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

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Brazilian General Hugo Penasco Alvim, with Palmer as deputy, the IAPF lessened the negative perception of U.S. intervention and, ironically, inspired signs like "Brazilians Go Home" and "IAPF Go Home" alongside the traditional anti-American sentiments. The lesson here is that such actions of ours in the hemisphere should, in the future, have broader OAS support, including national military commitments. This would reduce the damage to an American national image that is always shaky at best among its southern neighbors.

Intervention in the Caribbean is a sound memoir by a wise soldier-scholar, with some pertinent lessons for American policymakers and military planners eyeing both the Caribbean Basin and its neighbors farther south.

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Yates, Lawrence A. *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*. Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1988. 225pp.

Military interventions in the Third World are chancy affairs at best, as countries great and small have learned to their dismay in recent decades. During the post-World War II era, the American experience with such interventions has been especially spotty.

Power Pack is a study of the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and Lawrence Yates has added laurels to his position as a historian with the Combat Studies Institute of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He has provided an eminently readable work that tells us a good deal about the Dominican intervention. More significantly—and more disturbingly—he has highlighted certain characteristics of the American way of intervention (to paraphrase Russell Weigley) that existed before the Dominican affair, contributed mightily to our failure in Vietnam, and persists today. If anything, Yates understates the problem when he remarks of the intervention that "Some of the general problems continue to arise in joint contingency planning operations today."

This state of affairs quickly becomes apparent to the reader who moves through the chapters dealing with the evolution of U.S. interests in the Caribbean, the onset of the crisis in the Dominican Republic, the initial U.S. intervention in 1965, the subsequent "regionalization" of the intervention by the Organization of American States (OAS), and the termination of the crisis. Deciding that it was impolitic to rationalize an American military intervention in terms of what was known briefly as the "Johnson Doctrine" (essentially no more Cubas in the Western hemisphere), "the president . . . justified the Marine landings solely in terms of 'protecting

American lives'." In keeping with the theories of limited war prevalent at the time, politicians and political appointees asserted the primacy of civilian control "not only over policy determinations but over military operations as well." One consequence was that the Joint Chiefs of Staff "found themselves locked out of several critical meetings where military operations were discussed by Lyndon Baines Johnson and his civilian advisers." Another consequence that became apparent as the crisis developed was a tendency for those making operational decisions in Washington to forget that "Just because the intervention had entered a political phase did not eliminate the military dangers."

Operational difficulties that could not properly be laid at the door of Washington-based politicians quickly compounded the burdens with which those politicians encumbered *Power Pack*. As Yates points out, "many of the deficiencies in joint planning, command and control, coordination, intelligence, communications and deployment for Lebanon [1958] plagued the Dominican venture as well. . . ." The Marines deployed to the Dominican Republic functioned efficiently, relative to "the confusion that characterized the coordination and control of the troop commitment all along the chain of command," further raising doubts about the operational requirement for Army contingents, given "the ability of the marines to

carry out the ISZ [International Security Zone] mission by themselves."

There are fascinating vignettes, such as that about a company of the 82nd Airborne Division "receiving withering fire" which "cost the paratroopers five casualties, none of them serious" that makes one wonder how they would have described fire that inflicted a single fatality. There is a depressing description of "a plethora of . . . directives, guidelines and rules of engagement" that arrived incrementally not "in a single package, but . . . in response to specific situations." And there is an ominous foretaste of Vietnam in a Dominican intervention where "for the first time in historical memory . . . U.S. troops in the field became the subject of adverse commentary [from American correspondents]."

What makes this tale so disturbing is that virtually the same criticisms could be directed at subsequent U.S. interventions in situations as different as Vietnam, Beirut (1982-1983) and Grenada as well. But the Dominican intervention was one the United States could not lose. Where failure *was* possible, as in Vietnam and Beirut, it came home to roost with a vengeance—and not all the medals and unit citations showered on the military, nor all of the rhetorical justification from politicians, could manage to dilute the acid taste of defeat.

Fortunately, *Power Pack* suggests some lessons that should be taken to heart. One, the intrusion of politicians into *operational* matters is certain to be an invitation to disaster, just as the intrusion of the military into political questions (e.g., should an intervention occur at all) might be equally counterproductive. Second is that tactical commanders need to have the latitude to exercise that initiative in practice that is encouraged in field manuals and constrained in actual operations. One of the problems with "leading from the rear" is that commanders (in or out of uniform) lose the essential urgency of decision fueled by the urge to survive. Third is that the principles of economy of force and unity of command mandate giving complete operational control of any intervention to a single, unified command and to using ground forces from a single service in the intervention. Putting both Marine and Army formations on the ground for the sake of interservice harmony is not at all wise in such limited interventions, as both the Dominican Republic and Grenada demonstrated so aptly.

It would be reassuring to believe that these and similar lessons derived from *Power Pack* would be acted on in practice. Regrettably, there is little chance of that, barring an attitudinal revolution of sorts in the Pentagon. Nonetheless, Yates has given us a sound, thoughtful, well-researched, well-written and judiciously argued piece of scholar-

ship. I would have liked to have seen a "lesson learned" section developed at length, but that can be the next task for this thoroughly competent military historian.

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Mazarr, Michael J. *Semper Fidel: America & Cuba, 1776-1988*. Baltimore, Md.: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1988. 521pp. \$24.95

Other than a rather catchy title, Mr. Mazarr offers us nothing new in this piece that is brazenly referred to in the dust jacket as "the first comprehensive history of Cuban-American relations." The book is essentially a chronological review of major events in the last three hundred and fifty years of history as it pertains to events that affected both Cuba and America. The first half dutifully ticks off the high points between the arrival to the New World of Christopher Columbus up to the socialist revolution in 1959. It is as though the author constructed a timeline of significant events and then fleshed it out with a paragraph or two for each event listed. To be sure, some topics deserve, and receive, greater coverage than others; Mr. Mazarr is comparatively generous with the Monroe Doctrine, according it nearly two full pages.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with history by chronology, even if the analysis is often lacking. Unfor-