

US foreign policy towards the Americas

The Kennedy administration

Kennedy served as president of the United States for less than three years but his foreign policy legacy was immense. In Vietnam, he began the escalation of US troop involvement; in Berlin, he defused a looming crisis over the sovereignty of West Berlin. But his administration is best known for the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 days of intense negotiation and ultimatums designed to end a standoff between the United States and Soviet Union that, it is argued, brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Although the Missile Crisis dominates his administration's political legacy, Kennedy was determined to change the worldview of the other countries in the region through a series of programs to assist them in economic and social change rather than through military intimidation or direct assistance to military regimes. The Alliance for Progress was a program that aimed for the same political stability as other cold war policies but it attempted to achieve it through assistance rather than coercion. Nonetheless, Kennedy's foreign policy concentrated on the US–Soviet rivalry and his presidency was marked by the arrival of a strong Soviet presence in the region.

Flexible response and the Kennedy Doctrine

When John Kennedy assumed the presidency in January 1961 he reiterated the US commitment to contain communism that had marked the Truman and Eisenhower administrations before him. He clearly stated his intention to expand upon both containment and the New Look. Addressing the former, and arguably restating the Monroe Doctrine, the Kennedy Doctrine warned the Soviet Union to stay out of the Americas and pledged to reverse any Soviet incursions into the region that had already occurred. This meant that a key focus of his policy in the Americas would be based on ousting the Soviet Union from Cuba.

The New Look and its core concept of massive retaliation was superseded by the idea of flexible response. This policy did not preclude nuclear war as an option but considered it the choice of last resort. Other options included: negotiation with the Soviets; economic assistance to developing nations; continuation of covert operations; expansion of conventional forces. These policies were articulated in the inaugural address he delivered on January 20, 1961. In this speech he laid out his objectives globally, but also specific to the region. The Kennedy Doctrine showed US commitment to the region even before the events of the early 1960s unraveled and revealed the necessity of a specific policy towards the rest of the region.

The Alliance for Progress

Both Nixon's trip to Latin America in 1958 and Castro's success in Cuba showed the previous administration that there was a need to change US policies in the region. It was left to Kennedy, however,

to implement such changes. Returning to the Act of Bogotá (1960), Kennedy fulfilled a pledge to distribute \$500 million in assistance to Latin American countries and established a ten-year plan that had six objectives:

- increase per capita income
- diversify trade
- industrialize and increase employment
- bring about price stability
- eliminate adult illiteracy
- bring about social reform.

Kennedy argued that only through prosperity in the region would there be stability, and these two conditions would eliminate the appeal of Marxism and nurture democracy. Participating countries had to develop plans that included redistributive reforms: in most Latin American countries, 5% to 10% of the population controlled 70% to 80% of the land. He recognized that US economic assistance was very limited and could do little to change the situation; nor would a short-term fix be possible. The US—and its Latin American partners—would have to commit to a long-term program for there to be success.

Prior administrations had contributed very little to the economic development of Latin America. Truman had only allocated 3% of US foreign aid, and while Eisenhower increased that amount to 9% there was some question as to how it was allocated. For his part, Kennedy (and Johnson after him) increased assistance to Latin America to 18% of all US overseas aid; this amounted to \$22.3 billion throughout the 1960s. Ultimately, however, the Alliance for Progress failed. Despite its ambitions, all of that money only amounted to \$10 per person, per year, in the affected countries. Furthermore, planning and allocation of funds was based on a system with a strong middle class, and the reality was that the middle classes in the countries in question were relatively small and tended to support dictatorships rather than progressive ideas. Latin America began the 1960s with a very limited democratic base that only got smaller throughout the decade.

In Kennedy's last year as president there were six coups, forcing him to soften his stance towards dictatorships in the region. Rather than supporting democracies, the change of course supported dictatorships to try to bring about change. Unfortunately, this often strengthened and perpetuated these regimes and the economic development monies rarely reached their intended recipients. By the end of the decade, dictatorships prevailed in the region and while these may have assuaged US fears of Marxist regimes they did little to end the discontent that most Latin Americans experienced.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Of all countries in the region, Cuba consumed the most of President Kennedy's time. From Eisenhower he inherited an unresolved situation in the Caribbean: Cuban exiles were being trained to overthrow the regime of Fidel Castro. But Kennedy's decision-making would lead to a foreign policy debacle that had farther-reaching

consequences than anyone could have imagined. During the 1960 election campaign, Kennedy had taken a hard stance against Castro and accused the Eisenhower government of not doing enough to combat Castro. He promised Cuban exiles in the US that he would take every opportunity to combat communism in the region and restore Cuba as a democracy.

Kennedy was ambivalent about the CIA-directed plan that had been created by Eisenhower and Dulles. According to the plan, the exiles would launch an amphibious invasion of Cuba that would lead to an uprising on the island as it was assumed that many Cubans rejected Castro's rule. With US air support, the exiles would take a beach head, and a government-in-arms would ask for further assistance from the US. The United States would recognize this government and assist it in stabilizing the country and overthrowing Castro.

The plan relied on stealth, a bit of luck and the support of the Cuban population. The exiles had been planning the invasion for over a year, and it is estimated that the US government spent close to \$5 million on the project. However, intelligence gathered by the CIA revealed that, despite the propaganda leveled against the Castro regime, most Cubans would not support an armed insurrection. The exiles were largely hated enemies of the Cubans who remained and it was foolhardy to expect them to support the return of those who had exploited the previous system.

Kennedy himself was unsure as to how to proceed. He promised to be hard on communism and to support the exiles yet the plan was not sound. A State Department memo argued for the cancellation of the invasion on legal grounds stating that such an action would violate US commitments to the Organization of American States and the obligations incurred by signing the Act of Bogotá. Congressmen further argued that this was an immoral action that exaggerated Castro's threat to the region and was an invitation for Soviet actions. At a press conference on April 12, 1961, Kennedy said, "I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces. This government will do everything it possibly can ... I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba ... The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba. It is between the Cubans themselves."

Despite the internal debates on the morality and legality of US support for an invasion, it took place. The invasion was a disaster; at the last moment, Kennedy decided that the US would not provide air support to the invading force, leaving them vulnerable to the Cuban air force, and the exiles lacked supplies. Two hundred rebel forces were killed in the attack and a further 1,197 were captured by the Cuban army. The Cuban people did not rise. For the United States, it was a public relations disaster. US involvement was not covert and thus the administration was guilty not only of violating international law, but also of failing in its attempted coup. Castro, for his part, claimed the success of his revolution over the US operation. But Castro was also shaken by the attempt and went so far as to request assistance from

Activity

Analyzing Kennedy's speeches

Choose one of the documents and with reference to their origins and purpose, assess the values and limitations of the source for historians studying Kennedy's foreign policy in the Americas.

- Kennedy's inaugural address, January 20, 1961, at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/president/inaug/kennedy.htm>.
- Kennedy's Alliance for Progress speech, March 13, 1961, at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1961kennedy-afp1.html>.

"[I]f the nations of this hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside communist penetration—then I want it clearly understood that this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our nation."

President Kennedy, April 20, 1961

US assistance to Latin America under the Alliance for Progress

Fiscal Year	Budgeted (in millions of \$US)
1962	1,400
1963	1,400
1964	1,400
1965	1,400
1966	1,400
1967	500
1968	469
1969	336

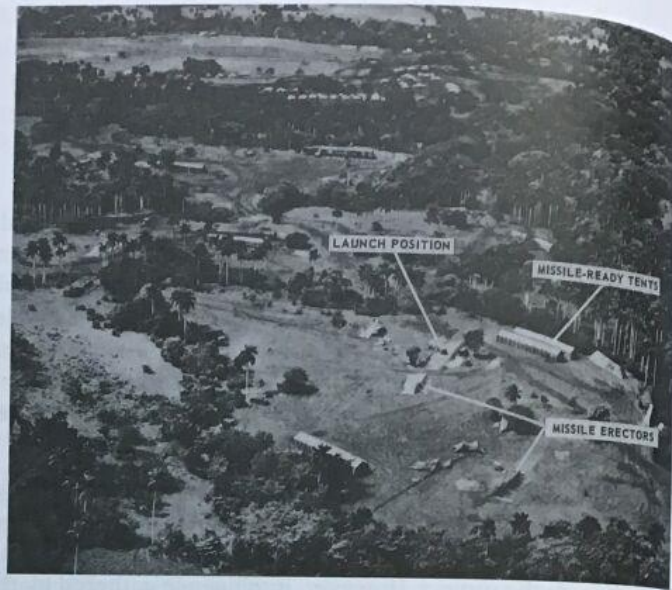
the Soviets in the defense of Cuba. This, in turn, led to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In the summer of 1962, US intelligence began to report heavy Soviet activity in and around the island of Cuba. Agents in Cuba dispatched reports of Soviet trucks hauling machinery into the countryside and U2 spy planes photographed images of cruise-missile launch sites. On the strength of these reports, the US stepped up surveillance and Kennedy warned both the Cubans and the Soviets in speeches that the US would defend itself and its neighbors from hostile attacks.

On October 16, 1962, President Kennedy was informed that a U2 spy plane had taken photos of medium range ballistic missile sites in Cuba. On October 22, Kennedy gave a televised address to the American public informing them of the installations and announced that a quarantine was placed on Cuba and that any violation of the quarantine would be seen as a hostile action that would force the United States to retaliate; on the following day the OAS approved the quarantine. This asserted the policy of brinkmanship in an instant, and the ideas of massive retaliation and mutual assured destruction became potential realities. At the same time, the Soviets dispatched a ship heading to Cuba; the US would consider this an act of war. Subsequent negotiations and compromises, however, resulted in Khrushchev ordering the ship to turn around, and the Crisis was averted. The Soviets agreed to dismantle and remove the weapons under UN supervision. For his part, Kennedy promised that the US would not try another invasion on Cuba; it was also secretly agreed to dismantle and remove nuclear weapons it had in Turkey.

The implications for the Cold War were immense as many citizens were confronted with the possibility of nuclear war. And while Castro was left out of most of the decision-making process, his regime remained unharmed and able to develop. In the future, Cuba would become a center for revolutionary and guerrilla activity in the region and around the globe. This did not end US activities in Cuba; the US continued its boycott on Cuban goods, not allowing trade or travel with Cuba. Additionally, it kept its embassy officials withdrawn although there were unofficial American advisors in Cuba. Covert operations also continued. It was later revealed that the CIA had made several failed assassination attempts on Castro that have passed into legend: exploding cigars and poison-infused shaving cream were two reported methods used to try to kill Castro.

US relations with Cuba during Kennedy's administration show how many aspects of the flexible response policy were used, and the commitment to the Kennedy Doctrine that was articulated so early in his presidency.



A US spy photo taken in October, 1962, of a medium-range ballistic missile base in San Cristobal, Cuba, with labels detailing various parts of the base.

Discussion point

One point in the Act of Bogotá states that "the territory of a State is inviolable; it may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or of other measures of force taken by another state, directly or indirectly, on any grounds whatsoever ..."



What does this mean for Cuba regarding US and Soviet actions in the early 1960s?

The Johnson administration

If the Missile Crisis was emblematic of Kennedy's presidency, President Lyndon Johnson's legacy was Vietnam. Assuming the presidency due to Kennedy's assassination maintained Johnson's commitment to Kennedy's policies until he could run for election himself. In the Americas, then, he was committed to continuing the Alliance for Progress and containing and eliminating communism. To assist him in Latin America, he enlisted an old friend from Texas, Thomas Mann, who had been the key advisor to Eisenhower in his regional policies. Mann was named Alliance for Progress administrator and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs, and he developed a new line in regional affairs. The Mann Doctrine, revealed in March 1964 attempted to redress conflicting US interests in the region. US policies should focus on: economic growth with neutrality towards social reform; protection of US private investments; opposition to communism; and non-intervention. Lastly, the US should have no moral reservations about cooperating with military generals to achieve its policy goals; there should be no preference for democratic states or institutions. It promoted stability over democracy and protected US private investments in the region. Few distinctions were made between anti-US politicians and groups and pro-communist forces.

In April 1964, the US had the first opportunity to implement this new course. The Brazilian president João Goulart was overthrown in a coup that installed a military dictatorship. The United States offered assistance to the regime in the form of \$1.5 billion in economic and military assistance (25% of all money that went to Latin America) and, in return, Brazil adopted a pro-US, anti-communist policy. Taking the policies even further, in spring 1965 the US sent 22,000 troops to the Dominican Republic to maintain the pro-US government there. Johnson and Mann also went on to give support to Duvalier (Haiti), Somoza (Nicaragua), Stroessner (Paraguay) and numerous other dictatorships that were anti-communist, if also brutal dictators.

The war in Vietnam was taking a substantial toll on US assistance through the Alliance for Progress. As US military commitments in Southeast Asia grew, there was a need to cut funding elsewhere. As a result, Johnson cut funds for economic assistance—but not military assistance. Even where economic assistance continued, the money rarely reached its intended destination.

El Salvador and Nicaragua: the beginnings of revolution

El Salvador was dominated by dictatorships that early on recognized the value of claiming anti-communism. When a group of moderate officers tried to take power in 1960, the US withheld recognition and forced the junta's collapse. It was subsequently replaced by a right-wing regime. Upon reviewing Alliance statistics, El Salvador seemed to be a model of success: it had high growth rates and its exports increased; however, Alliance monies were usually diverted to the landowning oligarchy, and the peasants →



who were supposed to benefit from the economic assistance remained impoverished and uneducated. The food grown in the country was exported, rather than used for feeding the hunger-stricken peasants. Resistance to the regime was growing, although the CIA reported that there were few revolutionary threats to the regime.

In Nicaragua, the Somoza family ruled the country as its own personal fiefdom beginning in 1937. When the patriarch, Anastasio Somoza, was assassinated in 1956, his sons assumed control over the country. They had the support of US presidents, including Lyndon Johnson and they seemed to have undisputed control over the country, a situation that benefitted US investors in the country, and conformed to the Mann Doctrine. But change was afoot in that country. In 1961, opposition insurrectionists formed the National Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) or Sandinistas, a guerrilla group committed to overthrowing the Somozas. Although the CIA reported that the group was no real threat, it began urban warfare in 1966, and by 1967 the US began to commit military advisors to assist Nicaragua's National Guard, and provided military training to officers through the School of the Americas. Despite such measures, support for the FSLN continued to grow, and would lead to revolution in future decades.

“A revolution is coming—a revolution that will be peaceful if we are wise enough; compassionate if we care enough; successful if we are fortunate enough—but a revolution that is coming whether we will it or not.”

Senator Robert F. Kennedy

The Nixon administration

Johnson's decision to step down from the presidency led to the election of Richard Nixon, previously the vice president who had witnessed anti-American protests in 1958. At the end of his vice presidency he had counseled a change in course regarding Latin America, and had in some respects sown the seeds for the Alliance for Progress. But it was his administration that would kill the Alliance. Evaluating the aims and outcomes, he determined that the Alliance had not fulfilled its goals, and that it had actually fueled discontent in some areas. While this was an astute observation, he did little to try to remedy the problems and often continued the same policies that had been in place. Like Johnson before him, foreign policy was dominated by Asia—first Vietnam and the promises he made for the withdrawal of US forces, and later by opening the People's Republic of China to the West.

Nixon in Chile

Latin America came to the forefront of US foreign relations when Nixon had to contend with a democratically elected Marxist president in Chile. In 1970, upon the election of Salvador Allende, it was made clear that the US objective was to keep him from taking office; or, in the worst case scenario, to remove him from power as quickly as possible.

US companies had over \$1 billion invested in Chile. International Telephone and Telegraph, and the copper conglomerates Anaconda and Kennecott all feared that an Allende presidency would mean nationalization of their companies and the collapse of revenue

streams. The United States had intelligence stations in Chile that monitored Soviet submarine fleets and there was fear of a domino effect in South America. Kissinger felt that Chile posed a more serious threat than Cuba as the Marxists in place had been democratically elected in free and fair elections, and ratified by the Chilean congress.

The US used both covert operations and economic measures to try to oust Allende. From 1970 to 1973, an estimated \$10 million was spent in trying to bring about his downfall. To do so, the US:

- cut off all economic assistance to Chile, amounting to \$70 million
- discouraged foreign private investment
- opposed international credits and loans from the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank
- tried to disrupt the international copper market (critical to the Chilean economy)
- put diplomatic pressure on other Latin American countries to oppose Allende
- gave money to the opposition
- used the CIA to bring about a strike of truckers
- organized a break-in of the Chilean embassy in Washington DC.

In reality, the popularity of Allende and his UP had begun to wane. The Chilean military and middle classes strongly opposed his programs for social reform and were willing to take action themselves. The country was in chaos with reforms that were costly and a lack of income to pay for ambitious social programs. In August 1973, Augusto Pinochet was named commander in chief of the Chilean military, sealing the fate of Allende's administration. On September 11, the navy seized the port of Valparaíso and by 4 p.m. armed forces that stormed the presidential palace announced that Allende had committed suicide.

With the benefit of hindsight it seems that Chile was headed towards political change with or without US intervention and in that light the covert operations seem like money unnecessarily spent. However, it is significant that the US was willing to go to such lengths to overthrow a democratically elected government. The US embraced the Pinochet regime and enthusiastically supported it as it brutally repressed the opposition and removed all social reforms that had been put in place to assist the poor. But the Nixon administration was soon embroiled in its own affairs, and while covert actions might have been acceptable overseas they were not only immoral but illegal at home. Nixon resigned, facing impeachment, leaving the affairs of Latin America to Gerald Ford until the 1976 elections.

The Rockefeller report of August 1969 addressed Latin America and assessed that there was potential for political upheaval and a strong Marxist presence in the region; it therefore made sense to collaborate with military rulers to prevent the spread of communism in the region.

Activity

Perception

- The following poem was translated from the Spanish and written shortly after the fall of President Salvador Allende of Chile. In it, women of two distinct classes give their views of their lives under the short-lived socialist government.

Two Women

I am a woman.

I am a woman.

I am a woman born of a woman whose man owned a factory.

I am a woman born of a woman whose man labored in a factory.

I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.

I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.

I am a woman who watched two babies grow into beautiful children.

I am a woman who watched two babies die because there was no milk.

I am a woman who watched twins grow into popular college students with summers abroad.

I am a woman who watched three children grow, but with bellies stretched from no food.

But then there was a man;

But then there was a man;

And he talked about the peasants getting richer by my family getting poorer.

And he told me of days that would be better and he made the days better.

We had to eat rice.

We had rice.

We had to eat beans!

We had beans.

My children were no longer given summer visas to Europe.

My children no longer cried themselves to sleep.

And I felt like a peasant.

And I felt like a woman.

A peasant with a dull, hard, unexciting life.

Like a woman with a life that sometimes allowed a song.

And I saw a man.

And I saw a man.

And together we began to plot with the hope of the return to freedom.

I saw his heart begin to beat with hope of freedom, at last.

Someday, the return to freedom.

Someday freedom.

And then,

But then,

One day,

One day,

There were planes overhead and guns firing close by.

There were planes overhead and guns firing in the distance.

I gathered my children and went home.

I gathered my children and ran.

And the guns moved farther and farther away.

But the guns moved closer and closer.

And then, they announced that freedom had been restored!

And then they came, young boys really.

They came into my home along with my man.

They came and found my man.

Those men whose money was almost gone.

They found all of the men whose lives were almost their own.

And we all had drinks to celebrate.

And they shot them all.

The most wonderful martinis.

They shot my man.

And then they asked us to dance.

And they came for me.

Me.

For me, the woman.

And my sisters.

For my sisters.

And then they took us.

Then they took us.

They took us to dinner at a small private club.

They stripped from us the dignity we had gained.

And they treated us to beef.

And then they raped us.

It was one course after another.
One after another they came after us.

We nearly burst we were so full.
Lunging, plunging—sisters bleeding, sisters dying.

It was magnificent to be free again!
It was hardly a relief to have survived.

The beans have almost disappeared now.
The beans have disappeared.

The rice—I've replaced it with chicken or steak.

The rice, I cannot find it.

And the parties continue night after night to make up for all the time wasted.

And my silent tears are joined once more by the midnight cries of my children.

In pairs, read the poem, with each person taking one part. After reading the poem answer the following questions:

- 1 What facts do they remember that are similar?
- 2 What facts do they remember that are different?
- 3 How do their interests differ?
- 4 How are their interests the same?
- 5 Are there any universal experiences here?

Source: <http://www.regrettoinform.org/education/html/writing02.html>.

The Carter administration

The presidency of Jimmy Carter marked an initial shift away from what had become traditional Cold War foreign policy. When he took office in 1977, Carter asked the US public to put aside their "inordinate fear of communism" and embrace a new program. He promised to: reduce the US military presence overseas and exhort other NATO members to pay more for their own defense; cut back on arms sales that had reached \$10 billion per year under Nixon; and slow the arms race with a new round of nuclear weapons talks. Instead, he wanted to address environmental issues and improve human rights abroad through US assistance and pressure. But Carter found shifting the public's perception of foreign policy difficult at best. Part of the problem was a division in his own government: NSC head Zbigniew Brzezinski was an anti-communist hardliner who was suspicious of Soviet motives; Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, on the other hand, advocated a policy of "quiet diplomacy" and rapprochement. Carter's main foreign policy advisors were often in opposition with one another.

The other problems that Carter faced came towards the end of his presidency from external events. In late 1978 the Soviets began to step up their involvement in Afghanistan, and they eventually invoked the Brezhnev Doctrine and invaded the neighboring country. This led to the deterioration of détente and the arms talks stalled; a US boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics further hurt US-Soviet relations. At the same time, revolution engulfed Iran and led to a foreign policy crisis wherein American citizens were held hostage by an incoherent government angered by the sanctuary the US

provided the deposed Shah. As a result of the international instability, the defense budget ballooned to over \$15 billion.

In the Americas, Carter's policies were focused on human rights and the Panama Canal. In November 1903, the Hay Bunau-Varilla treaty gave the United States the right to build a canal in Panama that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Additionally, the US would lease the land from Panama in perpetuity for \$250,000 per year plus \$10 million and would reserve the right to use military force if necessary to protect the canal. In September 1977, Jimmy Carter and Panamanian president Omar Torrijos signed two treaties that returned the land and the canal to Panama. According to the terms of one treaty, Panama took control of the Panama Canal on December 31, 1999, with joint protection, management and defense in the interim period. The second treaty emphasized the neutrality of the Canal in times of peace and war, requiring that it remain open to all vessels of all countries.

In an unprecedented move, military and economic assistance could be denied to countries that were seen as obvious human rights abusers. Under this, Guatemala, Chile and Argentina lost their US funding, and support of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua was also withdrawn as the Sandinistas were gaining momentum. It appeared as if, at least in the Americas, US policies were moving away from Cold War domination; that is, until the impact of events in Central Asia reversed this development.

In 1979, the new government of Nicaragua was recognized, given \$8 million in emergency relief and promised a further \$75 million. However, an October 1979 coup in El Salvador prompted US fears that Central America was mirroring Southeast Asia and soon the whole region would collapse into communism. After fueling support against the right-wing regime, the US soon withdrew support for the younger, more moderate officers and their coalition fell apart. They were replaced by yet another vicious military-backed government that oversaw, among other things, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in March 1980 and the murder of three North American nuns and a lay worker in December 1980. The US continued to provide military assistance through atrocities in which 10,000 political murders were committed in 1980 alone.

The promises of Carter's inauguration were unfulfilled due to inconsistencies in his administration's policies and events beyond US borders. The events in Central America, the USSR and Iran all led to a reversion to Cold War policies of containment and a fear of the domino effect—policies that had been in place since the onset of the Cold War. In the end, little changed in the outlook of the US, and its attitudes in Latin America were fomenting revolutions that would soon be unleashed.