THE UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES OF INFORMAL EMPIRE: THE UNITED STATES, LATIN AMERICA, AND FIDEL CASTRO, 1945-1961

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ABSTRACT

At the forefront this is a study of United States-Cuban Cold War relations. Overtime U.S. relations with Cuban took on a very personal tone. One man’s name is inseparable from any discussion concerning the subject, Fidel Castro. Castro’s relationship with the United States has been a long and tortuous one. This work examines an often overlooked episode during the period immediately after Fidel Castro took power, namely his April 1959 trip to the United States and the responses it provoked among U.S. policy makers.

This thesis argues that the advent of the Cold War caused the United States to intensify its role in Latin America to such a degree that an informal empire was established throughout the region. The imperial mindset created by informal empire caused U.S. policy makers to adhere to dogmatic diplomacy when Fidel Castro visited the United States in April 1959. Castro’s visit, his first as de facto leader of Cuba, offered the Eisenhower administration opportunities to reconstitute U.S.-Cuban relations while also co-opting the energies of the Cuban Revolution, opportunities the administration did not seize. While the United States alienated Castro on his April visit, the Soviet Union secretly established ties with the new revolutionary government in Havana. The April trip highlights a time when one superpower, the United States, exercised doctrinaire diplomacy while its rival, the Soviet Union, showed flexibility.

Castro’s April 1959 visit and the American response underscores the larger problems that existed in U.S.-Latin American Cold War relations, those problems being the United States’ predisposition to implement uncompromising policies towards revolutions and social movements in Latin America. Castro’s rise to power and turn to the Soviet Union forever altered U.S.-Latin American relations. Ultimately, the severing of relations between the United States and Cuba brought unforeseen and unintended consequences for both nations.
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Dr. Kathleen Berkeley deserves a big thank you for her sound counsel and advice during my time in Wilmington. I would also like to thank Dr. David La Vere for allowing me the opportunity to pursue my Master’s degree at UNCW. A very special thanks to Kim, Nils, Max, and Joel Buri for providing me with an outlet from school that proved to be one of my life’s greatest experiences. I am also very grateful to the staff at the William Randall Library for their professional service at all times. Finally, special thanks to Rob, Matt, and Keith, whose friendship and advice over the past two years has been invaluable.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family (Paul, Brenda, Michael, Adam, and Ashley). All whose value to me could never be expressed through words. And to Kanh, for it was the very subject of history that brought us together. Getting to know you over the past two years has truly been a blessing.
INTRODUCTION – THE UNITED STATES, LATIN AMERICA, AND CUBA DURING THE COLD WAR

On 3 January 1961, only weeks before leaving office, President Dwight D. Eisenhower severed U.S. diplomatic relations with Cuba. By instructing “the Secretary of State to deliver a note to the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of Cuba in Washington which…states that the Government of the United States is hereby formally terminating diplomatic and consular relations with the Government of Cuba,” Eisenhower made clear the United States’ position towards revolutionary Cuba.¹ Since Eisenhower’s declaration, two countries with close geographical and historical ties have operated under the constraints of not having formal diplomatic relations.

Overtime U.S. relations with Cuba took on a very personal tone as opposed to a relationship based on rational choice and bureaucratic decision making. One man’s name is inseparable from any discussion concerning U.S.-Cuban relations, Fidel Castro. Castro’s relationship with the United States has been a long and tortuous one. He outlasted nine presidential administrations, and at the age of eighty-two he is still a driving force in Cuba and a revered figure in much of Latin America. After the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Mariel Boat Lift, it is hard to imagine that U.S.-Cuban relations could be anything other than contentious. US-Cuban relations as well as the overall U.S. relationship with Latin America during the Cold War can be separated into two periods: the pre-Castro period (1945-1958) and the period following Castro’s rise to power (1959-present). This thesis will examine an often overlooked episode during the period immediately after Castro took power, namely Fidel

Castro’s April 1959 trip to the United States and the responses it provoked among U.S. policy makers.

Though the United States had long enjoyed a powerful position in Latin America, U.S.-Latin American relations during the early Cold War period were different from previous eras in the amount of control the United States sustained and in the way the United States exerted that control. The advent of the Cold War caused the United States to intensify its role in Latin America to such a degree that between 1945 and 1955 the United States established an informal empire throughout the region. The imperial mindset created by informal empire caused U.S. policy makers to adhere to dogmatic diplomacy when Fidel Castro visited the United States in April 1959. Castro’s visit, his first as de facto leader of Cuba, offered the Eisenhower administration opportunities to reconstitute U.S.-Cuban relations while also co-opting the energies of the Cuban Revolution, opportunities the administration did not seize. While the United States alienated Castro on his April visit, the Soviet Union secretly established ties with the new revolutionary government in Havana. The April trip highlights a time when one superpower, the United States, exercised doctrinaire diplomacy while its rival, the Soviet Union, showed flexibility.

While this thesis’ primary focus will be the period after the Cuban Revolution, it is imperative to explore U.S. policies towards Latin America at the beginning of the Cold War to better comprehend the United States’ response to Castro’s visit. The number of studies that have been written on Cold War foreign relations is overwhelming. For years historians have focused their attention on the two main adversaries of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union. Although works exist that examine U.S. and Soviet relations with the developing world, it has not been until more recent times that interactions between the two great powers and the so-called
periphery have begun to receive more attention. It is widely known that the United States maintained a focus on Europe and East Asia during the early period of the Cold War. Still, while focusing on Europe and East Asia the United States did pay close attention to other areas of the world, particularly Latin America.²

The success of Fidel Castro’s revolution in 1959 increased the interest in the study of U.S.-Latin American relations. Works devoted to American grand strategy as well as the connection between the United States and military leaders in Latin America were published in the aftermath of Castro’s rise to power. One of the first of these works was written by Dexter Perkins in 1961. Perkins, who is well known for his interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, explored U.S. hemispheric security policies as well as the political and economic interactions between the United States and its Latin American neighbors. He also briefly examined the early Cold War period deftly arguing that most Latin American nations viewed the idea of collective security as “nothing less than American intervention in disguise.”³ Perkins’s assessment fell in line with other early writings on U.S. Cold War relations with Latin America. Robert Burr’s 1969 publication Our Troubled Hemisphere, for example, was also focused mainly on the political aspects of U.S.-Latin American relations.⁴

In 1974 Gordon Connell-Smith posited that the Cold War did not greatly affect U.S.-Latin American relations. He contended that Latin America was considered a low priority for the United States. Connell-Smith also maintained that the United States’ policy towards Latin America remained static, “she (the United States) saw no reason to change her traditional policy towards her southern neighbors: emphasis remained upon stability and the strong encouragement

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² For a recent study on the Cold War in Latin America refer to: Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, Eds. In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
³ Dexter Perkins, The United States and Latin America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1961), 79.
of private enterprise.”⁵ Though there is some validity to his argument, U.S. policy makers did not ignore the region.

During the 1980s the Reagan administration’s controversial policies towards Latin America caused a renewed interest in the region for scholars of American foreign relations. For example, Lester Langley attempted to re-examine the “idea” of the Western Hemisphere.⁶ Langley’s definition of the term “idea” came from Arthur Whitaker, who wrote in 1954 that the nations of the New World have a “special relationship to one another that sets them apart from the rest of the world.”⁷ Langley maintained that the main purpose of his work was to weave the concepts of politics, economics, and culture in U.S.-Latin American relations into a more cohesive synthesis. His examination of the impact of the Cold War in Latin America argued that the threat of communism was more perception than reality. He posited that “Communist parties throughout Latin America, in fact, went into decline after World War II.”⁸ Although Langley is correct in suggesting that communism did not represent a direct threat to Latin America, he failed to recognize that the region was still very susceptible to communism due to its disparate economic conditions. Langley also discussed events in Bolivia during the early 1950s, asserting that Bolivian revolutionaries “chose” the course of their revolution in 1952. However, the leaders of the Bolivian revolution were not in control as much as Langley suggested. Once policy makers in Washington threatened to halt economic aid to Bolivia if the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) continued its economic reforms, the leadership of the MNR quickly fell

⁸ Langley, America and the Americas, 183.
in line. Langley’s interpretation offered fresh insights into the development of U.S.-Latin American relations, and how the Cold War affected that relationship.

More recently, political scientist Jorge Domínguez asserted that U.S. Cold War ideology caused U.S. officials to act illogically while implementing policy towards Latin America. Echoing Connell-Smith’s argument, Domínguez contended that the Cold War did not significantly influence U.S.-Latin American relations. However, he proceeded to list specific events during the Cold War that did, in fact, have an effect on the relationship. Domínguez argued that “…the Cold War did not give birth to the significance of ideological themes either in U.S. foreign policy generally or in U.S. relations with Latin America specifically.”

His overall argument was that the United States “[only] deployed military force or otherwise sought to overthrow a Latin American government whenever it felt ideologically threatened by the prospects of Communism in a Latin American country…” However, Domínguez’s assertion that the United States did not “intervene” in Bolivia during the 1950s requires some clarification. Shortly after taking office the Eisenhower administration intervened both diplomatically and economically in order to reduce the strength of the leftist government that took power in Bolivia under Paz Estenssoro. Although the military and CIA did not play a role in this intervention, the United States took strides to thwart any long term radical modifications to the Bolivian economy.

This work differs greatly from both Domínguez and Connell-Smith, in that it argues that the Cold War did indeed play a major role in U.S.-Latin American relations. During the Cold War, U.S. officials became less reflective and more reactionary in the implementation of policy. They employed radical new ideas and methods including the development of inter-American

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10 Ibid, 34.
organizations and the use of covert interventions in order to implement their policies in Latin America.

The new millennium ushered in a time period of re-examination of the historiography of U.S.-Latin American relations during the Cold War, specifically during the early Cold War period. Mark Gilderhus’ sweeping narrative of U.S.-Latin American relations explored the roots of U.S. involvement in Latin America, and the factors that contributed to that development. At time previous studies emphasized either U.S. economic interests or strategic concerns. William Appleman Williams argued strenuously that U.S. policy was greatly influenced by the desire to maintain open markets abroad. Gaddis Smith posited that U.S. strategic concerns played a greater role in the implementation of American policy in Latin America. The economic/strategic debate is an interesting one, but in most cases U.S. policy was formulated around a combination of the two. Gilderhus’ major contribution is the inclusion of even more factors that determined U.S. policy. Rather than focusing exclusively on economics or strategy, Gilderhus argued that the roles played by ideology and cultural commitments as well as security needs and economic interests must be included.

In 2006, Alan McPherson identified a variety of other non-state actors to the development of U.S.-Latin American relations. His work examined anti-U.S. sentiment, industrialization, proxy wars, and trans-nationalism. What makes his work compelling is the meticulous research he conducted in a number of Latin American archives. McPherson argued that since the end of World War II the United States and Latin America became more deeply involved with one

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another in every way; economically, politically, militarily, socially, and culturally. The resulting unequal interdependence was the main theme of McPherson’s examination. U.S. policy makers acted on the assumption that Latin Americans could not govern themselves and were economically unproductive. Those assumptions not only promoted the unequal interdependence posited by McPherson, but they also promoted U.S. dominance in the region.

Though long considered as being of secondary importance to the United States at the outset of the Cold War, U.S. policy makers clearly did not treat Latin America as a peripheral concern. It was the early period that shaped how U.S. policy makers responded to the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro’s subsequent April 1959 visit to the United States. This examination will commence with an exploration of U.S. and Soviet policies in Latin America from the beginning of the Cold War in 1945 to the mid-1950s. Castro’s revolution was a turning point for U.S. and Soviet policy makers in U.S. policy towards Latin America. Cuba’s alliance with the Soviet Union was a pivotal event in the Cold War, but it was one that did not have to occur. The United States had long enjoyed a hegemonic relationship with the countries of Latin America, much in the same way the Soviet Union exerted control over Eastern European nations at the conclusion of World War II. Even after Soviet ascension to superpower status, Soviet policy makers chose to view the Monroe Doctrine as a de facto rule. It was not until 1959 that Soviet leaders began to believe seriously that Latin American countries could be used, and while the United States alienated Cuba, Soviet policy makers embraced Castro and his revolutionaries.

The crucial period from May 1958 to April 1959 will also be analyzed. This period witnessed Vice President Richard Nixon’s fateful visit to Latin America and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Nixon’s visit, coupled with Castro’s 1959 revolution, forced the United States to completely reassess American policy towards the region. This reassessment was
ultimately compromised by the mindset created by the United States’ informal empire. The term “mindset” will be defined as a habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how one will interpret and respond to situations. U.S. policy makers, believing in the policies of their predecessors, assumed that Fidel Castro could be “tamed” as previous Latin American leaders had been. That mistaken assumption proved to have drastic consequences. Policy makers, in an attempt to portray Castro as a menace, also heavily exaggerated the threats posed by the Cuban Revolution in the immediate weeks and months following Castro’s seizure of power. After Castro’s visit, relations between the United States and Cuba quickly deteriorated, while Soviet-Cuban relations rapidly strengthened.

The response of the United States to the Cuban Revolution and Castro’s April visit will also be highlighted. This is a subject that has been heavily debated among scholars of American foreign relations. The early period of Fidel Castro’s rule and U.S. diplomacy have been of particular interest to academics, especially the years from 1959 to 1961. One of the more hotly contested issues among scholars is how to determine exactly what led to the severing of ties between the United States and Cuba. That debate leads historians to address the question of whether more emphasis should be placed on the role of Castro and Cuban Revolutionaries or U.S. and Soviet policy makers. It is impossible to ascertain an absolute answer to the question of who determined the course of the revolution. After much examination it becomes clear that emphasis and agency need to be lent to U.S. and Soviet policy makers. The pace at which U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated makes it essential to examine the first months of Castro’s rule.

In possibly the most comprehensive narrative of the United States’ response to the Cuban Revolution, Thomas Paterson portrayed the foreign policy of the United States during the onset of Fidel Castro’s revolution as completely inept. He depicted the United States as having failed
to develop a cohesive and effective policy towards Cuba. While Paterson was correct that U.S. policy makers were never fully unified on policy towards Cuba, the Eisenhower administration did eventually reach a consensus on implementing hard-line policies that included withholding economic aid and support of anti-Castro forces. In the discussion of the pre-Castro period, Paterson and Louis Pérez agree that U.S. support of Castro’s predecessor, Fulgencio Batista, made Cuba ripe for revolution. Paterson argued that the United States’ focus on Castro’s pre-revolutionary communist ties was misplaced. His examination, though thorough, has one glaring omission. Not enough attention is given to Soviet diplomacy and overtures towards Cuba and how it affected Castro’s decision making. Also, while *Contesting Castro* offers an excellent and exhaustive examination of Castro’s insurrection from 1956 to 1959, it leaves more to be desired concerning the U.S. response in the aftermath of Castro’s ascension to power. Whereas Paterson’s examination of American action toward Castro in power was brief, this thesis will attempt to examine the breadth and depth of American foreign policy concerning Castro’s Cuba in the aftermath of the revolution.

In 2006 Samuel Farber posited that Castro and Cuban revolutionary leaders acted on their own and were not merely reacting to U.S. policies. Though Cuban leaders were forced to operate under serious constraints, they nevertheless determined the path Cuba would take. U.S. policy makers were portrayed as acting in a reasonable manner in setting policy. Farber’s ultimate argument was that Fidel Castro epitomized the Cuban revolution and did not let U.S. policy makers dictate to him what kind of Cuba he would form. The main contribution Farber’s work made is the level of agency he gave to Fidel Castro and Cuban revolutionaries, though in doing

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so he minimized the great influence U.S. policy makers exerted over Castro. It is imperative, however, to examine the international aspects of the Cuban Revolution, because doing so allows for a more complete narrative.

The most recent scholarship on the U.S. response to the revolution comes from Alan McPherson. In *Yankee No* McPherson delved into the concept of anti-Americanism and how it affected Castro’s revolution and the United States’ response. McPherson argued that “Revolutionary resentment became the dominant variant of anti-Americanism in Cuba in 1959 because it allowed Fidel Castro’s government to gradually purge Cuba of almost all of its ambivalence.”17 Regarding the American response, McPherson noted that “The response of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to the sudden anti-Americanization of Cuba was diplomatic rigor mortis. To describe the Eisenhower administration as having experienced diplomatic ‘rigor mortis’ can be misleading. Though the administration did not devise a ‘grand strategy’ for policy towards Cuba in the aftermath of the revolution, the administration did have a plan of action for how to reply to Cuba under Castro. Initial responses included a more conciliatory approach, a strategy that was quickly reversed in favor of more uncompromising policies and tactics.”18 Ultimately, the concept of anti-Americanism offers a new and insightful approach to U.S.-Latin American relations.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 was a multifaceted domestic Cuban phenomenon that took on an international dimension. Thus, when discussing this subject it is essential to offer a balance between the effects of U.S. policy, overtures between the Soviet Union and Cuba, and the revolutionary nationalism Fidel Castro offered to Cubans. The earliest months of Castro’s rule, January to April, were critical in shaping the overall U.S. response to Castro in power as

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18 Ibid, 50.
well as determining how Castro’s April visit would unfold. Those months were marked by U.S. efforts to gain a clear picture of exactly who Fidel Castro was, and what kind of leadership he offered. For his part Castro remained an enigma, sometimes expressing anti-American vitriol while at other times speaking about the close bonds that Cuba and the United States shared.

Finally this study will offer a detailed interpretation of the events surrounding Fidel Castro’s April 1959 visit and the attendant diplomacy of both the United States and Cuba. The trip included several memorable speeches, appearances, and meetings. Castro spoke at Princeton, Columbia, and Harvard universities. He appeared on NBC’s *Meet the Press* and met with acting Secretary of State Christian Herter and Vice President Richard Nixon. The trip also took on importance in the overall Cold War struggle between the United States and Soviet Union. While Castro traveled throughout the United States, his brother Raúl initiated contact with the Soviets.

As this study progresses several key themes will be brought to the forefront. First and most prevalent is the theme of U.S. informal empire during the Cold War. It is important to note the differences between formal and informal empire. Formal empire includes direct rule by the metropolis while informal empire incorporates informal pressures and control. Though formal

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19 A note on terminology: There is a continuing debate among historians and other academics over the use of the terms “informal empire” and “hegemony.” Robert Keohane argued for a more simplified definition of hegemony. He contended that hegemony can best be defined as “a situation where one country has significantly more power resources or capabilities.” Guy Poitras posited that hegemony is not only concerned with “resources or capabilities” but also a “preponderance of power of one state over other states…the power is derived from economic and military resources.” In a recent essay on the use of “World Systems Theory,” Thomas McCormick contended that World Systems Theory provides a “more sophisticated” definition of hegemony. He stated that “true hegemony” exists if three interrelated facts are obtained, including broad economic supremacy, preponderant military power, and the ability to manage the global economy. Niall Ferguson, a prominent historian of empire, called for an end to the term “hegemony,” arguing that the term “empire” is sufficient. “With a broader and more sophisticated definition of empire, it seems possible to dispense altogether with the term hegemony.” For each of these quotes, refer to: Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony, Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 34; Guy Poitras, *The Ordeal of Hegemony: The United States and Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 2; Thomas McCormick, “World Systems,” *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, Second Edition, Eds. Michael Hogan and Thomas Paterson. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 153; Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 12. This thesis uses both terms, although “informal empire” appears most often. Also, this thesis uses the term “hegemony” as defined by Poitras: as a “preponderance of power of one state over other states…”
control offers the metropolis direct rule it can drain resources and be very expensive. Informal empire, on the other hand, can be cheap and allow for more flexible responses at times of crisis, but the metropolis does not garner the same influence that comes with direct rule. One of the most important similarities is that both imply the exercise of power by one nation over another. Studies of empire in Latin America usually focus on the political and economic facets, but a recent trend includes the study of empire and culture. The term informal empire came to prominence in 1953 with the publication of John Gallagher’s and Ronald Robinson’s “The Imperialism of Free Trade.” Gallagher and Robinson posited that “The conventional interpretation of...empire continues to rest upon study of the formal empire alone, which is rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line.”

To Gallagher and Robinson, the structure of informal empire needed to be examined in order to better understand the concept of imperialism. They stressed the importance of economics and argued that “What was overlooked was the inter-relation of its economic and political arms; how political action aided the growth of commercial supremacy, and how this supremacy in turn strengthened political influence. In other words, it is the politics as well as the economics of the informal empire which we have to include in the account.”

Recently, one of the most influential scholars of empire has rejected informal empire as an “unhelpful euphemism.” Ann Stoler argued that informal empire does not constitute a working concept and is therefore inadequate to use in imperial studies. Alan Knight refuted

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22 Ibid, 7.
Stoler and contended that informal empire can be used as a working concept. He posited that “indirect control covers a wide spectrum, ranging from semiautonomous fiefs within formal empire to unequal and clientelist relations between “sovereign” powers, whereby one exercises disproportionate power over another and can bend it to its own imperial will.”

While Robinson and Gallagher contended that informal empire included using political and strategic influences to reach economic objectives, this thesis seeks to highlight that American Cold War informal empire used economic pressures to achieve political and strategic goals. Discussing the global implications of U.S. Cold War policy, Kenneth Osgood contended that United States’ empire “was also a covert empire built on subtle manipulation. It rested not on military conquest and absolute control, but on informal modes of dominance camouflaged to reduce the apparent size of intervention.” Osgood’s definition of American control is easily applicable to U.S.-Latin American relations during the early period of the Cold War.

A second theme explored in this work is how the Cold War affected nations that were considered on the periphery. Fidel Castro’s revolution took Cuba completely out of the Cold War's periphery and into the center of the East-West conflict. U.S. policy makers acted in a manner less conducive to sustaining a working relationship with Castro’s Cuba while the Soviets opened up to the possibility of attaining an ally in the Western Hemisphere.

A third theme treats the role of domestic politics and its influence on foreign relations. By the time of Castro’s seizure of power, President Dwight Eisenhower was close to fulfilling his second term as U.S. President. Vice President Richard Nixon asserted himself in foreign policy

25 Kenneth Osgood, Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 150.
matters to improve his chances of victory in the 1960 presidential election, so much so that the ardent anti-communist held a meeting with Fidel Castro during the April 1959 visit.

A final and very important theme is the value of direct diplomacy. Castro’s visit offered Eisenhower the chance to gauge for himself the character of Fidel Castro. By allowing Vice President Nixon to meet with the Cuban leader, the American President missed an opportunity for direct diplomacy. Castro’s trip was an eleven day tour that included stops in cities including: Washington, New York, Boston, and Houston.26 The reception he was given by policy makers and the diplomacy of the Eisenhower administration had detrimental effects on U.S. relations with Castro’s Cuba.

While Castro’s first visit to the United States has long been viewed as having been insignificant, the opportunities the April trip presented both the United States and Cuba were immense. By examining Castro’s April 1959 trip it is possible to gain a better understanding of the possibilities for cooperation that existed in U.S.-Cuban relations immediately after Castro took power. Furthermore, the April 1959 visit offers a window into how U.S. policies precipitated the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations and how the overall structure of U.S.-Latin American relations affected the United States’ response to Fidel Castro.

CHAPTER I – “GO LINE THEM UP.” CONSTRUCTING EMPIRE: THE UNITED STATES IN LATIN AMERICA, 1945-1955

Throughout the history of the United States there has always existed a special relationship with the nations that compose Latin America. Though the cornerstone of United States policy towards Latin America, the Monroe Doctrine, was established in 1823, the United States lacked the means to enforce it. Throughout the 19th century the United States’ influence in Latin America never reached that of Great Britain’s. British power was exerted primarily through economic dominance. Matthew Brown posited that towards the end of the 19th century Latin America had become “fully incorporated into the Atlantic economy, principally in the subordinate position of an exporter of raw materials to the industrializing powers…”

By 1890 total British investment in Latin America had reached £426 million. When American leaders did attempt to extend the United States’ presence in the region, they were rebuffed. During the 1870s President Ulysses S. Grant made no secret that he wanted the Dominican Republic annexed to the United States. Grant’s annexation proposal was quickly denounced, for U.S. policy makers and members of Congress did not wish to construct a formal American presence in the region. Instead, they deferred to Great Britain. James Blaine, American Secretary of State under Presidents James Garfield, Chester Arthur, and Benjamin Harrison, continued the United States’ 19th century policies of limited engagement with Latin America. Blaine consistently argued for the United States to engage Latin America through negotiations and treaties rather than annexing and formally controlling Latin American nations.

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It was not until 1898 that U.S. policy towards Latin America became much more pronounced. At the conclusion of the Spanish-American-Cuban War in 1898 the United States leapt onto the world stage as a global military power. The United States’ new-found global status was felt nowhere more than in Latin America. In the aftermath of the war the United States’ presence in the region became more formalized. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the war, ceded official control of Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain to the United States.\(^{31}\) U.S. victory over Spain proved to be a starting point for American military interventions; between 1898 and 1933 U.S. troops were deployed to Central America and the Caribbean more than 30 times.\(^{32}\)

The United States bolstered its international status at the end of World War I in 1918. As British influence and power in Latin America continued to erode after the war, the United States’ role and power in the region continued to increase.\(^{33}\) While many have come to believe that the 1920s was a decade of American isolationism this was certainly not the case with regards to American policy towards Latin America. The 1920s witnessed American policy makers continually employ overt military actions and throughout the decade U.S. interventions in Latin America routinely occurred. In 1920 U.S. troops executed a two week intervention in Guatemala, and in 1921 troops were sent to Costa Rica and Panama to quell hostilities between the two nations. During election strife in Honduras in 1924 U.S. troops were ordered to intervene to keep the peace.\(^{34}\) One of the more notable interventions came in the six year military occupation of


\(^{32}\) McPherson, \textit{Yankee No!} 17.


Nicaragua that began in 1927. Marines were ordered to the Central American nation to help quell unrest that had developed between conservative and liberal leaders. American officials oversaw the Nicaraguan election of 1928, controlled that elections victor, José María Moncada, and arranged a truce between conservatives and liberals.

In the years that immediately preceded 1945, U.S.-Latin American relations operated under the Good Neighbor policy. President Franklin Roosevelt called for the implementation of the policy as early as his first inaugural address in 1933 when he stated, “In the field of world policy I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.” Overall, United States policy during the Good Neighbor era turned out to be pragmatic. The Roosevelt administration attempted to conduct relations in a ‘hands off manner’, but when administration officials felt that U.S. interests were threatened they quickly acted. Historians have questioned just how “neighborly” the Roosevelt administration acted. Max Paul Friedman used the example of American removal of over 4,000 Germans living in Latin America during WWII. When discussing how the Good Neighbor policy affected U.S.-Latin American relations, Friedman argued that the deportation program of the Roosevelt administration in 1938 highlighted the myth of the Good Neighbor.

The Cold War and threats of Soviet penetration of Latin America caused the United States to institute new methods and policies towards the region. No longer did policy makers

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believe that sending marines to Latin American shores was a viable or practical option. Cuba, because of its geographic position and close historic ties to the United States found itself squarely under the umbrella of the United States’ informal empire.\textsuperscript{39} The international climate in the post-1945 world offered new challenges. At the conclusion of World War II only the United States and Soviet Union remained as world powers. Each sought to establish or maintain its spheres of influence. In this bipolar world U.S policy makers believed that in order for the United States to maintain its standing as a superpower it had to preserve and strengthen its status as the keeper of the Western hemisphere. As a result U.S. policy makers, not wishing to be labeled imperialists by the Soviet Union, opted for informal control which disguised American dominion.

When examining relations between the United States and Latin America from 1945 to 1955 it becomes apparent that a U.S. informal empire was established. The United States wielded unprecedented influence over the region during the early Cold War period. The presidential administrations of Harry S. Truman and Dwight Eisenhower thought it necessary to be involved in the domestic and international affairs of Latin American nations. In the wake of the Allied victory in World War II the Truman administration attempted to control all aspects of the inter-American relationship through multilateral organizations, conferences, treaties and pacts, and arming the region. Dwight Eisenhower, while pursuing the ideals of anti-communism, instituted a much more aggressive foreign policy towards Latin America. Eisenhower overtly and covertly intervened in Latin America. By being so involved in the region, these presidents were able to have a great influence on the inner workings of the region. The control the United States

\textsuperscript{39} The Platt Amendment of 1901 had granted Cuba quasi-independence with the United States reserving the right to intervene when U.S. interests were threatened. The Platt Amendment was not repealed until 1934.
States exerted over Latin America from 1945 to 1955 does not take away Latin American agency, but ultimately underscores the problems that can arise from an informal empire.

The year 1945 proved to be a time of great transition for the United States. World War II concluded, the Soviet Union emerged as a power rival, and the man who had led the country for the past twelve years was gone. The death of Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945 left a great void in the oval office, one that was filled by the “the noisy shopkeeper” Harry Truman.\(^\text{40}\) Even before Roosevelt’s death it had become apparent that the United States and Soviet Union had differing views of the post-war world. These differences quickly escalated and created the Cold War. The advent of the Cold War caused a complete re-assessment of U.S. policy, and to prevent Soviet infiltration of Latin America, the United States proved willing to institute new and innovative policies.

The deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations led the Truman administration to embark on a foreign policy which focused on Europe, East Asia, and the Soviet Union.\(^\text{41}\) The need for Truman to place emphasis on those areas of the world has led to criticism of his administration’s hemispheric policies. The criticism levied against Truman is unwarranted. Although the Truman administration enacted Eurocentric policies, it did not ignore its neighbors to the south as some historians have argued. Stephen Rabe argued that during Harry Truman’s first term, “the Latin American policy of the United States seemed confused and inconsistent.”\(^\text{42}\) Robert Beisner criticized both Truman and Dean Acheson. “Compared to Europe, the Latin American record made by President Truman and Dean Acheson is marked by ignorance and neglect as neither of


them knew much about the nations to the south." Rabe and Beisner may be correct in asserting that both Truman and Acheson were “confused” and “ignorant,” but their claim that U.S. policy during this time was “inconsistent” and “neglectful” is wrong.

In fact, the policies enacted by the Truman administration from 1945 to 1952 helped set in motion the United States’ Cold War “informal empire” in Latin America. The groundwork for Latin American policy during the Truman administration, however, was laid before the end of World War II. In February 1945 an inter-American conference convened in Mexico City. U.S. policy makers privately stated one objective of the conference was to “give rest of the world…the impression we are presenting it with fait accompli on issue of spheres of influence…” The conference produced the Act of Chapultepec, which enshrined the principle of collective security. The act stipulated that an attack on one nation in the hemisphere was an attack on all nations. The vast difference between the size of the United States’ armed forces and those of Latin America essentially made the United States the official protector of the region. At the conference of the United Nations, held in San Francisco in 1945, Latin American nations were granted full participation, but were expected to side with the United States. When Latin American leaders showed autonomy in their voting, a U.S. senator told assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Nelson Rockefeller that, “your God-damned peanut nations aren’t voting right. Go line them up.”

In 1947 the United States asserted its control in Latin America at the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Rio Pact re-iterated the principle of collective security, but more importantly it stated that nations

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in disagreement should first try to resolve their issues in the Inter-American system. “High Contracting Parties undertake to submit every controversy which may arise between them to methods of peaceful settlement……in the Inter-American System before referring it to the General Assembly or the Security Council of the United Nations.”

Stipulating that disputes be settled regionally kept Western Europe and the Soviet Union out of the arena. Latin American leaders left Rio de Janeiro deeply disappointed that President Truman had not offered the region the kind of aid Western Europe was to receive through the Marshall Plan. Truman concluded the conference by saying, “the problems of countries in this hemisphere are different in nature and cannot be relieved by the same means and the same approaches which are in contemplation in Europe.”

The United States consolidated its control of Latin America in 1948 through the charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) signed in Bogotá, Columbia. The preamble of the charter echoed the United States’ Declaration of Independence, but quickly took on an inter-American tone. “All men are born free and equal, in dignity and in rights, and being endowed by nature with reason and conscience, they should conduct themselves as brothers one to another.”

As well as reaffirming the theme of collective security, the charter also included a new provision that allowed for that security to guard against “any other form of interference or attempted threat.” This provision, found in article 19, explicitly referred to the threat that communism could pose to the region.

Prior to 1948, the Truman administration had made a concerted effort to promote democracy while simultaneously bringing Latin American nations under control through treaties and organizations. The administration’s efforts were a result of the economic, political, and

49 McPherson, Intimate Ties Bitter Struggles, 23.
ideological ties that were strengthened between the United States and Latin America as a result of World War II. After the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, all nine Central American and Caribbean nations declared war on the Axis powers. Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico all soon followed suit. By January of 1942 eighteen Latin American nations had severed ties with Axis nations. The United States successful inclusion of Latin American nations into its World War II strategy nurtured strong bonds by the end of the war. Furthermore, American propaganda efforts also helped reinforce the ideas U.S democracy and the American way of life. These ideas were espoused by American controlled Latin American media outlets. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough contended that by the end of the war “the press and radio throughout Latin America had been heavily penetrated by US capital.”

By 1948 U.S. informal control expanded to meet U.S. fears of Soviet penetration into Latin America and American policy focused more on preventing the spread of communism rather than promoting liberal democracy’s. American policy maker George Kennan stated during a visit to Rio de Janerio in 1950 that “it is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by Communists.” Policy makers understood the important role economics would play in increasing American influence in the region. “The economic and strategic importance of Latin America to the United States is generally accepted, as is the fact that the United States has considerable to gain from development in Latin America.” Truman understood that the United States enjoyed an economic advantage over Latin America which it could use as leverage to force a consensus on

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U.S. policies. The reasoning behind the Truman administration’s emphasis on economics was the belief that “several conditions which play into the hands of the Communists exist in many of the American Republics. There is poverty that is so widespread that it means a bare subsistence level for large masses of people.” Speaking to Congress in April 1948 Truman stated, “We must fairly recognize that the economies of the other American Republics are relatively undeveloped. The United States, by reason of its close relations with these countries and its strong economic position, is the principal source to which the other American Republics look for equipment, materials and technology as well as for their financing.” Latin Americans consistently sided with the United States in hopes of gaining considerable economic assistance.

A further way the Truman administration instituted an American informal empire in Latin America was through its military assistance program. Throughout the 1940s the administration unsuccessfully lobbied Congress to pass the Inter-American Military Cooperation Act (IAMCA). Though unable to gain congressional approval, the administration was still able to supply the region militarily. Part of the problem with gaining the support of U.S. lawmakers was that Truman’s own cabinet was not in agreement on the subject for most of the decade. The lack of State Department support was evident in 1946 when the president sent the act to congress for approval. Truman’s proposal would have allowed the United States to give other American nations equipment and training on conditions determined by the United States. Chester Pach contended that though the State Department “agreed to sponsor the IAMCA, it refused to make

more than a perfunctory effort to secure its passage.”58 It was not until 1947 that Secretary of
State George Marshall and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson supported the calls for a
more proactive assistance program. By 1947 fears of Soviet expansionism led to unity on the
issue of hemispheric military assistance.59

After earning the support of Marshall and Acheson the United States enjoyed a complete
monopoly on supplying equipment to Latin America and assisting in the training of Latin
American military officers. The military assistance program act did not only condition Latin
American governments to be beholden to the United States for military equipment, but it also
created close cooperation between U.S. policy makers and Latin American military leaders.
Though the administration agreed that assistance needed to be increased, there still existed
disagreement on how to implement the policy. American military officials hoped to extend the
U.S. military presence in Latin America to include even military bases. In a memorandum from
Secretary of Defense James Forrestal to the State Department, Forrestal contended that, “For
some time the military establishment has believed it’s desirable to obtain international agreement
to certain general principles concerning the development and use of an Inter-American system of
military bases for the collective defense of the Hemisphere.”60 George Marshall responded to
Forrestal that it would be difficult in peacetime to establish formal agreements for bases inside
Latin America and that no such request would take place.61 The United States did not wish to
obtain such a formal presence in the region as informal control would suffice.

58 Ibid, 47.
60 “The Secretary of Defense (Forrestal) to the Secretary of State,” 21 January 1948. FRUS, 1948, The Western
Hemisphere, Vol. IX, 208.
61 “The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense (Forrestal),” 4 March 1948. FRUS, 1948, The Western
Hemisphere, Vol. IX, 211.
In the early 1950s the administration further expanded control in two key ways. First, in 1950 the National Security Council memorandum 56/2, “United States Policy Toward Inter-America Military Cooperation,” was approved. Second, in 1951 congress passed the Military Defense Assistance Act (MDAA). This act expanded American military aid to Latin America, and most importantly, gave the United States military a more pronounced role in the region. The Truman administration was now able to put into operation a comprehensive hemispheric defense plan. American capital was directly funneled to Latin America for military use. In 1951 $38.1 million was marked for Latin America, the next year that figure increased to $51.7 million. The approval of the NSC memorandum and congress’ passing of the MDAA occurred due to major Cold War events that transpired at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s. The Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb in 1949 and that same year China came under communist control. Those events coupled with the North Korean attack on South Korea led policy makers to believe that American military assistance to regions susceptible to communism was imperative.

The Truman administration’s policies in its last years were greatly influenced by the ideas of two influential U.S. policy makers. Diplomat George Kennan and Secretary of State Dean Acheson both viewed the region as important to overall U.S. Cold War strategy. Acheson believed “an explosive population, stagnant economy, archaic society, primitive politics, massive ignorance, illiteracy, and poverty—all had contributed generously to the creation of many local crises, tending to merge into a continental one.”

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finding trip to Latin America. Though Latin America was outside of Kennan’s area of expertise he did offer the State Department his view. After returning he sent a memorandum to Acheson reporting that the United States did not fully appreciate the significance of Latin America in the overall Cold War struggle and should maintain a more active role in the region. Kennan also argued that the United States should explore “the elaboration of coercive measures which can impress other governments…”

The island of Cuba offered the United States its first opportunity to play the more active role in the region that Kennan had suggested. Ramón Grau San Martín had emerged from exile and electorally defeated Fulgencio Batista in 1944. This forced the United States to deal with a Cuban leader other than the general. Policy makers in the Truman administration felt that Grau was a weak politician who did not take advantage of U.S. economic assistance. Furthermore, they believed that Grau was too anti-American and would cause problems for U.S. interests in Cuba and throughout Latin America. In 1948 Grau refused a U.S. offer to buy surplus Cuban sugar, and the Truman administration viewed Grau’s refusal as the ultimate sign he was not fit for leadership. Fortunately for the Truman administration many Cubans also believed Grau was unfit for leadership and he was replaced in office by Carlos Prío in 1948. In 1952 a Cuban election was set to take place that pitted Batista against Grau and incumbent Prío. Three months before the vote Batista, fearing defeat, overthrew the Prío government. It took the Truman administration only eight days to recognize Batista’s government. The Cuban strongman was back in power and eventually had the full support of the United States; the Truman administration saw Batista’s government as being friendly to the United States and a military

66 “Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department of State (Kennan) to the Secretary of State,” 29 March 1950. FRUS, 1950. The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere. Vol. II, 609.
ally. Because of their developing military alliance Truman granted Batista arms and extensive military training for the Cuban army. Batista’s relationship with the United States was cemented under the Truman administration.

The Truman administration clearly did not ignore Latin America, but rather initiated policies that kept the region squarely in the Western camp. The administration employed the diplomatic tools of conferences, treaties, pacts, armament and recognition. By initiating control through diplomatic tools the administration was able to direct Latin America in a manner which masked its political dominance. U.S.-Latin American relations during the Truman administration created a sense among policy makers that Latin American governments should and would follow the United States’ lead during the Cold War.

When Dwight Eisenhower became President in 1953 he inherited the Truman administration’s Latin American policy. Many officials in the Eisenhower administration believed that Truman’s foreign policy towards the southern countries of the Western Hemisphere was severely lacking. Eisenhower declared while campaigning in 1952 that the Truman administration had turned the Good Neighbor Policy into “a poor neighbor policy.” Eisenhower vowed not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor and promised to give Latin America his attention. Almost immediately after taking office Eisenhower made anti-communism the central theme of his foreign policy regarding Latin America. Leaders who had communist tendencies would not be tolerated. The basis of its anti-communist stance stemmed from the administration’s fear that the Soviet Union would take advantage of the economic situation in

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70 Rabe. Eisenhower and Latin America, 6.
71 Ibid, 40.
Latin America to rally support for communism. To help fight communism in Latin America, President Eisenhower turned to a man he greatly admired, his younger brother, Milton. In a speech to the Organization of American States on 12 April 1953 President Eisenhower announced that Milton would,

visit shortly a number of these great republics (Latin America). He will carry to each of the governments he visits the most sincere and warm greetings of this Administration. He will report to me, to Secretary of State Dulles and to Assistant Secretary Cabot, on ways to be recommended for strengthening the bonds of friendship between us and all our neighbors in this Pan American Union.72

Milton Eisenhower took his job as presidential envoy very seriously; after the announcement he requested that the Assistant Secretaries of State, Treasury, and Commerce accompany him on his trip so a comprehensive report would be drafted for the president.73 His duties included a thirty-six day trip through ten Latin American countries. President Eisenhower had a deep respect for his younger brother. He noted in his private diary while campaigning for the presidency in 1951 that, “Incidentally my real choice for president, by virtue of character, understanding, administrative ability, and personality, is my youngest brother, Milton.”74

Sending his brother on such an extended trip was a significant sign that the Eisenhower administration was serious about improving U.S.-Latin American relations, but the policy established after the trip looked very much like the policy of the past. The main goal of the administration was to improve the living conditions of Latin America so that they would be less vulnerable to the blandishments of communism. Milton Eisenhower was adamant that economic aid was the best way to strengthen relations. However, he believed that this should be done

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through private enterprise and investment rather than through direct government to government loans.\textsuperscript{75} In a sense, the Eisenhower administration’s policy was simply to pump money into Latin American nations to improve their standards of living. In President Eisenhower’s own words, “Between 1953 and 1960, to help in finding solutions, we had done many things, starting with that popular export, money.”\textsuperscript{76} The problem with sending that “popular export” was that Latin American nations needed political and economic reform as much as they needed capital.

Between 1953 and 1954 re-invested earnings from private sources increased from $152 million to $193 million. Even with that increase, direct private investment decreased from $93 million to $82 million. The private sector, which Milton Eisenhower supported, was not meeting the needs for growth in Latin America.\textsuperscript{77}

The countries of Latin America at this time were dominated by military leaders who did not view reform as necessary. Fears of Soviet penetration led Eisenhower to support military regimes that kept the status quo intact. The Eisenhower administration supported military rulers in most cases because military men proclaimed themselves to be firmly anti-communist. Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay, Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, Manuel Odría of Peru, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, and Batista of Cuba were a few of the leaders the Eisenhower administration patronized. All were known to have pitiful human rights records and to be extremely corrupt.\textsuperscript{78} Many Latin Americans were outraged when Eisenhower awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit award to Jiménez and Odría. Both were known for their ruthless dictatorships, but they were firmly anti-communist.\textsuperscript{79} Without reforms the money was essentially

\textsuperscript{78} Rabe, \textit{Eisenhower and Latin America}, 86.
worthless. The president’s brother prophetically stated, “There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that revolution is inevitable in Latin America. The people are angry. They are shackled to the past with bonds of ignorance, injustice, and poverty. And they no longer accept as universal or inevitable the oppressing prevailing order which has filled their lives with toil, want, and pain.”

President Eisenhower did not only inherit policies from the Truman administration, but his administration also inherited a deteriorating political situation inside Bolivia. In April 1952 Victor Paz Estenssoro and his Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) took power after ousting a military junta. The Estenssoro government quickly nationalized Bolivia’s top economic resource, tin. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, ordered U.S. ambassador to Bolivia Edward Sparks to explain to the Estenssoro government that the United States could be Bolivia’s number one purchaser of tin, but that no trade agreements would be reached until the MNR changed its current political path. Ultimately, the Eisenhower administration was able to counter and control the Bolivian Revolution without having to overthrow the MNR. Diplomatic pressure and economic intervention coupled with Bolivia’s dependence on American markets essentially curtailed the revolution before it truly started.

While the situation in Bolivia unfolded U.S. policy makers were forced to pay attention to events in the Central American nation of Guatemala. Colonel Jacobo Arbenz was elected president in 1950, and by 1952 the CIA portrayed Guatemalan communists as having significant power in the government, asserting “the political alliance between the administration and the

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Communists is likely to continue.” In Washington the prevailing fear was that Arbenz would institute a communist regime and in doing so create a “communist beachhead” in Latin America. On 18 June 1954 covert action against the Arbenz government began. Six days later Arbenz resigned the office of president after losing the battle to CIA-backed Guatemalan forces.

The examples of Bolivia and Guatemala highlighted the United States’ response to perceived Cold War threats. The Eisenhower administration intervened directly in the affairs of each country. Yet, rather than commit U.S. troops to the region as earlier administrations had done, Eisenhower employed different, less formal methods of imperial control in Latin America. American policy makers saw the tools of intervention as necessary to sustain American hegemony in the region. These “successful” interventions created a dangerous precedent for how the Eisenhower administration would formulate future policy towards the region. The outcomes achieved by the United States in Bolivia and Guatemala solidified the U.S. empire in Latin America.

The primary motivation for the United States to exercise great influence in Latin America came from U.S. fears that the Soviet Union would infiltrate the region and communism would run rampant. In truth, while the United States immediately sought to play a role in Latin America after World War II, Soviet policy toward the region was dormant. Joseph Stalin was preoccupied

with the events unfolding in Berlin and areas closer to the Soviet Union. Stalin’s first goal was to secure Soviet security; his country had been attacked by advancing German forces from the west twice in four decades. Stalin put his quest for security at the forefront of his post-war foreign policy; ideas of spreading communism were secondary.\(^{86}\) Concerning Latin America the Soviet Union had established diplomatic relations with the majority of Latin American nations during the war, but the deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations led to the termination of Soviet-Latin American relations. By the end of the war only Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay had formal diplomatic relations with the Soviets.\(^ {87}\) Stalin viewed the region as nothing more than a group of American satellites not being worth Soviet time and capital.\(^ {88}\)

The lack of a Soviet presence in the region prevented Soviet policy makers from being able to formulate any coherent strategy towards Latin America. In order to gauge how open the region may have been to Soviet overtures human intelligence was needed. During this period the Soviets established few workable contacts and did not have the apparatus in place that was needed. The main agency responsible for Soviet foreign affairs was the Committee for State Security (KGB) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The KGB had residencies in only three Latin American capitals, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo. That fact led Stalin to scornfully remark that the twenty Latin American countries were the “obedient army of the United States.”\(^ {89}\) U.S. and Soviet policy makers essentially equated Latin American nations to those of Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union had its sphere of influence, and the United States had its. The treaties and formal arrangements established between the United States and Latin America were the result of this strategy.


America effectively barred Soviet entrance into the region.\textsuperscript{90} During the 1950s both the United States and Soviet Union demonstrated authority when nations in their respective spheres were perceived to have stepped out of line. The United States derailed the Paz Estenssoro government in 1952 and the government of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, while the Soviet Union put down an uprising in Hungary during 1956.

Soviet policy underwent drastic changes with the death of Stalin in 1953. For a brief period the Soviets operated under a collective leadership. The ouster of Premier Georgi Malenkov paved the way for Nikita Khrushchev’s rise to power.\textsuperscript{91} Khrushchev was a different kind of leader. He attempted to distance the Soviet Union from both Stalin’s domestic and foreign policies. Khrushchev blamed Stalin for the Soviet approach of militarizing struggles with capitalists and for lack of involvement with the developing world.\textsuperscript{92} In the famed secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party Khrushchev laid out his charges against Stalin’s regime.

In the foreign policy realm Khrushchev believed that the Soviet Union should look to expand and be more open to nations taking a different path to socialism than the Soviet Union had done heretofore. Though he envisioned a more outward-looking Soviet foreign policy, Khrushchev had concerns closer to the Soviet Union to address first.\textsuperscript{93} The situation in Berlin was the main focus for Khrushchev, as it had been for Stalin. Also, Soviet relations with the United States were on a cordial level after the Geneva Summit of 1955. The summit included the first meeting between Khrushchev and Eisenhower. Khrushchev left the meeting with a very

favorable opinion of the American President, “I cannot judge how good Eisenhower is as a president. It is for the American people to decide that. But as a father and grandfather I would gladly entrust my kids to him…..” Khrushchev was also convinced that Eisenhower would not allow a military confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union. Khrushchev remarked that he trusted Eisenhower as “one war veteran would another.”\textsuperscript{94} Perhaps Khrushchev did not wish to harm Soviet relations with the U.S. by increasing overtures to governments in the U.S. sphere of influence. Whether it was Khrushchev’s hopes for a better relationship with the United States, or the Soviet focus on other international matters and lack of diplomatic presence in Latin America, the Soviet Union left Latin America to the United States. Soviet policy makers respected the United States’ sphere and did little in the way of establishing ties in the Western Hemisphere.

Recently a new argument has emerged that the Soviet Union attempted to make advances into Latin America as early as 1956. Bevan Sewell posited that Soviet policy regarding Latin America was much more sophisticated than previously thought. He cited the example of Soviet economic overtures to the region in the form of the Soviet Economic Offensive (SEO) of 1956. To Sewell, the SEO was a critical moment in which the Eisenhower administration shifted economic policy towards Latin America. Sewell posited, “Ultimately, were it not for the emergence of the SEO in Latin America and the subsequent failings of the U.S. response, it is difficult to see later changes in policy being as radical as they turned out to be.”\textsuperscript{95} In reality, while the SEO did affect the Eisenhower administration, drastic shifts in economic policy

\textsuperscript{94} Anatoly Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents} (New York: Random House, 1995), 38.

towards Latin America would not come until later and the SEO did little in the way of establishing a large Soviet presence.

The policies established by Presidents Truman and Eisenhower made it abundantly clear to the world and particularly the Soviet Union that Latin America remained firmly within the U.S. sphere of influence. While U.S. policy during this period was not static and continued to take on different forms, its main focus was the maintenance of American hegemony in the region. This fourteen-year period was a time when the United States increased its role in Latin America and saw its dominance wax and wane. The United States’ rival in the Cold War, the Soviet Union, did little to make inroads in the region.

The period from 1945 to 1955 witnessed the first inter-American conference and the Act of Chapultepec, the Rio Act, the creation of the Organization of American States, and the implementation of American military cooperation. This early period of the Cold War also saw the United States shift away from the promotion of democracy in favor of promoting stability. Pacts and organizations, formed during the Truman years, became the cornerstones of the American informal empire. They formalized the ideas of collective security, anti-communism, and hemispheric solidarity, while simultaneously maintaining U.S. dominance over the region. The Eisenhower administration continued the tradition of American dominance by exploiting the tools created by Truman and adopting new methods. Diplomatic intervention tamed the Bolivian revolution in 1952, while covert intervention employed in Guatemala overthrew a democratically elected government.

The U.S. War Department’s belief in 1945 that the United States would maintain “preclusive control” over the Western Hemisphere was borne out. The perceived success of U.S. policy during this time period gave U.S. officials a false sense of security. Those

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perceptions would have drastic consequences for U.S. policy makers at the end of the 1950s when events in Latin America tested U.S. policy and threatened the U.S. informal empire.
CHAPTER II – THE LIMITS OF AMERICAN POWER: LATIN AMERICAN RESPONSES TO U.S. HEGEMONY, 1958-1959

After employing American diplomatic and covert tools to control the situations in Bolivia and Guatemala, the Eisenhower administration entered a period of complacency in its relationship with Latin America. Vice President Richard Nixon reported that his ten country tour of the region, completed in March 1955, had been a great success. He was hopeful the construction of an Inter-American highway would soon begin and commented that goodwill among Americans and Latin Americans was strong.\(^{97}\) A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in December 1955 predicted Latin American governments would continue moving towards more moderate leadership. It argued that leaders akin to that of deposed leaders Juan Peron in Argentina and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala were unlikely to take root. Also, U.S. economic superiority would remain undiminished. The NIE concluded, “The tendency in Latin America to place responsibility for its economic development upon the United States is likely to continue.”\(^{98}\)

The complacency the Eisenhower administration displayed toward Latin America was shaken in 1958 and subsequently shattered at the beginning of 1959. Nixon’s second visit to the region in May of 1958 ended as a diplomatic disaster when the vice president was forced out of Venezuela by angry crowds. Months later a monumental transfer of power occurred on the island of Cuba; after being a major actor in the Cuban government for more than twenty-five years, General Fulgencio Batista was ousted by thirty-two year old Fidel Castro. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution highlighted the shortcomings of U.S. policy towards Latin America. Nixon’s visit coupled with Castro’s revolution forced the United States to completely reassess American policy towards the region.


In the immediate aftermath of Castro’s revolution, the United States attempted to establish a working relationship with the revolutionary government in Havana through two policy initiatives. First, the United States immediately recognized the new Castro government. Second, the State Department made a significant change in its diplomatic apparatus. Earl Smith, who had been U.S. ambassador to Cuba since 1957, was recalled and replaced by veteran foreign service officer Philip Bonsal. American policy reassessment created a schism between U.S. policy makers in the Havana embassy and those serving on the outside, particularly those in President Eisenhower’s National Security Council (NSC) and other diplomats in the region. Some like Bonsal cautioned for patience, while others like CIA Director Allen Dulles believed Castro to be a nuisance unworthy of U.S. cooperation.

Ultimately, this policy reassessment was restricted by the mindset determined by the United States’ informal empire in the region. Policy makers operated under the assumption that Fidel Castro was a typical Latin American revolutionary. They believed Castro could be controlled and manipulated as previous Latin American leaders had been. NSC members and State Department officials not directly involved with Cuba did not fully comprehend Castro’s revolution nor the underlying anti-Americanism that existed within the movement. Furthermore, believing that Fidel Castro was unfit for leadership and fearing the spread of revolutionary fervor throughout Latin America, policy makers exaggerated the early aims of the Cuban Revolution. Moreover, Castro was viewed as a possible menace to the status of American informal empire throughout the region. Because of the confidence that stemmed from President Truman’s success in organizing Latin America under U.S. leadership and President Eisenhower’s triumphs over radical governments in Bolivia and Guatemala, elements of the United States’ policy making
establishment saw no reason for the United States to continue drastic reassessments of policy that included new more conciliatory approaches to the Castro government.

In the summer of 1958, while the administration diverted the majority of its attention to Fidel Castro’s insurrection against Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, another unsettling event occurred in the region. In May Vice President Richard Nixon set out on an extended tour of South America. Urged to make the tour by Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Roy Rubottom, Nixon’s visit included stops in Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and Uruguay; the trip proved disastrous. Nixon was harassed by law students in Montevideo and bombarded with rocks by students in Lima.99 After hearing of Nixon’s reception in South America, an aide to Secretary of State Dulles remarked, “The preponderance of U.S. influence in Latin America is being challenged.”100

American influence was being challenged not from outside sources, but rather from within. Nixon’s trip ended in Caracas when his motorcade was attacked by several hundred Venezuelans. President Eisenhower airlifted marines and sent a Navy flotilla to the coast of South America just in case Nixon needed to make a quick exit. The president also sent Nixon a message of encouragement. “Dear Dick, your courage, patience, and calmness in the demonstration directed against you by radical agitators have brought you a new respect and admiration in our country.”101 Nixon, not willing to admit the shortcomings of U.S. policies, commented on the trip that, “there is no question but that the Communists have selected Latin

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100 McPherson, Yankee No! 9.
America as a major target in their international policy.”

Nixon told policy makers in Washington that the incidents demonstrated that the United States had to give more attention to Latin America. He concluded that “Caracas was a much-needed shock treatment which jolted us out of dangerous complacency.”

The trip was a public relations nightmare for the United States. Latin Americans openly attacked the Vice President of the United States and forced him out of the region. Nixon remarked in his memoirs that, “of all the trips I made abroad as Vice President, the one I least wanted to take was my visit to South America in 1958…because I thought it would be relatively unimportant and uninteresting.” American journalist Walter Lippmann asserted that it would not be an exaggeration to classify the trip as a “diplomatic Pearl Harbor.”

The Nixon trip had repercussions for another scheduled visit to Latin America. President Eisenhower’s brother Milton was scheduled to make another visit to the region, but State Department officials recommended that the trip be cancelled. “In view of recent events and intelligence reports from Panama and Guatemala in particular and to a lesser extent the other Central American countries, it seems best to recommend that Dr. Milton Eisenhower’s visit to that area be postponed for the time being.”

The administration’s view of Latin America was completely altered as a result of Nixon’s trip. The confidence administration officials had earned after the interventions in Bolivia and

102 Stanford Bradshaw, “There is no question but that the Communists have selected Latin America as a major target in their international policy,” Washington Post, 9 May 1958, read into the Congressional Record by Senator Olin Johnston, May 15, 1958.


105 Ibid, 183.


Guatemala was gone. President Eisenhower expressed concern over the “superior attitude” the United States had towards Latin America. Policy makers were forced to digest the consequences of the trip while still trying to help bring about an acceptable conclusion to the events in Cuba.

On 23 December 1958, during a meeting of the NSC, Allen Dulles contended that the Cuban revolutionary movement had been infiltrated by communists and the United States must prevent a Castro victory. Eisenhower was alarmed at Dulles’ contention that a Castro victory should be blocked for it was the first time in an NSC meeting that a member had made such a declaration. One week following Dulles’ startling admonition, Fulgencio Batista was ousted from power in Havana and the revolutionary era in Cuba commenced. In the days immediately prior to Batista’s flight the Eisenhower administration desperately tried to convince the Cuban general to leave the island and assured him that he would be granted a visa to the United States; Batista refused the offer.

In the early morning hours of New Year’s Day 1959 Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba. Radio Rebelde, the 26th of July Movement’s radio station, announced that “no matter what news comes from the capital, our troops should not cease firing at any time.” Though Castro’s revolution had vanquished Batista on the first day of January, 1959, Fidel did not reach Havana until 8

108 McPherson, Yankee No! 33.
111 “Instructions from General Headquarters to all Rebel Army Commanders and the people, January 1, 1959,” in Cuban Revolution Reader: A Documentary History of 40 Key Moments of the Cuban Revolution, Ed. Julio García Luis (New York: Ocean Press, 2001) 13; The 26th of July Movement was formed in 1953 after Fidel Castro led a failed attempt to overthrow the government of Fulgencio Batista. Castro and his followers attacked the Moncada Army Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. They hoped their attack would lead to a general uprising. Fidel, along with Raul, were arrested and later deported to Mexico. For more on the formation of the 26th of July Movement refer to: Antonio Rafael de la Cova, The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution (Columbia, SC: Published by University of South Carolina Press, 2007).
January. Castro was forced to stop at every provincial capital to speak to large crowds. Cubans gathered in massive demonstrations to hear the young revolutionary. Castro recalled that “a tank was the only thing that could get through—you couldn’t get through in a truck or you’d be crushed.”

On 13 January, five days after Castro had arrived in Havana, the Eisenhower administration released its own assessment of the Cuban leader. The administration viewed Castro as determined to secure for himself a high leadership role in Cuba. It also stated that “Castro seems to be nationalistic and somewhat socialistic; and although he has criticized alleged U.S. support for Batista, he cannot be said to be personally hostile to the U.S.”

Even before Castro arrived in Havana the Eisenhower administration took steps to reach out to the victorious Cuban revolutionaries. On 7 January 1959 Secretary of State Dulles wrote to Eisenhower recommending that the United States recognize the new Cuban government. “The Provisional Government appears free from Communist taint and there are indications that it intends to pursue friendly relations with the United States. I request you authorization to take the necessary steps to recognize the present Provisional Government of Cuba.”

Bestowing American recognition on Cuba was the same method Truman had used to initiate cordial relations with Batista in 1952. The Eisenhower administration hoped acknowledging the new revolutionary government would produce similar results.

Recognition was not the only measure the Eisenhower administration took. It also reassessed the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana. Earl Smith, a career businessman had been the

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American ambassador to Cuba since 1957. Smith had very little knowledge of Cuba and did not speak Spanish fluently. Smith’s appointment as ambassador was helped by his leadership of the Republican party in Florida and his strong business contacts in Cuba. Raúl Menocal, a minister in the Cuban government, and Miguel Tarafa, a Cuban sugar king, were close associates of Smith. While Smith had a deep knowledge of business activities inside Cuba, he never fully understood the complexities of Latin American politics. When Castro came to power Smith’s days as ambassador were numbered. The Eisenhower administration and Smith quickly realized that he would be viewed by Castro as having been close to the Batista regime. The same day Castro arrived in Havana, 8 January, Smith informed the Cuban leadership that he was no longer the American ambassador to Cuba. Two days later Smith submitted his resignation to President Eisenhower. In the span of a week Cuba lost a dictator and an American ambassador.

Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles chose career Foreign Service Officer Philip Bonsal as Smith’s successor. Bonsal had extensive experience in Latin American affairs as well as Cuban affairs. He had been involved in the region in both official and business capacities and had lived in Cuba twice, once as a student in 1926 and again on a foreign service assignment in 1938. He also sat on the Cuban desk in the Department of State from 1939 to 1940. Most importantly, Bonsal was fluent in Spanish, and would have no trouble communicating with the new Cuban government. What made Bonsal such an intriguing choice for Eisenhower was his role as ambassador to Bolivia. Bonsal was credited with helping keep the Bolivian revolution of 1952 under control. He advocated that Bolivia be allowed to enact social reforms, but he

Bonsal immediately pressed the Eisenhower administration to give Castro time to present himself to policy makers and the world. Bonsal’s approach differed greatly from that of many other members of President Eisenhower’s administration. While elements of the administration believed in a heavily pro-active and interventionist policy towards Latin America, Bonsal had been an ardent supporter of Franklin Roosevelt’s pragmatic Good Neighbor Policy.\(^\text{119}\)

By the time Bonsal arrived in Havana, Castro was solely in control of Cuba. The new American ambassador quickly concluded that American policy must conform to the inter-American doctrine of non-intervention while working towards a friendly relationship with Castro’s government.\(^\text{120}\) Castro and Bonsal first met at a Cuban baseball game. Castro was speaking with spectators when Bonsal arrived. “The crowd rose and gave me a prolonged ovation, I was truly moved by this tribute to my country.”\(^\text{121}\) Bonsal reported that Castro had been in a cordial and effusive mood explaining that agrarian reform, industrialization, and financing low cost housing were the vital elements of the revolution.\(^\text{122}\) For Castro, Bonsal was a welcome addition to the United States’ diplomatic mission in Havana. For Bonsal, his main objective was to figure out what political path Fidel Castro intended to establish for Cuba.

During the first few weeks and months of his rule, Castro did not make Bonsal’s job easy. He kept U.S. policy makers guessing, and made inconsistent statements concerning his views of the United States and its government. He lambasted the United States and its policies during


\(^{120}\) Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, the United States*, 39-40.


Batista’s rule while giving high ranking government positions to pro-Western moderates. In a speech at the Presidential Palace before a large crowd Castro proclaimed, “Now that the people of Cuba have triumphed, they (United States) want to castrate our revolution, prevent justice from being done, and this is what the people of Cuba will not permit, because they have now grown considerably and have reached their maturity and are governing themselves.”\textsuperscript{123} While proclaiming that the United States wanted to “castrate” the revolution, Castro surrounded himself with administrators who held favorable views of the United States. Felipe Pazos was appointed President of the National Bank. Pazos wanted a more limited but still important role for American capital inside Cuba. Roberto Aragón, a staunch practitioner of political democracy, was Cuban Foreign minister. Rufo López Fresquet was in charge of the Treasury Department, a man well known to the American business community. Elena Mederos, a friend of many American leaders, was appointed Minister of Social Affairs.\textsuperscript{124}

It was Castro’s strong following and ability to produce massive crowds that caused much consternation for U.S. policy makers. On January 21 500,000 thousand Cubans gathered outside the Presidential Palace to hear Castro speak.\textsuperscript{125} The revolution’s appeal was not just felt by Cubans, but by all Latin Americans. This worried Eisenhower administration officials who had seen U.S. power challenged during Nixon’s visit and were now witnessing more anti-American sentiment in Cuba.\textsuperscript{126} The Cuban Revolution and its success resonated throughout Latin America for several reasons. The young bearded revolutionary leader struck a chord with Latin Americans; he espoused ideas of social justice, hemispheric unity, and economic equality. By


\textsuperscript{124} Bonsal, Cuba, Castro, the United States, 35.


\textsuperscript{126} Thomas Wright, Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), xii.
1959 many Latin Americans had become distressed over the control the United States exerted throughout the region. The revolution represented a diminutive Latin American nation standing up to the United States. Castro’s appeal to Cubans was greater than that of the MNR in Bolivia or Arbenz in Guatemala, and Castro’s appeal also differed from the MNR and Arbenz in that he was able to reach all Latin Americans. Only weeks after taking power, Castro visited Venezuela. Caracas’ newspaper, *El Nacional*, printed Castro’s itinerary and invited all Venezuelans to greet him.\(^{127}\) Over 300,000 Venezuelans gathered in the *Plaza de Silencio* to hear Castro speak.\(^{128}\) U.S. policy makers were not comfortable with the power Castro appeared to wield over Cubans and Latin Americans.

Furthermore, Cuba was not Bolivia or Guatemala. While both Bolivia and Guatemala had limited importance to the United States, American economic and strategic interests were much more pronounced on the island of Cuba. By the end of the 1950s the United States and Cuba were heavily intertwined economically. The ratification of the Platt Amendment in 1901 had allowed American businesses control over Cuba’s main economic resource, sugar. The Cuban-American Sugar Company, the American Sugar Company, and the United Fruit Company all took control of sugar estates inside of Cuba.\(^{129}\) Nearly the entire Oriente coast came under U.S. management.\(^{130}\) Sugar production was not the only sector of the Cuban economy U.S. businesses directed. Mining, banking, utilities, and tobacco production also went the way of the United

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\(^{127}\) *El Nacional*, 22 April 1959, p. 35.


\(^{129}\) Oscar Zanetti argued that the United Fruit Company became such a large part of Cuban society that in regions where the company operated locals associated more as UFC employees than as Cuban citizens. He contended that “the activities of the company contributed to the acquiescence of sectors within the regional society-top employees, big planters, tenants…who publicly and notoriously defended the company to which they had linked their destinies.”\(^{12}\) Refer to: Oscar Zanetti, “The United Fruit Company in Cuba,” *The Cuba Reader: History Culture, Politics*, Eds. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

\(^{130}\) The Oriente region is situated in eastern Cuba 650 miles from Havana. It is home to five provinces: Las Tunas, Granma, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo.
States. U.S. companies cornered all of Cuba’s economic markets, and in doing so took up massive amounts of land. It was estimated that in 1906 Cubans were reduced to owning only 25 percent of land on the island.\footnote{Louis Pérez, \textit{Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 72.}

The Reciprocity Treaty of 1903 not only strengthened economic ties between Cuba and the United States, but also fortified Cuban economic dependence. President Theodore Roosevelt stated that “Thus in a sense Cuba has become part of our international system. This makes it necessary that in return she should be given some of the benefits of becoming part of our economic system.”\footnote{Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, “Second Annual Message,” 2 December 1902. Available from http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29543. Accessed 6 April 2009, \textit{APP}.} By 1911 U.S. capital in Cuba was over 200 million.\footnote{Pérez, \textit{Cuba under the Platt}, 74.} Reciprocity increased the integration of the Cuban economy into the American system. In the early days of the Platt Amendment the United States controlled 40 percent of Cuban sugar production. By the mid 1920s that number had increased to 63 percent.\footnote{Pérez, \textit{Ties of Singular Intimacy}, 120-123.}

During Batista’s reign Cuba’s dependency on the United States greatly increased. During this time U.S. control over Cuba’s economy was staggering. The U.S. market accounted for 80 percent of Cuba’s exports. Those exports represented almost one-third or more of Cuba’s total national income.\footnote{Paterson, \textit{Contesting Castro}, 35.} Sugar continued to play a major role during the Batista era. The United States received almost half of Cuba’s sugar exports. In 1958 that number increased to 58 percent.\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, American penetration of the Cuban economy outside of sugar also increased. North American companies owned 40 percent of sugar mills. U.S. businesses were in charge of 90 percent of Cuban telephone and electric services and also had large stakes in Cuba’s railway and petroleum industries.
Strategically, U.S. policy makers viewed Cuba as being imperative to American hemispheric defense. Cuba’s geographic position led it to be labeled as the “gateway to the Americas.”\textsuperscript{137} Additionally, the United States possessed a military base on the island located at Guantánamo Bay.

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution American strategic and economic interests took precedence. The Eisenhower administration did not want the revolutionary fervor in Cuba to spill over into other Latin American nations that could threaten U.S. those interests. Less than a month after Castro took power the first reports came out concerning revolutionary activities throughout the hemisphere. From the Havana embassy Daniel Braddock described Che Guevara as pressing Fidel to undertake efforts all over Latin America. Guevara, an Argentine physician joined Castro’s forces while in Mexico in 1955 and was one of the most radical members of the 26th of July Movement. Though Braddock characterized Che’s ideas as unrealistic, he did argue that they could cause problems for the U.S. and the OAS in the future.\textsuperscript{138} Most importantly, Braddock’s assessment was vague and did not offer any concrete examples of Cuban interference with other governments. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Hill went one step further and stated, “…certain elements in the Castro government—especially the Argentine Communist-liner Major ‘Che’ Guevara—are contemplating and planning active support to revolutionary activities against Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay….it is, however, difficult to tell whether anything concrete has yet been worked out and


what the attitude of the Cuban Government and Castro will eventually be toward these activities."

The same day of Hill’s evaluation, Braddock cabled the Department of State and suggested Castro be invited to visit the United States. Braddock believed a visit “could help dispel much of his (Castro) suspicion and prejudice. Invitation might best come from the Army. If Department agrees Castro visit in our interest, I suggest invitation be conveyed by Bonsal soon after arrival.” Administration officials in Washington disagreed with Braddock and believed an invitation was premature; no formal invitation was extended.

Braddock’s earlier assessment of Cuba’s aims throughout the region was corroborated by the Division of Research and Analysis for American Republics (DRA) weeks later. DRA director Robert Dean reported that revolutionary movements within Cuba were planning to spread the revolution. American ambassador to Uruguay Henry Hoyt voiced concerns that Castro’s revolution was going to attempt to overthrow the governments of Paraguay, Nicaragua, and Panama. Historian Richard Welch described U.S. policy makers during the early months of Castro’s rule as guilty of “magnifying Cuban efforts to inspire rebel invasions against reactionary regimes…” The strongest accusations against Castro concerned revolutionary activities against Nicaragua and Panama in April 1959. Castro responded that subversive

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139 “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Special Assistant (Hill),” 6 February 1959. FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI, 396.
143 “Memorandum from Ambassador to Uruguay Henry Hoyt to Assistant Secretary Roy Rubottom,” 26 February 1959. GRDOS, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. RG 59, Records of the Special Assistant on Communism, 1958-1961. Box 1, Lot 64D24, NACP.
activities originating in Cuba would not be tolerated. On 18 April more than one hundred Nicaraguans were arrested in the Pinar del Rio province in Cuba. When arresting the Nicaraguans provincial Rebel Army Commander Dermidio Escalona declared that Fidel had forbade any invasion from Cuba. The *New York Times* reported that “…Fidel Castro had declared that no armed expeditions could leave Cuban territory for other countries.” Also in April, several Cubans participated in an invasion of Panama. Castro stated that those Cubans were “irresponsible” and damaged “the prestige of the (Cuban) revolution.” Castro also declared that the Cuban government had no intention to take part in the Panamanian invasion. Newly-appointed Cuban ambassador to the OAS Raúl Roa García denounced Cubans interfering in Panamanian affairs. García affirmed Cuba’s commitment to non-intervention. In response to the perceived Cuban threat to Panama U.S. policy makers advocated the invocation of the Rio treaty, and the OAS members all concurred. Historian Gaddis Smith confirmed that, “Fidel Castro was wrongly accused of staging an invasion of Panama in April 1959, and the United States in a state of high alarm mobilized air and Naval patrols…”

Furthermore, in April U.S. ambassadors to Caribbean nations convened with Secretary Rubottom in what was described as “a “super secret” and “stormy” meeting in El Salvador,” to discuss dictators and revolutionists. In attendance were ambassadors to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, and Cuba. The *New York Times* available at http://0-proquest.umi.com.unccle.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=1&did=89182597&SrchMode=2&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1231102310&clientld=15115. Accessed 3 January 2009.

149 Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine*, 144.
*Times* reported, “there is no immediate possibility of a successful invasion in the Caribbean area, a country by country poll of the United States ambassadors to twelve nations in the area…”\(^{151}\)

While the majority of ambassadors believed that no immediate threat existed, there still was much disagreement on how policy should be implemented. The *Times* further reported that arguments over policy were so heated that the threat of “resignations were a dime a dozen.” The sides broke down between political appointees and career foreign service officers. Appointees, such as ambassador to Mexico Robert Hill, insisted that the United States immediately release a statement condemning revolutionary activities in the Caribbean area while career foreign service officers argued for the OAS to be included in the discussion before any statements were released.\(^{152}\) In the end, the State Department decided to seek OAS counsel before releasing any statements. Making use of the OAS was seen as taking a soft line approach. The OAS had long declared that no matter what policy the United States decided upon towards Castro, it must adhere to the principles of non-intervention. Just before Castro took power in January 1959, every Latin American nation, except the Dominican Republic, affirmed that “any intent to help Cuba to terminate present situation should be limited by strict adherence to principle of non-intervention.”\(^{153}\)

The cornerstone of American control in Latin America, the OAS, appeared impotent to the more “hawkish” elements in the Eisenhower administration. One of the most contentious discussions at the conference was between Deputy Under Secretary of State Loy Henderson and

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ambassador to Cuba Bonsal. Henderson argued that in his view Castro was developing “Nasser-like” characteristics. Bonsal replied that domestic strife in Cuba was keeping Castro busy, that he foresaw no immediate Cuban threat and that Castro was not predisposed to establishing “Nasser-like” leadership.

After being in power for less than a month Castro was tied to numerous plots against governments in Latin America, though no U.S. policy maker predicted an imminent threat and no actionable reports had been produced. Castro was purported to be planning the overthrow of several Latin American governments, when in fact the Cuban leader was more focused on consolidating his power inside Cuba. Signs posted in government offices depicted the Cuban plight, “We have lost fifty years -- we need to get them back -- be quick.” Reforms came rapidly, more than 1,500 in the first nine months of Castro’s rule. Castro delivered numerous speeches throughout the capital and provinces appealing to Cubans to embrace the nationalistic sentiment the revolution had created. He called on Cubans to act in an autonomous manner. “I believe that this nation has the same right of other nations to govern itself, to chart its own destiny, freely, and to do things better and more democratically than what others do, who spoke of democracy and sent Sherman tanks to Batista.” During this time anti-American rhetoric was frequently employed by Castro. Daniel Braddock remarked that, “there has not been a single public speech by Castro since the triumph of the revolution in which he has not shown some

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154 Under Secretary Loy Henderson’s reference to Nasser pertained to Egyptian leader Gamel Abdel Nasser who earned the ire of the Eisenhower administration with his nationalist policies. Nasser also advocated positive neutrality in the Cold War struggle. For more on the Eisenhower administration and Nasser refer to: Salim Yaqub, Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
157 Ibid, 487.
feeling against the United States, American press or big business concerns in Cuba.”

158 Castro’s reforms and anti-Americanism drew loud applause during his speeches. The United States was not used to being treated in such a manner by a Latin American leader. Yet, though Castro was very busy in those first few months, he was not exporting revolution, he was consolidating his own.

Though Cuba under Castro would later support various revolutionary movements throughout the world, during the period that immediately followed his own victory he did not actively support revolutionary movements. Moreover, when Cuba became involved with rebel activities, as was the case with the Panamanian venture, Castro was quick to denounce such actions. Political scientist Jorge Domínguez argued that Castro’s support for revolutionary movements was guided by certain principles. Domínguez wrote, “State-to-state relations that enhance Cuba’s security have precedence over support for revolution.”

159 Following the revolution’s victory in January 1959, Castro knew that support for revolutionary activities in the region would damage Cuba’s ability to conduct state-to-state relations.

The overstated allegations against Castro in the immediate month after he came to power were strikingly similar to the exaggerated claims made by John Foster and Allen Dulles that Guatemala’s Jacobo Arbenz was stockpiling Soviet weaponry in 1954. The accusations made by the Dulles brothers served as a motivating factor for eventual U.S. intervention. Once again certain members of Eisenhower’s policy making staff were exaggerating the Cuban threat. While diplomats in Cuba believed the Caribbean to be safe, CIA chief Allen Dulles’ concerns continued. In a briefing for Secretary of State Christian Herter, Dulles contended that “The

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159 Jorge Domínguez, To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba’s Foreign Policy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 117.
present movement, centered in the Caribbean area, against the remaining Latin American
dictators is threatened with domination by international Communism…” Dulles also declared
that Fidel Castro was the leading instigator in the region and, if allowed, would cause instability
throughout the Caribbean.  

As early as March 1959 Dulles called for a hard line towards
Castro. During an NSC meeting that concerned anti-Castro movements Dulles stated “we must
not do anything which would tend to discourage the growth of this movement.” Dulles’
declaration of encouragement for anti-Castro Cubans is significant for it would be those
“movements” that came ashore at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

The allegations of Castro spreading revolution and overstatements by policy makers like
Allen Dulles prompted a restriction of “goodwill” policy initiatives. Rather than continue
policies that reached out to Castro’s Cuba, such as recognizing Castro’s government and
replacing ambassador Smith with Phillip Bonsal, which offered the opportunity to conciliate
Castro’s movement, policy makers allowed exaggerated allegations to influence their decision to
employ more hard line policies. In Washington, Castro was judged to be a pressing threat; both
to stability in the Western Hemisphere and to U.S. foreign policy instruments such as the
OAS.

In February 1959 the NSC convened to discuss the Cuban situation. In attendance were
the president, secretary of state, and other high ranking officials. Secretary Dulles asserted that
the Cuban government was weak and that this was causing labor unrest which communists might

\[160\] “The Political Situation in the Caribbean Area,” 15 April 1959. GRDOS, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. RG
59, Lot File 61 D 110, Box 25, NACP.

\[161\] “Memorandum of discussion at the 400th Meeting of the National Security Council,” 26 March 1959. TPC. Reel

\[162\] Anti-Castro forces, trained and funded by the CIA, attempted an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba in April of 1961.
For more on the Bay of Pigs refer to: Peter Kornbluh, The Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the

take advantage of. He blamed the problems on the youth and inexperience of Fidel Castro. The main purpose of the meeting was to decide what to do about economic aid to Castro’s government. Cuban officials were scheduled to meet with the Treasury Department and were expected to request a $100 million stabilization fund. President Eisenhower commented that the money should not be offered as long as there remained problems in the government. Most agreed and Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Douglas Dillon advised that a financial blowup could threaten the status of Castro’s government. Utilizing an approach similar to the one implemented towards Bolivia in 1952, economic aid was seen as an instrument with which to manipulate the new Cuban government. By withholding economic aid NSC members believed that Castro would become more apt to follow a political path directed by the United States. To close the meeting Dulles stated that that the new Cuban officials “had to be treated more or less like children. They had to be led rather than rebuffed. If they were rebuffed, like children, they were capable of anything.”\textsuperscript{164} Though the NSC had decided to withhold stabilization aid pending changes in Castro’s government, not all administration officials agreed on that course. In Havana, Daniel Braddock argued for lending money for stabilization because withholding such funds would be “widely interpreted as a ‘reactionary’ attack on revolution and will strengthen anti-American sentiment and play into hand of Communists.”\textsuperscript{165} Still, the NSC’s proposal was implemented.

Perhaps the greatest irony of President Eisenhower’s strategies towards Latin America was that while American influence in the region was eroding, the administration was beginning to make a concerted effort to implement more enlightened policies. While dealing with the

consequences of the vice president’s demoralizing trip as well as Fidel Castro’s revolution in Cuba the administration was becoming more open to new policies. Immediately following Nixon’s trip Eisenhower admitted that in many ways the United States held a “superior attitude” towards Latin America and discussed the “vital necessity to avoid giving rise to injured feelings by the other American Republics.”

The administration’s shift occurred on political, economic, and military fronts. Politically, Eisenhower created the National Advisory Committee on Inter-American Affairs along with the State Department post of the Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. The administration also broke off relations with dictators and embraced former rivals. Between 1956 and 1960 ten Latin American dictators fell from power.

Eisenhower’s shift in policy towards Latin American leaders culminated in February 1960 when he embarked on a two week visit to South America. Two days before his visit, when discussing the importance of inter-American relations Eisenhower declared, “Yet even

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166 McPherson, *Yankee No!* 33.
among close comrades, friendships too often seem to be taken for granted. We must not give our neighbors of Latin America cause to believe this about us.”

Possibly the most drastic shifts in policy took place in the economic realm. In the final two years of his presidency, Eisenhower established a regional lending agency, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and he also pursued Congress to allocate more funds for the region. No longer did the administration formulate economic policy with an emphasis solely on private investment. The IDB became the cornerstone for the administration’s new look economic policy towards Latin America. In his 1959 State of the Union speech Eisenhower stated that the IDB would “promote the finance of development in Latin America, and make more effective the use of capital from the World Bank, the Export-Import Bank, and private sources.” Along with the IDB the administration also allocated 500 million dollars for the region through the Social Progress Trust Fund. Eisenhower hoped that a Social Progress Trust Fund could be used to reduce rampant poverty throughout the region. The fund was established to support health, education, housing, and land reform projects throughout Latin America. For the first time in Eisenhower’s Presidency the administration attempted to utilize loans rather than rely on American business to solve the economic woes of Latin America.

Militarily, rather than allocating massive amounts of aid and equipment to Latin American governments, the Eisenhower administration concentrated on helping Latin American

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172 Rabe, Eisenhower and Latin America, 141.
militaries attain “a reasonable military capability to maintain internal security.” This initiative reduced U.S. reliance on Latin American military dictators. American military leaders were ordered to foster a Latin American military establishment “as small and inexpensive as possible.” Rather than focusing on training Latin American soldiers to be prepared to combat Soviet forces, American military leaders began training soldiers for guerilla warfare. American General Edward Lansdale, who would acquire notoriety for his training of South Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War, was consulted on how to implement a new military training program for Latin America.

Unfortunately for Eisenhower, the administration’s less heavy-handed policies were not implemented until his final years in office. However, the newly established policies did not go away when Eisenhower left the presidency. This Eisenhower “shift” would be continued by President John Kennedy and in many ways served as the foundation for the Alliance for Progress. In his memoirs Eisenhower remarked that the Kennedy administration continued his enlightened policies “enthusiastically…giving it a bright and dramatic new label.”

Regarding the situation in Cuba in early 1959, while policy makers in Havana called for more conciliatory policies, other high ranking members of Eisenhower’s foreign policy team

175 The Alliance for Progress was a comprehensive program aimed at combating the appeal of Fidel Castro’s revolution to Latin Americans. Initiated by the Kennedy administration the charter was signed at an inter-American conference at Punta del Este, Uruguay, in August 1961. The Alliance called for the establishment of democratic governments, elimination of adult illiteracy, a more equitable income distribution throughout Latin America, and economic and social planning. The United States pledged $1 billion for the first year and a total of $20 billion over ten years. Ultimately, the Alliance did not meet many of its expected goals and many have argued that the Kennedy administration’s attempt to modernize Latin America in an “American light” was a failure. Historian Hans Morgenthau contended that the administration engaged in “a policy of make believe.” For Morgenthau’s quote refer to: Hans Morgenthau, “A Political Theory of Foreign Aid,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56 (June 1962), 302. For more on the modernization aspects of the Alliance for Progress refer to: Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
believed Fidel Castro posed an imminent threat to U.S. power and influence in the region. Even though Castro had been in power for more than a month, U.S. policy makers still viewed the Cuban leader with a sense of ambivalence. On 24 February 1959 the administration found out they would be getting a firsthand look at the Cuban leader. In a meeting with Herbert Matthews, Roy Rubottom was taken aback when told that Castro had accepted an invitation from the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) to visit the United States.\(^{177}\)

The Castro visit would be a monumental event. Never before had a Cuban leader planned to embark on a trip to the United States of such importance. In the first few weeks of Castro’s rule he had tested U.S. policy makers, and now he had the opportunity to visit the country that in many ways defined Cuba’s existence. At a press conference only days after Rubottom was informed of the visit, Castro spoke about the state of U.S.-Cuban relations. He emphasized that Cuba had the right to diversify its economy and end its dependence on sugar. He also discussed his developing relationship with ambassador Bonsal. “This time I think the U.S. government sent a good ambassador. Everybody says he is a good ambassador and I feel the attitude is not against us politically.”\(^{178}\) Very soon after the official announcement of the visit, Castro sought out Bonsal to make sure that U.S. officials in Washington had not been “embarrassed” by his acceptance of the ASNE invitation, Bonsal reported that they had not been.\(^{179}\) On 9 March Bonsal visited Cuban Minister of State Dr. Roberto Agramón to discuss Castro’s visit along with the overall status of U.S.-Cuban relations. Bonsal thanked the minister for the kind reception he had been given upon entering Cuba and said he felt optimistic regarding future

\(^{177}\) “Memorandum of conversation between Herbert Matthews and Roy Rubottom,” 24 February 1959. GRDOS, 1955-1959. RG 59, Central Decimal File, 737.00/2-159, NACP.


relations between the two countries. Bonsal also inquired about Castro’s visit and let Dr. Agramonte know that Acting U.S. Secretary of State Herter was keenly interested in Castro’s upcoming visit.\textsuperscript{180} Always the astute diplomat, Bonsal made certain not to mention President Eisenhower or his views on the visit.\textsuperscript{181}

Several questions surrounded Castro’s visit. Who would meet with the Cuban leader? What sort of economic discussions would take place? Who would Castro bring with him on the trip? One of the central questions surrounding Castro’s visit was what role President Eisenhower would have. Would the president hold a meeting with the Cuban leader? The State Department’s Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (ARA) reported that it was reluctant to advise Eisenhower to meet with Castro considering the Cuban leader’s use of anti-American rhetoric, but they also reported that they wished to make a final recommendation closer to the visit.\textsuperscript{182} Ultimately, Eisenhower agreed to allow Herter to meet with Castro, but stated that he had no desire to meet with him and would make sure to be out of Washington during the visit.\textsuperscript{183} In his memoirs Eisenhower later wrote, “I was more than irritated by the news of the invitation and of Castro’s acceptance…..I inquired whether we could not refuse him a visa. Advised that under the circumstances this would be unwise, I nevertheless refused to see him.”\textsuperscript{184} In contrast to the Eisenhower revisionist history which argues the virtues of the Hidden Hand Presidency, the time

\textsuperscript{182} “Memorandum from the Director of the Executive Secretariat (Calhoun) to the Acting Secretary of State,” 13 March 1959. FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI, 430-431.
\textsuperscript{183} “Memorandum of conversation between Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter and President Eisenhower,” 31 March 1959. GRDOS, Secretary and Undersecretary Memorandums of Conversation. RG 59, Box 11: February 1959 to April 1959, Lot 64D199, NACP.
\textsuperscript{184} Eisenhower, Waging Peace, 523.
before and during Castro’s visit was a period in which President Eisenhower did delegate important roles to subordinates and was somewhat detached from foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{185}

Whereas President Eisenhower was adamantly opposed to seeing Castro, Vice President Nixon was much more willing. At a meeting with Secretary Herter, Nixon expressed his willingness to receive the Cuban leader at his home for a “couple of hours if Castro wishes.”\textsuperscript{186} It should come as no surprise that Nixon was so eager to meet with Castro. During this time Nixon sought out assignments to bolster his foreign policy experience.\textsuperscript{187} Having been a two-term vice president Nixon was the presumptive Republican Presidential nominee for 1960, an election in which Nixon believed that national security and foreign policy would be key issues. By agreeing to meet with Castro, only one year removed from his humiliating visit to Latin America, Nixon was hoping to demonstrate that he was capable of conducting hemispheric diplomacy.

Possibly the most important subject to be addressed during Castro’s visit was to be economic aid. U.S. policy makers knew that the Cuban economy, like that of Bolivia in 1952, was heavily dependent upon the United States’ market. British officials reported that while Fidel Castro was interested in obtaining an increase in the Cuban sugar quota, U.S. policymakers had no interest in offering an increase of any form of aid.\textsuperscript{188} Days before Castro’s visit the President

\textsuperscript{185} Fred Greenstein initiated Eisenhower revisionism when he portrayed Eisenhower as being a shrewd political operator very involved with the decision making process. Eisenhower, as president, has been viewed as a soft spoken grandfather type. Greenstein highlighted that not only was Eisenhower an ardent golfer, but also a staunch cold warrior. Behind Eisenhower’s congenial and likable personality lurked a man completely aware of the importance of his job. For more on Eisenhower revisionism refer to: Fred Greenstein, \textit{The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader} (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Stephen Rabe, “Eisenhower Revisionism: A Decade of Scholarship,” \textit{Diplomatic History}, Vol. 17 (Winter 1993), 97-116.

\textsuperscript{186} “Premier Castro’s Desire to See the Vice President,” 7 April 1959. GRDOS, Secretary and Undersecretary Memorandums of Conversation. RG 59, Box 11: February 1959 to April 1959, Lot 64D199, NACP.

\textsuperscript{187} Nixon was scheduled to travel to the Soviet Union to participate in the opening of the American National Exhibition in July; that visit sparked the famed “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. During this “debate” both Nixon and Khrushchev emphasized their respective countries industrial accomplishments regarding household appliances. Nixon also requested diplomatic trips to Bonn and Paris; those requests were denied by the State Department.

of the Cuban National Bank, Dr. Felipe Pazos, wrote the U.S. embassy a memorandum highlighting possible talking points on U.S.-Cuban economic relations if the subject should arise during Castro’s visit. Pazos made it clear that with the decline of sugar prices and the rise in domestic unemployment the Cuban economy was rapidly deteriorating. He hoped that long term loans would be made available to help with agricultural and industrial development, the improvement of sanitary conditions, and to help raise Cuban standards of living. In response to Pazos’ requests it was suggested that U.S. officials reply that loans of that nature could not be considered until “a satisfactory stabilization agreement has been arranged with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).” Secretary Herter further cemented the U.S. position regarding aid to Cuba during a meeting with Manati Sugar Company owner George Braga. Braga, like many other American businessmen with wide-scale economic interests in Cuba, was worried that Fidel Castro would negatively affect American business interests on the island. To quell Braga’s concerns Herter stated that “there was no predisposition on the part of the U.S. Government officials to make credits available should this be raised by the Cuban visitors.”

On 15 April ambassador Bonsal wrote to the State Department stressing the magnitude of Castro’s visit. He noted that the trip had increased in importance for Cubans. Some viewed it as the “first time a Cuban ruler has visited United States representing fully sovereign and equal nation, free from any domination or control.” Bonsal concluded his memorandum by noting, “All statements and actions by United States public figures in connection with the trip will be given

Microform, Reel 1, FO 371/139396-139415. Davis Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, hereafter referred to as BFSOF along with appropriate reel number.
190 “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Acting Secretary of State,” 15 April 1959. FRUS. 1958-1960. Cuba, Vol. VI, 469.
191 “Current Situation in Cuba; Visit of Fidel Castro,” 10 April 1959. GRDOS. Secretary and Undersecretary Memorandums of Conversation. RG 59, Box 11: February 1959 to April 1959, Lot 64D199, NACP.
great significance and exhaustively interpreted and analyzed in Cuba.‖¹⁹² The British also discussed the importance of Castro’s upcoming visit. British officials reported that the United States was displaying a certain ―coolness‖ towards Castro and that ―all in all, Cuban-American relations are likely to be going through a testing time during the coming week.‖¹⁹³

On the eve of Castro’s visit, the United States policy making establishment was in a state of flux. President Eisenhower was in the final stretch of a two-term Presidency and had just been informed that long time friend John Foster Dulles would not be returning as Secretary of State because of failing health. Christian Herter would become the new Secretary of State, and one of his first duties was to meet with Castro. Vice President Nixon was keenly aware that Eisenhower’s overwhelming popularity was derived largely from his foreign policy experience and hoped the American people could come to view him as an experienced and capable diplomat. Also, by mid-April U.S. policy makers had failed to develop a consensus on how to approach Castro’s government. The growing gulf between officials directly and indirectly involved with Castro continued to widen. Ambassador Bonsal repeatedly called for more patience while his colleague in Havana Daniel Braddock pushed for small scale economic aid. Those in the upper echelons of the administration disagreed with Bonsal and Braddock. President Eisenhower wished to avoid any interaction with Castro and did not want economic aid offered, while Allen Dulles believed Castro needed to be led, not tolerated. The growing divide between policy makers ensured that American policy was not coherent.

The period from January to mid-April 1959 was crucial in establishing U.S. policy towards the Cuban Revolution. At the onset of Castro’s victory the Eisenhower administration

¹⁹³ “Memorandum from David Muirhead to Henry Hankey (British Foreign Officer in Charge of South American Affairs),” 13 April 1959. *(BFSOF, Reel 1), FO 371/139396-139415.*
attempted to improve U.S.-Cuban relations through policy changes, but the administration quickly reverted to policies that derived from its previous experiences in the region. Fearing that American stature in the region was threatened policy makers in Washington, operating under an imperial mindset, believed Fidel Castro had to be controlled as previous Latin American leaders had been. That imperial mindset would carry over to Castro’s eleven day visit to the United States.
CHAPTER III – THE FALLACY OF INFORMAL EMPIRE: FIDEL CASTRO’S APRIL 1959 VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

On 15 April 1959 Fidel Castro and his entourage departed Havana bound for
Washington, D.C. Castro's eleven day visit included stops in the American capital along with the
cities of New York, Boston, and Houston. Those accompanying Castro on his trip included
Minister of the Treasury Rufo López Fresquet, Minister of the Economy Regino Boti Leon,
President of the National Bank Felipe Pazos, Director of Foreign Trade Ernesto Betancourt,
Financial Counselor Joaquín Meyer, and personal assistant Teresa “Tete” Casuso. During his
visit Castro participated in both public and private functions. Publicly, he spoke at Princeton,
Columbia, and Harvard Universities. He also debated with moderator Mae Craig on NBC’s Meet the Press and gave a speech at the National Press Club. In what may have been his most public
moment, he delivered a speech in New York City’s Central Park. Privately, Castro met with
Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter and appeared in a closed door session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In his most important private event he met with Vice President Richard Nixon. Throughout his public and private moments Castro was repeatedly barraged with questions related to international communism.

Castro came to the United States as a young inexperienced leader who wanted to re-
constitute U.S.-Cuban relations. During his visit Castro hoped to convey to U.S. policy makers
the nature of his revolutionary regime. As he departed Havana he declared “in the United States we can earn a better understanding of the Cuban situation.”

American ambassador Bonsal was reported to be optimistic about Castro’s visit. However, the diplomacy crafted by the Eisenhower administration and the conduct of U.S. policy makers proved to be detrimental to

U.S.-Cuban relations. President Eisenhower and administration officials in Washington sought to utilize their economic strength to control the course of the revolution while simultaneously “taming” Cuba’s new leader. Furthermore, the administration was not willing to acknowledge long standing grievances Cuban leaders held towards the United States. Castro’s April visit proved important for three critical reasons. First, the response to Castro by U.S. policy makers set the tone for future U.S.-Cuban relations. Second, the trip took on importance in the larger Cold War struggle between the United States and Soviet Union. It was during Castro’s visit that the Soviet Union altered its policies and established ties with the new revolutionary regime in Havana. Third, the Cuban leader’s visit underscored the fragility and limitations of the United States’ carefully constructed informal empire in Latin America.

Castro’s April 1959 trip to the United States has been neglected by historians. Accounts of the trip are few and usually only allotted a few pages of text. Furthermore, only one article-length treatment of the visit exists. This is mainly a result of the belief that the trip was an aberration in U.S.-Cuban relations since it occurred shortly after Castro took power and before he implemented radical policies. Castro’s September 1960 visit to New York City has garnered much more attention, for it included a hard line speech at the United Stations and a “bear hug” with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. While the April trip has not received the attention it deserves, that does not mean it lacks importance to the narrative of U.S.-Cuban relations. In fact, the trip represented what Lester Langley called the “last real hope for friendly relations between Washington and Havana…” Langley was one of the first historians to comment on the trip and concluded that “hope was doomed because neither Castro nor the Eisenhower administration was

196 McPherson, “The Limits of Populist Diplomacy.”
willing to trust each other.” 198 It should be noted that Langley’s assessment of the visit was published in 1968, well before any government documentation regarding Castro’s visit had been declassified.

In Thomas Paterson’s examination of the United States’ response to Castro’s revolution the April trip received only a few pages of attention. Paterson contended that during the visit “Eisenhower deliberately snubbed him (Castro) by leaving town to play golf in Georgia.” 199 On that point, Paterson is entirely correct; President Eisenhower missed the chance to engage in direct diplomacy with Cuba’s new leader. Regarding one of the most important aspects of the visit, economic aid, Paterson posited that Castro did not want to be a supplicant to the United States and did not want to “sell out” to the Americans by requesting aid. 200 Castro’s public pronouncements that he did not want to “sell out” and request aid completely contradict the substance of his private conversations. In discussions with Vice President Richard Nixon, Castro explicitly requested that the sugar quota be increased. While Castro did not wish to request aid publicly, he gave no indication he would not be open to receiving it, and he pressed U.S. leaders for stronger economic ties.

Jules Benjamin argued that the United States’ response to Castro’s visit was derived from previous patterns of U.S. reactions. Benjamin contended that U.S. policy makers believed that Fidel Castro could be taught how to govern in a way acceptable to the United States. His argument falls in line with the notion that the Eisenhower administration believed that Castro could be “tamed” as other Latin American leaders had been. Benjamin concluded, “The paternalism that had always been a part of the North American view of Cuba allowed U.S. officials to believe that even the untutored Castro might be schooled into proper behavior. When

198 Ibid.
199 Paterson, Contesting Castro, 256.
200 Ibid, 257.
Castro visited the United States in April 1959, U.S. officials took the occasion to begin his education.\textsuperscript{201}

The only article length examination that deals specifically with Castro’s April 1959 trip is by Alan McPherson. McPherson argued that Castro’s trip might have been a public relations success but instead highlighted the limits of a populist approach to diplomacy. He contended that the trip’s true meaning was in “the populist style Castro practiced to circumvent normal protocol, and more importantly in the failure of that populism to sway not only U.S. foreign policy makers but also the U.S. public.”\textsuperscript{202} McPherson asserted that U.S. policy makers were open to a more independent Cuba but expected Castro to change his Cold War neutralism and become a member of the United States’ camp. McPherson placed much of the blame on the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations on the implementation of a Cuban “radical” agrarian reform program in May of 1959, even though Castro had made it clear to U.S. policy makers during his April visit that U.S. lands would be seized. As for the larger impact of the trip, McPherson posited that “The trip itself most likely played a role in hardening the two sides because it revealed diverging views on relationships between governments and their publics and because it underscored the yawning gap between Cuban self-delusion and US disdain for Latin American political culture.”\textsuperscript{203} In his conclusion, McPherson interjected some present day context in the form of U.S. relations with Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez. Comparing the diplomacy instituted by Chavez to Castro’s trip is innovative and interesting, but leaves much to be desired. Castro’s April visit was not merely a public relations ploy by the Cuban leader, but was an instance that highlighted the problems that

\textsuperscript{202} McPherson, “The Limits of Populist Diplomacy,” 237.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid, 261.
can occur in relations between large powers and small powers. Furthermore, U.S. actions during the visit need to be examined within a larger Cold War context.

It is imperative that Castro’s April 1959 visit be placed into a framework that assesses U.S. policy towards Latin America more generally. The Eisenhower administration was not ready to make concessions to a revolutionary government in its backyard, and thus Castro’s visit constitutes a missed opportunity. Ultimately, Castro’s April visit offered the administration an opportunity to steer Castro’s Cuba more towards the United States’ camp, an opportunity the administration did not exploit. Operating under the constraints created by its informal empire, policy makers in the Eisenhower administration adhered to doctrinaire diplomacy that had been established at the outset of the Cold War.

The American media provided Castro a platform that the Cuban leader used to espouse his views of the United States and other aspects of the revolution. Castro’s media schedule included an appearance on Meet the Press, and speeches before the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and the National Press Club (NPC).

Speaking to the ASNE, Castro discussed in depth his plan for the Cuban economy. “The right of the Cuban and the way of the Cuban to improve his country…is what we want the people of the United States to understand...When somebody asked me if we were not coming for money, how could the United States help us? I answered…we want a just treatment in economical matters.”

Castro also called for Americans to continue visiting the island, “if tourists want to go to Cuba, we want tourists to go to Cuba.” During a question and answer session Castro was asked about issues concerning his government’s ties to communism and mass executions of Batista followers. When bluntly asked about the role played by communists in the success of the

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204 “Address by Dr. Castro,” 17 April 1959. American Society of Newspaper Editors (Reston, VA), 86-87. Author received Castro’s remarks via fax from the ASNE on January 15, 2009.

205 Ibid, 86.
revolution, Castro responded by saying that the communists had played no role, but that combination of “the middle class, the labor, the peasant, the rich people, everybody, it was a fight of all the classes, was a fight of all the people.” On the subject of executions the Cuban leader was forthcoming in admitting that many executions had taken place, but he contended that they were justified as a response to the heinous criminal acts committed by those punished. By the time of Castro’s visit, U.S. officials had estimated that 509 Cubans had been executed since Castro’s seizure of power. The question and answer session at the ASNE was one of the first moments the American people were able to gain firsthand knowledge of Castro. Furthermore, Castro won over many in the room by speaking in English, a language with which he was not entirely comfortable.

On 20 April Castro spoke at a NPC luncheon and declared that agrarian reform was necessary for Cuba to grow economically and socially. He contended that by expropriating land, the Cuban government would be able to create an internal market and provide employment to over 700,000 people. Castro’s Finance Minister, Rufo López Fresquet, also stated that lands taken by the government would be paid for and organized into cooperatives. On the discussion of democracy in Cuba, Castro contended that “where there are hungry people, there is no real democracy.” The speech at the NPC involved the first public discussion of Cuba’s need for economic assistance. Responding to a question regarding his views on attaining economic assistance from the U.S., Castro replied “We didn’t come here to get money. Many men come

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206 Ibid, 93
here to sell their souls.”\textsuperscript{210} When pressed about Cuban-Soviet economic relations, which were non-existent at this time, Castro responded that “Cuba has not received any offer of economic aid from the Soviet Union or any other nation and we have not asked for it.”\textsuperscript{211} On this subject Castro was vehemently opposed to Cuba explicitly requesting the money. In fact, before the trip Castro had told Treasury Minister Rufo López Fresquet that “I (Castro) don’t want this trip to be like that of other new Latin American leaders who always come to the U.S. to ask for money. I want this to be a good-will trip. Besides the Americans will be surprised. And when we go back to Cuba, they will offer us aid without our asking for it.”\textsuperscript{212} Castro’s reluctance to ask for aid irked many officials in Washington who had hoped that Cuba’s economic dependence could be used to manipulate the island’s new leader.

The day after his arrival in Washington Castro made his first major public appearance. He was received at a luncheon given in his honor by Secretary Herter. It is somewhat surprising that the State Department and particularly Secretary Herter partook in such actions honoring Castro. The State Department had pressed the legislative branch, primarily the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, to receive Castro “because they didn’t want him.”\textsuperscript{213} Furthermore, upon hearing of Castro’s acceptance of the invitation to visit the United States Herter had complained that Castro displayed singularly “bad behavior” by accepting an invitation to visit the United States without first consulting the State Department.\textsuperscript{214}

Nevertheless, on 16 April Herter dined with Castro at the Statler-Hilton Hotel. In attendance at the luncheon were several members of Castro’s entourage including economic advisers Felipe Pazos and Joaquín Meyer. Representing the United States were several

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid, \textit{NYT}.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid, \textit{NYT}.
\textsuperscript{214} Paterson, Contesting Castro, 256.
members of the State Department’s Latin America team such as William Wieland and Roy Rubottom. 215 Seated close together, Fresquet and Meyer discussed the Cuban economy and American support with Assistant Secretary Rubottom. When the discussion turned to private capital versus government capital Rubottom made it clear to the Cuban economists that “we (United States) were interested in the treatment of private investors who had already established themselves in Cuba and the climate that might await future investors. He (Pazos) seemed to get the point.” 216

While Castro’s president of the National Bank (Pazos) and financial counselor (Meyer) were pursuing government funds, Rubottom asserted the interests of American business in Cuba, the same businesses that many supporters of the Cuban Revolution believed had helped fund the Batista regime. Regarding Cuba’s number one economic resource, sugar, Rubottom stated that there was “no chance of any better arrangement for Cuba regarding sugar than that under the 1956 legislation…” 217 Using its economic advantage which included Cuba’s dependence on American imports, as had been had done in garnering support for organizations and treaties at the onset of the Cold War, the Eisenhower administration attempted to back Castro’s advisers into a corner. Also, during the luncheon Castro was afforded a brief private meeting with Secretary Herter. Soon after the conclusion of the luncheon Herter traveled by helicopter to Georgia to brief the President and to be announced as the President’s choice to become full-time Secretary

215 Memorandum from the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs to the Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter,” 10 April 1959. GRDOS, Secretary and Undersecretary Memorandums of Conversation. RG 59, Box 11: February 1959 to April 1959, Lot 64D199, NACP.
217 Ibid, 472; The United States Sugar Act of 1956 instituted a technical formula to determine quota shares for domestic and foreign sugar producers. Under this act Cuba’s shares were decreased despite repeated pleas from Cuban government officials. The act further cemented for Cubans the reality that the United States controlled the island’s economic well-being.
of State. In discussing Castro with Eisenhower, Secretary Herter described the Cuban as “a most interesting individual, very much like a child in many ways, quite immature regarding problems of the government…” The comparison of Castro to a child was very similar to Allen Dulles’ earlier accusation that the Cubans needed to be treated “more or less like children.” The implication that Castro was comparable to a child implied that the Cuban leader was unfit for leadership in the eyes of U.S. policy makers. Being labeled as incapable was a characterization that had been given to previous Cuban leaders, most notably Ramón Grau San Martín in 1948.

Herter went on to say “In English he spoke with restraint and considerable personal appeal. In Spanish, however, he became voluble, excited, and somewhat wild.” Herter would become one of the first administration officials who formally advocated Castro’s ouster.

Following his appearance on Meet the Press Castro traveled to Capitol Hill for a meeting with Vice President Richard Nixon; their encounter took place in Nixon’s private capitol building office. Nixon recorded that the two men discussed “his (Castro) political views, his attitude toward the United States, and other international issues.” The meeting lasted more than three hours, and at its conclusion Nixon prepared a memorandum for President Eisenhower, Acting Secretary of State Herter, and Allen Dulles. Nixon reported that Castro arrived to the meeting very tense for he believed he had not fared well on his Meet the Press interview. “I reassured him at the beginning of the conversation that Meet the Press was one of the most difficult programs a public official could go on and that he had done extremely well.” Nixon also

220 Ibid, 475.
stated that “his (Castro’s) primary concern was with developing programs for economic progress.”

The Cuban economy was a subject that Castro and Nixon spoke about at length. While Castro called for government capital, Nixon recorded later, “I told him quite bluntly that his best hope as far as the U.S. was concerned was not in getting more government capital but in attracting private capital.” Nixon’s admonition to Castro highlighted the administration’s firm belief in private investment. As with Bolivia in the early 1950s the administration sought to utilize its economic position to coerce Castro to accept the U.S. position. The main problem was that Castro had fought a three year insurrection to oust a corrupt leader who had engaged in numerous underhanded business transactions with the private investors of whom Nixon was speaking. To bolster his case for private investment Nixon used Puerto Rico as an example. “I tried tactfully to suggest to Castro that Muñoz Marín had done a remarkable job in Puerto Rico in attracting private capital and in generally raising the standard of living of his people and that Castro might well send one of his top economic advisers to Puerto Rico to have a conference with Muñoz Marín.” Castro “took a very dim view of this suggestion, pointing out that the Cuban people were ‘very nationalistic’ and would look with suspicion on any programs initiated in what they would consider to be a ‘colony’ of the United States.” Nixon’s insistence that Castro follow in Puerto Rico’s footsteps illustrated the administration’s unwillingness to allow U.S.-Cuban relations to be reconstituted.

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224 Ibid, DNSA.
225 Ibid, DNSA.
226 Ibid, DNSA.
Concerning American property in Cuba, Castro was quite forthcoming with the vice president in explaining his planned agrarian reform. Nixon commented that “he explained his agrarian reform program in considerable detail justifying it primarily on the ground that Cuba needed more people who were able to buy the goods produced within the country and that it would make no sense to produce more in factories unless the amount of money in the hands of consumers was increased.”

Nixon concluded his view of Cuba’s new leader stating that Castro, “is either incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline—my guess is the former and I have already implied his ideas as to how to run a government or an economy are less developed than those of almost any world figure I have met in fifty countries.” While Nixon later commented that he spoke to Castro like a “Dutch uncle,” his interpreter, Robert Stevenson reported that Nixon spoke to Castro just like a father.

The fact that Eisenhower allowed Nixon to take the meeting spoke volumes. Nixon was a man who made his reputation as a staunch anti-communist and was very suspicious of politicians with leftist leanings. Nixon was known as one of the more hawkish anti-communists in Washington. Also, Nixon’s experience with Latin America was primarily limited to his disastrous 1958 tour of the region. Rather than engage Castro in direct diplomacy, Eisenhower enjoyed a brief golf outing to Augusta, Georgia. As one might expect Castro’s recollection of the meeting differed from Nixon’s. A Latin American reporter stated that Castro commented that “Vice President Nixon had reprimanded him for recent revolutionary activities against the Nicaraguans and Panamanian governments, Castro said that Nixon had devoted much of his

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227 Ibid, DNASA.
228 Ibid, DNASA.
229 Pérez, On Becoming Cuba, 490.
conversation to defending the Somoza government of Nicaragua…‖ Revolución reported that
the meeting had been satisfactory for both Nixon and Castro. Academics Leycaster Coltman
and Julia Sweig contended that Nixon had patronized and humiliated Castro during the meeting.
“When Nixon later gave his version of the meeting to the press, Castro’s body language was
clear to those who knew him. On the surface he remained courteous and correct, but he was
struggling to contain his anger and resentment.”

What stands out most about Castro’s meetings with Herter and Nixon were the acting
secretary’s and vice president’s descriptions of Cuba’s new leader; both Herter and Nixon
questioned Castro’s ability to govern. Nixon contended that Castro’s ideas on how to lead Cuba
were extremely underdeveloped while Herter described the Cuban as immature regarding issues
of governance. It should come as no surprise that Nixon and Herter made such drastic comments
after having meeting with Castro. By 1959 a trademark of U.S. policy towards Latin America
involved policy makers determining what constituted a proper and suitable leader in the Western
Hemisphere. Paz Estenssoro had been declared unfit to lead for putting forth radical plans for the
Bolivian economy in 1952 while Jacobo Arbenz had been affirmed as a menace and unsuited to
be Guatemala’s President because of his frequently alleged communist ties.

At the conclusion of Castro’s stay in Washington, Secretary Herter prepared a
comprehensive memorandum detailing his visit. Herter contended that Castro did not have the
same notion of law and legality that existed in the United States and that his position on
remaining in the western camp “must be regarded…as uncertain.” Herter also wrote that, “There
is a probability that the land reform programs which Castro considers to be the essential key to

230 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Mexican and Caribbean Affairs (Wieland),” 21 April 1959. FRUS,
the future well-being of the Cuban people may adversely affect certain American-owned properties in Cuba.” 233 Herter’s acknowledgement that Castro’s agrarian reform would negatively affect U.S. business is critical, for it highlights that American policy makers knew well in advance that Castro’s economic policies would injure American economic interests. Some have argued that Castro and his followers engaged in crafting a secret agrarian reform. 234 While it is true that the agrarian reform later enacted by Castro was more widespread than his public declarations, it should have come as no surprise to the United States. 235 The British also prepared a memorandum concerning the end of Castro’s visit. They reported that the United States had “had no intention of extending economic aid to Cuba or of making any official gesture of support for the regime.” 236

After departing Washington Castro and his contingent headed north. First on the schedule was a stop in New Jersey where Castro began his Ivy League college tour with a speech at Princeton University. Corwin Hall was standing room only on 20 April 1959. When introducing Castro Professor Robert Palmer stated that the event was purely an academic exercise and off the record. Palmer’s assertion that Castro’s speech was academic in nature was


234 Tad Szulc argues that Castro and members of the Communist party in Cuba (PSP) held secret meetings in the fishing village of Cojimar outside of Havana. Szulc asserts that Castro was a Communist from the beginning and hid his true political affiliation so he could consolidate power. Recently declassified Soviet documents contradict Szulc’s argument that Castro was closely tied to the PSP and show early in 1959 PSP members told Soviet agents that Fidel was in fact not a Communist, but that his brother Raúl was a party member; Tad Szulc, “Castro,” 19 October 1986. NYT. Available at http://0-proquest.umi.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=283839002&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1232295540&clientId=15115. Accessed 18 January 2009; Szulc, Fidel: A Critical Portrait (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 476-478.


236 “Memorandum from David Muirhead to Henry Hankey (British Foreign Officer in Charge of South American Affairs),” 23 April 1959. BFSOF, Reel 2, FO 371/139416-139443.
somewhat correct. It had been Palmer, who was teaching a course on modern revolutions that semester, who had pushed for Castro to be extended an invitation to speak on campus. While there exists no official record of Castro’s speech it has been reported that it lasted over two and half hours and that when Professor Palmer motioned for Castro to begin a conclusion, the Cuban leader brushed him aside and continued pontificating. When he finally concluded his address he was ushered to the home of New Jersey Governor Robert Meyner for a reception. At Governor Meyner’s home Castro was introduced to several influential Americans, including former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Acheson reported that he spoke at length with Castro and was deeply impressed by the Cuban leader’s honesty and by the care with which he chose his words. Overall, Castro’s Princeton visit was deemed a success, except for the cigar butts left on the floor of the Governor’s mansion by Castro’s entourage.

Upon leaving Princeton Castro traveled to the same city he had visited in 1955 to secure funds for his revolution, New York. Castro’s schedule in the “Big Apple” included a visit to the New York Times, a tour of the United Nations (U.N), and a speech at Columbia University. Though Castro’s visit to the U.N. was reported to be of an informal nature, he was escorted by Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. During the tour Castro stated, “In the United Nations, Cuba has complete independence.” Castro’s welcome at Columbia was similar to the one he received at Princeton. As Castro embarked for Columbia large crowds formed around his motorcade with signs reading “viva la Revolución Cubana,” and “viva Fidel.” Castro remarked,

237 Geyer, Guerilla Prince, 230.
240 In 1955 Castro crossed into the United States at the Texas border and made his way to New York City. He held fundraisers for the 26th of July Movement. Speaking at the Palm Garden Hall he declared “in 1956 we will be free or we will be martyrs.” During Castro’s visit he was continuously followed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Paterson, Contesting Castro, 18-20.
“this is just the way it is in Cuba.”  

At Columbia more than one thousand people showed up to hear Castro discuss his hopes for agrarian reform in Cuba as well as Cuba’s economic condition. Castro pronounced, “by making the estates of landowners smaller, we will make them produce three or four times as much as they have.”

On his final night in New York Castro delivered a speech in Central Park that attracted thousands. Americans and Latin Americans hovered together to hear Cuba’s new leader. The large crowd put Castro very much in his own element. In Cuba he was accustomed to drawing thousands of listeners. Castro declared that the Cuban Revolution had been misunderstood by the United States and that he did not come to America to hide. He told the story of his first visit to New York City when he spoke in front of one thousand people at the Palm Garden. “From this same city, in the act of Palm Garden, we said that in 1956 we would be free or would be martyrs.” Castro also used the platform in Central Park to conjure up public support and speak about the human nature of the revolution. He drew loud applause when he stated “Freedom with bread, bread without terror, that is humanism.”

To conclude his Ivy League and public speaking tour, Castro spoke at Harvard University on 25 April; once again large crowds gathered to welcome him. Castro was introduced by Harvard College Dean McGeorge Bundy, who would later serve as John Kennedy’s National Security Advisor and advocate Castro’s overthrow. Castro spoke in front of more than 8,700 people at Harvard’s Dillon Field House. He once again spoke in English. When introducing Castro Bundy related an interesting anecdote. Apparently over lunch that day, Castro told Bundy

243 Ibid.
245 Ibid, 25.
that he had in fact applied to Harvard in 1948 but had been rejected. Bundy announced to the crowd that Harvard was ready to make up for that oversight and accept Fidel Castro into the class of 1963.246

The differences in the treatment Castro received from the American public and the Eisenhower administration was notable. The gap between the public reception and the private reception Castro was afforded highlighted the growing chasm between the American public and American foreign policy makers. American universities graciously opened their doors whereas government institutions, such as the State Department, were almost forced to receive the new Cuban leader. While the public used its time with Castro for question and answer sessions and to hear the Cuban leader speak, American policy makers used their time to lecture and attempt to direct the revolution. As the American public became entranced by Castro, American policy makers became aggravated. For the public Castro represented the modern revolutionary. He was different than the political leaders to which Americans had become accustomed. He did not wear a suit and tie, but rather opted for olive military fatigues. He maintained a beard and spoke with a candor and flare that was absent in most American leaders.247 To the Eisenhower administration Castro was a young, radical, inexperienced leader who had no concept of how politics in the Western Hemisphere were conducted. While the public was engrossed, American policy makers,

247 A certain segment of the American public, African Americans, were particularly enthralled with Castro and the Cuban Revolution. Ebony, a widely distributed African American magazine portrayed the revolution very favorably. In April 1959 they published an article that detailed the plight of Juan Almeida, a black Cuban who fought with Castro during the revolution. The article asserted that Castro’s belief in racial justice encouraged Almeida to join the revolution. The Cuban government reciprocated the warm reception Castro was given by African Americans. By late 1959 the Castro government was openly advertising for an increase in African American tourism to Cuba. Castro enlisted the help of African American boxing champion Joe Louis who declared that Cuba was a place where African Americans could vacation and not have racial discrimination. For more on Castro and African Americans refer to: Brenda Plummer, “Castro in Harlem: A Cold War Watershed,” Rethinking the Cold War. Ed. Allen Hunter (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
operating under the self-imposed restrictions of an imperial mindset, viewed Castro as a
“dangerous nationalist” who threatened U.S. interests.248

While Castro traveled throughout the eastern seaboard of the United States, important
events transpired inside Cuba. Two of the revolution’s most public figures, Raúl Castro and Che
Guevara, delivered stirring speeches that caught the attention of U.S. policy makers. Raúl, who
had been in Fidel’s shadow since their university days paled in comparison to his brother both
stylistically and physically. While Raúl was known for being better read and more
knowledgeable, he lacked the charisma and machismo of his older brother. Furthermore, Fidel
classified Raúl as being “extraordinarily respectful” to him and observed that Raúl did not
have the authority for major decisions regarding the revolution. Raúl used the opportunity of
Fidel’s absence to speak about the enemies of the revolution. Speaking at the University of
Havana, Raúl accused the United States government of supporting counter-revolutionary
activities. Ambassador Bonsal noted that Raúl’s words were carefully chosen and highlighted his
strong anti-Americanism.249 Guevara echoed Raúl’s sentiment and used the example of Jacobo
Arbenz to crystallize his point. Guevara accused the United States of smearing Arbenz as a
communist and then partaking in a “defamatory campaign against Arbenz and then paying for his
ousting.” Guevara also challenged peasants, urban workers, and students to be diligent in their
support and to be willing to take up arms to defend the revolution.250 Guevara was well traveled
in Latin America and had been present in Guatemala during the overthrow of the Arbenz
government. By April 1959 he was a central figure in Cuba. Argentinean by birth, he was

248 Naftali and Fursenko, One Hell of a Gamble, 6.
VI, 479-480.
250 “Foreign Service Despatch, Statements by Ernesto “Che” Guevara,” 23April 1959. Records of the Foreign
Service Posts of the Department of State, Cuba, U.S. Embassy. RG 84, 1959-1961. Box 97, Political Affairs (Cuba),
NACP.
declared a Cuban citizen after Castro took power. The speeches by Raúl and Che highlighted a developing division among the “big three” of the revolution.

While Fidel attempted to come to an understanding with U.S. policy makers, Raúl and Che goaded administration officials. Raúl not only spoke about the revolution in Fidel’s absence, but he also directed policy. Raúl requested assistance from the Soviet Union to help in consolidating his control of the Cuban armed forces. Specifically, he wanted Spanish communists to help in training and advising. Soviet leaders were very hesitant to agree to Raúl’s request.\(^{251}\) Cuba was in the American sphere of influence, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had little knowledge of Cuba’s new leader, Fidel Castro. Khrushchev wrote “At the time that Fidel Castro led his revolution to victory and entered Havana with his troops, we had no idea what political course his regime would follow.”\(^{252}\) Furthermore, Soviet intelligence did not have any means of extracting information from the island. Soviet policy makers relied on newspaper and radio reports to gather information on what was happening inside Cuba.\(^ {253}\)

It was by mere chance that the Soviet Union found out about Raúl’s political allegiance to communism. Nikolia Leonov, a KGB officer, had come in contact with Raúl during their student days.\(^ {254}\) Leonov had struck up a friendship with Raúl in 1953 and reported that the younger Castro brother was affiliated with the Cuban Communist Party, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP.) In his memoirs Khrushchev recalled, “we knew that Raúl Castro was a good Communist, but it appeared that he kept his true convictions hidden from his brother Fidel. Che

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\(^{253}\) Ibid, 489.

\(^{254}\) Raúl Castro and Nikolai Leonov have been described as firm friends. Leonov was a KGB foreign intelligence officer when they first met in 1953. For more refer to Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Journey to the Heart of Cuba: Life as Fidel Castro* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2001), 56-57; Christopher Andrew and Vasisili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 34.
Guevara was a Communist, too, and so were some of the others—or so we thought.” The Kremlin believed that Fidel was not a communist, but rather a revolutionary who intended to “put his own stamp on a social revolution in his own country.” One may question how Raúl kept his PSP membership covert for such a long period. Throughout the insurrection relations between the 26th of July Movement and the PSP were strained. The PSP only offered its unwavering support after it became obvious Castro’s forces were going to succeed. Furthermore, it was not until January 1959 that Fidel Castro began meeting regularly with PSP officials and during that time the PSP criticized Castro and his cabinet for not acting in a revolutionary manner.

The success of Castro’s revolution was a complete surprise to the Soviets. One Russian policy maker described it as “a completely unexpected miracle.” Khrushchev was certainly no revolutionary, but as historians Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko noted, “he admired those who could make a revolution.” Perhaps Khrushchev became swept up with revolutionary fervor at the sight of Cuban tanks ousting a dictatorial government. As one member of the Soviet Presidium later remarked about the Cuban Revolution, “I felt as though I had returned to my childhood.” After much debate on whether or not to grant Raúl’s request, on 23 April 1959 the Presidium approved the request. The initial contact between Castro’s Cuba and the Soviet Union had taken place, but not at the behest of Fidel.

256 Naftali and Fursenko, *Khrushchev’s Cold War*, 296.
259 Gaddis, *We Know Now*, 181.
261 Naftali and Fursenko, *Khrushchev’s Cold War*, 296.
262 Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of A Gamble*, 11-12
During Fidel’s visit Raúl stayed in contact with his older brother, keeping him informed of the goings on inside Cuba. On 23 April, the same day Raúl’s request to the Soviets was granted, he spoke with Fidel by telephone. Raúl questioned his brother’s dedication to the revolution and informed him that many Cubans believed he was “selling out” to the Yankees. Hearing his brother’s accusations, Fidel was enraged and almost came to tears. He contended that he “had not made a single unworthy or submissive speech.”263 At some point in the conversation, the brothers agreed to meet in Houston, Texas, where Fidel’s plane would be refueling before flying to South America to continue his foreign tour.264 On 27 April Raúl and six to eight escorts, all carrying diplomatic passports, departed Havana bound for Houston.265 The Castro brothers’ meeting took place in Houston’s luxurious Shamrock Hilton Hotel. Fidel and Raúl argued into the night, and while no complete record exists of what was said, it most certainly pertained to the phone conversation that took place on the 23 April. Fidel’s Foreign Trade Director, Ernesto Betancourt, recalled a shouting match between the brothers that included the phrase, hijo de puta.266 The next day in public the brothers denied any argument, and Revolución published a photograph of Fidel and Raúl smiling while they toured Houston.267 Once in private at the Houston airport they once again argued loudly. Betancourt returned with Raúl to Cuba and recollected that it was completely silent on the plane. Betancourt believed that

267 Revolución, 28 April 1959, p. 1.
Raúl refused to acknowledge him because “he was convinced I had been persuading Fidel to improve relations with the Americans.”

The differences among Fidel, Raúl, and Che were a result of Fidel’s openness to establishing some sort of relationship with the United States. Raúl and Che believed Soviet support, rather than American was the best option for Cuba. Fidel’s indifference to the Soviet Union was evident when he took power in January and during his April visit. Shortly after he took power the Soviet Union extended recognition to the Castro government, an overture that Fidel did not reciprocate. Furthermore, during a reception at the Cuban embassy on 18 April Castro “snubbed the Soviet Ambassador…” The differences between Fidel and Raúl and Che continued to widen after his return to Cuba in May. After returning Castro publicly denounced the ideas that Raúl and Che had touted in the previous days. Castro declared that on his trip to the United States, people sympathized with the Cuban Revolution and that he welcomed U.S. contributions to the development of Latin America. As for Che’s call for a standing militia, Castro said none was necessary in a time of peace.

The developing rift between Fidel and Raúl did not go unnoticed by U.S. policy makers. Lars Schoultz argued that as early as February 1959 the United States began to view the Cuban Revolution as a fragile coalition of three separate groups. The first being the most radical led by Raúl Castro and Che Guevara; a second group comprised of left-leaning moderates led by Fidel Castro and a third group described as a “more mature, moderate group.”

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268 Latell, After Fidel, 15.
270 Langley, America and Americas, 191
272 Lars Schoultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 89.
Security Council meeting on 23 April, Allen Dulles stated that he was well aware of the differences that existed among the Cuban leadership."273

The troubles that existed among Cuba’s “big three” came close to causing a fissure among the leaders of the revolution, but was ultimately not exploited by U.S. policy makers. Raúl momentarily contemplated dividing the 26th of July Movement to show Fidel that the PSP was needed, while Che threatened to emigrate from Cuba.274 While Raúl and Che were recognizable and powerful figures in Cuba, the influence they exerted over the Cuban people did not come close to matching Fidel’s. Had Raúl spilt the rebel movement, he would have quickly found out how small his following was. Che, an Argentine, had not built up a strong rapport with Cubans by 1959 to wield enough power to threaten Fidel.275 Ultimately, Fidel, spurned by U.S. leaders on his April visit, adopted some of Raúl and Che’s more radical views.

The events that occurred during Fidel Castro’s visit, both inside the United States and inside Cuba, underscore the complexities that characterized U.S.-Latin American relations and Soviet-Latin American relations. The long history that the United States had with Latin America caused U.S. policy makers to insist that Castro and Cuba adhere to the status quo of Latin American subservience to U.S. hegemony. Furthermore, American “successes” in Latin America, namely U.S. interventions in Bolivia and Guatemala, helped form the mindset that policy makers held towards Castro on his visit. If the Cuban leader proved unwilling to follow U.S. suggestions, appropriate action could be taken. Rather than engage in open dialogue with Castro, U.S. policy makers such as Vice President Richard Nixon took the occasion to lecture the

274 Naftali and Fursenko, One Hell of A Gamble, 18.
young revolutionary on how Cuba should be governed. Secretary Herter’s initial description of his time with Castro focused more on Castro’s “wild” oratorical style than his policies. While the public greeted Castro with an open mind, policy makers clung to a mindset of the past.

The Soviet Union’s lack of history and involvement in the region paid monumental dividends during early Soviet-Cuban overtures. Soviet policy makers were willing to alter their stance towards a region of the world with which they had previously little contact. The lack of Soviet preconceptions about the region bolstered early Soviet relations with Raúl Castro. While hesitant to grant Raúl’s request for advisers, Soviet policy makers did sympathize with Cuba’s plight and assented to the request. Moreover, the Soviet Union had nothing to lose in the region while the United States feared that a radical Cuba under Castro would threaten the informal empire American policy makers had constructed there. During the April visit U.S. leaders were inhibited by an imperial mindset that proved uncompromising. The April visit offered hope in the way of an understanding between the governments in Havana and Washington. Ironically, U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated during the visit, while Soviet-Cuban relations strengthened.
CONCLUSION – UNSEATING EMPIRE: SOVIET ENCROACHMENT IN CUBA

The pace at which U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated and Soviet-Cuban relations strengthened was remarkable. After the promulgation of his agrarian reforms, many Eisenhower administration officials believed Castro needed to be replaced.276 On 9 November 1959 Secretary Herter privately called for the Eisenhower administration to implement policies that were “designed to encourage within Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America opposition to the extremist, anti-American course of the Castro regime but that in achieving this objective, the United States should avoid giving the impression of direct pressure or intervention against Castro, except where defense of legitimate United States interest is involved.”277 Less than one week later Castro’s Ministry of State Representative Raúl Roa cabled to ambassador Bonsal that “The views of the United States Government…are spreading over the whole world unfairly unilateral versions of the issues under discussion, silencing or distorting the reasons, evidence, and arguments on which Cuba bases her determination and unyielding will to enjoy her full rights and privileges and attain whatever her destiny as an independent nation may have in store for her.”278

After being in power less than a year, Castro was persona non grata in the eyes of the Eisenhower administration. Allen Dulles announced on 13 January 1960 that “over the long run…the United States could not tolerate the Castro regime.”279 During a meeting with Bonsal,

276 On May 17, 1959 the agrarian law was promulgated. It restricted the number of acres a person could own and it emphasized the role of the state much more than previously thought. For more on the agrarian reform refer to: Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998), 1215-1216.
Herter, and Roy Rubottom, an angry President Eisenhower declared that “Castro begins to look like a madman.” When pressed about what should be done regarding the Cuban sugar quota, which was close to expiring and needed to be renegotiated, Eisenhower stated that any public announcement should simply state that “that the matter is being studied and something will be sent to congress.”

While the United States debated Cuba’s sugar quota, the Soviet Union made an offer. In February, after establishing formal diplomatic relations, the Soviets agreed to purchase 425,000 tons of sugar immediately, and promised to increase that amount to one million tons in each of the following four years. The Cubans also received $100 million in the form of credits, technical assistance, and petroleum. Castro began to view Soviet aid as a potential path to modernity for Cuba, in direct opposition to the path offered by the United States. The relationship with the Soviets allowed the Cuban sugar economy to cease its dependency on U.S. markets. The development of economic ties with the Soviet Union made U.S. threats of cutting the Cuban sugar quota less menacing.

By the middle of March 1960 President Eisenhower wanted action. He did not believe Fidel Castro was the democratic reformer the Cuban leader claimed to be. On 17 March 1960 the State Department prepared a memo for the president, entitled, “Status of Possible OAS Action on Cuba.” Eisenhower wanted to form a coalition of Latin American Nations in order to apply

281 Ibid.
282 White House, Staff Secretary. “Memorandum of a conference with the President,” 26 January 1960. DNSA. Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited, item # CU00022. Available at: http://0-narchive.chadwyck.com.ucnclcoast.ucwil.edu/cat/displayItem.do?queryType=cat&&ResultsID=1200083E9DE3
international pressure to Castro’s government. The State Department informed the president that OAS support was not likely because, “….. our own latest National Intelligence Estimate does not find Cuba to be under Communist control or domination, and we lack all of the hard evidence which would be required to convince skeptical Latin American Governments and the public opinion behind them.”

Also on 17 March President Eisenhower approved, “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime.” The plan called for the formation of a paramilitary force comprised of Cuban exiles to topple the Castro regime “in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention.” The plan also called for acts of sabotage in Cuba in order to create domestic duress. Although the administration was not ready to openly begin operations against Fidel Castro, U.S. intervention was not entirely ruled out. “Before the covert action program has accomplished its objective, every effort will be made to carry it out in such a way as progressively to improve the capability of the U.S. to act in a crisis.”

The same day that the National Intelligence Estimate determined that Castro was not under communist control, President Eisenhower approved the covert military campaign to oust the Cuban leader.

In an effort to reduce U.S.-Cuban tension Fidel Castro cancelled his brother’s scheduled trip to Moscow. Fidel did, however, let Raúl visit Czechoslovakia. There Raúl met with Soviet agent Nikolai Leonov. Raúl made it clear to Leonov that Cuba feared a U.S. invasion, and that Fidel did not expect Latin American nations to support the Cuban cause. Ultimately, the Cuban leadership felt they would be standing alone in a fight against the United States. Upon returning

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287 Ibid, DNSA.
to Moscow, Leonov briefed Khrushchev about Raúl’s concerns. Though the Soviet Union had no credible evidence to back up Cuban claims of an imminent American invasion, Khrushchev’s response to these perceived threats was decisive. On 9 July 1960, speaking to a group of Soviet teachers, Khrushchev offered to protect Castro’s government with Soviet missiles. “Figuratively speaking, if need be, Soviet artillerymen can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire should the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to start intervention against Cuba. And the Pentagon could be well advised not to forget that, as shown at the latest tests, we have rockets which can land precisely in a preset square target 13,000 kilometers away.”

After hearing of the Soviet Premier’s offer, Fidel Castro cabled and advised Raúl to contact the Soviets and arrange a trip at once. Only after Khrushchev promised to defend Cuba with Soviet missiles did Fidel allow his brother to visit the Moscow.

On 26 September 1960 Fidel Castro made his second visit to the United States and spoke in New York City at the United Nations. Castro railed at the hostility directed at his government from Washington. He also spoke of Cubans remembering that it was the United States that ousted Arbenz and ended the Guatemalan social experiment. Castro concluded his speech saying Cuba declares, “the right of countries to engage freely in trade with all the peoples of the world; the right of nations to their full sovereignty……Some wanted to know the line followed by the revolutionary government of Cuba. All right that is our line.”

By the fall of 1960 U.S. policy towards Cuba was front and center in the presidential campaign. Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy repeatedly denounced his opponent, Vice President Richard Nixon, for being part of an administration that “lost Cuba.” In many aspects the foreign policy side of the campaign deteriorated into a contest over who could be more anti-

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288 Naftali and Fursenko, One Hell of a gamble, 50-53.
Castro. In October, only one month before election day, Kennedy’s campaign issued a statement that implied he supported unilateral action against Castro’s Cuba. Nixon seized the opportunity to charge that Kennedy was too inexperienced and that his statement was a dangerous challenge to Moscow. While Kennedy and Nixon fought it out on the campaign trail, the Eisenhower administration continued to tighten its policies against Cuba and continued to train anti-Castro Cubans. As a member of the administration, Nixon was unable to discuss publicly any elements of administration policy towards Cuba. When pressed by Kennedy on why the Eisenhower administration was allowing Castro to threaten U.S. interests Nixon was trapped; he was prevented from acknowledging that the administration was in fact developing hard line policies. To Nixon, publicly admitting any official policy “would be, for me, an utterly irresponsible act: it would disclose a secret operation and completely destroy its effectiveness.” Ultimately, Kennedy defeated Nixon in the closest election in United States history up to that point. There exists no way of ascertaining how much of an effect Kennedy’s bellicose rhetoric had in helping him obtain votes, but it did cast him as an anti-Castro “Cold Warrior” when he entered the White House. Seventeen days before John Fitzgerald Kennedy became the 35th President of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower terminated U.S.-Cuban diplomatic relations. During the inauguration address of 1961, incoming President Kennedy declared,

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge--to convert our good words into good deeds--in a new alliance for progress--to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join

with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.\(^{293}\)

Shortly after Kennedy’s inaugural address, former President Eisenhower advised his successor that he should continue supporting anti-Castro forces “to the utmost.” Eisenhower also recommended that the program of training anti-Castro Cubans should be “continued and accelerated.”\(^{294}\) Kennedy, who had been overtly anti-Castro during the campaign, went along with Eisenhower’s suggestions. On 17 April 1961, almost two years to the day that Fidel Castro began his April 1959 visit to the United States, 1,400 Cuban exiles invaded Cuba supported by the CIA. As the invasion commenced, Fidel Castro announced for the first time, the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution.\(^{295}\) The invasion at the Bay of Pigs was a disaster; while the United States and Cuba had traded verbal and economic barbs for months, the introduction of arms placed U.S.-Cuban relations at the point of no return.

Could the United States and Castro’s Cuba ever have agreed on a *modus vivendi*? Had President Eisenhower reached out to Castro during his April 1959 visit and welcomed him, could U.S.-Cuban relations have been sustained? Or did Castro need the United States as an enemy in order to consolidate his power? Castro’s frequent use of anti-American rhetoric immediately after taking power in 1959 certainly did affect the United States’ opinion of Cuba’s revolutionary government, but Castro’s April 1959 visit provided a chance for U.S.-Cuban relations to be reconstituted.

While Fidel Castro’s visit has not received the attention it deserves from academics, that does not mean the trip did not hold importance. Castro’s April 1959 visit and the American

\(^{295}\) Farber, *Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*, xi.
response underscores the larger problems that existed in U.S.-Latin American Cold War relations, those being the United States’ predisposition to implement uncompromising policies towards revolutions and social movements in Latin America. This thesis attempts to situate the visit into its proper Cold War context as an important event that brought Cuba out of the Cold War’s periphery and into the center of the East-West conflict. While the argument exists, first contended by Gordon Connell-Smith in 1974 and later echoed by Jorge Domínguez, that the Cold War did not substantially alter U.S.-Latin American relations, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Cold War did in fact affect the relationship between the United States and Latin America.

From the beginning of the Cold War in 1945, the United States believed it necessary for the Western Hemisphere to be under absolute American control in order to combat Soviet communism. The policies of President Harry Truman consolidated U.S. informal control of the region. Organizing Latin America through the Rio Pact and Organization of American States, Truman utilized the United States’ superior economic and military position to erect the foundation for American regional hegemony. The Eisenhower administration continued Truman’s legacy of informal control and employed new methods, such as covert actions to maintain the United States’ place in the hemisphere. The administration curtailed the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 by crippling that nation’s economy, and in 1954 Eisenhower authorized covert action that led to the overthrow of a democratically elected President in Guatemala. In the end, attempts by Latin American nations to modify the existing order in the Western Hemisphere between 1945 and 1955 were thwarted by the United States.

Furthermore, during the early period of the Cold War U.S. policy makers failed to admit that Latin American nations held legitimate grievances over U.S. policies. Rather than taking
into account the differences that existed in countries such as Bolivia, Guatemala, and Cuba, American policy makers viewed any challenge to the status quo as a challenge to American hegemony. By the time President Eisenhower realized a shift in policy was necessary, American influence in the region was eroding. Examining U.S. endeavors in attaining and sustaining informal empire in Latin America during the early period of the Cold War can provide a basis for further research that examines U.S.-Latin American Cold War relations in the wake of the strengthening of Cuban-Soviet relations during the 1960s and early 1970s. Particularly, how did the United States attempt to diminish the appeal of Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union to Latin Americans during the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon?

The limits of the American empire were highlighted by Vice President Nixon’s disastrous visit to Latin America in May of 1958. The Vice President of the United States was openly attacked in Latin America by regular citizens. The larger importance of Nixon’s trip was what it illustrated about U.S. policy towards the region. The attack on Nixon demonstrated the shortcomings of U.S. policy. In the wake of Nixon’s visit it was clear that the U.S. hold on the region was dissipating. Before being able to digest completely the consequences of the Nixon visit, the Cuban Revolution exposed the fragility of the United States’ informal empire. Failing to understand adequately what the limits were to their informal empire, U.S. policy makers believed that U.S. superiority in the region was irreversible. When Latin American governments attempted to act autonomously, American policy makers responded with reactionary policies.

The imperial mindset, formed over years of dominance, retarded American policy maker’s efforts in the region. When Fidel Castro took power in January 1959 he found himself squarely in the sphere of American influence. So what does Castro’s visit highlight about the inner workings of American foreign policy and informal empire? Castro’s April 1959 visit
illustrates how entrenched views predetermined that American policy makers would attempt to dictate rather than to listen to the Cuban leader. Also, it highlights how the maintenance of an informal empire can be, at times, unfeasible. Castro’s attempt to gain Cuban autonomy from U.S. hegemony was incompatible with the objectives of the Eisenhower administration. His rise to power and turn to the Soviet Union forever altered U.S.-Latin American relations. Ultimately, the severing of relations between the United States and Cuba brought unforeseen and unintended consequences for both nations.
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