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**Reincarnation of the Good Neighbor:
Nixon and the Creation of Latin American Policy**

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by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2015

Dedication

To Laura for her patience, and Stephen for the type laughter only a toddler can bring

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Omar Bradley Foundation, the Graduate History Department at UT Austin, and the Clements Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft for funding portions of the research that led to this report.

Abstract

Reincarnation of the Good Neighbor: Nixon and the Creation of Latin American Policy

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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Much of the research on President Richard Nixon and his Latin American policy offers an overly simplistic portrayal of his attitudes and policies toward Latin America. This report explores the creation of President Richard Nixon's Latin American policy in the first year of his administration. After a brief overview of key events early in the administration, such as the U.S. government's response to the brief war between El Salvador and Honduras known colloquially as the "Soccer War", the body of the report will explore two discrete events. The first event was the ill-fated Operation Intercept, an attempt by the Nixon administration to stem the flow of marijuana across the Mexican border. Operation Intercept, the largest peacetime search and seizure operation in U.S. history up to that point, highlighted many of the sources of friction between U.S. government agencies. Additionally, the operation provides an example of the growing importance of the NSC in government decision making and the ability of the Nixon administration to learn from past mistakes. This incident also provides an example of the

agency of the Mexican government, the other half of the foreign policy equation. The other event this report will highlight is Nixon's one major speech on Latin America, which he gave on October 31, 1969. This speech was the culmination of almost a year's worth of events, meetings, and reports that morphed into the White House's strategic vision toward the region. This report concludes with a comparison of Nixon and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Latin American policies. Both president's approaches were remarkably similar in substance including an increased focus on hemispheric trade and close relations with unsavory dictators that advanced U.S. interests. The differences in policy outcomes were ultimately due to changing cultures in both the United States and Latin America, but also to fundamental differences in how both men approached the presidency.

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Introduction

“Understandably, perhaps, a feeling has arisen in many Latin American countries that the United States really ‘no longer cares.’ Well, my answer to that tonight is very simple. We do care. I care.”

-Richard Nixon 1969

On January 20, 1969, Richard M. Nixon recited the Oath of Office on two family bibles held open to Isaiah 2:4¹, “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore,”¹ becoming the 37th president of the United States. The symbolism was unmistakable. Nixon wanted to portray himself as a peacemaker. In his sweeping inaugural address, Nixon communicated a grand vision to “make the world safe for mankind.” However, at no point in his address did he mention any particular country or region. The Latin American² diplomatic community took note of this silence since every inaugural address since Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) contained a reference to hemispheric relations, and worried about what his silence meant.³ Roosevelt’s first inaugural address, however, failed to reference Latin America specifically. The one line on foreign policy was purposely vague dedicating “this nation to the policy of the good neighbor.” Only later in his administration did the term “good neighbor” become

¹ Full verse: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

² This master’s report uses the terms Latin America, Western Hemisphere, and Central and South America mostly interchangeably. Occasionally Western Hemisphere includes Canada and or the Caribbean Islands. Such usage will be noted in the text

³ Richard J. Walter, *Peru and the United States, 1960-1975: How Their Ambassadors Managed Foreign Relations in a Turbulent Era* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 170.

associated with hemispheric policy.⁴ The anxiety among the diplomats was that Latin American concerns would not be a priority under the new president.

The perception among many historians has been that the trajectory of U.S.-Latin American relations has been one of general decline since President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ This is not to say there were not moments of increased engagement. President John F. Kennedy launched an "Alliance for Progress" which provided aid to Latin American countries in an effort to thwart Communism. Previously, President Dwight D. Eisenhower increasingly focused on the region after the ill-fated visit of then Vice President Richard Nixon to South America in 1958. For the most part, however, U.S.-Latin American relations, outside of Cuba, took a back seat to other U.S. priorities.

When analyzing Nixon's Latin American policy, historians have generally viewed the administration as continuing the downward trend in relations.⁶ Scholars have latched onto some of Nixon's and his chief foreign policy expert, National Security Advisor (NSA) Henry Kissinger's more dismissive comments when analyzing Nixon's hemispheric policy. For instance, Kissinger, after listening to the Chilean foreign minister lecture on the United States' general abuse of power in the hemisphere, told the minister

⁴ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 497.

⁵ For example see Stephen G Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, Reprint edition (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007).

⁶ For example see Jeffrey F Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 185.; Richard J. Walter, *Peru and the United States, 1960-1975: How Their Ambassadors Managed Foreign Relations in a Turbulent Era* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 169.

over lunch, “nothing important can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South.”⁷ Nixon, while giving career advice to the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Donald Rumsfeld also offered his opinion, “people don’t give a damn about Latin America.” He then continued, “The only thing that matters is Japan, China, Russia, and Europe.”⁸ One scholar even went as far as stating, “Nixon voiced contempt about all things Latin American.”⁹ Nixon in his first year in office, however, was more concerned about Latin America than the dismissive comments suggest. In an attempt to rejuvenate the state of U.S.-Latin American relations, Nixon unconsciously modeled his policies on FDR’s Good Neighbor approach. While Nixon himself would never admit to recycling ideas from the past, since he constantly spoke about seeking “bold” and “imaginative” policies, the similarities between their two approaches are striking.

The Good Neighbor policy, broadly speaking, focused on the principals of nonintervention and trade. In practice, nonintervention meant that the United States would recognize unsavory governments, such as the regime of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, as long the government in power was somewhat amenable to supporting broader U.S. interests. When greater U.S. interests were involved, Roosevelt was very capable of dropping both “the letter and spirit of the Good Neighbor policy.”¹⁰ In terms

⁷Quoted in John D. Martz, ed., *United States Policy in Latin America: A Quarter Century of Crisis and Challenge, 1961-1986*, Latin American Studies Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 30.

⁸ Quoted in Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 118.

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

of trade, a similar calculation took place. The president would drastically reduce tariffs but only on a reciprocal basis.¹¹ One way to understand Roosevelt's U.S.-Latin American policy is as historian Frederick Pike offers through the lens of realpolitik. Pike encapsulates his thought process as the people of the United States were "no better neighbors than" they "had to be."¹²

The election of a new president, particularly one of a different party from his predecessor, can provide the mechanism for policy changes in the U.S. government. A new president can bring new ideas and people into the government bureaucracy who can incrementally, or sometimes dramatically, change the course of government policy. Nixon certainly represented a break from his predecessor Lyndon B. Johnson. Many of his most dramatic policy changes, such as Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine, took root early in his presidency as Nixon laid the foundations of his foreign policy and legacy. Nixon had the same opportunity to sow a new Latin American policy in his first year in office.

Nixon came into office with more firsthand experience in Latin America than any other U.S. president in history. His official trips as Vice President included two tours of the region, one to Central America and the Caribbean in 1955, and one to South America in 1958. In 1959, he was the highest-ranking U.S. official to meet with Fidel Castro during his tour of the United States after the Cuban Revolution. As Vice President, he

¹¹ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 500–501.

¹² Fredrick B. Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (University of Texas Press, 1995), xi–xii.

even once offered a spirited defense of the Good Neighbor policy as a better example to the world than the Soviet Unions' use of satellites.¹³ Often overlooked by historians was Nixon's first experience in Latin America. In 1940, Nixon embarked on a two-week road trip of Mexico on the newly built Pan-American Highway during his honeymoon with his new bride Pat. The experience must have been somewhat positive since both Pat and Richard Nixon returned to Mexico for their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1965. As president, Nixon would strongly lobby for the completion and expansion of the Pan American Highway, a Good Neighbor era project.

Nixon's openness to change in U.S. policy was evident from the campaign trail. During one speech, he called for a "sweeping reevaluation" of the Alliance for Progress, the largest U.S. aid program in history to Latin America. Nixon recognized the declining nature of hemispheric policy when he drew a clear contrast between himself and Johnson accusing Johnson of being unable or unwilling to "give our neighbors the priority status and effective aid which they deserve." The thrust of his overall message was that "trade instead of aid" should be the guiding principal in formulating hemispheric policy."¹⁴ Nixon's message also stood in contrast to his opponent Hubert Humphrey, who emphasized the positive aspects of the Alliance for Progress and generally advocated maintaining the status quo without substantial changes to its basic structure.¹⁵ The focus

¹³ "Nixon Denounces Soviet Satellites: Contrasts Control by Russia With U. S. Good-Neighbor Policy in the Americas," *New York Times*, November 2, 1955.

¹⁴ Robert B. Semple Jr., "Nixon Urges Help for Latin Nations: Asks Major 'Re-Evaluation' of Alliance for Progress Nixon Urges Help for Latin Nations," *New York Times*, October 15, 1968,

¹⁵ Benjamin Welles, "Humphrey and Nixon Differ on Latin-American Aim," *New York Times*, November 5, 1968,

on increased trade within the hemisphere was similar to Roosevelt's Latin American policy.

While the failure to mention hemispheric relations in his inaugural speech raised concerns among the diplomats, the administration's next step should have somewhat ameliorated their worries. The day after the inauguration, Nixon's first official meeting with a foreign dignitary was with the head of the Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General Galo Plaza. In a wide-ranging conversation, the two leaders touched on social, political, and economic issues in the region.¹⁶ During the conversation, the secretary general made an interesting recommendation. When Nixon asked what his next move for Latin America should be, Galo Plaza's statement was short and to the point "Send Nelson Rockefeller there," he stated, "his name is magic."¹⁷ Nixon agreed to Plaza's recommendation and proceeded that same day to call Rockefeller, the Governor of New York at the time, who accepted the president's request to lead a fact-finding mission to the region. It would take several months of planning and logistical coordination before Governor Rockefeller started his mission in May 1969.

Before the mission began, a particularly important meeting took place among Latin American countries purposely without the presence of the United States. The initial publication of the *Consensus of Viña del Mar*, a lengthy list outlining broad areas of hemispheric agreement, in April 1969 marked the first time that a large majority of Latin

¹⁶ Benjamin Welles, "President Talks With O.A.S. Chief: Galo Plaza Is Nixon's First Official Foreign Visitor," *New York Times*, January 22, 1969,

¹⁷ Joseph Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson Rockefeller*, 1st edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 100.

American countries met to discuss the problems of U.S.-Latin American relations without the United States present. The *Consensus of Viña del Mar* included several foundational principles such as respect for treaties, sovereignty, nonintervention, and economic improvement initiatives. Nixon personally received the document in June and took it seriously, leading to the creation of a special commission to examine the issues in the report, and influencing his forthcoming major policy speech on the Western Hemisphere.¹⁸

Another event that would bring Latin America to the forefront came in the summer of 1969. Early July marked the opening of hostilities in the so-called “Soccer War” between Honduras and El Salvador, the first open war between states in the Western Hemisphere since 1935. The proximate cause of the war was rioting caused by the defeat of Honduras by El Salvador in a World Cup qualifying match, which led Honduras to cut off diplomatic relations and expel several thousand El Salvadoran citizens living in Honduras. The true cause of the war, however, was a complicated border dispute dating to Spanish imperialism, clashes between Hondurans and El Salvadorans living in Honduras, and a weak government in El Salvador. Nixon took a personal interest in the conflict, instructing Kissinger to get Rockefeller’s advice and expressing his hope to “get a little credit” as a “peacemaker.”¹⁹ The United States would ultimately support a regional approach to peace through the OAS.

¹⁸ Gabriel Valdes S., “The Americas in a Changing World as a Response to the Consensus of Viña Del Mar,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 1975): 210–212.

¹⁹ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation(subsequently called Telcon), July 14, 1969

In 1969, the National Security Council (NSC) spent a significant amount of time studying Latin America, generating reports on specific countries such as Peru and Brazil and on broader topics such as the role of the Catholic Church in the region.²⁰ The study on Peru focused on the 1968 expropriation of International Petroleum Corporation (IPC) property, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. The first decision point for the U.S. government would not come until April of 1969, when an obscure U.S. law known as the Hickenlooper Amendment²¹ would force presidential action. The study on Brazil was different since no major crisis triggered the study. It was the country's growing economy and population, known as the "Brazilian miracle," that would later lead Nixon to pronounce, "Brazil is the key to the future."²² The broader NSC studies would focus on hemispheric trends such as the continuing importance of the Catholic Church and the military.²³

The relative importance of Latin American policy in 1969, as compared to subsequent years in the Nixon White House, is particularly evident in a study of Kissinger's telephone transcripts. Kissinger conducted much of his business on the telephone, and the subjects of his transcripts could be reasonably used as a proxy for the foreign policy emphasis of the White House. Of the 136 "Telcons" relevant to Latin America from the inauguration until Nixon's resignation, over fifty percent are from

²⁰ See NSSM 15, 42, 67.

²¹ The Hickenlooper Amendment of 1962 required the president to cut off U.S. foreign aid to countries that expropriated private U.S. property without beginning to provide compensation within six months.

²² Matias Spektor, *Kissinger e o Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2009), 9.

²³ NSSM 68.

1969.²⁴ Nixon's first year in office was the one moment in his presidency when his administration focused on Latin America and developed a strategic vision for the region.

This master's report will focus on the closing months of 1969 and the final steps in the creation of the government's strategic vision toward the region. In order to understand U.S. hemispheric policy, this report will focus on two discrete events that highlight different challenges and aspects in Washington's search for a coherent Latin American policy. The first event was the ill-fated Operation Intercept, an attempt by the Nixon administration to stem the flow of marijuana across the Mexican border. Operation Intercept, the largest peacetime search and seizure operation in U.S. history up to that point, highlighted many of the sources of friction between U.S. government agencies. Additionally, the operation provides an example of the growing importance of the NSC in government decision making and the ability of the Nixon administration to learn from past mistakes. This incident also provides an example of the agency of the Mexican government, the other half of the foreign policy equation. The other event this report will highlight is Nixon's one major speech on Latin America, which he gave on October 31, 1969. This speech was the culmination of almost a year's worth of events, meetings, and reports that morphed into the White House's strategic vision toward the region.

This report contains four chapters. Chapter one examines the planning process and initial execution of Operation Intercept from its roots in the presidential campaign

²⁴ From National Security Archive "The Kissinger Telephone Conversations: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969-1977." seventy-three conversations in 1969. Even though a higher priority in 1969, the subject of Latin America constituted only about 4% of his conversations. This is still much higher than the rest of his time as NSA. For example, in 1970 Latin America was a subject of his conversations less than 1/10 of one percent of the time, or seventeen conversations out of 2,810.

through the end of September 1969 when the operation was in full swing. The planning and initial execution of the operation was disastrous. In chapter two, the report will focus on Nixon and Kissinger's reception of the Rockefeller report and their initial reactions to the recommendation. Chapter three will then return to Operation Intercept as Mexico and the United States determined a method to stop the heavy handed enforcement and moved to a more cooperative approach. The final chapter explores the drafting and delivery of Nixon's major policy speech to the Inter-American Press club on October 31, 1969, the one point in his presidency when he publically stated a new policy toward the region.

While Nixon had an opportunity to improve U.S.-Latin American relations, he ultimately failed. After the initial efforts to focus on the region, other foreign policy priorities such as Vietnam and China overwhelmed the administration.. Domestic budgetary pressures slashed foreign aid spending and forced the establishment of trade restrictions not only for Latin America but also for other regions. Additionally, even when focused on the region, such as the state visit of Brazil's military dictator Emílio Garrastazu Médici in December of 1971, he suffered domestic and international criticism for working with military dictatorships, much more than Roosevelt ever did for working with military strongmen. For all the hard work and effort spent on creating a new Latin American policy early in the administration, the region generally reverted to its normal position in Cold War decision making—to the background.

Chapter 1-- Operation Intercept

On September 8, 1969, Nixon and the President of Mexico, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, met for the dedication of the jointly built *Amistad* (friendship) dam, located along the U.S. Mexican border on the Rio Grande and then proceeded to meet on Mexico's side of the border for a bilateral meeting. This event marked the first of Nixon's two trips to Mexico, the only Latin American country he would visit as president. The wives of both men and thousands of observers braved the hundred-degree heat to mark the opening of the dam. Both leaders gave optimistic and enthusiastic speeches during the dedication ceremony. Nixon hoped for a "furtherance of an ideal friendship" and continuation of the "special relationship" that bound the two countries together, while Díaz Ordaz stated that whatever problems existed "will not become a barrier between us." Both presidents also commented that they were glad that their predecessors had agreed to change the name of the dam to *Amistad* away from the original name *Diablo* (Devil).²⁵

Just a few weeks later when Operation Intercept began on September 21, 1969, both sides would quickly forget their kind words as the border between the two countries became an unofficial battleground in the undeclared "War on Drugs."²⁶ Operation Intercept, the largest peacetime search and seizure operation in U.S. history, called for

²⁵Robert B. Semple Jr., "Big Dam Dedicated By Nixon and Diaz On Mexican Border: A Day in the Life of the President: Some Solemnity, Some Exhilaration Big Dam Dedicated by Nixon and Diaz," *New York Times*, September 9, 1969 and Carroll Kilpatrick, "Border Dam Dedicated by 2 Presidents: Friendship Border Dam Dedicated To Further Friendship Best in History Now," *The Washington Post*, September 9, 1969.

²⁶ Nixon would not use the term "War on Drugs" until 1971 contemporary newspaper accounts were using the military language see "Nixon Seeks French Aid in War on Drugs," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1969..

obtrusive searches on the border and wreaked havoc on border communities until its conclusion on October 10, 1969. The result of the operation, however, highlighted strengths in Mexican diplomacy and initiated soul searching within the administration that would lead to a temporary improvement in relations with Mexico.

While President Nixon saw marijuana use in the United States as a large problem, President Díaz Ordaz did not agree. Domestic marijuana use was likely insignificant in Mexico since smugglers grew the vast majority of marijuana for export. The larger problem for Mexico was the abuse of inhalants.²⁷ In the meeting after the dam dedication, Díaz Ordaz requested additional aid for drug eradication efforts in the form of helicopters and light planes and informed the attendees there had been an interruption in aid from the United States on the narcotics front. Mexico's president, however, ended on a positive note stating "he would be happy to help [the U.S.] in any way that he could."²⁸ He emphasized Mexico's willingness to cooperate, following the suggestion of his foreign ministry, which, sensing the sensitivity of the drug issue, directly advised the president "not let the United States leave with the impression that Mexico has not done everything that she could do."²⁹ At no point in the conversation did Nixon mention or hint about the

²⁷ María Celia Toro, *Mexico's "War" on Drugs: Causes and Consequences* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

²⁸ Memoranda of Meetings, El Mirador, Mexico (Amistad Dam), September 8, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics* (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d436>, last accessed on 7 April 2014.

²⁹ Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada. Acervo Histórico Diplomático. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (AHGE) SPR-634-1 Entrevista Del Presidente Gustavo Diaz Ordaz Con El Presidente Richard M. Nixon, Celebrada En La Presa De La Amistad. 1969.

upcoming Operation Intercept, leaving Díaz Ordaz unaware of the upcoming increase in border security.

Nixon's emphasis on narcotics and stopping the drug trade began during his campaign for office. On September 16, 1968, coincidentally the same day he appeared on the television show *Laugh In*, candidate Richard Nixon spoke to a capacity crowd in Anaheim, California. While the broad theme of the rally centered on "law and order," Nixon stressed the growing threat of narcotics. Among his ideas, Nixon advocated for a "multinational commission" to stem the tide of drugs. He also stated he would triple the number of border agents as recommended by a commission chartered by the Johnson administration. Finally, he would "accelerate the development of tools and weapons to detect narcotics in transit."³⁰ While he also mentioned unspecified help to current addicts, his speech centered on interdiction and restricting supply.

In April 1969, Nixon instructed his attorney general, John Mitchell, and Treasury Secretary, David Kennedy, to assemble a task force to study the issue of drugs and narcotics. Their report, released two months later on June 6, reflected a consensus with seven different government departments contributing to the report. Unusually for a matter involving foreign policy, the State Department participated only in "an advisory capacity" and did not contribute substantively to the final product. However, the report

³⁰ Bergholz, Richard. "Nixon Will Not Curb Issue of Law and Order." *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 17, 1968.

claimed that the State Department was fully on board with “whole hearted support,” according to the contribution made by Undersecretary of State Elliot Richardson.³¹

The core of the Task Force’s recommendations focused on unilateral U.S. actions on the border with Mexico. While several of the recommendations were somewhat trivial, such as building parking lots on the U.S. side of the border to allow pedestrians to cross into Mexico on foot, the report also advised larger efforts. For instance, it called for increased fencing where it would have “the most beneficial effect” and substantial increases in funding for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Bureau of Customs.³² Most likely for political reason, the Nixon administration wanted to implement a plan as soon as possible in order to demonstrate the president’s resolve to the American public. The largest border enforcement action in U.S. history emerged from this ad hoc taskforce with very limited time to put together a complicated plan and with limited input from the State Department.

Before the U.S. government could implement the plan, on June 9, 1969, the U.S. and Mexican governments met at a conference focused specifically on the problem of illegal drugs. According to one high level Nixon aide, Gordon Liddy, the task force finished the report by June 6 in order to have it ready for the conference. Liddy, when recounting the results of the meeting, mentioned that the Mexican delegation, “using

³¹ "Special Presidential Task Force Relating to Narcotics, Marijuana and Dangerous Drugs", 6 June 1969, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on 10 March 2014.

³² Ibid., 21.

diplomatic language,” told the delegation words to the effect of “go piss up a rope.”³³ One anonymous Mexican diplomat remembered the event differently. In his recollection, the strong tenor of the U.S. delegation surprised him since this was an informal meeting. Additionally, the Mexican contingent commented that in February, the Mexican government launched the largest marijuana eradication campaign in country’s history involving over 2,000 government troops.³⁴ Whatever the true resolve of Mexico’s drug eradication effort, the American contingent left the conference ready to ratchet up the pressure on Mexico.

Operation Intercept began due to an unplanned, messy failure of communication within the U.S. government. On August 28, 1969, the 11th Naval District announced it was going to place Tijuana off limits two weeks later on September 15 to the one hundred and fifty thousand military service members located in San Diego under the order of Admiral Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations. The closure of Mexico to military personnel was one of the explicit options the original Presidential Taskforce on Marijuana and Dangerous Drugs had advocated. However, within hours of the publication, the Pentagon rescinded the order as premature since it was still under consideration.³⁵

After the confusion surrounding travel restrictions placed on military personnel in San Diego, the *New York Times* leaked several details of Nixon’s opening action in the

³³ G. Gordon Liddy, *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997). 134.

³⁴ Quoted in Richard B. Craig, “Operation Intercept: The International Politics of Pressure,” 559–60.

³⁵ Ruben Salazar, “Civilian Underling Blamed for Confusion on Tijuana Ban,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1969.

undeclared “War on Drugs.” In its September 9 edition, the same edition that reported on the Amistad dam ceremony, *Times* reporter Felix Belair Jr. quoted extensively from the June 6 Presidential Task Force report, which the White House had not released publically. The paper claimed that Operation Intercept would “constitute the nation’s largest peacetime search and seizure operation by civil authorities.” The paper also reported that President Nixon had “summarized” the plan to President Díaz Ordaz during their meeting at the opening of the dam.³⁶ This leak in the *New York Times*, along with the unauthorized release of plan to ban service members from Tijuana, caused the U.S. ambassador to Mexico Robert H. McBride to ask tougher questions about the value of the operation.

State Department officials generally opposed Operation Intercept, but their response was at best unorganized and fragmented. Gordon Liddy noted that the June 6 report “paid lip-service to the Mexican efforts—more so than we would have but for the Department of State.”³⁷ On September 12, 1969, just a few days after the *New York Times* leak, Ambassador McBride cabled back to Washington with major concerns about the operation, noting that from his point of view, “it appears that repeated leaks have now minimized possibilities of success of Operation Intercept and that its value...seems to have decreased greatly.” He also mentioned that the U.S. Navy order “even indicated the date of [the] operation,” implying that the original date for Operation Intercept was

³⁶ Felix Belair Jr., “Mexico is Asked to Help Combat Drug Smuggling,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1969.

³⁷ Liddy, *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy*, 133.

September 15, the day before Mexico's Independence Day.³⁸ As a further illustration of confusion within the State Department, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Charles Meyer, theoretically responsible for all of Latin America, was not involved with the planning of Operation Intercept. Additionally, even during the execution of the operation, Secretary Meyer was often not part of the decision making process.³⁹ This spoke poorly of the task force planning the operation, but also of the State Department for cutting out the highest-level cabinet official dedicated to Latin America. The incompetence of the State Department would become a recurring theme in the formulation of Latin American policy.

On September 21, 1969, at 2:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, Operation Intercept officially commenced. By this point, leaks and press briefings on the U.S. side had removed the element of surprise. On the first day of the operation, inspections leading out of Tijuana backed up traffic for six miles with a peak wait time of three to four hours. The morale among the U.S. citizens in the group was, according to one report, "high" with one mother expressing her opinion that the tougher the inspections, the less she would have to worry about her kids. The enforcement action made no significant arrest on the official start day of the operation. Two days before, however, one of the newly installed radars on the border diverted an unregistered plane that was loaded with 532

³⁸ *Leaks Reducing Chances of Operation's Success* U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, secret telegram", June 12, 1969, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on 17 March 2014.

³⁹ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) September 30, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics* (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d442>, last accessed on April 21, 2014.

bricks of marijuana weighing over a thousand pounds.⁴⁰ The U.S. government made no other significant arrests after the start of Operation Intercept.

The next day, the enforcement actions on the border caused shops to open without the usual customers. As one U.S. executive in California sarcastically noted, “at least we solved our parking problem.” In Texas, the Chairman of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce remarked that the U.S. government had consulted neither his group nor other civic leaders he knew.⁴¹ No one was spared inspection; even Mexico’s consul general in El Paso was “rudely searched” by agents from New York on temporary duty to the border.⁴² By day four of the operation, a U.S. representative briefed that Operation Intercept was going smoothly, even though the amount of marijuana seized during the operation was a fraction of the amount made under the old border inspection system. Even though the government insisted that procedures were going well, and citizens on both sides of the border had reduced the amount of cross border commutes, wait times could still reach up to two hours during peak times.⁴³ Complaints were starting to reach the ear of government policy makers, and they would soon have to respond more visibly.

The two largest Mexican newspapers, *El Universal* and *Excelsior*, were largely silent in the first days of Operation Intercept. According to the State Department, this was

⁴⁰ Felix Belair Jr, “Drug Drive Opens At Mexico Border: U.S.. Operation Seeks to Cut Illicit Flow of Marijuana, Heroin and Pep Pills Drug Drive Starts at Mexican Border,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1969.

⁴¹ Dial Torgerson, “Check Hurt Border Tourism: Check at Border Cripple Tourism Dope Checks Cripple Trade Along Border,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), September 23, 1969.

⁴² Richard B. Craig, “Operation Intercept: The International Politics of Pressure,” 572

⁴³ Philip Fradkin, “Drug Checks at Border Running Smoothly: U.S.. Officials Say Operation to Continue Indefinitely; Crossing Delay Now 2 Hours,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1969.

a deliberate effort by the government-dominated press to strike a tolerant tone about the operation at first.⁴⁴ The government took a more confrontational stance when on September 25 Operation Intercept became front-page news on *El Universal*. The story emphasized the human suffering of Mexican migrant workers, saying some of them had lost their jobs due to delays at the border. Additionally, the article mentioned that commercial interests on both sides of the border were protesting the unilateral move as not conducive to business.⁴⁵ *Excélsior* also ran the story on the front page with the headline reading, “Not a Single Gram of Marijuana Found by U.S. Border Agents.”⁴⁶ The next day, the story once again dropped off the front page of the Mexico City press as the United States and Mexico began initial negotiations to end Operation Intercept in New York City.

The accounts of the operation in Mexicali’s newspaper *La Voz de la Frontera* were much more forceful than the coverage out of Mexico City due to the city’s location closer to the border and long distance from the central government. The front-page of the paper led with a picture of the long line of vehicular traffic and an account of the effects of the operation on ordinary Mexicans.⁴⁷ The coverage continued throughout the next few days with multiple newspaper articles. For example, on September 26, the paper noted

⁴⁴ Operation Intercept Department of State, confidential memorandum, 2 October 1969, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on 07 April 2014.

⁴⁵ Alberto Rosales, “Aumentan Los Problemas Por La Operación Intercepción,” *El Universal: El Gran Diario de México*, September 25, 1969.

⁴⁶ Alejandro Isigo, “Bajo a La Mitad El Turismo de EU a Tijuana,” *Excélsior*, September 23, 1969.

⁴⁷ “Minuciosa Revisión Se Realiza En La Frontera Con EE. UU.,” *La Voz De La Frontera*, September 23, 1969.

pressure placed on the federal government by the trade union *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesino* (CROC) and its hopes for the upcoming summit.⁴⁸ In addition to the news items, multiple editorials and letters to the editor appeared in the paper just days after the commencement of Operation Intercept.

Besides news reports, the mood of the population was clear in the advertisements that appeared in the border paper. One two-page advertisement sponsored by the chamber of commerce depicted a long line of cars imploring Mexicans to buy locally and avoid the hassle of intrusive searches at the border. The ad promised the reader that local products were the same price, varied, of high quality, and “above all no one will frisk you!”⁴⁹ Another advertisement in the paper placed by the chamber of commerce and other entities such as the bureau for national tourism asked Mexican citizens to stay home in order to allow “tourists, students, and people with urgency and necessity” to cross the border expeditiously.⁵⁰ A jeweler provided his own spin on the trend by sarcastically thanking Nixon for making locals see that it was better to shop in Mexico than the United States.⁵¹

As the operation continued, the stories in the mainstream Mexican press would gradually grow in intensity. In a front-page story, *El Universal* reported a boycott of American goods in the United States launched by ten Mexican border cities dubbed

⁴⁸ “Juntas de Emergencia Para Modificar La Intercepción,” *La Voz De La Frontera*, September 26, 1969.

⁴⁹ “Advertisement1,” *La Voz De La Frontera*, September 26, 1969.

⁵⁰ “Advertisement2,” *La Voz De La Frontera*, September 26, 1969.

⁵¹ “Advertisement3,” *La Voz De La Frontera*, September 27, 1969.

“Operation Dignity.” The boycott would begin at the beginning of October.⁵² Operation Dignity never fully materialized since the border communities never unified on one plan. Additionally, Mexican consumers refused to stay home, and while cross border traffic did slow down, it remained at a heavy level throughout Operation Intercept.⁵³ The threat of a boycott, even if not well executed, demonstrated Mexican citizens’ level of anger on the issue of the border.

While the events of Operation Intercept were in full swing, the Nixon administration was nearing the end of its review on Latin American policy. Before the implementation of the unilateral enforcement action, Nixon received Governor Nelson Rockefeller’s long awaited report on the region. Nixon and his staff, however, did not begin to fully read or process the report until the week that Operation Intercept kicked off. Additionally, at least one important meeting and several important decisions on the content of the report took place while Operation Intercept was underway. The linkage between the two events are virtually nonexistent in the historical record; however, the chronological overlap between the two events does suggest a moment in time when Latin American affairs took a more prominent role in the administration.

⁵² Alberto Rosales, “Una ‘Operación Dignidad,’” *El Universal: El Gran Diario de México*, September 27, 1969.

⁵³ Craig, “Operation Intercept: The International Politics of Pressure,” 567-568.

Chapter 2-- Reception of the Rockefeller Report

Governor Nelson Rockefeller initially briefed Kissinger and Nixon about his findings on September 3, before Nixon's dedication of the Amistad dam.⁵⁴ According to a memorandum received by Nixon the day prior, the conversation likely would include several "small items." However, one item relating to Panama required his attention. Panama's leader, General Omar Torrijos, in his meeting with Rockefeller, had requested certain technical assistance to "re-establish the democratic process." His request on the surface was a bit odd since he came to power in a military coup d'état just a year earlier. Rockefeller recommended appointing a political advisor to assist Torrijos, but also requested more guidance. Kissinger advised against appointing an advisor for multiple reasons centering on the risk of sidelining the State Department, undermining Nixon's new ambassador to Panama, and lack of clarity of Torrijos' true motives.⁵⁵ Kissinger, in making his recommendation, followed the advice of his chief advisor on Latin America Viron Vaky. His advisor was much more colorful in his advice calling the situation "delicate," "embarrassing," and "unnecessary involvement in other nations' domestic matters." He strongly advised against Rockefeller playing "Secretary of State this way."⁵⁶

In order to understand Nixon's attempt to formulate a hemispheric policy, one has to understand Nelson Rockefeller. Rockefeller had a long history with the southern

⁵⁴ Presidential Daily Diary, September 1969.

⁵⁵ Memo; Henry Kissinger to President Nixon; September 2, 1969; folder Governor Rockefeller, July 1972: Box 831; National Security Council (NSC): Name File; Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (RNPL), Yorba Linda, California.

⁵⁶ Memo; Viron Vaky to Henry Kissinger; August 30, 1969; folder Governor Rockefeller, July 1972: Box 831; NSC: Name File; RNPL.

continent. His formative experiences in the region came in 1935 with a trip to the oil fields of Venezuela. During his trip, he was struck by what one aid later recounted as the “raw vitality and wild beauty” of the country and region.⁵⁷ The self-imposed segregation of North American workers, few of whom spoke Spanish, also unnerved him. Rockefeller, who took a two-week crash course in Spanish before his trip, attempted to engage with the local population in their native language.⁵⁸ He continued to improve his Spanish over time, and his basic fluency continued to be an asset as time progressed. Deeply involved in both business and philanthropic work in the region, his experience would lead to his extraordinary appointment to a post within the U.S. government by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during World War II.⁵⁹

One of Rockefeller’s biographers recounted how his first position under Roosevelt introduced him to the intricacies of government work. Rockefeller made mistakes, but he “learned more from his mistakes than his successes.”⁶⁰ During his time in government, Rockefeller developed an admiration for FDR second only to his grandfather. Coincidentally, coming in third was his admiration for General George C. Marshall.⁶¹ His appointment, as the newly created Coordinator of inter-American Affairs (CIAA), increased his prominence among Latin American government officials. Essentially, his job was to counter the effects of Nazi propaganda in the Western

⁵⁷ Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 102.

⁵⁸ Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller*, 2014, 125.

⁵⁹ For more on this period of his life see Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁶⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

Hemisphere. He sponsored a variety of programs including loan guarantees to Walt Disney to create a South American themed cartoon to highlight American culture.⁶² His position as an outsider led to a certain amount of tension with the State Department, which he regularly circumvented in planning his initiatives.⁶³ For example, the CIAA launched one particularly disastrous advertising campaign where, among other mistakes, the agency sponsored Spanish language advertisements in Brazil. The CIA planned this particular campaign without coordinating with the State Department. Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, received word of the botched campaign and briefed FDR. Roosevelt issued a rebuke to Rockefeller urging him to play nice with the States Department because in a “showdown between your office and the [State] Department” he would side with the State Department.⁶⁴

While there was bad blood between Rockefeller and the State Department, he still accepted an appointment to become FDR’s Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs in December of 1944. As an Assistant Secretary, the Eurocentric bureaucracy continued to stifle him because they were suspicious of Latin American concerns. Rockefeller fought hard to treat Latin America as a distinct region shepherding the passage of the Act of Chapultepec, an informal defense agreement later formalized as the Rio Pact. In one of his last acts as Assistant Secretary, Rockefeller attended the UN conference at San Francisco. During the conference, he lobbied for Latin American

⁶²For more see J. B. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney: Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941-1948* (New York: Disney Editions, 2009).

⁶³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 140–145.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 153.

demands of recognition of the Act of Chapultepec and removal of the Security Council veto. Later realizing he had gone too far in supporting the Latin delegation, Rockefeller, who submitted a pro forma letter of resignation after FDR's death, soon found himself without a job.⁶⁵ Rockefeller used his experience and contacts built under FDR and Truman over two decades later in an attempt to reorient U.S. policy. Although Nixon originally envisioned a small-scale trip to a half a dozen countries or so, Governor Rockefeller planned to visit all of Central and South America and several Caribbean islands. Charles Meyer, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, opposed the scale of the trip arguing for a "low profile" approach and advised Rockefeller to avoid a "dog and pony show."⁶⁶ Meyer's boss, Secretary of State William Rogers, also desired a limited trip advising the governor to "keep it small."⁶⁷ The governor ultimately received the president's support for a larger scale visit with limited interference from the State Department and hired several experts to accompany him on his trip. All told, Rockefeller would spend around \$750,000 of his own money, consume countless hours of his time, and stake his reputation on the success of the trip and subsequent report.⁶⁸

Official goodwill and fact-finding trips to Latin America from the United States were nothing new. Rockefeller, in his governmental position under Roosevelt, sponsored

⁶⁵ Ibid., 165–188.

⁶⁶ Peter Relyea Bales, "Nelson Rockefeller and His Quest for Inter-American Unity" (Ph.D., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1992), 457.

⁶⁷ Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 100.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 107.

several goodwill tours, while President Dwight Eisenhower sent his brother Milton twice to the region in order to write a series of reports. Eisenhower also sent Vice President Nixon in 1955 and 1958 and visited Latin America himself in 1960 after the announcement of a trade pact between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Both President Kennedy and President Johnson would also tour the region in an effort to gain publicity the Alliance for Progress aid program.⁶⁹ What made Rockefeller's trip different was the scale of the trip, since he intended to visit twenty-three different countries, and the timing of the trip early in an administration.

Nixon and Kissinger originally wanted Rockefeller to begin his listening and fact-finding tour in February, fitting subsequent trips into his schedule as he saw fit. Rockefeller, however, could not begin the tour as quickly as the administration hoped since he was facing budgetary issues back in New York.⁷⁰ As planning for the presidential mission continued, Rockefeller periodically communicated with Kissinger on logistical and substantive matters related to the trip. One conversation conveyed Nixon's hope that Rockefeller's trip could "put his Latin American policy on a new basis." The Governor responded, "he is going to listen and to report to the President." Continuing Rockefeller suggested, "if his mission results in suggestions that will be useful, fine—then the President can announce policy." The conversation subsequently turned to the security situation in Guatemala foreshadowing some of the issues Rockefeller would face

⁶⁹ Ernesto Capello, "Latin America Encounters Nelson Rockefeller," in *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 51–56.

⁷⁰ Telcon, January 21, 1969.

on his trip.⁷¹ The president continued to take a personal interest in Rockefeller's preparations, at one point requesting that Rockefeller meet with Archbishop Raimondi, the Apostolic delegate to the United States, since the president felt that he brought a unique perspective to Latin America.⁷²

The first leg of Rockefeller's trip (May 11 to May 19, 1969), consisting of Mexico and Central America, began with no major issues in Mexico. At his first stop he began his speech on the tarmac with the following statement saying he came, "not to bring advice, but rather to take advice" he would continue with "I bring no new program, no simple answers, no easy slogans."⁷³ Video from Mexico depicts exuberant crowds greeting him and recorded Rockefeller and his wife touring a hospital where children greeted them with a traditional dance routine.⁷⁴ Certain countries in Central America proved to be less inviting. In Guatemala he was not allowed to stay overnight in Guatemala City and had his meetings with the government officials outside the city for his safety. In Honduras, he faced hostile crowds made up mostly of students. Instead of disengaging from the crowd, he waded in and engaged the students in a debate. A newspaper reporter later quoted him as saying, "See. Nobody laid a hand on me. But somebody lifted my wallet."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Telcon, April 16, 1969.

⁷² Memo; Viron Vaky to Henry Kissinger; 16 July 1969; folder Governor Rockefeller, July 1972: Box 831; NSC: Name File; RNPL.

⁷³ New York (State) and Governor (1959-1973 : Rockefeller), *Public Papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Fifty-Third Governor of the State of New York, 1969* ([Albany], 1973), 1685.

⁷⁴ Capello, "Latin America Encounters Nelson Rockefeller," 58.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Bales, "Nelson Rockefeller and His Quest for Inter-American Unity," 457.

The second leg (May 27 to June 3, 1969) of the mission faced problems even before it began since Peru canceled Rockefeller's visit in protest of sanctions imposed by the United States due to the fining of U.S. fishing vessels impounded in disputed waters of the coast of Peru.⁷⁶ The situation in Bogotá, Colombia, his first stop, did not improve the tone of his trip. Students violently protested his arrival in the capital city, as protestors clashed with riot police. Colombian security rerouted Rockefeller's motorcade around the worst of the violence along a route that had more riot police than well-wishers.⁷⁷ Protests continued in Ecuador and Bolivia with the Bolivian president meeting with Rockefeller at the airport due to the volatile situation.⁷⁸ By this point, Venezuela had canceled its portion of the visit, citing security concerns and likely remembering the disastrous visit of then Vice President Richard Nixon in 1958, when angry protestors surround his motorcade. One reporter, who was on the scene the day Rockefeller was supposed to arrive, reported that the city was covered with posters reading "Rockefeller, Venezuela Repudiates You" placed by a leftist Catholic youth group.⁷⁹ At the halfway mark of his mission, Rockefeller reportedly took the protests in stride saying that while he did "not want his mission to leave a trail of bloodshed" he would not mind "being a lightning rod

⁷⁶ Peru claimed sovereignty over all waters within 200 nautical miles of its coast. The United States only recognized territorial claims out to 12 nautical miles.

⁷⁷ Juan de Onis, "Governor Starts 2nd Leg Of Mission: In Bogota, Street Clashes Precede His Arrival," *New York Times*, May 28, 1969.

⁷⁸ Bales, "Nelson Rockefeller and His Quest for Inter-American Unity," 458.

⁷⁹ Juan de Onis "Rockefeller's Mission: Governor Hopeful Protests Will Focus U.S. Leaders' Attention on Latin Issues," *New York Times*, June 4, 1969.

for Latin-American protest if this will focus the attention of United States political leaders on inter-American problems.”⁸⁰

Some politicians in fact did begin to pay more attention to the presidential mission even if not in the way that Rockefeller hoped. Senator Frank Church, the chairman of the Senate’s subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs and an ardent critic of Nixon, called the tour at the halfway mark a “fiasco” and accused the administration of “conducting foreign policy by gimmickry.”⁸¹

The military dictatorship of Brazil marked the first stop of the third leg of the presidential mission (16 June-22 June). Brazil, unlike many of the previous stops, was calm since the Brazilian government had rounded up thousands of potential protestors, releasing them after the governor had left.⁸² The roundup, while harsh and dictatorial, demonstrated the importance Brazil placed on relations with the United States. In Uruguay, the last country he visited on this leg of the trip, the firebombing of a General Motors plant greeted him. Additionally, due to security concerns he could not meet with officials inside the capital but instead had to meet in the virtually deserted resort town of Punta del Este. Rockefeller continued his upbeat assessment—at least in public—stating that this leg marked a “turning point” and asserting “A pattern of consultation has now been established which is providing the points of view, the information and counsel

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, 12 June 1969.

⁸² Capello, “Latin America Encounters Nelson Rockefeller,” 58.

which the President was desirous of obtaining as a basis for formulation of U.S. policy in the western hemisphere.”

Rockefeller’s final leg included several Caribbean countries outside the scope of this report. However, his first stop to Argentina proved quite eventful. According to one of Rockefeller’s aides, “Argentina proved the worst.”⁸³ The governor arrived to the near simultaneous firebombing of seventeen Minimax grocery stores co-owned by his family. Ten thousand troops patrolled the capital Buenos Aires, and Rockefeller under the cover of darkness met with six leftist leaders without the Argentine government’s knowledge.⁸⁴ The volatile situation in Argentina, while related to the turbulence in other Latin American countries, was also inflamed by local events. Specifically the *Cordobazo* an extended and violent workers’ strike in the city of Córdoba where violence had peaked the month before Rockefeller’s visit. When the trip ended he reflected, “this Presidential Mission has brought home to the American people that all is not well in the Western Hemisphere and that there is urgent need for changes in our policies.”⁸⁵ He later highlighted his recommendations for change in the written summary of the trips findings.

Rockefeller’s final written findings focused on the forces of progress in Latin America. The region in his view, like the rest of the world, was experiencing rapid change, and while the United States could not “control” change, the United States had to

⁸³ Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 103.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ New York (State) and Governor (1959-1973 : Rockefeller), *Public Papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Fifty-Third Governor of the State of New York, 1969*, 1731.

“understand” change in order to “shape intelligently and realistically our relationships.”⁸⁶ Rockefeller defined change as the “crucial characteristic of our time.” He saw change as disruptive and saw the result in stark terms as either “tremendously constructive or tremendously destructive.”⁸⁷

In Rockefeller’s analysis, two of the main contributors to change were ironically two of the more traditionally conservative institutions. The first of these institutions was the Catholic Church.⁸⁸ This propensity for change was a new role for the Church because, as the report noted, it had worked “hand in hand with the landowners to provide ‘stability.’” Rockefeller did temper his remarks noting that the Church in some situations was “vulnerable to subversive penetration.” He concluded this section of the report unsure of the role the Church would play in the future. Elements within the Church might be “ready to undertake a revolution,” but he was not sure “as to the ultimate nature of the revolution itself or as to the governmental system by which the justice it seeks can be realized.”⁸⁹ The other avenue of change was the military. Rockefeller took direct aim at the many critics of military governments in the United States such as Senator Frank Church when he stated in the report, “we will have to give increasing recognition to the fact that many new military leaders are deeply motivated by the need for social and

⁸⁶ Nelson A. Rockefeller, *The Rockefeller Report on the Americas: The Official Report of a United States Presidential Mission for the Western Hemisphere*, New York Times edition (Quadrangle Books, 1969), 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For more of Rockefeller’s analysis on the Catholic Church see Theresa Keeley, “Nelson Rockefeller’s 1969 Mission to Latin America and the Catholic Church,” 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140108152712/http://www.rockarch.org/publications/resrep/keeley.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Rockefeller, *The Rockefeller Report on the Americas*, 31.

economic progress.” He continued: in “many cases, it will be more useful for the United States to try to work with them in these efforts, rather than to abandon or insult them because we are conditioned by arbitrary ideological stereotypes.”⁹⁰ Ironically while he argued that the average Latin American military leader had changed, his policy prescription looked very similar to Roosevelt’s treatment of military dictators. Rockefeller’s recommendations reproduced what one historian has argued was a built in irony of the Good Neighbor policy, “aiding dictators next door for the sake of fighting other dictators overseas.”⁹¹

The recommendations in the report included economic issues, and several structural recommendations within the U.S. government. Many of the economic recommendations paralleled the Consensus of Viña del Mar including refinancing of debt and preference for Latin American trade goods. Possibly the boldest part of the recommendations were the proposed reorganizational changes within the U.S. government bureaucracy since, according to the report, hemispheric policy could “neither be soundly formulated nor effectively carried out” under the current U.S. governmental structure. The report explained that current divided decision-making within the U.S. government led foreign governments in the hemisphere to become “frustrated and humiliated” since their representative could not find a person who could “make a final decision” in the maze of bureaucracy.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31–33.

⁹¹ Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*, 9.1.1998 edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1998), 224.

⁹² Ibid., 43-44.

One of the key recommendations was the creation of a Secretary of Western Hemisphere Affairs to coordinate all U.S. policy. This new secretary would be the “focal point” for all hemispheric matters. While not stated specifically in the recommendations, this new position would privilege the Western Hemisphere in the bureaucracy since no other region would have a similar secretary. Additionally, the report called for more government employees dedicated to Latin American issues in the White House including a special office in the NSC.⁹³ Nixon received these recommendations in early September, but based on the available documentary record did not read the report until a few weeks later in mid-September.

Rockefeller had a long and tangled relationship with both Nixon and Kissinger. Rockefeller and Nixon were old political rivals competing for the Republican nomination in the 1968 presidential race. Rockefeller also had a long relationship with Kissinger, whose research he sponsored when he was a professor at Harvard. As one biographer wrote about the relationship between the two in the 1950s, “behind Nelson’s back, Kissinger sometimes mocked his patron for failing to do his homework. Within earshot, he was deferential to the point of sycophancy...”⁹⁴ Kissinger maintained many of his mannerisms when discussing issues with Rockefeller during his tenure as NSA.

By September 19, Kissinger had read the report. In a conversation with Governor Rockefeller, Kissinger said his final product was “excellent.” Rockefeller reemphasized his strong opinion that unless the State Department underwent a serious reorganization

⁹³ Ibid., 22, 45–55.

⁹⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 254–255.

and refocused on Latin America, the region would be “lost.” Kissinger agreed with his point, and took particular aim at Assistant Secretary Charles Meyer, whom he called a “weak man.” At this point, it appeared that Nixon had not read the report, but Kissinger was confident he soon would.⁹⁵ By September 24, the president had read the report, and was prepared to “speak very highly” of it if asked to do so. It appeared that the president wished to discuss the issue further and invited Rockefeller to a meeting at Camp David on the September 29.⁹⁶

Between Rockefeller and Nixon’s first meeting on September 3 and his next meeting on September 29, the president refocused on Latin America. Besides the events of Operation Intercept, which began on the September 21, the president took interest of how his Latin American policy was playing in the press. The president took particular interest in an article by James Goodell in the *Christian Science Monitor*, when he personally tasked the State Department with “knocking down” the story.⁹⁷ The article was highly critical of current U.S.-Latin American policy, accusing the administration of placing hemispheric relations, “low on its agenda of priorities.” Goodell was particularly critical of the administration’s decision to keep the contents of the Rockefeller Report a secret. According to an unnamed Latin American diplomat, “It all boils down to the fact that Richard Nixon has little interest in doing anything constructive in Latin America.” Nixon’s attempt to counter the narrative of the article suggests he was concerned about

⁹⁵ Telcon, September 19, 1969

⁹⁶ Telcon September 24, 1969.

⁹⁷ Memo for the President; October 4, 1969; folder October1-15: Box 3; Hand Writing File; RNPL.

Latin American policy, or at a minimum, concerned about the public's perception of his policy. Nixon explored several of these themes in his next meeting with Rockefeller.

The one-hour meeting on September 29 featuring Nixon, Kissinger, Meyer, and Rockefeller provides one of the most expansive views of Latin American policy from Nixon in the documentary record. While Nixon expressed his views about Latin America freely in the two National Security Council meetings dedicated to Latin America in 1969, the small group setting at Camp David allowed him to speak more extensively. In this setting, he laid out a vision for the region as he attempted to overcome the current constraints of U.S. policy. The meeting began with the President noting that "Latin America was in trouble as indicated by such things as the Peruvian problem, the Bolivian Coup,[and] Elbricks abduction."⁹⁸ Nixon continued by echoing the thinking of Goodell's article. He stated. "Justified or not, people feel Latin America is on the back burner." Continuing with somewhat paternalistic language, he reasoned that the "Latins,"⁹⁹ whom he called "sensitive," felt "they should not only be on the front burner, but on front burner No. 1." He felt that the administration should validate their assumptions and "treat them with special concern."¹⁰⁰

Continuing on his monologue, Nixon emphasized his search for "action on Latin American policy." The President wanted "new ideas." He wanted to "express the special

⁹⁸ The dissertation will go into detail regarding each of these issues. The Bolivian Coup took place the day before the meeting. Domestic dissidents in Brazil kidnaped the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, Charles Elbrick on September 4th and held him for four days.

⁹⁹ Nixon in private conversations would call not only residents of South and Central America "Latins", but also residents of Spain, France, and Italy casting a very wide net of stereotypes.

¹⁰⁰ Unless otherwise stated the following section are based on Memo; Memorandum of Conversation, September 27, 1969; folder Governor Rockefeller, July 1972: Box 831; NSC: Name File; RNPL.

relationship.” Anticipating a critique, he told his distinguished audience, “Oh, but the Africans might not like it,” and then promptly told them, “Forget that, forget the bureaucracy.” Nixon was primarily referring to the State Department, to which he seemed to hold in particular disdain stating “in the 23 years” he had worked with the State Department, they “had not had one imaginative, bold new idea.” He then reiterated, “he was going to get a new Latin American policy,” and “If it did not come from the State Department, it would have to come from within the White House.”

Returning to the subject of bureaucracy, Nixon seemed sympathetic to Rockefeller’s recommendation to create a Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, which Nixon envisioned as a “first among equals” in the State Department. He believed that this move would be a way to “show our special concerns” to the region. As part of this reorganization, he believed that the new secretary should also have in his or her portfolio Canada, which at the time was the responsibility of a different arm of the State Department. He emphasized that he was flexible with what the policy would look like, but wanted “something special,” and “special handling” of all substantive issues. Nixon likened the situation to World War II stating it was time to “break out like Patton breaking out of the Battle of the Bulge.” He did not want his upcoming speech on Latin America to be just “nice words,” he wanted “to do things.”

Switching gears, the president wanted to discuss an important issue raised in the Rockefeller Report, how to handle the military. Working with the military was important in so far as it was in the nation’s interest “to keep things stable.” Nixon felt the United States could be “selective” in providing aid to military governments, but should not

condem “the military a la Senator Church.” Determining which government to support was a simple calculation which Nixon summed up as “Are they friends or enemies, will they be stable, will they accept private investment.” Rockefeller agreed with the president providing a personal example of how he convinced the military government of Paraguay to chose a better qualified American company over a French company that had been paying bribes. The governor chose this example to illustrate how a policy of engagement could lead to real gains even with a government the United States had other problems with.

During the conversation, Nixon engaged with specific policy issues listed in the report or otherwise on his mind. Foreign aid, in his view, was “finished” unless “drastically reshaped.” It was therefore important to look at Rockefeller’s recommendations on foreign aid “carefully.” Meyer then called the current foreign aid program “an export promotion program rather than development assistance.” Nixon agreed with his assessment and told him to “say that,” he was willing “to be very liberal in aid measures if something new is proposed.” The participants also discussed other recommendations in the report including several new regional institutes, and a recommendation to form a joint Congressional Committee on the Western Hemisphere.

The conversation then turned toward two specific countries, Panama and Cuba. Rockefeller brought up the issue of Panama, presumably to finish discussing the issue of Panama’s leader General Torrijos that he had likely brought up in their previous meeting. He had developed a fondness for the General, and felt his was a government the U.S. could work with. The U.S. government in particular was interested in signing a new

treaty to determine the long-term fate of the Panama Canal. Rockefeller felt the U.S. could work with Torrijos, while Meyer brought up the State Department's concern with negotiating with an unconstitutional government. Nixon took Rockefeller's position on this, and as a show of goodwill, told the state department to "get out of the mill" two helicopters Torrijos wanted. Nixon had one final point. Contrary to feeling elsewhere in the bureaucracy, "He wanted to follow a very tough line of Cuba." He could possibly work with Cuba on issues such as "hijacking matters," but otherwise he wanted a "tough line," and did not "want to hear press speculation that we are considering a new policy." Nixon stuck to his principles and maintained a tough policy of sanctions against the Castro regime.

The President also engaged with the principal critique of Goodell's article, the failure to publicly release the Rockefeller Report. Nixon's concerns revolved around perception. He did not want the report's recommendations, and the eventual policy direction the White House took to become a matter of "historic record." He did plan, however, to release portions of the report once he made the final policy determinations. Until then, he wanted a "disciplined" and "positive" response emphasizing the report's contribution to policy, and not the report itself. Nixon eventually agreed to release the report in full as a statement emphasizing the importance of Latin American policy. It turned out, however, that his initial inclination was correct. The differences between the report and the ultimate tenor of U.S. policy became a tool to bludgeon his approach toward the region. Nixon, however, ultimately released the report after determining the report's release would maintain interest in U.S.-Latin American policy after his speech.

The report played a major role in the ultimate formulation of U.S. policy toward Latin America in Nixon's speech on October 31. While problematic, Rockefeller's trip and report provided ideas for the bureaucracy to ponder over the next month as the NSC drafted Nixon's speech. Many of Rockefeller's ideas originated with his experience under Roosevelt. Some of his ideas, such as better relations with military dictators, came directly from the Good Neighbor Policy. Others probably came from speaking with Latin American leaders who trusted him due to his experience under FDR. Nixon soon incorporated many of Rockefeller's suggestions into a major policy address. Until then, the administration still had the pesky issue of Operation Intercept hanging over its head.

Chapter 3-- Operation Intercept End Game

As Operation Intercept continued, some opposition began to surface within the White House. In a strongly critical reprisal of the original plan for Operation Intercept, the White House Budget Bureau laid out an argument for its inherent weaknesses, calling the plan “grossly inadequate” and “likely to result in embarrassment to the president.” According to the Budget Bureau report, Operation Intercept underestimated the damage to U.S.-Mexican relations, the political backlash of border community residents, and the long-term monetary cost.¹⁰¹ The misgivings of the Budget Bureau added to critical voices within the State Department.

The Mexican government soon noticed the lack of U.S. governmental unity in the planning and execution of Operation Intercept. On September 26, U.S. Secretary of State, William Rogers, and Mexico’s Foreign Secretary, Carrillo Flores, met in New York City where the topic of the interdiction effort arose. During their meeting, Rodgers insisted that Operation Intercept was “initiated on the orders of some Assistant Secretary within the Department of the Treasury,” and launched with no consultations with the State Department.¹⁰² As Intercept continued, Mexico increased its efforts to end the operation diplomatically. On September 29, the Mexican ambassador spoke to Assistant Secretary of State Meyer and other U.S. diplomats to deliver another official protest from Mexico. According to summary of conversation from Mexico’s Foreign Ministry, the Mexican

¹⁰¹ "Budget Bureau Comments on Marijuana Policy", September 29, 1969, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on March 10, 2014

¹⁰² México Archive Resumen de la Entrevista Sobre la “Operation Intercept,” September 29, 1969.

Ambassador's position was quite clear. In terms of stopping the marijuana trade, the operation was a "failure." However, the operation was "an excellent instrument to destroy the environment of goodwill prevalent along the border." By the end of the meeting, the Mexican entourage had come to two sobering conclusions. First, the United States "seemed inclined to maintain 'Operation Intercept'" since the U.S. delegation seemed "uniformed and very distant from the border." Second, Secretary Rogers was either "not informed" about the operation or "lied" to Foreign Minister Flores. If he had not been informed, the diplomats reasoned, "that would demonstrate an absolute lack of organization within the State Department, and irresponsibility (on the part of Rogers) of leaving such an important decision in the hand of a subordinate."¹⁰³

The day after the meeting between Meyer and Mexican diplomats in Washington D.C, Díaz Ordaz remarked that a "somber curtain"¹⁰⁴ had fallen between the two countries while toasting American astronauts who had recently returned from landing on the moon.¹⁰⁵ The Mexican president's remarks made front-page news in Mexico City. The coverage in the Mexican press emphasized another point he had made in his toast when he referred to the operation as a "bureaucratic error." He continued saying he did not want to "cast a shadow over" what should be a joyous celebration, but his obligation

¹⁰³ Ibid.

⁹⁰ A more accurate translation of the phrase *muro de sospechas* is wall of suspicion

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) September 30, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d442>, last accessed on April 21, 2014.

to his people was to make this “misunderstanding go away as soon as possible.”¹⁰⁶ His foreign minister continued fighting to end the operation by circumventing normal diplomatic channels.

Foreign Minister Flores, possibly after learning about the internal divisions in the State Department over Operation Intercept, broke diplomatic protocol and wrote directly to Nixon. In the letter, which he wrote by hand and sent straight to the White House, he asked President Nixon “to review that operation and to order its excesses be corrected.” He additionally noted how terrible the optics of this operation were since the Mexican people “simply cannot understand that two weeks after you met with our President, the most drastic, and for many, unfriendly measure against Mexico was taken.” He ended by writing how it was “totally unorthodox to address you (President Nixon). I will never do it again. But in this case I am convinced you have the opportunity of doing something for which all Mexicans will be grateful.”¹⁰⁷ Foreign Secretary Flores continued negotiating once he returned to Mexico.

After he delivered his letter and flew back to Mexico, Flores found the situation much worse than what he had gathered from New York. In a meeting with Ambassador McBride on October 2, 1969, Flores remarked that Operation Intercept was the worst problem to materialize in U.S.-Mexican relations in his eleven years of public service. In order to solve the problem he suggested skipping the gesture proposed by the Nixon

¹⁰⁶ Jose Manuel Jurado, “‘Un Error Burocrático’ Daña Las Relaciones Con EU: Diaz Ordaz,” *Excelsior*, September 30, 1969.

¹⁰⁷ "Antonio Carillo Flores to Nixon Secretariat of Foreign Relations, personal letter", Undated, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on March 10, 2014

administration to send a delegation to Mexico City, and instead meet in New York City. The recommendation to have the talks in New York City was mainly a practical one. Díaz Ordaz and Flores felt that the U.S. delegation would be “attacked” in the press and “hounded” by reporters. Concerning the start date of the negotiations, the Mexican government wanted to begin as soon as possible with an announcement on Friday October 3, 1969, with actual talks beginning on Monday October 6. Ambassador McBride agreed and recommended the proposed timeline to the State Department.¹⁰⁸ Talks would start one day after the proposed timeline on October 7.

Even as negotiations were ongoing, the operation showed no signs of slowing down. While U.S. officials touted the doubling of marijuana prices as a success, these same officials also admitted to major weaknesses in the execution of the operation. In addition to smugglers avoiding checkpoints on land, obsolete radar technology meant that drug dealers were still able to traffic drugs into the U.S. via air corridors. Despite the limited effectiveness of the operation, U.S. customs officials vowed to continue their efforts, and even planned an intensification of the operation.¹⁰⁹

While the negotiation between Mexico and the United States were ongoing, Kissinger became more directly involved. While briefed on the situation, Kissinger did not take a direct role in Operation Intercept until he drafted the response to Secretary

¹⁰⁸ Telegram 5388 From the Embassy in Mexico to the Department of State 02October, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d442>, last accessed on April 21, 2014.

⁹⁹ Felix Belair Jr “Operation Intercept: Success on Land, Futility in the Air,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1969.

Flores's letter. Kissinger may have become involved due to Flores's letter bypassing the State Department and landing on his desk. Kissinger's memorandum to President Nixon focused on the "unorthodox nature of such a letter," noting that the "unusual step does, in fact, underline the intensity of the Mexican feeling about Operation Intercept." Kissinger also reminded the president about Ordaz's "somber curtain" remark during the toast to the U.S. astronauts. Kissinger believed that the Mexican government was worried about a "cooling off" by the United States to Mexico, and felt that Operation Intercept was "becoming a serious problem in our relations with Mexico." He concluded his memorandum by informing the president that the State Department had agreed to a bilateral meeting, and recommended that the President sign a "warmer" response to the Foreign Minister than protocol would normally dictate.¹¹⁰ On October 7, the same day as the bilateral meeting between the United States and Mexico, Nixon signed the "warm" letter to Foreign Minister Flores. He also sent a note to his aid, John Ehrlichman, asking for a status update. He ended his request for information by dictating, "this is the time to negotiate since we have proved our point pretty effectively."¹¹¹ The strong reaction of Mexico, as suggested by Flores' letter, prompted Nixon's reaction. Nixon, as he often would when engaging with foreign leaders and dignitaries, would change his position¹¹²Operation Intercept would soon be over.

¹¹⁰ Letter to you from Mexican Foreign Minister on Operation Intercept White House, memorandum", Undated, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on March 10, 2014.

¹¹¹"Untitled Memorandum from the President", 7 October, 1969, National Security Archive, available online at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB86/>, accessed on March 10, 2014.

¹¹² Analysis of examples are outside the scope of this report, but include policy changes after conversations with the presidents of Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil.

On October 10, 1969, Operation Intercept officially ended earlier than the month originally envisioned by the plan's architects. The plan ended with assurances by the Mexican government that it would improve drug enforcement on its side of the border with assistance from the United States dubbed "Operation Cooperate." The result of Operation Intercept was the arrest of forty-four low-level smugglers, or one smuggler per one hundred thousand people searched, and the mass disruption of commerce along the U.S.-Mexican border. While the protests and inconveniences were by no means small on the U.S. side of the border, they were larger on the Mexican side of the border.

Another front-page announcement in the Mexican press heralded the end of Operation Intercept and the beginning of Operation Cooperate. The two parties would negotiate the details of Operation Cooperate over the next several months in a series of bilateral meetings.¹¹³ The details, which included monetary assistance from the United States, were less important than the realization that respect for Mexican sovereignty ensured greater cooperation. Both the United States and Mexico would soon be touting the program. Mexico's running tally of destroyed marijuana plants and poppy fields, reminiscent of Vietnam body counts, would be the measure of success.¹¹⁴ Soon the hard work of rebuilding trust and diplomatic relations between the two countries would begin.

On November 18, 1969, President Nixon sent a highly apologetic letter to Díaz Ordaz. In the letter, Nixon highlighted several Mexican priorities on which his

¹¹³ Antonio Barragan, "Fin a La 'Intercepción': Es Substituida Por La Cooperación Mediante Acuerdo de Los 2 Gobiernos," *El Universal: El Gran Diario de México*, October 11, 1969.

¹¹⁴ Craig, "Operation Intercept: The International Politics of Pressure," 577.

administration had made progress. The most important part of the letter, however, reflected his regret about the damage Operation Intercept caused to the bilateral relationship:

In this connection, Mr. President, I want to express my personal regret for the friction which Operation Intercept has caused in the relations between our two countries. Operation Intercept was conceived as one element in a major campaign to combat the traffic in narcotics from whatever source. It was not intended to single out Mexico, nor to give offense to Mexico. I want to give you my personal assurances on this point. When it became apparent to me that this operation was being viewed by your Government as an affront to the Mexican people, and that it was causing economic hardship for border communities, I asked that the intensity of inspection be reduced to a point where the major frictions, and irritations which the operation had caused in our relations with Mexico could be eliminated.¹¹⁵

It would take more than one letter however, to repair the relationship between the two countries.

While Nixon's team poorly timed and conceived Operation Intercept, its termination came at an opportune time for Nixon's hemispheric policy. Nixon and his team would spend the rest of October preparing and writing his one and only large-scale speech on Latin American policy. The speech would chart a new course of intra-hemispheric affairs basing many of its talking points and concepts on the Rockefeller Report.

¹¹⁵ Letter From President Nixon to President Diaz Ordaz of Mexico, Washington, November 18, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d451>, last accessed on April 21, 2014.

Chapter 4—Major Policy Address

The idea for a major speech on Latin American policy came from Secretary of State William Rogers in a July 9, 1969 NSC meeting on Latin America. The Nixon administration had yet to make any major substantive policy changes on Latin America, and was receiving criticism from Latin American diplomats and the press. Kissinger concurred with Rogers and suggested early October as a possible date for the speech. Nixon agreed, but remarked that he would emphasize “realism,” and not “generalities or platitudes.”¹¹⁶ The president ultimately gave his speech on October 31, 1969, to a receptive audience, the Inter-American Press Club, a group he had addressed previously as Vice-President. The speech would be the first major policy address he would give on Latin America during his time in office. As it turned out, it would also be his last.

The likely reason for the change in dates from early to late October was to give the government a chance to staff and approve the recommendations from the Rockefeller Report for their inclusion in the speech. Kissinger’s guidance on this point was clear: “there would be no specific decisions on the policy issues before Rockefeller’s views were submitted.”¹¹⁷ Once he submitted his report, the bureaucracy would have about six weeks to make its objections clear to the president and present its own ideas. Nixon’s

¹¹⁶ Hand Written Notes NSC Files; Box H-23; Folder: NSC Meeting 7/9/69; NSC Institutional Files (H-Files); RNPL.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of an NSC Review Group Meeting, Washington, July 3, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d3>, last accessed on April 12, 2105.

cabinet would express its thoughts during the next NSC meeting on Latin America on October 15, 1969.

The day before the NSC meeting, Kissinger talked with Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson to discuss his plan for the next day. As was often the case when Latin America was the main issue, Kissinger planned on speaking only in generalities while someone else, in this case Richardson, spoke to the more technical details. Kissinger advised Richardson to be careful about how he brought up the speech since “the President is sensitive about speeches. The President looks at a speech as a way of making the bureaucracy do something he thinks it should.”¹¹⁸ During the NSC meeting, the president verbally expressed his frustrations with the bureaucracy that would implement his policy, continually prodding it to take “risks” in Latin American policy.

First on the agenda for the NSC were trade preferences and tariffs. Nixon was highly skeptical of the recommendations, which the Cabinet offered with several exceptions and caveats. Nixon emphasized that he was willing to “take political risks,” and all recommendations should “zero in on Latin America.” What Nixon wanted was a system of generalized tariffs to help the developing countries of Latin America. Generalized tariffs would allow the United States to lower tariffs on developing countries while maintaining higher tariffs on more advanced economies. Secretary of State Rogers would dampen Nixon’s enthusiasm somewhat by warning about “empty gestures” in the upcoming speech. He was worried about overpromising and under delivering. However,

¹¹⁸ Telcon, October 14, 1969.

when the agenda turned to moving more funds through multilateral organizations, Nixon was much more skeptical, “It would be money down a rat hole.”¹¹⁹

The discussion then turned to some of Rockefeller’s recommendations. For example, Nixon brought up the issue of integrating Canada more deeply into the hemisphere. In response, Rogers stated, “The Canadians are thinking of joining the OAS,” to which Nixon responded, “do it.” While the conversation on the subject became a bit glib—for example Nixon wanted to, “Bring Trudeau (prime minister of Canada) in. Give him a beard, and let him play with Castro”—the integration of Canada into the hemisphere was one of Rockefeller’s recommendations that Nixon had accepted. The participants of the meeting favorably received several other of Rockefeller’s recommendation such as the untying of AID loans and grants that would allow the use of AID funds on local manufactured products, as opposed to the previous rule of requiring U.S. goods.

One recommendation that Nixon could not support was a blanket debt rescheduling policy. The Rockefeller Report noted that many countries were “having to make new loans,” in order to, “pay interest and amortization on old loans,” and this situation should be a “major concern” to the United States.¹²⁰ The Treasury Department was adamant that it did not “want it (debt rescheduling) in the speech.” Nixon, aware that he was already asking the U.S. government to move outside of its comfort zone,

¹¹⁹Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, Washington, October 15, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d14>, last accessed on April 12, 2105.

¹²⁰ Rockefeller, *The Rockefeller Report on the America*, 87.

responded, “I even understand we can’t cover it in the speech.” Nixon, however, felt the need to give Rockefeller a heads up of his decision stating, “I do not want to give the impression we ignored the Rockefeller report. Go the Rockefeller people and explain it must be done country by country.”

Finally, the meeting ended on a long discussion of the role of the military in the region. Nixon likely had the late 1968 coup in Peru when General Juan Velasco Alvarado took power on his mind when he observed, “Coups have brought to power Nasser types. They don’t come from the elites. They are nationalistic, revolutionary, and anti-American.” Nixon was likely referring to new military leaders in Peru and Paraguay. The new type of military strongmen were not communist but were willing to accept Soviet aid and support. Nixon expressed somewhat mixed feelings about military governments. On one hand, he thought that the U.S. government should attempt to “lower our profile.” On the other hand, he mentioned, “we must influence their leadership through close contact between our military and theirs. We should do it but not appear to be doing it.” On how the U.S. government should respond to Latin American governments, Nixon came up with a three-part test: “their attitudes toward us, their chances to survive and the degree of stability.” Not included in his test was whether a country was democratic calling it, “knee-jerk reaction that a democratic government in Chile is more to be admired than another.” Nixon’s final notable comment foreshadowed some of the significant military coups during his tenure: “Don’t cut off contact between our military and theirs. They

may run the place someday.”¹²¹ Once the meeting concluded, the next step was preparing the bureaucracy to initiate any changes Nixon wanted to announce in the speech.

The first action was the untying of U.S. aid ordered as National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 28. The NSDM, published five days after the NSC meeting on October 20, was the official presidential order to change policy. Nixon had fought off a challenge from AID that recommend the untying be limited to the acquisition of the minimum amount of local currencies needed for development programs in the region.¹²² The quick turnaround between the NSDM and the NSC meeting was necessary since Nixon wanted something concrete he could point to in his speech. He would attempt to build up expectations of his foreign policy address over the next ten days.

In a conversation with Kissinger, Nixon seemed very enthusiastic about the speech. He felt that the elites of Latin America would feel that the speech “was the most meaningful one that they have heard in years.” The speech in his words had “no new promises, only new action.” Nixon wanted to “build up” the speech and asked Kissinger to see if “Rocky” (Nelson Rockefeller) would be “willing to come down and background the press.” Nixon, somewhat uncharacteristically also said, “it wouldn’t matter if it leaked.” He also asked Kissinger to work with H.R Haldeman to build up the speech and

¹²¹ Annex A to a Paper Prepared in the Department of State, Washington, undated, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d15>, last accessed on April 12, 2105.

¹²² National Security Decision Memorandum 28, Washington, October 20, 1969, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d16>, last accessed on April 12, 2105.

“get leaks out.”¹²³ Additionally, in a separate conversation the same night, Nixon wanted the speech sent to every Latin American ambassador. Once again, he emphasized, “we don’t give a damn if it leaks.”¹²⁴ Around the same time Nixon was providing his guidance, drafts of the speech bounced within the government as each Cabinet level department received a chance to provide their input.

One early cause of concern among some of the government officials was Rockefeller’s recommended organizational changes within the State Department and NSC to streamline Latin American policy. Rogers did not agree with the recommended restructuring, but felt if the president was going to with them then, “he shouldn’t just take 1/3 of the recommendations but do it all the way through.” Even with his halfhearted recommendation, the Secretary of State felt that there was no “chance in the world that Congress would pass this anyway.”¹²⁵ Nixon, when commenting on early versions of the speech, seemed generally pleased with the way it was shaping up. He, however, still felt that the speech failed to “emphasize strongly enough that the time for slogans and promises has ended and the time for action has come.”¹²⁶ As the date for the speech drew closer, the State Department began to have more serious reservations.

Rogers made one last effort to influence the speech and overall Latin American policy with the help of Kissinger. Rogers wanted to change the title of person in charge

¹²³Telcon, October 24, 1969; If Kissinger contacted Haldeman it did not make it into his edited diary collection. The topic of concern for the week prior to the speech was a big upcoming Vietnam speech.

¹²⁴ Telcon, October 24, 1969.

¹²⁵ Telcon, October 23, 1969.

¹²⁶ Telcon, October 25, 1969.

of Western Hemispheric affairs from Under Secretary to Deputy Secretary moving the person farther down the chain of command. Kissinger stated, “that was tried,” but “the President didn’t want it that way.” Kissinger then later asked Rogers for his opinion on whether Rockefeller should be a part of the press background briefing. The Secretary of State answered in the negative and Kissinger appeared to agree with him.¹²⁷ Rockefeller ended up not providing background information to the press, therefore depriving the president of his most visible ally in advocating for a new hemispheric policy. In a subsequent conversation, Rogers seem exasperated about the speech saying he “didn’t understand what the President is doing”. Kissinger attempted to reassure Rogers that the president was only trying “to be as close to the Rockefeller recommendation as possible,” however, he offered to “hold” the implementing memo on certain technical issues in order to allows Rogers to raise his concerns.

On another matter, both Kissinger and Rogers were constraining the president’s proposed course of action. Rogers, “didn’t agree with putting the Canadians” in the same portfolio as the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America as Rockefeller and Nixon wanted. Kissinger promised to “send out a rephrasing,” which would make the issue of Canada “subject to study,” since he validly noted, “This is not something we want to do without talking to the Canadians.”¹²⁸ While Kissinger’s reasoning may have been sound, the Canadian issue provides another vignette were the bureaucracy fought against changes Nixon wanted to implement.

¹²⁷ Telcon, October 27, 1969.

¹²⁸ Telcon, October 28, 1969.

The day before the speech, personal in the State Department to the president's annoyance were still making changes to the speech highlighting what Kissinger noted were there "kamikaze impulse." Charles Meyer seemed to understand Kissinger's concern, but felt the last minute changes were necessary since "some nuances...had to be cleared up." In Meyer's opinion, "the speech was pretty damned good—it will sound like a full symphony in Spanish." Continuing rather boldly he felt, "It would be well received; in fact, they will think they wrote it." The two men also discussed the next day's press background briefing. The National Security Advisor admitted again, "he doesn't really know the Latin American issues very well," even after close to a year on the job and offered to brief the "conceptual" portion of the backgrounder while Meyer's "would present the operational part."

On the day of the speech, October 31, 1969, at 3:30 PM, Kissinger and Meyer provided the press with a background not for attribution briefing prior to the president's speech that night. Meyer had just arrived from a short meeting in the Roosevelt Room in the Whitehouse where the president had briefed several key congressional leaders on his speech including Senator's J.W Fulbright and Frank Church.¹²⁹ While Meyer spoke extensively, Kissinger made the most interesting and provocative comments. Kissinger began as he previously discussed with the conceptual underpinnings of the speech in slightly grandiose language. Latin American policy was an, "extremely important aspect of overall American foreign policy," Kissinger said.

¹²⁹ Presidential Daily Diary 31 October

Additionally he continued:

There is a special relationship in the Western Hemisphere. It is the most consistent expression of American foreign policy. It is the area with which we are geographically closely linked. It is an area which is also of profound significance...¹³⁰

Further explaining the government's approach, Kissinger nested Latin America in Nixon's larger foreign policy vision as "reflected in the President's Guam statement," and "the general policy statement announced on his Asian trip."¹³¹ Kissinger was referring to one line in the President's Guam remarks, "I want to be sure that our policies in the future, all over the world, in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the rest, reduce American involvement. One of assistance, yes, assistance in helping them solve their own problems, but not going in and just doing the job ourselves..."¹³² While Vietnam remained the "immediate preoccupation," Kissinger hoped that the administration was remembered for building "a structure of peace," which he then continued, "what we are trying to do in the Western Hemisphere is the first step in this direction."¹³³

Nixon's speech later that night marked the first time a presidential speech was beamed live via satellite to Latin America courtesy of the United States Information

¹³⁰ Press Background Briefing, October 31, 1969; Box 5; Folder: Latin American Speech; White House Special Files: Ronald Ziegler; RNPL

¹³¹ Kissinger was referring to the "Nixon Doctrine" of which the most well-known portion expressed the position that the United States would keep its treaty obligations, and would provide military assistance, but expect host nations to take the lead in providing troops. See. William P. Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (Hill and Wang, 1999), 68.

¹³² Richard Nixon: "Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen," July 25, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140>

¹³³ Press Background Briefing, October 31, 1969; Box 5; Folder: Latin American Speech; White House Special Files: Ronald Ziegler; RNPL

Agency.¹³⁴ Nixon began the speech by downplaying the influence the United States could have in changing the region. “For years” he remarked, “we in the United States have pursued the illusion that we alone could remake continents.” After citing “the dramatic success of the Marshall Plan of postwar Europe,” he ended on a sobering note “experience has taught us better.” Nixon hoped to move to a “mature partnership” and “toward a more balanced relationship” in the region.¹³⁵ He then proceeded to list five influences that shaped his thinking about hemispheric policy.

First, was his personal experience of having “visited every nation in this hemisphere.” Second were the recommendations of Governor Rockefeller, which he called “farsighted.” Third were the proposals in the Consensus of Viña del Mar. The final two factors were the advice of other government officials, and what Nixon called “the concern of the people of the United States.” After laying out how his thinking had evolved, he continued with one of the many applause lines: “Tonight I offer no grandiose promises and no panaceas. I do offer action.”¹³⁶ The “action” that Nixon referenced was generally modest in scope, but realistically achievable during the course of his administration.

He introduced his plans with another applause line certainly appreciated by Latin America leaders, “Our partnership should be one in which the United States lectures less

¹³⁴ Robert B. Semple Jr, “President Urges Latins Take Lead To Spur Progress” *New York Times*, November 1, 1969.

¹³⁵ Richard Nixon: “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Inter American Press Association.,” October 31, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2302>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

and listens more.” His first proposal was to move foreign aid to a multilateral system under a new agency where the countries of the region had more input into where the United States would channel foreign aid. Trade would also be a priority with the United States “lead(ing) a vigorous effort to reduce the nontariff barriers.” Nixon also noted growing regional trade integration in the region such as the Central American Common Market (CACM). In sticking to a lower key approach he said, “The decisions on how far and how fast this process of integration goes, of course, are not ours to make,” while still offering assistance if requested. He also introduced his reorganization plan “raising the rank of the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to Under Secretary-- thus giving the hemisphere special representation.” Nixon in the speech also announced the untying of AID funds from NSDM 28. Recognizing many of the constraints on his policy in announcing the untying of funds, Nixon went off script saying there were “not too many occasions when the President can accomplish something by just ordering it to be done.”¹³⁷ Finally, the president announced several other smaller initiatives including increased sharing of science and technology. Nixon would end his speech by linking the region to his greater goals.

Nixon’s speech finished on a topic he often brought up, peace. As Kissinger stated in the background briefing, the Western Hemisphere could serve as the model for building a more peaceful world. Nixon in the speech reinforced Kissinger’s point. After saying “we can have lasting peace and progress only if the nations directly concerned

¹³⁷ Comparison between final marked up draft and live speech: October 31, 1969, WHCF, Subject: speeches, Box 113, RNPL. and speech transcript

take the lead themselves in achieving it.” He offered a “successfully progressing Western Hemisphere” could be “an example for the world.” He then continued, “Understandably, perhaps, a feeling has arisen in many Latin American countries that the United States really ‘no longer cares.’ Well, my answer to that tonight is very simple. We do care. I care.”¹³⁸ In a speech filled with somewhat modest proposals, Nixon would finish by setting a rather high visionary bar. His vision never reached the level of Rockefeller’s Good Neighbor policy or even the much-maligned Alliance for Progress.

In a major policy speech, it can be difficult to tease out the different competing voices within the text. In the case of this speech, the availability of Nixon’s final draft with his personal corrections highlights several points of emphasis. At one point, Nixon expressed a “preference” for democracy, but also offered to “deal realistically with governments in the inter-American system as they are.” Nixon personally wrote the evenhanded verbiage, however, the day before the speech instead of expressing “preference” for democracies, he actually “favor(ed) dictatorships.”¹³⁹ Another change to the speech made by Nixon included the removal of a section establishing a Latin America advisor in the NSC,¹⁴⁰ likely at the behest of Kissinger. The most interesting editorial choice was the removal of another section of the speech. While the speech espoused U.S. humility and Latin American partnership, Nixon was not prepared to say the following,

¹³⁸ Richard Nixon: “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Inter American Press Association,” October 31, 1969.

¹³⁹ Quotes and analysis from Mark Lawrence, “History from Below: The United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years,” in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 274.

¹⁴⁰ Speech file

“We have learned that we lack the power to remake the world in our image; and if the principle of non-intervention has meaning, we must also accept the fact that we lack the right to do so.”¹⁴¹ Nixon’s inability or unwillingness to accept that the United States did not have a right to intervene unilaterally in the hemisphere would haunt him later in his term.

The reaction to the president’s speech among his critics in the domestic press was generally poor.¹⁴² The response in Latin America, however, as documented by the White House, was more positive. A summary of newspaper reports and the private opinions of U.S. ambassadors and embassy personnel found the reaction to the speech to be “generally quite favorable.” The praise tended to focus on the tone of the speech, trade measures, and “emphasis on the US talking less but listening more.” Criticism tended to focus on the need for more specifics, social development, and lack of endorsement of democracy.¹⁴³ Further reports continued to emphasize the generally positive reaction to the president’s address. In Mexico, an estimated four million people tuned in to watch a voiced-over Spanish version of the speech translated without commentary. In the Mexican press, *Excelsior* credited Nixon with a “brilliant speech” and a “profound understanding of Latin American conditions.” The newspaper continued hoping that his speech would not be “obscured by Congress.” The news in Brazil followed a similar trajectory. A former government official Roberto Campos called the reduction in trade

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Lawrence, “History from Below,” 273.

¹⁴³ Viron P. Vaky to Ronald Ziegler “Preliminary Reports on Reactions to President’s Speech,” November 1, 1969; Box 5; [Folder:Latin America 3 of 3]; White House Special Files: Ronald Ziegler; RNPL

barriers and untying of U.S. loans and AID funds “a noble proposal,” while also commenting that in the United States, “Congress has the last word.” Unsurprisingly the most critical reaction to the speech came from Cuba with one radio broadcast calling the speech “pompous” and full of “hypocritical breast-beating.”¹⁴⁴ While the White House undoubtedly reveled in the generally positive coverage, the administration needed to build momentum for change.

Nixon continued to sell his vision by releasing the Rockefeller Report in full ten days after the speech. The press widely praised the administration’s move. *The Washington Post* led with the headline “Rockefeller’s Report: Worth Waiting For.” They praised the report, calling many of Rockefeller’s proposals “excellent.” The editors also correctly highlighted the strong signal the release of the report sent, “Mr. Nixon in effect applies a blowtorch at his own back; he builds into the Latin-policymaking process a strong outside impetus for change.”¹⁴⁵ Another newspaper, *The New York Times*, also praised the report calling the recommendations “ground-breaking.” Continuing, the newspaper reported that Nixon’s speech, while lacking the Rockefeller Report’s “sense of urgency,” realistically “espoused the report’s philosophy of a new partnership.”¹⁴⁶ The positive press would be useful in the short term as the Senate began oversight hearings.

¹⁴⁴ “President’s Speech on Latin America Summary,” November 2, 1969; Box 5 [Folder:Latin America 3 of 3]; White House Special Files: Ronald Ziegler; RNPL

¹⁴⁵ “Rockefeller’s Report: Worth Waiting For,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1969.

¹⁴⁶ Tad Szulcs, “Rockefeller Fear of New ‘Castros’ Voiced In Report” *New York Times*, November 9, 1969.

Over the longer term, however, Nixon's "blowtorch" would backfire when it came time to implement many of the proposals from the Rockefeller Report and his speech.

Rockefeller continued to advocate for the president and his policy proposals before a skeptical U.S. Senate Subcommittee hearing on November 20, 1969. Rockefeller took particular criticism from Senator Church on his view that the United States must continue providing military aid to Latin American countries. Rockefeller strongly felt that many countries in the region, citing Uruguay as an example, would "face chaos and anarchy" without U.S. assistance. Rockefeller additionally faced criticism for not making stronger recommendations on birth control,¹⁴⁷ to which he responded that any imposed solution would be "resented and perhaps counter-productive." The governor managed to find support on the Senate panel for other portions of his recommendations including the organizational change in the State Department, increased trade, and debt renegotiation.¹⁴⁸ While the Senate was skeptical of some changes, and supportive of others, overall, the president had begun to build some shortly lived momentum in implementing his Latin American policy vision.

By the end of the year, according to one news account, the Nixon administration, speaking on background, was generally disappointed in its foreign policy achievements. Among the "disappointments" were lack of progress in negotiating an end to the Vietnam War, Nigerian Civil War, and Arab-Israeli conflicts. Among his accomplishments

¹⁴⁷ For a general history about the unintended consequences of developed countries hawking population control solutions see Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁸ Jim Cannon to Henry Kissinger, November 21, 1969.

including troop withdrawals from Vietnam, the unnamed White House official touted “new policies toward Asia and Latin America—outlined respectively at Guam last summer and in a speech later here” as potential positive developments in the administration.¹⁴⁹ Nixon would continue to focus on Latin America as the year wound down.

December 30, 1969, Kissinger issued a memorandum outlining the president’s position on future U.S.-Latin American negotiations to implement the points of his speech. Kissinger relayed the president’s specific instructions to “present specific and concrete proposals.” The president wanted the proposals of the U.S. government to be “imaginative and positive,” while maintaining a “style of partnership and dialogue.” He also relayed a large list of specific initiative the president wanted to work on including the removal of “nuisance duties,” generalized trade preferences, multilateral aid frameworks, and debt services.¹⁵⁰ The memorandum appears to demonstrate a sincere effort by Nixon to engage and improve the U.S. relationship with the region. The year therefore ended with Nixon and his team attempting to implement in good faith the guidance of his speech. Unfortunately beginning in 1970 Nixon’s nascent Latin American policy would implode due to a variety of internal and external factors.

¹⁴⁹ Tom Lambert, “Nixon Reviews Year’s Foreign Policy Results: President Called Disappointed Over and but Aware of Gains, Too,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1969.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Chairman of the Under Secretaries Committee, Washington, December 30, 1969; folder Governor Rockefeller, July 1972: Box 831; NSC: Name File; RNPL.

Conclusion

“On many occasion a report is made advocating a program for progress in Latin America; everybody gets excited for a few days or a few weeks; and then the report is quietly pigeon –holed and for the most parts forgotten. United States policy toward Latin America must have consistency, continuity, and follow-through. ”

-Richard Nixon 1955

Kissinger, a known soccer enthusiast, was in Mexico City in early June 1970 to watch the final matches of the World Cup. The day before the title match, Kissinger took a moment out of his schedule to call on Díaz Ordaz as a courtesy to the Mexican president. According to the State Department summary of the meeting, Díaz Ordaz brought up the issue of Operation Intercept. He regretted his harsh public comments, “but said he had been placed in impossible position. Half of Mexicans thought, he said, that he had combined with President Nixon to deceive Mexican people about the operation and the other half thought he had been deceived by our president in not telling him about ‘intercept.’” Díaz Ordaz then mentioned that he thought the United States had taken “prompt and effective” steps to ameliorate the damage, and that the relationship was now back on an “even keel.” Henry Kissinger assured the president that the United States now had certain vague “precautions” in place to prevent another Operation Intercept from happening again. Kissinger then remarked that the relationship between the United States and Mexico was important due not only to the common frontier, but also to Mexico’s position as “the border between the English and Spanish-speaking worlds of America.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Telegram 3332 From the Embassy in Mexico to the Department of State, June 21, 1970, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available

Operation Intercept had no corollary in the Roosevelt administration. However, the United States and Mexico had several tense diplomatic moments during FDR's terms in office. One of the better-known moments was Mexico's expropriation of oil fields in 1938. Before the expropriation of the oil fields, Mexico seized large tracts of U.S. corporate owned farmland in an effort to promote agricultural reform. The response of Mexico's leadership in both Operation Intercept and what one historian coined as the agrarian dispute were similar. For example, in both cases Mexican diplomats circumvented the State Department and appealed to the president. In the case of Operation Intercept, it came through a letter, while in the case of the agrarian dispute it came from direct appeals from the ambassador Josephus Daniels to FDR, a personal acquaintance of the president. Similarly, after both crisis passed, Mexico negotiated monetary aid from the United States while continuing its preferred policy. Mexico continued with land reform in the 1930s providing compensation to U.S. companies with aid provided by the U.S. government. Mexico in the 1970s continued their previous policies of burning marijuana fields, only this time with U.S. subsidies.¹⁵²

While the U.S. government and Mexico were able to mitigate the damage of Operation Intercept, Nixon's greater Latin American policy as outlined in his October 31 speech floundered. Kissinger later wrote in his memoir that vision Nixon had laid out in his speech "was an idea ahead of its time." Nixon in his speech spoke eloquently of

online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d453>, last accessed on 10 April, 2015.

¹⁵² John J. Dwyer, "Diplomatic Weapons of the Weak: Mexican Policymaking during the U.S.-Mexican Agrarian Dispute, 1934-1941," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 3 (January 1, 2002): 375-95, doi:10.1111/1467-7709.00316.

greater “partnership,” increased hemispheric trade, and more effective foreign aid. Not mentioned in the speech, but championed by Nixon, the integration of Canada into the hemisphere began under Nixon with Canada becoming a permanent observer to the OAS in 1972, before becoming a permanent member in 1990. Besides the integration of Canada, Nixon pushed for greater integration of South America into the hemisphere. The key symbol of integration would be the improvement and completion of the Pan-American Highway. Nixon’s vision was simple “a road usable year round—from NY to the tip of S.A. [South America].”¹⁵³ Unlike other Latin American priorities, Nixon spent a considerable amount of energy and appropriations on the issue. Successfully completing the highway, began under FDR, would have been a major accomplishment. Ironically, the failure to complete the highway was the direct result of a lawsuit brought by the Sierra Club under one of Nixon’s signature domestic achievements, the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act.¹⁵⁴ The failure to implement Nixon’s ideas in Kissinger’s estimation were due to bureaucratic divisions, particularly the opposition of John Connally, the Secretary of the Treasury, who succeeded in delaying the submission of any legislation that would favor Latin America. Additionally, a ten percent reduction

¹⁵³ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, April 27, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/>

¹⁵⁴ Shawn W. Miller, “A Destiny so Manifest: Pan-Americanism, American Environmentalism, and the Failure to Pave the Darién Gap,” 201AD, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rci.rutgers.edu%2F~triner%2FHerb-fest%2FMiller.pdf&ei=oGw4VYKgDISngwSuiIGwBg&usg=AFQjCNFU68IUPufcGll1OPmwWJb4crgMMg&sig2=PhJLOx6Oou_SbE6oOfatyg.

in foreign aid, and a ten percent surcharge on imports further damaged relations, and in Kissinger's estimation "put an end to any further multilateral effort in the Western Hemisphere for the remainder of Nixon's first term."¹⁵⁵ Kissinger himself also deserved much of the blame for Nixon's failure. He admitted to having a "distorted geographic perspective," continuing, "London, Paris, Rome, and Bonn seemed close; Mexico City seemed far away, Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires beyond reach."¹⁵⁶ According to Nelson Rockefeller's biographer and aide, Rockefeller blamed Nixon for failing to implement his recommendations, but also acknowledged, "it was not entirely Nixon's fault." He had concluded that he had failed to "infect his friend Henry Kissinger with his own passion for Latin America."¹⁵⁷

Nixon's framework in many respects resembled the "golden age" of U.S.-Latin American relations under FDR's Good Neighbor policy. While Nixon failed to respect nonintervention, as demonstrated by CIA machinations in Chile and elsewhere, he also never sent in the armed forces as previous and subsequent presidents did. Nixon also kept his promise to "deal realistically with governments in the Inter-American system as they are." Even in the case of Chile, the United States maintained diplomatic relations throughout. In the case of other dictatorships, particularly Brazil, relations flourished. Roosevelt's form on nonintervention could be equally fuzzy. In August of 1933, Ramón Grau San Martín came to power in a military coup. FDR refused to recognize the Cuban

¹⁵⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 709.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 706.

¹⁵⁷ Persico, *Imperial Rockefeller*, 106.

government until Colonel Fulgencio Batista overthrew the government in January 1934. Batista maintained a strong influence on the new Cuban government, officially led by President Carlos Mendicta. The United States recognized the new government within five days.¹⁵⁸

Nixon's military policies in the region also mirrored Roosevelt's policies. During his second NSC meeting on Latin America, Nixon emphasized that he wanted close contact between U.S. and Latin American military officers. Additionally in 1971, he disapproved an effort underway in the Department of Defense to shutter Southern Command.¹⁵⁹ Roosevelt's military officers also remained engaged in the region. For example, in the case of the Dominican Republic, led by the military dictator Trujillo, U.S. military officers recommended a much more cooperative policy with the Dominican Republic than the State Department.¹⁶⁰ Finally, FDR extended full diplomatic courtesies and recognition to military dictators. In 1939, FDR personally met with Nicaragua's military leader Anastasio Somoza García receiving him at the train station and allowing him to spend the night in the White House.¹⁶¹ Thirty-Two years later Nixon would

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Smith, *The United States and Latin America: A History of American Diplomacy, 1776-2000*, New Ed edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, July 6, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d44>.

¹⁶⁰ Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door*.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *The United States and Latin America*, 96.

receive the third Somoza to rule Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, into the White House saying, “Mi casa esta(sic) su casa.”¹⁶²

Finally, the direct link between the two presidents’ Latin American policies was the advice and counsel of Nelson Rockefeller. His recommendations, such as closer ties to military leaders, were in many ways a direct transplant of FDR era ideas. The similarities between his ideas in 1969 and the FDR era policies is not surprising. His first business trip to Venezuela in 1935, where he fell in love with the people and culture, took place during the Good Neighbor policy. Several years later, he came to learn more about U.S-Latin American relations in his governmental positions under Roosevelt. Galo Plaza may never have recommended Rockefeller except for their encounters under Roosevelt in 1945 shepherding the passage of the Act of Chapultepec.¹⁶³ Rockefeller earned the credibility he needed during the Good Neighbor policy that allowed him to influence policy under Nixon.

For all their similarities, Nixon was never able to reboot the Good Neighbor policy. The standard explanation for why Nixon’s Latin American policies failed is that he prioritized other regions of the world. Perhaps, the lack of prioritization was unavoidable. Nixon faced many urgent foreign policy issues vital to the nation’s interest in the Soviet Union, China, the Middle East and Vietnam. With so many other important issues, and limited time, the minimal engagement with Latin America was perhaps

¹⁶² Memorandum for the Record, Washington, June 2, 1971, 7:30, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d504>.

¹⁶³ Mireya Salgado Gómez and Carlos de la Torre, *Galo Plaza y su época* (Flacso-Sede Ecuador, 2008), 13.

appropriate.¹⁶⁴ Other issues, however, also played a role. For example, even though FDR's relations with Congress were strained at times, his relations with the House and Senate were also at times very good. Nixon's relations with Congress on the other hand always were strained sometimes causing difficulties in implementing his agenda. One other point is that the global position of the United States was very different in the 1930s as compared to the late 1960s. FDR led a nation that originally wanted to focus more on its core interests in the hemisphere. Nixon led a Cold War United States thoroughly entangled in world affairs.

The Culture of the United States had also changed over time as best demonstrated in the films Americans watched during that era. Movies such as *The Emperor Jones* (1933), *Blondies Goes Latin* (1942), and Walt Disney's *The Three Caballeros* generally portrayed residents of Latin America in a positive manner.¹⁶⁵ Additionally one opinion poll conducted in 1940 indicated that 84% of Americans wanted to know more about Latin America, and 75% called for greater contact between the United States and the region.¹⁶⁶ During Nixon's presidency, the public knew little about Latin America, and the depiction of the region in Hollywood films such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Bananas*, and *Bring me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, depicted the stereotypical Latin

¹⁶⁵ Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door*, 28–29.

¹⁶⁶ Pike, *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*, 134.

American as “inept,” and “blood thirsty.”¹⁶⁷ Nixon himself at times seemed resigned to the American public’s indifference, once stating:

We’ve been around this track a number of times. I had the Latin American heads of state here. Nobody gives one tinker’s damn about Colombia, Venezuela, et cetera. We try! You know, they don’t even care about Mexico. Not much. ¹⁶⁸

Times had even changed since Nixon’s loss to Kennedy in 1960 where Nixon blamed the loss of Cuba to Communism for his electoral defeat.¹⁶⁹

The situation was different not only in the United States, but also in Latin America. The violent student protests that greeted Rockefeller at many of his stops emphasized this point. Many people in Latin America were dismissive of his report even though as one historian noted, “the report essentially reiterated the nonintervention principle of the Good Neighbor policy.” The reason many of the Latin American elites were dismissive was in the historian’s opinion, “they no longer believed in the possibility of nonintervention.”¹⁷⁰ Newer studies of Rockefeller’s trips suggest his reception in Latin America was more positive than the newspaper reports suggested.¹⁷¹ However, whatever the true feelings of the population, Rockefeller conducted his presidential mission during

¹⁶⁷Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 4 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2012), 346.

¹⁶⁸ Conversation No. 520-5 Transcription courtesy of the National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB95/mex03.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 49.

¹⁷⁰ Professor Elizabeth A. Cobbs, *The Rich Neighbor Policy: Rockefeller and Kaiser in Brazil*, 1st edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 252.

¹⁷¹ Capello, “Latin America Encounters Nelson Rockefeller.”

a time of massive societal turbulence, particularly in the student population.¹⁷² Finally, Richard Nixon and Franklin D. Roosevelt, irrespective of ideology, each approached the presidency in a fundamentally different way. One Nixon aide recounted how Rockefeller consistently singled out FDR's ability to "cultivate a sympathy and understanding, and convincing interest, in the hemisphere."¹⁷³ Nixon, by choice, lack of ability, or circumstances simply could not match FDR's ability. FDR had an instinctive ability to juggle multiple balls and take advice from multiple sources that served him well during his presidency. Nixon at times appeared to take advice from different individuals. Nixon's interactions with Rockefeller on Latin American issues was the clearest example, but the interactions with Latin American leaders also left an impression, at least temporarily.¹⁷⁴ For the most part, however, Nixon relied on the advice of Kissinger, who once stated if he needed "any information on Latin America, I'll look it up in an Almanac."¹⁷⁵ Kissinger's version of realpolitik did not have much room for the United States' closest geographic neighbors.

On the first day of the New Year January 1, 1970, Viron Vaky worried about the future of U.S-Latin American relations. He believed that the U.S. government had "and

¹⁷² For a global account of student protests in 1968 see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2005) Specifically on Brazil see Victoria Langland, *Speaking of Flowers: Student Movements and the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil*, 2013.

¹⁷³ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, January 1, 1970, FRUS, 1969-1972, Volume E-10: Documents on American Republics (Washington, DC: Department of State), available online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/>

¹⁷⁴ Nixon during his presidency met at the White House the leaders of Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Brazil. The conversations, while important, are beyond the scope of this report.

¹⁷⁵ Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 116.

articulated a conceptual framework” that was “realistic and reasonable—even historic. But most of our government does not believe or accept it, or does not understand it; and we are in danger of betraying it.” Vaky foresaw “stormy times” ahead and the need for “special effort, special concern, some policies that are politically difficult domestically, and money,” to fulfill the president’s vision for Latin America. Additionally, the “bold and imaginative” ideas in the Rockefeller Report would require “commitment of substantially increased inputs of resources and efforts.” Kissinger wrote at the top his memo “excellent paper,” at the end he wrote, “All right, how do we get it?”¹⁷⁶ Looking back on the Nixon administration as a whole, Vaky’s worries proved prescient. What was now Vaky labeled “historic” was a throwback to a bygone Good Neighbor era. However, times had changed, and a policy that may have worked in the 1930s and 1940s would face harsher scrutiny in the 1970s.

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum From Viron P. Vaky of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, January 1, 1970

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