

2. *Democracy and dictatorship*

Prior to World II U.S. efforts to promote democracy by military intervention and by nonrecognition of dictatorial regimes consistently failed to achieve their objective. After one more such failure in Argentina in 1946, it has been the policy of the U.S. Government ever since to maintain correct relations with all de facto governments in Latin America regardless of their political coloration.

However, in the immediate postwar period the U.S. Government, in its public statements, continued to emphasize support of democratic principles. Following the overthrow by military officers of the popularly elected Acción Democrática government in Venezuela in 1948, President Truman wrote to ousted-President Gallegos:

I believe that the use of force to effect political change is not only deplorable, but also contrary to the ideals of the American peoples. The Government of the United States proposes to do everything possible, in accordance with its international obligations, to fortify the democratic forces in this hemisphere.¹⁴

A State Department press release of December 21, 1948, referring to military coups in Peru and Venezuela, warned that "if this use of force continues, it cannot fail to become a sufficiently serious issue to engage the American Republics as a whole." Secretary of State Dean Acheson the following year underscored this line of policy by publicly proclaiming that "we deplore the action of any group in substituting its judgment for that of the electorate."¹⁵

Although the "use of force" continued, as for example the 1950 army coup in Haiti or that of 1952 in Cuba, no further U.S. official concern was expressed. During 1952, the Truman administration apparently had few qualms about signing mutual defense assistance pacts with the dictatorial regimes then in power in Cuba, Peru, and Colombia, and the Eisenhower administration followed a similar practice with the Dominican Republic in 1953 and Nicaragua in 1954.

In addition to the aid, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations have on occasion given public commendation to dictatorial regimes. For example, on June 9, 1952, Ambassador Ralph H. Ackerman, expressing his appreciation for the guided-missile tracking base facilities the United States had just received from the Dominican Government, said to the people of the Dominican Republic:

All western nations today are striving * * * for the amelioration of mankind. Governments are taking interest in the welfare of people * * *. Your own illustrious president * * * Trujillo * * * gave illustration of this trend when, in a speech he made only a few days ago, he reiterated an aspiration he has often voiced before, to raise the standard of living of the Dominican Republic so that the people may benefit from a fuller life. No one can gainsay the great benefits he has already succeeded in bringing about.¹⁶

The Eisenhower administration has gone even further in manifestations of open support for authoritarian military regimes. Soon after assuming office it undertook a rapprochement with the Perón regime in Argentina and granted a loan. In November 1954 President Eisenhower presented Legion of Merit citations to Presidents Odría and Pérez Jiménez, the very men who 6 years previously had seized power, forcefully overthrowing freely elected, popular, civilian governments. As these dictatorships had recently collapsed, it should

¹⁴ Bohemia (Havana), Feb. 13, 1949.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bulletin, No. 3647, Inter-American Series No. 58.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bulletin, July 14, 1952.