

The OAS and US Struggle for Hegemony: 1948-1962

Hannes Cloete
Supervised by
Dr. Jason Colby
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Background	9
Early Days	13
Guatemala and the revealing of OAS capabilities	
The Arbenz issue	16
Eisenhower has a plan	22
Complicated American friends and the reality of international law	
Calderonistas and Costa Rica	26
A turning tide	30
United States, OAS, and the Castro issue	
Trouble brewing in Cuba	33
Punta del Este	35
The threat of global annihilation	37
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	42

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Introduction

“The warehouse of imperialism” is what Fidel Castro labeled the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1961.¹ On the other hand, US President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the OAS “the oldest and most successful association of sovereign governments in the history of the world.”² These contrasting statements could agree on only one thing: The OAS was one of the most important players on the stage of inter-American relations during the Cold War.

The majority of academic attention that the OAS received was during the 1950s and 1960s, which should come as little of a surprise given its involvement in major inter-American conflicts and disputes during that time. Preceding the CIA-coordinated overthrow of socialist Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz, the tenth Inter-American conference saw the passing of a resolution that condemned international communist intervention and thus marked the historic decree of an international community’s stance in response to Cold War relations. The Calderonista invasion of Costa Rica led to the establishment of an investigative OAS committee that exposed and put an end to Nicaragua’s covert funding of the rebels. The committee would go on to allow the United States to sell fighter planes to Costa Rica, which effectively turned the tide of the conflict in its favor.³ Likewise, the Punta del Este conference of 1962 led to the suspension of Cuba from the inter-American system, as well as the passing of a resolution that listed Marxism-Leninism as a system of governance incompatible with inter-American relations.

¹ David Binder, “For Cuba, the O.A.S is almost beside the point.” *New York Times*, October 13, 1974. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp88-01315r000400130003-4>

² Lyndon B. Johnson. “Statement by the president on the OAS mission to the Dominican Republic.” The American Presidency Project. Santa Barbara, Calif.: University of California, 1999. Web retrieved from Library of Congress, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-the-oas-mission-the-dominican-republic>.

³ Kyle Longley, “Resistance and accommodation: The United States and the nationalism of José Figueres, 1953–1957,” *Diplomatic History* 18, no.1 (January, 1994): 24.

Such a hands-on approach from the OAS saw the organization become the subject of writing for many political science and international law experts at the time.

Literature Review:

The 1960s saw a great deal of academic work deal with the place of the OAS within the inter-American sphere. The vast majority of these academic articles, even those concerning older events such as the Guatemalan coup, were published under political science journals instead of history-oriented ones. Within political science, great value is placed on theorizing how the world ought to be governed, which means that even institutions that may not appear overly influential on the surface level will be studied as experts are constantly looking for evidence of success or failure within political systems.

Gordon Connel-Smith, for example, detailed the Punta del Este Conference and its lessons in an edition of *The World Today* in 1962; he focused on the place of the OAS within inter-American relations, and in the end concluded that the organization's role largely depends on what route the United States decides to take in relation to its American neighbors.⁴ Smith may not have found the organization all too influential, yet this alone was enough reason for him to write on it due to the nature of political science.

In 1966, the Inter-American Institute of International Legal Studies released an overview of inter-American affairs up until 1965, with the majority of focus on the OAS.⁵ While the book does detail the actions conducted by the OAS in response to events such as the Guatemalan coup, Calderonista invasion, and Cuban Missile Crisis, it fails to highlight the underappreciated

⁴ Gordon Connell-Smith. "The Future of the Organization of American States: Significance of the Punta Del Este Conference." *The World Today* 18, no. 3 (1962): 120. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40394173>

⁵ Inter-American institute of International Legal Studies, *The Inter-American System: Its development and strengthening*. (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, 1966.)

manner in which US foreign policy was swayed by the OAS. It is of course worth noting that at this time, CIA and State Department documents concerning these events were not available to public access. The issue is that political science journals such as that of Smith mostly wrote the OAS off as not too important before such information became public. Therefore, when studying the OAS in the 1950s and 1960s through secondary sources, we are mostly left with journal articles published right after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Modern historical writing also seems to gloss over the role of the organization. As is the case with how many international organizations are portrayed, the discussions and agreements reached within the OAS are often seen as reflections of the state of international relations, and not necessarily as tools that forge or change the course of the global polity.⁶ Within history, we seek to understand why things happened the way they did, and so it is seen as counter-intuitive to dissect at length a historical actor that did not seem to impose much of an impact. Major historical experts on the inter-American issues of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Stephen Rabe and Arthur M. Schlesinger, seem to acknowledge the general actions of the OAS on a surface level yet do not afford the organization any sort of meaningful analysis on its place in the international polity.⁷ In order to understand the reasons why historians rarely mention the OAS, it would help to understand why political scientists have traditionally seen international organizations as not exceptionally influential.

In 2003, Jack Goldsmith and Stephen Krasner, acclaimed experts of law and international relations published an article entitled “The limits of idealism,” which criticized the optimism of international unity. In it, they pointed out flaws in the arguments of international liberalists

⁶ In reference to how the OAS is often not treated with much respect in literature, see: Monica Herz, *The Organization of American States: Global governance away from the media* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011), 1.

⁷ Stephen Rabe, *The killing zone: The United States wages cold war in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2005)

(those espousing an international political community), while also laying bare the main drawbacks of international organizations. Goldsmith and Krasner warned against the minimization of considerations of power, stating that international liberalism wrongly assumes that “norms of right behavior can substitute for national capabilities and material interests.”⁸ They also explained the international system to be a limited one in the way of concrete action, noting that international institutions only see their legislation legitimized when members see such legislation as beneficial to themselves.⁹ This argument neatly summarizes why international organizations such as the OAS have recently been viewed with skepticism by political scientists, and largely ignored by historians.

This paper, however, will argue that OAS activity from its inception in 1948 up until the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 warrants significant attention. It was during this tumultuous time that the OAS was at its most influential, and it was this period that many international relations experts such as Juan Pablo Scarfi and Andrew Tilman see as the last stretch of the heydays of Pan-Americanism.¹⁰ State Department files, CIA documents, and other government records will be drawn upon to show that the OAS often deterred, motivated, and rerouted US foreign policy in significant ways.

The thesis will mainly aim to address the following questions: Was the OAS simply a reflection of pre-established foreign policy, or did the organization forge foreign policy? Did the OAS succeed in creating a multilateral inter-American relations scene, or did the US establish itself as a hegemon within the organization? What was the role of the OAS within the United

⁸ Jack Goldsmith and Stephen Krasner, “The limits of idealism,” *Daedalus* 132, no.1 (Winter, 2003): 48. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/20027822?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁹ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁰ Andrew R. Tilman and Juan Pablo Scarfi, *Cooperation and Hegemony in US-Latin American Relations: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137510747>

States' war against socialism? To address these questions, three main historical events will be looked at within the relevant timeframe: The 1954 CIA coordinated coup of Guatemala, Nicaragua's invasion of Costa Rica in 1955, and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It is also important to address some of the limitations that will be faced when attempting to answer these questions. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected sectors of our society in a multitude of ways, and this is no different for the field of academics. The Columbus Memorial Library, located in Washington D.C., functions as the main archival source of material relating to the OAS. Unfortunately, the institution has been closed to in-person visits since the start of the pandemic. Online sources mostly only go as far back as the 1990s, while one is completely unable to reach library staff to inquire on earlier materials; this is most probably also due to the effects of the pandemic. It is still relatively easy to find major documents such as the transcripts of OAS conferences; however, this thesis warrants deeper investigation and so it is only sensible to turn to other sources.

Given the prominent role of the United States in the questions that this paper aims to answer, the role of the OAS will be largely explored through the lens of a US perspective by looking at State Department and CIA documents. A limitation that comes with this is the withholding and tampering of such documents. Much of the documentation relating to controversial events such as the Guatemalan coup has been destroyed, withheld, or redacted.¹¹ It is oftentimes academia and the debate caused by academics that push governments to further declassify documents and become more transparent on information; this may be shown by the CIA's declassification of documents in 1997, following a multitude of literature on US

¹¹ Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, xi.

operations within Guatemala.¹² Therefore, while tedious, it is only fitting to use the information available to us in order to further develop the narrative on inter-American relations.

Background

Starting with the American Revolution, the Americas would establish itself as a place where people of various backgrounds would strive for independence from their European overlords. Black Haitians followed the United States' independence struggle with their own in 1804; Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín established themselves as icons in the Spanish American Wars of Independence, which saw the majority of South America liberated. This regional seeking of autonomy garnered a sense of Pan-Americanism and togetherness for the American states.

It should be noted, however, that the United States' awkward hegemonic position on the continent had always been recognized. When Pan-Americanism emerged in Latin-American states, among the threat of Europe, many felt that the 'colossus to the north'¹³ also had to be taken into consideration. To address this, Latin American states attempted to establish non-aggression and mutual defense pacts with the United States. Despite the commitment to keeping European powers out of the Americas, as shown by the Monroe Doctrine, the United States was unwilling to make many binding agreements forwarded by its southern neighbors.¹⁴ This reluctance may perhaps be explained by a skeptical interpretation that many have thrown on the Monroe Doctrine.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Jerome Slater, *The OAS and United States foreign policy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 19.

¹⁴ Ibid, 20.

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 outlined that any military intervention by foreign powers in the Americas would be taken as a military action against the United States; the doctrine also holds that the Americas and Europe were to remain separate spheres of influence and that the United States would not interfere with European colonies or their legitimate foreign affairs.¹⁵ While it is generally agreed upon that the Monroe Doctrine formed a cornerstone of US foreign policy in the 19th and early 20th-centuries, the manner in which the doctrine manifested itself differed over time.

The United States had an expansionist veneer throughout the 19th-century. Historian of Mexican affairs, Peter Guardino, explains that war was, in fact, beneficial for the industrializing United States at the time, and so it only made sense for it to adopt an expansionist vision.¹⁶ The United States had launched a military campaign into Canada during the War of 1812, while parts of northern Mexico were in strong US interest due to their predominantly Anglo presence and the promise of opening new lands for cotton cultivation.¹⁷ The US invasion of Mexico in 1846 painted the states in an imperialist light for Latin America, which was only further worsened by its capitalist imperialism in Central America.

Jason Colby, historian of US international policy, explains that US corporate activity within Central America created a sense of economic dependence and colonial subordination amongst the local populations. For example, the construction of the Panama Railroad had its own police force that enforced law on those that opposed it.¹⁸ It is true that the gold rush in California meant ships would arrive regularly in Central America for produce such as coffee, and entire

¹⁵ “Monroe Doctrine: 1823,” www.ourdocuments.gov (accessed 22 December 2021)

¹⁶ Peter Guardino, *The dead march: A history of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁸ Jason Colby, *The business of empire: United Fruit, race and U.S. expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 25-26.

towns would come into construction along relevant routes in Nicaragua; however, traveling Americans would often bring racial prejudice with them, which only further worsened local views on the United States.¹⁹

These events drove a great wedge of distrust between Latin American states and the United States, eventually resulting in a conference to be held between only Latin American states in Santiago de Chile in 1856. In fear of the reinvigorated spirit of Manifest Destiny, the attending countries signed the Continental treaty, which acknowledged the uneasy reality and dangers of the United States being in a bilateral and not multilateral relationship with its southern neighbors.²⁰

Yet the tide would soon turn in the favor of a more united Pan-America. In the 1860s, the United States strongly opposed the French occupation of Mexico. Following the Civil War, the United States directly assisted Mexico in its defeat of the French Empire. This, combined with the end to US slavery and southward expansion, meant that US-Latin American relations greatly bettered during the late nineteenth-century.²¹

The next major movement in Pan-Americanism would be that of the Big Brother policy under US Secretary of State, James G. Blaine. This led to the first International Conference of American States in 1889, where Pan-American promotion of peace, opening of tradelines, uniform customs regulations, criterion for dispute resolution, and the adoption of silver coin among other matters were discussed.²² The conference was mostly a failure, but it did see the establishment of the International Union for American Republics meant for diplomatic

¹⁹ Ibid, 21-23.

²⁰ Ann van Wynen Thomas and A.J. Thomas Jr, *The Organization of American States* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 9.

²¹ Ibid, 12.

²² Carlos Stoetzer, *The Organization of American States* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), 6.

conferences. The Pan American Union, which functioned under this organization, was mostly concerned with commerce, and displays the primary concerns of Latin American states in relation to their relationship with the United States.

US-Latin American relations were relatively stunted going into the twentieth century; this was mostly because of continued US interventionism in the region, the lackluster results of American conferences, and the establishment of the Roosevelt Corollary, which asserted the US right to intervene in Latin American affairs. President Woodrow Wilson's promotion of liberal internationalism and Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy were attempts at reassuring the US' neighbors that they were committed to a policy of non-interventionism and positive trade agreements. The United States economically assisted Brazil's industrialization and signed into force the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934, which greatly opened up negotiations for reducing tariffs; in turn, Latin America helped the United States during World War Two through the supply of raw materials.²³

Historian, Stephen Rabe, notes the 'Good Neighbor policy' followed a policy of 'reciprocation'; in turn for non-interventionism, Latin American states were to respect US investments and follow their policy on the global stage.²⁴ As will be seen, it may be argued that this policy was often respected by Latin American states into the Cold War.

The horrors of World War II revealed the need to adopt a system of collective security, which gave rise to the Rio Treaty of 1947. The agreement was signed and ratified by 21 American states, and so may be seen as an extremely Pan-American agreement. Officially named the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, it aimed to create a hemispheric defense

²³ Stephen Rabe, "The Johnson Doctrine." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no.1 (2006): 50. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/full/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2006.00286.x>

²⁴ *Ibid*, 51.

doctrine. Article 3 of 26 may summarize the essence of the agreement best: “The high contracting parties agree that an armed attack by any state against an American state shall be considered as an attack against all the American states.”²⁵ It was essentially a Monroe Doctrine extended to all states. On the other side of the pond, a new major threat was busy surfacing: internationalist communism. This was the main reason for the ninth International Conference of American States to be called in Bogotá in 1948. It was here that the OAS would be born.

Early Days

The Bogotá Conference of 1948 dealt primarily with economic issues, which is an accurate reflection of what most Latin American states were concerned with in their relationship with the United States. During the war, South America had become largely dependent on the northern superpower for much of its export market; because of this, its leaders sought a trade relationship that functioned on more equal terms, while the United States was seeking to maintain an economic position of power. For example, Article 3 of the Economic Agreement of Bogotá called for the acknowledgment of the disparity in prices between manufactured goods, and raw goods, with an intent to stabilize this imbalance; the US delegation found it necessary to make a reservation on this article.²⁶ The awkward economic relationship between the United States and the Latin American nations may be reflected by the fact that while a major company such as United Fruit greatly contributed to infrastructure, railways, and ports of Central American states, the locals also felt that their independence and sovereignty had largely been

²⁵ OAS Official Records, *Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance*. (Washington D.C., 1961), 2.

²⁶ Organization of American States, *Convenio Económico de Bogotá*, 1961, 32.

attenuated by US corporations.²⁷ This dynamic between US corporatism and Central American nationalism would play a key role in the early days of the OAS.

Alongside economic measures, the Conference of Bogotá introduced the charter of the OAS. The charter explained that the OAS was meant to establish an avenue of cooperation between states that will ensure the consolidation of the sovereignty of American states that are united by the goal of creating an environment where a man is offered “land of liberty, and a favorable environment for the development of his personality and the realization of his just aspirations.”²⁸ It should be noted that the statement may be interpreted to be espousing for a system of laissez-faire capitalism; it was also at the Bogotá conference that Resolution XXXII was passed, which detailed internationalist communism as a threat to the tenets of American values.²⁹ Yet, US interventionism in the case of Latin American socialism would require just cause considering the main principles of the charter.

Article Five reaffirmed the Rio Treaty’s point of viewing an attack on an American state as an attack against all American states, while article 13 gave each state the right to pursue its own cultural and economic identity³⁰; in regards to this article, it should be noted that the “international communism” listed under Resolution XXXII was in reference to global communist interventionist efforts from superpowers such as the USSR, not the democratic pursuit of a socialist economy. Article 15 forbade the direct or indirect intervention of one state against another, especially when such intervention was intended to threaten the state’s political, cultural or economic elements; Article 16, crucial to the relationship between the USA and Latin

²⁷ Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 159.

²⁸ Organization of American States, *Charter of the Organization of American States*, 1962, 1.

²⁹ Office of the Historian, “Foreign relations of the United States, 1948, the western hemisphere, Volume IX: Document 161.” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d161>

³⁰ “Charter of the Organization of American States.” 4.

America, forbade the use of coercive measures of an economic character in order to obtain advantages from other sovereign states.³¹ All of these articles that sought to protect the sovereignty of American states and create a multilateral relationship would come under strenuous testing during the early days of the OAS.

At first, it seemed like the dream of a multilateral and non-interventionist inter-American system was well alive. This may in part be said because of NSC 16, a State Department report published in March 1948 that reported the threat of internationalist communism to be relatively low in Latin America.³² The State Department would soon reverse this opinion, however, in the context of the accelerating Cold War.

In 1949, the USSR successfully tested its first atomic bomb, while Mao Zedong would go on to declare the People's Republic of China (PRC). Then, in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy made his famous allegations of communist infiltration in the US government. The Red Scare was in full swing. Therefore, it should come as little surprise that US diplomat, George Kennan, came to the conclusion in 1950 that the United States should support anti-communists in Latin America even if they were to be authoritarian and anti-democratic.³³ The United States was definitely not without anti-communist support within Latin America, some of this being through authoritarian avenues.

Even Juan Perón, one of the few leaders that would not fully take the side of the United States at the Caracas Conference of 1954, gave his view that “communism is a very serious problem in the Americas...”³⁴ Around the time of the Bogotá Conference, the government of

³¹ Ibid, 5.

³² Rabe, *The killing zone*, xii.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Office of the Historian, “Foreign relations of the United States, 1948, the western hemisphere, Volume IX: Document 163.” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d163>

Panama proposed drastic measures to control communism within Latin America; these measures included restricting access of known communists coming in and out of American states. “In accord with Resolution XXXII,” the US Department of State espoused its support for such measures.³⁵ This not only shows the almost unanimous backing that the United States had gained over time through close economic cooperation (especially in the Second World War), but also the importance that was placed on positioning US foreign policy in respect to Inter-American agreements and affairs. It should also be noted that the United States adopted a policy of turning the other cheek in response to the authoritarian right-wing and anti-communist regimes of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. But, the United States’ grip on Latin American relations would come under threat following the 1950 Guatemalan presidential election.

Guatemala and the Revealing of OAS Capabilities

The Árbenz Issue

In the case of Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, it is important to deliver a detailed report considering that this would be the OAS’s first real test in attempting to establish multilateral relations and avoid hegemonic domination; therefore, the lessons of Guatemala will do well in revealing the essence of OAS international relations.

In November of 1950, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán won the Guatemalan election with a resounding 65.44 percent of the vote. During his presidency, he brought ideas of self-dependence and land reform. Árbenz set about constructing ports and roads, while planning on the expansion

³⁵ Office of the Historian, “Foreign relations of the United States, 1948, the western hemisphere, Volume IX: Document 165.” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d165>

of mines, factories, and general infrastructure.³⁶ He intended to transform Guatemala from a state with a feudal economy, into a stable capitalist society; however, his implementation of land reform policies greatly damaged US corporate interest in the area, and throughout his presidency one may observe an ever-increasing openness to ideas of communism.³⁷

This was especially concerning to United Fruit, which had major interests in Central America. United Fruit had a long and controversial history in the region; it had taken advantage of corrupt politicians and intimidated those that stood in its way in order to gain favorable concessions. Thomas McCann, a twenty-year employee of the company, explained that Guatemala was chosen as a center for company operations for two reasons: its arable banana land, and its extremely weak as well as corrupt government system, which offered an “ideal investment climate.”³⁸ The change in climate that Árbenz brought with him would be fully understood by United Fruit when it sent one of its top executives, Walter Turnbull, to go and secure positive relations with Árbenz in October of 1951. Turnbull was not met with the same cooperative attitude that he had been made used to by corrupt Central American officials; Árbenz told Turnbull that in order for United Fruit’s contract on Guatemalan land to be extended, the company had to start paying for the exhaustion of the land, improve the docks at Puerto Barrios, and reduce rail freights. United Fruit eventually had its contract extended in a settlement a few months later; however, the relationship between the company and Guatemala had drastically changed.³⁹

³⁶ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1945*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 149.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 134.

³⁸ Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, 73.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 74-75.

Eventually, Árbenz passed Decree 900 in March of 1952. The decree outlined measures of drastic land reform that would see the redistribution of vast estates of land as well as stretches of unused land. Approximately 85 percent of United Fruit's land was uncultivated, which the company argued it needed for crop rotation and soil conservation; these claims were dismissed by Árbenz. Within two years, the Guatemalan government would expropriate roughly 400,000 acres of the 550,000 acres of land owned by United Fruit. Based on tax returns filed by the company, each acre of land was valued at roughly \$3, which the company was compensated for. United Fruit claimed that the land was instead worth around \$75 per acre, however, which may have been closer to the truth given a lack of incentive to pay hefty taxes.⁴⁰ United Fruit would appeal to both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations for assistance; the hand of the US government was almost to be expected by United Fruit considering its close connections within the State Department.⁴¹ Both administrations would launch their respective covert operation to overthrow Árbenz, with both attempts revealing great lessons on the deterrence and resolve of the OAS.

Árbenz' relationship with communism was complicated. The president outlined an explicit goal of turning Guatemala into a capitalist state, yet he maintained close relations with communists, showed a growing sense of sympathy for the ideology, and implemented social policies such as land reform. The Truman administration instructed Árbenz to sever ties with communists, which he refused; this prompted the United States to deny Guatemala assistance in constructing the inter-American highway.⁴² As would be shown by the Guatemalan delegation at the next OAS conference, this action could potentially be seen as a violation of Article 16 of the

⁴⁰ Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1988), 46.

⁴¹ Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, "Big Fruit," *New York Times*, March 2, 2008. Para, 7.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/books/review/Kurtz-Phelan-t.html>

⁴² Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 48.

Charter of the OAS, forbidding the use of coercive measures of an economic character in order to obtain advantages from other sovereign states.⁴³ It was such resistance from the Guatemalan presidency that formed part of the motivation for the Truman administration to extend NSC-68 to Latin America; this meant Latin America would officially be viewed as a top priority in the foreign policy of communist containment.⁴⁴

In 1952, Truman approved Operation PBFortune, aimed at overthrowing Árbenz. First, it would seek out the support of three right-wing Latin American dictators: Anastasio Somoza Garcia of Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, and Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela. Second, it would aim at providing arms to exiled Guatemalan military officer, Carlos Castillo Armas, who was to take over from Árbenz in presidency. As will be shown, OAS policy played a role in the United States taking a covert approach to ousting Árbenz.

As historian, Brian Loveman explains, the Bogotá Conference meant that the United States found it necessary to establish such secret “exchange networks” with anti-communist authorities in order to bypass the burden of non-interventionism.⁴⁵ A declassified CIA document from March 17, 1952 details that Castillo Armas had been promised support from Somoza, who was also intending to acquire support from Trujillo. Trujillo is cited in the document as explaining that while anti-communist sympathy may not be rife in Guatemala, there should be enough of it to take advantage of and cause unrest.⁴⁶ A CIA document from November of 1952 reveals that a mysterious Guatemalan man who presented himself as a representative of Somoza had approached US government officials in late 1952, and inquired on what US action would be

⁴³ “Charter of the Organization of American States.” 5.

⁴⁴ Richard. H Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign policy of intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 11.

⁴⁵ Brian Loveman, *No higher law: American foreign policy and the Western hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2010), 277.

⁴⁶ CIA historical records program, *Guatemalan situation*, 17 March 1952.

taken against Árbenz.⁴⁷ Somoza would later visit the US himself, however, and be informed that there was no interest in sponsoring a covert operation-yet. Cooperation with right-wing governments was essential for the well-being of US foreign policy in Latin America. This indicates that the OAS functioned as a legitimate vehicle for inter-American affairs, and forced the United States to alter its policies. In fact, it would even go on to curtail US operations.

Operations for PBFortune were well underway in mid-1952; the United Fruit Company itself had lent a freighter to the CIA, which was set to sail off to Nicaragua in October of that year.⁴⁸ The freighter had been officially reported to be carrying agricultural equipment, but was in fact loaded with weapons⁴⁹; these were intended for the use of Castillo Armas' men. However, things would turn sour very soon for Truman and PBFortune. As historian, Nick Cullather argues that US public image and the bonds of inter-American agreements such as those of the OAS meant that Truman was forced to call off Operation PBFortune.

Cullather first outlines the problematic lack of secrecy that was maintained among operatives involved in PBFortune. The CIA would come to regret asking Somoza for assistance in its operations. Somoza was a chatty man who did not care much for the secrecy of the information; his son casually inquired on the whereabouts of the "machinery", while the State Department would come to learn that word of the operation had spread around top officials in Central American governments⁵⁰-their cover was blown.

It was US Secretary of State Dean Acheson who would push for Operation PBSuccess to be aborted after it had become clear that US involvement may become exposed. As Cullather

⁴⁷ CIA historical records program, *Guatemalan situation*, 13 November 1952.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 31.

⁴⁹ Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 230.

⁵⁰ Cullather, *Secret History*, 30.

notes, OAS stipulation was absolutely paramount in Acheson's motivation. First, Acheson placed great importance on maintaining the 'Good Neighbor Policy' image that Roosevelt had partly established. His second concern, however, was the damage an exposed covert operation may do to US global policies in respect to previous agreements-a direct reference to the 1947 Rio Treaty and the judicial organs of the OAS. It was, in fact, with US support that the United Nations (UN) would opt to hand over jurisdiction to the OAS for disputes within the Americas.⁵¹ As the Rio Treaty had stated, an unjustified attack against one American state would be viewed as an attack against all American states; while a Pan-American military operation against the United States was out of the question, the OAS could be used as a tool of condemnation against the United States, which would greatly tarnish its global credibility. The Rio Treaty was being taken so seriously by US officials, that by 1951 strong considerations were made to draft a proposal for the consultative meeting of foreign ministers of the Americas in order to garner information on internationalist communist activity which would allow the United States to invoke the Rio pact and invade Guatemala.⁵²

This clearly shows that US foreign policy had to be forged around the constructs of international organizations such as the OAS in order to remain on good global footing; international treaties such as the Rio Treaty, while not exercising hard power on states, still had a major effect in deterrence. The OAS showed early promise in creating a more multilateral inter-American framework, and potentially placing the importance of democracy ahead of the attack on communism.

Ultimately the risk proved too much for Acheson and the State Department, and so PBFortune was terminated. As Cullather states, the risk of being exposed and humiliated by the

⁵¹ Ibid, 31.

⁵² Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, 13

global stage was simply not worth it for Truman.⁵³ Yet, Joseph Caldwell King, CIA chief of the western hemisphere, espoused for financial support to keep flowing toward Armas; Armas would continue receiving a weekly allowance of \$3000 in order to keep part of his military force running.⁵⁴ The operation clearly still had some degree of interest from the United States, and this interest would soon be reinvigorated with a change in Secretary of State and presidency.

Eisenhower has a plan

Despite Truman not running during the 1952 US presidential election, Eisenhower used Truman's shortcomings in foreign policy as a vital part of his campaign. Eisenhower conveyed to the American people that US foreign policy was in a terrible state and that Truman had been "soft on communism."⁵⁵ He would cruise to a comfortable victory in the election and appoint John Foster Dulles as his secretary of state. Dulles held notably anti-communist beliefs and placed heavy emphasis on Latin America. He found it especially important to not only rid the Americas of the red threat but to convince its inhabitants that internationalist communism was a legitimate danger.⁵⁶ For Dulles, this was where the OAS was to play a vital role.

The OAS was intended to be used as a jumping-off platform for PBSuccess, the Eisenhower administration's attempt at overthrowing Árbenz. PBSuccess would follow a similar playbook as PBFortune, with Castillo Armas set to invade Guatemala from bases in Honduras and El Salvador.⁵⁷ Dulles envisioned the tenth inter-American conference which was to be held in March 1954 at Caracas as a prime opportunity to garner anti-communist support, and partly

⁵³ Cullather, *Secret History*, 31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 32-33.

⁵⁵ Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

⁵⁷ Cullather, *Secret History*, 74-76.

legitimize the overthrow of Árbenz.⁵⁸ In fact, Castillo Armas wanted the earliest days of the coup to come right after the Caracas conference had concluded, and when anti-communist sympathy would be highest amongst American states.⁵⁹ This shows that while international conferences may not always produce hard binding laws, they hold great potential in forging national outlooks.

The United States had called on the conference in the guise of it being meant mostly for economic matters, but CIA documents from September of 1953 reveal that the main objective of the conference was to present evidence of ‘communist domination of the Guatemalan government’ in order to convince the Americas of the red threat.⁶⁰ Leading up to the conference, the Department of State was heading a campaign aimed at convincing other Latin American states of the threat posed to their security by Guatemala.⁶¹ The State Department and CIA did in fact keep extremely close ties with its neighbors in order to ensure that Caracas would not fail. One month before the conference, Zuleta Angel, Colombia’s ambassador to the United States, approached CIA operatives and informed them that a Colombian representative in Guatemala had reason to believe that the Guatemalans had information they would use to humiliate the United States at Caracas.⁶² For the United States, however, close inter-American ties proved futile at avoiding this feared humiliation.

The conference was first preceded by controversy due to the choice of location. Venezuela was still under the right-wing dictatorship of Perez Jimenez, who had imprisoned numerous political dissidents. While many states voiced their disapproval at this, in the end, it

⁵⁸ Loveman, *No higher law*, 280.

⁵⁹ CIA historical records program, *Guatemala situation*, 5 February 1954.

⁶⁰ CIA historical records program, *Guatemala situation*, 1 September 1953.

⁶¹ Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 49.

⁶² CIA historical records program, *Guatemala situation*, 10 February 1954.

was only Costa Rica that refused to send a delegation.⁶³ Things would soon get worse for the United States, as the Guatemalan delegation handed out a 98-page document titled “Democracy threatened-the case of Guatemala,” which outlined foreign intervention in Guatemala’s politics.⁶⁴ Guillermo Toriello, Guatemala’s minister of foreign relations, received great applause from other Latin American states when he denounced US intervention in his country, and Central America in general.⁶⁵ The United States, however, was able to use economic leverage to make sure that it would reach a favorable outcome.

Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., US ambassador to the UN, had informed the State Department one month before Caracas that the conference was headed for disaster and economic strength had to be flexed in order to gain support from the Americas. This led to the restoration of the export-import bank as a major loaner to Latin America. The bank’s budget had been severely cut half a year prior, and Dulles waited until Caracas to announce its reinvigoration. The crown jewel of this announcement was a 12 million dollar loan for the Cuban Electric Company.⁶⁶

This meant that despite the humiliation the United States had received, it eventually managed to pass a watered-down version of the anti-communist resolution that it had brought to the table. Attending states were not willing to denounce communism completely as Dulles had hoped, but in the end, he secured approval of Resolution XCIII, which stated that American states intend to preserve the continent’s political integrity against international communism.⁶⁷ The important aspect here is that international communism essentially means involvement from

⁶³ Loveman, *No higher law*, 280.

⁶⁴ CIA historical records program, *Guatemala situation*, 10 March 1954.

⁶⁵ Max Paul Friedman, “Fracas in the Caracas: Latin American diplomatic resistance to United States intervention in Guatemala in 1954,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21, no. 4 (2010): 674.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2010.529352>

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 675.

⁶⁷ John C. Dreier, *The Organization of American States and the hemisphere crisis*. (New York City: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 53.

outside powers. Eisenhower would have to find a reason to invoke the Rio Treaty in order to justify action against Guatemala.

To the joy of Dulles, the Rio Treaty and Caracas resolution would soon become relevant. After the conference, it was found that a shipload of Soviet arms arrived in a Guatemalan port. This caused the OAS to plan a consultation of ministers of foreign affairs under article 6 of the Rio Treaty, set to take place in July of 1954.⁶⁸ However, Armas' invasion was already underway, and with covert US support, the overthrow of Árbenz was complete some two weeks prior to the conference. The Latin American press reacted extremely negatively to US involvement in the coup,⁶⁹ while OAS records only show the organization detailing that the Rio Treaty conference was no longer necessary.⁷⁰

The Guatemalan coup had revealed the core aspects of the OAS: It possessed powers of deterrence, as shown by its significant role in ending PBFortune. It was valued as a great battlefield of international relations, as shown by CIA preparation for Caracas, the reopening of the export-import bank, and Guatemala's humiliation of the United States. Most disappointingly, it was also revealed that its efforts of creating multilateral relations could easily be foiled by the power of the United States, and that international law would be trampled by larger powers since it did not qualify as hard law. There were many more challenges on the road ahead for the OAS.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁶⁹ Cullather, *Secret History*, 112.

⁷⁰ OAS official records, *The Organization of American States: 1954-1959*, 16.

Complicated American friends and the reality of international law:

Calderonistas and Costa Rica

During the early months of 1948, the United States played a vital role in securing victory for José Figueres in the Costa Rican Civil War. US support came as little surprise considering that Figueres had been exiled in 1942 for criticizing president Calderón's connections with the Costa Rican Communist Party, and even after he was allowed back, he continued to criticize Calderón's successor, Picaldo.⁷¹ It was Picaldo's attempt at rigging the election that motivated Figueres to start the war. After Figueres' victory, a junta would rule the country for 18 months before handing over power to Otilio Ulate Blanco, who had been cheated out of the election. Figueres would comfortably win the 1953 general election and return to power, maintaining relatively pleasant relations with the United States, partly helped by the fact that Costa Rica was quickly becoming one of the few functioning democracies in Latin America.⁷² As will be shown, however, Figueres often gave Dulles reason to be confused over what policy to pursue with Costa Rica.

On the international scene, Figueres was generally respected as a man of democracy; he gave women the right to vote in 1949, and during his first official term he would significantly improve housing, healthcare, and education.⁷³ Yet, his outspoken criticism against right-wing Latin American dictatorships that functioned as US bastions against communism meant that he

⁷¹ Kyle Longley, "Resistance and Accommodation: The United States and the Nationalism of José Figueres, 1953-1957," *Diplomatic History* 18, no.1 (January 1994): 4. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1994.tb00192.x>

⁷² Charles D. Ameringer, *Don Pepe: A political biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 117.

⁷³ Laura Ymayo Tartakoff, "José Figueres: Latin lucidity in Central America," *Soc* 44, (September 2007): 145. <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/article/10.1007/s12115-007-9017-9#citeas>

would find himself in an awkward position with the United States.⁷⁴ As may be recalled, it was only Costa Rica that chose to boycott the Caracas conference due to it being held in the territory of Venezuelan dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Figueres also possessed some socialist tendencies and made clear that he would not bend his back to U.S. corporatism; he nationalized the banking system and pursued a policy with United Fruit that would see them lose considerable control in his country. Eventually, after much back-and-forth deliberation, United Fruit agreed to increase its taxes within Costa Rica from 15% to 30%.⁷⁵ All this meant that the United States was faced with a major dilemma when one of its right-wing dictator allies came head to head with Figueres in late 1955.

In April of 1954, Anastasio Somoza García, dictator of Nicaragua, survived an assassination attempt carried out by Nicaraguan exiles. Somoza would go on to personally torture the assassins that had not already been killed by his agents. Eventually, he concluded Figueres was behind the operation.⁷⁶ Figueres denied these accusations, yet even State Department documents show that there was considerable proof that initial plans for the assassination originated within the Costa Rican government. The Nicaraguan foreign minister was so confident of Figueres' involvement that he even privately told a State Department official that they had requested an OAS investigation into the subject, but expected nothing of it due to Costa Rica's probable rejection of the investigating committee.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid, 146

⁷⁵ "Banana strike ending," *New York Times*, October 9, 1955.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1955/10/09/archives/banana-strike-ending.html>

⁷⁶ Longley, "Resistance and accommodation," 18.

⁷⁷ Office of the Historian, "Foreign relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics: Volume IV: The ambassador in Nicaragua (Whelan) to the Department of State, Washington, May 17, 1954."
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d606>

Anticipating conflict but not wanting to rid oneself of a useful ally, Eisenhower opted on not taking action unless completely required. Considering that there was significant talk of the United States' alleged involvement in Guatemala, the State Department was extremely wary of the US public image in the international sphere.⁷⁸ At first, it seemed as if this cautious policy would work. In late 1954, however, it started to become clear that Somoza was preparing for war. This war would not only call upon the OAS, but also reveal the potential power of its international law.

It became clear to the State Department in November of 1954 that Somoza was planning on launching a covert operation that would infiltrate the Costa Rican government, assassinate top officials, and support rebels. Such actions would violate the non-intervention policies of the Rio Treaty, allowing for partial US intervention under the guise of the treaty. In order to partially counter the lopsided air superiority that Somoza would possess, the Defense Department sent six interceptors to Costa Rica for standby. This action was also done under the Rio Treaty, essentially recognizing a potential attack on Costa Rica as an attack on the United States. State Department documents reveal that the United States placed great emphasis on the use of the OAS as a multilateral tool in solving the conflict, while Figueres made clear that if an attack occurred, he would declare war so that the OAS would have to get involved.⁷⁹

CIA documents near the end of 1954 show that the Eisenhower administration was well aware of Nicaraguan air superiority posing a major threat even with the provided interceptor

⁷⁸ Office of the Historian, "Foreign relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics: Volume IV: The Secretary of State to the embassy in Nicaragua, Washington, January 20, 1955." <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d607>

⁷⁹ Office of the Historian, "Foreign relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics: Volume IV: The ambassador in Nicaragua (Whelan) to the Department of State, Washington, May 17, 1954."

support.⁸⁰ The attack commenced on 11 January 1955 when five hundred troops made their way into northern Costa Rica. Rebel planes began bombing Costa Rican targets, and anti-Figueroes radio propaganda was broadcasted.⁸¹ Figueres immediately appealed to the OAS for intervention; in response, the OAS formed an investigative committee consisting of representatives from the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Paraguay.⁸²

As the State Department and CIA had predicted, air inferiority was a major issue for Figueres, which is why the OAS investigative committee served as the turning point of the war. The investigation revealed that the rebel planes were operating from Nicaraguan air bases. Previously, the United States had declared that it would not get extensively involved in military affairs within the conflict unless the OAS gave its approval; this was to protect its public image. The major discovery from the committee gave reason for such approval from the OAS. Figueres sent in a request to the OAS for the United States to be allowed to sell them P-51 Mustang fighter planes, a possibility that had been discussed with the United States long before. The request was approved, and four Mustangs were hurried off to Costa Rica. The tide of the war immediately turned in Figueres' favor.⁸³

The United States' reliance on OAS approval acts as a sure sign that the international organization had made US-Latin American relations a more multilateral scene by this time, and that the OAS' stance had the capability to act as hard law and strongly impact the decision making of any state within its council. Before the end of the conflict, the OAS would flex its legal muscles once more.

⁸⁰ CIA historical records program, *Current intelligence bulletin*, 5 September 1954.
<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CURRENT%20INTELLIGENCE%20BULL%5B15706731%5D.pdf>

⁸¹ Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 122.

⁸² OAS official records, *The Organization of American States: 1954-1959*, 27.

⁸³ Dreier, *The Organization of American States and the hemisphere crisis*, 64.

After the insurgency had been quashed, Somoza made one last attempt at invasion and rushed his forces to the border under the guise of preparing for a Costa Rican counterattack. The OAS investigating committee created a six-mile neutral zone straddling the border, and forbade both sides from entering; Somoza and Figueres abided.⁸⁴ The OAS also facilitated the normalization of affairs between the countries; representatives from both states signed an agreement at a meeting of the Pan American Union on January 9, 1956. The agreement approved the findings of the investigating committee. Afterward, a pact of Amity was signed as well, which prompted the investigating committee's mission to be declared complete.⁸⁵ The OAS had not only displayed its ability in facilitating a more multilateral inter-political scene, but also proved itself to be a respected and legitimate international broker in disputes.

A turning tide

Somoza's assassination on 21 September 1956 signalled a new era in inter-American affairs for the United States. Its wall of right wing-dictatorships that blockaded communism in Central America would start to wane. For the United States, Somoza's overthrow was the least problematic out of those that would come, since his son simply succeeded him. This was not to be the case for Castillo Armas, Guatemala's president who had been installed by the United States themselves through the covert operation; his assassination in 1957 would see the country thrown into a general state of disarray.⁸⁶ Venezuela's Marcos Pérez Jiménez would at least get to live. He was overthrown in a military-led coup in January of 1958 which prompted him to leave

⁸⁴ Office of the Historian, "Foreign relations of the United States, 1955-1957, The American Republics: Central and South America, Volume VII: Memorandum of a conversation, Department of State, Washington, January 20, 1955." <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v07/d92>

⁸⁵ OAS official records, *The Organization of American States: 1954-1959*, 27.

⁸⁶ Cullather, *Secret History*, 103.

the country, with power eventually returning to Rómulo Ernesto Betancourt, former president of Venezuela and stark enemy of Jiménez. It is important to note that since these were authoritarian leaders who were not democratically elected; their time in power did not reflect the general Latin people's perspectives of the USA. As Vice-President Richard Nixon's goodwill mission to Latin America in 1958 would reveal, the on-ground opinions of the United States were also not in a great state.

During Nixon's mission to Argentina, he met with a group of students and faculty at the National University of Buenos Aires for a question-and-answer session. During the session, he did his utmost to assure the students that the United States stood firmly against dictatorships, and held a strong anti-interventionist policy. While the session seemed to have run smoothly, Nixon was met with an entourage of whistles and boos by students outside the building, with many shouting "Go home Nixon, Argentina is not for sale!"⁸⁷ In Peru, angry sentiment over the United States holding down coffee prices and taking over the cotton market led to Nixon being pelted with tomatoes.⁸⁸ He then made his way to the closest university and interrupted in-session classes to take questions; this was done out of desperation to salvage whatever reputation he could for the United States. Considering that he left campus with another student's saliva on his face, it is fair to say the tactic had not gone to plan.⁸⁹ If there was one thing the disastrous tour had revealed, it was that more multilateral relations were necessary with the Americas in order to create good relations; one organization stood as a vehicle for this task.

⁸⁷ Marvin R. Zahniser and W. Michael Weis, "A diplomatic Pearl Harbor? Richard Nixon's goodwill mission to Latin America in 1958." *Diplomatic History* 13, no.2 (Spring 1989): 173. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1989.tb00050.x>

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 175-176.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 177.

Since the Calderonista incident, the OAS had gained recognition on the American scene and been relatively busy. A border incursion incident involving Nicaragua and Honduras led to the appointment of another OAS investigating committee. The committee's findings and recommendations led to the withdrawal of troops and the resumption of diplomacy between the two states that had been at each other's throats for quite some time.⁹⁰ The importance placed on the OAS would be even more emphasized when relations between Betancourt and Trujillo came to boiling point in 1960. Trujillo had been losing support drastically in the past few years, with the United States effectively abandoning him as well. This caused him to go paranoid and support numerous covert attempts of overthrowing Venezuelan president Betancourt, who had replaced his dictator friend Perez. Such actions prompted Betancourt to request the OAS for an investigation, which was enough for Trujillo to directly order his agents to plant a bomb in Betancourt's car. Betancourt would survive, and Trujillo's international reputation was tarnished.⁹¹ The success of the OAS investigating committees in Honduras and Nicaragua, as well as the angst that the request for such a committee caused Trujillo shows that Latin America widely valued the international law and deliberation of the OAS at the time. US Secretary of State, Christian Herter, even requested for the OAS to take control of Dominican governance, and establish alternative political parties for a transition to democracy. This plea was not met and in the end, only an arms embargo was imposed.⁹² Yet, the fact that Herter even publicly proposed such a bold maneuver shows that the United States was beginning to understand that

⁹⁰ OAS official records, *The Organization of American States: 1954-1959*, 18

⁹¹ Stephen G. Rabe, "The Caribbean Triangle: Betancourt, Castro, and U.S. foreign policy, 1958-1963." *Diplomatic History* 20, no.1 (Winter 1996), 67. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1996.tb00252.x>

⁹² *Ibid*, 67-68.

sincere interaction on a multilateral stage, alongside economic cooperation, was what could potentially win back the hearts of Latin Americans.

United States, OAS and the Castro issue:

Trouble brewing in Cuba

Throughout his presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy would constantly berate the Latin American policies adopted by Eisenhower and Dulles.⁹³ Many would argue that Kennedy's criticisms were genuinely well warranted, especially when looking at the situation off the Florida coast. The Cuban Revolution lasted for six grueling years until Castro finally seized power and overthrew the US-backed Fulgencio Batista in early 1959.

Initially, the United States seemed open to diplomacy with Castro; however, his nationalization of US assets infuriated Eisenhower. The establishment of a strong one-party state through the execution, jailing, and expulsion of political opponents also gave the United States even more justification to start placing embargos on Cuba in 1959, which would only increase until a prohibition on all exports to Cuba was finally reached.⁹⁴ While heavily criticizing Eisenhower's support of Batista, who greatly corrupted Cuban politics during his time in power, Kennedy still only saw Castro as a rather unfortunate byproduct of the tyranny caused by Batista.⁹⁵

By the time Kennedy assumed the presidency in January of 1961, CIA operations aimed at overthrowing Castro were well underway. Cuba had greatly increased its trade with the USSR

⁹³ Remarks from Senator John F. Kennedy at Democratic Dinner, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 6, 1960. Para 20. Retrieved from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

⁹⁴ Chris Arsenault, "US aid ship in Cuba: Ending the embargo?" *Al Jazeera*, 16 July 2012. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2012/7/16/us-aid-ship-in-cuba-ending-the-embargo>

⁹⁵ Remarks from Senator John F. Kennedy at Democratic Dinner, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 6, 1960. Para 4. Retrieved from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

since US embargoes had been placed on them, and so Kennedy had no issue with continuing to oppose Castro and approving the covert operation that would come to be known as ‘The Bay of Pigs.’⁹⁶ However, Kennedy and his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, would first attempt to win back Latin America through the greatest instrument that the United States possessed: economic leverage. The Caracas conference had shown the promise of economic support in garnering allies; and perhaps even, the lackluster OAS response to alleged US intervention showed that action through such international avenues could soften up one’s neighbors.

Kennedy announced his plans for ‘The Alliance for Progress’ in January of 1961. The program was aimed at strengthening economic ties between the United States and Latin America through ambitious long-term programs that would attempt to better social development.⁹⁷ The plan would only be approved later in the year, but the impression had already been made amongst Latin Americans. Furthermore, at the OAS Sixth meeting of Consultation, held in August of 1960, the United States complied when asked to impose sanctions on the Dominican Republic because of Trujillo’s deplorable actions.⁹⁸ This is another example of the OAS enforcing hard action on a state instead of the soft action that international organizations are mostly associated with. Such favors from Kennedy may be taken as direct attempts at winning over Latin American political approval through international organizations such as the OAS. Yet, the disaster that was the Bay of Pigs invasion would deal a massive blow to the United States’ public relations.

The operation was, of course, a humiliating failure that was made only worse by news of the United States’ involvement in the operation becoming widespread. Kennedy had smeared

⁹⁶ Bevan Sewell and Nataliya Petrova, *The US and Latin America: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Economic Diplomacy in the Cold War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 112.

⁹⁷ L.V. Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy, and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 22.

⁹⁸ Gordon, “The Future of the Organization of American States.” 116.

himself with the same sort of immorality that he had accused Eisenhower during his presidential campaign: a lack of respect for non-interventionism. Numerous countries in Latin America condemned US involvement, and the United States had its international reputation greatly damaged once more.⁹⁹ To Kennedy it became clear that the lessons of PBFortune and the Calderonista invasion of Costa Rica were to be taken seriously: international backing was of utmost importance, and if not taking action is not an option, then secure as much support as possible before committing to something which may damage your country's reputation.

Punta del Este

Out of all OAS action taken in regard to Cuba, most historians and political scientists usually take notice of the Punta del Este Conference of January 1962. The suspension of Cuba from the OAS is certainly very noteworthy considering it was the first case of a state being suspended. Yet, one must expel the idea that the conference signaled a unified Americas standing up to Cuba. As will be shown, Punta del Este exposed ways in which the OAS can be both bilateral and multilateral in a variety of ways.

Dean Rusk made his way to Uruguay in January 1962 with one clear goal in mind: obtain diplomatic as well as economic sanctions against Cuba. For leverage, he utilized the Alliance for Progress, which had been approved at the same conference. With the Alliance still fresh in the memories of the delegations, Rusk argued that a socially prosperous Americas would only be possible through 'pure' economic and political dealings. Rusk reasoned that since Cuba did not abide by these 'pure' ideals, all diplomatic and economic interaction with it would have to cease. Yet, this proposal faced stern opposition from OAS members. Over the following days, he would

⁹⁹ Sewell and Petrova, *The US and Latin America*, 148.

have to wrestle in order to ensure that the major states of Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile all abstain from voting, so that they could not vote against the resolution as they had initially intended.¹⁰⁰ In the end, only Mexico went ahead with opposing the resolution. Opposition from such powerful actors meant that Rusk was forced to drop the clause of an embargo, and simply focus on diplomatic expulsion.¹⁰¹

Eventually, a resolution was passed that excluded Cuba on the grounds that it had violated the Rio treaty by allowing in the involvement of the internationalist communist conspiracy.¹⁰² The proceedings of this conference reveal an interesting dynamic on the workings of the OAS; the United States was able to secure the support of much smaller American states, which were extremely reliant on US economic interaction, and its support alone was enough to secure the resolution since each state is given a single vote no matter its population. In this regard, US economic leverage had a considerable advantage within the OAS council.

Yet, one can not ignore the manner in which the resolution was forced to drop the embargoes clause due to the effect of the opposition from major states such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. This showed that within the OAS, there was significant room for international relations to become more multilateral. Despite the conference producing a mixed bag of results for the United States, it did not deter them from consulting the OAS during one of the most frightening events in human history.

¹⁰⁰ "Punta del Este II." *The Harvard Crimson*, 7 February 1952.
<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1962/2/7/punta-del-este-ii-pdiplomats-like/>

¹⁰¹ Gordon, "The future of the American states," 118.

¹⁰² OAS official Records, *The Organization of American States: Eighth consultation of ministers of foreign affairs* (Washington D.C. January 31, 1962), 294-295.

The threat of global annihilation

The first meeting called by Kennedy following the discovery of Soviet missile sites in Cuba revealed the importance placed on the OAS by the United States foreign policy at the time. A discovery had just been made which could potentially trigger a war of cataclysmic proportions, and so Kennedy immediately called on a meeting of his principal advisors at 11:45am, October 16, 1962.

Kennedy gave Rusk permission to start the meeting, and within a minute he had mentioned the place of the OAS in all of this. Rusk emphasized that the OAS must be ‘stimulated’ immediately so that the Americas as a whole may recognize the missile sites as a violation of the Rio treaty, which would justify US action and perhaps even an OAS inspection team that may be sent to the sites.¹⁰³

Initially, Kennedy was advised to carry out an airstrike on the missile sites and then invade Cuba. However, he was wary of waging war at this delicate time, and so opted for the option of a blockade on Cuba.¹⁰⁴ This made the OAS even more relevant since the United States would no longer be directly engaging in warfare; it would simply be interfering in the affairs of another state—a matter that would appear much more legitimate and less intrusive if it picked up approval through an international organization. When the British ambassador asked Kennedy about the legality of this blockade, he explained that it would be made legal under the Rio Treaty after a meeting of the OAS members.¹⁰⁵ These initial conversations reveal just how valued the word and international law of the OAS were to the United States. Appreciation for OAS

¹⁰³ Office of the historian, “Foreign relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Cuban Missile Crisis and aftermath, Volume XI: Transcript of a meeting at the White House, 16 October 1962.”

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/transcri.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy, and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 45.

apparatus had most probably been built throughout numerous events such as the termination of PBFortune, the investigating committee in Costa Rica, and the flexing of OAS power shown in other Latin American affairs such as border disputes.

It should be stressed, however, that a major power such as the United States would not drastically alter its action in such an event simply because of a lack of approval from an international organization. Kennedy told a senator that even if the OAS did not give them a two-thirds vote for the blockade, the United States would go ahead with it anyway. However, obtaining the two-thirds was still of utmost importance, since without it the blockade would be seen as an act of war.¹⁰⁶

The council of the OAS met in Washington D.C. on 23 October 1962 in order to discuss the suggestions put forward by the United States. Secretary Rusk accused Castro of allowing the Soviets to enslave the Cuban people and intervene in the Western Hemisphere, which violated the Rio Treaty. The resolution called for a quarantine on Cuba, while a separate resolution calling for the removal of offensive weapons was also put forth. Both resolutions would pass unanimously¹⁰⁷-a rarity in OAS relations. The United States now had its actions backed with international legality, and while Kennedy had made it clear that even without it they would have continued with the blockade, it was quite obvious that the United States was on standby for OAS approval. Kennedy wasted no time after news of the resolution's approval reached him; he sent a letter to Khrushchev that same day, informing him that a quarantine would be placed on Cuba at

¹⁰⁶ Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), p. 178.

¹⁰⁷ Meetings with staff and congressional leadership on the Cuban Missile Crisis, October 24, 1962. Retrieved from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

2pm Greenwich time, 24th October.¹⁰⁸ Khrushchev and Kennedy would exchange letters regularly between then and the end of the crisis, when an agreement was finally reached.

Considering the aggressive actions that were seriously considered by Kennedy and his advisors during their first meeting after the missile sites had been found, it was clear that the Kennedy administration was in a massive hurry to take action. Lightning-quick OAS approval for the blockade around Cuba meant that the United States could quickly commit to a much more sound policy. Again, it should be made clear that the OAS did not determine the US course of action, but it did legalize it as well as speed up the process. Considering the crisis took place over the course of a couple weeks, the speed of the council's approval was undeniably important in securing a US course of action.

Conclusion:

The OAS has often been written off as always having been a place where states have always come to share their views and then leave; it is, according to many, not a place where policy and hard laws are created. The cases of the Guatemalan coup, the Calderonista invasion of Costa Rica, and the buildup to the Cuban missile crisis all show that this was not the case. What is important to keep in mind with international organizations is that a significant part of their effect, deterrence, cannot be seen on the surface level of international relations.

PBFortune was terminated with great consideration for how the OAS may react; however, the termination of the operation is not something that would have reached the newspapers, or made itself heard in any way. It is only the operations and conflicts that do go ahead that we see and are able to observe; states very rarely go to war when they fear that the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

international community's response may significantly harm their international standing.

Therefore, it is mostly the conflicts and operations that escape international organizations' reach that we see go ahead. Because of this, when we critique organizations such as the OAS, it is not just important to ask what happened, but also what could have happened.

It is through looking at the organization in this way that we arrive at the conclusion that the OAS did in fact succeed in establishing more multilateral relations in the inter-American scene. The United States patiently waiting for OAS approval to send assistance to Figueres is a scenario that does not fit with what one is used to in terms of US military action. The obvious response to this would be to bring up the considerable economic leverage that the United States exercised on the Americas to win over favors. It is firstly important to note that it would have been extremely unrealistic for the OAS to achieve an inter-American system with no hint of US hegemony. However, one must also not forget that the OAS often managed to utilize this economic powerplay from the United States in order to achieve a more stable Americas; an example of this would be when the OAS requested and received US sanctions on Trujillo in 1960, during a time when the United States was clamoring for a better reputation on the inter-American scene.

The OAS provided the United States with both a potential tool and potential hazard when it came to obtaining this positive reputation amongst Latin-American states, and even the global polity: The Caracas conference, while producing favorable resolutions for the United States, provided a platform where Guatemala was able to embarrass the US delegation. On the other hand, the OAS served as an extremely useful tool for Kennedy in his attempt to certify that the Cuban blockade would not be taken as an act of war and tarnish the image of the US internationally.

When taking all this into consideration, it is difficult to place the OAS into a definitive spot in relation to the United States' war against socialism. Longstanding US economic hegemony in the Americas meant that as long as American states reciprocated economic favors with diplomatic assistance, the OAS could serve as a potential fan belt for turning out international law condemning communism in the region. As shown by both the Caracas and Punta del Este resolutions getting watered down yet still passing after some economic handouts, this was a tactic that neither completely succeeded nor failed for the United States.

In the end, the OAS is not an organization one can place on either end of the spectrum when it comes to ideology or capability; it was not a complete US tool, nor a multilateral haven, and while it definitely exercised deterrence and some occasional hard law, its capabilities were not enough to dictate international politics in the Americas. The one sharply outlined answer that may be derived out of all of the considerations taken from the events discussed in the paper, is that the OAS was treated as a legitimate actor, and sometimes even a battlefield of international relations by its members during the 1950s and early 1960s. This was a treatment that the OAS had earned itself throughout its early years and challenges; One does not garner the label 'whorehouse of imperialism' by a figure such as Castro without wielding a degree of power.

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