

John H. Crimmins Oral History Interview—5/23/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: John H. Crimmins
Interviewer: John N. Plank
Date of Interview: May 23, 1964
Location: Washington D.C.
Length: 12 pages

Biographical Note

Crimmins, Deputy Director and Director of the Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs in the Department of State (1961-1963), discusses the political and economic situation in the Dominican Republic in 1961, John F. Kennedy's handling of the Dominican Republic situation, and Caribbean policy in general during the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed January 12, 1978, copyright of these materials copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any

concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

John H. Crimmins, recorded interview by John N. Plank, May 23, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of John Hugh Crimmins

to the

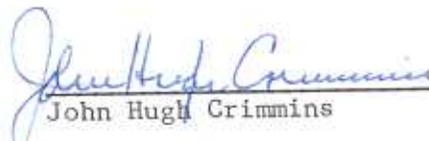
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, John Hugh Crimmins of Brasilia, Brazil do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and the transcript of the interviews conducted at Washington D.C. on May 23, 1964 for the John F. Kennedy Library.

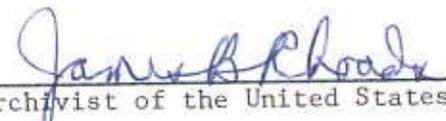
I hereby donate all literary rights in the aforesaid interview to the John F. Kennedy Library.

The tape and transcript may be opened to researchers at the discretion of the Director of the John F. Kennedy Library; his decision to be based on such considerations as potential embarrassment to living persons or their immediate successors, the interests of national security, or potential prejudice to the friendly relations between the United States and foreign nations.

This agreement may be revised by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.



John Hugh Crimmins



Archivist of the United States



Month, Day, Year



Month, Day, Year

Oral History Interview

with

John H. Crimmins

May 23, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By John N. Plank

For the John F. Kennedy Library

PLANK: [The first few words are inaudible]... Cuban developments, Haitian developments, developments in the Dominican Republic during his time in the Kennedy Administration [John F. Kennedy] and I believe will be talking on this particular type about the Dominican Republic and his relationship to that. Before we get into substance, John, would you just say something about how you got involved in departmental activities [State Department] and what your relationship to the Kennedy Administration was?

CRIMMINS: Well, I joined the department in March of 1946, shortly after leaving active service with the army. For the first ten years of my service with the department, I was with the special projects staff in the office of the director of intelligence, dealing for almost all of this time with Latin American affairs. Later, in my tour with the special projects staff, I became involved in Western European and Yugoslav affairs.

In 1956, I entered the foreign service and was immediately, or almost immediately, assigned to the National War College, where I spent the period August '56 to June of '57. In July of '57, I was assigned to the embassy in Rio de Janeiro as first secretary in the economic section. I spent almost precisely four years in Rio, returning to the department in late, very late, July of 1961 as the deputy director of the office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs [C.M.A.]. Almost immediately, upon my entry on duty in C.M.A., I was assigned the special task of following Dominican developments.

PLANK: Could you fill us in just a bit, John, on why Dominican developments were so important?

[-1-]

CRIMMINS: Well, you will recall, John, that at the end of May 1961, the generalissimo [Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina] had been assassinated, which had led to a very fluid and tense situation in the Dominican Republic. The period June and July, and I recall again that I became involved in Dominican matters very late in July—actually in early August. During the period from the assassination to my involvement with Dominican affairs, there had been an uneasy period during which President Balaguer [Joaquin Balaguer] who had been the nominal chief of state under the generalissimo, was, we hoped, trying to assert a certain independence of Ramfis Trujillo who was the heir in a power sense of the generalissimo, and was the real force in the Dominican Republic.

If I may go back even before the assassination of the generalissimo in May of '61, to August of 1960, you will recall that the Organization of American States [O.A.S.] had levied certain sanctions upon the Trujillo regime as a result of the Trujillo-inspired effort to assassinate Rómulo Betancourt [President of Venezuela]. The specific sanctions that were voted unanimously by the organization consisted of an obligatory rupture of diplomatic relations with the regime and the suspension of all trade in arms and implements of war, with authority given to the Council of the Organization of American States to extend this economic sanction, if you want to put it that way, to other economic items. Subsequently, it was decided by the council to embargo commerce in petroleum, petroleum products, trucks, and spare parts, as a further demonstration of the isolation of the Trujillo regime and also as a means of inducing, of course, changes in the system. These O.A.S. sanctions antedated the assassination and, of course, were still operative during the period May to August of '61 of which I am now speaking.

I think it is pertinent here to point out that the economic effect of the economic sanctions was not impressive, but the symbolic effect of the economic sanctions and, of course, of the ultimate sanction—the ruptured diplomatic relations—was very important. It became a matter of major significance, not only to the Balaguer-Ramfis Trujillo regime, but also, and perhaps especially to what we came to call the moderate opposition. Even beyond this, and this is especially important, the diplomatic relation sanction—which I have referred to as the ultimate sanction—had tremendous economic importance inasmuch as the Sugar Act.... The sugar legislation of the United States had been amended, if I recall, in March of '61, to prohibit the granting of a quota in the U.S. market at premium prices from any country with which the United States was not in diplomatic relations.

PLANK: This prompts a question, John. Was it your feeling when you came into the department from Brazil that there was a pretty broad-running consensus within the department as well as in the broader community with respect to the wisdom and visibility of our Dominican policy?

[-2-]

CRIMMINS: My own impression—coming literally cold from the field in this because I had not followed Dominican matters at all since 1956 when I was in the intelligence area of the department, and even then on a sort of left-handed way because most of my attention was directed to Western Europe—when I came cold to this, I gained the impression that there was a general desire to bring about certainly an amelioration in the effects of the Trujillo regime, but there was considerable difference of view about how far we or, for that matter, our O.A.S. partners should go in pressing for a change. There was a certain uneasiness—and this is my distinct recollection—about the effectiveness. It wasn't so much a question of the wisdom of trying to bring about a change; it was a question of how effective the leverage available to us could be in bringing about a change.

There was present in everyone's minds two major pitfalls here. First, that too heavy pressure on the regime could—and I'm talking about the early August period now, after the assassination—provoke a reaction, in physical terms even, by the Trujillista elements which would remove for the foreseeable future the possibility of a gradual evolution toward a more open society. On the other hand, we were aware that the creation of a chaotic situation in the Dominican Republic, that could be brought about by extreme pressure on the regime, could lead to an accretion of power by the far left elements that were not tremendously significant, but certainly present. We also—to go back to the first pitfall—were very conscious that a reaction on the part of the Trujillos to pressure would tend to polarize the forces in the Dominican Republic, thus providing the far left opportunities to develop strength and to take advantage of the inevitable disillusionment and destruction of what we call the moderate opposition. This was not unlike the situation that the F.A.I.N. [Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional] has been trying to create in Venezuela. This left us with the necessity of trying to construct a policy that would bring about a relaxation of the rigid controls exercised through the Trujillos in order to permit the moderate opposition to play an increasingly significant role in the political life of the country.

PLANK: I would like to interrupt just for a moment, John, to ask you what kind of reading you had from the field about the distribution of power in the Dominican Republic at this time. I would assume that the assassination pretty well shook up the whole system. Where was effective power lodged in the Dominican Republic during this period?

CRIMMINS: Well, the effective physical power certainly resided in Ramfis Trujillo and the military forces and police forces that were under his personal control. There was no organized physical force that was capable of resisting or even challenging in any way the existing power structure headed by Ramfis. We were trying to see whether Balaguer, again, as I said earlier, could construct an independent political position around which moderate forces could concentrate. At the same time, again in a political sense, there was no question but that the middle class, let's say the articulate part of the population, the articulate part of the population in the political sense, was very strongly anti-Trujillo.

As a result of the relaxation of controls following the assassination, political groupments had been permitted to form. The most significant one at that time was the U.C.N., the National Civic Union headed by Viriato Fiallo [Viriato Alberto Fiallo] and consisting essentially of middle-class business and professional people. The U.C.N. had certain—well, it covered a broad spectrum. It was a very loose grouping at this time and in fact remains such at the present time. It had a left wing and a right wing and a broad center. But, to go back to your basic question, the physical power certainly resided completely in Ramfis Trujillo and his immediate military commanders, particularly Sanchez [Dr. Carlos Sanchez y Sanchez] the chief of staff of the air force. Now, I think it's worth noting here that within the military, the air force was by all odds the most powerful element because it not only controlled the very limited air capability that existed, but more significantly had within it the only substantial striking force on the ground. The Dominican Air Force had followed the Luftwaffe practice of having a significant ground capability. They had tanks, obsolete certainly, but the only tanks that existed. They had artillery, and the personnel in this ground force were the elite of the Dominican armed forces. The Dominican army, although large, was little more than a widely dispersed gendarmerie force without any combined arms or unit training to speak of. The navy was small and had a more nearly liberal tradition, in part because of large-scale training by U.S. forces—greater exposure to the U.S. than the other two—but it was not really a significant factor in the physical power equation. Well, to go back, Ramfis controlled all the physical levers here.

PLANK: This control was firm enough, was it? That is, the lines of allegiance were...

CRIMMINS: Yes, at this time, in August, we were convinced that the armed forces would respond almost without question to Ramfis. And when I say almost without question, I mean with very, very few exceptions. Now, we were aware that there were certain figures that were restive and partially disaffected from Ramfis and from the Trujillos in general, but these were pretty unknown quantities and their ability to move was very limited.

PLANK: What was your explanation for this allegiance to Ramfis? What kind of reputation did he—well, really what I'm asking is the sociological question of why did they feel loyalty to this man?

CRIMMINS: I think, essentially, because he was the heir of the generalissimo. After thirty years of the most stringent control by the old man and the subordination of all interests to the generalissimo, and the continuing Trujillo control of economic power, and this is very important. The Trujillos, Ramfis and his brothers and his uncles and the in-group of the Trujillos, continued to dominate in a nearly total sense the economic life of the country. And preferment, position, was still entirely dependent upon the Trujillo family, and Ramfis was the controlling member of the Trujillo family after the assassination. So, the fortunes of the establishment, if you want to put it that way, were tied up with Ramfis. And it was clear that

the allegiance of the military commanders naturally flowed to Ramfis as the inheritor of the mantle of the generalissimo, partly through the continuation of the momentum, but partly because there was no other alternative at this time.

PLANK: Let me ask a couple of questions. You've mentioned the opposition, that is the Fiallo opposition. I want to ask first, what we mean by opposition in this context? And then, a related question: It's evident from what you said that the United States was effectively in touch with both groups, that is, both with Ramfis and those associated with him and with what opposition existed. I'd like to know just how this worked out. That is, this was not a clandestine opposition, obviously.

CRIMMINS: No. No. As I said earlier, following the assassination, the formation of political groupings was permitted. There had been some gestures in this direction even before the assassination of the generalissimo, as I recall, but certainly after the assassination this was part of the ameliorative trend that was adopted under Balaguer with Ramfis's acquiescence. So that there was a limited and, we hoped, a growing participation in the political life of the country. It is a little ironic to speak of a participation because there had been none before. I don't know quite the word I want to use at the moment—the initiation of participation in the political life of the country by these opposition groups.

The opposition ranged from the U.C.N. through the Castro-oriented [Fidel Castro] N.P.D. [Dominican Popular Movement] and part of the 14th of June Movement. Now, the 14th of June Movement at this time consisted basically of two wings, what I would call a Democratic left wing and a Castro-oriented wing. We were very interested in the direction that the 14th of June would take. And throughout the period about which I'll talk, we were dealing with them in a very careful way because we were not sure of the eventual orientation of the 14th of June or of its leaders—Manuel Tavarez was the principal leader who we estimated had certain qualities that might make him the leader for good or for ill in a freer, looser situation. But it ranged, as I say, from the U.C.N., let's say, the right wing of the U.C.N., which was essentially conservative, through the left wing of the 14th of June to the M.P.D., which was quite evidently Castro-oriented, far left in any case and to the clandestine elements of the P.S.P. [Partido Social Progressista] Dominican Communist Party, whose principal leaders were in exile, many of them in Cuba.

Almost totally, this opposition was anti-Ramfis and also, significantly, anti-Balaguer. There was a great reluctance on the part of the opposition to accepting the concept of Balaguer as a transitional figure—which we looked upon him as. He was too closely identified in the eyes of the great majority of the opposition with the Trujillo regime to be trusted. And of course, with the assassination of the generalissimo and with the partial steps toward the beginning of political activity, there was a root-and-branch philosophy that began to become evident and a desire not to compromise, a desire not to wait upon events, a desire not to prolong the assumption of power by non-Trujillo or anti-Trujillo forces. Now I think that this is perhaps

parenthetical, but I think that this has been the history of the Dominican Republic since then; that because essentially, mind you, of the lack of political activity for thirty years, no one was or has been prepared to engage in what we would consider a normal give and take, a normal process of compromise. It has been pretty much an all or nothing kind of attitude.

Now, I want to make clear some of the terms I have used and will be using. The moderate opposition, in our mind, was the opposition to Trujillo short of the Castro-oriented left wing of the total opposition. This would encompass the U.C.N., the beginnings of the P.R.D. [Dominican Revolutionary Party] the right wing of the 14th of June, the embryonic Social Christian Movement. The non-moderate opposition would consist of the left wing of the 14th of June ranging through the P.S.P.

PLANK: I take it from all you've said, John, that the U.S. presence there was very effective in the sense of—you obviously were in a position to know what was going on, what the various groups were. I would like to come back to this earlier question I raised of how we maintained contacts.

CRIMMINS: Yes. John Hill [John Calvin Hill]—when I became involved, John Hill was the consul, the senior American representative there. He subsequently became consul-general, and upon the resumption of diplomatic relations in January—the chargé. John was a most effective, a most effective operator, and he and his people—and of course this involved Agency people and the full range of the country team, if you want to put it that way—were in close touch with all elements of the Dominican scene, with Ramfis and Balaguer, with Viriato Fiallo, with persons who later came to be prominent in the P.R.D. and the Social Christian Movement. There was a wide range of political contact. We felt, really, that our intelligence, particularly in the military sector—this is very important because it has a role to play later—was lacking. I referred earlier to indications that there were some military leaders who were disaffected or close to disaffection with Ramfis. We simply did not know enough about these people or about their potential or their political attitudes to be sure of the prospects in that direction. This subsequently became a major target for activities. In fact, about the end of August, this became one of the principal efforts that we undertook. Well, to complete this part, John Hill was extremely effective and kept in very close touch with practically all elements in the situation.

We were not in contact to any significant degree with Manuel Tavarez and the 14th of June. There were elements in the 14th of June, and if I may open a parenthesis here—in this rather fluid state of political development, which was characterized by the establishment of political movements and groupings rather than parties; there was considerable overlap. For example, many members of the U.C.N. were also members of the 14th of June. This complicated the picture in trying to identify trends within the political groupings. To go back, we were not in close touch with Manuel Tavarez, in large part because

[-6-]

he did not want to be in close touch with us, which of course led to a certain suspicion on our part about his ultimate intentions, although we had not by this time made up our mind that

Tavarez was a negative factor or was destined or committed to be a negative factor. In fact, we looked upon him as a rather fluid factor, who could go either way. We were determined to make a good try to see whether he was lost to the democratic cause or whether he was recoverable or whether he really was fundamentally oriented toward a democratic position, a truly democratic position. But, with that exception, and with the exception of the far-left elements—the M.P.D. and the P.S.P.—in clandestinely we were in touch with the moderate opposition in a very close and continuing way.

PLANK: John, after covering this political aspect of it, I would like just to ask you to give a preliminary assessment or generalized assessment of what the economic situation was in the Dominican Republic that you were confronting as you came to deal with the Dominican problems.

CRIMMINS: Well, our estimate at that time was that the economy was deteriorating, not rapidly, but certainly going downhill and economic pressures were continuing. A great deal of this was created by uncertainty about the sugar market. The pressures exerted by the denial of the U.S. premium market to the Dominican Republic were rather heavy. There was increasing unemployment in the country. This was beginning to be felt, but I think it was striking at the time that there was a very widespread sentiment in the anti-Trujillo forces that the economic stringencies could and should be endured in order to maintain the pressure on the regime through the very severe economic sanction of the withholding of the U.S. sugar market. In other words, the opposition—and mind you, the important elements in the opposition were middle-class businessmen and professional men—was entirely willing to suffer economic consequences in order to maintain pressure on the regime. I think it's important to note that this economic pressure hit the Trujillos, Ramfis, the whole family very, very hard because of their control over 90 percent, I guess it was 80 percent, of the Dominican sugar output through family direction of the Haina [Rio Haina Central] and associated sugar mills. So that this, of course, affected, since sugar was the mainstay of the Dominican economy—the uncertainty about sugar prospects affected the entire economy, reduced commercial activity in general, and particularly hit the immediate interests of the Trujillos. So it was a major factor. I think a case probably could be made that this economic sanction did what economic sanctions are often said not to do, mainly exert a very heavy influence on political developments in the country.

PLANK: I want to ask in a related way what there was of U.S. economic involvement, whether you were subjected to any kind of U.S. pressures to modify in one direction or another your economic policy vis-à-vis the Dominican Republic.

CRIMMINS: I was never conscious of any U.S. economic pressure. Now, the South Puerto Rico Sugar Company, which operated Central Romana and was the principal non-Trujillo sugar producer, was certainly

hit by the closing off of the U.S. premium market, and there may have been bleats from South Puerto Rico; I am not aware of them myself. I talked to South Puerto Rico representatives constantly and they never in any way attempted to influence me, personally. Now, there is a possibility that this kind of effort was made at a higher level, although I never heard of any. In any case, I am morally certain that this pressure, if it were ever attempted, played no part in the formulation of our policy.

The other U.S. interests in the island were principally Alcoa [Aluminum Company of America] and some very minor other investments. I'd have to check this. But my own very strong recollection is that U.S. business in general looked toward a freer economic situation following upon a diminution of Trujillo influence. After all, the Trujillos so totally dominated the economy that U.S. economic interests were operating with very little elbow room and my own impression was and is that American interests thought that in a freer situation they stood to gain as the country did as a whole. In other words, I want to make clear, that there was no pressure whatsoever, that I am aware of, on the part of American economic interests in the Dominican Republic such as they were, to maintain a Trujillo-like system.

PLANK: What prompted the question, of course, was a series of reports that we got, before you became seized of the Dominican situation, oh, of senators like Senator Ellender [Allen J. Ellender], for example, going into these apologia for Trujillo. If my memory serves me correctly, Pawley [William D. Pawley] was one of his apologists at one stage. Of course this was before the assassination and apparently what you're saying is that after the assassination...

CRIMMINS: Yes, well, I think it was quite evident for a number of years that there were certain elements in the Congress and in some private sectors that were sympathetic to the Trujillo government. I think part of this was a belief—oh, this goes way back—that Trujillo was a staunch bulwark of anticommunism in a critical area. I think this overlooked, of course, Trujillo's opportunistic readiness to play both sides of the street at various times, particularly the latter years of his regime. I think this was personal predilection in part and susceptibility to flattery and favor on the part of the regime. Now, this opens up a whole new question of Trujillo influence, Trujillo lobbying, particularly, in the Congress, particularly through sugar channels.

PLANK: Well, we don't have to go into that

CRIMMINS: But, I do not think the Trujillo lobby—and from my earlier experience in the intelligence business, there certainly was a Trujillo lobby—in the period that I was associated with the situation was not a significant or particularly active force. I never felt that there were forces at work here, operating in a semi-clandestine way, to influence U.S. policy.

[-8-]

PLANK: Well, let's move right on in then to this set of decisions with which you were

associated that had a Dominican bearing during the Kennedy Administration. As I recall from our earlier conversation, your first, immediate association with President Kennedy has to do with the Dominican case, is that not correct?

CRIMMINS: Yes, actually it occurred very shortly after I became involved in Dominican matters. As I said earlier, it was in the first days of August that I became effectively associated with the office of Caribbean and Mexican affairs and Ed Vallon [Edwin E. Vallon], who was then director of the office, immediately assigned me the task of working with the Dominican question. And from, say the third or fourth of August, for the next six months, 90 percent of my time was devoted to the Dominican question, both as deputy director and then as acting director after Ed's death in October. The first time I met the President was the first time that I attended a White House meeting chaired by the President.

PLANK: Would you—just for this particular exercise, John—just give us an impression that you drew of the man; how did he strike you?

CRIMMINS: Well, of course, I was a fan of his from afar, namely from Rio de Janeiro during the '60 election and the '61 inauguration and in the development of his Administration in the first months of 1961. The overall impression that I retained of the President was one of great vigor, really. The image that came to mind immediately on the twenty-second of November when he was assassinated was a recollection of him coming into the Cabinet Room—where almost all of the meetings that I participated in took place—from his office. He would come striding across the small outer office into the room—often with a cigar in his hand—very vigorously. He would nod and smile and say hello to the people around the table as he came in, but he walked very quickly and sat down, and the impression of vigor, the impression of being totally in charge, was what first impressed me and continued throughout the limited association that I had with him.

Another major aspect of his personality and his method of operation that impressed me all the way from August of '61 through the assassination was the broad ranging nature of his interests and his great attention to detail. There were all sorts of jokes around the department about the President's being the Dominican desk officer and the Cuban desk officer and that sort of thing, and to a very real degree that has substance because he would almost constantly become involved in the details of a situation. He was always able to look at the entire picture, but he wanted to know facts. He was not at all satisfied with broad generalizations. He would pick up a point and almost worry it until he was satisfied in his own mind that he understood it. To illustrate this, I had been told when I first came that the President, of course, was very interested in the Dominican situation, and when I found that I was to go to this first meeting on the Dominican question in the White House—well, my first meeting—I made a special effort to be sure that I was fully briefed

[-9 -]

on details of the number of air force personnel at San Ysidro Base, which was the center of the air force strength, how many tanks they had, how many men there were in the army, what

the navy consisted of, what the gross national product for 1960 had been, what percentage of the sugar properties were held by the Trujillos and who owned the rest, and a mass of detail.

PLANK: In the event, did you find that you over briefed?

CRIMMINS: No, I did not. I found that this came in very handy because at that meeting and in subsequent meetings, he asked very detailed questions, and one of his very common questions was “How do you know that?” or “What is your evidence for that?” and then turn to somebody else after one of the participants had given an opinion and say, “Do you agree with that?” This obvious and sometimes disturbing tendency to probe very deeply was entirely characteristic of him.

I also, of course, was impressed by his sense of humor and the use of the light touch on occasion. I’ve also seen him get annoyed. I’ve never seen him in what I understand could be a very critical mood. I never was exposed to that at any of the meetings that I attended. I could tell from time to time that he was annoyed if he didn’t get a satisfactory answer to a question, to a reasonable question.

PLANK: Did you get the feeling, John, that when he came into these meetings, for example, this first Dominican meeting, that he came in primarily for policy guidance or for the information upon which he could base his own policy conclusions? I don’t know whether I phrased it properly.

CRIMMINS: Of course, it was very clear that he intended to make up his own mind and his searching questions illustrated that. But he was—I always felt that he was very seriously interested in the recommendations of all the advisors around the table. This was not a briefing session. These were policy discussions. He, of course, intended to make the decision himself, but it was not a fact collecting exercise in order to assure himself that he had all the facts and he would then make the decision. He was very interested in the policy views of the people around the table.

PLANK: Now we know he took his decisions with the world context in front of him. In your meetings, did this ever come out, or did he spare you that? That is, he was asking you about the Dominican Republic, let us say, and did not ask for your speculations about the effects of this on other problem areas or....

CRIMMINS: No. The Dominican case, and the Haitian case, and the Mexican situation—and I was involved in one non-controversial aspect of the Mexican case with him—did not have really global implications. They certainly had hemisphere implications, but in the case of the

[-10-]

Dominican Republic this was not an acute question. In the case of Cuba, certainly it was very evident to me, although to the best of my recollection—I have to check this—I never participated in a direct meeting with him on Cuba in the period June to November of ‘63. But

even though I did not participate in meetings, I certainly was very much exposed to his participation in the Cuban question. And all the demands that were levied on me that originated with him or the questions that were raised by him and transmitted to me, always reflected a global context, if you want to put it that way, and, of course, this was borne in upon me time and time again. But in most of these other questions, in all the other questions, the Dominican Republic and Haiti particularly, there was no need to think beyond the hemisphere, really. The rest of the world was not particularly concerned. From time to time, in the Haitian question, as I remember, there were some possibilities—very, very limited possibilities—of bloc fooling around, but these were so minor that they never became serious questions.

PLANK: Just to round out this particular picture of your impressions of the President, did you ever get the feeling that he was looking over your shoulder at the domestic implications of policy?

CRIMMINS: Oh, absolutely. Now, in the latter period—of course, I was so totally absorbed in Cuba, which has had such tremendous domestic implications that my view perhaps has been distorted—but I have always been extremely conscious of the President's concern about the domestic implications of the Cuban question. Again, on the Dominican and Haitian questions, as in the case of the broader international implications, the domestic implications were marginal, although we were very conscious of them, and this reflected the concern of the President.

Let me sum all this up. I've wandered here. With respect to the international implications on the Dominican and Haitian questions, there were almost none, certainly no significant implications beyond the hemisphere. On the President's concern about the domestic reverberations of policy as it affected my area, there was some, but essentially minor, concern on the Dominican and Haitian case. On Cuba, of course, there was major concern.

PLANK: I take it that this first meeting in August was a crucially important one from the standpoint of Dominican policy.

CRIMMINS: Yes, I certainly feel that this was the case. This was about the third meeting with the President on the Dominican case since the assassination, as I recall. There was one in June—this is before I came, of course—and one in late July or very early August, either just before or just after I arrived. Then the meeting of August 18 was a major review of the Dominican situation for the purpose of setting a firm course for the next six months. We never talked in terms of six months, but this was the general understanding. In part, this had been precipitated by the receipt from Ramfis through Colonel McLaughlin [Col. John J. McLaughlin], of

[-11-]

a memorandum in which Ramfis indicated that he would have trouble holding the allegiance of his officers if he could not hold out to them the prospect of an improvement in relations

with the U.S. And, as I recall the memorandum, what was asked for was the establishment of a military mission in the Dominican Republic which, in the terms of the memorandum, would demonstrate the concern of the United States for the problems that the Dominican military faced in a transitional period from a completely closed system to a more open system. The second purpose of the mission, in terms of the Ramfis memorandum, was to expose the Dominican military to indoctrination by the U.S. military in the proper role of the military in a "constitutional" system. In addition, the memorandum called for the lifting of the sanctions against the Dominican Republic. Now, there, of course, was a note of alarm struck in this memorandum about the possibility of Ramfis's losing control of his commanders with the implication that his military people might get out of control and move against the political groupings who were beginning to agitate and set back the entire process.

[At this point, the telephone rang, Mr. Plank excused himself, and the remainder of the tape was blank.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-12-]

John H. Crimmins Oral History Transcript
Name Index

B

Balaguer, Joaquin, 2, 3, 5, 6
Betancourt, Rómulo, 2

C

Castro, Fidel, 5, 6

E

Ellender, Allen J., 8

F

Fiallo, Viriato Alberto, 4, 5, 6

H

Hill, John Calvin, 6

K

Kennedy, John F., 1, 9, 11

M

McLaughlin, John J., Col., 11

P

Pawley, William D., 8

S

Sanchez Y Sanchez, Dr. Carlos, 4

T

Tavarez, Manuel, 5, 6, 7
Trujillo Molina, Rafael Leonidas, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8,
10
Trujillo, Ramfis, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12

V

Vallon, Edwin E., 9