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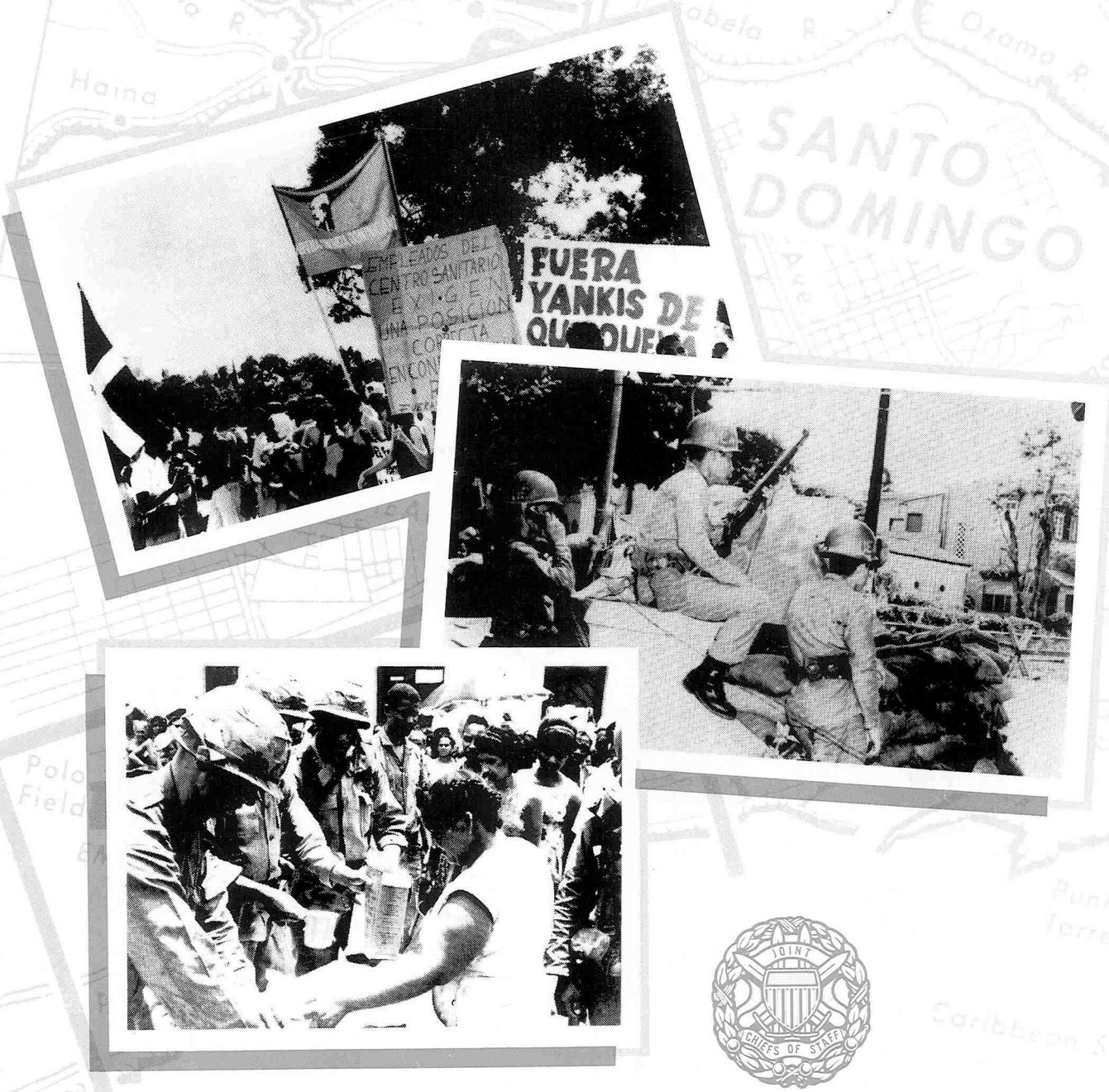

Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966

by Lawrence A. Yates

FOREWORD

In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy expressed concern that Communist-sponsored unconventional warfare was one of the most pervasive threats to American security and that the U.S. military establishment was inadequately prepared to counter the threat. To correct this deficiency, the White House put pressure on the services, especially the U.S. Army, to develop the doctrine and forces necessary to conduct what was variously called counterinsurgency, counterguerrilla warfare, special warfare, special operations, or stability operations. As the military's capability to engage in unconventional warfare grew, so, too, did the opportunities to translate this capability into action. One such opportunity was the crisis in the Dominican Republic in 1965.

In *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965—1966*, Dr. Lawrence A. Yates vividly describes the role of the military in what today would be termed peacetime contingency and peacekeeping operations. After tracing the origins of the Dominican crisis, Dr. Yates analyzes the concerns that led to U.S. intervention; the joint planning, command and control arrangements, and intelligence-gathering efforts that preceded and followed the introduction of U.S. marines and paratroopers into the country; the missions of those forces and the difficulties they encountered; the formation of an inter-American peace force that transformed unilateral intervention into a multilateral undertaking; and the way in which military forces provided the foundation upon which a political settlement was negotiated.

In virtually every phase of the Dominican intervention, political considerations far outweighed military requirements. In this sense, *Power Pack* illustrates the kind of political-military operations U.S. armed forces are most likely to engage in today under conditions short of all-out war. Many of the problems the military experienced in playing a suporting role to the diplomats and civil authorities instead of occupying stage center would later be reprised in Vietnam. In some respects, the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic was a dress rehearsal for Vietnam. In other respects, the dissimilarities are equally striking. In the Dominican Republic, the United States deployed, in the course of one week, a force large enough to end a civil war, suppress a potential insurgency, assist in restoring order and democracy, prevent a Communist takeover, and, having accomplished all this, leave the country one year later with its objectives achieved. The intervention in the Dominican Republic represents a successful application of U.S. power and diplomacy and an instructive case study for professional officers today.

July 1988

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Preface

The Combat Studies Institute's previously published Leavenworth Papers addressed, to a degree, joint and combined military operations. Leavenworth Paper No. 15, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965—1966*, by Lawrence A. Yates, describes a military operation characterized by multiple-service participation. Professor Yates' contribution provides an important analysis of the interplay between statecraft and military operational planning and execution. Based extensively upon recently declassified official documents and direct interviews with several key participants, *Power Pack* addresses not only questions of planning and deployment but the course of the intervention from the landing of marines to evacuate American citizens, through the commitment of the 82d Airborne Division to separate the combatants in the Dominican civil war, to the establishment of the ad hoc Inter-American Peace Force, the first hemispheric military organization of its kind.

The United States intervention in the Dominican Republic was successful. It accomplished the mission of preventing a Communist takeover and providing the military presence to make a political settlement possible. Nevertheless, Power Pack experienced its share of problems associated with outdated operations plans, poor communications and coordination, hasty planning, and inadequate staff and facilities. This study's true value lies in the identification of these problems in an effort to understand why they occurred and to prevent their recurrence.

While the J-7 Directorate works daily to resolve such problems by promoting material interoperability actions; joint professional military education (PME); joint doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (JTTP) development; joint training exercises; and plans formulation, all military professionals are responsible for anticipating and preparing those joint and combined actions necessary for their successful execution. Dr. Yates' case study provides insight into the causes of these problems and the need for flexibility, innovation, and common sense in resolving them.

The Dominican Republic case study thus testifies to the value of military history for officers coming to grips with the kinds of joint and combined military operations most likely to occur in today's world.

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Author's Preface

In proposing a major research project to be sponsored by the Combat Studies Institute, my criteria were simple. The subject had to be useful to the Army and, with luck, of interest to myself as well. Ideally, the topic would combine my specialized training in cold war history and my current preoccupation with military operations at the low-intensity level. In selecting my subject, several topics came to mind but were discarded for one reason or another: the U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1958 had already been covered in a Leavenworth Paper, Vietnam was too broad a subject to treat adequately in monograph form, and Army activities in preparation for an invasion of Cuba during the missile crisis remained too sensitive and highly classified to receive more than brief consideration.

One case study, however, showed considerable potential: the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965. The utilitarian value of studying the Dominican crisis was obvious for several reasons. To begin with, it presented a logical sequel to Leavenworth Paper No. 3—Dr. Roger Spiller's *"Not War But Like War": The American Intervention in Lebanon.*[1] Both case studies, in today's terminology, meet the criteria of peacetime contingency and peacekeeping operations. As with Lebanon in 1958, the Dominican intervention was a joint operation. In general terms, many of the deficiencies revealed in joint planning, command and control, coordination, intelligence, communications, and deployment for Lebanon plagued the Dominican venture as well, despite U.S. efforts to remove the causes of these problems during the interval between the two interventions. Many of these problems have yet to be resolved satisfactorily and, for this reason alone, deserve further analysis.

There is another similarity between the two operations. Dr. Spiller, in his Lebanon study, emphasizes the discrepancy between "operational military plans" and "the realities of operational practice."[2] The same discrepancy certainly affected the marines and paratroopers who entered the Dominican Republic. Hurried planning, poor intelligence, inadequate briefings, and unfounded rumors created in the combat soldiers' minds a simplistic perception of what would confront them once they arrived in the objective area. When the complex reality of the Dominican civil war became apparent to the soldiers and their superiors, they had to demonstrate flexibility and common sense in adapting to the situation. Most soldiers retained their initial convictions as to who constituted the "good guys" and the "bad guys." Adaptation came more in the realm of what duties the soldiers would be called on to perform. Except for the frequent firefights with snipers, combat was rare. Instead, combat units found themselves distributing food, performing a variety of civic action programs, and, within weeks after their arrival, trying to maintain peace between warring Dominican factions until diplomats could arrange a political settlement. Ultimately, the marines and paratroopers made the necessary accommodations to reality. They were, after all, professionals with a mission to accomplish. Still, many of them, in command and on the line, never fully understood why they could not effect a military solution to the crisis, and all resented the avalanche of politically motivated restrictions that flew in the face of military tradition and, in some cases, made it difficult for them to defend themselves.

Thus, another reason for writing a paper on the Dominican crisis was to explore in more detail the causes and implications of the often inescapable incompatibility between political objectives and military considerations. Much of what would become associated in the public mind with the Vietnam War originated, or first became a source of controversy, during the Dominican crisis. Limited war theories, spawned by the Korean conflict, dictated that policymakers in Washington determine the nature, scope, and acceptable limits for military operations in the field—operations traditionally left to a theater commander's discretion. The strict application of limited war theories during the Dominican intervention undermined civilian-military relations well before the controversy became a cause célèbre in Vietnam (and the basis for many "stab-in-the-back" theories of that war).

In another area, the "credibility gap" with which President Lyndon Johnson had to contend and the souring of what had been a close, in many ways symbiotic, relationship between the military and the news media had their origins in the Dominican Republic—although they would be exacerbated in Vietnam. The Vietnam War overshadowed the Dominican intervention, and as a result, many of the controversies surrounding the latter crisis have been largely forgotten. The purpose of this monograph is not to resurrect these controversies just to prove that they existed before Vietnam became America's foreign policy obsession but, rather, to probe the causes of this friction with an eye to ameliorating instances of it in the future.

Finally, I selected the Dominican crisis because it offers insight into a basic dilemma the United States faces in Latin America today. Maintaining

friends and allies in the hemisphere depends in no small part on U.S. adherence to its pledge of nonintervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. Since the mid-1930s, U.S. presidents have largely honored that pledge, at least in terms of military intervention. The dilemma arises when the United States perceives that threats to its vital interests in Latin America can be countered only by recourse to military action. While such action may remove the security threat, it is almost certain to create a crisis in U.S.-Latin American relations. In a given crisis, many Latin American governments may be sympathetic to the U.S. concerns that might prompt intervention, but the sympathy of those governments in most cases will not be as strong as their aversion to Washington sending troops on a combat mission into a sovereign nation. The historical specter of U.S. gunboat diplomacy and interventionism in the hemisphere still casts a dark and pervasive shadow. This study will examine how, in the Dominican crisis, the Johnson administration tried a number of expedients to escape this dilemma, including the formation of a hemispheric police force.

After CSI accepted my proposal to write on the Dominican crisis, I pursued research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas, and at other archival repositories. These quests revealed that sufficient unclassified material existed to warrant further research. An excellent dissertation by Herbert Garrettson Schoonmaker and a subsequent monograph by Major Lawrence Greenberg proved invaluable to the project,[3] as did interviews with several participants in the crisis. The assistance rendered both by General Bruce Palmer, Jr. (USA, Retired), the commander of U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and by Colonel Steven Butler, currently at USACGSC, deserve special mention. The list of others to whom I am indebted is extensive, and my deepest thanks go out to all of them. Their names and institutions can be found in the notes and bibliography. As the research continued, several documents were declassified. I am especially grateful to Mr. Randall Rakers of the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, for keeping me abreast of these developments. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for making publication of this Leavenworth Paper possible. Finally, I cannot praise enough the expertise and, perhaps more important, the patience that Mr. Don Gilmore brought to editing this manuscript. The work of Elizabeth Snoke on my notes and bibliography was also indispensable.

The resulting monograph seeks to analyze the Dominican intervention within a chronological framework. I have examined U.S. involvement in the crisis at various levels, from the national command authority down to the soldiers in the streets of Santo Domingo, and have demonstrated how statesmen and soldiers acted and interacted within each level of command and between one level and another. Although the Dominican intervention was a political-military operation, the study emphasizes the military role. The political dimension is discussed extensively, but only as a vehicle for continuity or for demonstrating the political-diplomatic impact on military activities.

By way of previewing the study that follows, the first two chapters assess the history of U.S. interventionism in the Caribbean area, U.S. policy toward the Dominican Republic, the origins of the Dominican crisis, and the U.S. system for monitoring and managing the crisis. Chapters three and four treat the decision to land the marines and paratroopers and the preparations that went into the effort. Chapters five and six focus on the initial military actions by American soldiers in the country and the adjustments they had to make during the first days and weeks of the intervention. Chapter seven analyzes the activities of U.S. units once the stability operation acquired the characteristics of a peacekeeping mission. Chapter eight explores the way in which peacekeeping became a multinational operation and a political solution to the crisis finally took shape. My general findings are presented in chapter nine.

Prelude

In late April 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered U.S. marines and Army paratroopers into the Dominican Republic in America's first armed intervention in a Latin American country in three decades. LBJ insisted that the operation was necessary to prevent the establishment of another Communist country, a "second Cuba," in the Western Hemisphere. The president's justification quickly became known (and almost as quickly forgotten once Vietnam captured the headlines) as the Johnson Doctrine. In the controversy generated by the intervention, critics accused LBJ of displaying an "arrogance of power" that, in effect, repudiated the solemn pledges made by his predecessors since the 1930s not to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign countries within the hemisphere. The Johnson Doctrine, the president's detractors charged, arrogated to the United States the right to intervene unilaterally in any Latin American country that Washington judged imperiled by the threat of an imminent Communist takeover. As one protest song proclaimed, American soldiers had become "Cops of the World."

Sticklers for historical consistency might suggest that the so-called Johnson Doctrine be more appropriately labeled the Johnson Corollary, in that, like Teddy Roosevelt's earlier edict claiming for the United States a hemispheric "police power," it was but yet another twist to the tenets of the venerable Monroe Doctrine. In 1823, President James Monroe had informed the European powers that the Western Hemisphere was closed to their colonial ambitions and "alien" political systems. Over the next 140 years, American* statesmen would define U.S. interests in Latin America in terms of security, economics, politics, and regional unity, with circumstances dictating the specific issue or emphasis of the moment. But however issues and policies might shift, there remained constant the principle that no foreign power should be allowed to establish a permanent presence or acquire preponderant influence in what many Americans regarded as their back yard.

*As a rule, the term "American" is used in this study as an adjective referring to the United States and *not* to other countries in the Western Hemisphere. The exceptions to this rule are few and obvious. For example, the Organization of American States clearly refers to an agency composed of various countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Few American presidents found need to enforce the principle until the United States expelled Spain from Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898 and acquired, a few years later, the right to build and control an isthmian canal across Panama. The strategic importance of the canal and the advent of modern navies capable of launching major amphibious operations from military bases far from their home ports underscored America's need, by the turn of the century, to establish hegemony in the Caribbean area (see map 1). To remove any pretext or temptation for outside powers to intervene militarily in Latin America, the United States sought to impose stability on Central American and Caribbean countries suffering from chronic political and financial upheaval. The means for achieving this goal included diplomacy, economic leverage, and, when necessary, the deployment of American troops. In the most noteworthy interventions between 1898 and 1934, U.S. forces occupied Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua to restore order and counter what Washington perceived as external threats to U.S. security. The devastation World War I visited upon Europe also served America's hemispheric interests by further reducing foreign influence in Latin America.

By the time Franklin D. Roosevelt entered the White House in 1933, the dominant position the United States had built up in the Caribbean region enabled the president to eschew gunboat diplomacy and inaugurate the Good Neighbor Policy. U.S. troops withdrew from Nicaragua and Haiti, and American statesmen formally renounced the "right" to intervene militarily in the affairs of Latin American countries. The consequent improvement in U.S.-Latin American relations enabled North and South America to stand virtually united against the emerging Fascist threat to world peace and hemispheric security. In various ways, World War II reinforced in Washington's eyes the advantages of working through a multilateral, inter-American system.[1]

When world war gave way to cold war, the paramount goal of U.S. policy in the hemisphere became that of insulating Latin America from Soviet-Communist penetration. So as not to antagonize potential allies to the south, Roosevelt's successor, President Harry S. Truman, reaffirmed America's adherence to the Good Neighbor Policy and the principle of nonintervention. U.S. statesmen also worked with their Latin American counterparts to create a regional mechanism for countering the Communist threat. The thrust of this cooperative effort was decidedly military. The Rio Treaty of 1947 declared that an attack on one American republic would be regarded by the signatories as an attack on them all. The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), approved the following year, strengthened hemispheric solidarity and provided an instrument for the enactment of military measures under the collective security clauses of the Rio Treaty. Truman's appeals for a U.S. program to standardize weapons and equip and train the military of Latin America met with little success until the Korean War prompted Congress to pass the Mutual Security Act of 1951. Title IV of this act extended the existing Military Assistance Program (MAP) to Latin America. A series of bilateral treaties between the

Map 1. The Caribbean region

United States and the nations receiving this assistance helped transform what had been a meager effort involving sales from existing military stocks into a comprehensive program that would better protect the hemisphere from outside attack.

These regional defense measures integrated Latin America into Truman's policy of containing communism. Latin American heads of government endorsed the arrangements, partly because they, too, shared Washington's

concern over Communist expansion. More important, as leaders of underdeveloped nations, they hoped that their cooperation on security matters would prompt a grateful ally to approve large-scale economic aid and commodity agreements that would help to diversify and expand the industrial base of Latin American economies. Hopes were quickly dashed; there would be no quid pro quo. While acknowledging that economic conditions in Latin America provided a tempting target for Communist agitators, American officials bluntly told Latin American leaders that limited U.S. resources and more pressing commitments elsewhere precluded a replication within the inter-American system of the Marshall Plan of massive economic aid to Europe. Instead, Latin American governments would have to attract private investment and rely on internal market forces to stimulate economic development.[2]

Although Truman's Republican opponents often criticized his policies toward Latin America as inadequate, little changed in 1953 when Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first GOP president in twenty years.[3] The new administration eloquently proclaimed its determination to help southern neighbors solve their problems, but the rhetorical fanfare heralded few new initiatives. Advocates of greater economic aid to Latin America saw their case collapse in the face of the administration's fiscal conservatism and infatuation with private enterprise as the cure for underdevelopment. When Eisenhower and his advisers discussed Latin America in 1953 and 1954, they were troubled most by the situation in Guatemala, where a Left-leaning—some U.S. officials said Communist—government triggered the hemisphere's first cold war crisis. Preoccupied as was his predecessor with events in Europe and Asia, Eisenhower sought to end the crisis expeditiously by having the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) engineer the downfall of the offending regime.[4] After the success of the CIA-sponsored coup, Latin American affairs reverted to their traditional place low on America's cold war agenda, there to remain barring new hemispheric crises that would accord them a higher priority.

A series of crises erupted during Eisenhower's second term that ultimately forced the president to reassess his policy toward Latin America. The first hint of impending trouble appeared in the mid-1950s, when the Kremlin launched an economic offensive calculated to win the allegiance of the world's underdeveloped countries. Eisenhower and his advisers worried that Soviet offers of aid and technical assistance might prove irresistible to Latin American republics struggling to remain solvent. Concern deepened when Vice President Richard M. Nixon, during a tour of several South American countries in 1958, encountered hostile, anti-American crowds, including one in Caracas from which he barely escaped with his life. Concern finally turned to alarm during 1959 and 1960, when Fidel Castro, having overthrown the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, employed harsh measures and increasingly anti-American rhetoric to consolidate his power.

While Castro's advocacy of radical economic and social change troubled Washington, it was his pledge to export revolution throughout Latin America and his apparent willingness to open his country to Soviet influence

Military Review

Fidel Castro leads a group of guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra

that convinced several State Department and CIA officials that Cuba would become a Communist state aligned with the USSR. Eisenhower was not convinced that Castro was himself a Communist, but that hardly mattered. From Washington's perspective, the Russians, without recourse to force but in violation of the Monroe Doctrine, were establishing a foothold in Cuba from which they could more easily promote internal subversion in an area where one of the most stable commodities was instability. Something had to be done to shore up Latin America and to eliminate the Cuban threat.

Eisenhower's response to these developments took several forms during his last two years in office. Largely because of Nixon's harrowing experience in South America, the administration conceded that private investment alone could not stimulate the level of economic growth needed to steel Latin Americans against Communist violence and subversion. Accordingly, the United States acquiesced in the establishment of the Inter-American Development Bank, a regional agency that would provide greater assistance to the hemisphere's underdeveloped countries. After Castro entered Havana,

the National Security Council updated policy statements that, while reaffirming America's nonintervention pledge, indicated that in certain circumstances the United States would take whatever "political, economic, or military actions [it] deemed appropriate" to sever close ties between a Latin American state and the Soviet Union.[5]

The president certainly deemed covert operations an appropriate form of action for dealing with the situation, and in the spring of 1960, his patience with Castro exhausted, Eisenhower approved a CIA plan to train Cuban exiles for paramilitary operations against the Castro regime.[6] He also struck at Cuba's sugar quota in the United States and, through diplomatic channels, sought Latin American support for further sanctions against Castro. Most governments resisted the request: their commitment to the principle of nonintervention, or their reluctance to challenge Castro's charismatic appeal, overrode Washington's entreaties. The few leaders who heeded the call tended to set conditions on the scope and application of the proposed sanctions. The conditions served to intensify a debate already underway within the American government concerning the most vulnerable aspect of U.S. policy toward Latin America: the support of right-wing dictatorships.

Although U.S. and Latin American leaders often spoke of democracy as if it were the prevailing political system in the hemisphere, in too many instances, democratic trappings provided only the flimsiest cover for the authoritarian rule of strongmen and military juntas. During the formative years of the cold war, these regimes tended to be right wing and repressive, causing more than a few U.S. officials to squirm over Washington's attachment to this dictator or that. But democracy, it could be rationalized, while certainly the preferred system of government for the hemisphere, simply lacked deep roots in Latin America's political tradition. The United States had, in times past, challenged that authoritarian tradition, but by and large, efforts to teach southern neighbors "to elect good men" had generated more anti-Americanism than enduring commitments to popular government. Because Communists could exploit the tenuous nature of both democracy and progressive change in Latin America, the safe course for an American administration, by this reasoning, was to support right-wing regimes so long as they posed no threat to U.S. security and economic interests, remained dependable allies, and established barriers to Communist totalitarianism.

Washington's acceptance of this uncomfortable but convenient relationship could not easily survive the regional turbulence of the late fifties. Chronic economic woes, growing social unrest, and rising expectations in Latin America intensified demands for change that regimes committed to the status quo could not easily meet without undermining the foundations of their own power. As the rigidity inherent in the right-wing systems became apparent, there arose the unsettling prospect that, instead of erecting bulwarks to communism, U.S.-supported dictatorships might be paving a pathway to power for left-of-center movements.

Authoritarian regimes in Columbia, Peru, and Venezuela were the first to succumb to reformist groups, the political complexion of which caused

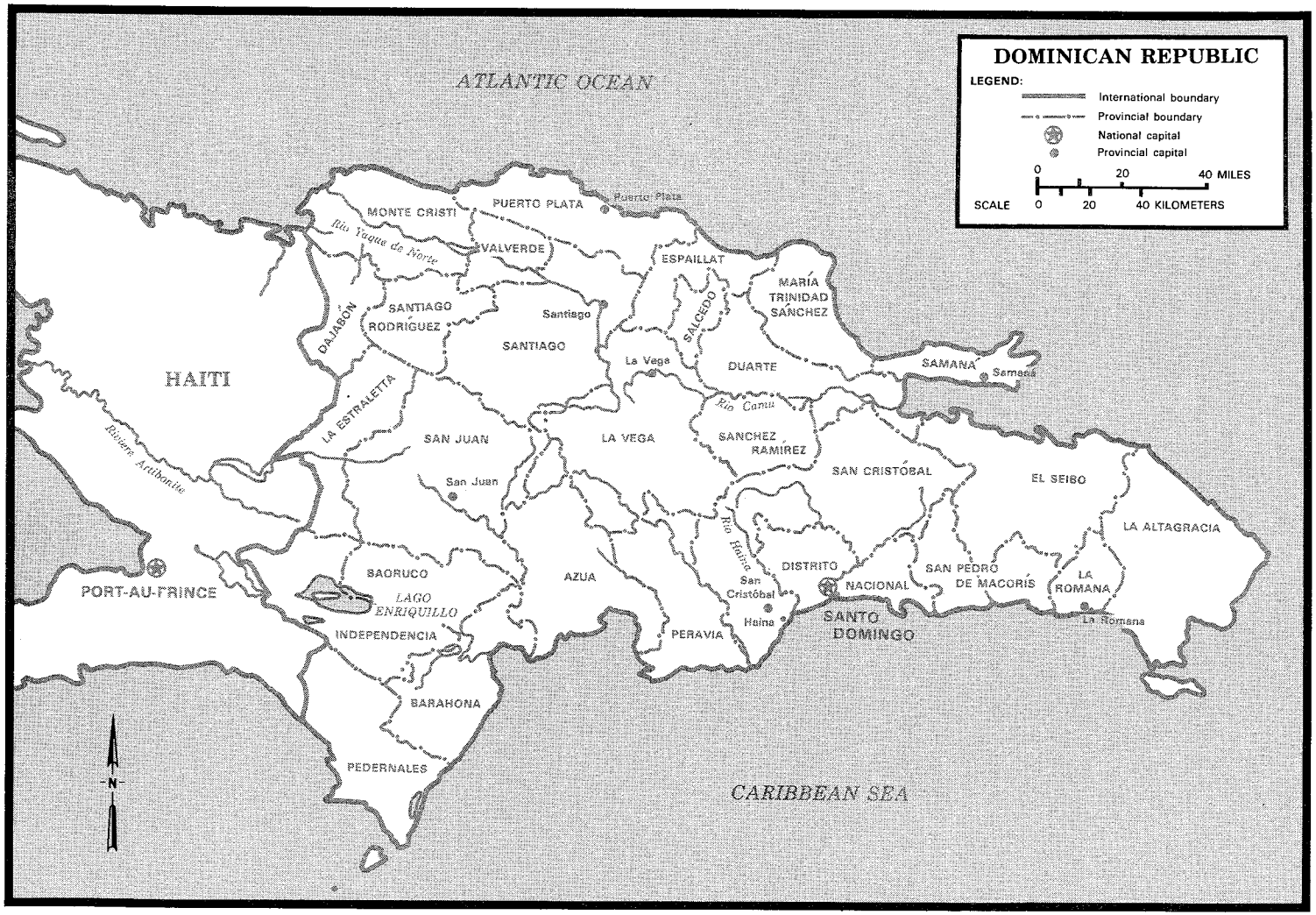
some distress among conservative officials in Washington. But it was Nixon's ordeal in South America and, more important, the excitement generated throughout Latin America by Castro's charisma and revolutionary rhetoric that forced the Eisenhower administration to reassess its policies toward right-wing dictators. In 1958, Eisenhower imposed an arms embargo on Batista—a protest against the increasing brutality of the Cuban regime, but a gesture diluted by the continuation of U.S. military training programs and other visible signs of American support.

Not until confronted with Batista's defeat and Castro's call for revolution did Ike truly realize that his hopes for preventing the spread of communism in the hemisphere hinged on the willingness of his administration to support reform movements in Latin America—even those to the left of center—and to distance itself from allies on the extreme right.[7] Suddenly, progressive leaders such as Rómulo Betancourt in Venezuela and José Figueres in Costa Rica found that they had influence in Washington and that they could use it as leverage to exact a price for their support of U.S.-sponsored sanctions against Castro. The United States, they insisted, must condemn all dictatorial regimes in Latin America, both of the Left and of the Right, not just the government of Cuba. Of the remaining right-wing candidates for censure, the one that came most readily to mind was the malevolent dictatorship of Rafael Leoñidas Trujillo Molina, the strongman of the Dominican Republic (see map 2).

* * *

Trujillo seemed but the latest testament to the sad commentary that Dominican history comprises a succession of foreign occupations, domestic tyrants, coups, countercoups, dictatorships, and revolutions—broken occasionally by unsuccessful experiments in democracy. By one count, the Dominican Republic had 123 rulers, mostly military men, from its discovery in 1492 until Trujillo. Chaos, political factionalism, corruption, and economic instability continuously wracked the country, contributing to the sense of resignation, fatalism, and low self-esteem that engulfed large segments of the population.[8]

The United States played but a small role in Dominican affairs until the early twentieth century, when changing security interests rendered Hispaniola strategically important.[9] Lodged between Cuba to the west and Puerto Rico to the east, the island occupied a position along the Atlantic approach to the Panama Canal. In 1905, the fear that Santo Domingo's chronic financial crises would provoke European intervention led U.S. and Dominican officials to establish, by mutual agreement, a U.S. receivership over Dominican customs. This arrangement brought only temporary stability, and a decade later, against the backdrop of the war in Europe, President Woodrow Wilson ordered U.S. marines into the country in 1916 to impose order and counter German influence. The American military occupation of the Dominican Republic lasted eight years. During most of that time, U.S. military governors tried to reshape Dominican politics, economic relationships, and society in such a way as to institutionalize peace and stabil-



Map 2. The Dominican Republic

ity. Drawing on and elaborating military experience in similar situations, the marines initiated public works programs together with reforms affecting health and sanitation, education, government administration, the judicial and revenue systems, tax laws, land titles, and agriculture. The occupation policy was comprehensive and well intentioned but obtained mostly transitory results. When the marines withdrew in 1924, the country's political, economic, and social structure remained fundamentally unchanged and as potentially unstable as ever.[10]

Although the occupation failed to impose stability on the country, it left behind a vehicle that would accomplish that goal, though not in the way intended by Washington or the marines. To maintain order and democracy after their departure, the marines had organized and trained a native national guard and had tried to imbue it with the professional and apolitical standards to which U.S. soldiers conformed. But Trujillo controlled the *guardia* and turned it into a partisan instrument that, together with the secret police and an army he created from the National Police in 1928, allowed him to take control of the country in 1930. "Thus began," according to one account, "the reign of one of the earliest—and longest surviving—totalitarian dictators of the 20th century," a reign characterized by nepotism, terror, murder, malfeasance, torture, concentration camps, repression, corruption, commercial monopolies, and the financial aggrandizement of the Trujillo family.[11]

Dominicans, then as now, regarded Trujillo with ambivalence: they feared his methods and resented the pain he inflicted on many of his countrymen, but they admired the economic development, the prosperity, the political stability, and the national discipline and prestige his rule fostered. U.S. policymakers shared the ambivalence. Franklin Roosevelt allegedly referred to Trujillo as a son of a bitch, but "our son of a bitch." One of Truman's secretaries of state, James F. Byrnes, described Trujillo to the president as "the most ruthless, unprincipled, and efficent dictator in this hemisphere," the head of a "completely unsavory" regime. Byrnes advised Truman to "avoid even the appearance of lending him any support." The U.S. Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo (Santo Domingo) echoed this sentiment early in the Eisenhower years in a message that referred to "Trujillo's psychosis" and urged "greater efforts to prevent identification of the United States with Trujillo in the minds of the Dominican people in light of his growing excesses and the likelihood that he has only a few more years."[12] Yet Trujillo clung to power. He proclaimed himself the hemisphere's leading anti-Communist and placated the skeptics in Washington by ensuring domestic stability. He also cultivated (some would say bribed)[13] U.S. congressmen, hired lobbyists in the United States, and flaunted U.S. military and economic assistance and the laudatory public statements of prominent Americans as endorsements of his personal rule.

Trujillo's deftness in soliciting American support could not continue indefinitely. By the late 1950s, he had become too much of an international embarrassment for Washington to tolerate. In 1956, the dictator's henchmen kidnapped a Spanish scholar teaching in the United States. The scholar

had written a scathing biography of Trujillo, a "crime" for which he and two unwitting pawns paid with their lives. Revelations regarding the affair outraged many Americans. Trujillo's continued military assistance to Batista after the United States had terminated arms shipments to the Cuban dictator further antagonized the Eisenhower administration. But it was Trujillo's intrigues against the Betancourt government, including an attempt to assassinate the Venezuelan president, that led to OAS and U.S. sanctions against the Dominican dictator in 1960. As signs of its displeasure, the United States cut economic aid and broke diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic. An even stronger measure went unannounced, as President Eisenhower once again turned to the CIA, in this case authorizing it to assist Dominican opposition groups conspiring to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship. As these groups made clear, the regime could not be toppled unless the dictator himself were assassinated. "If you recall Dracula," one conspirator emphasized, "you will remember it was necessary to drive a stake through his heart to prevent a continuation of his crimes."[14]

Thus, as the Eisenhower administration came to a close, it was engaged, through of variety of overt and covert tactics, in trying to rid the hemisphere of extremism on the right and left, as personified by Trujillo and Castro, respectively. As the president informed a small group of advisers, he would "like to see them both sawed off."[15]

* * *

Eisenhower's tentative reassessment of U.S. policy toward Latin America gave way to major initiatives in the region under his successor, John F. Kennedy. By the time Kennedy became president in January 1961, the main battlefield in the cold war had clearly shifted from Europe—where only the anomaly of Berlin threatened a superpower crisis—to the world's underdeveloped countries, most of which were engaged in the process of gaining or adjusting to independence from Western colonial powers. Although Latin American republics had been independent for some time, they shared certain characteristics with the newly emerging nations: economic backwardness, social fragmentation, political instability, a maldistribution of wealth and power, rising expectations, and an increasingly militant nationalism. Politically active labor unions and student associations and an emerging middle class were more apparent in Latin America than elsewhere in the underdeveloped world, but their existence did not guarantee the kind of stability Washington desired. As Nixon's tour of South America had demonstrated, militant nationalism as espoused by elements of these groups could exhibit anticapitalistic, anti-American overtones by fixing on such themes as Latin America's neocolonial dependency on the United States.

The "sweep of nationalism," the new president believed, was "the most potent factor in foreign affairs today." Long before entering the White House, Kennedy had expressed fears about the Communists exploiting Third World nationalism to further their own universalist programs. These fears were reinforced just two weeks before his inauguration when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev proclaimed Russian support for "wars of national libera-

tion" in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Confronted by Khrushchev's challenge and Castro's revolutionary fervor, New Frontiersmen surpassed Eisenhower in raising Latin America from the mire of U.S. neglect. As Kennedy was noted to have observed, "the most critical spot on the globe nowadays was Latin America, where the situation seemed made-to-order for the communists."[16]

Kennedy christened his vessel for Latin American stability the "Alliance for Progress." Conceptually, the Alliance differed little from U.S. programs designed for other parts of the Third World, where, according to foreign policy experts, demands for change—defined as modernization—were inevitable, and right-wing regimes that opposed change, atavistic. Support for the status quo portended dangerous consequences, but so, too, from Washington's standpoint, did the Communist alternative of forcing change through violent revolution. The role of the United States was to promote change through peaceful evolution—the "middle way" between reaction and revolution.

This was hardly a novel idea in American foreign policy, but Kennedy differed from its previous proponents in the amount of U.S. assistance he was willing to countenance in the form of foreign aid and in the ideological latitude he was willing to tolerate on the part of recipient countries. In the Alliance for Progress, Latin America would at last have its Marshall Plan. Through a cooperative venture entailing massive economic aid from public and private sources and the enactment of fundamental social and economic reforms by aid recipients—preferably democratic, nationalistic governments of the center and non-Communist Left—*La Alianza* promised to promote economic development, social stability, and, where it did not exist, political democracy. Planners optimistically (and naively) projected that Latin American economies could be placed on a self-sustaining basis within a decade. The peaceful transformation to modernity would bring stability to Latin America, and stability would insulate the hemisphere from communism.

The emphasis on *gradual* change meant that developing countries had to be protected in the short term from right-wing procrastination and from Communist-inspired sabotage, guerrilla warfare, and coups d'état. U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military leverage seemed ample for overcoming the Right's resistance, while the strategic doctrine of Flexible Response devised by the Kennedy administration offered several options for countering the full range of Communist tactics.

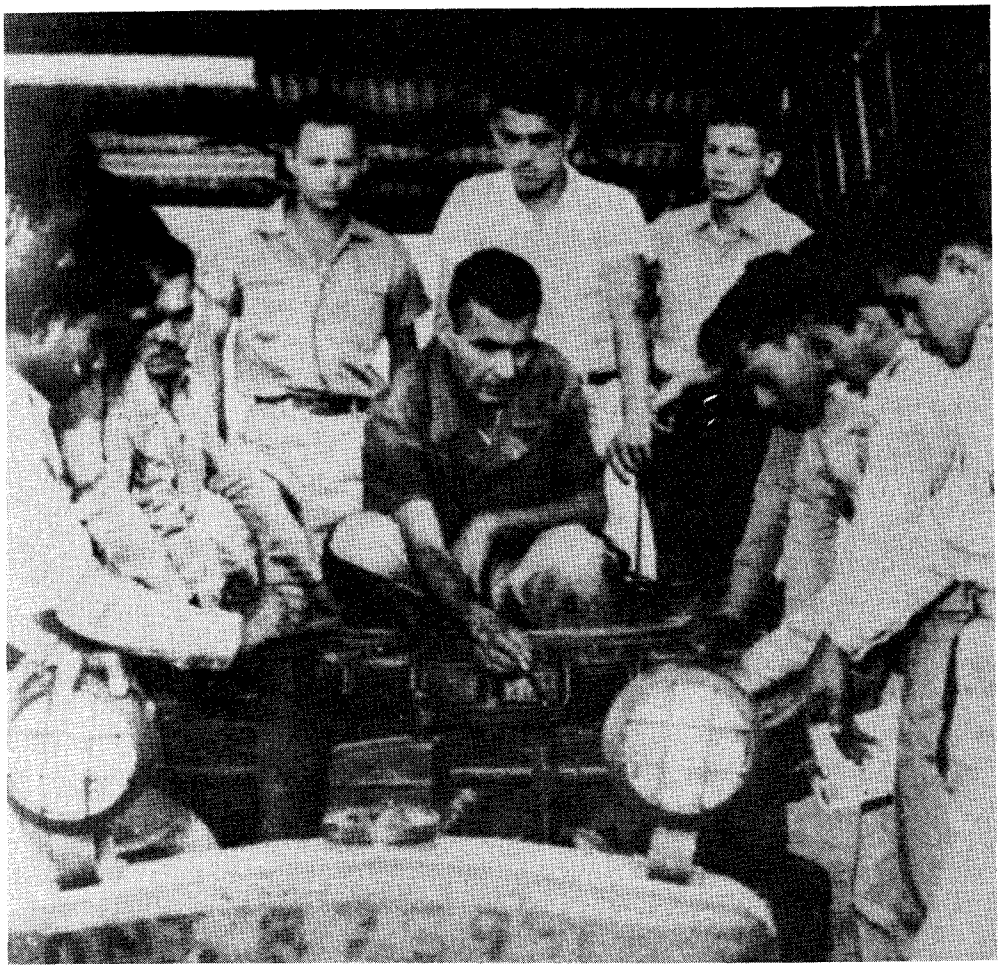
In the president's opinion, the most effective method for checking Communist subversion and guerrilla warfare in Latin America was counterinsurgency.[17] In its broadest sense, counterinsurgency encompassed a variety of economic, social, political, psychological, and military activities that required the expertise and interaction of various U.S. government agencies. The Agency for International Development (AID), for example, would oversee economic assistance to Latin American countries, while its Office of Public Safety would train indigenous police in interrogation techniques and riot control. The United States Information Agency (USIA) would counteract

Communist propaganda by assisting host governments in improving their image at home and abroad, while the CIA would gather intelligence and engage in covert and paramilitary activities.

The Latin American armed forces had the key role to play in counterinsurgency. Many of President Kennedy's advisers propounded the then-popular thesis that the younger and midlevel officers within the Latin American military represented a new breed of technically skilled professionals who were not only receptive to civilian democracy but also ready to serve as willing agents of the Alliance for Progress. Specifically, these officers would engage in civic action and counterguerrilla activities designed to win popular support for their governments and to defeat hard-core rebels for whom reformist programs were anathema.

Latin American officers who lacked sufficient training and experience in counterinsurgency could receive it in service schools in the United States or at the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. In most cases, Military Assistance Advisory Groups (MAAGs) operating in eighteen Latin American countries under MAP-authorized bilateral treaties would provide the necessary training. (The original rationale for MAP had been hemispheric defense, but a 1959 study of the program recommended a greater emphasis on internal security. The Kennedy administration accepted this shift in emphasis because it reflected the president's predilection for counterinsurgency.) To enhance the training provided by regular U.S. military advisers, small Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) of U.S. Special Forces (Green Berets) could be dispatched, on request of a host country, to provide more specialized instruction in civil affairs, psychological operations, engineering and construction, medical assistance, intelligence and interrogation, riot control, electronic security, civic action, and counterguerrilla tactics and techniques. Kennedy had resuscitated, upgraded, reoriented, and expanded the Special Forces so that by 1963, Green Berets specifically designated for MTT or other duties in Latin America were located with the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and with the Special Action Force, consisting of the 1,500-man 8th Special Forces Group augmented by specialized detachments, located in the Canal Zone.[18]

Should unconventional methods fail to eliminate the Communist threat to peaceful development in Latin America, Kennedy had the ability to conduct within the hemisphere a variety of conventional military operations ranging from a show of force to all-out U.S. intervention. Two unified (more than one service) commands had planning responsibilities for such contingencies: the newly activated United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM or SOUTHCOM), located in the Canal Zone, had Central and South America as its area of operations; the older United States Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM or LANTCOM) had the Caribbean as one of its areas of operations. A third unified command activated in 1962 acquired operational control over combat-ready army and tactical air forces within the United States. Known as the United States Strike Command (USSTRICOM or STRICOM), it was responsible for providing a rapidly deployable force for use in emergencies anywhere in the world, including Latin



Army Information Digest

Civic action at work: a training class in Bolivia during the early 1960s

America. STRICOM had operational control over two Army corps, the III Armored and XVIII Airborne, and the Air Force's Tactical Air Command (TAC). Selected units from these groups could be employed in a crisis either to reinforce other unified commands or to carry out contingency operations assigned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to STRICOM itself.[19] Also available for deployment in Latin America were U.S. Navy and Marine Corps units.

The array of U.S. conventional and unconventional military power available for use in Latin America presented a sobering backdrop to Kennedy's pledge to support democracy and to fight communism in the hemisphere. During his three years in office, the president would not hesitate to employ the military option in his attempt to honor that pledge.

* * *

Photo No. ST-A5-3-61, John F. Kennedy Library

President Kennedy at Fort Bragg greeting paratroops during a combat readiness demonstration

On taking office, Kennedy inherited from Eisenhower the two covert operations aimed at ridding the Caribbean of Castro and Trujillo. The Cuban venture turned into a fiasco at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. Although Kennedy recouped some of his spent credibility the following year by imposing a naval blockade that forced the Soviet Union to withdraw nuclear missiles from Cuba, Castro remained in power. Trujillo was not so fortunate. Scarcely a month after the Bay of Pigs, Dominican gunmen ambushed and killed the dictator.[20] All but two of the conspirators forfeited their lives, as the military and the Trujillo family took an exceptionally grisly revenge. Killing the assassins might have had a therapeutic effect on the family, but it could not guarantee that the political void left by the dictator's death would be filled by his followers. Anything seemed possible, especially if the United States should become involved in the succession crisis. In Washington, Kennedy was determined to do just that. His enumeration of the political possibilities in the Dominican Republic has become a classic statement of the cold war dilemma facing American foreign policy toward the Third World. "There are three possibilities in descending order of preference," the president calculated, "a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime or a Castro regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid the third."[21]

Soon after the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy—to avoid the third possibility—approved contingency plans for U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic

should the Communists attempt a coup d'état. Then, in the days and weeks following Trujillo's assassination, JFK put pressure on the country's nominal president, Joaquín Balaguer; the late dictator's son, Rafael ("Ramfis"); and the Dominican armed forces to liberalize their policies and prepare the country for elections. Continued economic sanctions and the presence of U.S. naval units and a Marine brigade (later reduced to a battalion) in Dominican waters conveyed the seriousness of Kennedy's intentions. The Balaguer regime responded with token reforms and promises of more to come, but these tentative movements were placed in jeopardy when two of Trujillo's brothers, after receiving an urgent summons from Ramfis, returned to the country in mid-November determined to restore the family to power. Kennedy's secretary of state, Dean Rusk, issued a public warning that the United States would not "remain idle" in the face of such defiance. Kennedy again deployed a large naval task force off the Dominican coast in plain sight of Santo Domingo. As U.S. jets flew overhead and the ships broadcast warnings that the task force's marines were ready to intervene, diplomats served an ultimatum to the Trujillos and their military followers not to initiate armed action. Dominican officers backing Balaguer supported U.S. goals by bombing Trujillist troops designated to spearhead the coup. Realizing that the situation was hopeless, Ramfis left the country, followed soon thereafter by the "wicked uncles."[22]

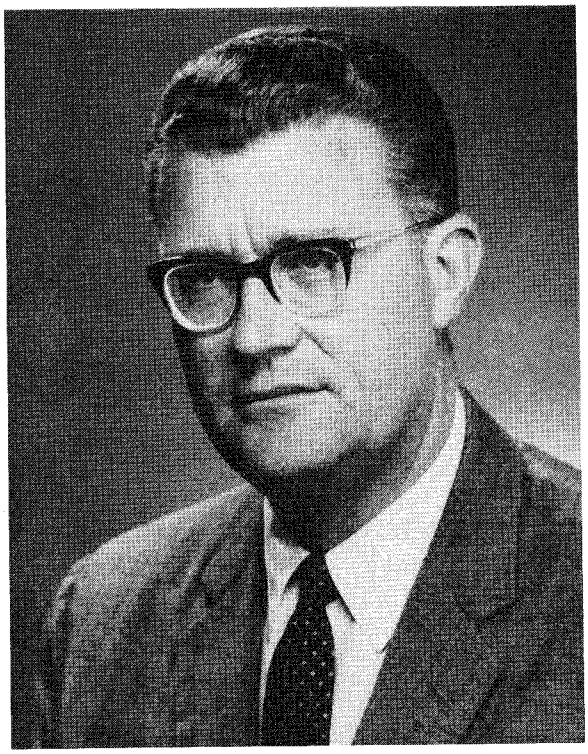
With the Trujillos gone, Balaguer began to retreat from his democratic pledges. In this, he fared no better than the family he had once served. Washington helped to force his resignation and then blocked a military attempt to restore him to power. Finally, in early 1962, Kennedy regarded the prospects for turning the Dominican Republic into a "showcase of democracy" under the Alliance for Progress as promising enough to warrant U.S. recognition of a Dominican Council of State that had promised elections for the country. He also resumed U.S. economic and other assistance. To enhance the chances for democracy and order, the administration attempted to build up the Dominican police force and to reduce the size and pro-Trujillo sympathies of the regular armed forces. The MAAG for the Dominican Republic was reopened, and a new military assistance agreement signed. The president, according to one source, perceived the Dominican Republic as a "testing ground between the revolutionary ideology of Cuba and [the] democratic ideals of open societies."[23]

The major obstacle to meaningful democratic elections was posed not by Trujillo loyalists—U.S. threats could hold them in check—but by the late dictator's political legacy. His thirty-year reign had left the country bereft of an organized and responsible political opposition. In 1962, no fewer than eight major parties emerged in contention for the presidential and national assembly elections. The parties spanned the political spectrum from conservative to Communist, but the two with the largest following were the right of center *Unión Cívica Nacional* and the left of center *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (*PRD*)—the latter founded by Juan Bosch, an idealist, poet, and reformer. To the surprise of American officials, Bosch won the presidency by a convincing 2 to 1 margin. His inauguration took place in January 1963.

Herold Ober Associates

Juan Bosch campaigning for the presidency of the Dominican Republic

At first, Washington lavished Bosch with economic, technical, and military aid (the latter included increasing the MAAG from five to forty-five advisers). Bosch, for his part, published a constitution—a seemingly propitious beginning for an experiment in U.S.-style democracy. But Washington's optimism soon waned as the Dominican president proved an inept politician and administrator. Having spent the twenty-four years before the election in exile, Bosch had lost touch with the realities of his country's predicament. Few in the Kennedy administration would have quarreled with George Ball's recollection of Bosch as "unrealistic, arrogant, and erratic. I thought him incapable of running even a small social club, much less a country in turmoil. He did not seem to me a Communist . . . but merely a muddle-headed, anti-American pedant committed to unattainable social reforms."[24] After only a few months in office, Bosch had managed to alienate American officials and most groups within his own country. His 1963 constitution failed to guarantee privileges to the Catholic church and contained a clause prohibiting the expulsion of Dominicans from the country—a technique, according to one author, that "had come to be regarded as an inalienable right of the party in power for getting rid of national troublemakers."[25] In addition, Bosch's reform program foundered—to the dismay of the Left—while his refusal to take a strong stand against radicals alarmed



National Archives

W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., the new U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic

Washington, conservative elements in Dominican society, and anti-Communists within the armed forces. With the government degenerating into chaos, an archconservative segment of the Dominican military led by Colonel Elías Wessin y Wessin overthrew Bosch in September 1963.

The coup leaders promised free elections, banned Communist activities, declared Bosch's constitution "nonexistent," and replaced Bosch with a civilian Triumvirate. The new government played on American fears of continued chaos in the Dominican Republic. As one Dominican general put it, "If the United States refused assistance, the regime would go it alone. If this meant terror and civil war and Castro/Communist guerrilla warfare, the regime would do its best. With the United States' help, it might win; without it, it might lose."[26] Despite these attempts to manipulate Washington, the United States severed diplomatic relations, suspended aid, and recalled most of its official personnel. But the displeasure expressed by U.S. officials was halfhearted and short lived. Few bemoaned Bosch's forced exile, and Kennedy, by now disillusioned with the prospects for democracy and the progress of the Alliance—not only in the Dominican Republic but throughout much of Latin America—decided to recognize the new government.[27] Before the decision could be implemented, though, President Kennedy was assassinated.

Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's successor, waited a month before recognizing the Triumvirate and dispatching a new ambassador, W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., to Santo Domingo. The pause was intended to deflect speculation that,

by recognizing a government that had come to power through a military coup, the new president was deviating from the course Kennedy had charted toward Latin America. Not that such speculation would have been idle. The decision to recognize the latest Dominican regime might have been Kennedy's, but whereas JFK had acted out of disillusionment, LBJ acted more out of indifference, as would become apparent early in his administration. Preoccupied with the Great Society at home and the growing war in Vietnam, Johnson left hemispheric affairs to the State Department's assistant secretary of inter-American affairs, Thomas Mann, a conservative and fellow Texan. Under Mann, the emphasis the Kennedy people had placed on structural reform and political democracy in Latin America gave way to a different set of priorities: economic development and the protection of American business and security interests. One commitment survived the transition intact: LBJ, like his predecessor, had no intention of allowing a "second Cuba" to be established in the hemisphere, and to that end, he would employ military force if necessary. In time, the unhappy course of events in the Dominican Republic presented him with the opportunity to demonstrate his determination on this point.