

The 1960s: A Decade of Revolution

by Kenneth Finlayson

Photo collage by D. Telles

The decade of the 1960s witnessed profound change in the established world order. The post-WW II global configuration was essentially bi-polar, with the United States-led West aligned against the Soviet-dominated East. In the 1960s, this split along ideological and economic lines divided the world into five centers of power: the Soviet Union and its satellites; Communist China and Southeast Asia; Europe and the United States; Africa; and Latin America. This article will look briefly at each of these regions and the general United States foreign policy strategy for each. The emphasis will be on Latin America, in particular Bolivia, and events such as Cuban-instigated insurgencies, affecting U.S. engagement in the southern hemisphere. In Latin America, Cuban-sponsored revolutionary fervor was a major factor in determining the U.S. strategy.

The Allied powers determined at the end of World War II the Security Council's permanent membership in the newly formed United Nations (Chiang K'ai Shek's Nationalist China, not Communist China, held a permanent seat). The power blocs of the Fifties began to erode in the Sixties. It was the Soviet Union that faced off against the West in the Cold War, and instigated such provocations as the erection of the Berlin Wall.¹

In the immediate post-War period, U.S. nuclear superiority caused the Soviet Union to forcibly integrate the countries of Eastern Europe into the Warsaw Pact as a buffer and a counter to NATO.² As the Soviets achieved nuclear parity with the United States, the

The Berlin Wall divided East and West Berlin for 28 years. Construction by the German Democratic Republic began on 13 August 1961. The Wall collapsed on 9 November 1989 to pave the way for German reunification.



Mao Zedong (R) with Associated Press correspondent John Roderick in Yanag China, 1946. Mao's Peoples Republic of China broke with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, resulting in two Communist spheres of influence in the world.



In the 1960s, cracks began to appear in the monolithic Soviet bloc when Alexander Dubček presented a less repressive regime in Czechoslovakia. The "Prague Spring" was ruthlessly suppressed by the Soviet Army in 1968.



Wars of National Liberation

"It is our duty to support the sacred struggle of the oppressed peoples and their just anti-imperialist wars of national liberation."

Nikita S. Khrushchev, June 1960¹

Post-World War II Wars of National Liberation are defined as those conflicts fought by indigenous military groups against an imperial power in the name of self-determination. The purpose is the violent pursuit of political change; to create a new nation state grounded in some kind of cultural community. Overwhelmingly based on guerrilla warfare, Wars of National Liberation were the predominant form of conflict in the 1960s. An example today would be Chechnya, where the Muslim Chechens are fighting for independence from Russia. *Map by D. Telles.*

Wars of National Liberation in the 1960s:



Endnotes

- 1 Walter Darnell Jacobs, "Soviet Views of Wars of National Liberation," *Military Review*, October 1967, 61.
- 2 Daniel Moran, *Wars of National Liberation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006) 24.

fear of a global nuclear war receded and the Eastern bloc countries sought relief from repressive Soviet control. In the Sixties, the Soviet Bloc began to show signs of disintegration. Yugoslavia, Albania, and Czechoslovakia all rebelled against Russian rule. The Soviet Union, while maintaining control over its Eastern European satellites, worked diligently to foster the spread of Communism abroad as it had in the 1950s. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in June 1960, Nikita Khrushchev asserted the Soviet Union's support to "Just Wars of National Liberation."³ Containment of Communism was the cornerstone of the United States and European strategy.

In the post-War era, Western Europe was divided over the best approach to meet the Soviet threat and on the question of how to deal with the divided Germany.⁴ The Marshall Plan poured billions of U.S. dollars into Europe and Japan to put the war-torn nations back on their feet. Protected by NATO forces and reinforced by the nuclear arsenals of the West, the governments

of Western Europe were popularly elected democracies or constitutional monarchies. The fundamental issue facing the Europeans was their political and economic alignment in response to the Soviet threat.

The nations of Europe did align in 1949 under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (NATO), but the cohesive nature of the alliance was disrupted when France withdrew in 1966. In spite of this, the nations of Western Europe remained stable and committed to opposing the Soviets. There was a genuine desire to advance European economic progress and a reluctance to see the spread of nuclear weapons.⁵ Outside of Europe, notably in Asia and Africa, things were far from stable.

In the former French colonial holdings in Indochina, Communist North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh was waging a war against the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government. Communist insurgencies threatened neighboring Laos and Cambodia, with the latter eventually falling to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The United States was



Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev and U.S. President John F. Kennedy in Vienna, Austria, on 4 June 1961. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Khrushchev tried to intimidate the young president by sending nuclear weapons and modern armaments to Cuba.

Governments in the 1960s

Between 1962 and 1967, the world moved from one in which the majority of the nations were democracies to one in which autocratic one-party states and military juntas became more common. Latin America and Africa were the two continents most affected by the change in governments. Each figure represents 5% of the world's population. *Map by D. Telles.*

1962



World Population by Government



1967



engaged in a steadily escalating conflict in Vietnam. This came to dominate American foreign policy and the U.S. military and became the focal point of domestic unrest in America throughout the 1960s. While the United States was decisively engaged in Asia in the 1960s, the interest in Africa was minimal.

The decade of the 1960s brought more political change to the African continent than anywhere in the world. In 1959 there were 9 sovereign nations in Africa. European colonial territories comprised the remainder of the continent. In one year the number of new sovereign countries jumped to 27 and continued to grow as the old imperial powers withdrew from the continent in the face

of widespread African independence movements.⁶ The transition to independence was often rocky, and many of the new nations fell under dictators or military juntas, reducing U.S. interest in Africa.⁷ This was in sharp contrast to America's role in Latin America. Two decades of U.S. preoccupation with Europe and Asia created an imbalance in American policy towards Latin America that the United States began to rectify in the 1960s.

When Secretary of State Dean M. Rusk asked, "Who speaks for Europe?" he was articulating a problem endemic to the highest levels of government, the tendency to generalize and simplify when formulating foreign policy.⁸ Latin America had a long history of



Ho Chi Minh was the Communist revolutionary who founded the Viet Minh independence movement in Vietnam during World War II. He was Prime Minister and then the President of the People's Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) until his death in 1969. He waged war against the Japanese, then the French until 1954, then against the United States and South Vietnam until his death in 1969.

regional cooperation. The Organization of American States (OAS), founded in 1948 was one of the oldest of the regional alliances. Castro's successful Communist revolution in Cuba threw shockwaves throughout Latin America, and U.S. foreign policy became predicated on preventing the further spread of Cuban-sponsored revolution.⁹ The Cuban Missile Crisis galvanized the nations of the OAS to action; the range of the Soviet nuclear missiles threatened the entire region. The United States foreign policy in the 1960s towards Latin America reflected a mistaken idea that there existed a hemispheric Pan-American movement.¹⁰ While the United States tried to develop a coherent, "one-size fits all" policy, each of

the nations in Latin America tried to get the U.S. to treat them as a special case.¹¹

President John F. Kennedy called Latin America "the most critical area in the world," a strong indicator of the priority that he placed on the region.¹² U.S. military and economic aid steadily increased in the 1960s. By 1967, over \$6 billion in economic aid from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and \$1.7 billion via the Military Assistance Program (MAP) had been distributed in Latin America.¹³ In addition to funds, Kennedy's newly formed Peace Corps dispatched some 16,000 workers to Latin America between 1962 and 1967, to conduct civic action projects, improve agricultural practices, and help educate the local populations.¹⁴ But Latin America was not a homogenous region; it contained widely diverse countries and cultures, with greatly varying degrees of development. In the 1960s, political instability affected many countries in the region.

In 1962, the nations of Latin America were predominately multi-party democracies. By 1967, military juntas were in control in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay as well as several Central American nations. The U.S. tended to support the juntas as a bulwark against Cuban-inspired communist revolutions. The ideological initiative the U.S. enjoyed at the beginning of the decade as the promoter of democracy was lost in subsequent years by its support of non-democratic regimes.¹⁵ The presence of Fidel Castro's Communist

- A Soviet missile shoots down an American Lockheed U2 spy plane; the pilot Francis Gary Powers is captured.
- Belgian forces leave the Congo.



- Ceasefire after Chinese capture Bomdila, India.
- Algeria became independent of French rule.
- Cuban Missile Crisis.



- PLO is founded in Palestine.
- Khrushchev is deposed in Soviet Union.
- Greek-Turkish Cypriot War begins.
- Gulf of Tonkin Bay Resolution.



- China's Cultural Revolution begins.
- President Nkrumah of Ghana overthrown by army.
- France withdraws from NATO.

1960

1962

1964

1966

1961

- Berlin Wall goes up.
- Bay of Pigs Invasion.
- Union of South Africa leaves British Commonwealth.
- Civil War in Congo.
- Alliance For Progress



1963

- United States President John F. Kennedy assassinated.
- Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.



1965

- Southern Rhodesia declares independence from Britain.
- Winston Churchill dies.



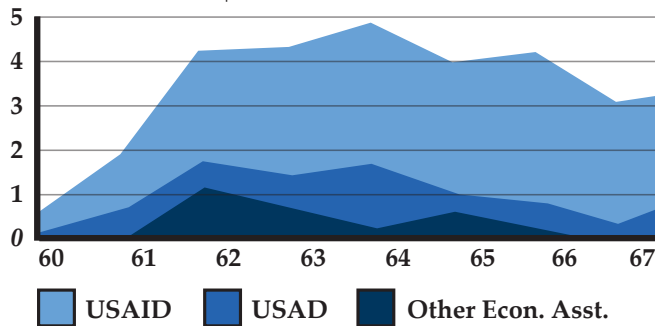
1967

- Civil War in Nigeria.
- Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.
- Anti-war Demonstrations in United States.
- Che Guevara killed in Bolivia.

1960 - 1967 International Scene

U.S. Economic Assistance

billions of 2005 \$US



U.S. economic assistance to Latin America reflected President John F. Kennedy's belief that the region was "the most critical in the world." This made Latin America the second largest recipient of U.S. aid after Asia.

Cuba encouraged many of the revolutionaries in the region to foment unrest. President Kennedy said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable."¹⁶ The revolutionary movements in Latin America had several well-defined objectives: popular participation in government; land reform in the break-up of the old feudal estates called the *latifundias*; the destruction of the ruling oligarchies that maintained them; and the main objective, economic development.¹⁷ But unlike Europe and Japan, there was no Marshall Plan equivalent for Latin America. The U.S. moved to alleviate their deficiencies with the Alliance for Progress (AFP).

The Alliance for Progress was structured to address these objectives and provide for security in the region. Formalized in August 1961, by the Charter of Punta del Este, the 20 signatory nations mapped out the vision for the Alliance for Progress that focused on agrarian reform and raising the standard of living in Latin America.¹⁸ The Alliance was founded as the response to the Cuban threat to incite revolution.¹⁹ President Kennedy called for "a vast cooperative effort, unparalleled in magnitude and nobility, to satisfy the basic need for homes, work, and land, for health and schools."²⁰ The AFP established principles for hemispheric cooperation and changed the fundamental structures of finance and economic development.²¹ But, as the decade wore on, the Alliance for Progress began to lose its effectiveness.

The AFP gradually became more about social reform than economic progress. It foundered on the resistance of the landed elites to cultural change and the nationalistic sentiments of the different countries.²² Foreign affairs analyst Philip W. Quigg noted, "With the exception of the Middle East, Latin America is the most politicized area which has not evolved an adequate tradition of public service or political responsibility."²³ This cultural mindset worked to the detriment of the reform programs. One bright spot was Bolivia, which by 1967 had received more than \$262 million in economic and military aid from the U.S. There the AFP-sponsored programs, notably land reform, were a deterrent to Cuban-sponsored revolution.



President John F. Kennedy signs the Charter of Punta del Este in August 1961. The Charter created the Alliance for Progress, Kennedy's idea for improving economic development in Latin America and countering the spread of Communist Cuban influence in the region.

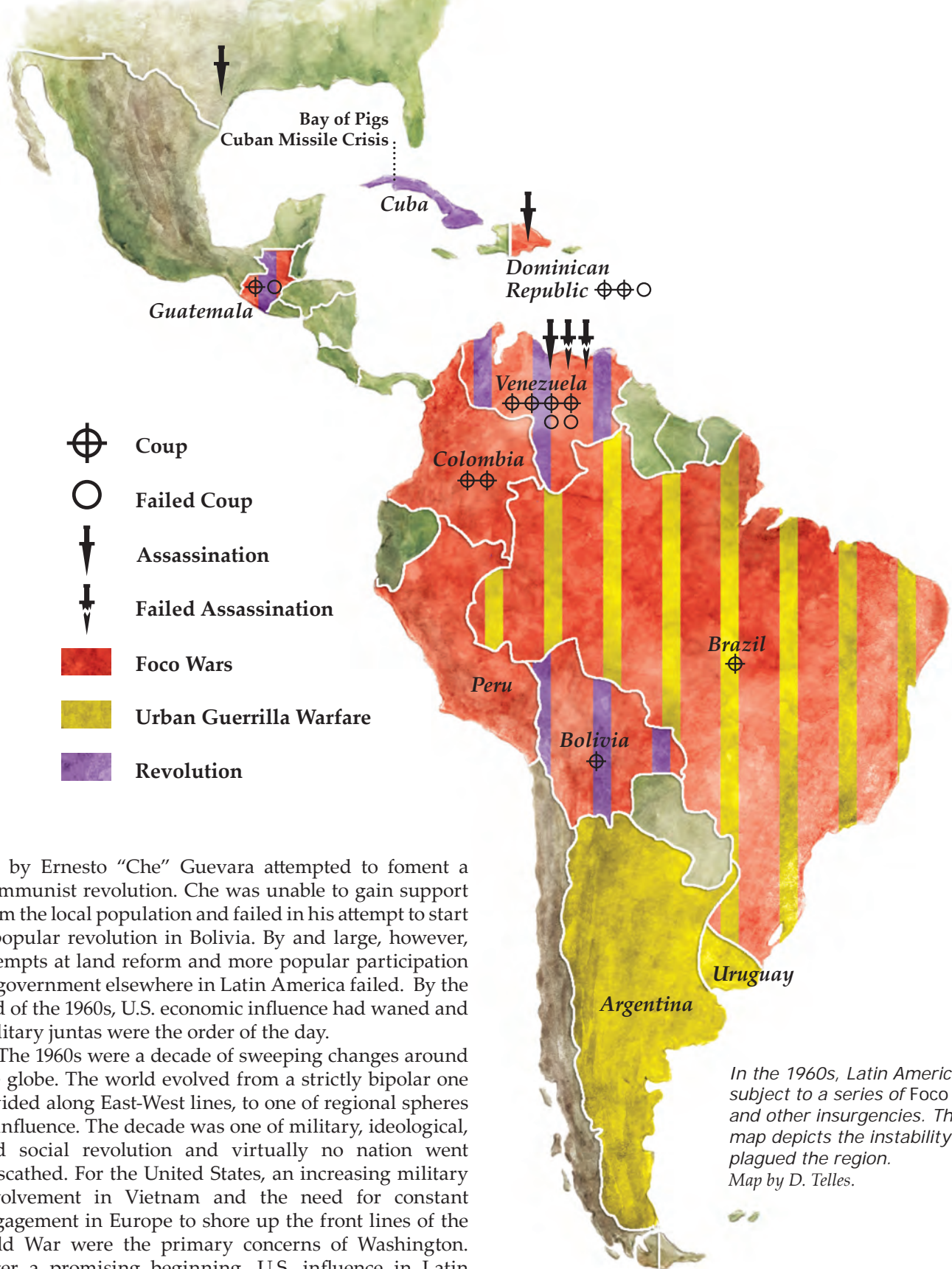
Land reform in Bolivia did work to the extent that after the 1952 revolution, many of the large *latifundias* were broken up and the land redistributed among the working classes, particularly to the indigenous population. The Indians were given title to their lands after nominal payments were made to the landowners by the government.²⁴ Over 19,536,850 acres, (nearly 31,000 square miles,) were in the hands of the Indian population by 1967.²⁵ This redistribution had far-reaching consequences when Cuban revolutionary elements

"the most critical area in the world"

— President John F. Kennedy



President John F. Kennedy greets the first Peace Corps volunteers in Washington, DC, 28 August 1961. The Peace Corps was his initiative and between 1962 and 1967, 16,000 volunteers were sent to Latin America.



- ⊕ Coup
- Failed Coup
- ↓ Assassination
- ⚡ Failed Assassination
- Foco Wars
- Urban Guerrilla Warfare
- Revolution

led by Ernesto “Che” Guevara attempted to foment a Communist revolution. Che was unable to gain support from the local population and failed in his attempt to start a popular revolution in Bolivia. By and large, however, attempts at land reform and more popular participation in government elsewhere in Latin America failed. By the end of the 1960s, U.S. economic influence had waned and military juntas were the order of the day.

The 1960s were a decade of sweeping changes around the globe. The world evolved from a strictly bipolar one divided along East-West lines, to one of regional spheres of influence. The decade was one of military, ideological, and social revolution and virtually no nation went unscathed. For the United States, an increasing military involvement in Vietnam and the need for constant engagement in Europe to shore up the front lines of the Cold War were the primary concerns of Washington. After a promising beginning, U.S. influence in Latin America waned as the decade drew to a close. The hemisphere proved particularly susceptible to the siren song of Cuban-sponsored revolution. Bolivia, one of the poorest and most politically chaotic of the Latin American nations, was a prime target for an insurgency. But, the failure of Che’s effort is one of the few American counterinsurgency success stories in Latin America. ♣

In the 1960s, Latin America was subject to a series of Foco wars and other insurgencies. The map depicts the instability that plagued the region. Map by D. Telles.

Kenneth Finlayson is the USASOC Deputy Command Historian. He earned his PhD from the University of Maine, and is a retired Army officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, special operations aviation, and World War II special operations units.



Bolivia was one of the few Latin American countries in which land reform measures had some success. The large Indian population of Bolivia did benefit from the reforms by acquiring arable land from the large latifundias.

Endnotes

- 1 Herman F. Achminow, "Crisis in Mao's Realm and Moscow's China Policy," *Orbis*, Winter 1968, 1179-1192.
- 2 Ducci, "The World Order in the Sixties," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1964, 381.
- 3 Richard J. Erickson, "Development of the Strategy of Peaceful Coexistence During the Khrushchev Era," *Air University Review*, January-February 1973, 5.
- 4 René Albrecht-Carré, "Europe and the German Problem," *Orbis*, Winter 1969, 1031-1045; Klaus Bloemer, "Germany and a 'European Europe'," *Orbis*, Spring 1966, 240-246.
- 5 Alastair Buchan, "Partners and Allies," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1963, 621.
- 6 Chief H. O. Domes, "The New African Profile," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1962, 293.
- 7 Claude E. Welch, "Soldier and State in Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, November 1967, 305-322.
- 8 Philip W. Quigg, "Latin America: A Broad-Brush Appraisal," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1964, 401.
- 9 Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 61. Cuban Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez is quoted as saying "Cuba has the duty of carrying out, and will always carry out, a revolutionary, proletarian internationalism." Margaret Daly Hayes, *Latin America and the U.S. National Interest: A Basis for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 103.
- 10 Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy: A History* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), 766-771; Quigg, "Latin America: A Broad-Brush Appraisal," 401.
- 11 Quigg, "Latin America: A Broad-Brush Appraisal," 402; Robert C. Hill, "U.S. Policy towards Latin America," *Orbis*, Summer 1966, 390-407.
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- 13 Neil B. Mills, "An Analysis of Civic Action in Selected Underdeveloped Countries," Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1964; **Between 1961 and 1967, the United States contributed an average of \$2 billion annually to the Alliance For Progress.** Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 71.
- 14 Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 72.
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- 17 Frei, "The Alliance That Lost Its Way," 438.
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- 19 Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 70; Graham H. Stuart and James L. Tigner, *Latin America and the United States*, 6th ed, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 804-805.
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- 22 **A strong indicator of the AFPs loss of coherence was the accumulation of special conditions, provisos, and prohibitions attached to economic aid. The decay of the Alliance began under Kennedy and accelerated under Lyndon Johnson.** Julie Cotler and Richard R. Fagen, ed., *Latin America & the United States: The Changing Political Realities* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1974) 190.
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