.S. figures in their opposition to the Panamanian government during the Kuna revolution, were some of the factors for the Panamanian indigenous political ascendance. Specifically, the Kuna revolution successfully opposed government infringement on their culture and lands. It provided the model for the political organizations that would represent the indigenous groups at the national level. In combination with the Torrijos Regime's opportunities, the political guidance and educational teachings from figures such as Perú, and the coordination between tribes, led to the Panama government's land concessions, establishing comarcas and collective property rights.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis helps explain why the geopolitical abnormality of the Darien Gap's lack of development, especially with regard to land-based transportation infrastructure, still exist today despite the history of attempts to develop it starting as early as the Spanish colonial era. Land-based transportation infrastructure plays a crucial role in national communication, economic development, and strategic security. Therefore, the existence of an undeveloped Darien Gap, located along the border between Panama and Colombia, is a geopolitical abnormality since land-bordering countries, even fierce and longtime state rivals, typically have connecting roads and railways. Even more puzzling is that since the 1920s, Panama and Colombia have had a strong and cooperative relationship. This thesis explains the Darien Gap's existence as a consequence of the varying levels of U.S. interests in the region in general and in the development of the Darien Gap with a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure in particular. The periods of low U.S. interests in the region gave local obstacles the ability to stop the development of the Darien Gap, the most recent and consequential being the efforts of Panamanian indigenous groups, which in the absence of U.S. influence had the political space and maneuverability to exert political pressure on the Panamanian government to prevent the development of the Darien Gap.

This chapter concludes the thesis by first summarizing the reason why the Darien Gap exists undeveloped as Chapter III and Chapter IV demonstrates. Second, this chapter postulates how China, as the latest extra-hemispheric threat, increasing its influence in Latin American states, can invoke U.S. determination to develop the Darien Gap with a land-based transportation infrastructure. Third, this chapter recommends three approaches to lessen the indigenous resistance, and possibly win their support, to the development of the Darien Gap. Finally, this chapter closes by suggesting that cultural considerations may prevent future attempts to develop de Darien Gap and proposes it as a topic for future research.

A. SUMMARY

Chapter III shows, there is a correlation between U.S. support for constructing a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure that would develop the Darien Gap and the presence of an extra-hemispheric threat to the United States in the Western Hemisphere. The correlation establishes a trend that shows the construction of a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure increased during the presence of an extra-hemispheric threat to the United States, and it decreased in the absence of those threats, resulting in lack of U.S. support for the construction that allowed local challenges, such as lack of funding and cooperation between Latin American states, to keep the projects from ever developing the Darien Gap. Chapter III is divided by periods of the trend's manifestation. Of those periods, the significant advances in the projects happened in the following periods:

- 1800-1898: Imperial European powers controlled naval trade in Latin America
- 1940-1945: WWII, U.S. Navy threatened by Japanese Navy and German U-Boats
- 1955-1977: Cold War, U.S. perception of Soviet Union's influence in Latin America

Every other period between those times, the U.S. had naval supremacy and hemispheric hegemony, accompanied by indifference for the Pan-American infrastructure project and a decrease in the advancement of the project. After 1977, with the decline of the Soviet Union's menace to the United States in the region, and with the United States agreeing to transfer control of the Panama Canal from the United States to Panama, the U.S. interests in the area began to change from regional development to protectionism. In this posture, the U.S. government halted further construction of the Pan-American Highway and the development of the Darien Gap, giving political space and maneuverability, free of U.S. influence, to local challenges to the development of the Darien Gap.

As Chapter IV demonstrates, when the U.S. government removed its support and political influence from the construction of the Pan-American Highway, the Panamanian indigenous groups had the political space and maneuverability to influence Panama's domestic policies and prevent the development of the Darien Gap. The long history of the ascension of the Panamanian indigenous political power, struggling against modernization attempts by Western forces and local elites, exemplifies how their savviness and adaptability was used to secure land rights and helps explains how they were successful in preventing the development of the Darien Gap. Ever Since colonial times, when the Spanish conquistadores sought to establish permanent settlements in the Darien, the indigenous groups of the Darien operated outside and within the Panamanian legal framework to secure land rights and apply these rights to prevent the development of the Darien Gap. In the process, they used international alliances and institutions; took advantage of elite's teaching and political leaders' influence; united efforts among members of the same and other tribes; and gained recognition and representation in Panama's national government to maneuver the domestic political environment. Furthermore, the indigenous communities increased recognition of their land rights by accomplishing the political unification of the Panamanian indigenous communities and the government's recognition of the autonomous, self-governing comarcas, some with district-level status and established representative governmental organizations at the national level.

Even though, since 1990, the Panamanian government, adopting neoliberal policies, continues to challenge indigenous political power, the indigenous community has been able to apply intense political pressure, staved off governmental infringements on their rights, and oppose commercial encroachment and development on their lands and way of life. Such was the case in 1995, when 8,000 indigenous people from five tribes opposed the latest significant effort to finish the Darien gap's Pan-American Highway.[346] So far, indigenous communities have prevailed in protecting their native lands, and essentially making the Darien Gap a protectorate of the indigenous nation, preventing its development.

[346] Ward, "Colombia-Panama Plan to Build Rain Forest Road Draws Fire."

B. WILL THE DARIEN GAP EVER BE DEVELOPED?

1. U.S. Perspective: A New Kid on the Block

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. policy in Latin America has focused on preventing threats from Central and South America from reaching U.S. borders. Moreover, with no extra-hemispheric threat, there has been little incentive for the U.S. to nourish interstate cooperation with the region. This U.S. neglect has caused Latin American states to feel that their needs have gone unheard by the regional hegemon. Meanwhile, the void that the U.S. neglect in Latin America left provides fertile ground for Chinese influence. The Chinese government has given Latin American states viable transportation infrastructure options, as part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, for the Latin American governments to address their domestic needs. Therefore, the increasing Chinese influence has caused the United States to adjust its foreign policy in Latin America, which could once again, with the presence of a new extra-hemispheric threat, rekindle U.S. interest in completing the Pan-American Highway.

The end of the Cold War in the 1980s completed the U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and since then, it has gone uncontested. With the absence of an extra-hemispheric threat in the Western Hemisphere came drastic changes in U.S. international relations with Latin America. In his analysis of the post-Cold War era, Peter H. Smith concludes that "as U.S. interest shifted from military security towards economic and social concerns, [U.S.] domestic constituencies came to have conspicuous impacts on American foreign policy:…environmentalist pushed for biological diversity, a disparate coalition supported a sometime-hysterical crusade against illicit drugs, nativists joined an equally hysterical crusade against undocumented immigration."[347] This shift in U.S. interests, allowing for biological diversity, also impacted the Darien Gap, as the U.S. government, in conjunction with the Panamanian government, created the Darien National Parks conservation funds, and since then, the United States has provided $22 million to conserve

347 Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 359.

the Darien National Park.[348] Furthermore, as during the U.S. response in the First World War and during the Marshall Plan's early years, the terrorist attacks of 9–11 and the subsequent War on Terror diverted U.S. national security interest away from the Western Hemisphere. This time to the Middle East, resulting in the U.S. government neglecting Latin American affairs.[349]

U.S. neglect of Latin American affairs does not necessarily mean an absence of U.S. involvement in the Western Hemisphere; instead, it has focused its foreign policy in Latin America to stop national security concerns abroad. These obstructive measures manifested in Panama as the U.S. attitude towards completing the highway at the Darien Gap changed. Likewise, in August 2017, during his visit to Panama, U.S. vice president Mike Pence thanked Panamanian president Juan Carlos Varela for Panama's efforts in opposing the Venezuelan government and controlling immigration flows and narcotrafficking. The Vice President added that "Panama is on the front line in the fight to eliminate the flow of illegal drugs and dismantle transnational drug trafficking organizations here in the Western Hemisphere."[350]

All the while, the U.S. neglect of Latin American affairs while concentrating on obstructive measures has left a void in Latin America that the Chinese government has increasingly filled, especially by investing in Latin American infrastructure as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. Latin American countries see Chinese investment as a viable option, especially those investments that are part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative, initiated in 2013 by the Chinese government, is a transportation infrastructure initiative seeking to connect China with countries worldwide as trading partners through large-scale projects that include roads, railroads, and

348 "United States, Panama Present Results of Chagres and Darien National Parks Conservation Funds," U.S. Embassy in Panama, November 21, 2018, https://pa.usembassy.gov/united-states-panama-present-results-of-chagres-and-darien-national-parks-conservation-funds/.

349 Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 359–60.

350 "Remarks by the Vice President Pence and Panamanian President Varela in a Joint Statement," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 18, 2017, https://pa.usembassy.gov/remarks-vice-president-pence-panamanian-president-varela-joint-statement-press/.

seaports.[351] The Chinese government has taken advantage of the need Latin American countries have for these types of investments. In an interview, Otaviano Canuto, former vice president of World Bank, stated, "The Chinese has occupied a void, they fill the blanks. The whole of Latin America, and there is no exception, is in dire need of infrastructure investment. So why would they simply listen to a plea, to a call from Washington to stop the entry of Chinese capital without having any alternative to fill the blank?"[352]

China has already made transportation infrastructure investments in over a dozen Latin American countries as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese government's willingness to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects that would typically have difficulty getting financed because of the high risks these projects carry has made the Belt and Road Initiative a viable option for many Latin American countries to address their domestic needs. In Argentina, the Chinese government invested in the Belgrano Cargas railroad, which otherwise would not have been constructed. Also, in Panama, a Chinese company was responsible for building the fourth bridge to cross the Panama Canal for $1.4 billion.[353]

With these investments, China, competing against U.S. interests, has already influenced Latin American countries, especially Panama. In June 2017, Panama became the second Central American country to establish diplomatic relations with China. In doing so, Panama also severed its relations with Taiwan, contrary to the U.S. stance in Asia. Similarly, other Latin American countries have also discontinued their diplomatic relations with Taiwan to appease the Chinese government. Furthermore, when the Panamanian government decided to strengthen its relationship with China, it did not give prior notification to U.S. officials of its intent, demonstrating a break in communication and trust

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[351] Guzman Daniela and Aaron Weinman, "Belt and Road Initiative to Boost Chinese Lending in LatAm," *Reuters*, January 28, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bri-latam-idUSKBN1ZR2GG.

[352] Competing for Influence: China in Latin America, March 20, 2020, Foreign Policy Association, video, 26:64, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMIBblyHkXY&list=PL3LaqIfWZqnE5hS9wMaRqJd-JQ23ELhs9&index=5.

[353] Foreign Policy Association.

between Panama and the United States and the decline of U.S. influence in the region.[354] Panama-China relations will most likely strengthen in the upcoming years, as the new Panamanian president, Laurentino Cortizo, pledged to continue bringing Chinese investment to Panama.[355]

As Chinese influence becomes more evident in Latin America, the U.S. government response, as with immigration and narcotrafficking, has been to try to block Chinese involvement in Latin America and stopping its spread. U.S. officials focus on arguing against Latin American states accepting Chinese investment without really providing a U.S. alternative. The Chilean ambassador to China, Jorge Heine best described the Latin American frustration with the U.S.: "When U.S. cabinet members visit Latin America these days, all they do is talk about China. When Chinese cabinet members visit Latin America, all they do is talk about trade and investment. And well, there is an interesting contrast there, and I suppose you can guess which one is more effective."[356]

In 2020, the U.S. response to Panama's COVID19 crisis reflected the U.S. obstructive trend while the Chinese government continues to strengthen its image as an alternative to Latin American states' domestic concerns. Panama's Ministry of Foreign Relations official webpage reveals that before 2020, interactions between the United States and Panama focused on security cooperation particularly stopping narcotrafficking and controlling immigration.[357] Starting in March 2020, once the global pandemic intensified, there was an abrupt decline of U.S.-Panama relation articles on the websites of Panama's

354 Foreign Policy Association.

355 Moreno, "Panama's New President Takes Office, Pledges End to Corruption."

356 Foreign Policy Association, *Competing for Influence*.

357 "Deputy Secretary Biegun's Meeting with Panamanian Foreign Minister Ferrer," U.S. Embassy in Panama, February 19, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/readout-deputy-secretary-bieguns-meeting-with-panamanian-foreign-minister-ferrer/; A Valdes, "Reunion Entre Panama y Estados Unidos Sobre Acuerdo Complentario Salas Becker [Meeting Between Panama and United States Regarding Agreement Salas Becker]," Republica de Panamá: Ministro de Relaciones Publicas [Republic of Panama: Ministry of Public Relations], last modified January 15, 2020, https://mire.gob.pa/reunion-entre-panama-y-estados-unidos-sobre-acuerdo-complementario-salas-becker/; "U.S. Admirals Visiting Panama Highlight Strong Security Partnership," U.S. Embassy in Panama, January 17, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-admirals-visiting-panama-highlight-strong-security-partnership/; "U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Visit to Panama Strengthens Bilateral Security Relationship," U.S. Embassy in Panama, February 3, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-deputy-assistant-secretary-of-defense-visit-to-panama-strengthens-bilateral-security-relationship/.

Ministry of Foreign Relations and the U.S. Embassy in Panama indicating a lack of diplomatic activities between the two nations. By contrast, in the first months of the pandemic response, Panama received COVID-19 aid from China. By the end of April, China had made four donations intended for Panamanian health professionals to Panama's Ministry of Foreign Relations.[358] It was not until August 2020 that the U.S. Embassy in Panama reported donations and aid to the Panamanian government on behalf of the United States.[359] These donations were not reported on Panama's Ministry of Foreign Relations website as was done for China. Also, in August, in conjunction with the reports of U.S. donations to Panama, the U.S. Embassy of Panama website started to include negative

[358] A Valdes, "Gorgas Recibe Cooperación China [Gorgas Recieves Chinese Aid]," República de Panamá: Ministro de Relaciones Publicas [Republic of Panama: Ministry of Public Relations], last modifed March 24, 2020, https://mire.gob.pa/gorgas-recibe-cooperacion-china/; Johanna Camargo, "Embajada China Entrega Donación a Panamá por Crisis del COVID-19 [Chinese Embassy Delivers Donation to Panama for COVID-19 Crisis]," República de Panamá: Ministro de Relaciones Publicas [Republic of Panama: Ministry of Public Relations], last modifed April 22, 2020, https://mire.gob.pa/embajada-china-entrega-donacion-a-panama-por-crisis-del-covid-19/; Mitizia Carrera, "Bienes de Ayuda Humanitaria e Insumos Médicos son Donados por el Bank of China [Humanitarian Aid and Medical Supplies are Donated by the Bank of China]," República de Panamá: Ministro de Relaciones Publicas [Republic of Panama: Ministry of Public Relations], last modified April 29, 2020, https://mire.gob.pa/bienes-de-ayuda-humanitaria-e-insumos-medicos-son-donados-por-el-bank-of-china/; Mitizia Carrera, "Embajada de China Dona Insumos Médicos para la Detección y Mitigación del COVID-19 [Chinese Embassy Donate Medical Supplies for the Detection and Mitigation of COVID-19]," República de Panamá: Ministro de Relaciones Publicas [Republic of Panama: Ministry of Public Relations], last modified April 22, 2020, https://mire.gob.pa/embajada-de-china-dona-insumos-medicos-para-la-deteccion-y-mitigacion-del-covid-19/.

[359] "United States Facilitates Taiwan Donation of 50 U.S.-Manufactured Ventilators to Panama through Local Foundation," U.S. Embassy in Panama, September 2, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/united-states-facilitates-taiwan-donation-of-50-u-s-manufactured-ventilators-to-panama-through-local-foundation/; "U.S. Embassy Donates COVID-19 Prevention Equipment to Panama's National Police," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 31, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-donates-covid-19-prevention-equipment-to-panamas-national-police/; "U.S. Embassy Delivers 6,600 COVID-19 Tests to Hospitals," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 24, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-delivers-6600-covid-19-tests-to-hospitals/; "U.S. Department of State Counselor Ulrich Brechbuhl Donates 50 Ventilators to Counter COVID-19 in Panama," U.S. Embassy in Panama, October 7, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-department-of-state-counselor-ulrich-brechbuhl-donates-50-ventilators-to-counter-covid-19-in-panama/; "Secretary Pompeo's Call with Panamanian President Cortizo," U.S. Embassy in Panama, September 22, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/secretary-pompeos-call-with-panamanian-president-cortizo/; "Remarks of U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien at Ventilators Donation Ceremony in Panama," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 17, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/ remarks-of-u-s-national-security-advisor-robert-obrien-at-ventilators-donation-ceremony-in-panama /; "National Security Advisor Visits Panama to Reinforce Partnership to Address COVID-19," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 17, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/national-security-advisor-visits-panama-to-reinforce-partnership-to-address-covid-19/.

news articles about China's encroachment on the South China Sea and the Galapagos.[360] The timing of the donations and the posting of anti-Chinese news on the U.S. Embassy's website may indicate the reactions by U.S. officials to an increasing Chinese influence in Panama.

Consequently, the United States government is already reacting and strategizing its response to the Chinese influence in Latin America. U.S. leaders argue that China's expansion in Latin American economies with its Belt and Road Initiative is also a U.S. national security concern and worry about its ability to steal intellectual property once they have a strong foothold in the Western Hemisphere. As a result, some U.S. leaders are trying to change the United States' current Latin American policies.[361] As U.S. Senator Chris Murphy explains, "[U.S.] strategy as a nation can't be to try to keep China out of economic markets around the world. It has to be to compete with Chinese products and Chinese investment."[362] Recent legislation also supports this latest response to the Chinese influence. In October 2018, the U.S. Congress approved the Build ACT, which establishes a U.S. government agency responsible for directing private sector funds to foreign development.

These recent shifts in U.S. policies in Latin America may again include support for the development of the Darien Gap with the construction of the Pan-American Highway. As Chapter II mentions, the belief that some U.S. leaders may have that the Darien Gap can stop illicit movement may be incorrect. Therefore, the rise of a new extra-hemispheric threat, the failed efforts of trying to make state borders impenetrable, and the economic growth potential a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure may bring to the

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360 "Commerce Department Adds 24 Chinese Companies to the Entity List for Helping Build Military Islands in the South China Sea," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 27, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/commerce-department-adds-24-chinese-companies-to-the-entity-list-for-helping-build-military-islands-in-the-south-china-sea/; "On China's Predatory Fishing Practices in the Galápagos," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 3, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/on-chinas-predatory-fishing-practices-in-the-galapagos/; "U.S. Imposes Restrictions on Certain PRC State-Owned Enterprises and Executives for Malign Activities in the South China Sea," U.S. Embassy in Panama, August 26, 2020, https://pa.usembassy.gov/u-s-imposes-restrictions-on-certain-prc-state-owned-enterprises-and-executives-for-malign-activities-in-the-south-china-sea/.

361 Foreign Policy Association, *Competing for Influence*.

362 Foreign Policy Association.

region while counteracting Chinese influence may cause the U.S. government to change once more in its position on the development of Darien Gap. With the palpable shift in U.S. policy in Latin America, the United States may once again see the Pan-American Highway as a lifeline and a measure to counteract the Chinese influence on Latin America by giving U.S. commerce a competitive advantage over China. U.S. Pan-Americanism may live again.

2. Indigenous Perspective: Economic and Political Opportunity

Even if the U.S. decides to invest in infrastructure construction, specifically the Pan-American Highway at the Darien Gap, to compete against the growing Chinese influence in Latin America, resistance from conservationists, including the indigenous people of Panama, is very likely. In this scenario, the two factors that this thesis finds to be working together to prevent the development of the Darien Gap would then at odds. However, this does not necessarily need to be the case since there are measures that could appease the indigenous resistance to, and even lead them to favor, the development of the Darien Gap with a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure. Since the Panamanian indigenous communities are still living in inequality and lower living standards compared to the rest of the Panamanian population, an indigenous-controlled and environmentally conscious land-based transportation infrastructure crossing the Darien Gap could be beneficial to the indigenous population, providing economic opportunities, and furthering their political power.

At a glance, Panama is a prosperous country with a government supportive of indigenous people. In 2019, the UN scored Panama's Human Development Index as 0.815, placing it in 58th position of 189 countries with the highest human development, measured by the population's average life expectancy, education, and standard of living.[363] Due to the canal and its geographic location, Panama's logistical capability facilitates globalization and the state's economic growth. All the while, Panama receives international

363 "Human Development Reports," United Nations Development Programme, accessed December 29, 2020, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAN.

recognition for being receptive to the indigenous population's demands by establishing comarcas and collective property rights.

Despite one of the fastest-growing global economies since 2015 and its apparent concessions to the indigenous population, the nation's prosperity has not been shared equally among the Panamanian civil society, where the indigenous communities enjoy less of the nation's wealth while having their land rights continually contested. A large part of the Panamanian population suffers from poverty and extreme income inequality. "Panama has the second worst income distribution in Latin America. About one-fourth of the population lives in poverty."[364] The wealth disparity overwhelmingly affects the indigenous people, with 90% of the indigenous people considered by the United Nations' standards to be extremely poor.[365] Though the indigenous groups in Panama have been more successful in securing land rights compared to other indigenous communities worldwide, the indigenous population is still not at the same socioeconomic level as the rest of the country, having fewer rights and lower living standards than the rest of the Panamanian population. At the comarcas, the residents face challenges to access healthcare because of the lack of transportation infrastructure and inadequate medical treatment. In 2005, at the Ngäbe Buglé comarca, the death rate was 50% higher than the rest of the country, and infant mortality was four times higher than outside the comarca. Similarly, education, communication infrastructure, electricity, and potable water are less accessible inside a comarca.[366] Even though all these services are rights extended by the Panamanian government to all its citizens, its discrimination against the indigenous population and treatment of them as second-class citizens at the fringes demonstrates the lower precedence indigenous rights have compared to the rest of the population. This inequality has the potential to worsen with the constant governmental infringements attempting to take back

364 "Central America: Panama," The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency, November 24, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html; "Panama: Overview," World Bank, October 9, 2020, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/panama/overview.

365 Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, "Game of Norms," 3.

366 Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, 8, 11–12.

some of the indigenous land rights, while the indigenous communities continue their ongoing efforts to protect their lands.

The circumstances created by Panama's inequality and its effect on the indigenous communities may provide the conditions to rally indigenous support for the development of the Darien Gap with a land-based transportation infrastructure with the potential to facilitate indigenous access to public services and diminish inequality. The Panamanian government has not invested in the road infrastructure in the comarcas as in other parts of the country. As researchers studying the human rights in Panama reported, "In contrast to the development taking place in Panama City, the lack of infrastructure on the comarca in terms of roads, health centers, hospitals, and schools, as well as insufficient resources devoted to bilingual education, means that Panama cannot meet its stated goals or international norms to fulfill its citizens' needs for health and education."[367] Consequently, not having access to transitable roads has hindered access to healthcare in the comarcas.[368] Developing the Darien Gap with transportation infrastructure would alleviate some of the inequality by facilitating transit and the connection between the community in the comarcas at the periphery and better public services. Already some factions of the indigenous community support the construction of a road in the Darien region. As Chapter II notes, doctors within the Kuna indigenous community in the Darien, have difficulties transporting severely ill patients to hospitals for advanced care, who sometimes die during the six- to seven-hour trip; these doctors believe that a road would greatly increase healthcare and reduce mortality rates in the comarcas.[369] A Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure would similarly help in indigenous access to public services and diminish their inequality; thus, gaining indigenous political support for the development of the Darien Gap.

Another method to win indigenous support for the development of the Darien Gap is by providing an indigenous-controlled Darien highway or railroad for their economic benefit.

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[367] Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, 12.

[368] Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, 8–12.

[369] BBC, *El Tapón Del Darién, Una de Las Zonas Más Intransitables de América Latina [The Darien Gap, One of the Most Impassable Zones in Latin America]*.

As mentioned in Chapter I, roads and railroads can facilitate trade and bring economic prosperity to the connecting regions by supplying producers with markets at a longer distance. This is even more relevant in the Darien region, where some communities solely depend on unreliable river-based transport for commerce and transportation of goods. As Chapter II mentions, local farmers who transport their goods by the river due to the lack of roads cannot transport their products to the market during the dry season.[370] Also, land-based transportation infrastructure would allow Panama's indigenous tourism industry to benefit from additional would-be tourists from South America. Finally, if the indigenous community controlled the sole land-based transportation infrastructure connecting the South and Northern American continent, they would have a monopoly on the region's land transportation sector, giving them the opportunity to generate tremendous income with tolls that would charge travelers accessing the road.

The idea of an indigenous-controlled road is not new in Panama. The Kuna tribe already control the Llano-Gardi Highway, connecting the Pan-American Highway to the Guna Yala comarca, deep in indigenous territory. The highway, which became operational in 2009, is primarily intended for indigenous transit. However, the Kuna allow tourism and work-related traffic as long as travelers pay a fee at a Kuna toll and have an indigenous police force that monitors traffic and enforces conservation to the indigenous land's natural environment.[371]

Another incentive that indigenous-controlled Darien highway or railroad would provide to the indigenous community is the additional political power it could provide the indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are aware of the political importance of roads, especially the Pan-American Highway. Knowing that the Pan-American Highway is a critical infrastructure and a lifeline to Panama's and neighboring countries' commerce, the indigenous community have often reverted to blocking transit via the Pan-American Highway as a means to apply political pressure. In 2009 and 2001, during two different disputes with

370 BBC.

371 Jose Quintero de Leon, "Vía El Llano-Cartí Será Un Paso Controlado [Highway Llano-Carti will be Controlled Access]," *La Prensa*, May 13, 2005, https://www.prensa.com/impresa/mas_de_la_prensa/Via-Llano-Carti-paso-controlado_0_1469103235.html.

the Panamanian government over construction infringement on indigenous lands, the indigenous opposition defaulted to blocking traffic, paralyzing Panama City's economy for days.[372] An indigenous-controlled Darien highway or road may give the indigenous communities legitimate soft power to apply pressure to governments by shutting access through the Darien and disturbing the commerce of many American states.

Finally, a road may provide the logistics needed for effective indigenous self-governance and political functions. The lack of roads limits tribal leaders' ability to govern because of their hardship when traveling from one part of the district to another, while members struggle to attend local or regional meetings, which often require hours of travel. A road would allow tribal leaders to better reach all sectors within their jurisdiction and their remote constituents. Also, communication, a requirement for well-informed and efficient governance, is impeded by the lack of roads. In comarcas, few residents own cell phones and have limited phone service. The same can be said for the availability of computers, televisions, TV broadcast signals, and internet access. This condition creates an information vacuum to their residents and tribal leaders, who may not be fully informed on outside events that may affect their communities, such as national elections, and may not communicate with each other and share important information needed for governance.[373] Roads can connect remote communities, facilitating travel, and with it, communication. Similarly, the Pan-American Highway would benefit the indigenous community's governance and communication in the Darien region by facilitating movement and providing a line of communication that leaders and constituents can use to reach community centers and disseminate information.

The indigenous people have not always been against a road to develop the Darien Gap. During the initial stages of the construction, many within the Darien indigenous communities saw the construction as economically beneficial. The poor application of the construction that disregarded the indigenous communities' liberties and way of life was the most significant factor in creating a strong indigenous opposition. With a culturally and environmentally conscious Darien highway or railroad controlled by the indigenous

[372] Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, "Game of Norms," 16.

[373] Watts, Brannum, and Ruff, 12.

population, Panama may finally bridge the gap, bringing some desperately needed economic relief and stability to the region.

C. POSSIBLE TOPIC FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

All that said, there is a possibility that the indigenous opposition is no longer the determining factor keeping the Darien Gap undeveloped. In their plight to gain land rights and preserve indigenous lands, indigenous communities partnered with international environmental conservationists, giving the Darien Gap almost an Amazon-like global recognition and the prestigious image of one of the few pristine and untamed places left on earth. The UNESCO's recognition of the Darien Gap as a *Cultural Worldwide Heritage* and *Biodiversity Reserve* could result in an international coalition of environmentalists opposing any development in the Darien Gap.[374] In this case, it is possible that in defense of the Darien Gap as a natural wonder, attempts to develop it would incite international outcry, similar to deforestation of the Amazon.[375] Furthermore, with the Darien Gap having global recognition and a global reputation of being unconquerable by man, the Darien Gap may be seen as a national treasure, becoming part of the Panamanian national heritage and identity. Therefore, even if the indigenous community in Panama becomes supportive of indigenous-controlled land-based transportation infrastructure at the Darien, control over the fate of the Darien Gap may have transcended domestic indigenous opposition and may now be at the national or international levels.

However, since the 1970s, when the construction of the Pan-American Highway stopped, there has been significant development in construction practice and technology to reduce environmental impacts. Governments worldwide are adopting regulations and laws that force construction projects to preserve the natural environment as much as possible. For example, sustainable construction practices now include reducing the idling time of construction equipment, minimizing haul routes, and selecting "green" construction

374 Negroponte, "Will the Darien Gap Stop the Region's Electrical Integration?"

375 Ernesto Londoño and Letícia Casado, "Under Pressure, Brazil's Bolsonaro Forced to Fight Deforestation," The New York Times, August 1, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/01/world/americas/Brazil-amazon-deforestation-bolsonaro.html.

materials, such as using recyclables in the cement.[376] There are also sustainable alternatives to the Pan-American Highway that would further mitigate the impact on Darien Gap's natural environment. One of these alternatives closely resembles the initial concept of the Pan-American railroad and proposes a Darien transam. Panamanian environmentalists are already more receptive to the idea of a direct aerial tramway. The options of suspended transportation infrastructure would not be as destructive to Darien's fauna as a railroad or highway. Additionally, direct travel between Colombia and Panama, with no stops in between will not cause the skeleton effect that occurs after the construction of roads, where urban sprawl and connecting roads start to spread outward from the initial road.[377]

The impact that Darien Gap's significance to the international environmentalist community and to the Panamanian national identity may have on creating opposition to the completion a Pan-American land-based transportation infrastructure requires further research and investigation. Further research is also required on the advances in sustainable transportation infrastructure construction and its possible applications in preserving the Darien's natural state while still bridging the gap.

376 Thomas J. Van Dam et al., "Towards Sustainable Pavement Systems: A Reference Document," FHWA-HIF-15-002 (Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, January 2015), https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/pavement/sustainability/ref_doc.cfm.

377 La Estrella de Panamá, "Potenciar La Conectividad De Panamá, ¿Con Un Tren Hacia Colombia? [Potential for Panama's Connectivity, With a Train Towards Colombia?]," La Estrella de Panamá, March 8, 2020, https://www.laestrella.com.pa/nacional/200803/potenciar-conectividad-panama-tren-colombia.

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