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INTERPRETIVE REPORT

U. S. Policy Confuses Latins

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The feeling is growing in Latin America that the Kennedy "grand design" for the hemisphere died with the late President.

Pragmatism—or an emphasis on "practical" action—is the new watchword for United States policy south of the border under President Johnson. With almost liturgical monotony, diplomats intone the word in every conversation about how to achieve the larger aims of United States policy in this hemisphere.

This new vogue came in with Thomas C. Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, special assistant to the President, coordinator of the Alliance for Progress and President Johnson's designated "one voice" on policy for Latin America. After more than 20 years in Latin American affairs as a career diplomat, Mr. Mann has a passion for quiet practicality—what he himself calls pragmatism.

The trouble is that after five months in office neither President Johnson nor Mr. Mann has

yet laid out how this ultra-practical approach fits into a consistent over-all policy for the Americas. Mr. Mann appears to have a phobia about public pronouncements. He is to give his first major policy speech on May 13—on the Alliance for Progress—but he has still to hold a bona fide press conference.

Confusion Growing

The result is growing confusion in Latin America over the distinction between ends and means in North American policy. Sober critics do not quibble over the need for the United States to use pragmatic means to cope with infinite variety in a tumultuous continent. But they are beginning to believe that the overriding concentration on these means hides a vacuum of thinking about any over-all framework for hemispheric relations.

Pundits already are contrasting the Johnson "opportunism" with the Kennedy "idealism" which guided United States policy under the late President. They reject the official United States line that only the style of

North American diplomacy has changed under Mr. Johnson, that the substance remains the same.

The twin testing grounds are the United States' attitudes toward Latin American dictatorships and the Alliance for Progress. In both areas the image is somehow spreading of a laconic President reneging on his predecessor's youthful and dynamic sponsorship of stable representative democracy.

Cataclysmic Impact

Educated Latins are the first to admit that this criticism has a highly-charged emotional content. In a continent where political power rests far more on individual personalities than on institutions, the assassination of John F. Kennedy had a cataclysmic impact.

In three short years Mr. Kennedy—with the help of an attractive wife—had become a kind of matinee idol for the man-in-the-street. Even today the visitor from the North is deluged with touching descriptions of how the life of the whole southern continent virtually halted during those funeral days in November. Today the Kennedy image of leadership lives on as a powerful political force.

"So, Johnson started out with two strikes against him," deplored one long-time North American resident. "He has to compete with a dead idol. Educated people here will tell you that it is still too early to pass judgment on Johnson. But down deep they feel that he will never measure up to Kennedy."

United States diplomats spend a good part of their time softly batting down a number of myths which have grown out of this idolatry. The chief one is that President Kennedy was so wedded to idealism that he rejected compromises with governments who came to power by overthrowing constitutional governments in Latin America.

Recognized 6 Governments

Officials point out that Mr. Kennedy was confronted with military takeovers or semi-takeovers in six Latin American countries—Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Honduras. And in all six he ended up recognizing the new governments and in giving them varying amounts of aid.

The more hostile critics even maintain that the United States suffered a loss of prestige in the Kennedy handling of the Peruvian coup d'etat in July, 1962. He ostensibly suspended diplomatic and aid ties and then unceremoniously restored them some months later—after the military junta had defied him and maintained itself in power.

But most thoughtful observers agree that by the end of his life President Kennedy had developed his own pragmatism for handling unconstitutional governments. His administration developed what has been lauded the "rule of democratic promises." That rule tied United States diplomatic recognition and economic aid to pledges by ruling juntas to restore representative democracy through new elections in a given time period. In the meantime the juntas would guarantee full civil rights.

North American Power

Implicit in this approach was the understanding that North American power alone can only shorten—not end—interludes of "illegal" government in Latin America. It rested on the belief that military takeovers, though disagreeable and even hazardous, are not always disastrous. It broke with that "neo-imperialist liberalism" in both halves of the hemisphere which maintains that the North American big stick is itself powerful enough to sustain democratic governments in countries still without either the traditions or psychology essential for mature democracy.

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