



NUMUN

Northwestern University Model United Nations

1960s United States Presidential Advisors

Topic A: Latin America and the Cold War

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Introduction

Latin America's role in the Cold War is rarely given the attention that its significance requires. Much Cold War history centers on the conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, with the focal points being the West Berlin powder keg or the American disaster in Southeast Asia. Apart from the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, Latin America's importance to the Cold War narrative falls by the wayside. Any person studying post-World War II Latin America can very easily become mired in an indistinguishable mess of coups and countercoups by various revolutionary and reactionary factions, with, of course, US interventions scattered throughout. With this disjointed and confused view of Latin American politics in the Cold War, it is hard to see the importance that the region had throughout the 40-year conflict.

However, Latin America was one of the few places where the balance of power in the Cold War moved, often swinging back and forth rapidly, and one where the US could be directly threatened by Soviet adventurism. The two other major hotspots, Europe and East Asia, were quite different in these regards. The entrenched positions in Europe remained relatively static throughout the conflict. When a situation arose where the balance of power could change, like the 1956 Hungarian revolution or the 1968 "Prague Spring", the threat of a major war breaking out on the continent encouraged both sides not to interfere or overplay their hand. On the contrary, in Latin America, the US and USSR both actively sponsored insurgents, backed political leaders of their choosing, and overthrew opposing regimes. In East Asia, while the US and her allies fought to contain communism, it was hard to see the strategic significance of sending hundreds of thousands of men to Vietnam. When the US withdrew and communism did not spread west to India or southeast to Indonesia and Australia, as the "domino effect" theory had predicted, many Americans realized that events in East Asia were not going to affect them at home. Latin America, on the other



hand, was right next door, and socialist revolutions could threaten America's economic interests in the region. Castro's call for spreading the revolution to the mainland spurred the United States to spend years fighting to prevent the much-feared "domino effect" from occurring so close to home.

Out of the entire history of the Cold War, the 1960s were arguably the most significant time for Latin America. At no other point in the Cold War was the world closer to being incinerated in a nuclear exchange than during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Less dangerous, but equally important, was the doomed Bay of Pigs Invasion. If the US had been able to destroy the year-old Castro regime, as it intended to do in 1960, then the Soviet Union would have lost its main foothold in the Western Hemisphere. It is easy to assume that communist incursions would have had a much more difficult time spreading to Central and South America without Cuba acting as a beachhead. Additionally, Kennedy's Alliance for Progress (AFP) initiatives represented the first time the US committed itself to drastically changing the social and political order of South and Central America. With so many significant events compressed into such a short time period, a different decision by either side in Latin America could have drastically affected the course of the Cold War.



Background

The United States and Latin America have always had a complex relationship. On one hand, the US often genuinely wanted to foster democratic growth and prosperity in its southern neighbors; on the other, the United States' economic and security interests often ran contrary to those goals. These contradictions ensured that there would be no shortage of tensions between the two parties.

The 1823 declaration of the Monroe Doctrine really marks the beginning of US involvement in Latin American affairs. Drafted by then-Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, the Monroe Doctrine declared that any attempt by a European power to further colonize Latin America would be considered an act of aggression. The Doctrine was meant to prevent the nascent democratic movements in the region from being strangled in the crib by renewed colonialism, while at the same time protecting US economic and security interests by ensuring that the European powers would not have the ability to prevent US goods from being sold and removing the threat of large European armies in the Western Hemisphere. As US presidents continued to invoke the Monroe Doctrine whenever they would intervene in Latin America, it ended up becoming the cornerstone of US policy towards the region for the next two centuries.

For the next eighty years, American involvement in Latin America was minimal. The Civil War and the closing of our own frontier preoccupied the country until the end of the 19th century. However, when the US became embroiled in the Spanish-American War in 1898, it forced itself into Latin American affairs by liberating Cuba from Spain. With the passing of the Platt Amendment in 1899, which forbade Cuba from acquiring foreign debts, signing military treaties with other countries, and giving Cuban land to countries other than the US, the US essentially ensured that it would dictate Cuban foreign and domestic policy. Additionally, the US Congress passed a series of laws that gave US goods special protections in Cuban markets, making Cuba wholly dependent on



US imports. Soon, however, the US came to recognize the need to protect its economic investments in the region, making the Spanish-American war a profound turning point in US-Latin American relations. The US occupation of Cuba saw some marked improvements for the island nation; under the military rule of Leonard Wood, the US expanded Cuban medical, sanitation, and education services to a wider range of the population.

President Theodore Roosevelt took US involvement a step further by declaring the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The Roosevelt Corollary claimed that the United States had the right to militarily intervene in Latin America in order to ensure stability in the region. This led to a host of military actions from Mexico to Haiti, as US Marines were deployed across the Hemisphere to protect American interests, up through the first half of the 20th century.

Additionally, Roosevelt's dream to link the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans with a canal system built and operated by Americans drove the US to become further embroiled in Latin American affairs. When the Colombian government, which owned the Panamanian isthmus at the time, refused to let the US dig there, the Roosevelt Administration encouraged the Panamanians to revolt against Columbia; the US immediately recognized the resultant Panamanian state and prevented Colombia from crushing the revolt. Once the canal was finished in 1914, it became the most strategically important part of Latin America to the US. Until Jimmy Carter returned the canal to Panama in 1977, every US president was tied to protecting the Canal Zone from foreign interference, as a failure to hold the Canal would seriously impair the US's ability to quickly move its navy from one ocean to the other.

During Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, the United States abandoned the Roosevelt Corollary in favor of the Good Neighbor Policy. FDR wanted to foster the growth of pan-Americanism and create a friendly image of the United States in Latin America. With the rise of fascism and other totalitarian regimes throughout the world, Roosevelt felt that it would be prudent



not to alienate Latin American countries and drive them towards anti-American dictators.

Additionally, with the American economy ravaged by the Great Depression, many Americans felt that it was a waste of precious resources to send troops to Latin America. As a result of the Good Neighbor Policy, American troops were withdrawn from Nicaragua and Haiti. One of the legacies of the Good Neighbor Policy was that, during the Second World War, many Latin American countries sided with the United States and declared war on Germany and Japan after Pearl Harbor.

Rebuilding Western Europe and containing communism in East Asia preoccupied America in the immediate post-war years. However, pervasive poverty and corruption in Latin America almost assured that the region would be ripe for socialist revolutions that would force the United States to act and protect its interests. In the late '50s and early '60s, two events in Latin America defined the Cold War for the region: Cuba came under communist rule after a revolution in 1959 (a major blow for US interests, with Cuba being so close to the US and so heavily influenced by American policy), and in 1961, a nascent guerilla movement called the Sandinista National Liberation Front was formed in Nicaragua and challenged the US-backed Somoza government. America's ability to combat communism in Latin America will decide the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere and could very well decide the Cold War.



Current Status

Currently, the most pressing issue facing the Kennedy Administration is the status of Cuba. In 1952, US-backed strongman Fulgencio Batista seized power in a coup. During his reign, he enacted numerous social reforms, including passing labor laws and supporting unions. However, widespread corruption and government brutality were, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “an open invitation to revolution.” In 1958, Fidel Castro and 82 followers started an insurrection in the Sierra Maestra mountain range. By the end of the year, the small uprising had turned into a countrywide revolt, and after the rebels captured the city of Santa Clara, Batista fled to Portugal. Castro’s military force seized Havana on 8 January 1959 and declared a new revolutionary government. Since then, they have seized private property, including about US assets worth roughly \$1 billion. Moderates have been purged from government positions, and the Castro regime has begun to round up dissenters and place them in “reeducation camps.” As of last year, Castro has solidified his control over the island nation by closing the last few opposition newspapers and creating the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), which encourages Cubans to spy on each other.

The Kennedy Administration is committed to taking a firm stance on Cuba for several reasons. First of all, the US’s previous commitments to keep the island under US control make the fact that it has joined the Soviet Bloc especially embarrassing. This could potentially send a message to other Latin American countries that the US is not serious about protecting its security interests in the region. Additionally, the proximity of Cuba to the American mainland makes the issue all the more pressing. Should the Soviet Union decide to use Cuba as a base for naval or air forces, it would directly threaten the southern and eastern coasts of the United States. Cuba has already shown off purchased Soviet military equipment during its New Year’s Day parade this last year.



However, most importantly, communism in Cuba must be contained or destroyed because Fidel Castro has expressed his resolve to export his socialist revolution to the mainland. Should a rolling campaign of communist revolts start in Latin America, there is a chance that the pro-US governments in the region would fall and be replaced with ones friendly to the Soviets. For this reason, the US must maintain control over its own hemisphere and be proactive, so as not to be forced onto the defensive.

There are two basic plans that the Administration has on the table right now. The first one deals directly with Cuba itself. The Eisenhower Administration gave the CIA the green light to develop a plan to overthrow the Castro regime; in 1960 the CIA began training ex-Cuban nationals to invade the island and take Havana. Code-named Operation Pluto, then-CIA director Allen Dulles created a series of bases in Guatemala and Nicaragua in order to train the fighters. The operation is still in the planning stage and the level of US commitment still needs to be decided. We are already giving the ex-nationals US equipment, including a small fleet of B-26 bombers, so the Cubans and Soviets will know that the invasion was US-backed. However, direct US military action in support of the rebels has not been completely written off. On one hand, directly using US troops, or at least US airpower, would greatly increase the chances of success; on the other, it might provoke an undesirable response from the Soviet Union. In any case, the decision to invade Cuba with the ex-national army will have to be decided quickly; any delay increases the chances of the Cuban government discovering the plan.

If the destruction of the Cuban regime is not possible, there is another option left to the Kennedy Administration. They could at least try to contain communism to Cuba and prevent it from spreading to the mainland. To do this, it would be necessary to correct the social problems facing Latin American countries. If the US could at least alleviate widespread poverty, it would be



much harder for communist parties to gain traction with the working classes. In order to do this, the Kennedy administration is planning on launching its Alliance for Progress (AFP) initiative. Much like Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, the AFP will be based be off improving America's image in Latin America. Increasing adult literacy rates, suitable land reforms and distributions, steady GDP growth, and the establishment of democratic regimes should be the major goals of the AFP. The main obstacle of the AFP is that many of the pro-US governments in Latin America are run by military dictators or corrupt officials. Even if the US were to funnel large amounts of financial aid to Latin America, there is a good chance that little of that money would find its way to the people who need it.

One more note: the US should closely watch developments in Nicaragua. The Somoza family has ruled Nicaragua since 1937 and has been decidedly pro-US. However, the current ruler, Luis Somoza Debayle, is a corrupt demagogue that ignores the plight of his citizens. Nicaragua would be a likely target for the Castro regime when it is ready to expand the revolution to the rest of Latin America.



Bloc Positions

Vice President Lyndon Johnson

Vice President Johnson was, for the most part, kept in the dark on foreign policy issues. Kennedy, only really giving the Vice President slot to him in order to garner Southern votes, had no intention of keeping him up to date on developing events. However, when Johnson was able to voice his opinion on foreign policy, he proved to be fiercely against the spread of communism. He ardently believed in the domino theory, as exhibited by his defense of the Vietnam War. He claimed that if democratic countries were to fall to communist revolutions, international socialism would eventually spread across the world. To forestall this, Johnson firmly believed in the executive branch's prerogative to send American troops into combat to prop up pro-US regimes.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk

Dean Rusk was made Deputy Undersecretary of State in 1950 and was instrumental in the US decision to intervene in the Korean War. Throughout the 1950s he developed a reputation as a cautious diplomat, often relying on international support for his decisions. However, Rusk did believe that direct military action to combat communism was sometimes appropriate. During the decision process leading up to the Bay of Pigs invasion, he never quite endorsed or condemned the plan. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Rusk believed that taking a diplomatic approach would best resolve the situation. Additionally, Rusk was a strong supporter of sending aid to developing countries and lowering tariffs to promote international trade as a means of improving diplomatic relations.



Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara

Robert McNamara actually had very little background in defense before becoming Secretary. Initially, he was tapped by President Kennedy to be Treasury Secretary, but he turned the position down in favor of the Defense job and had to learn the subject on the fly. As Secretary, McNamara rejected the concepts of “massive retaliation” and “brinkmanship,” the method of countering Soviet aggression by threatening nuclear war, in favor of a “flexible response.” In other words, McNamara wished to deemphasize nuclear weapons and create a more mobile and multifaceted conventional army that could respond to small wars in Third World countries in Asia and Latin America. To a large extent, McNamara supported the US military’s effort to become adept at fighting guerilla forces instead of just large land armies.

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy

While the Attorney General normally does not have much to do with foreign affairs, Robert Kennedy was in a unique position as the president’s brother. “Jack” often turned to “Bobby” for advice outside of his normal position. At first, Robert Kennedy strongly supported covert CIA action against Fidel Castro and wanted to supply anti-communist forces still active in the Cuban countryside. However, RFK often disliked how the CIA always wanted a free hand in whatever they were doing and was wary that CIA agents would take action without the approval of the President. During many crises, RFK would be the mediating voice between the hawks and the doves. He recognized the need to contain communism but also felt that the career military men could be too reckless.



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lyman Lemnitzer

General Lemnitzer believed that the best way to solve the issue of Cuba was a direct military invasion. He felt that bringing the brunt of America's conventional forces against Cuba would defeat Castro before the Soviets could respond. He supported the Bay of Pigs invasion and would have liked to see more direct US military intervention. In 1962 he proposed Operation Northwoods, which would have staged a series of "false flag" attacks in Miami that could be blamed on communist instigators in order to justify an attack into Cuba.

Commander of the Strategic Air Command General Thomas S. Power

General Power was a firm adherent to the concept of "mutually assured destruction" and an avid student of former SAC commander Curtis Lemay. He felt that the only way to deal with totalitarian regimes that possessed nuclear weapons was to threaten them with nuclear annihilation. When criticized for having Soviet population centers on SAC's target list, he famously declared, "Why are you so concerned with saving their lives? The whole idea is to kill the bastards. At the end of the war if there are two Americans and one Russian left alive, we win!" He saw the issues in Latin America not as a regional dispute but as part of a larger showdown with the Soviet Union that could be solved with a nuclear first strike that would cripple the Soviet Union before the US sustained heavy losses.

CIA Director John A. McCone

John McCone had no background in espionage and was an industrialist in the private sector prior to becoming Director. While in office, he felt that the CIA should be imaginative when dealing with Cuba. To him the CIA was a scalpel, not a blunt instrument. He correctly assumed that the Soviet



Union would try to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, even after a report by the National Intelligence Estimate said otherwise. He was deeply involved in plots to kill Castro and undermine the Cuban government.

Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson

By 1960, Stevenson was effectively removed from the political arena. After consecutive losses to Dwight Eisenhower in the Presidential elections of 1952 and 1956, he decided not to run in 1960, opening the way for Kennedy to win the election. His bland demeanor and impressive intellect earned him a reputation as a timid “egghead.” He was normally not an aggressive diplomat, preferring negotiations to military action. However, he was instrumental in the showdown with the USSR over Cuba; on 25 October 1962, at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, he showed the Council reconnaissance photographs that clearly indicated the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, directly refuting the Soviet ambassador’s insistent denial.

President’s (Informal) Chief of Staff Kenneth O’Donnell

Kenny O’Donnell was a longtime family friend of JFK and was officially only the President’s Appointment Secretary; in practice, he acted as Kennedy’s unofficial Chief of Staff. He was a major moderating voice during the Cuban Missile Crisis, voicing his support for a blockade of Cuba.



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