

## The Caribbean Triangle:

Betancourt, Castro, and Trujillo and U.S. Foreign Policy,

1958–1963

For historians of U.S. foreign relations, it is a revealing statement from a quotable president. As recounted by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his loving biography, *A Thousand Days*, President John F. Kennedy on 7 June 1961 listed U.S. policy options for the Dominican Republic in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo. Kennedy said, "There are three possibilities in descending order of preference: 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." Whether this is another case of "Camelot myth-making" cannot be precisely determined. The memorandum of record has Kennedy laconically concluding that "the last thing we wanted was a Castro type regime."<sup>1</sup> In any case, for Schlesinger, Kennedy's attitude toward the Dominican Republic represented another notable example of the administration's enlightened anticommunism.

Beyond serving as testimony to presidential wisdom, Kennedy's reported statement can be used as a reliable guide for analyzing the Latin American policy of the United States during the intense years of the Cold War and, indeed, for the twentieth century. As historians of inter-American relations have pointed out, the United States has consistently attempted to exclude extracontinental powers from the Western Hemisphere and to maintain its political and economic hegemony in the region. Stable, orderly regimes would protect U.S. interests, for they removed a temptation for foreigners to intervene and fostered a healthy business climate. U.S. officials often professed that security, prosperity, and democracy were intertwined and that decent, democratic regimes would produce the good life for

---

\*The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation.

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), 769; official quoted is Lincoln Gordon (U.S. ambassador to Brazil), Gordon Oral History, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts; Richard Goodwin memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, 8 June 1961, National Security File, Country File (hereafter NSFCO): Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General 1-6/61, Kennedy Library.

all hemispheric neighbors. But promoting elections, popular participation, and respect for civil and human rights has been subordinate to the goal of preserving peace and order in Latin America.<sup>2</sup> During the period from 1958 to 1963, U.S. policies toward democrats, like Rómulo Betancourt, and dictators, like Trujillo and his henchmen, hinged, as President Kennedy confessed, on the tactical question of which type of government and leader would be most effective in thwarting Fidel Castro.

In the mid-1950s, neither democracy nor decency characterized governments throughout Latin America. Dictators, like Trujillo, Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, and Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, controlled thirteen of the twenty Latin American republics. The Eisenhower administration found no fault with these tyrants, judging them dependable Cold War allies. The Latin American rulers vigorously backed the United States in international forums, cooperated militarily, and welcomed U.S. trade and investment. President Dwight D. Eisenhower once observed to NSC members that "in the long run the United States must back democracies."<sup>3</sup> But, prior to 1959, the president avoided raising questions of human or civil rights with any Latin American dictator. In fact, he awarded the Legion of Merit, the nation's highest award for foreign personages, to Pérez Jiménez and Peruvian strongman Manuel Odría, in gratitude for their Cold War support.

The Eisenhower administration's smug confidence in dictators was abruptly broken in 1958. Throughout Latin America in the late 1950s, regimes began to disintegrate. The dictators had not been able to produce the stability and economic growth that they had promised. Latin Americans tired of the rampant repression and corruption that characterized military rule. The dictators were also undermined by the collapse of their economies. The U.S. economic recession of 1957-58 reverberated throughout the hemisphere. The dictators were replaced by leaders, such as Argentina's Arturo Frondizi, whose political base was the urban middle sectors and whose programs included land reform, popular education, social services, and constitutionalism.<sup>4</sup>

U.S. political and intelligence analysts neither anticipated the mass uprisings that unseated dictators nor understood the contempt in which Latin Americans held U.S. policy. For example, in December 1957, a month before Pérez Jiménez's overthrow, the embassy in Caracas predicted that the military dictator would hold power, for "in the absence of democratic traditions,

---

2. Federico G. Gil, "The Kennedy-Johnson Years," in *United States Policy in Latin America: A Quarter Century of Crisis and Challenge, 1961-1986*, ed. John D. Martz (Lincoln, NE, 1988), 3-27; Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine* (New York, 1994), 3-19; Paul W. Drake, "From Good Men to Good Neighbors: 1912-1932," in *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America*, ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal (Baltimore, 1991), 3-40.

3. Memorandum of discussion at the 237th meeting of the NSC, 17 February 1955, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957* (Washington, 1987), 6:2-5 (hereafter *FRUS*, with year and volume number).

4. Tad Szulc, *Twilight of the Tyrants* (New York, 1959).

the majority of Venezuelans have developed what appears to be an apathetic or acquiescent attitude toward their authoritarian government." Venezuelans, however, proved to be anything but disinterested when, in May 1958, Vice President Richard M. Nixon reached Caracas to conclude his troubled tour of South America. Nixon had been harassed by law students in Montevideo, stoned by university students in Lima, and assaulted by a mob in Caracas. The demonstrators blamed the United States for Latin America's social ills, charging the Eisenhower administration with supporting repressive regimes and denying Latin America economic assistance.<sup>5</sup>

Administration officials reflexively blamed Communists for the uprisings. In a report to the cabinet, Nixon "emphasized that Communist inspiration was evident from the similarity of placards, slogans, and techniques." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles agreed that the Soviet Union had cleverly infiltrated mass political movements in Latin America. But the director of the CIA, Allen W. Dulles, challenged his brother's views, arguing that turmoil in Latin America transcended any possible political manipulation. Moreover, his agency could find no evidence that Moscow had orchestrated the Nixon incidents.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the CIA's findings, U.S. officials dreaded Latin America's democratic future. As Nixon told the NSC, the United States would normally be pleased about the expansion of democracy, but the phenomenon was occurring "in those Latin American countries which are completely lacking in political maturity." The vice president lamented that the dictators were being replaced not by the upper-class, wealthy politicians of the past but by men, like Frondizi, who "were oriented in the direction of Marxist thinking" and who were "naïve about the nature and threat of communism." Nixon had seen the simultaneous development of democracy and communism in democratic Uruguay and capitalistic Venezuela and deduced "that neither the democratic system nor the system of private enterprise is necessarily a safeguard against Communism." The secretary of state also yearned for the old political order. Both the Middle East and Latin America were witness-

5. Dempster McIntosh (U.S. ambassador to Venezuela) to State Department, 6 December 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957* (Washington, 1987), 7:1164-67. See also Marvin R. Zahniser and W. Michael Weis, "A Diplomatic Pearl Harbor? Richard Nixon's Goodwill Mission to Latin America in 1958," *Diplomatic History* 13 (Spring 1989): 163-90.

6. Minutes of cabinet meeting, 16 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* (Washington, 1991), 5:238-39. See also Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, 1962), 183-230. For Allen Dulles's views see Dulles memorandum for secretary of state, 28 May 1958, John Foster Dulles Papers, box 8, folder: Conversations with Dulles, A. W. (Intelligence Material), Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas; Allen Dulles to John Foster Dulles, 19 June 1958, Dulles Papers, Telephone Series, box 8, folder: Telephone Conversations, 6-7/58 (5); Annex B, "CIA Intelligence Annex: Sino-Soviet Bloc Activity in Latin America," 15 April 1958, Office of the Special Assistant National Security Affairs (OSANSA), Policy Papers Subseries, box 18, folder: Office of the Coordinating Board (OCB) Progress Report on NSC 5613/1, 3 June 1958, NSC 5613 (1), Eisenhower Library; Annex C, "CIA Intelligence Annex: Sino-Soviet Bloc Activity in Latin America," 12 November 1958, OSANSA, Policy Paper Subseries, box 18, folder: OCB Progress Report on NSC 5613/1, 2 December 1958, NSC 5613/1 (1).

ing a swing away from traditional rulers and kings "in favor of a kind of dictatorship of the proletariat, which was represented by a Nasser or Sukarno, with their mass appeal."<sup>7</sup>

At least through 1958, the dire predictions of Nixon and Dulles did not generate a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward authoritarian governments and political change in Latin America. President Eisenhower responded to the Nixon/Dulles colloquy by observing that much of the world equated the term "capitalism" with "imperialism" and concluding that therefore, "we should try to coin a new phrase to represent our own modern brand of capitalism." The administration's other initiatives were similarly superficial. Eisenhower and Nixon publicly stated that the United States preferred constitutional regimes, and the administration's new NSC statement on Latin America called for giving "special encouragement" to representative governments. The administration reminded itself, however, to be alert to the Communists' tactic of masquerading their subversive goals by allying themselves with nationalistic and progressive parties.<sup>8</sup>

The administration adhered to those guidelines in its relations with Venezuela. In August 1958, President Eisenhower denounced authoritarian rule in welcoming the new Venezuelan ambassador to Washington. But the State Department coupled that welcome with stern warnings to the ruling junta not to legalize the Venezuelan Communist party. The junta, led by Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal, ignored those warnings, because Venezuelans believed a united civilian front would help keep the military in the barracks. With candidates, including Larrazábal, actually accepting the support of Venezuelan Communists during the presidential campaign, the department decided that the reform-minded, but anti-Communist, Rómulo Betancourt must win. Through former Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, who knew Betancourt well, the department offered the Venezuelan leader aid, including presumably covert assistance. A confident Betancourt apparently rejected the offer, won a decisive electoral victory, and took office in early 1959.<sup>9</sup>

Anticommunism also continued to be the predominant U.S. concern with Rafael Trujillo, although State Department officials had become exasperated with the dictator's brutality. In 1956 the dictator's henchmen kidnapped in New York City and then murdered Jesús de Galíndez, a Spanish citizen and Columbia University scholar who had written a scathing indict-

7. Nixon and Dulles quoted in memorandum of discussion of 366th meeting of NSC, 22 May 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 5:239-46.

8. Eisenhower quoted in memorandum of discussion of 366th meeting of NSC, 22 May 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 5:244; NSC-5902/1, "Statement of U.S. Policy toward Latin America," 16 February 1959, *ibid.*, 91-116.

9. See Charles R. Burrows (chargé) to State Department, 13 February 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, *Microfiche Supplement* (Washington, 1991), 5:VE3; National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 89-58, "Venezuela: Situation and Prospects," 9 September 1958, *ibid.*, VE13; and Stephen G. Rabe, *The Road to OPEC: United States Relations with Venezuela, 1919-1976* (Austin, 1982), 136-38.

ment of Trujillo. Trujillo's men then executed Charles Murphy, an aviator from Oregon who had piloted the plane that took de Galíndez from New York to the Dominican Republic. The de Galíndez-Murphy murders gained national attention through the persistent efforts of Oregon congressman Charles Porter. Trujillo's agents responded to the uproar by arresting and murdering in prison Octavio de la Maza, a pilot and friend of Murphy. Dominican officials claimed that de la Maza left a suicide note in which he took responsibility for Murphy's death.<sup>10</sup>

Responding to congressional pressure and what it disparagingly characterized as "liberal elements in the United States and Latin America," the State Department reluctantly investigated the murders. In one diplomat's view, the facts of the case demonstrated that the Dominican Republic's conduct was "below the level of recognized civilian nations, certainly not much above that of the communists." Nonetheless, the administration wanted amicable relations with Trujillo because the Dominican Republic was in a strategic area, it permitted the U.S. Air Force to operate a guided missile tracking station on its territory, and it publicly supported U.S. Cold War policies. In November 1958, Secretary Dulles extended an olive branch, asking the Dominican foreign minister to remind Trujillo that the United States appreciated the Dominican Republic's anti-Communist leadership in the hemisphere.<sup>11</sup>

In 1958, officials focused neither on Venezuela nor on the Dominican Republic but on the disintegration of the Batista regime in Cuba and the growing power of the 26th of July Movement led by Fidel Castro. Throughout 1958 the United States contested Castro and his movement because it believed that the revolutionaries threatened the substantial U.S. economic interests in Cuba, which amounted to over \$1 billion in direct investments, and because it worried that Communists had infiltrated the movement. As officials in Washington concluded, "the 26th of July Movement has shown little sense of responsibility or ability needed to govern Cuba satisfactorily and its nationalistic line is [a] horse which Communists know well how to ride." Despite these fears, the Eisenhower administration took only a series of haphazard and ineffectual moves to deprive Castro of victory. In the aftermath of the Nixon trip and the congressional and public criticism of past support for dictators, the administration could

10. Jesús de Galíndez, *The Era of Trujillo: Dominican Dictator*, ed. Russell H. Fitzgibbon (Tucson, 1973). For the essential facts of the de Galíndez case see R. Richard Rubottom (acting assistant secretary of state) to Robert D. Murphy (deputy undersecretary of state for political affairs), 15 January 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957* 6:886-89. For a widely read account of the de Galíndez-Murphy murders see "The Story of a Dark International Conspiracy," *Life* 42 (25 February 1957): 24-31. For the claim regarding de la Maza see Generalissimo Rafael L. Trujillo, *The Other Side of the Galíndez Case* (New York, 1956).

11. Rubottom to Dulles, 20 February 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957* 6:907-8; Julian P. Fromer (officer in charge of Dominican Republic affairs) to Rubottom, 15 February 1957, *ibid.*, 903. See also memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Porfirio Herrera Báez (foreign minister), 7 November 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR5.

hardly embrace its man in Havana. Instead, it hoped it could find a "middle way" between Batista and Castro by persuading the dictator to step aside and schedule an election. But Batista stubbornly resisted all entreaties. In any case, U.S. officials misjudged the extent of the rot and corruption in Batista's Cuba and the appeal of the Castro movement. Ambassador Earl E. T. Smith repeatedly informed Washington that Castro lacked widespread popular support and passed along foolish reports alleging that Castro had syphilis and that his brother, Raul Castro, was a homosexual. Indeed, as late as 4:00 P.M. on 31 December 1958, just hours before Batista fled the island, administration officials still thought that they had time to find an alternative to Castro.<sup>12</sup>

Rafael Trujillo also dreaded a Castro victory. In late 1958 he urged the United States to lift its arms embargo and bolster the Batista regime in order to prevent the spread of international communism. Trujillo actually shipped small arms to the beleaguered dictator and, as he had done with Pérez Jiménez, initially granted political exile to Batista. The Dominican correctly predicted that a triumphant Castro would soon attack him. On 14 June 1959, Dominican exiles, led by Enrique Jiménez Moya, landed in the Dominican Republic. Trujillo's forces quickly routed the invaders. The exiles had been trained and equipped in Cuba, and Jiménez Moya had served as an officer in the 26th of July Movement. Castro later confessed that he supported the invasion because of his friendship with Jiménez Moya and because he detested dictators, especially Trujillo. Castro also knew that Trujillo's subordinates were training and equipping Cuban counterrevolutionary forces. Trujillo responded to the invasion by threatening to retaliate with air attacks on Cuba.<sup>13</sup>

Venezuela and Rómulo Betancourt also plotted against Trujillo, hosting and materially supporting Dominican exiles. President Betancourt was determined to overthrow his old enemy. During the 1945-1948 period, when Venezuela first experimented with democracy, Betancourt and Trujillo had

12. State Department to U.S. embassy in Cuba, 31 December 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* (Washington, 1991), 6:330-31. See also U.S. embassy in Cuba to State Department, 22 October 1958, *ibid.*, 241-42; memorandum of conversation between Smith and Andrés Rivero Agüero (president-elect), 15 November 1958, *ibid.*, 252-56; memorandum of conference in Christian Herter's office, 31 December 1958, *ibid.*, 323-29; and Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York, 1994), 109-225.

13. U.S. embassy in Dominican Republic to State Department, 15 December 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:293; Department of State to All Missions in the American Republics, 18 June 1959, *ibid.*, 535-37; memorandum of discussion at 411th meeting of NSC, 25 June 1959, *ibid.*, 5:391-92; Special NIE 80-59, "The Situation in the Caribbean through 1959," 30 June 1959, *ibid.*, 393-406; Charles D. Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables, 1974), 279-83. For Castro's admission of involvement see memorandum of telephone conversation between William Wieland (director of the Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs) and Tad Szulc (*New York Times*), 15 July 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:558-60. See also Department of State to All Missions in the American Republics, 18 June 1959, *ibid.*, 535-37; and memorandum of discussion of 412th meeting of NSC, 9 July 1959, *ibid.*, 407.

feuded. Rightist Venezuelans organized in the Dominican Republic, and Dominican exiles sought haven in Venezuela. Trujillo predictably welcomed the military *golpe de estado* of 1948 and then worked closely with Pérez Jiménez. After January 1958 Trujillo harbored right-wing Venezuelan exiles, ordered his radio stations to beam personal attacks on Betancourt, and probably authorized the planting of bombs in Caracas in the spring of 1959. In turn, Venezuela severed relations with the Dominican Republic. Venezuelan nationals also participated in the June 1959 invasion of the Dominican Republic.<sup>14</sup>

Betancourt's anti-Trujillista views also reflected his political principles. As the author of the Betancourt Doctrine, the Venezuelan believed that it was "nonsensical" to denounce totalitarian regimes in Asia or Europe and to tolerate despotic governments in the Western Hemisphere and called for the expulsion of dictatorial states from the OAS. Betancourt also hoped that the doctrine would notify the Venezuelan military that, if they struck another *golpe*, they would encounter united opposition from all American republics, including the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Turmoil in the traditional U.S. sphere of influence alarmed the Eisenhower administration. As CIA director Dulles informed Secretary of State Christian Herter, the United States had become associated "in the public mind of Latin America with the extreme right, especially as the friend and supporter of Dominican dictator Trujillo." Even moderate leftists had become estranged, creating "a situation which abets the cause of those who want to bring the Caribbean political scene under Communist domination." Despite Dulles's warning, the administration sharply rejected the Betancourt Doctrine and demanded a cease-fire in the Caribbean. Hemispheric neighbors should respect the nonintervention doctrine of the OAS charter. As Assistant Secretary of State R. Richard Rubottom told Latin American diplomats, 180 years of history proved that the United States did not favor dictatorships. "However, we cannot allow individual groups of 'liberators' to pass judgment on the governments of particular countries and to undertake from bases in other countries to launch attacks aiming to oust violently the governments they dislike. This amounts to anarchy."<sup>16</sup>

The United States tried both to reassert its hegemony and improve its public image at a meeting of foreign ministers held in Santiago, Chile, in

14. Ameringer, *Democratic Left*, 56, 60, 267, 279; memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Edward J. Sparks (U.S. ambassador), 27 April 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE28.

15. For the Betancourt Doctrine see Embassy of Venezuela, Washington, *Venezuela Up-to-Date* 10 (May/June 1961): 3-4; and memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Rubottom, 14 February 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE20.

16. Dulles to Herter, n.d. (but March 1959), *FRUS, 1958-1960* 5:372-73; Rubottom quoted in enclosure 1, memorandum of conversation, State Department, 8 July 1959, in Instruction from State Department to All Embassies in the American Republics, 16 July 1959, *ibid.*, 296-98.

August 1959. The ministers met to discuss the Dominican issue and turmoil throughout the Caribbean basin. Secretary Herter implicitly renounced past U.S. interventions in Latin America, observing that "history has shown that attempts to impose democracy upon a country by force from without may easily result in the mere substitution of one form of tyranny for another." Influential OAS members, like Argentina and Mexico, enthusiastically backed Herter's position. Most Latin Americans, opposed to compromising the nonintervention principle, rejected the Betancourt Doctrine and declined to break relations with the Dominican Republic. Herter agreed, however, to extend the Venezuelans a fig leaf to cover their diplomatic defeat. The Peace Committee, an inter-American body, would now have the power to initiate investigations of a member nation's behavior. But it would not have the power to enter the Dominican Republic without Trujillo's consent. With the U.S. position upheld, Herter hoped the inter-American community would hereafter focus less on Trujillo and more on Castro and communism.<sup>17</sup>

The looming confrontation with Castro's Cuba, however, would force the United States to choose sides in the war between Betancourt and Trujillo. By October/November 1959 the Eisenhower administration had concluded, in Rubottom's words, that the United States could never "do business with the Castro Government on a basis which could be termed even reasonably satisfactory." The Cuban had mocked U.S. power. He had indulged in anti-American propaganda, nationalized U.S. property, proclaimed Cuba's neutralism, and worked with Cuban Communists. Unchecked, Castro would, by example, undermine the U.S. position throughout Latin America. Covert actions aimed at harming Castro and Cuba began in late 1959 and were made coherent and systematic on 17 March 1960, when President Eisenhower approved a comprehensive plan to overthrow Castro.<sup>18</sup>

The Eisenhower administration desperately wanted regional allies in its war against Castro. As the president noted on 17 March, "he would be willing to trade several military bases for a strong OAS determined to hang together." Such sentiments sparked a new enthusiasm for Rómulo Betancourt and his doctrine. Although the administration had favored his election in 1958, it had not embraced him, for he was a social planner and economic

17. Herter quoted in Department of State, *Bulletin* 41 (31 August 1959): 301-5. See also State Department to Diplomatic Missions in American Republics, 6 August 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 5:310-13; Secretary Herter to President Eisenhower, 17 August 1959, *ibid.*, 344; notes of secretary's staff meetings, 21 August 1959, *ibid.*, 346-47; and Jerome Slater, *The OAS and United States Foreign Policy* (Columbus, OH, 1967), 94-96.

18. Rubottom to Philip Bonsal (U.S. ambassador), 20 November 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 6:676-77. See also Herter to Eisenhower, 5 November 1959, *ibid.*, 656-58; 5412 Committee paper, "A Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime," 16 March 1960, *ibid.*, 850-51; and Andrew J. Goodpaster memorandum of conference with president, 17 March 1960, *ibid.*, 861-63.

nationalist who raised taxes on U.S. oil companies, which had over \$2 billion invested in the country. Moreover, he had a suspect political past. As a youth, he flirted with political radicalism, and in the mid-1950s he published a scathing indictment of Pérez Jiménez and the oil companies. These views earned Betancourt the disdain of the State Department, which harassed him during his exile. Such feelings about Betancourt persisted among some administration officials. In mid-1960, Vice President Nixon labeled Betancourt an "opportunist" who accepted the support of the pro-Castroite "left." Nixon predicted that "Betancourt would take his present line until he got his way with respect to Trujillo but he would not stay with us on Castro."<sup>19</sup>

Nixon was wrong; President Betancourt was a stout anti-Communist. In front of U.S. diplomats, he laughed at his youthful infatuation with communism, and he ridiculed Juan José Arévalo, the former president of Guatemala, for equating anti-Americanism with anti-imperialism. Betancourt also claimed that he supported the covert U.S. intervention in Guatemala in 1954. He repeatedly pledged that Communists would not have a role in his government and that Venezuela would cooperate militarily and economically with the United States.<sup>20</sup> Ten years of exile had been a harsh and bitter experience for the Venezuelan leader. He and his political allies were determined not to alienate again Venezuela's entrenched interest groups. Betancourt now favored a moderate, evolutionary approach to social and economic reform.

Betancourt's views on Fidel Castro also caught the Eisenhower administration's attention. Castro had made a triumphant tour of Venezuela in January 1959. When he met with Betancourt, he startled the president by requesting a \$300 million loan and oil shipments at discount prices. The bemused Betancourt initially characterized Castro as young and naive. But his attitude hardened over the next two years. Castro began to criticize Latin Americans who were not revolutionaries. In March 1959, for example, Castro insulted José Figueres of Costa Rica, Betancourt's friend and mentor, at a rally in Havana. Thereafter, he publicly questioned Venezuela's reformist path. Betancourt also understood that the growing leftist movement in his country drew inspiration from the Cuban revolution.<sup>21</sup>

19. Eisenhower quoted in memorandum of discussion of 437th meeting of NSC, 17 March 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 5:429; Nixon quoted in memorandum of discussion at 450th meeting of NSC, 7 July 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:984-85. See also Rómulo Betancourt, *Venezuela: Oil and Politics* (Boston, 1979).

20. Memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Sparks, 10 March 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE22; memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Sparks, 27 April 1959, *ibid.*, VE28.

21. Memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Sparks, 31 March 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE25; editorial note, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:386-87; Ameringer, *Democratic Left*, 268, 291-92; Burrows (chargé) to State Department, 16 October 1959, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE37.

These young political radicals fomented violent antigovernment demonstrations in Caracas between October and December 1960.

In the name of anti-Castroism, the State Department began to woo Betancourt. In response to Venezuelan pleas, in August 1959 it had the Justice Department arrest Pérez Jiménez, who was now hiding out in Miami, and initiate extradition proceedings against "the bearer of the Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander." To prove to Venezuelans that the United States was not partial to dictatorships, it promised economic and technical cooperation. The department also made certain that attacks on Betancourt, broadcast on Cuban radio, reached his ears. And, in late April 1960, it agreed that the Peace Committee should investigate whether Trujillo had assisted the latest right-wing assault on the Venezuelan government.<sup>22</sup>

On 28 April 1960, Acting Secretary of State Loy Henderson formally requested Betancourt's support. The United States was "interested" in Betancourt's declaration that the resolution of the Castro problem depended on the resolution of the Trujillo problem and "that he was prepared to take the lead on Cuba, which he was certain most other Latin Americans would quickly join, if the Trujillo problem was resolved with United States cooperation." The United States, however, cautioned Betancourt that, if Trujillo fell, Castroite elements might move into the power vacuum. Betancourt responded by reiterating that his first concern was Trujillo and that he doubted Communist strength in the Dominican Republic. Over the next month, Venezuelan and U.S. officials exchanged ideas. U.S. diplomats counseled patience, emphasizing that Venezuela should work through the Peace Committee. But Assistant Secretary Rubottom also observed on 11 May 1960 that "Trujillo's days are numbered."<sup>23</sup>

The United States had in fact already turned against its client of three decades. In November 1959, the same month the Eisenhower administration had decided that constructive relations were over with Castro, Herter and Rubottom agreed that the United States would have to bring about the post-Trujillo era. They reasoned from analogy. A tyrant in a sugar-producing island had again "liquidated and enfeebled" moderate political opponents and polarized the political milieu, thereby providing an opportunity for radicals. The United States would have to learn the lessons of

22. Memorandum of conversation between Herter, Rubottom, and Pedro Arcaya (Venezuelan foreign minister), *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement 5:VE30*. See also Rubottom to Dennis A. FitzGerald (International Cooperation Administration), 25 September 1959, *ibid.*, VE36; Herter to U.S. embassy in Caracas, 25 April 1960, *ibid.*, VE40; memorandum of conversation at 443d meeting of NSC, 5 May 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960 5:908*; and Judith Ewell, *The Indictment of a Dictator: The Extradition and Trial of Marcos Pérez Jiménez* (College Station, 1981).

23. Henderson to U.S. embassy in Caracas, 28 April 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement 5:VE41*; Rubottom's comment in despatch, Herter to U.S. embassy in Caracas, which encloses Rubottom and Thomas Mann's memorandum of conversation with Marcos Falcón Briceño (Venezuelan ambassador), 11 May 1960, *ibid.*, VE42. Betancourt's response in editorial notes attached to Henderson to U.S. embassy in Caracas, 28 April 1960, *ibid.*, VE41.

history to prevent “a domino effect of Castro-like governments” throughout the Caribbean. In January 1960, the State Department developed a paper, approved in April by President Eisenhower, that called for military intervention “to prevent a Castro-type government or one sympathetic to Castro.”<sup>24</sup> But in order to avoid an invasion or naval show of force, the United States would attempt to persuade Trujillo to leave and begin establishing contacts with political moderates in the Dominican Republic.

The administration first tried sweet reason with Trujillo. During the first months of 1960, various emissaries, including Senator George Smathers, Ambassador William Pawley, and General Edwin Norman Clark, journeyed to Ciudad Trujillo to discuss with Trujillo the prospects for his stepping down or permitting a free election. A comfortable exile, perhaps in Portugal or Morocco, with a “trust fund” was mentioned. But the tough old dictator resisted all blandishments, boasting that “I’ll never go out of here unless I go on a stretcher.”<sup>25</sup>

The other part of the U.S. plan—to cultivate a Dominican opposition movement—also fell apart. In January 1960 Trujillo, alleging an assassination conspiracy, ordered a roundup of prominent businessmen, intellectuals, and professionals. Henry Dearborn, the deputy chief of the U.S. mission, described for Washington the Trujillo system as “an outrage abounding in trumped-up charges, arbitrary arrests, search without warrant, and inhumane treatment of prisoners.” Dearborn put the “ultimate question” to his superiors; that is, “whether we need Trujillo’s help against international communism sufficiently to support a regime characterized by such unsavory practices.”<sup>26</sup>

Other State Department officials reiterated Dearborn’s point, noting that the United States could not satisfy Venezuela and convince the OAS to move against Cuba until it resolved the Dominican imbroglio. But some, like John C. Hill, who made a fact-finding mission to the island, argued that it was impractical to attack Trujillo. Democratic elements in the Dominican Republic were not yet strong enough to prevent communism in the post-

24. Rubottom to Herter, 10 November 1959, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR9; memorandum for president, “Possible Action to Prevent Castroist Takeover of Dominican Republic,” with enclosure “Proposed Plan,” 14 April 1960, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, Administrative Subseries, box 15, folder: Intelligence Matters (13 & 14), Eisenhower Library. See also U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (hereafter Church Committee), *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, S. Rpt. 465, 192.

25. Trujillo quoted in the oral history of William Pawley, Herbert Hoover Library, West Branch, Iowa. For Smather’s mission see Henry Dearborn (deputy chief in the Dominican Republic) to State Department, 9 February 1960, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR12. For Clark’s efforts see memorandum of conversation between the president, Herter, and Allen Dulles, 21 March 1960, *ibid.*, DR17; memorandum of conversation between president, Herter, and Clark, 25 April 1960, *ibid.*, DR20; and memorandum of conversation between John C. Hill (State Department officer) and Clark, 25 May 1960, *ibid.*, DR24.

26. Dearborn to State Department, 11 February 1960, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR13.

Trujillo era. Anticipating President Kennedy's formula, Hill asserted that anticommunism had a higher priority than democracy and that "we must be prepared to jump solidly on the 'stop Castro' animal." It was an "ugly" choice, but the wrong choice would endanger national security and "expose the Department to what might well be the greatest yet criticism from Congress and public opinion." Vice President Nixon seconded Hill's assessment, telling the NSC that the primary U.S. interest in the Dominican Republic was to prevent pro-Castro groups from seizing power.<sup>27</sup>

Predictions of Castroism in the Dominican Republic were based on fears and dubious historical analogies rather than on concrete studies. An April 1960 National Intelligence Estimate dismissed the notion that Trujillo would be overthrown by a "Castro-like invasion or revolution," suggesting only that if turmoil ensured after the demise of Trujillo, Castro might incite a revolution from abroad and be the "ultimate victor." But intelligence analysts also understood that Castro no longer assisted exile movements or lent support to the Betancourt Doctrine. Castro had come to realize that the nonintervention principles of the OAS were in the best interests of the Cuban revolution. He even recognized that the U.S. preoccupation with Trujillo was clear evidence "that the North American Government was maneuvering against the revolution" and "trying to establish a procedure which at any time could be turned against us."<sup>28</sup>

Castro was prescient. As the Policy Planning Staff noted, "the political damage resulting from a U.S. involvement in Cuba could be minimized by our first or simultaneously helping overthrow a hated dictator." Undersecretary of State C. Douglas Dillon added that "if Trujillo could be removed from power in the Dominican Republic, while pro-Castro elements were prevented from seizing power in that country, our anti-Castro campaign throughout Latin America would receive a great boost." Thus, in June 1960 the administration decided to pursue vigorous, even violent, measures to overthrow Trujillo. It accepted the Inter-American Peace Committee's 3 June 1960 denunciation of Trujillo, noting that it might assist "our subsequent efforts to have the Peace Committee face up similarly to the Cuban problem." And in June it authorized a CIA proposal to make Henry Dearborn a "communications link" with Dominican dissidents who vowed to assassinate Trujillo. This authorization came shortly after President Eisenhower informed aides that he wanted Castro and Trujillo "sawed off."

27. Hill to John C. Dreier (U.S. ambassador to OAS), 15 March 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR15. See also Dreier to Hill, 14 March 1960, *ibid.*, DR14; Hugh S. Cummings, Jr. (director of intelligence and research), to Herter, 25 March 1960, *ibid.*, DR18; and memorandum of conversation of 441st meeting of NSC, 14 April 1960, *ibid.*, DR19.

28. NIE on the Dominican Republic, 26 April 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR21; Castro quoted in Philip Bonsal (U.S. ambassador to Cuba) to State Department, 23 April 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:898. See also special NIE on the Caribbean, 30 June 1959, *ibid.* 5:394; and special NIE, "Situation in the Caribbean through 1960," 29 December 1959, *ibid.*, 418-19.

Thereafter, the CIA began to develop plans to transfer sniper rifles with telescopic sights to the Dominican opposition.<sup>29</sup>

Even as the administration hatched assassination plots against both Castro and Trujillo, the Dominican counterattacked. On 24 June 1960 his agents attempted to assassinate President Betancourt by detonating a bomb planted near his passing automobile; Betancourt survived, but his hands were severely burned. Trujillo also tried to undermine U.S. policy within the United States. His fifty-four consulates in the United States took out advertisements in newspapers and planted stories with friendly journalists, reminding readers that Trujillo was a staunch anti-Communist. Further, he bribed U.S. officials, including congressmen who sat on committees that allocated a sugar quota to the Dominican Republic.<sup>30</sup> The Trujillo family controlled about 60 percent of the island's sugar industry.

Trujillo's attack on Betancourt provided the administration with a new opportunity to attack Castro. In August 1960 hemispheric foreign ministers met in San José, Costa Rica, to consider Trujillo's aggression against Venezuela. Reversing the stand he took at Santiago in 1959, Secretary of State Herter embraced the Betancourt Doctrine, proposing that the OAS take control of the political machinery of the Dominican Republic, oversee the end of the Trujillo tyranny, establish political parties, and conduct a free election. As Herter explained to President Eisenhower, his plan had dual objectives: A peaceful transition of power would avoid "a revolution which might well produce a communist or Castro-type government in Santo Domingo"; further, "if we prove successful in this, a very useful precedent will have been set for possible later action when the Cuban matter is before us." President Eisenhower agreed, observing that "until Trujillo is eliminated we cannot get our Latin American friends to reach a proper level of indignation in dealing with Castro."<sup>31</sup>

Herter's call for a renunciation of the sacred nonintervention principle shocked Latin Americans and never came to a vote. OAS members were prepared to condemn the Dominican Republic for its aggression, but they

29. Edward E. Rice (Policy Planning Staff) to Gerard C. Smith (assistant secretary of state for policy planning), 13 April 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:892; Dillon quoted in memorandum of conversation of 441st meeting of NSC, 14 April 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR19; Dillon to president, 20 May 1960, *ibid.*, DR23; Eisenhower quoted in memorandum of conversation between president, Dillon, Rubottom, and Joseph Farland (U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic), 13 May 1960, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 4, folder: State Department 3-5/60 (6), Eisenhower Library.

30. Memorandum of conversation between president and Herter, 30 August 1960, Office of Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 4, folder: State Department 8-9/60 (2), Eisenhower Library. The legislators identified by Eisenhower and Herter were representative Harold Cooley (D-NC) and Allen Ellender (D-LA). Cooley was chair of the House Agricultural Committee, the body that allocated a sugar import quota to the Dominican Republic.

31. Herter to president, 18 August 1960, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, box 11, folder 8/60 (2), Eisenhower Library; Eisenhower quoted in memorandum of conversation of 453d meeting of NSC, 25 July 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR25.

did not want to be seen judging the internal nature of the Trujillo regime. The OAS accordingly voted to break diplomatic relations with Trujillo and impose an arms embargo.<sup>32</sup>

Herter also failed to attain his second objective. After denouncing the Dominican Republic, OAS foreign ministers reconvened to consider the U.S. confrontation with Castro's Cuba. Latin American democracies declined to draw parallels between Trujillo's aggression and Castro's domestic and international policies. The ministers limited themselves to passing a bloodless resolution opposing extracontinental intervention in the hemisphere. A crestfallen President Eisenhower ordered Herter not to press the "weak-kneed" Latin Americans. He worried about the Cold War consequences of dividing the OAS.<sup>33</sup>

For the rest of 1960 the administration oscillated between various fronts in its anti-Trujillo campaign. Following the San José conclave, it broke relations with the Dominican Republic, but it maintained its three consulates on the island in order to preserve bases for CIA agents. The president also imposed punitive excise taxes on imports of Dominican sugar. The president did not want Trujillo to reap a sugar windfall in the aftermath of his July 1960 decision to cut the importation of Cuban sugar into the United States. Aware that Trujillo bribed key legislators, Eisenhower acted on his own authority because the agricultural committees refused to cut the Dominican Republic's sugar quota. A furious president threatened to risk impeachment rather than honor any congressional mandate to purchase Trujillo's sugar.<sup>34</sup>

The CIA continued to bargain with potential assassins, but with negligible results. The Dominicans repeatedly altered their requests for weapons and frequently wavered in their determination. Their caution was justified, for, in August, Trujillo's security forces again smashed an impending *golpe*. The administration also had second thoughts. In October 1960 Undersecretary Dillon informed Eisenhower that the United States was not taking "concrete moves" against Trujillo, because it feared that his downfall would not lead to "an individual of the Castro stripe in power." The administration, at the urgings of Thomas Mann, the new assistant secretary of state for

32. Slater, *OAS and United States Foreign Policy*, 192; John C. Dreier, *The Organization of American States and the Hemispheric Crisis* (New York, 1962), 99-100.

33. Editorial notes on San José meeting, 22 to 29 August 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 6:1060-65.

34. For the CIA's desire for a base in the Dominican Republic see telephone calls between Dulles and Herter, 19 August 1960, Christian Herter papers, Telephone series, box 13, folder 7/1-8/31/60, Eisenhower Library. For Eisenhower's actions see memorandum of conversation with legislative leaders, 23 August 1960, Whitman File, Legislative Leaders Series, box 3, folder: Legislative Leaders, 1960 (4), Eisenhower Library; memorandum of conversation between president and Herter, 30 August 1960, Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, box 4, folder: State Department 8-9/60 (2), Eisenhower Library; and memorandum of conversation of 453d meeting of NSC, 25 July 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, *Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR25.

Latin America, even toyed again with the idea of persuading Trujillo to participate in a peaceful transition of power and actually dispatched William Pawley, the former ambassador to Brazil and Peru, to speak to the dictator. Trujillo had seemingly softened his position when he demoted his vicious brother Héctor and appointed prominent scholar Joaquín Balaguer as president. But Henry Dearborn, who was now consul general and de facto CIA chief of station, warned Washington not to be deceived, for there was no indication that the regime planned "to abolish arbitrary arrests, prison tortures, or reprisals against its political opposition." Trujillo would continue "his political domination whether he is President or dogcatcher." Dearborn concluded: "If I were a Dominican, I would favor destroying Trujillo as the first necessary step in the salvation of my country." Indeed, it would be a "Christian Duty" to drive a stake in the heart of the Dracula-like Trujillo.<sup>35</sup>

Such sentiments combined with renewed Venezuelan demands for action hardened U.S. resolve. President Betancourt was frustrated that his enemy lived, had triumphed in the U.S. Congress, and still meddled in Venezuela. In December 1960 Betancourt called for another OAS probe into Trujillo's conduct. He assured U.S. diplomats that he was "fully aware" of the Castro problem, that he believed Castro was in the Soviet orbit, and that Cuba inspired leftist demonstrations and riots in his country. And, for the first time, he criticized Castro in a public address. But, as a matter of personal dignity, he adamantly refused repeated U.S. requests presented in "the strongest possible terms" to link Trujillo and Castro in a renewed OAS investigation. He repeated his pledge, however, to "head the movement of Latin American countries to dispose of the Castro problem once effective actions were taken against Trujillo." Betancourt further promised to dispatch troops to help a provisional Dominican government prevent communism.<sup>36</sup>

In its last days, the Eisenhower administration again accepted Betancourt's bargain. In the words of Chargé Allan Stewart, Betancourt was the "best bet" to achieve U.S. goals in Venezuela and throughout the region. He had publicly broken with Castro, battled leftist opponents, and embraced

---

35. Memorandum of conversation between president and Dillon, 13 October 1960, Whitman File, Eisenhower Diaries, box 53, folder: Staff Notes, 10/60 (1), Eisenhower Library; Dearborn to State Department, 3 August 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR26; Dearborn to Mann, 27 October 1960, *ibid.*, DR28. For CIA activities see Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 193-96. For Mann's diplomacy see Mann to Dearborn, 10 October 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR27. On the Pawley mission see Bernardo Vega, *Eisenhower y Trujillo* [Eisenhower and Trujillo] (Santo Domingo, 1991), 168-74, 226-30. During the 1950s Joaquín Balaguer was a fervent apologist for Trujillo. See *El principio de la alternabilidad en la historia Dominicana* [The alternability principle in Dominican history] (Ciudad Trujillo, 1952), 8-10; *Two Essays on Dominican History* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1955), 22. For Balaguer's defense of his collaboration during the Trujillo era see *Memorias de un cortesano de la "Era de Trujillo"* [Memoirs of a courtier of the "Trujillo Era"] (Santo Domingo, 1989), 259-61.

36. Sparks to State Department, memorandum of conversation with Betancourt, 5 December 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE51. See also Herter to president on Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, 8 December 1960, *ibid.*, DR30.

international capitalism. The Venezuelan simply believed that U.S. oil companies working in his country should shoulder an appropriate tax burden. By the end of 1960 the administration had repudiated the Dulles/Nixon thesis that Latin American democrats threatened U.S. interests. President Eisenhower caught the irony in this new feature of his policy; he confided to aides that "it was strange that he used to think of Betancourt as a leftist and now he was beginning to look like a rightist in relation to pro-Castro, pro-Communist attacks against him."<sup>37</sup>

As it embraced Betancourt, the Eisenhower administration launched its final assaults on Trujillo and Castro. It dramatically increased the size and firepower of the Cuban exile army training in Guatemala, and it pressed President-elect Kennedy to do "whatever is necessary" to overthrow Castro. It also broke diplomatic relations with Cuba on 3 January 1961, and it recommended that the new administration invoke the Trading with the Enemy Act. As for Trujillo, the administration banned the export of petroleum products, trucks, and truck parts to the Dominican Republic. The administration wanted not only to fulfill Betancourt's request for additional economic pressure but also to mollify him. The United States would be legally obligated to buy over two hundred thousand tons of Dominican sugar during the first three months of 1961. This mandate, in Herter's words, would "create a strain on our relations with the Betancourt regime and will probably strengthen communist-inspired opposition to Betancourt."<sup>38</sup>

The administration also heeded the warning of intelligence analysts who predicted in late 1960 that "the days of his [Trujillo's] regime appear numbered," with assassination "an increasing possibility." But they warned that "the tide is now running against the United States and the longer the current impasse continues, the more unfavorable to U.S. interests the outcome is likely to be when the Dominican pressure cooker finally explodes." In view of such analyses, the administration revived its covert program. Recalling that his administration had hoped "to move against Trujillo and Castro simultaneously," President Eisenhower, on 3 January 1961, ordered his national security advisers "to do as much as we can and quickly about Trujillo." Nine days later, the 5412 Committee (the special group that oversaw covert activities) ruled that the CIA could send small arms to Dominican dissidents. In the first months of 1961, Consul General Dearborn, through an intermediary, passed pistols and carbines to Dominicans.<sup>39</sup>

37. Stewart to State Department, 12 November 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:VE47; memorandum of conversation between president and national security advisers, 29 November 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 6:1127.

38. Eisenhower quoted in Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York, 1979), 87-88n; Herter to Eisenhower, 8 December 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR30.

39. Cummings to Herter, 22 November 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Microfiche Supplement* 5:DR29; memorandum of conversation between president, Gordon Gray, and others, 3 January 1961, OSANSA, Special Assistants Series, Presidential Subseries, box 5, folder: 1960

President John Kennedy pursued Eisenhower's policies on all three Caribbean fronts. He pushed ahead with Eisenhower's invasion plan, which culminated in the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961. Thereafter, the administration developed its own covert campaign, Operation Mongoose. Kennedy authorized the CIA to train Cubans to infiltrate the island and carry out terrorist and sabotage activities. And the CIA continued to hatch anti-Castro assassination schemes.<sup>40</sup> The Kennedy administration also developed an overt anti-Castro strategy, the Alliance for Progress. In March 1961 the president pledged a "Marshall Plan for Latin America." Through a massive infusion of public and private capital—ultimately \$20 billion—the United States would build decent, democratic, and anti-Communist Latin American societies.

Rómulo Betancourt's Venezuela served as the Kennedy administration's model for Latin America's democratic development. According to Kennedy's men, the future of Latin America "lay between the Castro road and the Betancourt road." The United States needed to embrace the middle-class reformers that Dulles and Nixon had mocked in order to forestall radical change. To display its new attitude, the administration installed a direct telephone line between the White House and Miraflores, the Venezuelan presidential palace. Venezuela was the first Latin American country that the young U.S. leader visited. The United States also helped Betancourt calm urban areas, where leftist organizers flourished, by rushing an emergency package of \$100 million in economic assistance in early 1961. Between 1962 and 1965, the United States would send an additional \$350 million in grants and credits.<sup>41</sup>

Although Betancourt warmly welcomed the Alliance for Progress and favorably compared Kennedy to Franklin Roosevelt, he continued to promote his doctrine and his anti-Trujillista views. Like its predecessor, the Kennedy administration wanted the Venezuelan and other Latin American democrats to support publicly its anti-Castro policies. By mid-February, the administration had been briefed by CIA officials about the covert campaign against Trujillo. But the administration's first move against Trujillo was an overt one. Warned by Secretary of State Dean Rusk that "account must be taken of the adverse effect of our position of leadership in the hemisphere if we support tyranny in the Dominican Republic," President Kennedy re-

---

Meetings with President, vol. 2 (2), Eisenhower Library. For covert activities see Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 196–201. Lorenzo "Wimpy" Berry, an American who owned supermarkets in the Dominican Republic, reportedly served as intermediary between Dearborn and the dissidents. See Bernardo Vega, *Kennedy y los Trujillos* [Kennedy and the Trujillos] (Santo Domingo, 1991), 44, 48, 85; and John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events: The Dominican Crisis from the Fall of Trujillo to the Civil War* (Garden City, 1966), 12.

40. Thomas G. Paterson, "Fixation with Cuba: The Bay of Pigs, Missile Crisis, and Covert War against Fidel Castro," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961–1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York, 1989), 123–55.

41. Arthur Schlesinger quoted in Tony Smith, "The Alliance for Progress: The 1960s," in Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy*, 87n.12. See also Rabe, *Road to OPEC*, 142–49.

quested that Congress deny the Dominican Republic any "windfall" from Cuba's sugar quota for the last nine months of 1961. With unified support from Republican leaders, who had conferred with Eisenhower and Nixon, the administration managed in March 1961 to push legislation out of the agricultural committees and through Congress. The president coupled this with a pledge that the Dominican Republic could join the Alliance for Progress when it rejoined "the society of free men."<sup>42</sup>

Castro's rout of the Bay of Pigs invaders on 17-19 April 1961 caused the administration to hesitate in taking the decisive step against Trujillo. In early April the CIA had sent five machine guns through diplomatic pouch to the U.S. consulate. But, on 25 April, CIA headquarters instructed Dearborn not to pass the machine guns and to inform the dissidents that the United States was not presently prepared to cope with the aftermath of an assassination. The CIA cable reflected disorder within the administration. Officials argued over whether the administration should continue to encourage potential assassins. Some, such as Robert Murphy, the former undersecretary of state for political affairs, who visited with Trujillo in mid-April, urged the administration to make peace with the dictator because he had been a consistent friend of the United States and because the Dominican Republic was near Cuba. NSC Adviser McGeorge Bundy, however, warned the president that a rapprochement with Trujillo would undermine the Alliance for Progress. Moreover, Trujillo had begun to collaborate with the enemy. Dominican radio stations praised the Cuban revolution and attacked U.S. "imperialism." Trujillo's henchmen secretly conferred with Cuban and Soviet authorities. Notably, Havana no longer denounced Trujillo.<sup>43</sup>

President Kennedy took personal command of Dominican policy. At an NSC meeting, on 5 May 1961, he ruled that the United States should not initiate the overthrow of Trujillo before knowing what government would succeed him. He also ordered the U.S. military to be prepared to invade the Dominican Republic to prevent a Communist takeover. The president's ruling left Dearborn incredulous. For a year the United States had been

42. Rusk to president, 15 February 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/61, Kennedy Library; Kennedy's Alliance for Progress speech in Department of State *Bulletin* 44 (3 April 1961): 471-74. For Betancourt's views see Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *Navigating the Rapids, 1918-1971: From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle*, ed. Beatrice Bishop Berle and Travis Beal Jacobs (New York, 1973), 733-34. For the role of the Republicans see *New York Times*, 23 February 1961.

43. On covert activities see Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 201-7; and Richard Bissell (deputy director of CIA) to Bundy, "Briefing Paper on Dominican Republic," 17 March 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/61. For debate within the Kennedy administration see memorandum by Murphy on 15-16 April 1961 trip to Dominican Republic, n.d. (but late April 1961), NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: Subjects, Murphy Trip, 1961; and Bundy to president, 2 May 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: Subjects, Murphy Trip, 1961. See also intelligence memorandum, "Situation in the Dominican Republic," 8 May 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/61; and *New York Times*, 14 May 1961.

nurturing the effort to overthrow Trujillo; it was “too late to consider whether [the] United States would initiate [the] overthrow of Trujillo.” The president’s final word, as expressed in a cable he helped write and sent on 29 May to Dearborn, was that the United States wanted to be associated with the removal of Trujillo so as to derive credit among Dominicans and Latin American liberals, but that “we must not run the risk of U.S. association with political assassination.”<sup>44</sup>

The next evening, 30 May 1961, members of the “action group” of the Dominican dissidents ambushed and assassinated Trujillo. The aged dictator, traveling only with his chauffeur, was on his way to see his twenty-year-old mistress. One of the assassins was Antonio de la Maza, the brother of the slain Octavio de la Maza of the de Galíndez-Murphy case. The other assassins held similar grievances against Trujillo. The assassins apparently had with them the CIA-supplied weapons.<sup>45</sup>

President Kennedy and his advisers were perhaps surprised by at least the timing of the attack. The president was in Paris meeting with President Charles de Gaulle and preparing for his meeting with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna. He ordered Rusk to stay behind in the United States for a day to survey the situation. Warships, loaded with combat-ready troops, patrolled the Dominican coastline. Consul General Dearborn, who was immediately informed of Trujillo’s death, reported that it was “highly unsafe” for him to maintain contact with the dissidents. He and CIA personnel were quickly recalled to Washington. The State Department, however, ordered them first to destroy all records concerning contacts with dissidents but not to destroy the president’s last exculpatory cable of 29 May.<sup>46</sup>

Although Trujillo’s death sparked a short celebration in Caracas, it did not terminate the Trujillo tyranny. Trujillo’s security apparatus reacted rapidly and captured or killed all but two of the conspirators. The dictator’s two brothers, who controlled private armies, terrorized political opponents. Trujillo’s vindictive son, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, Jr., or “Ramfis,” returned from Europe, took charge of the armed forces, and personally supervised the torture and execution of the conspirators. And the Trujillo family maintained its stranglehold on the Dominican economy.

Back from Vienna, President Kennedy reviewed the Dominican situation with aides in early June and listed his famous descending order of

44. Dearborn and Kennedy quoted in Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 209–13. On military preparations see General Earle Wheeler (JCS) to General Clifton, 5 May 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1–6/61.

45. Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 213–15; Víctor Grimaldi, *Los Estados Unidos en el derrocamiento de Trujillo* [The United States on the overthrow of Trujillo] (Santo Domingo, 1985).

46. Dearborn’s telegram in Clifton to Bundy for Kennedy in Paris, 31 May 1961, President’s Office File, Country File (POFCO): Dominican Republic, box 115A, folder: Dominican Republic Security, 2/61–9/63, Kennedy Library. See also Berle, *Navigating the Rapids*, 746–48; and Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 214–15.

preferences. His brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, even proposed that the administration give Ramfis a chance to fulfill his pledge to move the nation toward democracy. Henry Dearborn, now back in Washington, responded that such promises "were the same moves that Trujillo had always made without any intended impact on the structure of his regime." He added that democratic groups existed on the island and "could run a government." Dearborn urged the United States to drive the Trujillos out with military force. Others reminded that "we would do ourselves great harm" if the United States acted without the support of Venezuela. Despite this advice, Kennedy ruled that the United States should postpone action and simply monitor events.<sup>47</sup> His fear of instability and communism overwhelmed his concern for the Alliance for Progress and Betancourt.

Through the summer of 1961, U.S. Dominican policy reflected Kennedy's priorities. The State Department sent John C. Hill, the department's liaison with the CIA for Latin America, to replace Dearborn as consul general. His objectives were first to prevent "Castro/communism" and then to help establish "a friendly government as democratic as possible." Joaquín Balaguer, who remained the nominal president, was informed in July 1961 that Hill had direct access to Kennedy. What Kennedy considered of "utmost importance" was that the government move toward democracy. But the president wanted Balaguer to know that he was specifically interested in the "progress of anti-Communist laws in [the] Dominican Congress, measures taken [to] exclude [the] return [of] Communist and Castroist exiles, and other actions taken [to] prevent infiltration and agitation by Communist-Castroist elements." The administration also assured Balaguer that the United States would lend military support to stop a "Castroist invasion" of the Dominican Republic. Hill delivered the same message to Ramfis Trujillo in a series of cordial chats with the power behind the throne.<sup>48</sup>

In deciding to work with the younger Trujillo and Balaguer, the administration assumed that their government could last at least until May 1962, when elections were promised. In late August, President Kennedy decided that the United States would back Balaguer, because he "is our only tool" and because the "anti-Communist liberals are not strong enough." The president wistfully hoped that a Nehru-like figure would emerge who could command popular support, tame the military, and carry out socioeconomic

47. Dearborn and others quoted in Goodwin to Bundy, 8 June 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/61. Dearborn's recommendation in Clifton to Bundy for Kennedy in Vienna, 5 June 1961, POFCO: Dominican Republic, box 115A, folder: Dominican Republic Security, 2/61-9/63.

48. State Department memorandum, "Courses of Action in the Dominican Republic," 17 July 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 7-8/61; Rusk to Hill on oral instructions from president, 21 July 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 7-8/61. See also Hill to Rusk, 1 August 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 7-8/61; and Hill to Rusk, 12 August 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 67, folder: Cables, 8-9/61.

reform. But the president would take no chances. He reportedly predicted that his first year in office would be successful if neither the Congo nor the Dominican Republic was lost to international communism. In the meantime, the United States would wait, in Rusk's words, until it could "persuade the Trujillo family to leave the island in an orderly way that will not result in conditions that might give an opportunity for Castroism." The administration took up Eisenhower's scheme of establishing a trust fund to entice the Trujillos into exile.<sup>49</sup>

Neither Venezuelans nor Dominicans, however, were inclined to be patient. The Venezuelans, for example, sharply rejected the Kennedy administration's plan for partial lifting of the OAS sanctions. President Betancourt emphasized that the "ouster of all the Trujillos [was] essential to full democratization" in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans similarly demanded democracy and staged massive antigovernment demonstrations when an OAS inspection team arrived on the island in mid-September. The demonstrators pleaded for the OAS to maintain the sanctions until the old regime left. Intelligence analysts now understood that the Trujillos leaving the island had "become an obsession" for Dominicans. Dominican democrats were losing faith in the United States, with a concomitant growth of "Castro-minded influence." The Trujillos might not leave, and they might strike a *golpe*, which would only polarize the international and domestic political milieu. The journalist John Bartlow Martin, who Kennedy sent on a fact-finding mission, concurred, reporting that a renewed Trujillo regime would destroy the middle class, thereby ensuring that the next revolution would be "proletarian and leftist."<sup>50</sup>

Confronted with the collapse of his evolutionary policy, Kennedy acted boldly. In October he dispatched Undersecretary of State George McGhee to Ciudad Trujillo to tell the Trujillos that they must leave the island. When the family balked, Secretary Rusk warned on 18 November that the United States would not "remain idle" if the Trujillos tried to "reassert dictatorial domination." Eight U.S. warships loomed on the Dominican horizon. U.S. jets buzzed the capital's shoreline, and U.S. military attachés encouraged Dominican officers to desert the Trujillos. By 20 November, the Trujillo clan had fled into exile. Over the next two months, the administration would threaten and cajole Dominicans into establishing an anti-Communist

49. Kennedy quoted in Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 770-71; Rusk to president, 27 July 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: Subjects, Murphy Trips, 5-7/61. See also DeLesseps S. Morrison, *Latin American Mission: An Adventure in Hemisphere Diplomacy* (New York, 1965), 113-14. On democratization plan see Rusk to Hill, 1 September 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: Cables, 8/61-9/61.

50. Betancourt quoted in Teodoro Moscoso (U.S. ambassador) to Rusk, memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Chester Bowles (undersecretary), 16 October 1961, NSFCO: Venezuela, box 192, folder 10-11/61; Roger Hilsman (Division of Intelligence and Research) to acting secretary of state, 20 September 1961, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 8-9/61; Martin report on Dominican Republic, n.d. (but September 1961), POFCO: Dominican Republic, box 115A, folder 9. See also Martin, *Overtaken by Events*, 64-83.

coalition government, the Council of State.<sup>51</sup> With U.S. and Venezuelan assistance, the council managed to hold an election in December 1962 and hand power over to the winner, Juan Bosch, an ally of Betancourt.

The ousting of the Trujillos bolstered the administration's anti-Castro campaign, for President Betancourt fulfilled his pledges. He reportedly knew about and approved of the planning for the Bay of Pigs, although he declined to support the invasion publicly. But with the Trujillos gone, he openly espoused the U.S. cause. In November 1961 he broke relations with Castro in protest over Cuban propaganda. He then spearheaded the campaign to exclude Cuba from the OAS system, charging that Castro's communism posed a "serious and imminent danger" to hemispheric peace. During the October 1962 missile crisis, Venezuela stoutly supported the United States at the United Nations, and Betancourt assigned two destroyers to the naval blockade of Cuba.<sup>52</sup>

In 1963, the Venezuelan intensified his anti-Castro crusade. In Washington for a state visit, Betancourt called for constant and unremitting actions against Cuba "to encircle it, to cut it off without ceasing and failing." After meeting with Betancourt, President Kennedy asked the CIA for hard evidence "that could be presented in a public forum, such as the OAS, that would indicate that the link between the anti-Betancourt terrorists and Castro is direct." That evidence surfaced on a Venezuelan beach in November 1963 when Venezuela claimed it had discovered a small cache of Cuban arms. These arms were allegedly left for leftist insurgents determined to disrupt the November 1963 presidential election. The Cuban intervention surprised intelligence analysts in Washington, for Castro had not previously exported arms, although they also noted that Castro reportedly stated "he would like very much to get rid of 'Betancourt and company.'" Indeed, Joseph Burkholder Smith, who served as the CIA chief in Caracas, has implied that CIA operatives, responding to presidential pressure, engaged in a form of "black propaganda" and planted the arms.<sup>53</sup>

51. Rusk warning in Department of State *Bulletin* 45 (4 December 1961): 931. See also Vega, *Kennedy y los Trujillos*, 275-392; Balaguer, *Memorias*, 167-68, 313-14; and Morrison, *Latin American Mission*, 146.

52. Betancourt's position quoted in Rusk to all diplomatic posts in American Republics, 16 November 1961, NSFCO: Cuba, box 40, folder: Cables, 1-11/61. See also Allan Stewart (U.S. ambassador) to Rusk, 22 October 1962, NSFCO: Venezuela, box 192, folder 9/20-10/31/62.

53. Betancourt speech to National Press Club, 20 February 1963, POFCO: Venezuela, box 128, folder: Venezuela, General, 1963; Kennedy to John McCone (CIA director), 9 February 1963, NSFCO: box 192, folder: Venezuela, 1-2/63; CIA to director, "Current Thinking of Cuban Government Leaders," 5 March 1964, NSF: Memoranda to President, box 1, folder: Vol. II (2 of 2), 3/1-3/31/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas; Joseph Burkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (New York, 1976), 381-84. See also Thomas L. Hughes (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) to Rusk, 29 November 1963, NSFCO: Latin America, box 1, folder: Vol. I; and Benjamin Read (State Department) to Bundy, 13 February 1964, NSFCO: Cuba, box 24, folder: OAS Resolution-Arms Cache (I), Cuba, Memoranda-Vol. II, Johnson Library. The cache allegedly consisted of eighty-one rifles, thirty-one machine guns, and ammunition for heavy weapons.

Whatever the merits of Smith's story, the arms cache incident provided an opportunity for the new administration of Lyndon B. Johnson to intensify, in National Security Adviser Bundy's words, "our present nasty course" against Cuba. The administration, through the U.S. Information Agency, launched a massive anti-Cuban campaign throughout Latin America. And in July 1964, with Venezuela taking the lead, it obtained an OAS resolution that condemned Cuba for its aggression and called on member states to break relations and impose economic sanctions.<sup>54</sup> Cuba was effectively ostracized from the hemispheric community, with only Mexico ignoring the sanctions. The investment that the United States had made in Betancourt's Venezuela in early 1960 had finally paid off.

U.S. officials were also pleased that Betancourt was able to transfer the presidential sash to his duly elected successor, Raúl Leoni. This marked the first peaceful transfer of power in Venezuelan history. No such historical watershed occurred in the Dominican Republic, however, for Juan Bosch's presidency lasted only seven months. A cabal of wealthy businessmen and right-wing military officers struck a *golpe* in September 1963, spuriously proclaiming that they were saving the nation from Castro and communism.

The United States recognized the Dominican junta, although in one final gesture to Betancourt and his doctrine it delayed diplomatic recognition until after the Venezuelan election. The administration gave up on Dominican democracy because, as President Kennedy had admitted, anticommunism and stability were the administration's primary concerns. Throughout 1962 and 1963, the administration discouraged the Council of State and then President Bosch from purging the Trujillistas from the Dominican armed forces. It also supplied money and training to strengthen the military's counterinsurgency capabilities and the urban police's riot-control tactics. And it constantly badgered Bosch about restricting the freedom of Dominican leftists. Bosch proved to be an indecisive leader, but U.S. officials ultimately spurned him for refusing "to adopt a firm policy against Communism and Castro."<sup>55</sup>

---

54. Bundy quoted in Gordon Chase (NSC) memorandum of record of Cuba meeting of 19 February 1964, 22 February 1964, NSFCO: Cuba, box 24, folder: OAS Resolution—Arms Cache (II), Cuba, Memoranda—Vol. II. See also Read to Bundy, 13 February 1964, NSFCO: Cuba, box 24, folder: OAS Resolution—Arms Cache (I), Cuba, Memoranda—Vol. II; Chase to Bundy, minutes of 21 February 1964 Cuba meeting, 29 February, 1964, NSFCO: Cuba, box 24, folder: OAS Resolution—Arms Cache (II), Cuba, Memoranda—Vol. II; and Robert M. Sayre, NSC, to Bundy, 7 August 1964, NSFCO: Cuba, box 24, folder: OAS Resolution—Arms Cache (II), Memoranda—Vol. II.

55. Official quoted is Hughes (director of intelligence and research) in memorandum to acting secretary of state, 25 September 1963, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 67, folder: Cables, 9/63. See also comments on Bosch in Dean Rusk (as told to Richard Rusk), *As I Saw It* (New York, 1990), 369; and by Martin in *Overtaken by Events*, 601. For the shifting Dominican views on U.S. policy toward Bosch see Miguel Guerrero, *El golpe de estado: Historia del derrocamiento de Juan Bosch* [Blow to the state: History of the overthrow of Juan Bosch] (Santo Domingo, 1993), 196–98. For U.S. recognition policy see Abraham F. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 192n.81. For U.S. policy toward Bosch see National

As outlined in an article written by Assistant Secretary of State Edwin Martin shortly after Bosch's overthrow, U.S. policy had come full circle. The United States preferred tough, anti-Communist democrats like Rómulo Betancourt. But it would no longer disdain military dictators. The democratic goals of the Alliance for Progress had been too idealistic. Bosch and other Latin American reformers had proven to be inept and inexperienced. The military was a reliable anti-Communist force, and Latin America needed a certain degree of authority to prevent the instability and disorder that provided opportunities for Communists. Martin's newspaper article, which President Kennedy approved, reiterated the views of John Foster Dulles and Richard Nixon and anticipated the so-called Mann Doctrine of the Johnson administration.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Martin merely published what the president had previously said privately, when he listed his famous "three possibilities in descending order of preference" for the post-Trujillo Dominican Republic. This faith in authoritarianism proved as suspect as it did in the 1950s. The Dominican right wing could not quell demands for political change and social progress. In April 1965 President Johnson responded by despatching twenty thousand U.S. troops to the Dominican Republic to enforce an anti-Communist stability.

In the period from 1958 to 1963, the United States took extraordinary measures—assassination plots, bribery, embargoes, interventions, naval shows of force, grand economic schemes, propaganda, sabotage, and terrorism—in the area dubbed here the Caribbean triangle. Cold War anticommunism underlay these actions. But in pursuing these aggressive measures, officials were upholding customary U.S. policies. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States has practiced sphere-of-influence politics in the Western Hemisphere: It has tried to maintain peace and order, exclude foreign influences, expand trade and investment, and shape Latin America's development. The policies pursued by the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and subsequently Johnson administrations were rooted in that tradition.

---

Security Action Memorandum No. 153, "Dominican Republic: Plan of Action for Period from Present to February 1963," 15 May 1962, NSF: Meetings and Memoranda, box 336, folder NSAM 153, Kennedy Library; Ambassador Martin to State Department, "Bosch's First Two Months," 28 April 1963, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/63; William H. Brubeck (State Department) to Bundy, "President Juan Bosch of Dominican Republic," 4 June 1963, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 1-6/63; and CIA memorandum, "President Bosch and Internal Security in the Dominican Republic," 14 June 1963, NSFCO: Dominican Republic, box 66, folder: General, 6/14-7/31/63.

56. Edwin McCammon Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America* (Lanham, MD, 1994), 466. For the Mann Doctrine see Tad Szulc, "U.S. May Abandon Effort to Deter Latin Dictators," *New York Times*, 19 March 1964.