

November 1991

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Nietschmann, Bernard (1991) "The Miskito Nation and the Geopolitics of Self-Determination," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 3.

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THE MISKITO NATION AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

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Nations and States

Two dramatically different geopolitical assertions of territorial organization exist. The first portrays the world as being partitioned into 171 First, Second and Third World states which claim sovereignty over all the lands, 40 percent of the oceans, and the lower reaches of space, and the planet's 5000 distinct peoples. Almost all academic analysis and state and international policies are based on this world-of-states geopolitical assertion. The second geopolitical assertion depicts that world as having some 5000 Fourth World nations, each the territory of a distinct people who claim exclusive control of land (and sometimes sea) areas and resources, and most of whom never agreed to being part of a state which is usually considered to be an invading and occupying force.

The first geopolitical assertion supports a political and cartographic fiction that only the state is a nation and only a state can have a people, and all other non-state claims to territory or nationality are either illegitimate, irrational, or irrelevant. The second geopolitical assertion is behind 75 percent of the world's 110 contemporary wars and hundreds more political conflicts over nation rights to territory and resources, autonomy and self-determination, and culture, language and religion¹. Much of the world's stocks of forests, minerals, fresh water, and fish are in

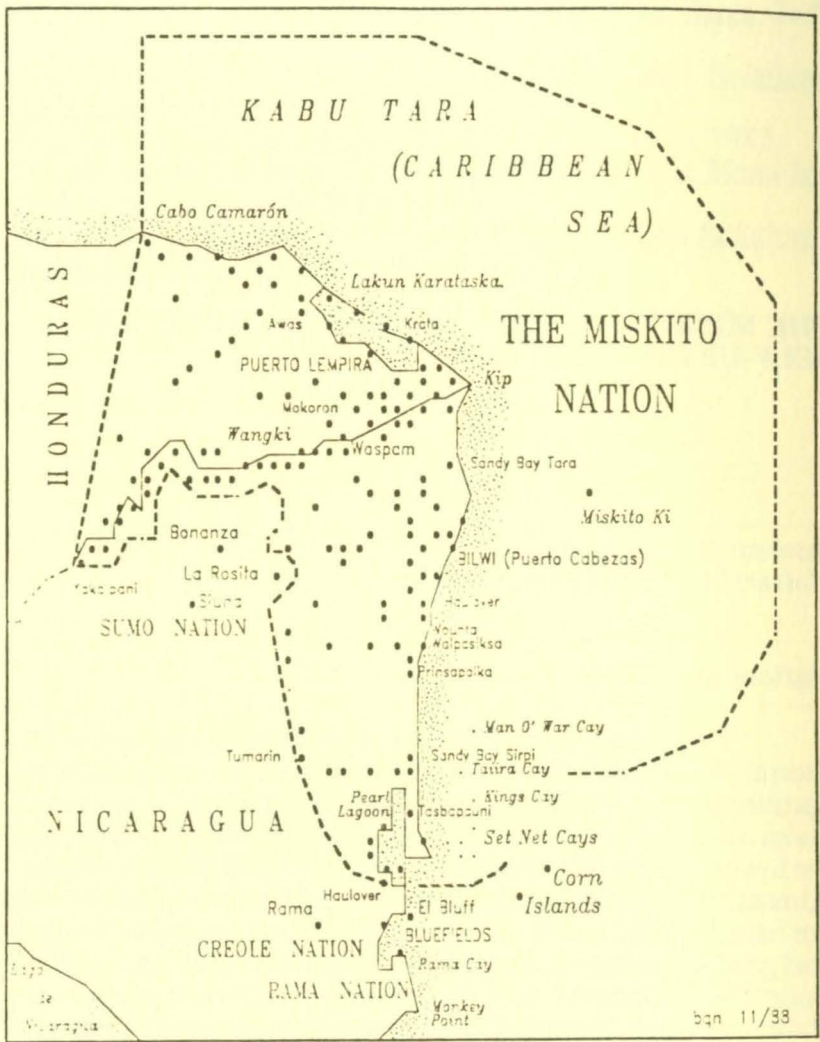


FIG. 1 THE MISKITO NATION

nation lands and waters, not those of states. To regain control over their territories, resources and identities, nation peoples from the Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia, Palestine, Xinjiang, Tibet, Catalunya, Eritrea, Kashmir, Tamil Eelam, Kawthoolei and elsewhere on every continent, are forcing this second geopolitical assertion upon reluctant and unrelenting states which will likely create a new geopolitical world order of decentralized states and independent or autonomous nations.

Though academics and journalists may confuse and misuse the terms state and nation and people and ethnic group², people directly involved in these political and military conflicts know where their country is and who they are.

Many of the issues of conflict between states and nations and their impact on local, regional and international geopolitics are represented in the political-cultural fracture area of eastern Central America.

The Miskito Nation

A large nation is located where the Central American isthmus juts into the Caribbean. Most maps and atlases do not show it but it is there nonetheless. It is almost twice as large as El Salvador. It has the region's longest river, most extensive forests, biggest continental shelf, richest fisheries, proven oil and mineral deposits, and greatest hydro-electric potential.

For 500 years it has resisted invasions and occupations by armies sent by kings and dictators. When the Caribbean was the main theater of European conflict, this nation was an important factor. Centuries later when the superpowers backed opposing sides in a civil war, this nation advanced its own third-side political and military struggle, receiving world attention when it fought Central America's largest army to a standstill and when it initiated the first peace negotiations of any of the armed groups in all of Central America.

Land and Sea Territory

This Caribbean coast nation is the Miskito nation, Miskito Masrika, sometimes called Won Tasbaia ("Our Land"). It has a land area of 37,000 km² (14,300 mi²) — the size of Tiawan or the Netherlands, and a sea area of 50,000 km² (19,300 mi²). It extends 650 kms along the Caribbean from Cabo Camaron to Pearl Lagoon, 400 kms (250 mi) up the Wangki River (Rio Coco) to Yakalpani — the westernmost Miskito community, and east more than 320 kms (200+ mi) to the edge of the continental shelf and to many of the banks and cays beyond (Fig. 1).

As seen by the Miskito people, their territory is bordered by the deep-water Caribbean to the east, the Rama nation to the south, and Nicaragua, the Sumo nation and Honduras to the west. As seen by most of the Hondurans and Nicaraguans, there is no such thing as the Miskito nation; the territory and peoples are part of one or the other state. This cartographic delusion has produced a waste pile of terms given by Tegucigalpa and Managua to the occupied territories: La Costa Mosquitia, La Reserva Mosquitia, Departamento de Zelaya, La Mosquitia, Gracias a Dios, Costa Atlantica, Zelaya Norte, Zona Especial I, Region Autonoma Zelaya Norte, and Region Autonoma del Atlantico Norte. Within the east coast area occupied by Nicaragua, the Miskito, Sumo and Rama nations are collectively called Yapti Tasba by those who were in and who supported the armed indigenous resistance. This same area is usually referred to by Nicaraguans as the Costa Atlantica.

The Miskito nation has four major environmental regions. Averaging 120 kms in width, the continental shelf and its shallow waters are rich in fish, shrimp, lobster and sea turtles. The lowlands fronting the sea are 5 to 30 kms in width and include the biggest concentration of coastal lagoons in Central America (Karataska is 100 km long) which contain abundant fish, shellfish, and resident and migratory waterfowl. Inland, is a large savanna of low rolling topography with poor pebbly soils dominated by lowland Caribbean pine (good for shipbuilding). Westward, is tropical forest with valuable mahogany and cedar, and as the land rises the mineral region begins, known for its moderate amounts of gold, but little explored. Cutting across these environments are some of Central America's major rivers: the Patuca, Wangki (Coco), Prinsapolka, Awaltara (Rio Grande) and Kuringwas. Overall, the area has abundant freshwater, large forests and fisheries, and, though it is in the rainy, humid tropics, sunny skies and tradewinds dominate over more than half the year.

Identity

The Miskitos see themselves as a single people based on a common ancestry, culture, language, society, institutions, territory and history. They claim sole rights of possession over their conterminous territory which is made up of an unbroken mosaic of demarcated community lands that stretch north and south for 650 kilometers and east and west up to 800 kilometers. The Miskitos assert that the only way to be within their territory is by invitation or invasion. The Hondurans and Nicaraguans assert the Miskitos are an ethnic group without rights to anything beyond immediate community lands, and the rest is national land and sea

available for development. The Miskitos reject being referred to as a minority or ethnic group. During a 1985 peace negotiation, Sandinista Comandante Luis Carrion said that "Nicaragua is disposed to protect the culture of Nicaraguan Indian ethnic groups." In response, Brooklyn Rivera, Miskito coordinator of the Misurasata resistance, said, "Ethnic groups run restaurants. We have an army. We are a people. We want self-determination."

Population

The Miskitos have a population of some 200,000 (almost the number of independent Belize) including 150,000 in the area claimed by Nicaragua, and 50,000 in the area claimed by Honduras. They are the third most numerous of the almost 50 nation peoples in Central America, well after the 5,000,000 Mayans (representing 22 groups in territory claimed by Guatemala), and as many as 1,000,000 Pipil and Lenca (territory claimed by El Salvador).

Nicaraguans say the Miskitos are but 5 percent of the population who are claiming almost one-half of the country. The Miskitos say that they are 100 percent of their country and that Nicaragua is claiming two-thirds and Honduras one-third.

Settlements

Before the Sandinista-Miskito war of the 1980s, there were more than 260 communities, each with a population of between 500 and 1000 people. The Sandinistas burned to the ground 65 of the Wangki River's 100 communities, the region of greatest population concentration (people are now returning to rebuild). A second concentration of settlements is located between Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) — considered by the Miskito to be their capital — and Kip (Cabo Gracias a Dios), an area containing 20 communities. Other settlement concentrations are found around Pearl Lagoon in the south and Karataska Lagoon (with Puerto Lempira) in the north, and along the many rivers.

The largest Miskito settlements are Bilwi (30,000) and Puerto Lempira (18,000), which also have many Ladinos (Nicaraguans and Hondurans, respectively) who generally work in branches of the state government or in small private businesses. Other areas of non-Miskito concentration are to the west, along the upper reaches of the rivers and interfluvial areas (called "the interior" by the Miskitos) where people from Honduras and Nicaragua are moving eastward, homestead by homestead, into the Miskito nation. A third area of Ladino concentration are the military bases: those of the Nicaraguan Ejercito Popular Sandinista (EPS) garrisons in Kamla, Tronquera, Waspam, San Carlos

and the mining communities, totaling some 7,000 in all - down from 20,000 during the war; and the Honduran Fifth Battalion in Rus Rus, Mokoron, and Puerto Lempira, with about 3,000 — down from 5,000 during the war.

Though claimed by Honduras and Nicaragua, the Miskito nation remains effectively isolated from both. Only one narrow dirt road — from Managua to Bilwi — seasonally connects the Miskito nation with the outside, and takes two to three days in a four wheel drive vehicle equipped with a winch. All other transportation into and out of the area is either by airplane, boat, or foot. Large airfields are at Bilwi and Puerto Lempira, Waspam, the mines, Auka, and smaller ones dot the northern area where refugees and guerrilla fighters were supplied during the 1980s. Modest port facilities are found at Puerto Lempira and Bilwi (once a mile long, the wharf was shortened by half by Miskito sabotage during the war).

Miskito History and History of the Miskito

Two distinct histories explain the past of the Miskito people. One is a Miskito history by outsiders that justifies invasion and annexation attempts. The other is a Miskito history by Miskitos that justifies territorial ownership and defense.

Miskut's People

Miskito history establishes the development of the Miskito people and nation along the coastal shore and rivers of the Kabu Tara (Caribbean). The original people migrated along the shoreline and settled where there were rich coastal resources. Later a warrior leader named Miskut founded a settlement at Sitawala in the coastal lagoon near the mouth of the river later named the Wangki. His family stayed in Sitawala but his followers (Miskut uplika nani) split into three groups which expanded and absorbed other peoples: the first went south and founded Bihmuna, Uskira, Li Dakura and Dakura along the coast; the second went up the Wangki and established new communities with people they defeated; and the third went north and created communities as far as Brus Lagoon. All of the communities were headed by the Miskut uplika nani which later came to be shortened to Miskito. The descendants continued to share a common identity through the same language and social, economic and political rules. This is how the Miskito came to be one people with one territory. This version of Miskito history is similar to the development of many nations: expansion, absorption, stability.

The Miskito Nation and European Superpowers

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the European maritime powers exported their conflicts to the Caribbean. England and other North European countries ignored the 1493 Treaty of Tordesillas by which the Pope divided the new discoveries between Spain and Portugal at 40 degrees W. longitude ("The Pope's Line"), with Spain making claim to everything west.

When the Europeans came, the Miskito response was direct: defend and repulse those who tried military occupation and demanded slaves, tribute and taxes, and trade with the rest. The Spaniards tried to invade, annex and tax and became the Miskitos' enemies; the English came to trade and fight the Spaniards and they became the Miskites' allies and stayed for more than 200 years.

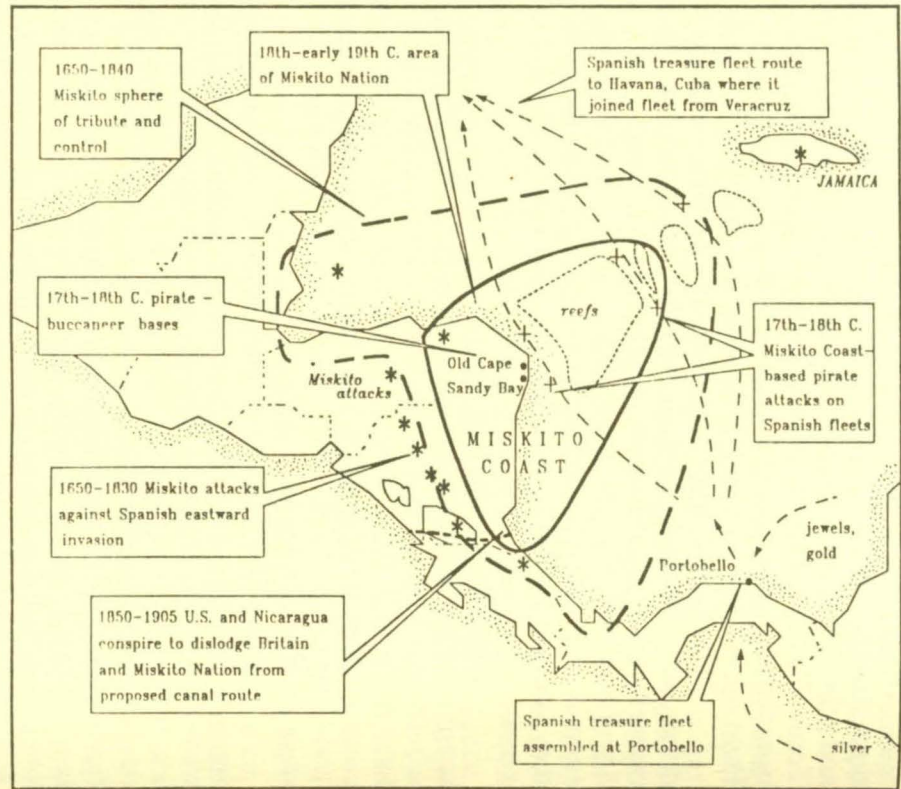
While Spain sought riches, subjects and tribute, England sought trading relations and allies to fight Spain. The Miskitos would have nothing to do with Spain's demands for tribute and later taxes, and sided with England. A private English trading company was established on Providence Island in 1633, less than 100 miles off the Miskito nation and soon English pirate vessels were anchored in Miskito harbors.

Pirates and buccaneers came because the Miskito nation was located at the only chokepoint along Spain's Panama-Cuba treasure route. Spain found gold, silver and jewels in South America, riches that were taken to Portobello on the Caribbean where the heavily guarded treasure fleet was loaded. Then the treasure fleets sailed north toward Havana across open sea until encountering the vast expanse of reefs and shoals that extend from the Miskito nation's waters to Jamaica, where the ships had to slow and break formation to pass through the chokepoint channels located between the reefs and between the reefs and mainland (Fig. 2).

The Miskito Coast offered many other strategic advantages to pirates. The pirate vessels had safe anchorage at Old Cape and Sandy Bay where nearby pine forests yielded worm-resistant lumber and pitch and resin to repair the vessels. Food and fresh water were abundant. The Miskitos were skilled small boat seamen (the English word dory comes from the Miskito dori) and assisted in the repairs, and worked with some of crews as harpooners, pilots and fighters. The pirate vessels were smaller and quicker and drew less water than the Spanish ships and though outgunned could outmaneuver them in the shallow, reef-strewn waters.

The Miskitos prospered with English trade, exchanging tropical woods, dyes, animal skins, hawksbill shell, and dried meat and fish for firearms, gunpowder, lead, tools, cloth, cooking

Fig. 2 THE MISKITO NATION AND 16th-19th C. FOREIGN CONFLICTS



utensils, rope and nails. These trade goods permitted them to expand control and collection of tribute from what is today Belize south to Bocas del Toro in Panama. From the mid 1600s to the late 1800s, the Miskito region became one of the most prosperous areas in all of Central America, due to the abundant natural resources, ready access to English maritime shipping, the industriousness of the Miskitos, and the absence of Spanish taxes that constrained economic development elsewhere in Central America. The Spanish colonial government ranted against Miskito free trade, the presence of the English, and the depredations by the pirates and their Miskito allies.

Miskito trade and prosperity were threatened by Spanish territorial advances and the Miskito fought, sometimes with English help, against the Spaniards on land and at sea. One investigator compiled a partial listing of Miskito-Spanish military battles that describes 25 between 1643 and 1814.³ The Miskitos sent 500 men in Miskito-built 60-foot sailing vessels to Jamaica in 1655 to assist Cromwell in taking the island from the Spaniards. In 1711 Spanish ships would not engage Miskito craft on Lake Nicaragua. In a 1723 naval engagement the Miskitos "totally destroyed a Spanish expeditionary force off the Honduran [Miskito] coast."⁴

Diplomatic approaches were used by Miskito leaders to encourage Spain to replace military invasions with trade relations. "In 1711, and again in 1721, the Miskitos offered formal trade treaties with the governor of Costa Rica, who went so far as to receive and dine with the Miskito king in his palace, but would sign no treaty without Miskito submission to Spanish sovereignty."⁵ As a result, no treaty was offered or signed.

In 1800, a Miskito army laid siege to, defeated, and ousted the Spanish military garrison at Black River in the north, ending 30 years of Spanish occupation. In so doing the Miskitos reasserted sovereignty over their nation twenty-one years before the Spaniards were forced to leave the other parts of the isthmus and the Central American states were formed.

Control of the Nicaraguan Canal Route

The Miskito nation was again thrust into international contention in the nineteenth century, this time over the proposed interoceanic canal route across Nicaragua, and again because of its strategic location. Great Britain had formed a protectorate over the Miskito nation, a favored trading partner, and a series of Miskito kings initiated by Britain had reigned for 200 years. But the discovery of gold in California heightened interest in building a canal to transport the flood of goods and peoples going to the

new gold fields. However, the Miskitos and their British allies controlled the Caribbean entrance to a potential canal. The United States sided with Nicaragua to remove the British and take over the Miskito nation.

For the next 60 years foreign states made alliances and treaties between themselves over the Miskito nation. In 1850 the Clayton-Bulwer treaty between Nicaragua, the U.S. and Great Britain recognized less than one half of the territory of the Miskito nation. Consequently, Miskito representatives made several missions to convince these governments to recognize the entire territory. United States Secretary of State, Mr. Marcy, wrote responses in 1853 and 1856 to the Miskito demand that their nation be recognized:

They have only possessory rights to the country they occupy and not sovereignty over it. The President cannot admit as true, and therefore cannot under any possible circumstances advise the Republic of Nicaragua to admit that the Mosquito Indians are a State or Government any more than a band of Maroons in the island of Jamaica are a State or Government.

The British unilaterally ceded the Miskito nation to Nicaragua in the 1860 Treaty of Managua. Informed consent was not obtained from the Miskito.

The Article I. Her Britannic Majesty ... will recognize as belonging to and under the sovereignty of the Republic of Nicaragua, the country hitherto occupied or claimed by the Mosquito Indians within the frontiers of the Republic, whatever that frontier may be.

Article II. A district within the territory of the Republic of Nicaragua shall be assigned to the Mosquito Indians, which district shall remain, as above stipulated, under the sovereignty of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Before the British left in the late nineteenth century, they did make cadastral surveys and gave a map and title with the boundaries to each community.

In 1894, Nicaraguan President Zelaya ordered his army to invade and "reincorporate" the east coast. Residents of

Bluefields and some Miskitos to the north fought and drove out Zelaya's army for six months. The British secretly provided 600 rifles from the ship Cleopatra, but a U.S. navy captain gave the location of the arms cache to Zelaya's army before the rifles could be distributed. In February, 1905, Zelaya imposed "The Mosquito Convention" on the occupied Miskito nation and rounded up several Miskitos and forced them to sign "the reincorporation." Immediately thereafter the Nicaraguan president named the area the "Departamento de Zelaya", invited in the United Fruit Company, and began to sack the wealth, a process that continued through the Somoza and Sandinista occupations. The twentieth century brought only exports from the Miskito nation. Very little was reinvested and the region became poor. During the Somoza dictatorships (1935-1979) foreign companies exported pine and tropical lumber and shrimp and sea turtles.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) promised to liberate the east coast indigenous people from the Somoza dictatorship but instead tried to force the people and their nations into the Sandinista state. FSLN Minister of Interior Tomas Borge said in an interview, "If you look at a map, you will notice that practically speaking it is another country, another geography, other customs. They feel as though they have lived within a separate civilization."⁶ President Daniel Ortega recalled, "The FSLN proclaimed a special plan for the Atlantic Coast.... The nationalization of the natural resources was necessary to improve the living standards of the Atlantic Coast communities".⁷

This "special plan" was the attempt to ram the Sandinista revolution down Miskito throats and annex their land and resources into Nicaragua and the Sandinista state. As a result, the Sandinistas and the Miskitos were at war by 1981, a year before the Contras.

The Sandinista-Miskito conflict (1981-1989) was a state nation war over land and resources, not ideology as was the Sandinista-Contra civil war. Most of the leadership and fighters in the three armed resistance forces were Miskitos. Though they began with arms recovered from ambushed Sandinistas, by 1982 the Miskitos needed more and better weapons and looked for allies. Misura and later Kisan had an arms alliance with the FDN ("the Contras") in Honduras, and Misurasata was part of ARDE (the original Sandinistas) in Costa Rica. Concerned over autonomy demands, these allies limited the flow of weapons; nevertheless, the 6,000 mostly Miskito fighters successfully engaged the FSLN's 20,000. The Miskitos were the first to shoot down a helicopter (December, 1981), blow up Soviet tanks (May, 1983), and do an amphibious assault (October 1983). By the end of 1984,

Miskito military and political resistance had forced the FSLN to the negotiation tables to discuss autonomy (1984-1988).

Foreign Claims to the Miskito Nation

Rights to Miskito land, waters and resources come from birth and marriage, not immigration or invasion.

A series of foreign claims and invasions have been made against the people and land and sea territory of the Miskito nation (Fig. 3). In the nineteenth century, Nicaraguan encroachment from the west, the British Protectorate, the 1860 Treaty of Managua's Miskito Reserve, and Nicaraguan President Zelaya's 1894 invasion greatly reduced the area under effective Miskito control, though these did not reduce by much the area settled by the Miskitos and hence their long-standing territorial claims.

Foreign Land Claims

Soon after their formation in 1821 Honduras and Nicaragua began disputing their common border. A 1906 decision by Spain's King Alfonso VIII put the border at the Rio Coco (Wangki), ruling against Nicaragua's claim to all of the Miskito territory. Nicaragua did not ratify it. In 1960 the International Court of Justice upheld the 1906 decision. Miskitos in the north went to bed "Honduran" and woke up "Nicaraguan".

Honduras wanted the Miskitos' territory but not the Miskito people. Brutal treatment by the Honduran army caused thousands of Miskitos to cross the river never to return home. During 1962-63 international aid helped build 10 new communities for these people who were refugees within their own nation. During the 1960s the Honduran army routinely burned crops to force more people to leave. A force of 500 Miskitos was persuaded by Nicaragua not to attack Honduras during the July 1969 El Salvador-Honduras "Soccer War".

Though Nicaragua occupied the southern two-thirds of the Miskito nation since its 1894 invasion, it never could subjugate the people nor control the area, even by unleashing 20,000 soldiers and Soviet helicopter gunships in the 1980s. Miskito assertions of territorial rights are the primary reason that Honduras and Nicaragua maintain military forces in the occupied territories.

Foreign Sea Claims

Miskito sea territory is another area of regional contention. Miskito sea territory is another area of regional contention. Historically, the continental shelf has been demarcated and claimed

by Miskito coastal communities -- each of which has an exclusive sea territory. This same continental shelf sea territory is also claimed by Honduras, Nicaragua, and Colombia who themselves assert overlapping, conflictive sea territories. At issue have been the guano cays (Albuquerque, Quitasueno, Roncador, Serrana, Serranilla), the continental shelf, the mainland itself, fisheries, petroleum, and competing claims to a 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) under the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea. In 1928 Colombia and Nicaragua agreed to a sea border at 82 degrees W. longitude, but in 1980, Nicaragua unilaterally nullified the treaty. The alluvial islands that may have once marked the international frontier at Cabo Gracias a Dios are gone or shifted, and Honduras and Nicaragua now unilaterally assert overlapping EEZs. And overlapping Nicaragua's claim is a 1986 treaty between Colombia and Honduras.⁸

The Miskitos have historically delimited and defended their sea territory. The boundaries of the overall sea territory have long been established. Each of the 60 or so coastal communities has a delimited sea area that runs east from the lagoons to the edge of the continental shelf. The Miskitos have had naval engagements in their waters with Spanish galleons and Sandinista gunboats. In the early 1970s Miskito turtlemen clashed with Jamaican fishermen and Managua was forced to revoke the Jamaicans' fishing permits.

The land and sea boundaries of the Miskito nation were one of the main subjects of peace negotiations between the Sandinista government and the Miskito resistance (Misurasata and Yatama) from 1984-1988.⁹

Resource Pirates and Drug Traffickers

Miskito waters are now being invaded by resource pirates and drug traffickers. With the end of the war in 1989 and the change of the Nicaraguan government in 1990, coastal surveillance by military helicopters and gunboats was virtually eliminated and resource pirate vessels began to appear in increasing numbers. These shallow continental shelf waters have the greatest concentration of lobster, shrimp, fish and sea turtles in the Caribbean and these populations were replenished by the protection from almost a decade of war.¹⁰ Boats from Honduras, Colombia, Panama, Japan and elsewhere illegally take monthly catches estimated to be worth \$2 million dollars.

The Miskito Coast is beginning to be used as a transshipment area for cocaine trafficking from Colombia. The area is used to refuel drug boats heading north from Colombia and to transship cocaine from the Colombian island of San Andres to small craft

that carry it to Limon, Costa Rica where it is then hidden in the cargo of container ships destined for the U.S. and Europe. Unlike affluent Costa Rica, impoverished Nicaragua and the Miskito nation do not have a significant internal cocaine market. However, some of the Colombian lobster buyers do exchange cocaine for lobster with Corn Islanders, and, increasingly, Miskito fishermen.

In response to these invasions of Miskito waters, and the absence of any Nicaraguan action, former Yatama combatants began in late 1990 to seek ways to raise a patrol force of small boats that will carry military weapons (the resource pirates and cocaine traffickers have AK-47 automatic rifles, and RPG-7 rocket and M-79 grenade launchers).

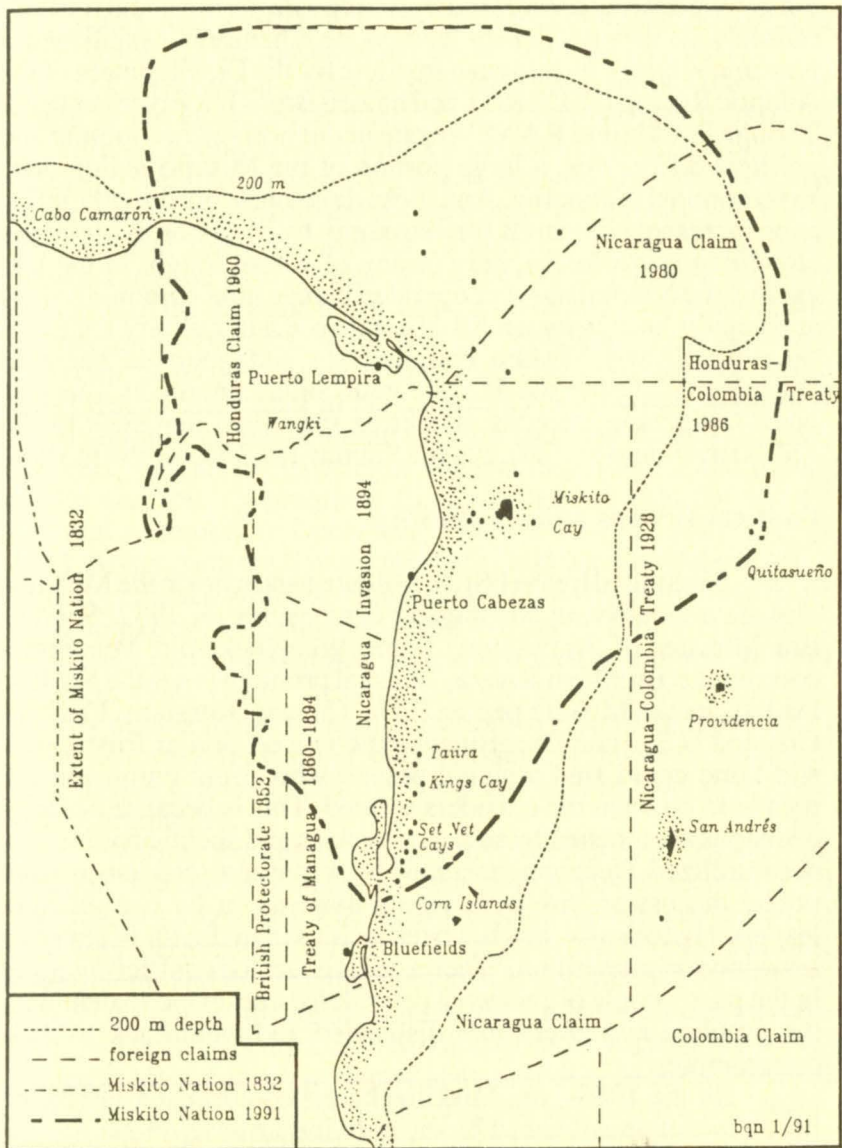
The Autonomous Regions

The Miskitos' successful defensive war against the Sandinista invasion compelled the FSLN to change from its 1979-1984 stance of attempting to obliterate demands for autonomy to a 1984-1990 position of trying to control autonomy. In the early 1980s Miskito nationalists demanded autonomy and were jailed, tortured, killed and disappeared by Sandinista state security (DGSE) who accused them of being "separatists" working for the CIA. The communities supported the war for autonomy and they were bombed, looted, and burned to the ground, and 20,000 people were forcibly relocated into FSLN-run camps and another 40,000 became refugees. The FSLN's military offensive failed as it provoked more people to join the resistance which was winning. In December 1984 the FSLN changed tactics and initiated its plan for controlled autonomy which became a constitutional law in September 1987 (based on the USSR-Lithuania model as it was in 1985). The east coast was to have internal self-government and decisions over local resource use. However, the exercise of autonomy was to be tightly controlled at the local level by insuring that only Frente Sandinista people were elected, and at the state level with legal provisions that the FSLN-dominated National Assembly and the State itself (FSLN National Directorate) could block any local decisions or actions.

Two political administrative autonomous areas were established: RAAN — Region Autonoma del Atlantico Norte, and RAAS — Region Autonoma del Atlantico Sur. The northern autonomous area RAAN covers mostly Miskito people and territory, while RAAS delimits the southern edge of the Miskito nation and includes other peoples as well.

However, when the FSLN lost the national election on February 25, 1990, their control over the Miskito nation (and the

Fig. 3 FOREIGN CLAIMS TO THE MISKITO NATION



Sumo, Rama, and Creole nations) evaporated overnight, leaving the autonomy law unbuffered by Sandinista political and military officials. President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro established a new ministry, the Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Atlantic Region (INDERA), and named Brooklyn Rivera as head. Though RAAN and RAAS operate under post-war economic and political difficulties, a large portion of the Miskito nation does have nominal autonomy. And these developments directly influence increasing demands for autonomy by Miskitos living in the Honduran-occupied territory (many of whom fought in the war against the Sandinistas and operated clandestine communication and supply lines between Miskito refugee and military camps in "Honduras" and Miskito communities and guerrilla bases in "Nicaragua". Using the Miskito gains on autonomy as a model, other indigenous peoples submitted their own demands to the FSLN: the Sumo in 1986, and the Subtiava and Monimbo in 1988.

Political Groups and Leadership

Frustrated by the FSLN's failure to transform the Miskitos into state-identifying Nicaraguan campesinos, in 1982, Sandinista Minister of Agriculture Jaime Wheelock told Misurasata coordinator Brooklyn Rivera, "the real problem is not the Miskito leaders, its the Miskito people." The Cubans, Russians, Contras, CIA and U.S. State Department experienced similar frustrations and none could find a single person who could command the people to do what the outsiders wanted. This is because political decisions are reached by social consensus and social consensus is decentralized. Decisions are made by community consensus from public discussion, not by a voting majority or by one or more leaders. Historically, this has been an important factor in resisting invasion and integration. When a crisis or armed conflict occurred in the past, people organized a centralized command to deal with the problem and afterwards disbanded and went back to their communities.

In the 1980s, the Miskitos launched not just a resistance but a revolution advanced by the only Indian army in the Americas, a revolution to permanently change their relationship with the Nicaraguan state, to regain control of their territory and resources, and to develop and modernize their country. Though the war was over in 1989, the Miskito leaders and organizations did not disband as had occurred for centuries, but took part in the 1990 local elections and are now the leaders of an autonomous government. The revolution is on hold. The war and the Sandinistas destroyed the economic infrastructure and many of the communi-

ties, and scattered thousands of Miskitos to 13 countries from Peru to Canada and Australia to Switzerland. Reconstruction and repatriation are the autonomous government's priorities.

Contemporary Miskito political organizations trace their origin to the early 1970s when Wangki river people formed an agricultural cooperative to protect themselves from Ladino and Chinese river traders who bought low and sold high. In 1974, this cooperative evolved into the political organization ALPROMISU (Miskito and Sumo Alliance for Progress), which challenged the Somoza regime over its attempt to impose Spanish as the only language of the area and the giveaways of community pine forests to foreign companies. This was the precursor to Misurasata (Miskito, Sumo, Rama and Sandinista Unity) — formed at the first General Assembly in November, 1979 — which organized the communities and promoted Indian land and resource rights, workers' unions for fishermen, loggers and miners, and public health and literacy programs (formally agreed to at the second General Assembly in December, 1980). Banned by the FSLN in 1981, Misurasata went underground at home and into exile and a military alliance with Eden Pastora's ARDE forces in Costa Rica. Miskito exiles in Honduras formed Misura in 1982 which allied with the Contra FDN force, and which then splintered to form Kisan in 1986. Under pressure from refugees, fighters and community people these three organizations formed Yatama in June, 1987, at a week-long third General Assembly in Honduran-occupied territory, attended by 2000 representatives from every Miskito community.

Within the autonomous RAAN and RAAS regions are Yatama, Frente Sandinista, and the central government's UNO political organizations. The locally elected governments have to find ways to accommodate the demands of these organizations, constituents and those of the more than 200 communities. Miskito people dominate all organizations and the autonomous government in the RAAN area. The two autonomous regions are represented in Managua by six elected senators out of 54 in the National Assembly and by INDERA (Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Atlantic Coast), headed by former Misurasata leader Brooklyn Rivera, which has a slim 1991 budget of \$1,500,000 for an area almost the size of Costa Rica.

Geopolitics and Ecopolitics

Miskito military and political demands for autonomy and self-determination in the 1980s had far-reaching political and geopolitical influences. Internationally the FSLN was besieged over

its Miskito policy, and internally it had to allocate 25-30 percent of its military resources in literally another country, and in another war where it had no chance of military victory. Many foreign leaders spoke privately and unsuccessfully to the FSLN about resolving this conflict (Francois Mitterrand, Olaf Palme, and Willy Brandt, for example). The CIA, U.S. State Department and the Contras failed to convince the Miskito resistance groups to join in the civil war against the FSLN, leaving a huge political and geographic gap in the effort to unite anti-Sandinista forces. Miskito political and military leaders shared and developed new strategies with representatives of many other nations who were fighting state invasions (e.g. Chittagong Hill Tracts, Kawthoolei, Eritrea, Nagaland, and West Papua). Many in Washington came to understand that the Miskito struggle was distinct from the Contra war and on two occasions the U.S. Congress earmarked funds for Misurasata (\$5 million in 1986 and \$2.19 million in 1988). Though the Miskito conflict and goals were not included in the Central American peace plan (Esquipulas II), Costa Rica President Oscar Arias provided critical behind-the-scenes support to Misurasata and Yatama for negotiations with the FSLN. In September, 1989, in Bilwi, the capital of the Miskito nation, former President Jimmy Carter went eyeball to eyeball with FSLN Minister of Interior Tomas Borge over the FSLN ban against the return of Yatama leaders to run in the 1990 elections. Borge blinked, the ban was lifted, and the leaders returned and won.

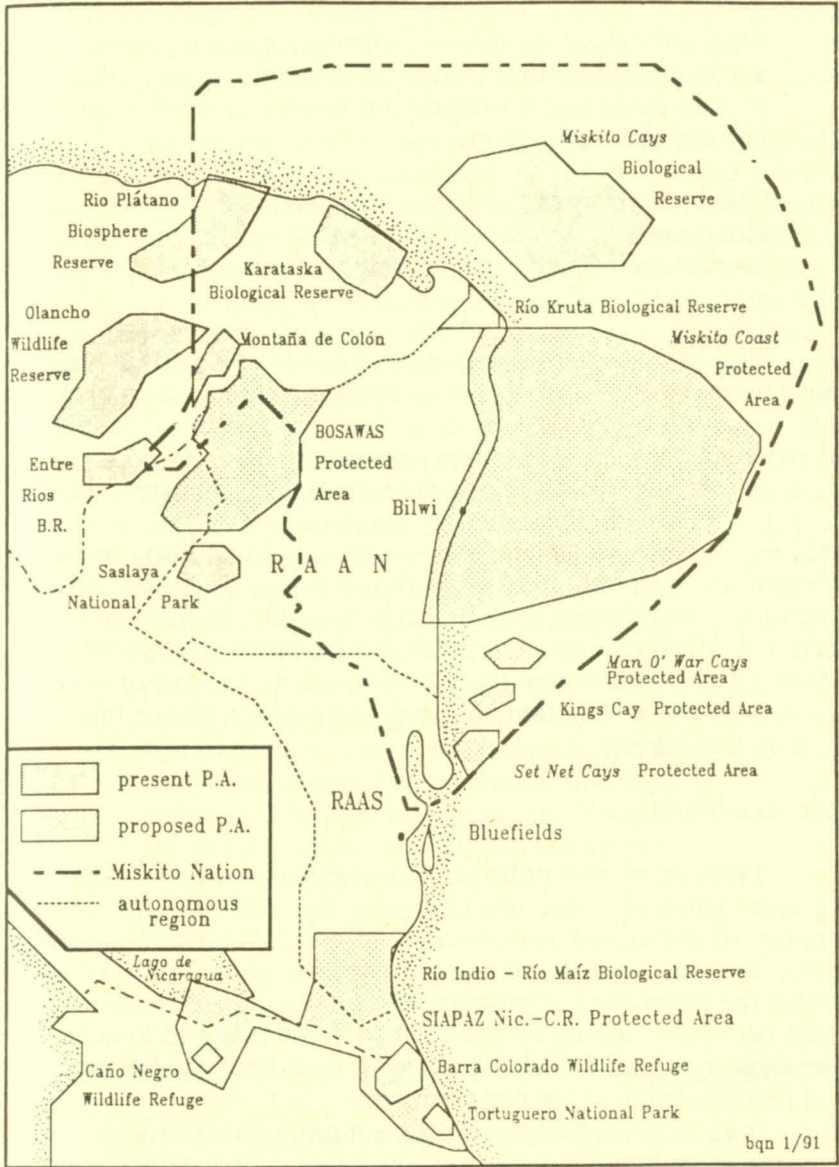
The connection between the Miskito resistance and the Sandinista election defeat was exaggerated in a front-page story in the USSR's Communist Party newspaper Pravda (translated by AFP wire service):

Sandinistas Misjudged Indians and Lost Vote, Pravda Says

Moscow, February 28 (AFP) — The opposition in Nicaragua won a general election on Sunday because it “took advantage of errors by the Sandinistas and acted with more flexibility”, the Communist Party newspaper Pravda said on Wednesday.

The Sandinistas were the revolutionary party in government, and Pravda said that they had committed “errors” in their relations with the Indian tribes such as the

Fig. 4 MISKITO ECOPOLITICS AND PROTECTED AREA BUFFERS



Miskitos on the Atlantic coastline.

“The central authorities did not take into account the traditions of the Indians nor of their tendency to keep their way of life and their autonomy.”

The Indians took up arms in neighboring Honduras and by the time the Sandinistas decided to give them autonomy, “it was too late...”

The Miskito nation is pursuing a new ecopolitical approach to demarcate and buffer its territory, reunify north and south, and consolidate its autonomy. The plan is to ring the land and sea boundaries with as many protected areas as possible, including national parks, biological reserves, biosphere reserves, etc. (Fig. 4). This would be done by supporting state and international initiatives to establish protected areas. In addition to the protected areas already in place in the Honduras occupied area, Nicaragua is introducing three others in the south. With these and others the Miskitos hope to curtail the eastward movement of Ladino agriculturalists into their territory, reduce resource over-exploitation and destruction, and defend against resource piracy and drug trafficking.

State Academia

Two remarkable political-economic processes are occurring simultaneously that are changing the outlines and very structure of states and the concepts of nationhood and sovereignty: the dismantling of many European states' powers to develop the European Community, and the worldwide pressure of nation peoples to withdraw from central state rule and to determine their own political destiny within a vast range of options from independence to greater autonomy.

In spite of the fact that world is rapidly transforming into a new global order with emerging new patterns of decentralizing states and independent or autonomous nations (the USSR, Canada, Yugoslavia, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Spain, etc.), most academics are but a marginal factor in the discussion of this process and the new politics of self-determination. This is because so many academic institutions, traditions and scholars are state creations and this produces one-sided analysis that justifies the state. In explaining any nation's assertion of self determination and auton-

omy, most university and media people worldwide depend upon the terminology of the state (separatism, secession, balkanization, tribalism, ethnic groups, minorities, tribes, dissidents, extremists, rebels, peasants). None of these terms are those of the nation peoples themselves. All of these are state catchwords.

As a result, many nation peoples prefer their own scholars and systems of communication to those of the state and considerable analysis is done on a nation-to-nation basis, which rarely enters into the archives of the state. The absence of academic literature should not be confused for the absence of analysis.

Oren Lyons, a Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation (which is a member of the Haudenosaune - "Six Nations" - Confederacy), who was an observer at the Misurasata-FSLN peace negotiations, counsels to nation peoples,

We are the original people on this land. We are the land keepers. We are not a minority within our own nations, within our own lands. One must understand that terminology is very important. How you address yourself is very important to them.... So must speak of ourselves as a people.... Your try to change their terminology, they will not accept it because it is that important. That terminology is just as important to you. So you should first represent yourself as what you are. Nations are not according to size, nations are according to culture.¹¹

FOOTNOTES

¹Nietschmann, Bernard "The Third World War," Cultural Survival Quarterly, 1987, Vol. 11. No. 3, pp. 1-16.

²A nation is a geographically bounded territory of a common people who have a common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology, language, area, and (often) religion. Today there are over 5000 nations in the world, 99.9 percent of which are not states. Most nations have persisted hundreds of years.

A state is a centralized political system, recognized by other states, that uses a civilian and usually a military bureaucracy to enforce one set of institutions, laws and sometimes language and

religion within its claimed boundaries. regardless of the presence of pre-existing nations. Today there are 171 states in the world. Most of the states are less than 200 years old. More than one-half of the world's states did not exist before World War II. Only a handful of the states are, in fact, nation-states (e.g. Iceland); most are multi-national states and many operate as empires, controlled — often dominated — by one nation (the Russian nation once ruled the USSR's 130 nations, Java controls Indonesia's claim over more than 300 nations, and Burmans dominate the dozen nations claimed by Burma).

A people is a self-defined group. A people has a common history; racial, cultural, linguistic and religious ties; a common territory or geographical location; and a common economic base. Peoples have international rights to identity, land, resources, self-government, self-determination; ethnic groups do not.

An ethnic group (or minority) is comprised of people who by force or choice leave their nation to live in another nation or state where they have no historical or contemporary rights to a territory but maintain their distinctive identity (e.g. Han Chinese in San Francisco are an ethnic group, in northern China they are a people; Russians in Russia are a people, in Lithuania or New York they are an ethnic group). The concept of an ethnic group is embedded in state hegemony. A people cannot be an ethnic group while on its own land (Palestinians are not an Israeli ethnic group). Despite the terminological proclivities of academics and journalists, almost no people within its own territory consents to being demoted to an ethnic group because it strips a people of international rights to self-determination, a territory, a resource base and self-rule. Furthermore, some of the original meanings of the word "ethnic" include "heathen" and "neither Christian nor Jewish", a terminological legacy which may account for the common derogatory assignation of "ethnic" to a lesser status of national identity, to an adolescent form of political maturity, and to an irrational — even dangerous — basis for political organization.

³Jenkins, Jorge El Desafío Indígena en Nicaragua: El Caso de Los Miskitos. Editorial Vanguardia, Managua, 1986

⁴Day, Peter "Miskito Power," Quadrant, January-February, No. 241, Vol. 32, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 27-37 (Sydney, Australia), p. 31

⁵Ibid. p. 31.

⁶Borge, Tomas "Ellos Perdieron el Poder y no se Resignan. Eso es," El Comandante de la Revolucion Nicaraguense Explica los problemas que enfrentan con la Buguesia Para Lograr una Sociedad Democratica, Por Esto, August 20, 1981, pp. 40-44,

Managua.

⁷Ortega, Daniel, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Record, November 10, 1986, p. 5.

⁸Sandner, Gerhard (Department of Geography, University of Hamburg) "La Dimension Maritima en los Conflictos Fronterizos en Centroamerica." Paper presented at the Second International Congress on Frontiers in Iberoamerica, San Jose, Costa Rica, November 14 -17, 1990 .

⁹Nietschmann, Bernard "Misurasata/Sandinista Negotiations, "Cultural Survival Quarterly, 1985, Vol. 9, No.1, pp. 59-60; The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation. Nicaragua and the United States. Freedom House and University Press of America, New York, pp. 59-89.

¹⁰Nietschmann, Bernard "Conservation by Conflict in Nicaragua," Natural History, 1990, November, pp. 42-49.

¹¹Lyons, Oren, Committee on Native American Struggles, Re-thinking Indian Law, New York, 1982. IV.