



# THE UNITED STATES AND THE TRUJILLO REGIME

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beginning in 1956 (discussed in Chapter II) that opposition to Trujillo would violate the principle of nonintervention, the United States was not unresponsive to its critics. On occasion the United States would admit that perhaps it had been overly friendly to dictatorial regimes.<sup>1</sup>

During the last two years of the Eisenhower administration, the orientation of the Latin American policy of the United States began to change. The major catalyst for change was Vice-President Nixon's hostile reception during his 1958 Latin American "good will" tour, especially in Peru and Venezuela. The saliva, rocks and insults hurled at Nixon reflected Latin American dissatisfaction with United States policies toward dictators, among other things. However, the policy change was further motivated by the judgment that dictators bequeath a political vacuum to their successors, which foments the communist alternative. Therefore the best way to oppose communism is by opposing oppressive regimes. Once dictators have been deposed, their countries are vulnerable to political chaos and communist subversion.

The United States did not immediately act upon this judgment concerning the link between dictatorship and communism. Vice-President Nixon, after returning from his harrowing Latin American tour, recommended that the United States extend a "cool handshake" to dictators and an *abrazo* to democracies. His views were echoed by Dr. Milton Eisenhower (see Chapter I). Beyond these moderate proposals, however, the United States was unwilling to oppose dictators as late as 1959. In the case of Trujillo, this unwillingness was made clear during the revival of Caribbean conflict in the late 1950's and at the Fifth Meeting of Foreign Ministers in 1959.

## 2. CARIBBEAN TENSION AND THE FIFTH MEETING OF MINISTERS

In 1959 Caribbean instability again involved the Trujillo regime. When Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista abandoned the

field on January 1, after his defeat by Fidel Castro in the Cuban revolution, he fled to the Dominican Republic, thus joining deposed Argentine dictator Juan Perón, who had already sought and gained refuge there. Trujillo and Batista had had many differences, but after the United States ceased its military aid to Cuba, Trujillo had sold military equipment to Batista. Castro had hated Trujillo on ideological grounds as well as for supporting Batista. Now his hatred of Trujillo was intensified when asylum was granted the former Cuban dictator.

Castro announced his determination not only to carry out a thoroughgoing social revolution in Cuba itself, but also to work for the speedy elimination of all remaining military dictatorships in Latin America, beginning with the Caribbean area. Although Castro later became a dictator professing communism, the issue in 1959 appeared to be the same as it had been before the post-World War II international strife in the Caribbean: democracy versus dictatorship. Almost immediately after Castro came to power in Cuba, he initiated a "war of nerves" against the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. Cuba and the Dominican Republic became the principal rivals in Caribbean international politics.

In 1959 three "invasions"—of Panama, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic—produced considerable tension in the Caribbean area. Although communism was not an issue, the revolutionary government of Cuba was a major contributor to Caribbean tension. In mid-June of 1959 the Dominican Republic was "invaded" twice by revolutionary groups of various nationalities at Constanza, Maimón and a point near Estero Hondo. The intruding forces numbered some 56 men brought in by aircraft and about 140 by yachts, all originating in Cuba. The Dominican government claimed to have "annihilated" the invaders.<sup>2</sup> On July 2, 1959, the Dominicans appealed to the Council of the Organization of American States for action under the Rio Treaty, accusing both Cuba and Venezuela of participating in the preparation of the recent "invasions."

The Dominican Republic also charged Cuba and Venezuela

with preparing new exile landings and appealed to the OAS to intervene. The Cuban and Venezuelan governments denied the charges, insisting they would not permit an OAS investigation of complaints on their territories. When Trujillo threatened attacks on their governments, they issued counter-threats that were equally precipitous. On July 10 the Dominican Republic unexpectedly withdrew its charges,<sup>3</sup> apparently recognizing that little support would be forthcoming from the other OAS members. By this time Trujillo had lost his support in the inter-American community, and the United States was becoming more and more impatient with him. Nevertheless the United States and several Latin American states felt that the time had come to convene a meeting of the American foreign ministers to discuss the Caribbean situation. The COAS decided at its July 13 meeting to convoke a Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

The Fifth Meeting of Foreign Ministers was held at Santiago de Chile in August, 1959. Its purpose was to reconcile the increasing demand for democratic progress and economic and social change in Latin America (particularly in the Caribbean) with traditional inter-American principles of peaceful relations and nonintervention in the internal affairs of others.<sup>4</sup> A few states favored a compromise of the nonintervention principle in order to oppose dictatorial regimes (*viz.*, those of the Dominican Republic and Haiti), promote democracy and protect human rights.

The United States Secretary of State, Christian A. Herter, took a strong stand for nonintervention, which received strong support from most of the other delegations present. Herter noted four principles expressed in the Charter of the OAS that were particularly applicable to the situation: nonintervention, collective security, the effective exercise of representative democracy and respect for human rights, and cooperation for economic and social progress. He emphasized the principle of nonintervention over the other three. Herter's strong stand, based on the idea that overthrowing oppressive regimes would

produce disorder and tension and give political opportunity to the communists,<sup>5</sup> exemplified the Latin American policy of the Eisenhower administration.

What was wrong with the United States position was that under the circumstances it appeared to rebuke Cuba and Venezuela—both of which favored compromising the nonintervention principle for OAS action against Trujillo,<sup>6</sup> and were, in addition, the apparent centers of anti-dictatorial, pro-democratic movements.

Notwithstanding the arguments of Cuba and Venezuela, the overwhelming majority of delegates opposed any compromise of the nonintervention principle, which was manifested in several provisions of the Final Act. However, in the Declaration of Santiago, the meeting strongly condemned dictatorial governments without mentioning specific names. Thus the Fifth Meeting of Ministers reflected certain changes in the intensity of feeling about nonintervention. An awareness of greater regional responsibility for democracy was reflected in the discussions. The nonintervention principle was viewed in other than absolute terms; it was looked upon as it related to certain dictatorial regimes in the Caribbean. The ministers, although reaffirming the nonintervention principle, apparently no longer wanted to allow it to be a shield for dictatorial practices. A number of important topics relating to the relationship between nonintervention, representative democracy and human rights were referred to various agencies for study and for the preparation of reports and drafts for future consideration.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. PRELUDE TO THE SIXTH MEETING OF FOREIGN MINISTERS

A number of events occurring in 1959 and 1960 prompted another Meeting of Foreign Ministers in 1960. Its focus was primarily on the Dominican Republic rather than divided among most of the other states of the Caribbean region, as had been the case in the past. The Inter-American Peace Committee played a major role in reporting and publicizing the activities