Abstract: For the first four years of his premiership, Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker took an immense interest in Canada’s relations with Latin America. Diefenbaker and his two foreign ministers, Sidney Smith and Howard Green, actively expanded Canadian links to the region and flirted with joining the Organization of American States. In turn, many Latin American political leaders welcomed Ottawa’s focus on their region. However, US President John F. Kennedy’s own interest in an expanded role for Canada in the Western hemisphere alarmed many Canadians, including the prime minister. This article examines the Canadian government’s formulation of Latin American policy and analyzes the interplay between foreign and domestic policy on this question.

Keywords: Diefenbaker, Cold War, Canada, Latin America, Kennedy, Organization of American States

Résumé : Pendant ses quatre premières années de pouvoir, le Premier ministre John Diefenbaker s’intéressa vivement aux relations du Canada avec l’Amérique latine. Diefenbaker et ses deux secrétaires d’État aux Affaires étrangères, Sidney Smith et Howard Green, ne ménagèrent pas les efforts pour développer les relations entre le Canada et cette région, songeant même à joindre l’Organisation des États américains. À leur tour, plusieurs dirigeants politiques latino-américains se réjouirent de l’attention qu’Ottawa accordait à leur région. L’intérêt de John F. Kennedy lui-même, le président des É.-U., pour un accroissement du rôle du Canada dans l’hémisphère occidental préoccupa bien des Canadiens, dont le Premier ministre. Cet article retrace l’élaboration de la politique latino-américaine du gouvernement canadien et analyse l’interaction des politiques étrangères et intérieures sur cette question.

Mots clés : Diefenbaker, guerre froide, Canada, Amérique latine, Kennedy, Organisation des États américains

Canada’s participation in the foremost multilateral organization in the Western Hemisphere, Anglin argued that Washington had been motivated by fears that Ottawa was not fully independent from London. At the request of Howard Green, Canada’s foreign minister, Anglin forwarded his article to the Department of External Affairs. Canadian diplomats were interested by his analysis, principally because, as Anglin noted, Washington no longer opposed Canada’s membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), the Pan American Union’s successor.1 US President John Kennedy certainly favoured Canadian participation in this international body, just as he supported the prospect of greater involvement by Canada in Latin America. While touring Venezuela in December 1961, Kennedy had a brief encounter with Andrew Ross, Canada’s chargé d’affaires in Caracas. Meeting Ross in a receiving line, Kennedy shook his hand and thanked the Canadian diplomat for the pleasant time that he had enjoyed in Ottawa when meeting Canadian officials there the previous May. The president also earnestly declared, “But, we want to get you into the OAS.”2 Indeed, while visiting the Canadian capital, Kennedy had pressed this issue. Nor was Kennedy the only foreign official who took a deep interest in Canadian membership in the hemispheric body. Many Canadians also supported Canada’s entry, but Diefenbaker was unmoved by these appeals, and Canada did not join the OAS until 1990.

Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s stance seems remarkable, given that the first four years of his premiership, lasting from 1957 to 1963, marked a high point of Canadian involvement in the Western Hemisphere. As Anglin observed in his article, Diefenbaker and Howard Green were each ‘critical of Canada’s traditional neglect of its interests in Latin America.’3 This neglect had deep roots. Canada is physically a part of the Western Hemisphere, but traditional ties to Britain and to the Commonwealth, as well as perennial wariness of entangling Canada with the United States, meant that Canadians had long been cautious of taking a greater role in hemispheric affairs. It was not until the Second World War that Ottawa began to establish diplomatic relations with states in the region. However, except for the occasional

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missionary, businessman, or trade official, Canadians largely remained aloof and uninterested in their neighbours south of the Rio Grande.\textsuperscript{4} Then, despite a postwar rush to join international organizations, Ottawa continued to neglect the Pan Am Union.\textsuperscript{5} In marked contrast to their predecessors, then, Diefenbaker and his two foreign ministers, Sidney Smith and then Howard Green, pursued a policy of engagement with Latin America. The Diefenbaker era saw the first visit to the region by both a Canadian prime minister and a Canadian foreign minister, the creation of a distinct and separate Latin American Division within the Department of External Affairs, and the establishment of Canadian diplomatic representation with all Latin American countries.\textsuperscript{6} These moves were indicative of the Canadian government’s interest in the area, but, even so, Canada remained outside of the Organization of American States.

The issue of Canada’s relationship to this hemispheric body is important because, as an analysis of Canadian public opinion on Latin America has shown, to Canadians the OAS and Latin America were synonymous.\textsuperscript{7} Canadian policy toward the organization thus serves as a litmus test for Ottawa’s commitment to the region. Throughout the early Diefenbaker years, the Canadian government flirted with entering the OAS, but these flirtations ultimately came to nothing. The problem for those policy-makers who desired Canada’s entry was threefold. First, Canadians were not much interested in Latin America. The dearth of public feeling on the matter made Diefenbaker, a politician ever mindful of public opinion, reluctant to commit Canada to the regional body.\textsuperscript{8} Second, the prime minister had looked south to find markets for Canadian goods. For Diefenbaker, Latin America was meant to be an El Dorado. Yet in a period where the Western Hemisphere was emerging as a site of competition in the Cold War, Latin American officials and American policy-makers looked to Ottawa for


\textsuperscript{8} See H. Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker’s World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
both a financial and a political commitment, neither of which the Canadian prime minister was willing to give. Third, there was the ‘ubiquitous “us factor”’ in this equation. Diefenbaker rose to power partly on a growing tide of Canadian nationalism – some would call it anti-Americanism – that was coming to prominence in Canada, thanks to concern among Canadians over ties between their country and the United States. Canadians thus became alarmed that Washington wanted them to become more involved in Latin America. Moreover, US policy in that region, especially toward Cuba, worried many Canadians, including the prime minister, only fuelling opposition to joining the oas. Archival sources from Canada and the United States shed much-needed light on this high tide in Canada’s interest in Latin America, the sudden shift from engagement with the region toward disengagement, and the impact that these three factors had on the Canadian government’s policy-making and on setting the level of Diefenbaker’s commitment to Latin America. While many historians view Diefenbaker as a chronically indecisive leader, on Latin America at least, he was governed, in part by public opinion, but also by a shrewd calculation of national interest.

Although he did not pay much attention to Latin America when in opposition, at one of the first Cabinet meetings of his premiership John Diefenbaker outlined his position on the recurring issue of Canada’s association with the oas. Admitting that membership might benefit Canada’s trade with Latin American countries, he cited two reasons to oppose membership: the difficulty of accrediting a representative to the organization, and potential differences with the United States. Still, the trade factor was important. Speaking to graduates of Dartmouth College in late 1957, the prime minister lamented that Canada’s ‘trading world has become increasingly confined to the United States,’ a concentration of trade that contained ‘inherent dangers’ for his country. This unease had already prompted Diefenbaker to look to expand trade with Britain and the Commonwealth. It would also


prompt him to look for markets in the Western Hemisphere. Yet he initially remained hesitant about the region, and his 1958 ‘world tour’ took him only to Europe, Asia, and the Pacific. However, Sidney Smith, Diefenbaker’s first secretary of state for external affairs, made up for this oversight. From 17 November to 4 December 1958, Smith toured Brazil and Mexico, becoming the first Canadian foreign minister to travel to Latin America. Brazil greatly impressed him, as did Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek, who expressed pleasure at Smith’s trip as well as hopes that Canada would both join the OAS and become more active in the area. In Mexico, Smith attended the presidential inauguration of Adolfo López Mateos, who was soon to emerge as an important figure in Diefenbaker’s brush with Latin America. Smith also used the opportunity of being in South America to meet with Canada’s regional ambassadors.

At the beginning of this heads-of-post meeting, Smith delivered a speech in which he provocatively argued that it seemed ‘doubtful that, for the short term at least, Latin America can be given a higher priority than we have been able to give it to date.’ Of more importance to the public and to the government were commitments to NATO and relations with Commonwealth countries and with the United States. Admitting to playing devil’s advocate, Smith turned to the OAS and asked whether Canada’s membership might divert funds from much-needed initiatives in development assistance, aid, and trade promotion. A consensus emerged in the ensuing discussion that relations with Latin America were low on Canada’s priority list. There was agreement also that the region was increasing in importance, that Latin American governments wanted closer relations with Canada, and that Ottawa should therefore ‘do more.’ The diplomats also agreed that accession to the OAS would be universally welcomed, but that ‘after the honeymoon period,’ difficulties might arise for Canada, particularly if the richer and poorer countries of the region squared off on certain issues. Smith remarked, then, that without reordering Canadian priorities in external affairs, more room should be made for Latin America. As for the OAS, the matter would be studied. Writing to Diefenbaker upon his return to Ottawa, Smith reported his

‘definite impression that the whole area is fast increasing in importance.’ Failing to mention the OAS, he did urge ‘that to the extent that our existing commitments will allow,’ the Canadian government ‘ought to take adequate steps to ensure that we maintain and develop the satisfactory relations we have already established with that part of the world.’

Despite Smith’s death in March 1959, Canadian focus on Latin America did not diminish. Howard Green, Smith’s successor, was also intrigued by thoughts of Canada expanding its role throughout the Western Hemisphere, a policy he pursued as the head of the Department of External Affairs. It helped that Latin Americans were interested in Canada. For instance, Mexican President López Mateos and Mexican Foreign Minister Manuel Tello Baurraud visited Ottawa in October 1959. Diefenbaker and López Mateos hit it off, as did Green and Tello. Raising the Canadian position on the OAS with Green, Tello emphasized that although Mexico would welcome Canada’s membership, Ottawa had to make that choice alone. That autumn, Green and Diefenbaker also entertained Luis Ignacio Arcaya, Venezuela’s foreign minister, who pressed them on the OAS and pursued this matter fervently for the rest of the year by constantly raising it with Louis Couillard, Canada’s ambassador in Caracas. In examining these overtures, Couillard argued that they represented a personal initiative of the foreign minister, adding that neither the Venezuelan public, nor the press, nor other government officials ‘ever mentions Canada and the OAS in any important way.’ Couillard cautioned that these advances should be resisted, and Diefenbaker and Green evidently agreed.

Nevertheless, on 10 February 1960, Green outlined the government’s intent to ‘pay special attention to Latin America,’ a region where he believed that ‘a good deal more can be done than has been done by Canada in the past.’ Over the following months he and the prime minister acted on this intention. First, in mid-March, Horácio Lafer, Brazil’s foreign minister, toured Ottawa. Being ‘rather outspoken’

in urging Canada to join the OAS, Lafer later told Canada’s ambassador to Brazil that he believed that he had ‘intellectually convinced’ Green and Diefenbaker of the benefits of membership. Next, on 21 April, Diefenbaker became the first Canadian prime minister to travel to a Latin American country, when he visited Mexico City. The trip included meetings with López Mateos and Tello, ornate state dinners, and speeches by the prime minister to the Mexican bar association and to the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Arthur Irwin, Canada’s ambassador in Mexico, thought that the visit had been ‘an unqualified success’: Diefenbaker and López Mateos had displayed a ‘sense of intimacy’; the press coverage had been ‘extraordinarily voluminous’; and the outpouring of public affection was warm. Thus, Irwin felt that the ‘visit marked a significant milestone in the history of Canadian–Mexican relations,’ if not Canada’s relations with Latin America.

In his meetings with Mexican officials, the prime minister displayed curiosity about the region. Speaking with Tello, he inquired about the Canadian position toward the OAS. The Mexican foreign minister then explained that the organization would undoubtedly benefit from both Canadian ‘wisdom’ and the political ‘stabilization’ that Canada would bring. Tello’s comments, as well as the trip itself, had an evident impact on Diefenbaker’s thinking. In two candid memorandums to Green, he raised several important considerations: the population of Latin American countries was expected to boom; the region represented a large but generally untapped market for Canada; and the OAS stood as a symbol of solidarity for the nations of the hemisphere. These factors clearly made the region and the issue of OAS membership important. In terms of public opinion in their own country, the prime minister observed, ‘Canadians seldom look beyond the United States.’ Regardless, he maintained, ‘I am more and more convinced that the political future of the Americas will depend on the OAS. We are losing ground.’ As evidence of this lost ground, Diefenbaker noted that the Latin American section within the Department

21 N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo, ‘Visit of the Prime Minister to Mexico,’ 25 Apr. 1960, and attached memo, ‘Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Mexican Foreign Minister in Mexico on April 22 1960,’ pt 2, file 11563-19-40, vol. 5465, RG 25, LAC.
of External Affairs, itself a subsection of the American Division, comprised only two diplomats. He suggested, too, that while the cost of membership might total a million dollars, it would be a worthwhile investment, as it would likely boost Canada’s commercial prospects.\footnote{J. Diefenbaker to H. Green, memo, ‘Organization of American States,’ 24 Apr. 1960, and J. Diefenbaker to H. Green, untitled memorandum, 24 Apr. 1960, pt 2, file 12426-40, vol. 7760, RG 25, lac.}

Green, meanwhile, was preparing for his own trip south of the Rio Grande. In preparation, Undersecretary Norman Robertson solicited the opinions of several officials within External Affairs on Canada’s policy toward the OAS. Assessing how membership would affect Canada’s existing relationships, Assistant Undersecretary Ed Ritchie presented an inconclusive report arguing that a closer connection to Latin American countries might be helpful but might also complicate relations with certain countries, particularly the United States.\footnote{A.E. Ritchie to N.A. Robertson, memo, ‘Implications of Membership in the OAS for Our Relations with Other Countries,’ 13 May 1960, pt 10.2, file 2226-40, vol. 6812, RG 25, lac.} Also offering their opinions were two of the more senior Canadian diplomats in Latin America, Richard Bower and Jean Chapdelaine, the ambassadors to Argentina and Brazil respectively. Bower advised that membership was desirable. Latin American governments, he warned, were perplexed by Canadian apprehensions about joining. Thus, Ottawa’s ‘continued failure’ to become a member could result in serious consequences, such as a loss of support from regional governments at the United Nations. As he cautioned, ‘the lover scorned can be pretty bitter.’ Conversely, Chapdelaine saw little benefit in membership. As OAS members, Latin Americans would expect Canadians to make fairly significant contributions toward regional development; by doing so, Ottawa would assume ‘a greater share of the “white man’s” burden, with little direct increase in influence, or return gratitude.’\footnote{N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo and attached reports, 13 May 1960, pt 12, file 2226-40, vol. 5043, RG 25, lac.} At this point many Latin American leaders, alarmed by the Cuban Revolution – which had seen the overthrow of a reactionary dictator by leftist militants – and concerned about internal unrest in their own countries, were hoping that Washington would take steps to assist their economic development and combat poverty, which seemed to be the wellspring of revolutionary discontent.\footnote{Hal Brands, Latin America’s Cold War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 9–36.} Chapdelaine’s belief that Canadian involvement
in the region might have to extend beyond political engagement through the OAS was not unfounded, then.

As Green was to discover while touring Argentina, Chile, and Peru from 21 May to 3 June, there was a definite desire among regional officials for Canada to step up involvement. Hinting at the need for aid, Argentine President Arturo Frondizi was also adamant that Canada become an OAS member, compelling Green to respond, somewhat lamely, that ‘Canada was becoming increasingly convinced of the importance of Latin America,’ and his tour of the region ‘was aimed at enhancing his knowledge of this part of the world.’ While in Buenos Aires, Green also chaired a heads-of-posts meeting that discussed the OAS question at length, although there was little consensus among the Canadian diplomats present. Green made clear his interest in Latin America. Indeed, he felt he was more interested in the region than his own department, but he worried that among observers there had been too much emphasis placed on Canada’s association with the OAS and that if membership was put off, ‘there might be a certain reaction.’

Travelling next to Santiago, Green arrived only weeks after a major earthquake had shattered much of Chile. His visit was curtailed to a day, which he spent touring some of the damage, and then meeting with the Chilean ministers of foreign affairs and finance, to whom he offered emergency aid and assistance. Asked about his country’s position on the OAS, Green responded that while ‘he personally saw some advantage’ in membership, ‘public opinion in Canada was not unanimously favourable.’

Green could not escape the OAS issue. In Lima, his next stop, Peru’s president emphasized the positive role that Canada could play through the organization by helping to alleviate poverty and shoring up the region against communist subversion. This subject also dominated Green’s press conference in the Peruvian capital. Waving off several reasons to oppose entry, Green told the gathered reporters that he could not make such a ‘big and serious’ decision alone. Then, on his return trip to Canada, Green had a brief stopover in Mexico City, which afforded him the chance to meet with the Mexican foreign minister. Responding to Tello’s appeal for Canada to join the OAS,

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27 Minutes of Meeting with Secretary of State for External Affairs, 22 May 1960, attached to Embassy, Buenos Aires to External, numbered letter 253, 31 May 1960, pt 1-FP 2a, file, 11563-I-20-40, vol. 7603, RG 25, LAC.
Green admitted that governments in the region clearly desired Canadian membership, but that Canadian public opinion would be the determining factor.\footnote{Lima to External, numbered letter 131, 2 June 1960 and attached memoranda of conversations; Lima to External, numbered letter 133, 3 June 1960 and attached notes; Mexico City to External, numbered letter 315, 3 June 1960, pt 3, file 11563-20-40, vol. 5466, RG 25, LAC.}

While having disappointed Latin American officials on the key question of OAS membership, from the standpoint of public diplomacy, Green’s trip to South America was a success. Ambassador Bower believed that the ‘generous attention’ accorded Green by the Argentine press, businessmen, and government officials, and the minister’s evident interest in Argentina had fostered warmth between that country and Canada and had made the visit a ‘success from every point of view.’ Chapdelaine informed Ottawa that as a result of Green’s tour, ‘Canada was more in the news than at any time since’ his own arrival in Brazil the previous year. A survey of Canadian press opinion prepared by External Affairs noted that editorials favoured an expanded role in Latin America, as well as participation in the OAS.\footnote{Buenos Aires to External, numbered letter 253, 31 May 1960; Rio de Janeiro to External, numbered letter 339, 8 June 1960; and survey, ‘Canadian Opinion on International Affairs, May 31 to June 6, 1960,’ pt 3, file 11563-20-40, vol. 5466, RG 25, LAC. See also Ogelsby, Gringos, 301–3.}

In reporting on his tour to the House of Commons, Green took note of these warm feelings. Explaining that many Latin Americans were ‘deeply puzzled’ that ‘Canadians do not seem to realize that Canada is a very important member of the western hemisphere family,’ Green announced a step signalling greater involvement in the region: the creation of a Latin American Division within the Department of External Affairs. Building on Diefenbaker’s suggestion, Green revealed that what was then a subdivision within the American Division, with only a minimal staff, would now be a full-fledged unit staffed by many foreign service officers.\footnote{Canada, House of Commons Debates (30 May 1960), pp. 4335–8 (Howard Green, MP).}

Green also considered whether to expand Canadian representation in Latin America. Whereas senior officials in External Affairs felt, in the words of Norman Robertson, that extending relations to Central America should be ‘given a relatively low priority’ over establishing new posts in Asia and Africa, Green felt differently.\footnote{N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo, ‘New Missions,’ 7 July 1959; C. Hardy to A.E. Ritchie, memo with attached minutes, 5 Feb. 1960, pt 1.1, file 12426-40, vol. 7760, RG 25, LAC.} Even before leaving for his tour south in 1960, Green had commented on a report that
the former Costa Rican president wanted Canada to play a major role in the region, writing that an embassy in San Jose would be desirable, as ‘Costa Rica seems to be the most interesting Central American country for us.’ A debate on Canada’s foreign policy in July 1960 allowed Green to reaffirm his plans to create the Latin American Division, to send Canadian observers to OAS meetings, and to open an embassy in Central America. He saw these efforts as important because ‘many western hemisphere problems involve us … and we cannot get away from the effect of many of the events which take place on this side of the Atlantic.’ Agreeing with Green, Liberal foreign affairs critic Paul Martin asked whether Canada’s increasing involvement would result in membership in the OAS. Similarly, Heath Macquarrie, a Progressive Conservative MP with a keen interest in the region, stated his own support for membership. Tracing the history of Canada’s involvement in Latin America and noting the traditional reasons why Canadians had long opposed membership, especially the potential effect on relations with the United States, Macquarrie dismissed these arguments as ‘almost contemptible.’ When debate continued the next day, another Tory backbencher expressed hope that his government would announce its intent soon, because ‘never before has Canada come so close to achieving continental solidarity.’ Green, however, would only defer the matter to public opinion.

Officials in Washington were also interested in Canada’s position on this question. In March, Brazilian Foreign Minister Lafer, fresh from his visit to Ottawa, had called upon President Dwight Eisenhower at the White House. The two men discussed Lafer’s recent trip to the Canadian capital, and Eisenhower was pleased to learn from Lafer that the Canadians had expressed an interest in expanding ties to Latin America, remarking that it was unfortunate that in the past ‘Canada had traditionally looked to the East and West rather than southward.’ Lafer also informed US Secretary of State Christian Herter of his hope that Canada would join the OAS, comments that the State Department

33 Green’s emphasis; see his notation on N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo, ‘Statement by Ex-President Jose Figueres,’ 26 Apr. 1960, pt 2, file 12426-40, vol. 7760, RG 25, LAC.
then passed on to the Canadian embassy, which were then relayed to Green. President Eisenhower raised this issue during Diefenbaker’s state visit to Washington in June, asking the prime minister, “By the way, when are you people going to join the OAS?” Noting that Mexican officials had posed this question to him, Diefenbaker affirmed that while there had been ‘powerful arguments in the past’ against Canadian membership, now ‘the matter should be reconsidered’.

Although membership in the Organization of American States remained on the backburner, the Canadian government did complete Canada’s diplomatic links with Latin America. On 20 January 1961, Green announced to the House of Commons both the formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the countries of Central America through an embassy in Costa Rica and an exchange of ambassadors with Ecuador. In addition, he revealed that Canada was entertaining an invitation from the OAS to send an observer to the upcoming Inter-American Economic and Social Council summit scheduled to take place later that year. Collectively, these were signs of the ‘further recognition of the importance of the growing ties between Canada and Latin America.’ In response, Liberal leader Lester Pearson argued that these were actually steps on the road toward OAS membership, but Green declined to be baited on this point. Two weeks later, the Cabinet approved a proposal to extend diplomatic representation to Paraguay and Bolivia, the only remaining Latin American countries in which Canada was not represented. Rather than open new posts and increase costs for the government, double accreditation would be used, so that the ambassador in Peru would be accredited to Bolivia, while Canada’s ambassador in Uruguay would represent Canadian interests in Paraguay.

At this juncture, a new president had come into office in Washington. John Kennedy was intently interested in Latin America, believing that

39 Canada, House of Commons Debates (20 Jan. 1961), p. 1255 (Howard Green, MP). The accreditation of an ambassador in San Jose to represent Canadian interests in Central America was later altered to accommodate a Guatemalan request that the Canadian ambassador in Mexico City represent Canada in Guatemala; see Cabinet Conclusions, 24 July 1961, vol. 6177, series A-5-a, RG 25, LAC.
the threat of communism in the region made it ‘“the most dangerous area in the world.”’ Kennedy’s signature initiative to combat communist subversion in the Western Hemisphere, announced to a White House gathering of Latin American diplomats on 13 March 1961, was the Alliance for Progress. This program, based on the precepts of modernization theory and other trendy social science concepts, called for massive development aid to turn Latin America into ‘an example to all the world that liberty and progress walk hand in hand.’ Administration officials hoped that Canada, a wealthy, industrialized country, would play a role in this effort. In a memorandum to the president, Walt Rostow, Kennedy’s deputy special assistant for national security and a strong advocate of both modernization theory and development assistance, outlined the need to encourage Ottawa to take part in the Alliance for Progress. When asked about the president’s program, Howard Green informed the House of Commons that the government was interested in providing assistance and aid to Latin America, although the matter had not yet been formally considered.

However much Green may have wanted Canada to become more involved in South and Central America, Diefenbaker was moving in the opposite direction, primarily because of American actions toward Cuba. Since the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, but particularly since mid-1960, the United States and Canada had pursued divergent paths. While Washington took a belligerent stance meant to contain and overturn the revolution, imposing an embargo in October 1960, Ottawa maintained its diplomatic and economic ties with Havana. As Diefenbaker explained, there was ‘no valid objection to trade with Cuba,’ nor was there reason to abandon ‘the kind of relations with Cuba which are usual with the recognized government of another country.’ Differences toward Cuba indicated both Canada’s desire for independent action in Latin America and hesitancy toward

pursuing American Cold War policy in the so-called Third World.\textsuperscript{45} This divergence between these two allies became most pronounced when, hoping to topple Cuba’s communist government, the Kennedy administration sponsored an invasion of the island by Cuban exiles, which foundered at the Bay of Pigs in mid-April 1961. Condemning the Cubans in a speech to the House of Commons, Diefenbaker was nevertheless concerned by this action, telling the American ambassador that he was worried ‘over where the United States goes from here.’\textsuperscript{46} Privately, he expressed more serious doubts about US policy, remarking to an aide that ‘he did not wish the United States Government to be left with the impression that they could count on Canadian support for anything foolish they might do with regard to Cuba.’ Crucially, he added that Canada ‘would not be “tied up in” any OAS moves in respect of Cuba.’\textsuperscript{47} For the prime minister, who had viewed Latin America as an untapped market, the emergence of the region as a Cold War battleground was troubling. This was an inopportune moment, then, for Kennedy to raise the issue of Canadian membership, which he would do during his trip to Ottawa. Diefenbaker’s lack of support would contribute to the deterioration of the relationship between himself and the president into one of deep antipathy, if not hostility.\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the Bay of Pigs, Green was still attracted to Latin America. Offering an overview of Canadian foreign policy to the House of Commons in late April, he dubbed the region an area ‘where we really belong.’ Beyond this rhetorical flourish, he dropped hints that reflected


\textsuperscript{47} H.B. Robinson to N.A. Robertson, 27 Apr. 1961, file 4, vol. 5, MG 31 E83, lac. There is a curious connection between Cuba and Canadian involvement in Latin America: see Hal Klepak, ‘Canada, Cuba, and Latin America: A Paradoxical Relationship,’ in Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era, ed. Robert Wright and Lana Wylie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 22–43.

a strong desire to further increase Canada’s role there, wondering aloud, for instance, ‘whether Canada is wise in adopting an isolationist policy with regard to the western hemisphere.’ Making it clear that a decision to join the OAS was not imminent, Green resorted to the argument that Canada would become a member ‘only when it is fairly clear that the majority of the Canadian people are in favour of this being done.’ Attacking this position, Paul Martin argued that if the government felt that membership in the OAS was so important, as appeared to be the case, then it should assume leadership on the issue. Re-emphasizing this point, Pearson raised the ‘menace of communist penetration’ of Latin America and questioned whether, if Canada’s government believed that the organization was a means of battling this threat, was it not then time to assume Canada’s ‘responsibility as a member of the OAS’?

Government officials in Ottawa were not ready to assume this responsibility. Arnold Heeney, the Canadian ambassador in Washington, favoured membership as well as increasing levels of development assistance, but his was a lone voice. As policy for Kennedy’s trip to Ottawa was discussed and formed, the preference that emerged was that Canada’s role in Latin America be limited. Talking points prepared for Diefenbaker by senior officials made it clear that although interested, Canada was ‘not yet ready’ to become a member of the OAS. Nor was the Canadian government prepared to embark on any new aid programs for the region, mainly because ‘our efforts should not be spread too thin.’ Further, although the Alliance for Progress seemed ‘sensible and constructive,’ Canadian officials doubted many Latin American governments could reasonably carry out the types of reforms demanded by the program. This latter point indicated that Canadian civil service mandarins doubted the efficacy of the economic modernization ethos that had taken hold in Washington. Critically, as this policy was being set down in early May, Green was on a European tour and thus was unable to offer his views on Canada’s position in Latin American. Diefenbaker, meanwhile, had already voiced doubts about the connection between the OAS, the United States, and Cuba.

51 A.D.P. Heeney to N.A. Robertson, 4 May, 1961, file 16, vol. 1, Arnold Heeney fonds, MG 30 E144, LAC.
52 R.B. Bryce to J. Diefenbaker, memo, ‘Suggested Points for Discussion with President Kennedy,’ 15 May 1961, file 8, vol. 5, MG 31 E83, LAC.
and these notes added additional reasons for opposing further Canadian involvement in the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, as the prime minister had remarked to an aide, with an election brewing, instead of focusing on development abroad he was instead "going to think of Canada for the next 14, 15, 16 or 18 months."  

A split was growing between Washington and Ottawa, a rift toward which the Americans seemed oblivious. The US embassy in Ottawa passed along a number of observations to the State Department as it prepared Kennedy’s briefing papers. Despite nationalist grumblings by some Canadians, US diplomats believed that Kennedy ‘had fired the imagination of many Canadians’ and had thus far only generated approval. What existed, then, was a ‘superb opportunity’ to advance US interests, because ‘even those who resist American influence in Canada are now well impressed by the new administration and their criticism is muted.’ Kennedy could thus win ‘stronger adherence to our global policies,’ particularly in Canadian policy toward Latin America. Several of the president’s advisors were divided on whether to press for Canadian membership in the OAS and increased involvement in hemispheric affairs. However, the matter was settled several days before the president’s trip when Rostow met with Ambassador Heeney, who thought Kennedy might ‘tactfully encourage’ the Canadians to enter the organization. Informing Kennedy of Heeney’s advice and in a follow-up memorandum entitled ‘What We Want from the Ottawa Trip’, Rostow outlined a few relatively minor goals for the president to ‘push’ for, among which were Ottawa’s participation in the Alliance for Progress and Canada’s membership in the OAS.

So when the president and prime minister met on 17 May, policy toward Latin America emerged as a significant point of both discussion and departure. Kennedy, making it clear that Latin America ranked among his chief concerns, expressed his hope that Canada would agree. Unmoved, Diefenbaker responded that ‘Canadians were farther away today from membership in the Organization of American States than they had been previously.’ Suggesting that Canada would

53 Diefenbaker qtd in Robinson, Diefenbaker’s World, 196.
54 Ottawa to State Department, tel. 780, 12 Apr. 1961; R. Goodwin to J. Kennedy, 24 Apr. 1961; C.V. Clifton to J. Kennedy, 8 May, 1961, file ‘Canada, General 4/61-5/14/61,’ box 18, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), series I, JFKL.
55 W. Rostow to J. Kennedy, 13 May, 1961, file ‘JFK Trip to Ottawa’ 5/61, box 113, POF, series 9, JFKL.
be more influential outside the organization than inside of it, the prime minister stressed that if they joined the OAS, Canadians would forever be faced with either having to disagree with the United States or open themselves to the charge of acting as American puppets. ‘Smilingly,’ Kennedy rejoined that his assumption was that ‘in most cases of disagreement Canada would be right.’ In the ensuing two-hour conversation, the president and prime minister went over this ground two more times without either changing his position. Nor did Diefenbaker do more than simply inquire about Kennedy’s plans for the Alliance for Progress.57

Having failed to sway the prime minister, the president nevertheless raised the OAS in his address to the Canadian Parliament. Emphasizing the role that Canada could play in the Western Hemisphere, Kennedy observed that ‘all free members of the organization of American states would be both heartened and strengthened by any increase in your hemispheric role.’ The United States and Canada ‘are partners in North American affairs; can we not become partners in inter-American affairs?’58 The following morning, in a breakfast meeting with Diefenbaker, Kennedy again raised the OAS and again was rebuffed. The president then left Ottawa. On his return voyage he spoke with Ambassador Heeney, who was accompanying him back to Washington. Heeney later reported that Kennedy had stressed that while the Canadians need not join the OAS, Canada’s increased ‘“presence”’ in Latin America would nonetheless be appreciated. Addressing Heeney’s argument that Canadian budgetary matters prohibited increased aid to the region, Kennedy averred that Canada possessed ‘an important and constructive role to play outside financial aid.’ When asked what he thought of the concerns many Canadians had about the impact OAS membership might have on Canada–US relations, Kennedy responded that any risks were not too serious and were ‘well outweighed by the advantages.’59 This last attempt by the president, made to a sympathetic ear, also failed.

57 Memoranda of conversation, ‘Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker – Canada, the OAS and IA-ECOSOC’ and ‘Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker – Cuba and Latin America,’ 17 May 1961, file ‘Canada, General, Ottawa Trip 5/17/61 Memoranda of Conversation,’ box 18, NSF, series 1, JFKL; and memorandum of conversation, ‘Visit of President Kennedy to Ottawa, May 16–18, 1961 – Meeting with the Prime Minister, May 17,’ file 7, vol. 5, MG 31 E83, LAC.


In parliamentary debate on the day after Kennedy’s departure, Paul Martin offered Liberal support for Canadian membership, but Diefenbaker stated only that the matter was still up for consideration. The prime minister had already made up his mind, however, and as with the infamous issue of Canada’s adoption of nuclear weapons, he rejected a political consensus with the Liberals. After receiving Heeney’s report of his discussion with Kennedy during the return flight to Washington, Diefenbaker telephoned the ambassador to confirm that ‘there was no immediate likelihood’ of Canada joining the OAS anytime soon. Despite the support of the Liberal opposition, Diefenbaker cited the correspondence he was receiving from Canadians as indicating ‘continuing evidence of popular opposition to such a move, particularly amongst “old Country” elements.’ He offered a slightly different explanation in a 23 May Cabinet meeting. Arguing that ‘unsettling events’ in the region meant that Canada was not yet ready to become an OAS member, but Ottawa would nevertheless dispatch an observer to attend OAS meetings.

Besides public opinion and worries about US policy in Latin America, the prime minister may have had another reason to oppose joining the OAS. Although it is not certain when he found it, Diefenbaker came into the possession of a copy of Rostow’s memorandum to Kennedy, titled ‘What We Want from the Ottawa Trip,’ which had been left behind in the prime minister’s office by the president or one of his advisors. This document, specifically its use of the word push, likely influenced Diefenbaker’s resistance toward OAS membership; it certainly angered him enough that the following year, in a well-known incident, he threatened the US ambassador to Canada by stating that he would make the memo public. While the Rostow memo was an innocuous list of talking points, Kennedy’s repeated insistence on the OAS during his talks with Diefenbaker and in his speech may have come to look like pushing.

The president’s public appeal, pushy or not, had certainly been a mistake. Canadian opinion rapidly turned against OAS membership, which in turn drove the prime minister’s opposition. In his memoirs, Heeney took the blame for having suggested to Rostow that the OAS

61 J. Diefenbaker to file, memo, ‘Heeney,’ 22 May 1961, file 9, vol. 2, MG 31 E44, LAC.
62 Cabinet Conclusions, 23 May 1961, vol. 6176, series A-5-a, RG 2, LAC.
matter should be mentioned. Rostow also later conceded that Kennedy had made an error in pushing the matter as hard as he did. Given the sense among US officials that there was a receptive attitude in Canada, it is not surprising that Kennedy pushed so hard for Canada to join the OAS, particularly since the president felt that events in Latin America were so important. Thus, the US embassy’s initial report on the president’s trip was quite positive. The press coverage had been favourable and the public reaction had been ‘extraordinary.’ No real criticism of the address to Parliament had been heard, and in suggesting that Canada join the OAS, Kennedy had not been ‘exceeding bounds of right or propriety.’ A more in-depth analysis of reaction to the speech, however, found that although the responses to the address were generally encouraging, there was no huge outpouring of feeling on Latin America and hence ‘little reason to believe Canadian decision to join OAS imminent.’ As a result, the embassy recommended that officials from other OAS countries be contacted to encourage Canada to join. Otherwise Diefenbaker’s government would simply be motivated by its ‘habit of postponing all controversial decisions’ and by its ‘consistent effort to avoid any adverse criticism, however weak or ill-founded.’

Adverse criticism, of the Americans, not Diefenbaker, was certainly evident. Aware that public and press opinion had previously favoured membership in the OAS, Green now wanted to know if there was a trend emerging in the opposite direction. External Affairs responded quickly with two analyses. The first, looking at press reaction, found that editorials printed after Kennedy’s visit, with two exceptions, backed Canada joining the OAS. The second, an examination of incoming correspondence prepared in early June, noted that while opinion in 1960 had mostly supported Canadian membership, in the past few months there had been a ‘perceptible swing in the opposite direction.’ The paper observed both that those in favour of entry tended to be more educated or were at least more knowledgeable about Latin America, and that many of the letters opposed to membership seemed similar

64 A.D.P. Heeney, The Things That Are Caesar’s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 175.
65 C. Ritchie to N.A. Robertson, memo, ‘Views of Walt Rostow,’ 4 Dec. 1962, file 13, vol. 6, MG 31 E83, LAC.
66 Ottawa to State Department, tel. 923, 19 May, 1961, file ‘Canada, General 4/61-5/14/61,’ box 18, NSF, series 1, JFKL.
and may perhaps have been dispatched by the Canadian Communist Party.  

Those who wrote in to oppose OAS membership typically questioned whether Canada and the United States could ever have a true partnership in the Western Hemisphere when the Americans possessed so much power. Others stated their opposition on the grounds that if Canada joined, it would face tremendous pressure ‘to provide handouts to one and all below the Rio Grande,’ with no resulting benefits. Canadian historian and Progressive Conservative supporter W.L. Morton believed that Canada should take up membership only ‘in its own time and in its own interests.’ He urged that Ottawa should focus instead on Europe and on the European Economic Community. Others opposed membership because they were upset by the course of US policy. Writing on behalf of a group of friends, one correspondent attacked the Americans as ‘unrepentant liars and breakers of treaties’ who resorted to ‘hysterical and unfounded fears of Communistic aggression.’ Supporting Canadian membership were some who believed that Canada could play a positive role by combating hunger as well as communism, or those who felt that joining the OAS would increase Canadian trade with the region.

At the same time as Canadian diplomats were assessing the public mood, the Canada-US Interparliamentary Group was meeting in Washington from 8 to 9 June. An annual gathering of several Canadian MPs and Senators and their US counterparts, these politicians engaged in social functions as well as substantive talks. Much of the discussion during this particular gathering dealt with the OAS, and members of the American Congress were ‘unanimous’ in desiring

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68 R. Campbell to Latin American Division, memo, ‘Public Opinion concerning Membership in O.A.S.,’ 26 May, 1961; N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo, ‘Survey of Public Correspondence regarding Canadian Participation in the Organization of American States,’ 6 June 1961; and N.A. Robertson to H. Green, memo, ‘Press Reaction to President Kennedy’s Appeal That Canada Join the O.A.S.,’ 29 May 1961, pt 2, file 4035-C-40, vol. 5069, RG 25, LAC. Also, see Ogelsby, Gringos, 305, 315.
69 L. Moore to J. Diefenbaker, 3 June 1961, pt 2, file 4035-C-40, vol. 5069, RG 25, LAC.
70 F.E. Winter to H. Green, 19 May 1961; and Morton to Green, 22 May 1961, pt 3, file 4035-C-40, vol. 5069, RG 25, LAC.
71 A. Stratton to H. Green, 6 June 1961, pt 1, file 4035-C-40, vol. 5069, RG 25, LAC.
72 W. Ehrlich to H. Green, 25 May 1961; and D. Williams to H. Green, 4 May 1961, pt 2, file 4035-C-40, vol. 5069, RG 25, LAC.
that Canada join. In the opinion of the Canadian note-taker, the Americans were ‘somewhat surprised’ about the extent of division among the Canadian parliamentarians on this question.73

Other foreign officials offered their own opinions on the matter. In Havana, the Canadian ambassador met briefly with Cuba’s foreign minister, Raul Roa, who applauded Ottawa’s interest in Latin America but urged that a decision to join the oas should be carefully considered. As Roa argued, Canada possessed a freedom of action outside the organization that it would not possess as a member.74 A few weeks later, Charles Ritchie, Canada’s representative to the UN, was approached by his Argentine colleague, who informed Ritchie that Buenos Aires desired Canadian membership sooner rather than later.75 Indeed, Argentinean President Arturo Frondizi, due to visit Ottawa in November, made it clear in a letter to Diefenbaker that Canadian participation in the oas was among his chief concerns.76

However, public opinion remained opposed to membership, and even newspapers favouring participation argued that, at present, the decision be postponed lest it ‘be interpreted as giving way to United States pressure.’ These analyses were now being sent to the prime minister, who had ‘expressed interest’ in being apprised of Canadian feeling on the matter.77 In addition to studying public feeling, Green had also directed External Affairs to review the role that Canada might play in inter-American affairs. In turn, Canada’s diplomats in the region were asked to give their opinions on this question. The resulting report offered a summary of each mission’s opinion, and two areas of agreement were pointed out: events in Latin America were serious

and had ‘important implications’ for Canada; and Canadian involve-
ment in the region, if OAS membership was concluded, would mean
that Ottawa would need to make a ‘substantial contribution’ toward
regional economic development.  
Canadian ministers proved unwilling to make such a commitment.
To Cabinet in July, Green set out policy for the Inter-American Eco-
nomic and Social Council summit in Punta del Este, Uruguay, to
which Canada was sending a team of observers. He proposed having
the delegates mention that Canada’s membership in the OAS remained
under consideration by the Canadian government. He also suggested
offering an annual allotment of seventy-five thousand dollars for tech-
nical assistance to Latin American countries. While this amount paled
next to the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of aid and assistance
that the United States was expected to offer at the conference through
the Alliance for Progress, the Cabinet rejected even this small sum.
Showing where their priorities lay, instead the ministers approved aid
allotments for the Colombo Plan, a program to assist Commonwealth
countries. Green’s proposal for an open-minded approach to the OAS
was also soundly rejected, killing his hopes for Canadian mem-
bership.  
It was not just the possibility of Canada’s entry into the OAS
that suffered. For some time Green had been mulling over a plan to
accredit a diplomat to the embassy in Washington who would coordi-
nate Canadian policy toward inter-American affairs. Having hinted at
the idea publicly, Green had planned to present the idea to his fellow
ministers, but when a memorandum for Cabinet on this topic reached
his desk, he backed away from signing it, and this initiative died too.

As for the Punta del Este conference, the Canadian delegates,
Heath MacQuarrie and Associate Minister of Defence Pierre Sévigny,
received multiple invitations to join the OAS from Latin American offi-
cials, including the Argentinean and Uruguayan presidents. Report-
ing on the conference to his Cabinet colleagues, Sévigny noted these
appeals and argued that Canada ‘cannot long postpone a decision on
membership in the [OAS] without damaging its acknowledged high
equity among Latin American countries and without impairing its

78   M. Cadieux to H. Green, memo, ‘Canada’s Role in Inter-American Affairs,’
80  E. Gill to Personnel Division, 8 June 1961; and N.A. Robertson to H. Green,
memorandum to Cabinet Recommending Appointment at the
Canadian Embassy in Washington of a Senior Officer Responsible for Inter-
relations with the United States.'

Discussion of this decision, or rather the lack of one, quickly arose in the House of Commons. Paul Martin criticized the government’s ignorance of Canada’s ‘responsibilities to our own sister American continents.’ Sévigny, offering an overview of his experiences at the conference, affirmed Canada’s ‘fate will be a better one if the fate of our neighbours in Latin America is also a better one.’

Macquarrie chimed in, reporting that in Uruguay he had ‘found complete unanimity in the view that Canada would be most welcome’ in the OAS. When Green finally stated the government’s intentions, he responded, likely with a degree of disappointment, that ‘one of the least effective ways of persuading Canada to adopt a policy is for the president or head of state of another country to come here and tell us what we should do, no matter if it is done with the best intentions. Even when it is done in that way it is not the best way to get results and I am surprised that the honourable member [Paul Martin] would suggest that we should at once have jumped through the hoop when the President of the United States made this suggestion.’ Admitting, ‘I do not think President Kennedy meant to interfere,’ Green could not commit to Canadian membership.

Rather than being an anti-American statement, Green’s comment was quite accurate. Kennedy’s public appeal for Canada to join the OAS had alarmed many Canadians, including the prime minister. Not only was the public plea worrying, but also, by the time Kennedy spoke, American policy toward Cuba had turned Diefenbaker away from seeking engagement with Latin America. The president, then, had had a double impact on Canadian policy, one that caused Canada to turn away from the Western Hemisphere. Yet Diefenbaker already had doubts about joining the OAS. Although he had cited the importance of both the OAS and of Latin America just after his return from Mexico – a full year before either the Bay of Pigs or Kennedy’s speech to Canada’s Parliament – the prime minister had been unwilling to force a decision on the issue in Cabinet or bring the issue to Parliament. Indeed, he was unwilling to commit to membership, despite the support of regional governments, the opposition Liberals, and a number of Conservative MPs, including several Cabinet ministers.

Having hoped to boost his country’s commercial prospects, Diefenbaker hardly wanted to be tied down by financial or political commitments to Latin America.

Diplomatic relations were extended and a Latin American Division formed, but Canadian policy stopped short of the type of engagement sought by Latin American governments, by Washington, and by a number of Canadian politicians and officials. Beyond disquiet about US policy in Latin America – especially toward Cuba – Diefenbaker was concerned about the level of commitment that would be required of his country. He had seen engagement with the region and membership in the OAS as means to open doors for Canadian exporters. Whether financially or politically, Latin Americans wanted Canada to become involved in their problems, however. Diefenbaker was willing only to go so far, Green wanted to go farther still, but many Canadians simply had little interest in Latin America or else had little desire to see their country play a role there. Public opinion obviously mattered, but so too did the question of Canada’s place in the world. Government ministers preferred to support efforts aimed at the Commonwealth. Further, Canadian support for the Alliance for Progress, or a parallel assistance program, would have involved a close association with Washington’s regional policy, a risk also posed by OAS membership. Given skepticism of the efficacy of the Alliance for Progress as well as doubts about US policy in Latin America in the wake of the Bay of Pigs, such an association was neither popular nor prudent. Diefenbaker’s interest in Latin America came at an unfortunate point, then, when the region was facing deep social and political unrest and was coming to the fore as a Cold War battleground. While the prime minister was often prone to indecision – witness the saga over nuclear weaponry – on Latin America and the OAS, his hesitancy was not the product of dithering but the result of shrewd judgment regarding the benefit of Canadian involvement in a volatile region. The Cold War in Latin America was frequently hot, and that Canada eschewed membership in the OAS until the end of that conflict shows the sensible and enduring nature of Diefenbaker’s position.

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