In this book I have tried to explain U.S. policy toward Panama during the 1980s, the Noriega years. In the process, this has also become a book about Panama. This is not the same book a Panamanian would write; it cannot be. I have tried to do justice to the Panamanian context and to various Panamanian perspectives, without which one simply cannot decipher the interactions that U.S.-Panamanian relations entail. My primary concern, however, is to account for the objectives and actions of U.S. policy.

The first part of the book presents my analysis and explanations. An overview and summary explanation are presented in the Introduction. Chapters 1 through 3 contain detailed explanations at three levels of analysis: international system, nation-state, and decisionmaking. The arguments presented in these explanatory chapters are based on a narrative case study of events in Panama and Washington, which is contained in Chapters 4 through 8.

Chapter 1 uses the international system level of analysis to explain U.S. Panama policy as a security concern for the United States and to explain how international dynamics, in the long term and during the 1980s, have affected U.S. national interests and shaped Panama's identity. Chapter 2 presents a state level analysis of developments in Panama, focusing primarily on the Spadafora crisis as a watershed. This crisis was Noriega's "Watergate," in which the survival tactics used eventually undermined the regime. The Spadafora crisis is also considered as a developmental event for the opposition and its ability to successfully contest the 1989 election. This chapter also considers an important internal development in the United States: changes in the foreign policy consensus and the impact of foreign policy beliefs on U.S. Panama policy. Chapter 3 uses the decisionmaking level of analysis to explain U.S. attempts to strike a deal with Noriega and the crisis dynamics that shaped U.S. policy and the decision to invade Panama.

I begin the narrative portion of the book with a discussion of three men
who shaped Panamanian politics and relations with the United States during the 1980s: Arnulfo Arias, Omar Torrijos, and Manuel Noriega. Chapter 4 introduces these central figures, their legacies, and some of the formative events that must be known before the 1980s can be explored.

The next four chapters comprise the case study and relate the story of U.S.-Panamanian relations and events in both countries during the Noriega years. I have divided the decade according to three U.S. foreign policy objectives: "Play Ball with Noriega," "Noriega Must Go, But How?" and finally "Civilians In, Military Out" and "Civilians In, But for How Long?" This division reflects noticeable shifts in the intent and strategies of U.S. foreign policy. Chapter 8, which considers U.S. Panama policy and developments since the invasion, concludes with an assessment of Panamanian politics today and the challenges that face U.S.-Panamanian relations in the 1990s.

As with any study of contemporary events, this work is bound by the sources and evidence available. Given the salience of U.S. Panama policy and the significance of the U.S. invasion, additional information will bring errors to light and provide new insights on the decade.

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