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Review by **Jorge Rivera Marín**, Cornell University

In July 2009 the State Department released the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume covering U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, 1969-1972. It is important to note that this electronic series does *not* cover U.S. relations with Chile, and the Uruguay entry is still pending. Relations with the government of Chilean President Salvador Allende are to be published in a separate volume. This was an understandable decision by the editors, since popular and academic interest in the September 1973 coup against Allende is considerable. One wonders, however, whether this omission is necessary with the shift to online publication of *FRUS*. Nonetheless, this volume offers a substantial collection of documents, as the Cuba and Mexico entries alone could also justify separate publication.

The administration of President Richard M. Nixon inherited what his top advisors felt was a conceptual incoherence in Latin America policy. There was, in eyes of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, a long-running failure to produce a consistent set of goals to guide policy towards the region, one that was exacerbated by the failure of President John F. Kennedy's economic development program in Latin America, the Alliance for Progress (Document 3, 4-5). Perceived lack of high-level attention to the region, in turn, led to complaints by Latin American governments that their concerns were ignored by Washington. The documentation presented in this volume reinforces this view, as Latin America remained a side show for the President and the National Security Council (NSC). Kissinger even complained in 1971 that "the NSC has not looked at Latin America policy in two years," and that this was increasingly a problem because, among other things, "we have a new government in Chile which provides an alternate model to other Latin American countries and which is increasingly hostile and potentially dangerous to us" (Document 48, 9-10).

The volume also reveals how new challenges posed by Allende's government and increasingly nationalistic military regimes were compounded by older problems. Fidel Castro's Cuba looms especially large, and in this regard the documentation is quite fascinating because it sheds light on the nexus between arms policy, military regimes, and Cold War strategy. In 1968 Congress passed the Conte-Long Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which essentially required the government to deduct foreign aid when a country received grant military aid (Document 9, 2, Document 60, 1-3). This was a major obstacle to the administration's efforts to promote its long-standing policy to standardize Latin American militaries with American-made equipment. Standardization of military equipment meant proliferating American-made arms and vehicles in order to facilitate technical support for allies, with the added benefit of creating a dependence on American manufacturers for resupply. Congressional pressure, however, made it very difficult to furnish grant military aid under Military Assistance Program auspices. It was, as one report put it, a source of "extreme irritation" that opened up Latin American arms markets to European arms suppliers (Document 52, 6).

This development, in fact, was a holdover from the 1950s and the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The unpopularity of American support for right-wing dictatorships in that decade came to a head in Cuba in 1959, when congressional, media and domestic pressure caused the Eisenhower administration to briefly reconsider its blanket support of unrepresentative anti-communist governments in Latin America.[1] In the wake of that debacle, many Cuban exiles and American officials claimed (incorrectly) that the United States could have prevented Castro's takeover by restoring grant military aid to the dictator Fulgencio Batista. But the reality was that Congress and the American public had no wish to burn tax dollars on incompetent right-wing dictators. Even the continued existence of a communist Cuba could not restart the military aid cash flow. The Cuba section is telling in this regard, because Nixon clearly carried the frustrations of the Eisenhower administration to his presidency. Nixon, hostile to even a routine review of Cuba policy at the beginning of his presidency, declared to Kissinger in no uncertain terms: "I'm not changing the policy towards Castro as long as I'm alive. That's absolute. That's final. No appeal whatever. I never want you to raise it with me again (Document 247, 1)." The historian Louis A. Pérez' contention that Cuba holds a unique, almost irrational place in the minds of American policymakers holds up very well in this volume.[2]

Although Nixon wanted to give the Cuban exile community "at least some sympathy for their plight," the fact was that grant military aid for anti-communist governments had become a bridge too far (Document 195, 1). In addition, the paramilitary threat to Cuba from exile groups was marginal by the time Nixon came to office. Increasing tensions with Allende's Chile, however, caused the administration to develop a sense of urgency and

[1] Stephen A. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 104

[2] Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 22

harden its attitude towards the restrictions placed by Congress on its ability to arm its allies in Latin America. In 1971 this led the administration to take a tougher line on a host of issues, such punitive economic responses to the expropriations of American investments in Guyana, opposition to the development of Soviet naval facilities in Cienfuegos, Cuba, and attempts to loosen up legislation that prevented anti-communist allies, such as Argentina and Brazil, from acquiring advanced jet fighters.[3] It is clear from the evidence that Allende's rise to power in Chile had a galvanizing effect on the Nixon administration's Latin America policy.

Nonetheless, it is important not to overestimate the influence of relations with Chile when trying to piece together how Nixon and Kissinger formulated their approach. While tensions with Chile certainly helped focus the administration's purpose in the southern hemisphere, it was not necessarily the prism through which American officials viewed the region. Kissinger in particular seems to have understood that Argentina and Brazil wielded enormous short and long term influence in Latin America, and building constructive relations with those two countries was a priority. As the military attaché in France put it, "if Brazil were to be lost, it would not be another Cuba. It would be another China" (Document 116, 2). The issue of arms sales is one of the few aspects of relations with Latin America that received sustained high-level attention, and the ever-present friction with Congress over the foreign aid program only grew during the Vietnam War era.

This is another reason why military aid became such a stumbling block in U.S. relations with the two largest countries in South America. If the administration stopped selling advanced weaponry to anti-communist governments, it would arguably have the greatest material impact on its most important clients. Argentina and Brazil had the money to buy, maintain and upgrade their weaponry in the long term. Failure to provide their governments with weapons they wanted would result in a loss of U.S. influence in their respective military establishments and the loss of Latin American markets to European arms manufacturers, especially France. Nixon in particular exhibited exasperation at this reality, no doubt equally squeezed by Congress on the issue because of the Vietnam War: "Senator Church and other types will come up with questions, which would throw out the baby with the bath water. Yet we must influence their leadership through close contact between our military and theirs. We should do it but not appear to be doing it (Document 14, 10)." In the case of Argentina, Nixon's desire to have an unhindered arms program was feasible because past tensions with the United States had left Buenos Aires with no USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) program for Congress to penalize.

The military and dynastic dictatorships of Central America posed a different set of problems. Some of these countries, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, held little immediate and long-term strategic value. They were, nonetheless, ostensibly anti-communist allies, and thus recipients of military aid. In this period the United States served as an arbiter of relations between those four counties, a position that brought little comfort to policymakers in Washington, who only sought constant short term

[3] See Documents 366, 226-239, 60 and 128 respectively.

management of relations with Central American countries. Guatemala's government under Carlos Osorio Arana, in particular, horrified its patron. Administration officials received evidence that President Arana was personally preparing death lists of political opponents, and Arana's head of intelligence, Major Elías Osmumco Ramírez, openly bragged that "he never interrogated a prisoner without killing him" (Documents 355, 1-4, Document 356, 1-3). Once again, however, a confrontation with Congress caused the administration to resist discontinuing military aid, and a reassessment of Washington's support for Arana's government was simply shunted aside (Document 358, 1).

On the whole, one can detect here a notable Vietnamization of Nixon's Latin America policy. The nature of Central American regimes was not a matter of concern for the President so long as those regimes bolstered America's strategic position in the hemisphere, and as Kissinger and Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (ARA) chief Charles Meyer A. Meyer pointed out, the United States did not have a working policy for promoting "liberal democracy" in the region (Document 3, 5). For example, when discussing Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza, Nixon made it clear that he cared little about representative government: "I don't want him to liberalize his regime; I hope he keeps it like it is." Secretary of Treasury John B. Connally emphatically concurred with the President, adding: "My God. I would hope so. He's the only friend we got [sic] down there" (Document 43, 1). What stands out in this volume in terms of policy is the extraordinary continuity with that of Nixon's predecessors; aside from Nixon's occasionally visceral behavior, one would be hard pressed to find substantive policy differences between Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon in their approach to Latin America.

This approach, of course, boils down to a limited commitment to economic development and a strong emphasis on providing just enough military aid to keep Latin American countries dependent on the United States for hardware and expertise. In this regard, the release of *FRUS* Volume E-10 does not present us with many surprises. Nixon and Kissinger do not appear to have been very imaginative in their deliberations of Latin America policy, and changes to this policy were purposely as cosmetic as possible. The exception tended to be when Congress interfered in the administration's foreign aid business, an action that annoyed the President but was one of the occupational hazards of arming unpopular, undemocratic governments abroad.

There is extensive material on countries I do not have the space to cover in this review, particularly documents pertaining to relations with Mexico. Much of the more controversial material, however, is related to Central America and Cuba, where coup plots, Soviet maneuvering, and the infamous Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras strained U.S. Latin America policy. Less savory aspects of this policymaking are also on display in the Costa Rica and Panama entries. Kissinger and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) blackmailed Costa Rican President José Figueres by revealing to him evidence that he took a large sum of money from the Soviet Union (Document 180, 1-3). Equally disconcerting are documents detailing how U.S. military personnel indirectly aided a 14 December 1970 attempted coup against dictator General Omar Torrijos of Panama by keeping word of the coup from their superiors for three full days (Document 527, 4).

One of the advantages of the online *FRUS* volumes is that their format allows for convenient indexing and browsing. The documents are presented with blurbs and source notes up front, so quick browsing of the contents of each entry is possible. Also, hyperlinked indexes of persons and acronyms on each document allow the reader to quickly identify people, organizations and agencies without having to leave the document itself. On the downside, there is no way to match text with page numbers without manually searching though the PDF files of each document. While volume E-10 still only represents a small cross-section of documentation from the National Archives, the Richard Nixon Presidential Materials Project, the Department of State, the Library of Congress, and the CIA, it gives us considerable insight into a tumultuous period in U.S.-Latin America relations.

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