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The U.S. Invasion of the Dominican Republic: From Cooperation to Conquest

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THE U.S. INVASION OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: FROM COOPERATION TO
CONQUEST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Andrew DeFabio

May 2023

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

The U.S. Invasion of the Dominican Republic: From Cooperation to Conquest

by

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Invasion of the Dominican Republic: From Cooperation to Conquest

by Andrew DeFabio

This paper explores the political and military relationship between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic from the Eisenhower administration to the Johnson administration's invasion in 1965. The U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic was a military operation that had been planned and prepared for by administrations prior and not simply a reactive decision to prevent a Communist takeover. Analysis of multiple administrations places the invasion of the Dominican Republic in a larger context of U.S. – Dominican relations. The U.S.'s desire to dominate military and political aspects of the Dominican Republic is consistent with U.S. Cold War Latin American policy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Historiography	2
Background	10
THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION: CULTIVATING CONTROL	16
Cooperation and Collective Defense	16
Methods of Control	20
Conclusion	29
THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION: GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY REVIVED...	32
“Political Assassination is Ugly and Repulsive”	33
Kennedy Plans to Invade	35
Conclusion	44
THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION: OPERATION POWER PACK	46
The OAS Constraint.....	47
The Dominican Crisis Unfolds	51
The Narrative Changes	58
Conclusion	69
CONCLUSION.....	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	74

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIA – United States Central Intelligence Agency
DoD – United States Department of Defense
D.R. – Dominican Republic
JC’s – Joint Chiefs of Staff
MAAG – Military Assistance Advisory Group
OAS – Organization of American States
U.S. – United States of America
UPD – Dominican Patriotic Union

INTRODUCTION

On April 28, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration ordered the United States military to land troops on the shores of the Dominican Republic. The U.S.'s subsequent invasion permanently changed U.S. and Latin American relations. This paper argues that the U.S. intervention in 1965 was the culmination of years of planning, threats, and punishment designed to control the Dominican Republic's government and its people. Cold War concerns had influenced and dominated all political and military relations between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic since the early 1950s, as the presidential administrations of both Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) and John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) repeatedly manipulated and threatened the Dominican Republic in order to advance U.S. interests. Thus, the invasion was not an aberration of U.S. policies and practices focused on dispelling Communists. This paper builds on the extensive historiography of the U.S. – Dominican intervention by expanding the temporal analysis beyond the invasion and tracing the military and political relationship between the two countries over multiple U.S. presidential administrations. For the purpose of this paper the term administration encompasses State and Defense Department officials. My analysis is chronological, as opposed to thematic, which better demonstrates the U.S.'s gradual build up to invasion. Historians have debated Johnson's reasons for intervention for decades, but few have analyzed his decision to intervene by situating it in the context of his predecessors' actions.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The scholarship on the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic has changed over the years. Military historians provided some of the first accounts of the invasion and focused on tactical and operational actions as the crisis unfolded.¹ Many historians from the 1980s to the 2000s focused on Johnson's decision to intervene.² Some historians have also focused on U.S. and Latin American relations in the aftermath of the invasion.³ As the U.S. government continues to release documents that relate to the events in 1965, historians' understanding of the intervention deepens. New information has provided insights into conversations and operational plans that were not available to historians in the past. Even though previous historians have studied the intervention for decades, a cultural shift away from Cold War perspectives has allowed new historians to reexamine the evidence with different biases. Historians' understanding of the intervention continues to change as new information and perspectives challenge old conclusions.

Historian Alan McPherson wrote extensively on U.S. and Latin American relations, including the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. In his article "The Dominican Intervention, 50 Years On," McPherson argued that studies of the intervention could be

1. Alan McPherson, "The Dominican Intervention, 50 Years On," *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 46, no. 1 (April 2015): 31.

2. McPherson, "The Dominican Intervention, 50 Years On," 32.

3. McPherson, 33.

divided into three distinct categories. The first category McPherson detailed is military historians who interpreted the intervention “as a success” because the Johnson administration stopped a Communist takeover of the Dominican government.⁴ The studies written by General Bruce Palmer, commander of the U.S. invasion force, and Lawrence Yates, a military historian, both fall within this category. The second category that McPherson identified is scholars who attempted to address the question of whether Johnson was “correct to send the troops.”⁵ Most historians who have studied the intervention can be grouped into this category, since many argue that Johnson’s reasons for intervention were questionable. Authors that have contributed to this category are Alan McPherson, Stephen Rabe, Eric Chester, and Piero Gleijeses. McPherson argued that a third category of scholarly research on the invasion of the Dominican Republic has focused on “the consequences of the Dominican intervention” both within the Dominican Republic and on U.S. – Latin American relations.⁶ Historians have used the invasion “as a case study . . . often in a comparative framework” to better understand the U.S.’s regional power and influence in Latin America.⁷ Authors that have contributed to this category include McPherson, Slater, Herman and Brodhead.

4. McPherson, 31.

5. McPherson, 32.

6. McPherson, 33.

7. McPherson, 33.

McPherson's categorization of scholars encompasses most, but not all, of the historians that study U.S. – Dominican relations.

Historian Lars Schoultz supports McPherson's analysis in his work *Beneath the United States*. Schoultz examined the policies that the U.S. implemented in Latin America to advance its interests.⁸ He concluded that there was a “pervasive belief [from American officials] that Latin Americans constitute[d] an inferior branch of the human species.”⁹ U.S. government documents from the Cold War era support Schoultz's argument and often refer to the inadequacy, laziness, and mismanaged nature of Latin American militaries. U.S. and Dominican weapon sales and negotiations were influenced by underlying U.S. assumptions that the Dominican Republic's military and government were inferior to the United States. Schoultz revealed the superiority complex of high-level U.S. officials which helps historians to better frame past policy decisions. The evidence uncovered within this paper also demonstrates the attitudes identified by Schoultz.

Historian Stephen Rabe wrote several books on U.S. and Latin American relations in the twentieth century. Rabe argued that the Eisenhower administration shaped its foreign policies around the idea of anti-Communism, no matter the economic, social, and political cost. He demonstrated that “the Eisenhower administration gave the Kennedy government well-

8. Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), XII.

9. Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, XV.

developed programs to overthrow governments in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.”¹⁰ Rabe showed that the Kennedy administration continued the Eisenhower administration’s policies of breaking diplomatic relations, imposing economic and military sanctions, and supporting covert CIA involvement in the Dominican Republic.¹¹ In Rabe’s *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, he separated the Kennedy administration’s relationship with Cuba from his study and focused on Kennedy’s implementation of the Alliance for Progress program. He also extensively documented Kennedy’s employment of “gunboat diplomacy” in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic.¹² He believed that Kennedy had “high ideals and noble purposes for his Latin American policy,” but he ultimately “compromise[d] and even mutilate[d] those grand goals for the Western Hemisphere.”¹³ Rabe offered a concise analysis of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administration’s relationships with Latin America. His work included analysis of the relationship between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, but only as a small subsection.

The most detailed and recent study of the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic is Eric Chester’s *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff and Commies: The U.S. Intervention in the*

10. Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 173.

11. Stephen Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 98.

12. Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 34.

13. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 199.

Dominican Republic, 1965-1966. Chester examined the correspondence of different agencies within the Johnson administration as the Dominican crisis progressed. He provided a day-by-day analysis of the negotiations and conversations that occurred before and during the invasion. His work is a self-proclaimed “case study in how the United States can exert its massive power to mold and manipulate . . . countries of the Third World.”¹⁴ His sources included conversations in and through the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo, accounts from local and international reporters, and testimonies from military personnel. While Chester’s analysis thoroughly examined the moments leading up to the invasion, he did not fully place the invasion within the context of broader U.S. and Dominican Republic relations.

Rag-Tags, Riff-Raff and Commies traced the Dominican Crisis from uprisings in Santo Domingo through the culmination of the Johnson administration's decision to intervene militarily. However, the idea of intervention in the Dominican Republic had been raised by the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s. Chester highlighted the transformation of the Johnson administration’s justifications for intervention but ultimately attributed Johnson’s reasoning to the containment of Communism. He argued that “they [citizens of Latin America] understood that the Dominican intervention represented a warning, a clear signal that Washington would not tolerate an unfriendly regime in Latin America.”¹⁵ Chester’s

14. Eric Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies: The U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-66* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 4.

15. Chester, *Rag-Tags*, 252.

analysis fits into a larger reoccurring pattern of U.S. and Dominican Republic relations. His work primarily was within McPherson's second category of scholarly study and focused on Johnson's decision to intervene. Chester determined that Communists constituted "a small, and ineffectual, minority of the rebel leadership."¹⁶ He did not, however, link his findings to economic and military interests that dominated U.S. and Dominican Republic relations throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

Historian Michael Grow added to Chester's study through analysis of the Johnson administration's reasons for intervention. He argued that in order "to protect their careers" U.S. officials exaggerated the Communist threat as a result of their "Cuban syndrome."¹⁷ After Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were determined to prevent another country in Latin America from turning to Communism. Grow also attributed the overestimated measure of Communist influence to misinformation from Dominican loyalists who passed information to the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).¹⁸ He also argued that Johnson was determined to send a message abroad to other Communist nations and protect the image of American power.¹⁹ The evidence used in this paper supports Grow's assessments and adds the importance of

16. Chester, 262.

17. Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 82.

18. Grow, *U.S. Presidents*, 83.

19. Grow, 89.

select U.S. military facilities such as U.S. missile testing sites. The Dominican Republic provided military advantages to the U.S. government that required U.S. control of specific areas of the Dominican Republic. Johnson's invasion was a culminating end to more than a decade's worth of plotting, preparing, and manipulation that characterized Cold War U.S. – Dominican Republic relations.

Most historians have focused on the immediate events leading up to the U.S. invasion in 1965. Several authors concentrated on individual U.S. presidential administrations and their relationships with Latin America.²⁰ However, none have examined the continuous relationship between the United States and the Dominican Republic across multiple presidential administrations. By expanding the temporal analysis to multiple administrations and focusing solely on one country and its relationship with the United States, we can further understand why the United States invaded the Dominican Republic. The Johnson administration's leading narrative for intervention was to combat the Communist threat in the Dominican Republic. However, the U.S. government spent years planning for and speculating on the protection of military assets. I argue that this multi-year planning effort indicates that the U.S. had a long-term intent to land troops on Dominican soil.

A broader perspective of U.S and Dominican relations reveals that the U.S.'s longstanding goal was to assert control over the smaller Dominican nation. Throughout the

20. Authors Rabe and Chester both have books that focus on individual U.S. administrations.

Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the U.S. government repeatedly exploited the Dominican Republic through all the means available to it in order to advance American interests. The short-term goals for each administration may have differed, but the underlying objective was clear: to influence political, economic, and social conditions in the Dominican Republic so that they would be favorable to the U.S. and its interests. When the moment came that the U.S. was no longer going to benefit from conditions in the Dominican Republic, Johnson ordered the military to intervene. It is this long-term frame that sets this paper apart from previous studies. Previous historical analyses only examined the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations in isolation and did not consider the relationship between the two countries during the entirety of the early Cold War. No other study had considered the U.S. missile program as a primary motivator to maintain and control relations between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic. Operational plans to invade the Dominican Republic were archived by the U.S. government deep within Cuban relations of the Kennedy administration. Kennedy's relationship with Cuba has come to dominate the legacy of the Kennedy administration. However, as this paper will show, his plans to invade Cuba were developed in parallel with plans to invade the Dominican Republic.²¹ Thus, historians who begin their analysis of the Dominican Republic intervention in 1965 overlook

21. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volumes X/XI/XII, Microfiche Supplement, The American Republics, eds. Edward C. Keefer, Louis J. Smith, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2021), Document 240: Memorandum from Ambassador Willauer to Rusk, January 27, 1961.

pivotal earlier events and decisions that demonstrate the U.S.'s persistent attempts to control politics in the Dominican Republic.

BACKGROUND

The United States has had a complicated relationship with its Latin American neighbors throughout the twentieth century. In the early 1900s U.S. dominance in the region expanded with a victory over Spain in the Spanish – American War of 1898. Following this victory, the U.S. gained direct control of Guam, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and it exerted significant political and economic influence over Cuba.²² Shortly after the war, the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine of 1904 proclaimed that any “chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society may . . . ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation”.²³ President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) directed his statements at Latin American nations, and he and his successors cited it to justify U.S. intervention in the region. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) launched an eight-year occupation of the Dominican Republic after two decades of strongarm Latin American policy. Wilson’s ostensible goal was to prevent Germany from attacking the

22. US Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, “The Spanish-American War, 1898,” *Milestones: 1866-1898*, last modified May 9, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/spanish-american-war>.

23. Theodore Roosevelt, “Theodore Roosevelt’s Annual Message to Congress for 1904,” 58th Cong., 1904, HR Rep. 233, 33 from *National Archives Catalog*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5752367>.

United States through the Dominican Republic.²⁴ Almost fifty years later, President Johnson gave the order to occupy the Dominican Republic a second time amidst a popular uprising.

Historical accounts of the Dominican Crisis of 1965 often begin with the assassination of the dictator Rafael Trujillo in May 1961. Trujillo assumed power over the Dominican government in 1930, and he relied on the military to maintain his control. He used “lavish rewards with constant distrust” and often rotated generals out of positions so that they never acquired too much power.²⁵ The military was “an army of internal occupation, an instrument of political tyranny . . . a police force.”²⁶ Trujillo became the largest sugar plantation owner in the Dominican Republic, and he lived extravagantly while the Dominican people remained impoverished.²⁷ The military helped him maintain control over his assets, and “the government was his legal servant, the populace his labor force, producer and consumer.”²⁸ By the end of the 1950s, Trujillo had essentially transformed the Dominican economy into an apparatus to generate his own personal wealth. While the Dominican people suffered under

24. US Department of State, United States of America, Archive, “Dominican Republic, 1916-1924,” last modified January 20, 2009, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwi/108649.htm>.

25. Piero Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis: The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and American Intervention* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 20.

26. Jesús de Galíndez, *La Era de Trujillo: Un estudio casuístico de dictadura hispano-americana* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Americana, 1962), pp. 162-166, quoted in Gleijeses, 22.

27. Gleijeses, *La Era de Trujillo*, 23.

28. Howard Wiarda, *Dictatorship and Development: The Methods of Control in Trujillo's Dominican Republic* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989), 40, quoted in Gleijeses, 25.

Trujillo's reign, dictators in other countries across Latin America started to be replaced through popular resistance.

In the 1950s a series of popular revolts ousted dictators across Latin America. The revolts started with the removal of Honduras's Julio Diaz in 1956. Colombians removed Gustavo Pinilla in 1957 and Venezuelans toppled Marcos Jimenez in 1958. Finally, in 1959 the Cuban people deposed Fulgencio Batista and Trujillo became unnerved.²⁹ In that same year, a group of Dominican exiles launched a failed attempt to overthrow the Trujillo regime. Trujillo responded with "a wave of terror."³⁰ He was fearful of losing control of his empire and began to export his governmental assets, which caused "staggering unemployment, high inflation, new indirect taxes and salaries even more miserable than the past, and heightened suffering of the Dominican lower classes."³¹ Trujillo was assassinated in 1961 by servants and the U.S. "shed no tears over [Trujillo's] demise."³² After assassins killed Trujillo, the Dominican people elected Juan Bosch president on December 19, 1962.

Bosch did not remain in power long. On September 25, 1963, members of the Dominican military deposed Bosch in a coup d'état and replaced him with a three-man civilian junta led

29. Gleijeses, 25.

30. Gleijeses, 27.

31. Gleijeses, 29.

32. Dean Rusk and Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 368.

by Donald Reid Cabral.³³ The civilian junta promised to hold elections in the fall of 1965, but the failing economy, political instability, and popular dissatisfaction led to a popular uprising in April 1965.³⁴ Cabral loosely remained in control and was supported diplomatically by the United States and militarily by the Dominican General Elías Wessin y Wessin.³⁵ Cabral's close alignment with the U.S. made him unpopular with the Dominican people, and he began jailing, kidnapping, and executing opponents; such activities quickly became "characteristic of the Trujillo era."³⁶ The development of anti-American sentiment was driven by the threat of American intervention both diplomatically and militarily. The Dominican Republic also harbored "deep social divisions," between "city and country, rich and poor, exiles and dissidents, democrats and autocrats."³⁷ Officers within the Dominican military planned to initiate a revolt on April 26, 1965. However, the Army Chief of Staff General Marco Cuesta, was loyal to Cabral and exposed the plot on April 24. Cuesta unknowingly informed one of the main conspirators when he tried to expose the plot and forced the rebels to enact their plan two days early.³⁸ Four days later, two U.S. Marine

33. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, *As I saw It*, 369.

34. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 370.

35. Chester, 42.

36. Chester, 42.

37. Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 131.

38. Chester, 45-47.

Companies went landed in Santo Domingo. The U.S. was accused of “direct armed intervention,” at a time when “United States imperialism was wildly extending its aggression in Vietnam,” and acting as an “international gendarme.”³⁹ The U.S. actions were heavily criticized by the international community.

Critics scrutinized the justifications for U.S. actions in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and scholars continue to question U.S. motives in the twenty-first century. Senator J. William Fulbright remarked as early as 1966 that “as a result of its actions in the Dominican Republic, its ready accommodation to the rule of conservative oligarchies and military dictators and its active support for such regimes through military assistance, the United States has allowed itself to become associated with both.”⁴⁰ At the center of the debates are the United States officials’ justifications for intervention. Some scholars argued that the Johnson administration’s justifications for intervention changed over time to adapt to the military circumstances in the Dominican Republic and the political landscape in the United States. W.W. Rostow claimed that on April 28, 1965, Johnson acted “to protect Americans and other foreign nationals endangered by the disintegration of order.”⁴¹ Rostow remarked that by April 29, Johnson’s reasoning for intervention changed to “prevent the communist dominated

39. “Intervention Denounced by Moscow,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1965, 14 from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/116836113/pageview/3D139A4B77D14998PQ/1?accountid=10361>.

40. William J. Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Random House, 1966), 97.

41. W.W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 411.

forces . . . from taking over . . . and to force a cease-fire and a negotiated arrangement for . . . free elections.”⁴² Proponents of Johnson’s change in rationale cited the conditions on the ground in Santo Domingo as the reasons for the shift in Johnson’s decision making.⁴³ However, analysis of Johnson’s private conversations and internal White House memorandums suggested that the anti-communist agenda always overshadowed the need to protect American citizens. Evidence suggests that the plans to invade the Dominican Republic were drafted several years prior and that the uprisings in 1965 presented the Johnson administration with an opportunity to exercise a long-standing belief that the U.S. should occupy the Dominican Republic. While there is no single document that shows the Johnson administration deliberately enacted an operational plan from previous administrations, the aggregated evidence from the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations reveals a blueprint for Dominican intervention that was extraordinarily similar to Johnson’s actions, as the following chapters will address.

42. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power*, 411-412.

43. Rostow, 412.

THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION: CULTIVATING CONTROL

Relations between the Eisenhower administration and the Dominican Republic changed drastically during the 1950s. When Eisenhower's first term began in 1953, his administration sought to establish and strengthen cooperation and collective defense initiatives between the two countries. However, growing distrust between the two nations resulted in a transactional relationship. The U.S. continued to escalate its use of aggressive tactics to impose its will on military and political outcomes in the Dominican Republic throughout the 1950s. Once the U.S. government realized that working with Trujillo would not automatically result in an ideal outcome, it adapted its manipulation methods to dictate the Dominican people's political future. Trujillo became more and more difficult to control and the U.S. used increasingly forceful tactics to obtain its objectives. Eisenhower was on the verge of using military force by the time he transitioned out of office. When he left office, he transferred a strained relationship with the Dominican Republic to the Kennedy administration. The Eisenhower administration never gave the order to invade the Dominican Republic, but they created the conditions that made intervention acceptable.

COOPERATION AND COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

The U.S. government has long recognized the strategic location of the Dominican Republic within the Caribbean. The U.S. government determined in 1951 that the Dominican

Republic was “indispensable because of its geographic position” in support of its long-range missile testing and the defense of the Antilles.⁴⁴ As part of the terms for establishing this missile testing site, the Dominican Republic granted the U.S. three military locations within the territory of the Dominican Republic and as many “observation and cablegraphic repeater points” that it deemed were necessary.⁴⁵ The U.S. retained authority within the established sites and had the ability to launch missiles from Dominican territory, fly missiles over Dominican territorial waters, and establish and maintain all necessary systems to sustain operations.⁴⁶ The Dominican Republic gave the U.S. Navy and Air Force broad lead way to operate “vehicles, ships and airplanes which may be necessary for the purpose of the Proving Ground.”⁴⁷ The agreement did more to guarantee U.S. access than to limit its actions within the Dominican Republic, though the U.S. did specifically promise not to test any atomic weapons.⁴⁸

At the same time that the Dominican Republic sanctioned the U.S. military’s direct presence on the island, the United States was transferring millions of dollars to countries

44. US Department of State, “Dominican Republic. Long Range Proving Ground for the Testing of Guided Missiles. Agreement, and Exchanges of Notes: Signed Nov. 26, 1951,” in *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 2569.

45. US Department of State, “Dominican Republic. Long Range Proving,” 2571.

46. US Department of State, “Dominican Republic. Long Range Proving,” 2573-2574.

47. US Department of State, “Dominican Republic. Long Range Proving,” 2574.

48. US Department of State, “Dominican Republic. Long Range Proving,” 2574.

around the world under the guise of defense and national interests. A spending estimate produced by the National Security Council in 1956 allocated \$533 million to Latin American countries. Of that \$533 million, the U.S. dictated that 44 percent of the budget was devoted to military assistance and defense support, 26 percent to education, information services and infrastructure, and the remaining 30 percent to Organization of American States (OAS) programs and technical cooperation.⁴⁹ The military budget for Latin America was nearly double that of all other spending. In the early 1950s as part of a broader Cold War defense effort, the U.S. established itself as a supplier to the Dominican Republic for military equipment and training.

In 1952, negotiations regarding the allocation of \$38 million that had been appropriated by Congress under the Mutual Defense Act of 1951 took place between the United States and several Latin American governments.⁵⁰ U.S. officials recognized the Dominican Republic as “important to the defense of the Antilles area” but they warned that “the Dominicans should appreciate that they must compete with other countries for material and contracts.”⁵¹ The State Department suspended negotiations early in 1952 after Fulgencio Batista seized power

49. US Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Document 16: National Security Council Report, September 25, 1956,” in *Department of State, Office of the Historian*, 1987.

50. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume IV, The American Republics*, eds. N. Stephen Kane and William F. Sanford, Jr. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1983), Document 354: The Ambassador in the Dominican Republic (Ackerman) to the Department of State, February 1, 1952.

51. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*.

in Cuba. The Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Edward G. Miller, Jr., wrote that “such negotiations [with the Dominican Republic] following so closely upon recent developments in Cuba” may “adversely affect the continuance of the military assistance program and the achievement of our mutual objective of strengthening the defense of the hemisphere.”⁵² By October of 1952, however, the State Department’s opinion had changed. The Dominican Republic requested forty F-51 fighter planes, which the U.S. was eager to supply.⁵³ The U.S. supported the request so that the Dominican Republic could “establish and maintain a military organization capable of maintaining the internal security of that government and assisting the other American States in their common effort of preparing for defense of the Western Hemisphere against any possible aggression.”⁵⁴ U.S. weapons, ammunition, planes and vehicles flowed into the Dominican Republic.

In line with the Eisenhower administration policy decisions detailed earlier, the U.S. secured a Mutual Defense Treaty with the Dominican Republic on March 6, 1953. Rafael Trujillo traveled to the United States and met with Eisenhower personally to formally agree to the treaty. Their conversation was brief, but Trujillo emphasized the “need for further

52. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

53. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

54. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 356.

inter-American solidarity in the great struggle against Communism.”⁵⁵ In addition to collective defense, the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953 established the need for permanently stationed military personnel within the Dominican Republic and implemented trade restrictions “with nations that threaten the security of the Continent.”⁵⁶ Two months later, the Department of Defense created the Dominican Republic Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). The group consisted of four officers and five enlisted soldiers.⁵⁷ The MAAG served alongside the embassy and acted as liaisons between the Department of Defense and Dominican officials in support of State and Defense Department objectives.

METHODS OF CONTROL

The State and Defense Department had originally established the MAAG as a cooperative initiative, but its role quickly changed. The Mutual Defense Treaty and the MAAG quickly became tools for the Eisenhower administration to try and control Trujillo and steer him toward satisfying U.S. national interests. In May 1953, only two months after the U.S. and the Dominican Republic signed the Mutual Defense Treaty, the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic threatened to cut off some of the assistance guaranteed in the treaty.

55. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

56. Department of State, United States of America, “Military Assistance Agreement Between the United States of America and the Dominican Republic,” in *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), 184.

57. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

The Embassy suggested that assistance be postponed until “Generalissimo Trujillo adopts a more satisfactory attitude and takes steps to improve the climate for foreign investment.”⁵⁸

The Embassy had claimed that it received “unofficial threats to expropriate companies in which United States investors have substantial interests.”⁵⁹ The State Department ultimately decided against the Embassy’s recommendations and continued to provide military and technical support to the Dominican Republic.

Problems continued into January 1954 as the Trujillo regime increased its attacks on American businesses in the Dominican Republic. The U.S. Embassy concluded that the Dominican government was executing a “well-planned campaign to terrorize the companies or to ruin them financially.”⁶⁰ The State Department provided the U.S. Embassy with several options to combat the attacks on American investments and persuade Trujillo to act in accordance with U.S. interests. The Secretary of State advised that the U.S. Ambassador suggest that Trujillo’s actions “might be expected to result in unfortunate publicity in the press” and that he “might discourage the foreign investments” needed to improve the Dominican Republic’s “economic development.”⁶¹ Internal letters in the State Department

58. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

59. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 362.

60. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

61. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 365.

indicated that conversations about how to handle the Dominican Republic situation occurred but were not officially recorded by government officials. In February, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs acknowledged recommendations produced by the U.S. Ambassador that were not published in departmental records. The Assistant Secretary agreed that “unless direct negotiations between the companies and the Dominican Government prove fruitless, we should not take any further action.”⁶² At this point in U.S. and Dominican relations, the State Department was fully in control of negotiations between the two countries. However, the U.S. government quickly adapted its strategy and adopted a more aggressive style in order to achieve the political outcomes it desired.

The turning point in U.S. and Dominican Republic relations during the Eisenhower administration came in March 1954. In a report to the Department of State from the Ambassador in the Dominican Republic, the Ambassador reached the conclusion that “Trujillo intends to possess, sooner or later, the properties of the American agricultural and electric companies.”⁶³ The U.S. government stopped issuing polite negotiations and subtle threats and switched to outright condemnation that went so far as to threaten to remove Trujillo from power. The Ambassador wrote:

62. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

63. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952-1954.

If we are to protect our influence in favor of representative government among other nations of the free world, regain the respect of the Dominican people, and protect American investors here and elsewhere, we must soon make it clear that Trujillo's recent conduct and present policies are quite unacceptable, and that we are not trying to saddle the Dominican people with his regime indefinitely.⁶⁴

The Ambassador's ominous indication that the removal of Trujillo was possible would not be the last threat from senior U.S. officials. The U.S. was accused of planning and coordinating other transfers of power during the Cold War in Latin America such as in Brazil.⁶⁵ The Ambassador recommended that in the interim the U.S. distance themselves from Trujillo and his exploitive use of the Dominican economy.⁶⁶

In 1956, the U.S. government reexamined its relationship with the Dominican Republic. The Eisenhower administration issued guidance that military assistance packages were to include only those assets deemed necessary "within the military requirements of the Dominican Republic."⁶⁷ U.S. officials conducted a full "re-evaluation of our overall attitude towards the Dominican Republic" that centered on "Dominican conduct towards Cuba."⁶⁸

64. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 367.

65. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 68.

66. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*.

67. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Volume VI, American Republics: Multilateral; Mexico; Caribbean*, eds. N. Stephen Kane, Joan M. Lee, Delia Pitts, and Sherrill B. Wells (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1987), Document 310: Letter From the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Mutual Security Affairs (Barnes) to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Gray), December 6, 1956.

68. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

According to the U.S. government, the Dominican Republic supported destabilization efforts in Cuba and was sympathetic to Cuban agitators acting against the Batista regime. U.S. officials considered reduction of military assistance among other incentives such as denial of loans, unfavorable press coverage, and reduced education assistance.⁶⁹

The harder line toward the Dominican Republic that the Eisenhower administration adopted in 1956 reflected a fundamental shift in Latin American policy that occurred that year. Within the 1956 National Security Report, the U.S. threatened to cut off all “economic and financial cooperation” and “take any other political, economic or military actions deemed appropriate” against any countries that allied themselves with the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ The U.S. established the possibility of military action in response to any relations between Latin American countries and the Soviet Union. The U.S. did indicate that it was willing to coordinate through the OAS if it deemed military actions were necessary, but it did not rule out the possibility of “unilateral action . . . as a last resort.”⁷¹ The policy established by the Eisenhower administration gave it the flexibility to respond to changing political situations in Latin America as it saw fit. The National Security Report of 1956 did not include specific

69. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 312.

70. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

71. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

plans to invade a particular country, but the report removed any question of whether the Eisenhower administration was open to explicitly intervening in another country's affairs.

Following this significant policy shift, the Eisenhower administration began planning and preparing possible courses of action to follow in the case of a sudden severance in U.S. and Dominican Republic relations. In 1957 a report by the State Department queried several governmental agencies to determine what "interest they would have were this Government [U.S.] to take action against the Dominican Consul General in New York which might conceivably lead to a break in diplomatic relations."⁷² The Defense Department responded that the U.S. missile support installations established in the early 1950s in the Dominican Republic were "vital" and the missile sites were responsible for "observation, destruction, and the maintenance of a manned repeater link."⁷³ If the U.S. were to immediately sever diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic, the impact on the missile program would have resulted in the loss of "considerable sums of money" and "would interfere with the missiles development program."⁷⁴ Nearly six years after the U.S. established the right to operate a missile program within the Dominican Republic, government officials were scrambling to maintain its security from the host nation.

72. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

73. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 320.

74. Department of State, United States of America, Document 320.

In order to further pressure the Dominican government, as well as address State Department and Congressional concerns regarding the Dominican Republic's usefulness to U.S. military interests, the U.S. government steadily reduced Dominican access to U.S. military equipment over the course of 1957. The Chief of the Naval component of the MAAG in the Dominican Republic "recommended that the materiel program of the military assistance program be completely eliminated, that all procurement be stopped, and that no further funds or material be allocated to the Dominican Navy."⁷⁵ Subsequently a month later "as a result of events which have taken place in the past few months" the State Department rescinded its promise of delivering updated F-80C airplanes.⁷⁶ The U.S. summarized its reasons for cancelling the orders within the 1958 Operations Plan for Latin America. The Eisenhower administration determined that it would only provide support to persuade "Latin American countries to limit their military objectives to those unilaterally determined by the U.S. government."⁷⁷ The Eisenhower administration dangled military assistance as a benefit

75. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

76. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*.

77. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume V, American Republics*, eds. N. Stephen Kane, Paul Claussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 3: Operations Plan for Latin America Prepared by the Operations Coordinating Board, May 28, 1958. Operations plans are the implementation of policy directives. Commanders, or presidents, issue guidance and Departments or staffs create plans to implement those policies and guidance.

for cooperating with U.S. interests and then threatened intervention to try and control Dominican behavior when it did not comply.

The U.S. Government followed through on its threats to cut off military assistance in June 1959. Six months after Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba, armed members of the Dominican Patriotic Union (UPD), an anti-Trujillo organization that the Cuban revolutionary government supported, invaded the Dominican Republic.⁷⁸ The armed individuals were quickly defeated by the Dominican Army. But despite this success and intelligence reports that indicated that Trujillo threatened to retaliate by launching air strikes against Cuba, the UPD's failed invasion had a profound impact on the Eisenhower administration.⁷⁹ Vice President Richard Nixon was concerned that Trujillo's government could fall just like Batista's had, and he indicated that the U.S. should "consider intervention [in the Dominican Republic] if this group threatened to come to power."⁸⁰ Analysts believed that Trujillo possessed the necessary firepower to prevent minor armed invasions, but feared that the small invasions would ultimately disintegrate internal support for the regime.⁸¹ The

78. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960.

79. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 122.

80. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960.

81. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 122.

uncertainty led to a complete cessation of the sale of military equipment and ammunition from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic.⁸²

By 1959 U.S. distrust of Trujillo had grown so much that the U.S. was willing to reduce military support, despite its continued presence operation of missile sites within the Dominican Republic. The U.S. military repeatedly expressed concerns over the safety of the missile sites should Trujillo be replaced by unknown successors. The U.S. intelligence community determined that “as long as Trujillo remains in power, there will be no threat to the U.S. guided missile tracking station in the Dominican Republic.”⁸³ However, U.S. intelligence officials also concluded that “should Trujillo leave the scene” a power-struggle in the Dominican Republic would ensue in which “pro-Communist exiles and other radicals would play a prominent part.”⁸⁴ Because U.S. officials were unable to determine which group would secure power in Trujillo’s absence, they concluded that the missile program could be jeopardized. Thus, from the U.S. perspective, Trujillo became a means to an end: the Eisenhower administration was content to keep him in power for fear of a Communist faction taking his place and gaining access to highly classified missile information.

82. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960.

83. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 126., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960.

84. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 126.

By the end of the Eisenhower's time in office, the U.S. Government determined that it was not in the U.S.'s interest for Trujillo to remain in power. The U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic believed that "U.S. security and business interests in [the] Dominican Republic will continue [to] deteriorate with every additional day Trujillo remains in office."⁸⁵ They concluded that Trujillo's policies were "counter [to] U.S. objectives."⁸⁶ The conditions of a strained relationship were passed from the Eisenhower administration to the Kennedy administration, a relationship that would also unexpectedly be passed from Kennedy to Johnson. In fewer than ten years, the U.S. and the Dominican Republic's relationship had progressed from mutual partnership to subversion and distrust.

CONCLUSION

The Eisenhower administration did not form specific plans for the invasion of the Dominican Republic, but it set the tone for the future use of force in order to exert U.S. will over the Dominican people. After the Eisenhower administration realized that it could not completely control the Dominican Republic through economic methods, they began to explore control options through political and military means. When those attempts failed to produce responses that the U.S. government desired, the U.S. government threatened military

85. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XII, American Republics, eds. Edward C. Keefer, Harriet Dashiell Schwar, and W. Taylor Fain III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 301: Telegram from the Consulate General in the Dominican Republic to the Department of State, February 4, 1961.

86. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 301.

intervention and utilized covert operations to remove Trujillo. Written records are inconclusive to determine the extent of which the Eisenhower administration had specific plans to invade the Dominican Republic. However, the tone and scope of their policies and statements indicate that conversations of military action were likely taking place. The U.S. government constantly took stock of its military assets in the Dominican Republic to understand the risk, should they decide to intervene militarily in Dominican affairs.

Some scholars have argued that it was the Communist takeover of Cuba that drove the Eisenhower administration to more drastic measures.⁸⁷ The documents and policies show however, that the Eisenhower administration was increasingly militant in their methods of control before Castro's coup. Cuban revolutionaries did not embrace communism until the spring of 1961 after Eisenhower left office. The events in Cuba did have an impact on the U.S. government's Latin American policy, but the U.S. had been escalating their actions in the Dominican Republic throughout the Eisenhower administration's time in office. Just as later presidents would claim the need to combat Communism to justify their actions, the enabling decisions that brought the U.S. to intervention occurred long before American forces were deployed to the Dominican Republic. The Kennedy administration inherited a relationship with the Dominican Republic that was strained and on the edge of disaster.

87. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 162.

Instead of charting a new course, the Kennedy administration opted to continue to escalate their actions in order to assert U.S. control over the Dominican Republic.

THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION: GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY REVIVED

Like its immediate predecessor, the Kennedy administration aggressively attempted to influence and control political outcomes in the Dominican Republic. However, as I will show in this section, whereas the Eisenhower administration applied pressure by reducing the Dominican government's access to military aid, the Kennedy administration revived nineteenth-century-style "gunboat diplomacy" and relied on naval power to achieve its desired results. The term "gunboat diplomacy" is most often associated with Commodore Mathew Perry and his use of U.S. Naval assets in 1853 against Japan.⁸⁸ Perry stationed U.S. Navy ships in the Tokyo Bay to force the Japanese into establishing relations with the U.S. The Kennedy administration repeatedly used methods similar to Perry's in order to force favorable outcomes in the Dominican Republic. Kennedy used the U.S. fleet to threaten Trujillo, support his successors, and prevent competitors who sought power from taking over without U.S. approval. In addition to the use of gunboats, the Kennedy administration developed plans to invade the Dominican Republic if the U.S. determined that it was necessary for their interests. Kennedy's militancy towards the Dominican Republic bridged the gap between Eisenhower's threats and Johnson's action. Johnson's decision to intervene

88. US Department of State, "Gunboat Diplomacy," *National Museum of American Diplomacy*, <https://diplomacy.state.gov/online-exhibits/diplomacy-is-our-mission/prosperity/gunboat-diplomacy/>.

does not appear as drastic when it is viewed contextually with Kennedy's actions.

Additionally, the Kennedy administration's plan to invade the Dominican Republic was strikingly similar to the events that unfolded in 1965 during the Johnson administration.

“POLITICAL ASSASSINATION IS UGLY AND REPULSIVE”⁸⁹

The Kennedy administration began exploring tactics it could use to steer political and military outcomes in the Dominican Republic almost immediately after entering office. In February 1961, one month after his inauguration, President Kennedy asked his staff about the stability of the Dominican government and the likelihood of Communists assuming control should Trujillo fall from power.⁹⁰ In an informational memorandum from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to President Kennedy, Rusk determined that “a question arises as to whether the United States would be prepared to intervene militarily either unilaterally or collectively with other American States. This question needs study, and a review of the entire plan is desirable.”⁹¹ If such a review was drafted, it is not currently available in any archival collection. But Rusk's initial memorandum does clearly demonstrate that U.S. officials were

89. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

90. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

91. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 302.

entertaining the idea of intervening in the Dominican Republic four years before thousands of American soldiers landed in Santo Domingo.

As Kennedy's first year in office progressed, officials in his administration openly displayed their disdain for Trujillo and their desire to see him replaced by dissidents friendly to the U.S. In a letter that the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic, Henry Dearborn, sent to the Department of State, Dearborn compared the possibility of assassinating Trujillo to the use of the atomic bomb in Japan. He wrote:

Political assassination is ugly and repulsive, but everything must be judged in its own context. The United States used the atom bomb on Hiroshima and that was ugly and repulsive—unless one stops to consider that it was used to save thousands of lives in the long run.⁹²

It became clear to Dearborn that “Trujillo’s overthrow in the near future would be in the interest of the U.S.”⁹³ The U.S. government no longer flirted with the idea of Trujillo being replaced but began talks with dissidents about the political future of the Dominican Republic.⁹⁴ The Kennedy administration was not yet ready to act militarily, but it was supportive of violence against the leader of the Dominican Republic.

The U.S. government created contingency plans for the sudden loss of Trujillo. The U.S. government wanted to ensure that whoever replaced Trujillo was sympathetic to U.S.

92. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 304.

93. Department of State, United States of America, Document 304.

94. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

interests, so the intelligence community assessed possible candidates for succession. Secretary Rusk told the U.S. Ambassador that if a replacement government deemed friendly to the U.S. were to “request U.S. armed assistance in face of real or anticipated threat from abroad” he should send his “request together with your recommendation soonest.”⁹⁵ Exactly four years later, the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic sent such a request to Rusk, who continued serving as Secretary of State in the Johnson administration.⁹⁶ And the Johnson administration responded by implementing an intervention plan that had been drafted in 1961.

KENNEDY PLANS TO INVADE

The Kennedy administration drafted the blueprint for the invasion of the Dominican Republic in the spring of 1961. They deliberated on, published, and shelved the plan shortly after US-supported Cuban exiles’ failed attempt to invade Cuba and topple Fidel Castro’s government in April 1961. In a report from the Cuban Task Force to Kennedy’s National Security Advisor, the U.S. government assessed three likely scenarios for the future of the Dominican Republic: internal or external forces would remove Trujillo from power, and he would then be succeeded by political powers that were friendly towards the U.S.; Trujillo

95. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

96. Department of State, United States of America, Dominican Republic. *Government Forces Request Military Assistance from US; Psychological Advantage Still Rests with Rebels; U.S. Marines Might Be Needed to Protect U.S. Citizens*, Telegram 1149, United States Department of State, April 28, 1965, 1-2 from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

would be removed from power, and he would be succeeded by political powers that were not friendly towards the U.S.; or Trujillo would remain in power.⁹⁷ The Cuban Task Force also provided detailed recommendations for each scenario that called for the “employment of U.S. military forces in the Dominican Republic” that could be executed “under Presidential authority” in case Trujillo were removed from power.⁹⁸

If Trujillo was ousted and replaced by political powers that were friendly to the United States, Task Force analysts advised that, should the new Dominican government approach the U.S. embassy to request military assistance, the U.S. should “dispatch such aid, up to and including the landing of US forces” to ensure the “stabilization of an internal situation acceptable to the US.”⁹⁹ The U.S. government believed that this assistance could bolster a new government that, despite its friendliness toward the U.S., could still be susceptible to a “subversive initiative . . . from Cuba and/or from the Dominican exile groups.”¹⁰⁰ Given the possibility of “subversion,” the U.S. prioritized offering military assistance to prevent Communist forces from overthrowing a newly-established friendly government after they had proclaimed control of the Dominican government. This further demonstrates that the Kennedy administration’s principal concern was the accomplishment of U.S. objectives, not

97. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

98. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 307.

99. Department of State, United States of America, Document 307.

100. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 307.

improving the political stability of the Dominican Republic or respecting the wishes of its people.

The Cuban Task Force also provided recommendations to the Kennedy administration if Trujillo was replaced by a government that was hostile to the U.S. and its interests. The report recommended that the U.S. Embassy have “stand-by instructions to urge the moderate pro-US group to declare themselves the provisional government and to request help from the U.S. and the OAS.”¹⁰¹ After the U.S. Embassy learned that forces removed Trujillo from power then “U.S. military forces be immediately positioned” to act in the Dominican Republic.¹⁰² Once the U.S. received a request for support from a group they deemed “acceptable,” military forces would move quickly into the Dominican Republic.¹⁰³ The U.S.’s primary goal in both of the scenarios detailed earlier was to control which of the succession groups would be legitimized as the government of the Dominican Republic. To ensure that its goals would be achieved, the Kennedy administration developed pre-planned responses that involved the use of U.S. troops. The Kennedy administration ultimately did not deploy forces to the Dominican Republic, but the recommendations and plans for troop deployments were readily available for the Johnson administration to enact in 1965.

101. Department of State, United States of America, Document 307.

102. Department of State, United States of America, Document 307.

103. Department of State, United States of America, Document 307.

Dominican dissidents assassinated Rafael Trujillo on May 30, 1961, and his death set in motion events that altered the future of the Dominican Republic. Instructions from the State Department to the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo directed that the Embassy convey to Joaquín Balaguer, Trujillo's likely replacement, that the U.S. was prepared to provide assistance should a "Communist attack from abroad" occur.¹⁰⁴ The State Department even offered to use the U.S. Navy as a show of force to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to Balaguer.¹⁰⁵ As White House officials continued to debate their plan of action, they moved two aircraft carriers, several destroyers, and 12,000 Marines into position 100 miles off the Dominican coast.¹⁰⁶ Tensions in the White House were extremely high as Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy suggested sabotaging the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic to provide justification for landing troops on Dominican soil.¹⁰⁷ The Kennedy administration came closer to intervention during that period than ever before.

In the aftermath of Balaguer's ascension, the U.S. government decided to increase its MAAG presence in the Dominican Republic. The Defense Department upgraded the lead

104. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

105. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 309.

106. Department of State, United States of America, Document 309.

107. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

officer of the MAAG to “field grade level.”¹⁰⁸ The increase in rank to the officers in charge of the attaché in the Dominican Republic indicated a strong increase in the responsibility and priority of those assigned to the Dominican mission. In addition to the rank increase, new orders were issued by the Department of State to alter the MAAG’s objective in the Dominican Republic. The State Department ordered the military attaché to “gather intelligence on the political activities and attitudes of the Dominican military.”¹⁰⁹ The promotion and placement of new commanding officers and the retooled mission assignment reflected the Kennedy administration’s continued desire to influence the course of events in the Dominican Republic and the increasingly volatile nature of U.S. and Dominican relations.

The Kennedy administration relied on gunboat diplomacy to influence the politics of the Dominican Republic as officials questioned how long Balaguer would remain in power. Intelligence reports indicated that Ramfis Trujillo, Rafael Trujillo’s son, intended to seize control of the Dominican Republic from Balaguer. U.S. officials were aware of Ramfis Trujillo’s ambitions and threatened that they “would find a pretext for coming in with the

108. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963. Officers in the grade of one to three are commonly referred to in the military as Company Grade Officers. Company Grade Officers are referred to as such because they typically serve in or lead company sized units or below. Company sized units can range between 40 to 150 personnel. Field Grade Officers are officers in the grades of four to six and typically serve in or lead units at the battalion or brigade level. Battalion and brigade sized units can have anywhere from 500 to 4,000 personnel.

109. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

Fleet” if he should manage to seize power.¹¹⁰ The State Department believed that Balaguer was more friendly to the U.S. than Ramfis, and in order to openly demonstrate U.S. support for Balaguer, as well as indicate to the younger Trujillo that the U.S. was prepared to intervene if necessary, the U.S. Ambassador requested a “military show of force be prepared for use.”¹¹¹ Once again the Department of Defense positioned U.S. naval assets “at [a] point just below [the] horizon from Ciudad Trujillo [Santo Domingo]” and were ready to move ashore if they were directed.¹¹² The State Department prepared the following statement for release should the president give the order to land troops in the Dominican Republic:

President Balaguer who has been playing an active role in working toward the democratization of the D[ominican] R[epublic] has invited units US Navy which have been on maneuvers in nearby waters pay courtesy call at C[iudad] T[rujillo]. This invitation has been accepted.¹¹³

The U.S. government was aware of the poor domestic and international press that could follow the deployment of U.S. military forces to control the internal affairs of another nation. The State Department purposefully kept the military beyond the horizon and out of sight of Santo Domingo to avoid condemnation. The State Department was temporarily satisfied with

110. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

111. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

112. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

113. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

Balaguer and the internal politics of the Dominican Republic, but only after they used a display of military strength to dictate the conditions in which he would rule.

In a power shift that surprised State Department officials, opposition forces ousted Balaguer in December 1961 and replaced him with a council of seven members who would govern until presidential elections that were scheduled for December 1962.¹¹⁴ During the period of council rule, the U.S. government focused its efforts on restoring the type of military and technical relations that existed during the early years of the Eisenhower administration. They identified the Dominican military as “in need of immediate U.S. encouragement and help in reorientation and adaption to new missions under Council.”¹¹⁵ The U.S.’s true goal, however, was to reduce the Dominican military to the size necessary for “internal security, coastal surveillance and anti-guerrilla capabilities.”¹¹⁶ The sudden period of stability after the council took power from Balaguer caused some officials within the U.S. Embassy to feel disappointed “when it became clear we were not going to invade immediately.”¹¹⁷ The council’s rule also prompted others within the Kennedy administration to reexamine their goal of influencing Dominican politics and how they would achieve it.

114. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

115. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

116. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

117. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the*

As the December 1962 elections drew near, the U.S. government scrambled to assess potential electoral outcomes and prepare U.S. courses of action in response. The U.S. Embassy believed that the upcoming elections would be “clean and peaceable.”¹¹⁸ The Embassy warned, however, that after the people decided a winner that the U.S. “face[ed] a dangerous interregnum when we must be prepared to move in.”¹¹⁹ In January 1963, Juan Bosch was elected president after winning 60 percent of the popular vote.¹²⁰ The U.S. intelligence community did not know enough about Bosch and feared that he might cater to far-left political movements within the Dominican Republic.¹²¹ Their fear of his sympathy to left-leaning politics caused the U.S. to maintain its ties to conservative Dominican military officers. The State Department declared that “we can have no new Castro in the Caribbean,” even if that meant supporting Bosch’s adversaries.¹²² In addition to not knowing if Bosch was pro-U.S., the U.S. feared that Bosch could create conditions favorable to Communist infiltrators. The U.S. did not believe that Bosch was a Communist, but they did fear his

United States, 1961-1963.

118. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 351.

119. Department of State, United States of America, Document 351.

120. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963.*

121. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963.*

122. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 354.

incompetence and apathy toward fighting Communism could expose the Dominican Republic to Communist attacks.¹²³

Bosch's policy decisions seemingly confirmed the U.S. intelligence community's assessment that "the Communist danger in the Dominican Republic is not immediate, but potential."¹²⁴ Bosch faced a complicated political situation in which his actions were welcomed by ordinary citizens, but alarmed the Dominican military and conservatives.¹²⁵ The CIA warned that in the event of a "reactionary coup, the Communists would have an opportunity to seize the leadership of the popular revolutionary movement."¹²⁶ The U.S. planned to use proven methods of external political manipulation to prevent far-left forces from seizing power. The U.S. Embassy believed that "our ability to influence events here depends upon our willingness to bring the fleet to the horizon."¹²⁷ The U.S. resorted again to the threat of using gunboat diplomacy. Whenever the Kennedy administration believed that political conditions in the Dominican Republic were unfavorable to the U.S., they brought in Naval firepower to support a regime they approved of.

123. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 354.

124. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

125. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

126. Department of State, United States of America, Document 356.

127. Department of State, United States of America, Document 357.

CONCLUSION

The Kennedy administration relied on the use of force to affect their desired outcomes in the Dominican Republic. A turning point in U.S. and Dominican relations came just six weeks before Kennedy's assassination. Members of the Dominican military conducted a coup and ousted Bosch in late September 1963. The military junta that seized control remained in power until 1965, when political unrest resulted in U.S. troops being deployed on Dominican soil. The coup to oust Bosch marked a major shift in U.S. and Dominican relations. The U.S. transitioned from implementing gunboat diplomacy to preparing plans for "active United States military intervention."¹²⁸ After the coup, Kennedy addressed the Secretary of Defense and wanted to know "how many troops could we get into the Dominican Republic in a 12-24-36-48 hour period?"¹²⁹ The discussions in the White House were no longer how far off the horizon the ships should stay, but how quickly they could carry their crews ashore. Two years later, President Johnson carried out those plans.

The Kennedy administration built upon the aggressive tactics to control the Dominican Republic that the Eisenhower administration developed. Historians that have only focused on the Eisenhower administration's relationship with the Dominican government or only on the Kennedy administration's relationship with the Dominican government have overlooked the

128. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963.

129. Department of State, United States of America, Office of the Historian, Document 358.

continuities between the two administrations. The Kennedy administration generated multiple assessments on the impacts of invasion and developed options to invade the Dominican Republic. The Kennedy administration's actions towards the Dominican Republic made invasion possible for the Johnson administration. They developed the plan for invasion, continued to dictate political outcomes in the Dominican Republic, and supported clandestine efforts to advance U.S. interests. Thus, when analyzed alongside Eisenhower's and Kennedy's aggressive approach to Dominican policy, Johnson's decision to invade seems more like a culmination and continuation of past policies and less like a radical break.

THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION: OPERATION POWER PACK¹³⁰

President Johnson's decision to invade the Dominican Republic in 1965 has generated decades of debate and criticism among historians, politicians, and international relations scholars. At the core of the controversy are the different justifications for intervention that Johnson stated in his public speeches and his private conversations. Memorandums within the administration revealed a mix of reasons for intervention that surfaced publicly whenever they were politically convenient for Johnson. The Johnson administration's public justifications for American military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 transformed as the intervention progressed. There were three major justifications used by the Johnson administration for military intervention: first, that the military presence was needed to protect American citizens in the Dominican Republic; second, that the U.S. had intervened to prevent the spread of Communism in the Western Hemisphere; and third, that the U.S. intervened to provide a rapid resolution to the political crisis in the Dominican Republic. Johnson's reasons for intervention are questionable given the evidence of strained relations and prior military plans for intervention promulgated by past administrations. Johnson's immediate reasons for intervention did not acknowledge the years of aggressive interference by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. When historians examine Johnson's actions

130. US Army, "Armed Forces Expeditionary Campaigns: Dominican Republic," *US Army Center of Military History*, https://history.army.mil/html/reference/army_flag/dominican.html.

alongside those of his immediate predecessors, his order to invade the Dominican Republic is no longer viewed as a simple reaction to current events, but a culmination of a years-long relationship profoundly marked by the U.S. government's desire to exert control over the Dominican Republic.

THE OAS CONSTRAINT

The American intervention in the Dominican Republic has caused politicians, scholars, and ordinary citizens to debate the justifications and legality of U.S. actions for decades because of the alleged U.S. violation of international law. The U.S. entered into an agreement with fourteen Latin American countries when it signed the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948. Article 13 of the charter guaranteed members the “right to develop its cultural, political and economic life freely and naturally.”¹³¹ Article 15 provided that “no State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State.”¹³² Article 17 specifically prohibited intervention and stated that “the territory of a State is inviolable; it may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation.”¹³³ The charter also provided a means to bypass Articles 15 and 17 if “measures [are] adopted for the

131. Charter of the Organization of American States, Bolivia-Brazil-Columbia-Costa Rica-Dominican Republic-Ecuador-El Salvador-Haiti-Honduras-Mexico-Nicaragua-Panama-Paraguay-United States, April 30, 1948, UNTS 1609, 6, from United Nations Treaty Collection.

132. Charter of the Organization of American States, 6.

133. Charter of the Organization of American States, 6.

maintenance of peace and security in accordance with existing treaties.”¹³⁴ The charter allowed intervention in another country’s affairs if it were sanctioned by the group in accordance with the charter’s prescribed procedures. The Johnson administration ignored the provisions of the charter and intervened prior to securing OAS support and disregarded the United States’ international obligations.

Senator Fulbright criticized the U.S.’s disregard for its legal obligations and argued that the U.S. did not allow the agreed-upon processes of deconfliction to occur. He contended that the United States “could have called an urgent session of the Council of the OAS for the purpose of invoking Article 6 of the Rio Treaty.”¹³⁵ Article 6 would have required all of the OAS members to “enjoy equal rights and equal capacity to exercise these rights and have equal duties.”¹³⁶ Senator Fulbright questioned why the Johnson administration believed “there was no time to consult the OAS, although there was time to ‘consult’ – or inform – the Congressional leadership.”¹³⁷ The Johnson administration, purposefully or not, did not convene with the OAS council prior to American forces landing on Dominican soil.

Congressional leaders were not the only government representatives that questioned the Johnson administration’s justifications. General Palmer doubted Johnson’s need for rapid

134. Charter of the Organization of American States, 7.

135. Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, 94.

136. Charter of the Organization of American States, 5.

137. Fulbright, 94.

decision-making when he stated that “expert consensus seems to have been that there was virtually no chance that the OAS would sanction intervention.”¹³⁸ Secretary Rusk claimed that the Mexican Ambassador told him that U.S. intervention was necessary but not to ask for a “formal approval or public endorsement. Just go ahead and do what has to be done [in the Dominican Republic].”¹³⁹ Johnson appeared to be without official support from other Latin American countries and determined that the only way to pursue his objectives was to ignore the OAS procedures altogether. The OAS political framework contained measures to rectify situations like the Dominican uprising and top U.S. officials chose not to exercise the diplomatic options available. The Johnson administration did not inform the OAS of the unilateral decision to deploy troops “until after the fact.”¹⁴⁰ The Johnson administration expended significant political resources to defend their decision in the aftermath of the invasion.

The Johnson administration was aware of the political consequences of their decisions. A memorandum from Arthur Schlesinger, a leading academic at the time, suggested that “the key to [preventing a communist takeover without damaging U.S. reputation] is self-evident: [it] is to make clear that our intervention is on the side of Dominican Democracy.”¹⁴¹ As

138. Bruce Palmer, *Intervention in the Caribbean* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 143.

139. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 376.

140. Palmer, *Intervention in the Caribbean*, 30.

141. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., to Moyers, Bundy, Goodwin, “Memorandum from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., to

early on as May 2, 1965, the Johnson Administration polled advisors on the best way to shape and present the reasons for intervention to the American people and the world. Over time, however, people challenged the evidence that was used for Johnson's decisions. Leaders within the administration, such as Secretary Rusk, distanced themselves from Johnson and the decision to intervene. In his memoir, Secretary Rusk recalled that he "doubted, for example, that Communists had taken over the rebellion or that small number of Communists would play a decisive role. The president, however, decided to stress the Communist threat."¹⁴² Despite the loss of trust from the international community and from politicians at home, Johnson said he would "do it again."¹⁴³

Johnson's National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy submitted a request for a review of U.S. legal authority to intervene in the Dominican Republic to the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (USACDA). The review is not available, but the memorandum that accompanied the review revealed some of the White House's fears. Adrian Fisher, director of USACDA, responded to Bundy's questions in a memorandum. Fisher told Bundy that he organized his answers to Bundy's questions "in a way that presents

Moyers, Bundy, and Goodwin on U.S. tactics to prevent a Communist takeover of the Dominican Republic" May 2, 1965, *White House Library*, from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

142. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 373.

143. Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), 195.

the least difficulty of ‘proof’ at a later period.”¹⁴⁴ He also indicated that the strength of the “communist argument,” depended on a “policy judgement,” that balances “what the evidence shows and (a) how the Administration can best handle the issues of political and legal justification for United States action.”¹⁴⁵ The inquiry by Bundy revealed Johnson’s concerns about the potential legal and, most importantly to Johnson, political ramifications of his decisions after critics suggested the Communist threat was negligible. Johnson’s initial public justification for intervention in the Dominican Republic showed his concern for the safety of American citizens, but privately his concerns over the spread of Communism loomed large. Johnson was concerned about the spread of Communism within the Dominican Republic as well as the political backlash of allowing another country in the Caribbean to fall to Communism. Johnson said that “no president seeks crises,” but when crisis presented itself in the Dominican Republic, he fit it neatly into his own agenda.¹⁴⁶

THE DOMINICAN CRISIS UNFOLDS

Johnson addressed his immediate rationale for intervention in his memoir in 1973. His words of explanation in the aftermath of the intervention responded to years of criticism and attempted to give credibility to the claims he made while the crisis was unfolding. At the

144. Adrian Fisher, *Memorandum: Authority of the United States to take Action in the Dominican Republic, May 4, 1965*, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 2, from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

145. Fisher, *Memorandum*, 2.

146. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 205.

beginning of the crisis, the Johnson administration justified military actions through the need to protect American citizens in the Dominican Republic. On the night of April 27, 1965, American evacuees gathered at the Embajador Hotel in Santo Domingo. After a mob of armed rebels arrived at the hotel, President Johnson stated that it was at that time that he realized he “might have to use our own forces to protect American lives.”¹⁴⁷ President Johnson made several televised statements that documented his intentions and concerns as the crisis evolved in late April 1965.

President Johnson made his first public acknowledgment of American actions in the Dominican Republic on the night of April 28, 1965. In a televised broadcast, Johnson proclaimed that he authorized the deployment of U.S. Marines “in order to protect American lives.”¹⁴⁸ He stressed the instability of the Dominican government and argued that military assistance was the only way to “guarantee their safety.”¹⁴⁹ He finished the speech with a sentence that would later be the crux of criticism for his administration’s actions during the crisis: “the council of the OAS has been advised of the situation . . . and the council will be

147. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 191-192.

148. Lyndon Johnson, “Statement by the President Upon Ordering Troops into the Dominican Republic,” 28 April 1965, *American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-by-the-president-upon-ordering-troops-into-the-dominican-republic>.

149. Johnson, “Statement by the President,” 1965.

kept fully informed.”¹⁵⁰ Johnson’s statements appeared to acknowledge the OAS’s authority, but instead, his actions over the next several days demonstrated his contempt for the OAS.

On April 30, 1965, President Johnson reaffirmed his reasons for intervention and laid the foundation for expanding the justification beyond the protection of Americans in the Dominican Republic. In a second televised address, he reiterated that “American forces have been in Santo Domingo in an effort to protect the lives of Americans,” but added that “there are signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control.”¹⁵¹ Johnson did not explicitly call out Cuban Communist interference in his first address, but he did in his follow up speech. Johnson’s publicly declared reasons for intervention changed on April 30. His second speech marked the administration’s transition from portraying an American policy of protection to a policy that was implemented to combat Communism.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk supported Johnson’s reasons for the initial intervention in his memoir published in 1990. Rusk agreed with Johnson in his memoir and supported Johnson’s claim that Dominican officials informed him that American lives were at risk.¹⁵² Secretary Rusk concluded that, without the support and safety of the Dominican government for American citizens in Santo Domingo, “we decided to send help.”¹⁵³ Secretary Rusk

150. Johnson, “Statement by the President,” 1965.

151. Johnson, “Statement by the President,” 1965.

152. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 370-371.

153. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 371.

consistently agreed with Johnson's assessment of the stability of the Dominican Republic, but later questioned the extent to which Communist forces were present and capable within the revolution.

General Bruce Palmer was one of the first government officials that cast doubt on Johnson's sincerity. Palmer was appointed by the Pentagon to be the commander of U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic and was directed to protect American lives. In his memoir, Palmer wrote that his "stated mission was to protect American lives and property," and that his "unstated mission was to prevent another Cuba and, at the same time, to avoid another situation like that in Vietnam."¹⁵⁴ Declassified mission orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) dated April 28, 1965, showed that forces offshore of Santo Domingo were ordered by the JCS to be "prepared to land with mission protect American Citizens," but there were no official references to Communism or Vietnam.¹⁵⁵ As early as 1961, U.S. military forces had been directed by the White House to "prepare promptly both emergency and long-range plans for anti-Communist intervention in the event of crises in Haiti or the Dominican Republic."¹⁵⁶ In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. military routinely rotated

154. Palmer, 5.

155. US Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff Message: Action by U.S. Forces to be Taken in the Dominican Republic in Response to Rapidly Deteriorating Situation, L.M. Mustin, JCS Msg 9887, United States: Department of Defense, April 1965 from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents.

156. US White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Dominican Republic and Haiti*, General Wheeler, United States: White House, 1961 from ProQuest: History Vault, https://hv-proquest-com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/pdfs/010634/010634_007_0580/010634_007_0580_From_1_to34.pdf.

naval forces in and out of the Caribbean.¹⁵⁷ The following day the JCS published an additional message which authorized 500 more U.S. Marines to deploy to the Dominican Republic with the same directed mission.¹⁵⁸

The press echoed the Johnson Administration in its immediate coverage of the Dominican Crisis. The *New York Times* headline on April 29, 1965, read “President Sends Marines to Rescue Citizens of U.S. from Dominican Fighting.”¹⁵⁹ The article succinctly captured the reason for intervention and stated that the “Marines were under instructions to protect and evacuate” Americans and other foreign nationals.¹⁶⁰ In the first few days of the crisis, the press mirrored the conversations and statements that the White House projected. However, members of the press eventually became critical of Johnson and offered competing accounts of U.S. actions from local Dominicans.

The press played a key role in relaying major policy decisions from the White House to the public and gave insight into high-level inter-governmental meetings. The *New York Times* quoted statements by Ellsworth Bunker, the U.S. representative to the OAS. In an

157. US White House, *U.S. Policy Toward the Dominican Republic and Haiti*, 8.

158. US Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff Message: Cable Regarding the Deployment of 500 Additional U.S. Marines to the Dominican Republic to Protect American Citizens, O.B. Gray, JCS Msg 1023, United States: Department of Defense, April 29, 1965, from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

159. Charles Mohr, “President Sends Marines to Rescue Citizens of U.S. From Dominican Fighting,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1965, 1.

160. Mohr, “President Sends Marines to Rescue Citizens of U.S. From Dominican Fighting,” 1.

address to the OAS, Bunker stated that the U.S. government had a right to intervene to protect its citizens. Bunker informed the OAS that the Johnson administration intended to deploy more Marines to the Dominican Republic to ensure that the U.S. was “adequately protecting American citizens and citizens of other countries.”¹⁶¹ Bunker then focused his efforts on increasing OAS involvement in the Dominican Republic which resulted in the formation of the Inter-American Peace Force (IAPF) on May 1, 1965. The OAS appointed General Hugo Alvim of Brazil as Commander and Lieutenant General Palmer as Deputy Commander.¹⁶² The Johnson administration wanted to transfer political liability to the OAS by shifting the focus from a unilateral American intervention to a collective OAS-sanctioned intervention. Johnson wanted to maintain strong control over the military and political outcome in the Dominican Republic while reducing the U.S. military’s visible involvement. His late involvement of the OAS shows that he realized the importance of framing the intervention as an OAS mission and not a unilateral U.S. action. U.S. unilateral action caused a serious deterioration in U.S. and Latin American relationships.

Not everyone was convinced of the Johnson administration’s urgent need to protect American citizens in the Dominican Republic. Senator Fulbright offered a compelling critique of the Johnson Administration’s claims of protecting American citizens in his

161. John Finney, “Talks Tomorrow: Washington Declares Its Right to Protect American Lives,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1965, 1.

162. Dominican Republic Public Affairs Office, *Inter-American Peace Force* (Puerto Rico: Ramallo Bros Printing, 1966), 13.

memoir *The Arrogance of Power*. In a declassified telegram from the American Embassy in Santo Domingo, the Dominicans requested American assistance “to help restore peace,” and the Embassy suggested to the White House that “U.S. Marines might be needed to protect U.S. Citizens.”¹⁶³ Fulbright pointed out that “no mention was made of the junta’s inability to protect American lives.”¹⁶⁴ It was only after the U.S. denied the Dominicans military assistance on the grounds of stability that the Dominicans learned that the “United States would not intervene unless [General Pedro Benoit] said he could not protect American citizens.”¹⁶⁵ In Fulbright’s view, the United States had solicited the need to protect Americans after coaching the Dominicans about the correct vernacular that would trigger a U.S. military intervention.¹⁶⁶ Jerome Slater elaborated on Fulbright’s interpretation and argued that the “immediate objective of the intervention was to preserve the Dominican military from destruction.”¹⁶⁷ Slater did not cite the protection of American citizens as a primary reason for intervention, and argued instead that the White House wanted “pro-American reformers rather than nationalistic radicals” and was willing to agree to democratic

163. US Department of State, Dominican Republic, *Government Forces Request Military Assistance from US*, 1-2.

164. Fulbright, 89.

165. Fulbright, 89.

166. Fulbright, 89.

167. Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation: The United States and the Dominican Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 53.

elections once it was evident that Communists would not be successful.¹⁶⁸ Both critics were not convinced by Johnson's rationale for initial U.S. military action. The Johnson administration employed control tactics at the start of the crisis that were identical to the methods employed by the Kennedy administration. The difference this time was that the U.S. troops disembarked on to Dominican soil.

In the first few days of the crisis, the Johnson administration effectively communicated its narrative to the public. Presidential speeches and State Department official statements reflected the need to protect American lives. However, as time passed, the need to eliminate and prevent the spread of Communism supplanted the narrative about the protection of U.S. citizens and rallied anti-Communist sentiment to the administration's political cause. Tad Szulc, a reporter for the *New York Times* on the ground during the crisis, charged that on the eve of intervention "the administration was not quite prepared officially to make the communist" accusation.¹⁶⁹ The administration's outwardly expressed reasons for U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic began to change.

THE NARRATIVE CHANGES

By May 2, 1965, President Johnson had fully shifted the publicly stated reason for intervention from the need to protect Americans to the need to prevent the spread of

168. Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 70.

169. Tad Szulc, *Dominican Diary* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1965), 51.

Communism. In a televised address, he stated that “what began as a popular democratic revolution . . . was taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of communist conspirators.”¹⁷⁰ Johnson had been mindful of Communist influences prior to his decision to intervene militarily. In his memoir, he remarked that as early as the morning of the April 28 he was aware of “three major communist parties in the Dominican Republic – one oriented toward Moscow, another linked to Castro, and a third loyal to Peking.”¹⁷¹ On the evening of April 29, Johnson met with his principal advisers and claimed “there was complete agreement that we must prevent a communist takeover and act on a scale that would guarantee the earliest possible end to the fighting.”¹⁷² Johnson implied that his advisers fully supported his decision, but their own accounts indicated resistance. By April 30, two days after Marines initially stepped ashore in Santo Domingo, Johnson began the public narrative that supported his goals and went beyond the need for the protection of American citizens.

President Johnson had many private conversations with his advisers that alluded to anti-Communism as the main reason for intervention in the Dominican Republic. In a recorded phone call to his adviser Abe Fortas, Johnson said that they needed to convince the American

170. Lyndon Johnson, “Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Situation in the Dominican Republic,” *American Presidency Project*, May 2, 1965.

171. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 198.

172. Johnson, 199-200.

people that “communists have captured this revolution, they’re taking it over, the extraneous forces have invaded the island, that we’re not going to allow another Cuba to develop,” and that if the rest of Latin America does not support it “we’re going to move anyway.”¹⁷³ In a conversation with Thomas Mann, the Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, Johnson asked what to include in his upcoming press conference. Mann advised him to say that “we are evacuating Americans,” but that “the situation is fluid” which gave Johnson the flexibility to expand his justification for intervention.¹⁷⁴ On April 27, Johnson was not prepared to name the Communists outright, but his advisors were warning him that Communists were likely to take over the revolution.¹⁷⁵

A closer examination of the transmissions between the Johnson administration and the State Department raises questions about the validity of Johnson’s statements. One of the most questionable facts that illustrated the disparity between Johnson’s stated objectives and his true objectives was a communication transmitted by the U.S. Embassy. The U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, W. Tapley Bennet, requested reinforcements of military personnel prior to the official publication of the order to send the troops ashore. In a transmission to the White House, Bennet requested support that would “go beyond the mere

173. Lyndon Johnson, “Lyndon Johnson’s Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965,” quoted in Michael Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson’s Secret White House Tapes 1964-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 299.

174. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 287.

175. Beschloss, 287.

protection of Americans and seek to establish order in this strife-ridden country.”¹⁷⁶ He believed that “power will be assumed by groups clearly identified with the communist party,” and that the U.S. “should intervene to prevent another Cuba.”¹⁷⁷ The president did not include Bennet’s warnings and requests in his televised message on April 28, even though Johnson was aware of Ambassador Bennet’s concerns. Additionally, it is unlikely that Ambassador Bennet would request reinforcements for a situation on the ground that had not yet taken place. His request was actioned by the Defense Department, and more troops flowed into the country in the coming days.

Throughout the crisis, President Johnson was heavily influenced by the advice of his closest advisers. Johnson’s National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, warned him of the need “to be ready to take stronger action if it looks as if the communists are beginning to win.”¹⁷⁸ As Johnson made the decision to deploy troops, Bundy reasoned that “the politics of four hundred [marines] and the politics of fifteen hundred are identical . . . so you might as well get them ashore.”¹⁷⁹ Johnson recognized the importance of communicating the Communist threat to support the need for U.S. troops within the Dominican Republic. In a conversation with Abe Fortas, Johnson commented on the need to “show that this is a Castro

176. US Department of State, *Dominican Republic: Situation Report*, Telegram 1155, United States Department of State, April 28, 1965, 1, from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

177. US Department of State, *Dominican Republic: Situation Report*, 1.

178. Beschloss, 290.

179. Beschloss, 292.

Communist operation.”¹⁸⁰ Few records exist of those within Johnson’s closest inner circle refuting or minimizing the Communist threat. Government officials outside the inner circle, however, questioned the Communist narrative.

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara contested the Johnson administration’s portrayal of the Communist threat in the Dominican Republic. In a recorded conversation with President Johnson, Secretary McNamara stated that “they haven’t shown any evidence that I’ve seen that Castro has been directing this or has had any control over those people.”¹⁸¹ Johnson was in the process of crafting his televised speech to the American public when McNamara pleaded with him to remove the most blatant accusations of Cuban involvement in the Dominican Republic.¹⁸² McNamara did not believe that the CIA had enough evidence to prove Johnson’s accusations and was worried that Johnson was putting his “status and prestige too much on the line.”¹⁸³ Two weeks later Johnson sensed the political pressure in response to U.S. actions and warned McNamara that he was “going to have some extensive grilling on what warnings you had from the services and from CIA” in regard to the Communist threat within the uprising.¹⁸⁴ In the same conversation, McNamara reaffirmed that he did not “think they are [controlled by Communists],” and asked, “how the hell can

180. Beschloss, 298.

181. Beschloss, 302.

182. Beschloss, 303.

183. Beschloss, 302.

184. Beschloss, 317.

fifty-eight people control them when they've got several hundred?"¹⁸⁵ These two conversations showed the consistency of McNamara's belief about the true nature of the Communist threat within the Dominican Republic and they demonstrated Johnson's apprehension at the time of his statements which later turned to anxiety.

Secretary Rusk and General Palmer both recognized President Johnson's fears of a Communist takeover in the Dominican Republic. Rusk claimed that U.S. military intervention would "prevent dictatorship of either the left-wing or right-wing variety."¹⁸⁶ General Palmer remarked that, on April 27, President Johnson "feared a creeping coup by communists" because they did not know who was in charge of the rebels.¹⁸⁷ The official orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not specifically cite the prevention of Communism as a stated military objective, but General Palmer recognized that his "unstated mission was to prevent another Cuba."¹⁸⁸ In retrospect, Palmer believed that President Johnson achieved his strategic objective of "positively discouraging the export of Castro-style communism."¹⁸⁹ Top officials like Rusk and Palmer recognized the President's secondary objective in addition to the protection of American civilians.

185. Beschloss, 317.

186. D. Rusk and R. Rusk, 372.

187. Palmer, 142.

188. Palmer, 5.

189. Palmer, 154-155.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) warned the White House of influential Communist actors in the Dominican Republic in the days preceding U.S. intervention, but Johnson did not include this information in his initial public speech. The CIA warnings came despite a report to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs two weeks prior to intervention that did not list the Dominican Republic as a “principal target area,” of the “communist program for the subversion of Latin America.”¹⁹⁰ As of April 14, 1965, the CIA had not identified any Communist leaders in the Dominican Republic.¹⁹¹ However, on April 25, a CIA cable to the White House situation room relayed that “there are many communists and other extreme leftists who are prominently involved in the pending overthrow.”¹⁹² Johnson would likely have considered this intelligence information in his decision to send in U.S. troops, but did not relay this information upfront to the American people. Johnson’s decision to not make the CIA’s recommendations public indicated that either the evidence provided on April 25 was not adequate, or that the administration was not willing to reveal the extent to which the U.S. was covertly involved in the Dominican Republic. Either of those scenarios could have become a political liability for Johnson, who “knew debate would be heated and

190. US Congress, House, *Communism in Latin America*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., April 14, 1965, HR Rep. 237, 11, from NewsBank: U.S. Congressional Serial Set, 1817-1994.

191. US Congress, House, *Communism in Latin America*, 17-18.

192. US Central Intelligence Agency, *Intelligence Information Regarding the Situation in the Dominican Republic*, *United States Central Intelligence Agency*, April 25, 1965, 1-2, from Gale Primary Sources: U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

intense after we sent troops to the Dominican Republic.”¹⁹³ Unable to name the Communist threat upfront, Johnson relied on the justification of the need to protect Americans first and the defeat of Communists second.

President Johnson then invoked the memory of John F. Kennedy to further his anti-Communist rationale. President Johnson recalled that he “never lost sight of the fact that [he] was the trustee and custodian of the Kennedy administration.”¹⁹⁴ Johnson claimed that Kennedy had been advocating for military preparations for activity in Latin America as early as 1963. He stated that President Kennedy held military readiness in Latin America as the “highest priority.”¹⁹⁵ Johnson asserted that Kennedy even sent “a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense noting that events in the Dominican Republic . . . might ‘require active United States military intervention.’”¹⁹⁶ In his memoir, Johnson referred to a charge from President Kennedy several days before he died. Johnson recalled that Kennedy told him that “we in this hemisphere must also use every resource at our command to prevent the establishment of another Cuba in this hemisphere.”¹⁹⁷ President Johnson invoked the memory of Kennedy to add justification and righteousness to his actions in the Dominican Republic.

193. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 204.

194. Johnson, 19.

195. Johnson, 197.

196. Johnson, 197.

197. Johnson, 202. The use of “in this hemisphere” is repeated by Kennedy.

President Johnson feared losing the Dominican Republic to Communism because he believed it would have been interpreted as yet another U.S. foreign policy failure. Palmer believed that Johnson had “seen Eisenhower criticized for ‘losing’ Cuba and Kennedy humiliated by the Bay of Pigs” and that Johnson was determined to not have another Latin American country fall to Communism while he was president.¹⁹⁸ Johnson stated that “the last thing I wanted . . . was another Cuba on our doorstep.”¹⁹⁹ Johnson’s invocation of Eisenhower’s and Kennedy’s perceived failures in Cuba and his subsequent Dominican military strategy demonstrated Johnson’s long-standing motivations for intervention in the Dominican Republic. His recollection of Kennedy’s preparations indicated that the initial justification to intervene for the safety of Americans was a convenient front for his true objective. The uprising in the Dominican Republic presented an opportunity for the culmination of years of military strategy designed to defeat Communism when it manifested again in Latin America.

Johnson’s third unpublicized justification for American intervention was the need for a rapid resolution in the Dominican Republic so that the U.S. could fully focus on military actions in Vietnam. Flight records show that OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER (an intense U.S. air bombing campaign in Vietnam) was already underway during the outbreak

198. Palmer, 19.

199. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 198.

of the Dominican Crisis.²⁰⁰ There was undoubtedly anxiety within the White House about the possibility of multiple conflicts erupting on different fronts. By the end of July 1965, Johnson ordered more troops to Vietnam, which raised the “fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately.”²⁰¹ In the days leading up to the intervention, President Johnson told Mann that he wanted a quick resolution to the uprising in the Dominican Republic. Johnson also wanted to finalize the ongoing negotiations with Panama regarding the anti-U.S. riots over sovereignty in the Canal Zone that broke out in 1964. He suggested that the U.S. offer more concessions to Panama and “do any bribing I can now, because it’s relatively inexpensive, compared to what we’re doing in Vietnam.”²⁰² Johnson did not want to be overwhelmed with multiple problems in Latin America while he was increasing the number of active combat troops in Vietnam. He told Mann that he did not “think we can take much troubles now.”²⁰³ The potential for multiple simultaneous conflicts weighed on Johnson and his advisors.

General Palmer reiterated the Johnson administration’s need to quickly end fighting in the Dominican Republic. He believed that Johnson wanted to stop the internal Dominican

200. U.S. Department of State, United States of America, *Southeast Asia Air Operations: Military Representative Daily Report*, April 29, 1965, 151.

201. Lyndon Johnson, “The President’s News Conference,” *American Presidency Project*, 28 July 1965, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-1038>.

202. Beschloss, 284.

203. Beschloss, 284.

conflict because the U.S. was at a “critical juncture when the United States was about to become deeply committed in Vietnam.”²⁰⁴ General Palmer reported that the “Defense Department [was] absorbed with the worsening situation in Vietnam,” and was “content to let Secretary Rusk and the State Department handle the Dominican matter.”²⁰⁵ The top leaders of the military became consumed by operations in Vietnam, which left the State Department as the subject matter experts for Dominican affairs. The crisis had turned from a military conflict to a “political problem.”²⁰⁶ Palmer was second in command of the IAPF and wielded significant influence over the ostensibly OAS-led military operations. Without oversight from the Defense Department and the White House, Palmer and the State Department Officials associated with the Dominican Republic were left to their own interpretations of policy.

In addition to the need to pivot quickly to Vietnam, Johnson argued that the OAS would not have responded rapidly enough to protect Americans or prevent a Communist takeover. He believed that “the Council moved too slowly to permit a collective decision in the time available.”²⁰⁷ Johnson informed Fortas on the night of the intervention that the United States had “notified the OAS . . . [But] I didn’t think I could wait twenty seconds for the OAS to

204. Palmer, 5.

205. Palmer, 79.

206. Palmer, 80.

207. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 202.

call that group together.”²⁰⁸ Johnson’s comments acknowledged the OAS’s existence but disregarded the legal requirements for foreign intervention set forth in the Charter of the OAS. By April 30, 1965, the narrative began to shift from the need to protect Americans to defeating Communism. The Johnson administration realized they were at a critical decision point. They saw an opportunity to enact his true objective and remarked that “if we don’t take over that island in the next twenty-four hours . . . we never will.”²⁰⁹ Johnson’s words demonstrated that he believed his priorities were superior to that of the OAS. The OAS’s focus may or may not have been in the best interests of the U.S. and Johnson was not willing to take that chance.

CONCLUSION

Johnson’s constantly changing rhetoric indicated that there was more to the intervention than was publicly revealed by the administration. There is a possibility that the Johnson administration was being completely honest and was slowly made aware of the Communist threat. However, it is more likely that the Communist threat became a scapegoat for a controversial decision. The Eisenhower administration established a relationship characterized by threats which culminated in the threat of military intervention. Shortly after, the Kennedy administration developed plans to invade the Dominican Republic. Both

208. Beschloss, 289.

209. Beschloss, 303.

administrations created assessments and contingencies in response to the political composition of the Dominican Republic. The Johnson administration inherited years of aggressive U.S. policies and invaded the Dominican Republic. Once Johnson gave the order to intervene, there was no way to refute the U.S.'s goal of political dominance. The overt act of intervention revealed years of attempts at U.S. dominance and control. The U.S. government was no longer able to issue threats because the Johnson administration followed through on their threatened action.

After the Johnson administration ordered military intervention, the U.S. immediately opened itself to domestic and international condemnation. President Kennedy had avoided significant backlash because he retained deniability of interference by visibly hiding the Naval assets designated to enforce Kennedy's gunboat diplomacy. Once troops landed on Dominican soil, the Johnson administration could not deny involvement in Dominican affairs. Furthermore, the Johnson administration ignored political mechanisms available through the OAS which were designed to solve problems like the Dominican crisis. Given that these opportunities were available and ignored, Johnson's decision fits better within the overall context of U.S. – Dominican relations. Transfers of power occurred multiple times in the aftermath of Trujillo's assassination, but the popular uprising in 1965 was different because a show of force had been used too many times. After years of manipulation and threats, the Johnson administration ran out of escalatory options and the next step was invasion. Almost immediately, Johnson realized that the U.S. had gone too far and scrambled to save his political legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

On April 28, 1965, the Johnson administration shattered the “good neighbor” policy in the Dominican Republic.²¹⁰ Years of U.S. Cold War policy steadily escalated to military intervention. What began as a mutually beneficial partnership deteriorated into a one-sided relationship. The Eisenhower administration first altered the scope of relations through the manipulation of military material and technical training. The Eisenhower administration steadily increased political and military pressure to force the Dominican Republic to comply with U.S. demands. The Dominican Republic resisted U.S. pressure and relations between the two countries became strained. When the Kennedy administration transitioned into the White House, they developed new concepts of the use of military force in the Dominican Republic. Instead of turning away from the methods that Eisenhower used to control the Dominican Republic, the Kennedy administration revived gunboat diplomacy. When the threat of force was no longer enough, the Kennedy administration drafted plans to invade the Dominican Republic. Johnson did not share Kennedy’s reluctance to invade the Dominican Republic. The Johnson administration received developed plans, drafted cover stories and initiated OPERATION POWER PACK. Johnson gave the order, but Eisenhower and

210. US Department of State, “Good Neighbor Policy, 1933,” *Milestones*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor#:~:text=President%20Franklin%20Delano%20Roosevelt%20took,maintain%20stability%20in%20the%20hemisphere.>

Kennedy conducted the analysis and planning that supported the occupation of the Dominican Republic.

The Johnson administration was enabled by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations in the Dominican intervention. Previous scholars focused their research on the military operation, the decision to intervene, and the outcomes of the intervention. This paper argues that the act of intervention cannot be viewed independently of the manipulation by the Eisenhower administration and the intimidation employed by the Kennedy administration. The communications in 1965 between the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic reflected the exact preparatory statements drafted in 1961. Initial planning for military action had been conducted by Eisenhower in the late 1950s. Kennedy built on that planning and added operational details to a plan that could and would be enacted a few years later.

Johnson's disjointed rhetoric is the impetus for further historical investigation. The hypocrisy of his publicized statements compared to his private conversations invites researchers to find other factors other than those highlighted by Johnson himself for intervention. Much of the debate around the Dominican intervention has focused on determining whether there actually were Communists present and acting in Santo Domingo. The traditional research question of whether or not Communists were present in the Dominican Republic misses the larger question of whether or not intervention was the Johnson administration's ultimate objective from the beginning. Was the presence of Communists only a pretense for a plan that had been discussed for years in Washington? As the U.S. government continues to declassify documents historians' understanding of the

invasion will continue to change. The warning signs in the 1950s and 1960s for an impending military invasion were present, but the evidence was only available to U.S. officials with access to classified materials. The invasion of the Dominican Republic should serve as a warning for pre-tenses that become justifications for war.

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