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Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965

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John Taylor is an award-winning author who has written extensively on U.S. and Asian affairs. During his research for the book *General Maxwell Taylor*, he relied heavily on the general's personal letters and contacts with many friends of the general. Taylor's writing experience, research, and knowledge of his subject allows for many interesting anecdotes. Yet the book fails to provide much in-depth analysis of, or insight into, the general's activities.

An example is Taylor's discussion of the general's pre-war years. He describes an officer who is concerned with his career development after having spent most of his time away from conventional military duties. The reader is given a good look into the general's decision-making process, but as the discussion progresses it lapses into a mere presentation of facts, and the analysis fades away. Moreover, discussions of critical stages of the general's career are very limited. For example, little is mentioned of General Taylor's successful reorganization of the Army in order to expand its war-fighting capability to meet contingencies across the spectrum of warfare. Only brief coverage is given to the rift between General Taylor while he served as Army Chief of Staff and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Arthur Radford. Further, Taylor could have devoted more space to the general's stand against the policy of massive retaliation and how his alternative, which was flexible response, was accepted by the Kennedy adminis-

tration and changed the complexion of the U.S. defense.

The book does have its bright spots. Among those of special note is the discussion of the general's command of the 101st Airborne Division. Taylor devotes attention to staff activities during the Normandy Invasion, the tragedy of Arnhem, and the heroic stand of the division at Bastogne. The discussion of the general's activities from the period of his assignment in Berlin to his assignment with the U.S. Far East Command is interesting. It provides a clear demonstration of how his knowledge of languages and foreign affairs and his diplomatic skills played a vital role in his success, and how such abilities have become invaluable to the professional soldier in post-war command assignments.

In spite of its deficiencies, *General Maxwell Taylor* does manage to illustrate the accomplishments of an extraordinary military officer. The book should serve as an excellent illustration of the important role of military leadership in U.S. national security and foreign affairs.

MARK EDMOND CLARK
New York, New York

Palmer, Bruce, Jr. *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*. Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1989. 226pp. \$23

Any book on U.S. intervention anywhere in the Caribbean Basin has a special timeliness these days. As in the case of Panama in 1989, the 1965

intervention in the Dominican Republic illustrates how planning errors endure and how certain historical themes also endure in such actions. But General Palmer's recollections as *de facto* intervenor-in-charge contain great value and relevance for the present and future.

Like his better-known Vietnam era colleagues, William Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams, Palmer was in West Point's Class of 1936. He was Acting Chief of Staff of the Army in the long interim between Westmoreland's and Abrams' tenures as Chief of Staff. Inclined to introspection, he is also the author of a well-received book on Vietnam, *The 25-Year War*. His latest book is primarily about his experiences as the American Military Commander in the Dominican Republic in 1965.

Intervention in the Caribbean is replete with the planning inadequacies of the expedition. It peeks occasionally at the human side of its top-level actors—protagonist, antagonist and unknown alike. But mostly, General Palmer presents us with terse and realistic benefits and hazards of the historical U.S. role as the neighborhood cop-on-the-beat in the hemisphere. At the same time Palmer sees the region for what it is: “. . . I found myself more and more looking at the Caribbean Basin as an entity; that is, the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the land region that encompasses Mexico, Central America, the northern littoral of Colombia and Venezuela, and all the islands in the Caribbean. The importance of this region to the United

States has been recognized by U.S. leaders since our beginnings as a nation. In my judgement . . . no geographic area of the world outside our borders is now or will be more important to the United States—strategically, economically, and sociologically—than the Caribbean Basin.”

He laments his inability to develop these ideas more concretely, though acknowledging their importance in U.S. strategy. The growing Hispanization of America's population and culture will make this region even more significant in our future policy-making. Within some of our lifetimes, the population of the United States is projected to reach 40 percent *hispanohablantes* with equally heavy political influence.

In late April 1965, when we intervened in the Dominican Republic, we were also deep in planning for the Americanization of military operations in Vietnam. (Palmer admits that perhaps contemporary Pentagon planners were too concentrated on Vietnam to pay sufficient attention to the immediate news from the Caribbean.) Still, policymakers and professional soldiers alike were sensitive to such buzzwords as “counterinsurgency” and “wars of national liberation” and the fears that they evoked. The geographic proximity of the island of Hispaniola (which the Dominican Republic shares with Haiti) to Cuba, and all that Fidel Castro represented, spurred Lyndon Johnson's decision to intervene. The President of the United States was determined to

permit no other Communist island nation to spring up volcanically from the Caribbean Sea.

Intervention in the Caribbean is no rewritten operational report; Palmer makes a concerted effort to tell his tale with appropriate spicing. When, late that summer, Hector Garcia Godoy became provisional president, a potential stumbling block to normalizing Dominican conditions was the rightist General Elias Wessin y Wessin. This most fearsome of Dominican military officers ran an autonomous military training center that formed his substantial power base. Going to Wessin, Palmer convinced him to submit to a voluntary exile to clear the way for Godoy. As Palmer stood witness, Wessin transferred his command to his deputy, Colonel Perdomo; "the ceremony consisting of Wessin's placing around Perdomo's neck, a leather necklace holding about half a dozen large keys, accompanied by a flood of tears and vigorous *embrazos*" — meaning I assume *abrazo*.

Since the assassination and ensuing political chaos of longtime Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo four years before, rumors abounded of imminent U.S. military intervention to stabilize the country. To play down these rumors, Palmer writes, the Johnson administration kept the Joint Chiefs outside any planning discussions until five days before the actual operation. When the Dominican situation finally boiled over late in April 1965, the White House ordered the intervention. The stand-

ing contingency plan for intervention in the Dominican Republic had been devised by CINCLANT in 1963 under orders from President Kennedy. But the plan provided only for a landing, not the nuts and bolts of occupation. The initial operation consisted of airlanding elements of the 82nd Airborne Division in support of Marine units already ashore, supported by the offshore Navy task force. All this was a *fait accompli* without advice or formal support from the hypersensitive Organization of American States. The usual hue and cry was raised about U.S. saber-wielding in the region; they did have some historical justification. Our acting unilaterally lent an ugly cast to the action. Lyndon Johnson benefited from the thinnest of legal justifications to cover the intervention. Three generals loyal to the Dominican government had created a ruling junta; their leader, Colonel Pedro Bartholeme Benoit, wrote an official request for U.S. military support because local forces were incapable of keeping order. But Benoit's official request was tendered *after* the U.S. had landed.

Probably the most positive lesson of the intervention came later. When embassies of other Latin American nations in Santo Domingo were threatened by rebel gunfire, six OAS member-nations cooperated in forming the Inter-American Peace Force. Contributing military and policy units of their own were Brazil (the largest contingent), Paraguay, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. Commanded by the

Brazilian General Hugo Penasco Alvim, with Palmer as deputy, the IAPF lessened the negative perception of U.S. intervention and, ironically, inspired signs like "Brazilians Go Home" and "IAPF Go Home" alongside the traditional anti-American sentiments. The lesson here is that such actions of ours in the hemisphere should, in the future, have broader OAS support, including national military commitments. This would reduce the damage to an American national image that is always shaky at best among its southern neighbors.

Intervention in the Caribbean is a sound memoir by a wise soldier-scholar, with some pertinent lessons for American policymakers and military planners eyeing both the Caribbean Basin and its neighbors farther south.

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Yates, Lawrence A. *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*. Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1988. 225pp.

Military interventions in the Third World are chancy affairs at best, as countries great and small have learned to their dismay in recent decades. During the post-World War II era, the American experience with such interventions has been especially spotty.

Power Pack is a study of the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and Lawrence Yates has added laurels to his position as a historian with the Combat Studies Institute of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He has provided an eminently readable work that tells us a good deal about the Dominican intervention. More significantly—and more disturbingly—he has highlighted certain characteristics of the American way of intervention (to paraphrase Russell Weigley) that existed before the Dominican affair, contributed mightily to our failure in Vietnam, and persists today. If anything, Yates understates the problem when he remarks of the intervention that "Some of the general problems continue to arise in joint contingency planning operations today."

This state of affairs quickly becomes apparent to the reader who moves through the chapters dealing with the evolution of U.S. interests in the Caribbean, the onset of the crisis in the Dominican Republic, the initial U.S. intervention in 1965, the subsequent "regionalization" of the intervention by the Organization of American States (OAS), and the termination of the crisis. Deciding that it was impolitic to rationalize an American military intervention in terms of what was known briefly as the "Johnson Doctrine" (essentially no more Cubas in the Western hemisphere), "the president . . . justified the Marine landings solely in terms of 'protecting