

Copyright
by
Aragorn Storm Miller
2012

**The Dissertation Committee for Aragorn Storm Miller Certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Precarious Paths to Freedom: The United States, the Caribbean Basin,
& the New Politics of the Latin American Cold War, 1958-1968**

Committee:

Mark A. Lawrence, Supervisor

Jonathan C. Brown

Henry A. Dietz

H. William Brands

Michael B. Stoff

**Precarious Paths to Freedom: The United States, the Caribbean Basin,
& the New Politics of the Latin American Cold War, 1958-1968**

by

Aragorn Storm Miller, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

Dedication

To Carla for compassion, to Bobby for perspective, and to both of you for the adventures...

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Mark Lawrence for being a patient mentor and friend for the last seven years. You have given more than I could ever hope to repay. I also owe a considerable debt to Henry Dietz, who helped me start the graduate school journey and saw me through to the end. Many thanks as well to Jonathan Brown for his piercing insight at many crucial points in the research and writing of this dissertation. I must express my profound gratitude to Marilyn Lehman, without whom this dissertation would have been impossible. I extend thanks to University of Texas Department of History, and to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, for generous funding along the way. I would also like to thank the many archivists and librarians who helped me at the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson presidential libraries, the national archives of the United States and the Dominican Republic, and the universities of Texas, Florida, and North Carolina. In particular, I must thank Quisqueya Lara at the Archivo General Nacional in Santo Domingo for her personal intervention on my behalf. This process has been an odyssey, but the people listed above have made the journey manageable.

Precarious Paths to Freedom: The United States, the Caribbean Basin, & the New Politics of the Latin American Cold War, 1958-1968

Aragorn Storm Miller, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Mark A. Lawrence

At first glance U.S. policy towards Latin America between 1958 and 1968 appears to have been a failure. Initiatives intended to promote democracy and economic development, and to insulate the hemisphere from the ideological and military struggles of the global Cold War, reaped only authoritarian regimes, uneven and sluggish economic growth, and political debates over the global systems of capitalism and communism that distracted attention from the unique and pressing problems of Latin America. A closer examination of the U.S.-Latin American relationship, however, reveals that the policies pursued by Washington succeeded in an unlikely arena, in the nation that seemed to matter most to U.S. policymakers. That nation was Venezuela, which emerged from generations of tyranny in 1958 only to become the focal point first for a right wing counterrevolutionary insurgency sponsored by the Dominican Republic, and then for a leftist guerrilla war that involved the competing ideologies of Cuba, the Soviet Union, and China. From 1958 onward U.S. policymakers identified Venezuela as a crucial bulwark against right-wing and left-wing extremism and as an ideal partner in the creation of a modernized, prosperous, and pro-U.S. Latin America. Venezuelan moderates, meanwhile, dexterously manipulated U.S. support to realize these goals and to eliminate the existential threats posed by domestic and foreign extremists. The study of

the Washington-Caracas partnership from 1958 to 1968 illuminates the ways in which U.S. and Latin American policymakers could, under certain circumstances, solve the most vexing political, ideological, and military problems besetting the hemisphere through an innovative blend of democratic, diplomatic, and coercive means.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	xi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: New Looks & New Nationalisms, 1956-1959	20
Confronting Economic Underdevelopment: The State Department and the White House in 1958 and Beyond	23
Rafael Trujillo as Case Study for the Obstacles to U.S. Reform Efforts.....	32
The Rise of the Latin American Reformers: Rómulo Betancourt and Developmental Nationalism.....	40
Despotism or Democracy? The Eisenhower Administration and Betancourt Confront the Future of Hemispheric Politics	49
The Collapse of the Pérez Jiménez Regime: Setting the Stage for a Political Reckoning	60
Conclusion	74
Chapter 2: The Contest for a New Political Order: The Last Stand of the Caribbean Right Wing & the Triumph of Nationalism, 1959-1961	77
Old Grudges, New Politics: Caribbean Crises and the Santiago Conference, Spring and Summer 1959.....	78
The Perezjimenista-Trujillo Union I: Rhetoric and Invasion, 1959-1960 ..	92
The Perezjimenista-Trujillo Union II: The Assassination Attempt Against Betancourt and its Aftermath, 1960-1961	108
The Death Rattles of the Right Wing, September 1960-June 1961	120
Conclusion	135
Chapter 3: Contesting Liberalism: Kennedy, Betancourt, & the Newest Left in Latin America, 1960-1963	138
Into the Wilderness: The Leftists Depart the Punto Fijo Coalition	139
Kennedy and Betancourt, Expectations and Reality, 1961	148
From the Pen to the Sword: The MIR-PCV Union and Its Embrace of Violence	160
The Communist World and the First Stages of Insurgency	174
Test of Wills: The 1963 Presidential Election in Venezuela	192

Conclusion	206
Chapter 4: Sharpening Swords & Ideas: Washington, Caracas, & the Deepening Insurgency	210
LBJ’s Inheritance: The Dilemma of Latin American Instability	212
A Moment of Contingency: Venezuela and the Communist World, Spring 1964	222
Containment, the Paraguaná Issue, and the 9 th OAS Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers	231
The Limits of the U.S. Commitment to Latin American Democracy: Brazil, April 1964	242
Victory and Defeat in Venezuela, August 1964-December 1965.....	252
Continuing Violence and Ambivalence, January 1965-January 1966.....	262
Conclusion	275
Chapter 5: A Coalescing Center & Splintering Radicalism, 1966-1967	280
Catalyzing a World Revolution? The Tri-Continental Conference and Revolutionary Adjustments in Venezuela, Winter 1965-1966	283
The Distance Between Prescription and Practice: Life and Death in the Venezuelan Guerrilla Movement, 1966	296
“Two, Three, Many Vietnams”: The Radical Communist Gambit in Latin America, 1967	314
To Punta del Este and Beyond: Johnson and Leoni Confront Castro and the Hard-Liners, Spring 1967	329
Conclusion	340
Chapter 6: “It Is Difficult to Take up Arms, but at Times More Difficult to Release Them”: The Twilight of the Guerrilla War, 1967-1968	345
Efforts at Conciliation and Efforts at Escalation: From the Glassboro Summit to the LASO Conference	348
The Hunters and the Hunted I: The Crucible of Guerrilla War in Venezuela, 1967.....	359
The Hunters and the Hunted II: Killing Che Guevara and the Idea of “Many Vietnams”	369
1968: The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla?	378

“We Fell into the Trap of Vanguardism”: The End of the Guerrilla War and the Election of 1968	392
Conclusion	404
Conclusion	408
Bibliography	418

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1, Venezuelan States: The vast majority of the guerrilla struggle occurred to the west and southwest of Caracas, though a significant guerrilla presence emerged in the mountains east of Caracas. By the late 1960s, sporadic guerrilla violence broke out in the eastern states as well.

Source: World of Maps,

<http://www.worldofmaps.net/typo3temp/pics/ff65ae598c.png> website (accessed March 23, 2012).179

Illustration 2, Urban Centers and Roadways: A more detailed look at Venezuela.

Roadways proved to be a double-edged sword in the guerrilla struggle.

Generally the guerrillas could avoid the army by staying in undeveloped areas, but once the army established a continual presence in an area, guerrillas were forced to skirt the roadways in moving to a new area, thus exposing them to military and police surveillance. Source: Ezilon

<http://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/southamerica/map-of->

Venezuela.gif website (accessed March 23, 2012).186

Guide to Abbreviations Used in Footnotes

AGNDR: Archivo General Nacional, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

BLAC: Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, Austin, Texas

CF: Country File

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CREST: CIA Records Search Tool (CREST)

DDEPL: Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas

FRUS: U.S. State Department Foreign Relations of the United States Series

JFKL: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston Massachusetts

LBJL: Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas

NACPM: National Archives, College Park, Maryland

NSC: National Security Council

NSF: National Security File

USIA: United States Information Agency

UTDDRS: University of Texas Declassified Documents Reference System

Introduction

At first glance U.S. policy toward Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s appears to have been a failure. As many historians have argued, initiatives intended to promote democracy and economic development, and to insulate the hemisphere from the ideological and military struggles of the global Cold War, seemed to reap only authoritarian regimes, uneven and sluggish economic growth, and political debates over the international systems of capitalism and communism that distracted attention from unique and pressing Latin American problems. Washington's obsession with communists in Cuba and elsewhere, according to this historical consensus, skewed its judgment to the point that it made accommodations with a host of benighted Latin American generals, who in turn manipulated U.S. support to crush the aspirations of the great mass of their people. While the United States and its clients might have "won" the hemispheric Cold War by preventing communist victories everywhere except Cuba, the great cost in lives, resources, and ideals made such a victory Pyrrhic in the extreme.

At a fundamental level, this dissertation questions the validity of such a dismal assessment. Its research springs from a consideration of whether there might have been a U.S.-Latin American partnership that both promoted the democratic ideals that Washington espoused as well as provided the security and stability that Washington coveted. If such an exceptional case existed, how might it have operated, in terms of the U.S. interaction with its Latin American partner and the interaction between these partners and their antagonists? Could a study of such a partnership reveal more clearly

the political and socioeconomic dynamics of the hemispheric and global Cold War? Put another way, the research question that guides this dissertation is, “Did U.S. policy toward Latin America essentially fail, or was there a triumph, achieved through largely democratic means, significant enough to challenge dominant assumptions about the darker and more publicized episodes in U.S.-Latin American relations? If there was a triumph, how did it come about and what would be the larger implications of such a case?”

Such a research question, of course, requires a definition of “success” in terms of U.S. policy expectations. The early research for this project indicated quite clearly that there was a period running roughly from 1958 through 1968 in which U.S. policymakers feared that the Caribbean Basin would be the starting point for a wave of social revolution, international intervention, and right-wing and left-wing extremism, that threatened to destabilize the hemisphere irreparably. The Cold War in Latin America, in other words, was at its “hottest” during this period. Successfully stopping such a wave meant promoting democratic reform, strengthening regional security apparatuses and, perhaps most importantly, pursuing these goals in conjunction with an ally or allies most threatened by the specters of revolution, intervention, and extremism.

Ultimately, the research revealed that Washington achieved this sort of success by cultivating a partnership with Venezuela, which emerged from generations of tyranny in 1958 only to become the focal point first for a right-wing counterrevolutionary insurgency sponsored by the Dominican Republic, and then for a leftist guerrilla war that involved the competing ideologies of Cuba, the Soviet Union, and China. From 1958

onward U.S. policymakers identified Venezuela as the crucial bulwark against political extremism and as the ideal partner in the creation of a modernized, prosperous, and pro-U.S. Latin America. Venezuelan moderates, meanwhile, dexterously manipulated U.S. support to realize these goals and to eliminate the existential threats posed by domestic and foreign extremists. While much of Latin America succumbed to military rule throughout the 1960s, U.S. diplomacy played a major role in ensuring that democracy established itself in Venezuela through successive competitive elections. Reciprocally, the resolve of Venezuelan democrats ensured that the greatest threats to hemispheric stability were blunted, thus advancing central U.S. policy imperatives. In short, Venezuela was especially important because U.S. leaders believed it to be the key to the stability of the entire Western Hemisphere. Flipping the coin, those who opposed the United States reckoned that a destabilized Venezuela would lead to a destabilized hemisphere, allowing them to impose their own political systems. The study of the Washington-Caracas partnership from 1958 to 1968 illuminates the ways in which U.S. and Latin American policymakers could, under certain circumstances, solve the most vexing political, ideological, and military problems besetting the hemisphere through an innovative blend of democratic, diplomatic, and coercive means. Venezuela was the critical arena of the hemispheric Cold War because of its tangible and psychological importance to the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, and because of the efforts by Venezuelans to reinterpret and alter U.S., Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban, policy and ideology.

This dissertation suggests that U.S. power neither was absolute nor operated in a vacuum, and that Washington's management of reform and of a peculiar brand of interventionist right-left despotism would have been impossible without regional allies. Yet while this unique strain of intervention required the crafting of unique solutions, Washington and its allies—and their antagonists—also attempted to define the parameters of ideas like freedom and justice. Such attempts were by no means unique to Latin America; they were central concerns to contenders involved in the Cold War on all continents. As Odd Arne Westad observes in *The Global Cold War*, ideas like freedom and justice were the critical currency of the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union, advertising themselves as champions of freedom and justice, respectively, bid for the allegiance of the developing and decolonizing world because it was the most effective means of undermining one another. Maintaining the loyalties of the developing world could pay more dividends to Washington and Moscow than maintaining stockpiles of the most advanced strategic weaponry. A system of triangular diplomacy emerged that relied as much on the articulation of ideals as it did on conventional *realpolitik*. Courtship by the superpowers gave the developing world new power, and in many cases charismatic leaders arose who sought not only to take advantage of this ideological competition but to take control of it as well. Mao Zedong of China, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, and Cuba's Fidel Castro are only the most notable examples of this trend. The problems the United States faced in Latin America between 1958 and 1968, therefore, were both peculiar to the region and typical in the long history of the Cold War. This critical link between Latin American problems and global ones enables my dissertation to enhance the

understanding of both discrete events in the history of U.S.-Latin American relations and of the ways in which the superpowers and developing powers interacted across the span of the global Cold War.

While much of the relationship between Venezuela and the wider world was exceptional, this relationship bore many similarities to the socioeconomic, ideological, and political history of the Cold War throughout Latin America, and the Cold War between the developed and developing world. The fact that Venezuela sat atop one of the world's largest oil reservoirs made the nation unique among its neighbors. In addition to these vast potential riches, as heirs to Simón Bolívar and his internationalist ideology Venezuelans could claim a cultural and political tradition on par with the most sophisticated American societies. Yet this socioeconomic and political might was far more potential than real, and such a situation made Venezuela relatively typical of the American states south of the Rio Grande. Under the leadership of dictators Cipriano Castro Ruiz (1899-1908), Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935), Eleázar López Contreras (1936-1941), and Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948-1958), Venezuela never diversified its economy from the export of a single commodity, in this case petroleum. Further, these dictators failed to negotiate on anything approaching equal terms with the foreign oil companies that came to extract and administer this national resource. Such a situation made Venezuela very similar to the rest of Latin America, which tended to feature economies that depended precariously on the international market for a single product and that were largely under the control of foreign interests. As the above list of dictators would indicate, furthermore, Venezuela had—absent a fleeting notion of being a part of a

democratic moment in the nineteenth century—neither a democratic legacy nor a democratic tradition. A closer analysis, in other words, reveals that Venezuela was much like its neighbors.

On the other hand, Venezuela was special in its potential, both economic and otherwise. Policymakers in Washington, Havana, Santo Domingo, and elsewhere recognized this fact and believed that control of or cooperation with Caracas would pay substantial dividends in terms of control of or cooperation with the rest of the Americas. As in many other Latin countries the untapped or mismanaged resources made Venezuela a sleeping economic giant. As will be seen below, access to Venezuelan petroleum and control of the Venezuelan economy promised to give Fidel Castro tremendous political power and independence as his relations with Washington soured and he began what would become a testy relationship with Moscow. Further, Castro perceived that subverting Caracas's democracy would deprive the United States of access to the Venezuelan economy and thus rob Washington of its greatest stake in the hemisphere. In terms of politics, the end of despotism and the rise of democracy in the historically inhospitable Venezuela constituted an existential threat to strongmen like Rafael Trujillo and a great triumph to a revolutionary like Castro—at least initially—and the moderate occupants of the White House. The stakes were great enough to encourage Trujillo to direct a counterrevolutionary intervention against Caracas from 1958 to 1961, Castro to direct a revolutionary intervention against Caracas from 1962 through 1968, and Washington to attempt to stop such efforts throughout the decade. Venezuela was

therefore consistent with its surrounding environment but exceptional in its potential to determine the political future of the Americas.

In dealing with these ideas, this dissertation relies primarily on a qualitative, narrative methodology, seeking to analyze the policymaking and leadership of individuals as well as of parties and nations. Granted, huge state bureaucracies and economic systems were at play in these years. These structures, governed by elites, impacted the citizenry differently based on class and other social factors. Yet everything learned during the course of this project, about the leaders of the 1950s and 1960s, indicates that they possessed very human dreams, desires, animosities, and idiosyncrasies. While they often saw themselves as wedded to the ideologies and imperatives of the organizations they served or led, they just as often found meaning in their own personal experiences and in their own visions of a proper present and future. Even in anonymous memoranda produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, for example, one can still detect human sympathies, antipathies, and sensations of being ensnared in a great human drama. Just as it seems impossible to deal with bureaucracies as homogeneous entities, a class-based or structural analysis—where the “state,” the “masses,” the “bourgeois,” and the “workers” are all discrete and uniform units—seems inappropriate in the face of an overwhelming number of shades of gray in terms of social strata.¹

¹ María Helena Moreria Alves' *State and Opposition in Military Brazil* (1985) is a good example of a tight structural and class-based approach to the problems of the Cold War in Latin America. Her presentation of an essentially homogeneous state constantly seeking total control of an essentially homogeneous populace is compelling in its dialectics and intimately bound binaries. But, as the title itself implies, there is little effort to develop a subtle and nuanced view of shifting identities and loyalties in the political arena.

Practically all of the protagonists presented below were elites or had aspirations to elite status, but there was great variety among them in terms of backgrounds, responsibilities, and inclinations. Whereas in Caracas and Havana heads of state like Rómulo Betancourt and Castro might be instrumental in crafting national policy with regard to the regional Cold War, heads of state in Washington and Moscow might be so distracted with other concerns as to respond to Latin American problems only when they became critical. Middle-level members of foreign offices and embassies thus became principal policymakers. Communist and other leftist groups in Latin America had similar divisions in terms of interests and loyalties; some, for example, focused on parochial interests while others were involved in strategy on a global scale. Further, as we will see, generational conflict between younger and older elites and semi-elites was typically a more powerful engine of change than class consciousness in Latin America.

This dissertation reveals a crucial yet under-treated dimension of hemispheric politics while embracing innovative reconsiderations of the dynamics of the Cold War and occasionally turning these reconsiderations on their heads. For more than fifty years historians have addressed various facets of the U.S. effort to manage Latin American political problems, the U.S.-Cuban confrontation, and the multilateral struggle for ideological primacy in the hemisphere. This project indicates that there is a need for a step back and change in focus. No study adequately contemplates Venezuela as a hinge between the United States and its antagonists in the hemisphere and beyond, yet the sources reveals that this was clearly the case. There exists a fair body of English-language literature on the U.S. relationship with Trujillo and a mountain of work on the

acrimony between Washington and Havana, for example, but this work makes only passing reference to Venezuela's relationship with Washington, Havana, or Santo Domingo. Typically the English-language scholarship refers to Venezuela as part of a broad survey of U.S.-Latin American relations, or in relation to U.S. policy towards Cuba or the Dominican Republic. In the Spanish-language scholarship, there is a treasure trove of writing on the discrete histories and experiences of individual countries and political leaders. A smaller body of literature deals with the bilateral affairs of certain Latin American nations during the Cold War, but there are almost no attempts to put such histories into a truly regional context, let alone a global one. In 1978 historian Sheldon B. Liss, commenting on Venezuela's place in the historiography on hemispheric politics, said "scholars have tended to treat Venezuela only in general works on Latin America. Although the country's history has been significantly shaped by its political relations with other Latin American nations and the United States, no broad studies of those relations exist."² Thirty-five years later, the situation remains much the same. This inquiry attempts to correct these shortcomings.

The Spanish-language scholarship suffers from two further shortcomings. First, it is relatively scanty. Second, it tends to be parochial or polemical, such that a sustained historiographical conversation has not developed. The Venezuelan government, for example, published *Seis años de agresión* (1967), which summarized Venezuela's resistance against right wing and left-wing extremism and portrayed the citizenry as

² Sheldon B. Liss, *Diplomacy & Dependency: Venezuela, The United States, and The Americas* (Salisbury, North Carolina: Documentary Publications, 1978), p. iii.

sympathetic victims of Castro's aggression. Beginning in 1977, Venezuelan Communist Party leader Guillermo García Ponce published a three-part series of books—*La insurrección*, *Las guerrillas*, and *El repliegue*—which recounted the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s from the leftist point of view. Neutral scholarship emerged by the mid-1970s with Luigi Valsalice's *La guerrilla castrista en Venezuela* (1975) and Julio Potillo's *Venezuela-Cuba 1902-1980: Relaciones diplomáticas* (1981). Yet these works were essentially surveys or syntheses of available data rather than monographical analyses of given issues or historical episodes.

Recent Spanish-language scholarship provides a fuller picture of the transnational aspects of the hemispheric Cold War, though this picture still suffers from a focus more on bilateral relations or a veer toward polemics rather than balanced analysis of international affairs. Simón Sáez Mérida's *La cara oculta de Rómulo Betancourt: El proyecto invasor de Venezuela por Tropas Norteamericanas* (1997), for example, is a provocative work hindered by two problems. First, Mérida's instrumental role in opposing Betancourt, and in forming the Venezuelan Leftist Revolutionary Movement in 1960, makes his impartiality concerning a potential U.S. invasion of Venezuela highly doubtful. Second, the historical record makes it clear that neither the U.S. nor the Venezuelan government ever seriously contemplated such a plan, secret or otherwise. Pedro Pablo Lináres recent work, *La lucha armada en Venezuela* (2006), is very promising in its detail and scholarly rigor. It attempts to see Venezuela's political and socioeconomic crisis of the late 1950s and 1960s from the perspectives of all the actors involved. Rather than make judgments or advance a specific thesis, it attempts to

reconstruct the remembered experience of those times. Yet the greatest strength of Lináres's work is also its weakness, as it tends to process reams of data and personal experience rather than advance a scholarly debate, and his focus remains on internal affairs at the expense of international ones.

The English-language scholarship, on the other hand, provides more fruitful points of departure for a new history of U.S.-Latin American relations during the Cold War. The U.S.-Cuban confrontation dominated the first strand of this scholarship on the Cold War in the Western hemisphere. Emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, this body of literature focused on the paradoxical ability of Cuba to resist U.S. attempts to reestablish hegemony in the first years of the Castro regime. Robert Scheer and Maurice Zeitlin's *Cuba: An American Tragedy*, published in 1964, as well as the 1971 works *Cuba, Castro, and the United States*, and *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, written by Philip W. Bonsal and Hugh Thomas, respectively, and Lester D. Langley's 1973 article, "Cuba: A Perennial Problem in American Foreign Policy," are indicative of this early bilateral focus. These authors stressed the imperialistic, hubristic assumptions and actions of U.S. policymakers toward Latin America in general and toward Cuba in particular. According to this line of historiography, the decades of apparent stability following the Spanish-American War obscured the desire within Cuba for economic and political self-determination. Castro's victory over Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista shocked U.S. policymakers, and his solid support among most Cubans—even in the face of repressive programs that belied Castro's espousal of democratic principles—further confounded American understandings of regional politics. Ultimately, the two nations engaged in a

cycle of provocation and retaliation that prevented them from resolving their differences. The close focus on the bilateral relationship precluded any examination of the international context, however, in favor of evaluating the legitimacy of either the Cuban or the U.S. position.

As the 1970s progressed, a second generation of historians began placing the U.S.-Cuban confrontation in a multilateral Cold War context, necessitating the consideration of the foreign policies of nations in the Caribbean Basin and beyond in the operation of hemispheric foreign relations.³ In their 1972 work, *The United States and the Trujillo Regime*, G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson did pioneering work in wrestling with the inconsistencies of U.S. policy toward Latin America—the simultaneous promotion of democracy and support of authoritarianism—and the emerging importance of the Organization of American States in guiding Cold War hemispheric affairs. Atkins and Wilson echoed the first generation of Cuba scholars, arguing that despite the preponderant power of the United States in the hemisphere, Latin American leaders tended to be the final determinants in their own political environments.

³ The earliest historiographical work on Venezuela and the international scope of the Cold War in Latin America that I have discovered is that of D. Bruce Jackson, who earned his M.A. at the University of California-Berkeley before working full-time as a United States Foreign Service Officer. His unpublished 1967 paper, “Moscow, Havana, and the Venezuelan Communist Movement, 1964-1967,” resides in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. This work does a fine job using contemporary monographs and periodicals to discuss the fissures and rivalries that arose between communists in Moscow, Havana, and Caracas, as Castro attempted to exercise hegemony across the Caribbean into South America. Jackson had apparently been working on this subject for some time, as his “Whose Men in Havana?” article was published in the May-June 1966 issue of the journal *Problems of Communism*. The “Moscow, Havana, and the Venezuelan Communist Movement, 1964-1967” paper apparently became a full monograph, though the publishing data is unclear. In 1969, he published *Castro, the Kremlin, and Communism in Latin America* through The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies “Studies in International Affairs” series. This work correctly pinpoints Venezuela as the primary outlet for Cuban revolutionary export, but does little more than reprise his earlier writings.

Lynn Darrell Bender's 1975 *The Politics of Hostility: Castro's Revolution and United States Policy*, along with Morris H. Morley's *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986* (1987), asserted that the U.S. effort to rein in Castro had to be evaluated in the context of changes in imperial-client relations brought about by the dynamics of the Cold War. The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as post-World War II superpowers—replacing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century concert of powers—placed a premium on the allegiance of the nations of the developing world; hard-pressed by the United States, Cuba could solicit ready support from the Soviet Union.

Considering the new politics of Cold War development, Franklin Tugwell and William H. Gray, in *The Politics of Oil in Venezuela* (1975), and *Venezuela, Uncle Sam, and OPEC: A Story for All Americans* (1982), respectively, explored the ways in which Venezuelan policymakers partially engaged with the United States and Cuba, as well as reduced foreign control of national petroleum resources as a way to assert political and economic independence. As mentioned above, Sheldon B. Liss' *Diplomacy & Dependency: Venezuela, the United States, and the Americas* made the first serious effort to survey Venezuela's influence on hemispheric affairs and the attempts by hemispheric contenders to use Venezuela to increase their own hegemonic power. Yet he himself admitted that his work was simply a first step whose lasting value would be as a foundation for further explorations. The scholarly focus expanded but had not yet developed a comprehensive picture of hemispheric controversies and their changing international context.

By the 1990s scholars were making important steps in putting together the United States, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba (though not always all at the same time) in constructing the ways in which their interactions influenced hemispheric and global politics. These scholars began addressing the relative lack of attention given to Venezuela's Rómulo Betancourt and the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo as hemispheric leaders. Perhaps because of the lurid and sensational nature of the Trujillo dictatorship, however, Venezuela and Betancourt continued to remain towards the background in the scholarly inquiry. Thomas G. Patterson brought the study of the U.S.-Cuban confrontation up to date with his 1994 work, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*. Stephen Rabe made a crucial first step in creating an adequately multilateral look at these players' roles in altering hemispheric affairs, in "The Caribbean Triangle: Betancourt, Castro, and Trujillo and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1958-1963" (1996). Eric Paul Roorda's *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* and Atkins and Wilson's *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (both in 1998) showed how U.S.-Latin American partnerships evolved into complicated dances of mutual manipulation. As Atkins and Wilson argue, U.S. clout in the realms of economics, culture, and international lawmaking gave it a sort of "suprasovereignty." Yet the Dominicans proved adept at using these same socioeconomic and juridical avenues to influence the United States, or to "Dominicanize" its northern neighbor while it was undergoing "Northamericanization." Michael Hall, in *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Trujillos*

(2000), illustrated the degree to which so-called “puppet” Latin American leaders could complicate and influence U.S. foreign policy.

The end of the Cold War brought about a new round of scholarship on the U.S.-Cuban conflict and the general contours of the hemispheric Cold War. For the first time, historians challenged the conventional wisdom that Cuba moved in lock step with Soviet policy. Further, scholars explored the personalities of policymakers, as well as their prejudices and personal insecurities, which contributed to the intensity of hemispheric and global Cold War crises. Finally, the academy probed the deep rifts within supposedly close-knit U.S. or Soviet-led constituencies. Newly declassified materials and the recently published memoirs of policymakers reveal that significant dissension existed within and among Cuban, Soviet, Chinese, and American actors. This wave of historiography showed the intensity with which the U.S. and Soviet superpowers sought détente in the face of a highly assertive developing world and a highly destabilizing Sino-Soviet split.⁴

With the end of the Cold War, historians like Rabe and Hall, interested in relationships between the superpowers and the developing world, have sought to examine critically the interaction of Cuba, the United States, and the Soviet Union in the 1960s and beyond. This generation of scholarship strives to shrink the focus of Cold War relations to the regional level, and to increasingly discrete chronological periods.

⁴ Prime examples of this scholarship include Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”*: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964 (1997); Rabe’s *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (1999); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (2002); James G. Blight and Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba’s Secret Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* (2002); and Hal Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War* (2010).

Further, there have been numerous efforts to reexamine the Cold War from a Latin American perspective, often using previously unexamined Latin American sources. The first wave of this scholarship tended to present Latin American agency as homogeneous in its resistance to the United States, and the second wave suggested that Latin elites manipulated the U.S. embrace in order to crush popular reform movements. Now a new balance is emerging.

As Max Paul Friedman neatly puts it, the newer historiography is seeking to “strike a balance by acknowledging the enormous impact of the Western Hemisphere’s only superpower without ignoring the role of Latin Americans in shaping their own history.”⁵ Now, scholars like Hal Brands dig deeply into the independent thought and agency of Latin Americans, arguing that local leaders acted as more than simple tools for, or students of, the so-called superpowers. In many cases, runs this line of reasoning, these leaders often conceived and executed their own policy prescriptions without seeking the advice or consent of the superpowers. In looking at the Latin American experience of the Cold War in its entirety, Brands and Rabe are also trying to build the view of the Cold War back towards the hemispheric level, synthesizing the histories of Central and South America and their interaction with the United States. Rabe in particular is interested in exploring the human toll of the hemispheric struggle. His recent work *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (2012) argues that the essence of the Cold War in Latin America is not a multilateral

⁵ Max Paul Friedman, “Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol 27, No 5 (November 2003), p. 625.

victory over leftist extremism but rather an incredible human tragedy, largely as a result of the callous policies of Washington and the excesses of its right-wing allies in the hemisphere.

This inquiry takes such ideas further, examining the exercise of agency within a fresh context—aware of the virtues of the recent historiography as well as its limitations—and retiring the notion that the Cold War in the Americas involved simple binaries of “right” or “left,” intervention or cooperation. The research demonstrates that Latin American agency was heterogeneous and constantly reforming, such that Latin Americans debated amongst themselves the meaning of independence or association with various global political trends. I also argue that Brands and others, in their admirable and needed effort to see the bigger picture in all its facets, have nevertheless overlooked a key site that contributed greatly to such a picture. This dissertation makes no attempt to contradict Rabe’s study of the tragedies that occurred in Central America and in the Southern Cone. Instead, the inquiry reveals that concepts like tragedy, crime, innocence, guilt, and virtue were shared among all actors in a time of great crises.

Centrally involved in these crises was Venezuela. For more than a decade Venezuelans struggled amongst each other—with means ranging from votes to guerrilla warfare—and in the international arena of ideas over the meanings of modernity, democracy, and independence, in the Cold War context. Ultimately, the Venezuelan people were nearly alone among Latin Americans in surviving the upheavals of the 1960s without or a social revolution or military counterrevolution but with electoral democracy. With these ideas in mind, this study adds to, and is informed by, new Cold War

scholarship that addresses the emergence of superpower détente, the assertiveness and militarization of the developing world, and the ramifications of the Sino-Soviet split, during the decade of the 1960s. In his second inaugural address, Dwight Eisenhower commented on the hard times and difficult tasks ahead for the United States and the peoples of the developing and decolonizing world that Washington sought to aid. “Our world is where our full destiny lies,” he said, “with men, of all people, and all nations, who are or would be free. And for them—and so for us—this is no time of ease or rest.”⁶ A year after this address a coalition of conservatives, moderates, and leftists toppled dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela. In their euphoria they believed that the opportunity was at hand to secure long-sought freedom. Though leaders in the Dominican Republic and Cuba would soon turn against the U.S. and Venezuelan governments, they too believed that a new era of freedom was at hand at the end of the 1950s. President Eisenhower had recognized the need for the United States to reveal a path for freedom in the developing world, and his counterparts in the Caribbean Basin reckoned that such a path was nearby. Yet these protagonists and antagonists soon discovered that they had very different ideas as to what freedom meant. Did it mean freedom from imperialism and foreign control, freedom to pursue macroeconomic prosperity, freedom from desperate individual poverty, freedom to experiment with socialism and social justice, or something else? Each player in this drama answered the question differently, but all agreed that a way of life was at stake. These differences thus

⁶ Second Inaugural Address of Dwight D. Eisenhower, “The Price of Peace,” January 21, 1957. The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University website (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/eisen2.asp, accessed March 7, 2012).

engendered a precarious and mortal struggle. It is to that precarious struggle for freedom in Latin America that we now turn.

Chapter 1: New Looks & New Nationalisms, 1956-1959

On Tuesday, May 13, 1958, during a scheduled tour through Latin America, U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon's motorcade came under attack from an anti-U.S. mob in Caracas, Venezuela. Before security forces came to Nixon's aid, the mob had brought the motorcade to a halt, caused significant damage to the vice president's vehicle, and come within moments of gaining physical access to him. The event received worldwide attention. Though interpretations differed by degrees, the press suggested that U.S. hemispheric policy had been unmasked: U.S.-Latin American relations were critically poisoned, and the Caracas incident merely represented larger problems to which U.S. policymakers had given little attention. The *Dallas Morning News* ran the headline, "Force Called Out for Nixon: Vice-President Stoned by Venezuelan Mob." An accompanying map listed Venezuela as one of the top four hotspots of anti-American sentiment throughout the world, along with Lebanon, Algiers, and Paris. Sergei Pakin of Radio Moscow referred to the incident as an "unparalleled fiasco" that reflected "the fiasco of United States policy in Latin America."⁷

In Latin America, newspaper after newspaper—from Rio de Janeiro's *Diario Carioca*, to Lima's *La Tribuna*, to Caracas's *El Mundo*—portrayed the incident as proof of the bankruptcy of U.S. reliance on dictators rather than on democratic institutions, and of U.S. unwillingness to address the economic and social needs of the other 20 American republics. In his Sunday editorial piece, Tad Szulc of the *New York Times* judged recent

⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, May 14, 1958, p. 1. "Nixon Tour a Fiasco, Moscow Radio Says," *New York Times*, May 14, 1958, p. 10.

policy toward Venezuela to be a “textbook example of how to lose the goodwill of a nation.”⁸ U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Nixon fought back, publicly insisting that hemispheric relations remained warm. In a show of good faith rather than of panic, they continued, the United States would initiate a full review of Washington’s approach to the hemisphere. The popular conception, however, held that Eisenhower had flatly ignored the political and socioeconomic problems of Latin America until the last moment, and that this omission catalyzed a movement of anti-American revolutionaries who might naturally align themselves with Soviet communism.

But was there such a clear turning point in U.S.-Latin American relations that Tuesday afternoon in Caracas? Had leaders throughout the Americas been working to chart a new way forward that would redress underdevelopment and broaden avenues for political participation? When despite these efforts revolution did come to Latin America, which leaders and which nations would determine whether revolution succeeded or failed, and would the governing ideology of these revolutionaries be capitalist, communist, or something in between? This chapter begins the exploration of the key arenas, leaders, and turning points in which Latin America assumed such a prominent role in the global Cold War. Here we trace the evolution in thinking of prominent members of the Eisenhower administration on hemispheric problems that long predated the Nixon incident in Caracas, and also follow the political thought of democratic activists in Venezuela, a nation the United States deemed critical to regional reform.

⁸ “Latin American Press Comments on Nixon’s Tour,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1958, p. 13. Tad Szulc, “Venezuela: Anti-U.S. Case History, Goodwill Is Lost in a Few Months,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1958, p. E14.

In the past decade, historians such as Stephen Rabe have progressively debunked the notion that the Eisenhower administration practiced a policy of benign neglect toward Latin America, and challenged the idea that Eisenhower remained passively under the thrall of doctrinaire anti-communists both within and without the White House. This chapter follows these interpretations but also adds nuance and broadens the picture by paying closer attention to the U.S. reaction to political developments in Venezuela and the Caribbean, between 1958 and 1960, than has been done in previous literature. While the search for new Latin American policies gained urgency in the wake of Nixon's spring 1958 visit to the region, the administration had sought to redress postwar problems since at least the beginning of Eisenhower's second term. In particular, Eisenhower and his Latin America "hands" searched for a way to foster development without conjuring notions of predatory dollar diplomacy, and to foster stability without relying on traditional regional *caudillo* strongmen.⁹ In this effort, the administration often had to

⁹ Because much of this dissertation concerns gradations and categories of political extremism in Latin America, some definitions are in order. The terms "*caudillo*" or "despot" refer to a leader who gains and maintains power through violence, intimidation, patronage networks, and the development of a cult of personality. This leader's power is virtually absolute and there are no true constitutional or democratic institutions. In some cases this sort of leader promotes modernization and nation-building projects, but any expanded government bureaucracy is always subsumed within the person of the despot or *caudillo*. Indeed a key feature of this sort of leader is his attempt to make his own identity and that of the nation synonymous. Historically the *caudillo* has been a common feature of the smaller nations of Latin America, particularly those of Central America and the Caribbean. Rafael Trujillo and Fidel Castro fall into this category.

A "dictator," for the purposes of this dissertation, is similar to the *caudillo* or despot in terms of his reliance on violence and intimidation to maintain near-absolute power. On the other hand the dictator relies on a bigger bureaucracy and body of elites (which he has largely co-opted) to govern and modernize a typically larger nation than that of the despot. This larger nation also tends to have a better-established national mythology than that of the despot, making it less likely that the dictator can intertwine his personal identity and power with that of the nation. Marcos Pérez Jiménez would fall into this category.

Moving away from this sort of personalistic style of governance is the "bureaucratic authoritarian" regime. This regime demonstrates similarities with despotisms and dictatorships in its antidemocratic emphasis on violence and police control. There is no single leader, however, but rather a diverse leadership

battle against more extreme voices at home and abroad. Within Latin America, meanwhile, leaders such as Rómulo Betancourt had devoted years of attention to charting a new way forward for hemispheric politics and economics, while dictators such as Rafael Trujillo sought to preserve the status quo at all costs. Toward the end of the 1950s, these ideological avenues approached a crossroads. The chapter argues that the policymakers of the Eisenhower administration—while paying most of their attention to problems beyond the hemisphere—laid the foundations for the dynamic policies pursued by John F. Kennedy, that the administration did so in a much more nuanced fashion than usually thought, and that northern South America and the Caribbean Basin played a pivotal role in this drama years before flamboyant leaders like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara captured the imagination of the hemisphere.

CONFRONTING ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT: THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE WHITE HOUSE IN 1958 AND BEYOND

Years before the Kennedy administration announced the Alliance for Progress, Eisenhower and his advisors—most notably Milton Eisenhower, Thomas C. Mann, and Douglas C. Dillon—pondered ways to counter under-development in Latin America in a manner that avoided the taint of U.S. intervention. The employment of traditional

that pursues a number of different policy objectives. Far from the relatively small-scale patronage networks maintained by the *caudillo*, a bureaucratic authoritarian regime maintains a huge state apparatus to collect taxes and distribute goods and services to a (theoretically) non-political citizenry. The military government that took power in Brazil in 1964 exemplifies this model.

Typically, these preceding government systems concentrate on consolidating and maintaining power in their own countries. For Trujillo and Castro, however, I argue that the term “interventionist despots” needs to be used as well, and that this phenomenon was essentially unique in the history of the hemisphere. These leaders made the export of their governing styles essential to the success of their own domestic governments. In this study Trujillo and Castro are special cases of despotic strongmen who were also interventionist despots.

notions of free trade risked criticism that the U.S. government and U.S. businesses pursued predatory profit-sharing arrangements, they feared. On the other hand, the potential creation of new inter-American banking institutions, which many Latin Americans wanted, raised the question of whether the United States would seek to dominate them, and whether such institutions would actually promote the expansion of Latin American economies. Further, the Eisenhower team feared that mismanagement by local elites of conventional grants and loans would perpetuate the cycle of underdevelopment and dependence. To make the problem worse, each of these potential policy avenues could easily be manipulated to justify accusations by the Latin American popular classes of *yanqui* imperialism: whether Washington did much, or did little, its intentions still might appear malevolent. Deliberately, and perhaps too slowly, the Eisenhower team began moving forward.

Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, the president's younger brother, articulated the administration's need to improve relations with Latin America. The region, he said, comprised a larger trading partner than the European community, or Asia and Oceania combined. Solving trade disputes in the Americas was thus a pressing need. Further, the president regarded a stable and cooperative Western Hemisphere as a foundation for dealing with political turmoil in the larger world. If the United States and Latin America could not find common ground, Dr. Eisenhower recalled his brother saying, cooperation elsewhere would prove even more elusive. Ironically, however, the international crises that the Eisenhower administration hoped to solve with the aid of hemispheric solidarity actually distracted from the creation of such unity. In Dr. Eisenhower's opinion, the

conventional perception that the administration had little interest in hemispheric affairs was fundamentally wrong. Constant existential threats from Europe and Asia drew the president's attention away from Latin America, making hemispheric progress difficult.¹⁰

In Dr. Eisenhower's opinion the main obstacle to such progress was the paradoxical tendency of Latin American hostility to rise along with increases in U.S. aid. In 1957, for example, combined public and private U.S. capital invested in Latin American had expanded to \$1.7 billion, among the highest U.S. foreign investment totals. Total U.S.-Latin American trade for the year amounted to \$8 billion. In 1958, the National Security Council judged that U.S. private direct investment would continue expanding by \$1 billion annually into the foreseeable future.¹¹ Yet these sums, which Eisenhower termed "staggering," did little to reverse local ambivalence regarding the United States. Modern conveniences like radio gave the poor masses a glimmer of the prosperity available in the industrialized West and informed them of the presence of U.S. aid and support for local governments. These governments, however, did nothing to reform what Eisenhower regarded as an archaic social structure. As a result, very little aid trickled down below the elite level, and Latin Americans continually associated their northern neighbor with their own intolerable conditions.

¹⁰ The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), Interview by John Luter, "Oral History Interview with Milton Eisenhower, 1 of 2," in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas [hereafter DDEPL], p. 5.

¹¹ The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), pp. 6-7. State Department Operations Coordinating Board, "Report on Latin America (NSC 5613/1, September 25, 1956; Period Covered: September 12, 1957 through May 21, 1958)," May 21, 1958, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume V: American Republics* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1991) [hereafter FRUS 1958-1960 V], p. 3.

Absent a fundamental reform of regional social and governing institutions, therefore, U.S. aid would provide no benefits for either providers or recipients. During Dr. Eisenhower's first serious studies of Latin America in the 1940s he was struck by this problem. His initial visits as a representative of the administration took him to gilded embassies and ministries, where he fielded requests for increases in traditional aid. He was immediately aware of being in the realm of a thin crust of elites who rode atop a miniscule middle class and "oceans of poor, miserable, illiterate people, living constantly at the starvation level."¹² It was these "oceans" of desperate citizens who bore weight of the insufficient social infrastructure. Eisenhower noted that the people most able to fund reform contributed the least to the project. In talks with politicians and elites, he remarked on the critical role of average U.S. taxpayers contributing to national wealth. In Latin America, on the other hand, the church and the wealthiest corporations and citizens were typically tax-exempt. Responding to a finance minister who insisted that a local development project be financed entirely by foreign capital, Eisenhower said, "Your personal income is about four times greater than mine, yet I pay in taxes to my government twenty times as much as you pay to yours." It was simply unfair, then, to expect high levels of U.S. aid dollars when vast sums of Latin American taxable income lay protected in U.S. and European banks.¹³ Only through diligent improvement in tax collection, land reform, education and healthcare, and arms control, could Latin America

¹² The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), p. 97.

¹³ Milton S. Eisenhower, *The Wine is Bitter: The United States and Latin America* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963), p. 4.

reach modern prosperity and discard time-honored notions of U.S. imperialism and exploitation.¹⁴

The administration also struggled with questions regarding free markets and principles of non-intervention enshrined in the Good Neighbor Policy and the United Nations Charter. Milton Eisenhower himself admitted that, prior to 1953, he had accepted the notion that the U.S. Export-Import Bank, created in 1934, and the subsequent UN World Bank were adequate aids for the developing world. Accordingly, Dr. Eisenhower opposed Latin American calls for an inter-American bank that could provide common funds and collective control of hemispheric economic affairs. Through successive conversations with Latin American leaders, however, Dr. Eisenhower began to feel that only collective action could resolve hemispheric underdevelopment. He reasoned that previous U.S. opposition to common markets and insistence on bilateral aid to individual nations had been wrongheaded; the economies of most Latin American nations were too small to compete with industrialized nations and take full advantage of individual aid projects. There would simply not be enough domestic consumption to take advantage of U.S. credit and aid. Perhaps within a collectively administered organ the United States could tailor regional development without opening itself to charges of predatory intervention. Thus Eisenhower added his voice to a long-standing Latin American chorus calling for a hemispheric bank.¹⁵ Such a plan would satisfy Dr.

¹⁴ The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ *ibid*, pp. 8-9.

Eisenhower's concern about directing loans toward institutional reforms without exacerbating feelings that the United States sought to dominate Latin American policy.¹⁶

At the end of 1957 Eisenhower, in conjunction with the departments of Treasury and State and relevant Latin American ministries, began to implement these plans, which culminated in the creation of the Inter-American Bank in 1959. After confidential work within the OAS, the president visited Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile in the spring of 1960. Following this visit the administration proposed legislation to provide new aid capital, and to lay the groundwork for the Inter-American conference that would culminate in the September 1960 Act of Bogota. The act declared that free and stable political institutions went hand in hand with basic economic equality and opportunity. Neither political nor economic development could occur without individual access to health care, housing, and education.¹⁷ In the spring of 1961, new president John F. Kennedy recapitulated these ideals in his address announcing an Alliance for Progress. In August, the American republics enshrined the Alliance for Progress and the Act of Bogota together, culminating the ideological reorientation and groundwork begun by Milton Eisenhower and the Latin America hands at the State Department. From Dr. Eisenhower's perspective, "The Punta del Este Conference of 1961 was what might be called the verification at the ministerial level of what had already been approved in the

¹⁶ The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), pp. 97-98.

¹⁷ Council of the Organization of American States, Act of Bogota, September 13, 1960, The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University website (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam08.asp), accessed February 11, 2010.

Act of Bogota of 1960.”¹⁸ Perhaps surprised by the lack of recognition of the dynamism of his brother’s administration in the Latin American arena—and disappointed by the praise heaped upon the Kennedy administration—Dr. Eisenhower insisted that “there were more changes in our policy and programs affecting Latin America than in any other administration in the history of our country.”¹⁹

Longtime State Department Latin America specialist Thomas C. Mann concurred with Dr. Eisenhower’s judgments, suggesting that the key difference between Eisenhower and Kennedy economic policy toward Latin America was one of style, rather than substance. “In much the same way that Franklin Roosevelt popularized Hoover’s policies towards Latin America by coming up with the name Good Neighbor Policy,” observed Mann, “President Kennedy came up with the phrase Alliance for Progress.”²⁰ The Kennedy administration, he concluded, profited from the experiences of Dr. Eisenhower, Mann, and other State Department officials, during the policy transitions of the late 1950s. The Eisenhower team through hard experience had realized that aid given to governments inadequately positioned to receive it, or too irresponsible to manage it, could actually do more harm than good to the Latin American people. In the worst-case scenario, a government or set of elites that did not have the long-term interests of the state at heart could simply run up debt and bequeath intractable problems to more responsible successors. Latin America, therefore, had to be positioned to maximize aid

¹⁸ The Reminiscences of Milton Eisenhower (June 21, 1967), p. 10.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 11.

²⁰ Thomas C. Mann, quoted in Maclyn P. Burg, “Oral History Interview with Thomas C. Mann by Maclyn P. Burg on December 17, 1975,” Oral History #353, pp. 1-2, DDEPL.

such that these nations could practice what Mann termed “self-help.”²¹ If Latin Americans, by and large, needed to adopt more responsible governing habits, U.S. policymakers needed to be wary of notions of American omnipotence lingering from the victory in World War II. The simple disbursement of aid could not necessarily solve the problems of underdevelopment. The final years of the Eisenhower administration, therefore, involved the partial abandonment of postwar euphoria and a re-embrace of realism in foreign relations.²²

Mann’s goal, like that of Milton Eisenhower, remained the improvement of conditions in Latin America for the betterment of the entire hemisphere, and not simply as a means to ensure U.S. domination. It was in the interest of the United States to have economically diverse, competitive trading partners in Latin America, he said, rather than economically inefficient nations that simply produced raw materials. Without an improved economy, the countries of Latin America could never generate the income to purchase sophisticated U.S. finished goods, he argued.²³ Categorically rejecting William Appleman Williams’ notion of the United States pursuing cold economic exploitation, Mann insisted that the United States always pursued what he termed “enlightened self-interest.” U.S. policymakers wanted to maximize national prosperity, he said, but at the same time these policymakers realized that the general welfare of their hemispheric

²¹ Mann, quoted in Burg, p. 7.

²² Burg, pp. 14-15.

²³ *ibid*, pp. 33-34.

neighbors would benefit U.S. interests as well.²⁴ As Mann noted, the State Department had long noted the problem of Latin Americans looking to the United States—rather than to their own governments—for support and guidance in development issues, while at the same time believing that the United States pursued predatory policies like setting the price of its exports artificially high and working with U.S. corporations to keep the price of Latin American exports artificially low.²⁵ This paradox was to be expected, for, as Mann noted, “I [do not] think we should expect any gratitude for aid; I never have thought that. Love and affection is not what foreign relations are based on. They’re based, as I said earlier, on estimates of self-interest.”²⁶

Mann also criticized the way “self-help” manifested itself. By not demanding accountability, and in some cases simply dumping money upon Latin America, the United States may have perpetuated hemispheric problems and opened itself to later criticism of the Alliance for Progress’ effectiveness. Rather than demand return on investment, Mann asserted, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations fell into the habit of offering “soft loans” to Latin America. Such loans, in Mann’s estimation, need not be carefully applied since they might never be paid off and, typically, additional loans were readily available. Over time, Congress questioned the wisdom of financing this type of

²⁴ Burg, p. 43. From my reading of Burg’s interview with Mann, it seemed that Mann bristled at suggestions that U.S. policy was selfish or exploitative. When Burg mentioned the work of Dr. Williams, Mann would have none of it, and insisted that Dr. Williams’ interpretations were a bit narrow and simplistic. Whether Mann had read or deeply considered William Appleman Williams was unclear, but the work of a foreign relations scholar becoming a subject of discussion with a contemporary policymaker seemed too unusual to omit from this chapter.

²⁵ State Department Operations Coordinating Board, “Special Report on Latin America (NSC 5613/1) (Policy Approved by the President, September 25, 1956) (Period Covered: From May 22, 1958 through November 26, 1958),” November 26, 1958, FRUS 1958-1960 V, p. 56.

²⁶ Mann, quoted in Burg, p. 47.

development, and the American public became disillusioned with the lack of progress achieved through such apparently profligate spending.²⁷

The Eisenhower administration had seen the need for a new way forward in its economic policy. Latin American governments had to have a much greater role in hemispheric economic decisions, and the United States needed to cooperate in improving hemispheric institutions to make this reformation possible. Yet it was also apparent that Washington needed to make sure that it cooperated with Latin American leaders who were committed to improving the social structure of their own nations. It could not expect results from Latin Americans who sought to preserve the socioeconomic status quo. Such conclusions naturally invoked the tricky proposition of deciding which Latin American leaders were either “good” or “bad” allies in the drive for reform.

RAFAEL TRUJILLO AS CASE STUDY FOR THE OBSTACLES TO U.S. REFORM EFFORTS

As Eisenhower’s second term progressed, his administration recognized the limits of privileging stability and pliable strongmen at the expense of open and democratic Latin American politics and politicians. Already taking initial steps to reform U.S.-Latin American economic relations, Eisenhower’s policymakers pondered the possibility of phasing out dictatorships without inviting potential communist encroachment. This task

²⁷ Burg, pp. 54-58. As Mann described it, the shift from primarily “hard loans” to “soft loans” engendered several problems. Like any loan given by the United States to a foreign government, the U.S. Treasury borrowed at interest on the open market. If the U.S. government could set terms for repayment with the foreign government equal to or greater than the loan it secured on the open market, the U.S. government would not lose money in the arrangement. With soft loans, however, the U.S. government would struggle simply to break even, since the interest rate and repayment period were so lax that money returning from Latin America would be greatly devalued by inflation. Such a situation was bound to receive public scrutiny, since it appeared that the United States was losing money without even achieving measurable progress.

posed enormous difficulties for the U.S. leaders. They had to reevaluate fundamental ideological assumptions and work on more equal terms with longtime allies and promising new partners while keeping a keen watch for emerging enemies. Further, leaders across the Latin American and global political spectrum were not passive bystanders, and indeed challenged U.S. hegemony in advancing their own agendas. By the spring of 1959, when a watershed in Latin American politics appeared to be at hand, the Eisenhower administration could count both successes and failures in its efforts to be a more progressive political force in the hemisphere. Overall, the administration had enjoyed much more success in rethinking hemispheric economics than in reorienting hemispheric politics.

During the first years of his presidency, Eisenhower perpetuated the hemispheric legacies bequeathed by his two immediate predecessors. He observed the twin canons of Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy: formal commitment to the principle of non-intervention and informal commitment to staunchly pro-U.S. and anti-democratic leaders in the Caribbean Basin. He did nothing to reverse the right-wing reaction against the liberalism of the war years, and the embrace by elites of an anti-communist discourse that took hold throughout much of Latin America during the Truman administration. Accordingly, the Eisenhower White House supported a notable roster of despots: Rafael Trujillo, who had turned the Dominican Republic into a virtual fiefdom since taking power in 1930; Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, who had come to power in a 1948 coup and consolidated his rule in a rigged 1952 election; and Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, who had also gained power in 1952 after leading a military coup.

As historian Peter H. Smith has noted, during the late 1940s and early 1950s the State Department and Truman and Eisenhower presidencies became unusually intimate with this regional right wing by virtue of its lock step with U.S. diplomatic and trade imperatives. Eisenhower heaped praise on Pérez Jiménez for, among other things, severing relations with the Soviet Union in 1952, going so far as to award him the Legion of Merit in 1954. Trujillo distinguished himself by seconding the United States at any and every OAS and UN vote. As Secretary of State John Foster Dulles characterized the situation, the dictators were the only trustworthy actors in the region.²⁸ Yet the apparent hegemony enjoyed by the United States masked a much more complicated relationship. The regional strongmen needed U.S. support to stay in power, but Washington's reliance on such unrepresentative and repressive actors in Latin America meant that any regime change would tend to be anti-American in nature, thus limiting the ability of Washington to put pressure on its client states should it become necessary.

U.S. policy towards the Dominican Republic in the second half of the 1950s illustrates the difficulty Washington faced in negotiating such a complicated embrace. Trujillo had long ruled with a shrewd combination of populism and patronage to maintain power and generate national wealth. Peasant smallholders produced coffee and cacao for competitive prices on the world market while Trujillo provided infrastructure, basic services, and a national mythology. At the beginning of the 1950s, however, Trujillo sought to transform the country from a relatively self-contained and self-reliant entity

²⁸ Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World* (New York: Oxford University, 2008) pp. 124-125, 128.

into a fully modern state and monoculture exporter, funded by a postwar boom in world sugar prices. Such a new direction, however, meant the expropriation of the relatively small but entirely foreign-owned domestic sugar industry. For the next few years, the government bought out several U.S. refineries at well below market prices and spent millions on lavish new construction projects in and around the capital city of Ciudad Trujillo, formerly Santo Domingo. Trujillo's staunch support of Eisenhower's foreign policy initially helped mute cries from the affected U.S. business community.²⁹

Indeed, as historian Michael R. Hall has observed, the two administrations found themselves increasingly bound, for better or for worse. Since the 1930s, U.S. trade policy set quotas giving 50 percent of the domestic sugar market to foreign producers, at prices more than twice as high as the international market rate. Of this 50 percent share, Cuba and the Philippines enjoyed the vast majority, leaving only traces to other countries like the Dominican Republic. Trujillo aggressively worked to widen his share, relying on a public relations campaign in the halls of Congress and in the boardrooms of the U.S. export community that trumpeted his rigid anti-communism and loyal consumption of American manufactured goods. By 1957, the Dominican share of U.S. markets had increased 500 percent over that of 1948, from 8,133 tons to over 42,000 tons. Yet this figure paled in comparison to the 2.5 million tons of Cuban sugar bought by the United

²⁹ Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, Trujillo, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 239-245. Turits and many others have noted the extent to which Trujillo generated popular support through a cult of personality, and the extent to which he made himself and the national identity synonymous. In addition to renaming the capitol after himself, Trujillo erected innumerable monuments to himself throughout the country. In the press his name was prefaced with several elaborate titles, including "The Benefactor" and "Father of the New Nation." The official daily, *El Caribe*, printed "The Era of Trujillo" on its front page in the section devoted to the day and date.

States in the same year. Despite such long odds, Trujillo continued to expand the domestic sugar industry until his country and his personal fortune could not survive—at least 50 percent of national revenue came from sugar export taxes—without the sugar industry. Such an aggressive drive of course disrupted many segments of Dominican society, adding new members to the legion who already opposed and detested Trujillo for his authoritarian excesses. The long intimacy between the White House and the Presidential Palace in Ciudad Trujillo, however, meant that a new Dominican government would almost certainly be leftist and opposed to the United States. As Eisenhower's second term began, he felt that Trujillo had to be supported, political baggage notwithstanding.³⁰

This support began to erode by virtue of what came to be known as the Galíndez incident. In March 1956, Jesús de Galíndez, a lecturer at Columbia University in New York whose scholarship and public statements had harshly condemned the Dominican dictator, disappeared under mysterious circumstances. For two months authorities found no traces of him. In May, Dominican dissidents claimed that he had been thrown alive soon after his disappearance into the boiler of the Dominican freighter *La Fundación*, then docked in New York Harbor.³¹ By September Galíndez's disappearance was still a mystery, though a *New York Times* investigation strongly suggested the involvement of

³⁰ Michael R. Hall, *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Trujillos* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 61-63. R. Hart Phillips, "Cuba is Thriving on Dearer Sugar; Economic Expansion Goes on Despite Uprising," *New York Times*, January 8, 1958, p. 49.

³¹ David Anderson, "Galíndez Reported Murdered on Ship; Galíndez Reported Murdered On Dominican Freighter Here, Ship to Stay Only a Day," *New York Times*, May 30, 1956, p. 1.

Trujillo.³² In December 1956, Gerald L. Murphy, an American citizen and pilot for Dominican Airlines, disappeared in Ciudad Trujillo after several indiscreet and drunken boasts that he had piloted the plane that smuggled a disguised Galíndez out of the United States to meet Trujillo's vengeance. Ominously, Murphy had told his fiancée on the day he vanished that he had been summoned on official business to the presidential palace. After a month of inquiries by the U.S. embassy, the Dominican government announced that another Dominican Airlines pilot, Octavio de la Maza, had hanged himself in prison and left behind a note confessing to murdering Murphy after the end of their homosexual affair.

Not satisfied with this story, the U.S. State Department and FBI dug deeper. By February 1957 the U.S. government was treating Murphy's disappearance as a murder investigation, prompting interest by U.S. lawmakers.³³ Many U.S. congressmen—particularly Democrats in the agricultural South—were pro-Trujillo and benefitted from junkets on his behalf. Congressmen Wayne Morse and Charles Porter from Murphy's home state of Oregon, however, lobbied the State Department to investigate further and to press the Dominican government for more information. A subsequent State Department investigation concluded that there had indeed been deep involvement by the Dominican government in the disappearances of both Galíndez and Murphy. A State Department report found such involvement inconsistent with the behavior expected of democratic nations. The behavior of the Dominican government, the State Department

³² "Trujillo vs. Galíndez," *New York Times*, September 13, 1956, p. 34.

³³ *Time Magazine*, "Sequels: Case of the Missing Pilot," Monday, February 11, 1957, SearchTime.com website (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,809032,00.html>), accessed September 9, 2009.

ruled instead, was on par with that of outlaws and communists.³⁴ Two years later, in March 1958, there was no outright condemnation of the Trujillo regime by Washington, but the bubble had been conclusively burst on Trujillo's image as a forthright partner of U.S. interests in the hemisphere.³⁵

As we have seen, up until 1956 the White House and State Department felt that the benefits of the *caudillo* status quo outweighed the public relations consequences. Those who, like Milton Eisenhower, favored more enlightened policies remained an articulate but hidden minority. As 1956 and 1957 progressed, however, the White House became increasingly uncomfortable with the embarrassing excesses of once-discreet and reliable dictators, Trujillo in particular. There were a number of democratic leaders in Latin America during this time with whom Washington might work, but most of them were marginalized or in exile. Being in exile, in fact, had become such a way of life for Latin American democrats that they had formed a loose organization, known as the Caribbean Legion, in the 1930s that was both a support network and a foundation for the launching of various coup attempts against regional strongmen. Of great concern to U.S. leaders was the fact that most of these democrats had at least loose connections to various hemispheric communist parties during their time in exile. Therefore the Eisenhower administration was ambivalent about jettisoning the *caudillos* and supporting democrats who might be masquerading communists. This fretting increased in 1957, as the Soviet Union launched new overtures for closer relations with Latin America.

³⁴ Stephen G. Rabe, "The Caribbean Triangle: Betancourt, Castro, and Trujillo and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1958-1963," *Diplomatic History*, Vol 20, No 1 (Winter 1996), p. 59.

³⁵ "After Two Years," *New York Times*, March 12, 1958, p. 30.

While members of officially established communist parties comprised a numerically small component of the Latin American political scene—consisting of perhaps 295,000 persons among a total population of nearly 200 million—their presence was particularly worrisome during the late 1950s. U.S. conventional wisdom held that a small number of communists could subvert much larger polities, and policymakers were further distressed by a Sino-Soviet push apparently in the offing in Latin America. According to the CIA, Latin American communists during this time improved their subversive and diplomatic potency with the active help of the Soviet Union and China. Rather than insist on leadership positions, the various Communist parties of the region worked to insert themselves into leftist and nationalist groups as part the time-tested popular front strategy. In Venezuela and Cuba, communists integrated themselves in opposition to the Pérez Jiménez and Batista regimes. This plan of Latin American communist cooperation with local leftists, the CIA perceived, originated in secret Soviet-Chinese-Latin American meetings in Moscow in November 1957. Leaders there situated Latin America within an initiative to promote “independence” movements in colonial and developing countries, and approved an action plan to increase coordination among hemispheric parties and stimulate popular anti-American sentiment. These sessions also addressed the problem of splintering within communist parties due to ideological schisms. To the greatest extent possible, and maybe even in an act of self-deception, the Soviets and the Chinese hid open debates between themselves, and the Latin Americans insisted that communist means and ends were homogenous throughout the world.³⁶ The

³⁶ Central Intelligence Agency [hereafter CIA], “Soviet Bloc Efforts at Penetration of Latin America,”

Sino-Soviet split, which would become such a complicating factor in the U.S.-Latin American relationship, had not officially manifested itself.

It was clear to the White House by 1958 that there was much to be done in repairing both the Latin American political and economic structure as well as its own approach to hemispheric leaders. If problems were not yet dire, the Eisenhower administration reasoned that they soon would be absent bold and innovative thinking. In particular, association with retrograde regimes like that of Rafael Trujillo was proving to be of great embarrassment to the United States as the pressure for socioeconomic reform increased in Latin America. Though remote at this stage, the possibility existed that Latin American reformers might topple U.S. allies and look to voices outside the West for ideas and ideologies. The Latin America hands in the Eisenhower administration had made great strides in showing a new way forward. Fortunately for them, there were many bold leaders with good ideas in key Latin American countries preparing to assert themselves and attempt to mold the socioeconomic contours of the hemisphere. In order to gain a more comprehensive political picture of the hemisphere in the late 1950s, we now shift to an examination of the most important leaders and ideas emanating from south of the Rio Grande River.

THE RISE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN REFORMERS: RÓMULO BETANCOURT AND DEVELOPMENTAL NATIONALISM

Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy contributed to Latin American stability during the 1930s, and the region enjoyed new prosperity in furnishing raw

materials for the Allied effort in the Second World War. At war's end, many Latin American leaders expected continued close cooperation, especially in the realm of economic development and the fostering of equitable political relations. Instead, the United States focused on creating a collective and reciprocal security arrangement. Hence, the most significant U.S.-Latin American summits of the immediate postwar period—the 1947 Rio Treaty of Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance and 1948 Bogotá International Conference of American States—produced only the Organization of American States, a body tuned more to U.S. concerns about Cold War security than to Latin American concerns about modernization. To the chagrin of the Latin American delegates, there would be no “Marshall Plan” for the Americas. Washington had parsed political questions away from economic ones, and Latin American reformers responded by combining them. The leaders of the more powerful Central and Southern American republics formed and circulated plans for state-sponsored development that revealed a decided ambivalence regarding the United States. While some prescribed a Latin continent free of foreign capital—or at least free from predatory foreign capital—others sought to create a hemispheric consortium strong enough to negotiate with the United States from a position of strength. Those who may have only sought economic reform in 1945 now sought an acknowledgement by the United States of the need for fundamental change in both hemispheric relations and in Latin American socioeconomics. This section suggests that the tension between new economic models articulated by U.S. and Latin American leaders created a powerful inertia for change at the close of the 1950s, as well as bled into Latin American calls for new methods of political leadership.

Perhaps the first regional leader to suggest that U.S. policy sowed the seeds of its own destruction, and to link underdevelopment with left-wing revolution, was Juscelino Kubitschek, president of Brazil since January 1956. The centerpiece of Kubitschek's presidential campaign had been the slogan "fifty years progress in five." By committing all national resources to economic and infrastructural development—including the construction of a new national capital 600 miles inside the Amazon jungle—leftist agitation and right wing military coups would become impossible, Kubitschek thought. Immediately after his inauguration, Kubitschek wrote to President Eisenhower, outlining these ideas and suggesting that a reorientation of U.S. policy towards combating poverty rather than communism would pay immediate dividends.³⁷ The letter drew no direct response from Eisenhower, however, and it would be two years before consensus emerged on the link between poverty and revolution.

In August 1958, three months after the Nixon debacle in Caracas, Kubitschek circulated a letter throughout the American republics that outlined an "Operation Pan-America," a comprehensive critique of the hemispheric status quo and a prescription for improvement. According to the letter, the extreme poverty of the Latin American masses created a situation in which most people focused only on "urgent needs of survival," rather than making positive contributions to the larger society. As a result, these masses were easy prey for "materialist" and "antidemocratic" ideologies. More than simply a problem of demographics, underdevelopment represented a moral shortcoming in the

³⁷ Thomas E. Skidmore & Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 164. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle...*, p. 136.

hemisphere, Kubitschek argued; Latin America therefore faced not only the collapse of its economies but also of its soul. In a not-so-subtle allusion to the U.S. preoccupation with anti-communism, the letter asserted, “the battle for the West is the battle for development.” Operation Pan-America called for a new spirit of hemispheric solidarity that would reaffirm the sanctity of private property and private initiative, while at the same time establishing cooperative market stabilization and fundamental improvements in social services and technical assistance.³⁸ These ideas fit nicely with policies then being considered by Milton Eisenhower and provided a foundation for the language later enshrined in the Alliance for Progress. Indeed, a close reading of the two charters would suggest that the later document essentially embellished and filled out the mandates of the first.

Kubitschek advanced a dynamic socioeconomic vision for the hemisphere, but the exiled Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela would soon eclipse him as the leading visionary of Latin American societal reform and democratization. Betancourt had worked for decades to craft a comprehensive political and socioeconomic vision of a modern Latin America capable of negotiating with the United States on equal terms, a region free from foreign capitalist intervention and domestic authoritarian rule. In exile throughout the early 1950s, Betancourt assiduously lobbied centrist and leftist constituencies in the United States for support. He was poised to take advantage of the wavering of U.S. support for dictatorships and of the budding Latin American call for reform. Because of

³⁸ “Aide Mémoire Sent by the Government of Brazil to Governments of Other American States, August 9, 1958,” Fordham University Modern History Sourcebook: Operation Pan-America, 1959 website (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1958panamerica.html>), accessed February 13, 2010.

his central role in coming political developments, a sustained discussion of his background is warranted. For purposes of organization, Betancourt's contribution to new economic models will be treated in this section, before his critique of hemispheric politics and the institution of the Latin American dictator is treated in the next section.

Betancourt rose to the attention of U.S. policymakers and became an important player in hemispheric politics in 1945, when his Democratic Action Party (*Acción Democrática*, or AD) allied with army leader Marcos Pérez Jiménez to form a coalition government and preempt President Isaías Medina Angarita's choice of a successor. This marriage of convenience solved immediate problems, since the army avoided what it saw as creeping liberalism and Betancourt prevented what he regarded as camouflaged authoritarianism in Venezuela. Betancourt was involved in this uneasy arrangement for three years, until being forced out by Pérez Jiménez and the military. Rather than being the culmination of a career, however, these years in power were simply a brief episode in his decades-long advocacy of economic reform and modernization.³⁹

He had been a student leader among the so-called Generation of '28, a cohort of middle-class youth who attempted to catalyze a general uprising against the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez in 1928. Following imprisonment, escape, and participation in a failed 1929 coup against the dictator, Betancourt fled to the Dutch island of Curaçao, just off the northwest coast of Venezuela. Here, he moved beyond simple political opposition to a consideration of the role of economics in Latin American society generally and in

³⁹ Judith Ewell, *The Indictment of a Dictator: The Extradition and Trial of Marcos Pérez Jiménez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981), pp. 14-20.

Venezuela specifically. “I discovered in Curaçao,” he wrote, “that not only did we need to face the struggle against despotism, but also a crucial problem for Venezuela: that of petroleum.”⁴⁰ Foreign companies like Standard Oil and Shell had rapidly transformed the oil-producing areas along the Venezuelan coast into something akin to colonial provinces, replete with dehumanizing refinery towns. Betancourt recalled living near 40,000 Venezuelan workers who “worked like beasts, and who were grossly underpaid and crowded into small sheet metal houses that lacked running water and electricity.”⁴¹ Like Karl Marx before him, Betancourt was so shocked by such conditions that he sought—ultimately unsuccessfully—to engage with these workers and secure their assistance in opposing the Gómez regime. Betancourt, already a voracious reader, began to study the history of the international petroleum industry. Because he could find very little literature written in Spanish, and much in English, he secured an English dictionary and undertook the study of that language as well.

In 1930 Betancourt and several colleagues relocated to Barranquilla, Colombia, where he began formulating concrete solutions to Venezuelan problems in what would become known as the “Plan de Barranquilla.” To this point Betancourt had simply asserted the need to eliminate tyrannical government and reclaim popular human and civil rights. He now made firm assertions: the nation needed to diversify its economy

⁴⁰ Rómulo Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia* (Caracas: Secretaría General del Partido Acción Democrática, 1976), p. 9, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin [hereafter BLAC]. The original Spanish reads, “Descubrí en Curazao que no solo debíamos afrontar la lucha contra el despotismo, sin también un problema crucial para Venezuela: el del petróleo.”

⁴¹ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 9. The original Spanish reads, “Trabajaban como bestias, percibiendo bajos salarios y amontonados en pequeñas casas sin agua corriente, sin luz eléctrica y construidas con láminas de zinc.”

away from export of raw materials; it needed to promote basic education and healthcare; perhaps most importantly, Venezuela needed to take control of its own finances. The Barranquilla Plan, he recalled, explained:

The challenges faced by those suffering socioeconomic subjugation would have to be confronted and solved after tyranny left the scene. We were a nation of giant plantations, lacking industries, beaten down by illiteracy and epidemic diseases. Our economy was controlled by a powerful and implacable sector of international finance: the petroleum consortiums.⁴²

What would become the economic plank of the AD Party began to take shape. Betancourt called for restructuring the system of concessions negotiated with foreign oil companies, allowing a more equitable division of income for Venezuela. He envisioned the popular election of officials at the state and national level, something unseen in national history. An AD government would shepherd massive public works projects to rationalize and nationalize basic resources. After decades of civic retardation and tyranny, freedom of press and association and access to education would be guaranteed. Most critically, the new government would put an end to the grossly exploitative plantation system and institute meaningful agrarian reform. Though relatively leftist, Betancourt stressed that he was not doctrinaire and would adopt left-wing ideology—from China’s Sun Yat-Sen to Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre of Peru—to the extent that it provided realistic solutions to Latin American problems. After a scant two years of true

⁴² Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 20. The original Spanish reads, “Retos socio-económicos subyacentes debían ser afrontados y solucionados después de que saliera el tirano del escenario. Eramos un país de economía agrario-latifundista, escaso de industrias, azotado por el analfabetismo y por enfermedades endémicas. Controlada su economía por un poderoso e implacable sector de las finanzas internacionales: los consorcios petroleros.”

political consciousness, Betancourt had formed the basic contours of a plan for an economically independent Venezuela.⁴³

In 1939 Betancourt added further research and intellectual rigor to his critique, this time using the government's own data to cement his indictment of the dictatorial regime of Eleázar López Contreras, who had taken power following Gómez' death in 1935. Drawing from the 6th National Census, taken in 1936, and the 1938 Annual Statistics of Venezuela, Betancourt wrote a pamphlet revealing the extent to which the nation remained underdeveloped and dominated by foreign capital. Of the nation's 3.5 million residents, only 20 percent lived in urban areas, and regardless of their location most Venezuelans created little national wealth, engaging instead in basic subsistence activities. Of the 700,000 city dwellers, a mere 26,000 engaged in industrial work, generating a total of 254 million bolívares. The oil industry, on the other hand, employed 40,000 workers, who, as Betancourt observed earlier, lived in destitution. Total revenue from this industry comprised \$400 million annually. Since revenue-sharing agreements heavily favored foreign corporations, Betancourt determined that, even if all local production was combined, Venezuela's gross domestic product was no match for the power of the oil industry. Betancourt offered two conclusions consistent with his previous writings: that autocracy and oligarchy had to give way to meaningful political rights, and that there needed to be a more equitable distribution of wealth. A third observation was new, however, and strongly presaged the ideology of AD for the next two decades:

⁴³ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, pp. 30-33.

A [strictly] conservative, liberal, or communist party, does not have the capacity to accomplish the task of constructing a modern state, committed to utilizing the human riches of the nation, and progressively giving Venezuelans control over their natural petroleum and mineral resources. Only an inclusive national and nationalist party...has the capacity to confront successfully the fundamental challenges facing the state.⁴⁴

As a result of being exiled in 1948, Betancourt began to focus less on economic issues and more on models of governance. Nonetheless, he continued to link political despotism with economic exploitation and underdevelopment. He maintained that a reciprocal relationship existed between Latin Americans gaining equitable economic relations with the United States and achieving true political independence. At a January 1957 Carnegie Center luncheon for the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom, for example, Betancourt asserted that U.S. big business poisoned hemispheric relations by showing Latin America the “wrong face of Uncle Sam.” By supporting unionization and other liberal labor policies, he contended, U.S. business interests could show the “other face” of the United States, the face of those who “sincerely believe in democracy.”⁴⁵ Betancourt, then, was one of those bold idealists who felt that he had much to offer the United States in heading off the coming Latin American social revolution. Like Kubitschek he perceived that the popular classes in Latin America

⁴⁴ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 35. The original Spanish reads, “Un partido conservador, liberal o comunista no estaba capacitado para realizar esas tareas de construcción de un estado moderno, empeñado en la valorización de la riqueza human del país y en el rescate progresivo para Venezuela del control sobre sus riquezas del sub-suelo petrolífero y ferroso. Sólo un partido policlasista nacional y nacionalista...estaba en capacidad de enfrentar con éxito los desafíos planteados a la nación.” As we will see, there was an element of fluid, “alphabet soup,” political groupings and regroupings during this period. At this time, for example, what would become AD called itself the Grouping of the Revolutionary Left, (*Agrupación Revolucionaria de Izquierda*, or ARDI). Later, this group allied with local communists in forming the National Democratic Party (*Partido Democrática Nacionalista*, or PDN).

⁴⁵ “Latin America Role of Labor is Praised,” January 13, 1957, *New York Times*, p. 27.

would soon channel their economic frustrations into political action and shatter the status quo. This fusion in the Latin American mind of economics and politics meant that Washington needed to identify and support the leading democratic reformers in the hemisphere. As the next section discusses, such support also meant attuning U.S. policy towards Latin American calls for squarely addressing the increasingly anachronistic institution of the Latin American personalistic dictatorship.

DESOTISM OR DEMOCRACY? THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION AND BETANCOURT CONFRONT THE FUTURE OF HEMISPHERIC POLITICS

Betancourt was perhaps the most articulate and durable champion of a Latin American political model predicated on freedom from domestic authoritarianism and foreign political intervention. By Eisenhower's second inauguration, Betancourt had spent nearly three decades in exile in the United States and in half a dozen Latin American countries, lecturing and publishing in support of hemispheric liberation. The consistency with which he advanced this message of freedom and justice earned him many friends and enemies during the 1930s and 1940s, and many of these friends and enemies became the dominant heads of state and policymakers of the hemisphere in the 1950s and 1960s. Tracing the arc of his politics and political relationships in the pre-World War II period, therefore, provides a window into the debate over the political status quo brewing by the end of the 1950s. Betancourt served as a sort of barometer for hemispheric politics during this period. He became such an intense critic of despotism that his return from exile could only mean that right-wing dictatorship had collapsed in

his own country, and that the dictatorships lingering from the Good Neighbor era were in danger of falling as well.

Betancourt's political career began almost accidentally; he was asked by fellow Central University of Venezuela law student Jovito Villalba to deliver a speech during Caracas' annual Student Week celebrations in February 1928. Twenty years old at the time, Betancourt later admitted that his speech was more Jacobin rabble-rousing against the dictatorial regime of Juan Vicente Gómez than anything original or noteworthy. He asserted that Gómez was a repressive tool of foreign interests—the dictator had seized power from former ally and boss Cipriano Castro with U.S. assistance in 1908—and took him to task for closing the university between 1912 and 1922 in an effort to stifle dissent. He concluded with a call for the citizenry to join the students in a denunciation of Gómez, and to rediscover Simón Bolívar's declaration of the "right of the nation to live in liberty." It was perhaps these concluding declarations that earned Betancourt and several other student leaders a stay at the Puerto Cabello prison. In addition to Villalba, who would found the influential left-center Democratic Republican Union (*Unión Republicana Democrática*, or URD) party in 1943, Betancourt met several notables during this jail stay. Among them were Raúl Leoni, who was president of the Student Federation of Venezuela; Guillermo Prince Lara, later to lead a guerrilla struggle against Gómez before succumbing to tuberculosis in 1931; Miguel Otera Silva, later a leading leftist journalist and member of the Venezuelan Communist Party; and Juan Oropeza, soon to become an influential journalist and partner with Betancourt and Leoni in

founding the AD Party.⁴⁶ For several weeks authorities subjected them to harsh conditions and only released them after great popular protest. On April 7, Betancourt and the rest of his cohort participated in a coup attempt against Gómez, assaulting unsuccessfully the military barracks and national arsenal at San Carlos. Following this failure, the cohort spent several weeks in hiding, preparing to flee the country. In May, Betancourt and his father left Caracas for Puerto Cabello, and then into exile Curaçao, off the Venezuelan coast. Here, he gained employment as an assistant bookkeeper and commercial correspondent for a local firm. The future Venezuelan president's first foray into national politics had come to a close.⁴⁷

In Curaçao, he moved beyond being simply “anti-Gómez” to a serious consideration of political philosophy. In this endeavor, he sought to justify why Gómez should be deposed, in the context of the inadequacies of *caudillo* politics, and to formulate a positive program for a post-dictatorial regime. Betancourt studied Marxism, socialism, and communism, to which he had very little familiarity due to Gómez's censorship of all potentially subversive literature. He found Russian revolutionary literature especially compelling because of its parallels to the situation gripping Venezuela. He read about that the heavy, mind-numbing repression suffered under the

⁴⁶ Raúl Leoni, as will be seen, would succeed Betancourt as president, representing AD, in 1964.

⁴⁷ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, pp. 7-8. John D. Martz notes, in “Venezuela's ‘Generation of ‘28’: The Genesis of Political Democracy,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol 6, No 1 (Jan 1964), that Leoni had sent Betancourt to speak at the *Teatro Capitolio*, where his denunciation of Gómez included the words, “our poor people seem forgotten by God and are crucified in republican anguish.” Referring to Betancourt's time in prison, participation in the April 7 revolt, and flight into exile, Martz notes the waves of popular protests and open letters written in opposition to the imprisonment of the students. The military also signaled its discontent, stemming from the fact that Gómez often assigned officers to jobs as overseers in cane fields or in the dictator's numerous cattle ranches.

czars and reasoned that if the Russian people could cast off such chains then the Venezuelans could certainly follow suit. The citizenry had been relatively passive under the Castro and Gómez regimes, Betancourt allowed, but they had never “abandoned the passion for liberty, justice, and equality, elements essential for national existence.” He sought to connect current events to national mythology. Despite decades of *caudillo* strongmen, he argued, Venezuelans had never forgotten that they were the heirs to *El Libertador* Simón Bolívar, who had fought against demagoguery to secure the nation’s democratic destiny. The emergence of the student rebellion of 1928 and its ability to connect with the popular classes, he maintained, provided evidence of this latent democratic spirit.⁴⁸

Devoted to uniting relatively leftist political ideology with positive action, Betancourt felt that the next step was membership in a political party. Accordingly, he joined the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party, based in Mexico City and under the leadership of Carlos León, an ex-professor of sociology at Central University of Venezuela and a former supporter of Castro and Gómez. This party possessed a loose left-wing ideological orientation, being comprised of men of relatively diverse worldviews, ranging from middling and serious intellectuals to part-time guerrillas. Notable founding members included leading Mexican revolutionary philosopher Humberto Tejera, and French Communist Party members Gustavo and Eduardo

⁴⁸ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 11. The original Spanish reads, “No aniquilado en nuestro pueblo la pasión de libertad, de justicia y de igualdad, elementos esenciales del ser nacional.”

Machado.⁴⁹ Among this cohort, Betancourt honed his politics and wrote several articles for various Latin American periodicals promoting greater political awareness and activism on the part of the students of the region. He soon had a falling out with the communists in this party, however. He was shocked to find several *Libertad* editorials that harshly criticized the young Venezuelan student movement. In what Betancourt described as “Stalinist” language, the editors portrayed the students as children of privilege who concealed their exploitation of the working class, who were in fact class enemies and the willing tools of the business elites and bourgeois of Caracas. He left the organization, thus beginning his checkered relationship with communism and with communist activists. He stayed in Curacao a little longer, before moving to Barranquilla, Colombia, where he finished his first political tract, *Dos meses en las cárceles de Gómez* (Two Months in the Jails of Gómez).⁵⁰

Betancourt dabbled briefly in agitation and revolution making, but at heart he was attracted to democratic politics. In 1929 he and his colleagues styled themselves as heirs to Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi and began traveling throughout the Caribbean Basin in an attempt to secure arms and support for an invasion of Venezuela. Their inability to secure a seaworthy boat, however, cancelled what Betancourt called his

⁴⁹ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 9. As will be seen later, the Machado brothers remained dominant figures among the Venezuelan left, guiding the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party into its later iteration as the Communist Party of Venezuela, and being so vocal an opponent of the future Betancourt government that they would be thrown in jail in September 1963. In the late 1920s, Betancourt regarded them as relatively innocuous leftists, though he later regarded them as extremist communists and die-hard Stalinists.

⁵⁰ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, pp. 13-14.

“Garibaldian episode.”⁵¹ In 1931 he relocated to San Jose, Costa Rica, reasoning that his political career would stultify if he remained in Colombia. Barranquilla was a great place to while away the nights singing and dancing with the *mestizos* but not “a propitious place to develop as an intellectual.”⁵² In Costa Rica he finished law school, edited a series of political pamphlets, and continued considering philosophies from across the political spectrum. His school was, as he put it, the “School of Universal History.” He rejected the Communist privileging of the proletariat at the expense of the rest of the nation. He sought to be “not a Russian but rather a Venezuelan, to defend first the democratic values and the economic sovereignty of Venezuela; afterwards, those [values] of our Latin America, and, finally, those [values] of humanity.”⁵³ Upon the death of Gómez in 1935, Betancourt returned home, where he found a crowded political scene. Older exiles—primarily officers, civil servants, and professionals who had run afoul of the regime and simply sought to reassert old privileges—competed with young, left wing, activists who had returned from revolutionary baptisms in Mexico, France, and Spain. Betancourt aligned himself closely with the younger and moderate leftists, avoiding association with the most militant of the communists and the left. Despite such efforts,

⁵¹ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, pp. 16-17. Betancourt was at least loosely associated with what was commonly known as the “Caribbean Legion.” The prevalence of zero-sum, strongman politics—and idealistic youth who harbored notions of Latin American democracy—in the Caribbean Basin ensured the existence of a floating band of expatriates who discussed plans for revolutions and coups in this or that nation. From year to year, and decade to decade, the loosely associated Caribbean Legion funded and participated in all sorts of political intrigue, rarely achieving success but always constituting a significant threat to sitting dictators.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 23. The original Spanish reads, “Barranquilla no era nada propicia para el ejercicio del trabajo intelectual. Su clima caluroso insupportable era de los que desleía estatuas.”

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 26. The original Spanish reads, “Y resultaba que a mí me interesaba, por no ser ruso sino venezolano, defender primero los valores democráticos y la soberanía económica de Venezuela; después, los de nuestra América Latina, y, por ultimo, los de la humanidad.”

the autocratic José López Contreras became acting president and soon suspended the constitution and instituted press censorship. Such a transition seemed to Betancourt a simple copy of European monarchy, in which a king would die, only to be replaced by a new one.⁵⁴

Narrowly avoiding arrest, Betancourt continued publishing criticism of Contreras in an uneasy alliance with the communists under the aegis of the National Democratic Party.⁵⁵ Both Betancourt and the communists focused on students and workers, but Betancourt also sought to broaden the appeal to the larger society. He insisted that local conditions—a semi-colonial country dominated by foreign capital, lacking domestic industries, having a small and unorganized working class—prevented the attainment of true democratic progress through an orthodox Marxist proletariat revolution. Further, he continued, the communist’s plan would wed the nation to Soviet ideology and thus trade one foreign master for another. Only an indigenous and organic union of industrial workers and rural farmers, intellectuals and business leaders, students and large landowners could achieve true independence and political freedom for the nation.⁵⁶ Betancourt eventually fled to Chile. There, he edited a new periodical, *Venezuelan Problems*, and organized several conferences at the University of Santiago. As noted in the previous section, Betancourt returned to Venezuela during World War II, only to face exile again in November 1948 following a military coup led by Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

⁵⁴ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, pp. 28-30. John D. Martz, “Venezuela’s ‘Generation of ‘28’: The Genesis of Political Democracy,” pp. 28-32.

⁵⁵ See footnote #44 for a more detailed explanation of this alliance.

⁵⁶ Betancourt, *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*, p. 32.

In the 1950s he travelled throughout the United States and the Caribbean, lobbying for greater attention to dictatorial regimes like that of Pérez Jiménez and the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo.

Betancourt conspicuously publicized the darker aspects of these regimes and suggested that U.S. support for them was inconsistent with rhetorical commitments to democracy and human dignity. Writing from Havana in February 1951, Betancourt noted both the injustice of the Pérez Jiménez regime and the cloudy understanding of the regime in the United States. In the two and a half years since he had been exiled, he asserted, Pérez Jiménez had imprisoned nearly ten thousand dissidents, and forced approximately 600 out of the country. Within Venezuela, AD had been outlawed—despite receiving 75 percent of the vote in the 1947 elections—and heavy press censorship endured. The current situation reflected the sham of legality characteristic of Nazi Germany or the new puppet states of Eastern Europe. And yet, Betancourt lamented, U.S. press coverage suggested that dictatorships like that of Pérez Jiménez simply illustrated the passive, benumbed political consciousness of the average Latin American. Echoing his writings from the 1930s and 1940s, Betancourt insisted that Venezuelans “endured,” rather than “accepted,” anti-democratic regimes “with the same vigor and passion for liberty as the European people of the countries occupied by the Nazi troops opposed them during the Second World War.” And while the Western democracies gave moral and materiel support to such resistance movements, Latin America had been abandoned in its struggle against totalitarianism. The result was two Iron Curtains: the first created by the local repressive governments, the second arising

from the general unwillingness of the U.S. press and public to consider or explore critically the politics of the hemisphere south of the Rio Grande.⁵⁷

In October 1952, Betancourt renewed his assault on the Pérez Jiménez regime in a letter to the *New York Times*. This time his specific criticism involved hastily announced national elections in Venezuela scheduled for November. According to Betancourt, this referendum was simply a façade designed to give legitimacy to the government in advance of Caracas' hosting of the upcoming tenth Pan-American Conference and to Pérez Jiménez's efforts to auction away oil concessions to foreign corporations. To illustrate his point concerning the illegitimacy of the coming election, he noted that the leaders of the Copei and URD parties—the only two major parties pledged to participate—both languished in jail. Copei had even issued a statement, continued Betancourt, that “the present electionary [*sic*] process is not developing within the minimum conditions of freedom, security and respect to which Venezuelans have a right.” Betancourt again endeavored to frame Venezuelan affairs as central to U.S. public interests, rather than as simply one ongoing local crisis in an anonymous American republic. While many within the United States knew Venezuela only as the home of Bolívar, he said, it was important to note that the country currently provided 15 percent of world's petroleum and that the recent closure of oil fields in Iran had been mitigated by increases in Venezuelan production to 1.8 million barrels per day. Because of these facts, Betancourt insisted, “It should be of the foremost importance to the Western

⁵⁷ Rómulo Betancourt, “To the Editor of the *New York Times*,” February 22, 1951, printed as “Events in Venezuela: Lack of Information Here on Latin America Regretted,” March 4, 1951, p. 144.

Hemisphere to know the kind of government that is likely to come out of the election [in Venezuela].”⁵⁸

In October 1955, Betancourt used Pérez Jiménez’s reception of the Legion of Merit by Eisenhower award as a pretext for further criticism, and for the first time he suggested that the regime existed in violation of the United Nations and Organization of American States charters. Here was the first clear example of the emerging “Betancourt Doctrine,” which held that dictatorial regimes were inconsistent with the American system. Writing from Puerto Rico, Betancourt decried the continuing imprisonment of “thousands” of dissidents and the continuation of blatant press censorship. Pérez Jiménez, he noted, had freely admitted that the press “is forbidden to write anything that, in our opinion, may be bad for the morale or progress of the country.” But more significantly, Betancourt sought to expose potential contradictions in U.S. policy toward Latin America. Since the Good Neighbor era, the United States had foresworn hemispheric intervention. Further, the UN and OAS charters sanctified the principle of non-intervention. Yet, according to Betancourt, the awarding of the Legion of Merit suggested U.S. approval of the regime. Since the regime did not actually represent the true interests of the nation, the United States was effectively intervening in Venezuelan domestic affairs. Further, he said, the United States shirked the UN and OAS mandate to respect human rights and guard them through international cooperation. Accordingly, he called for an OAS or UN investigation into the conduct of the Pérez Jiménez regime. He

⁵⁸ Rómulo Betancourt, “To the Editor of the *New York Times*,” October 5, 1952, printed as “Venezuelan Elections: Background is Given on Forthcoming Contest at the Polls,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1952, p. 28. The oil field closures to which Betancourt referred presumably relate to the 1951-1953 Iranian oil nationalization crisis.

sought to force the regime to “explain why is it that more than a thousand citizens have been jailed for two, three, and even five years as political prisoners without having been tried by judges or being granted the benefits of due process of law.” Such intervention would not be a violation of national sovereignty, he claimed, but rather a fulfillment of a commitment to human rights. Betancourt concluded, “[Juan] Perón’s fall [in Argentina] has been a recent revelation reminding us that dictators are never permanent. And that in the end freedom always wins the last battle.”⁵⁹

Betancourt also sought to take advantage of the aforementioned Galíndez-Murphy affair to promote his agenda of hemispheric democratization. In a January 12, 1957 speech at the Carnegie Center in New York, Betancourt used Galíndez’s disappearance to illustrate the ills of the Latin American political environment. The institution of the dictator, he asserted, limped on its last leg. Trujillo’s decision to use his secret police on foreign shores simply illustrated his flailing desperation. A somewhat lengthy excerpt from this speech is necessary to capture the intensity with which Betancourt both drove home his message to his enemies and reached out to sympathetic powers within the United States for their support. He declared:

These acts are the death struggles of a system of government and style of politics that is on its way toward disappearance in the Americas...[These] regimes are like prehistoric animals that belong to the third era of our political evolution and today, by virtue of being obsolete and impotent, constitute an unsustainable anachronism. This is the case because they stand against the fundamental drive for liberty throughout the Americas, and because Latin America is quickly moving beyond its status as backward and rural. We have embraced the industrial revolution of the

⁵⁹ Rómulo Betancourt, “To the Editor of the *New York Times*,” October 22, 1955, printed as “Aiding Latin America: United States’ Interest Commended as Speeding End of Dictators,” October 28, 1955, p. 24.

twentieth century, and it is no longer possible to confront modern problems with ignorant, arbitrary autocrats. Rather, these problems must be attended to and solved by modern government, based in and aided by new techniques of public administration.⁶⁰

Such sustained criticism in the mid-1950s put Betancourt squarely on the radar of leaders in the hemisphere concerned with either perpetuating or terminating the era of the right-wing despot in Latin America. Betancourt had long been a target of Trujillo's ire, but now the Trujillo propaganda apparatus began putting him squarely in its crosshairs. By 1957 the Dominican press widely denounced Betancourt as a lunatic or communist rabble-rouser. While the Eisenhower administration continued its support of Trujillo, it did so with a lower public profile. To assuage critics such as Betancourt, the administration placed roadblocks in routine U.S.-Dominican Republic technical and military exchange programs. Betancourt, for his part, continued his espousal of a new era, free from dictatorships. At the end of 1957, this goal came closer to fruition, as the dictator of his own country suddenly teetered on the brink of collapse.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ REGIME: SETTING THE STAGE FOR A POLITICAL RECKONING

In 1952 Pérez Jiménez had manipulated election results to confirm himself as president. Shortly thereafter he exiled URD leader Jóvito Villalba, the man considered

⁶⁰ Rómulo Betancourt, *Posición y doctrina* (Caracas: Editorial Cordillera, 1959), pp. 18-19, BLAC. The original Spanish reads, "Creo sinceramente que estas son las manifestaciones preagónicas de un sistema de gobierno y de un estilo político que en América está en vías de desaparecer. Los postreros coletazos de regímenes que son como animales prehistóricos, que pertenecen a la era terciaria de nuestra evolución política y hoy, por obsoletos e inactuales, constituyen un insostenible anacronismo. Porque contrarían la raigal vocación de libertad de las colectividades americanas, y porque América Latina está dejando de ser, aceleradamente, atrasada y pastoril. Se ha incorporado a la revolución industrial del siglo XX, y ya no es posible que sus complejos problemas los enfrenten, empíricamente, autócratas arbitrarios e ignorantes, sino que necesitan ser atendidos y resueltos por gobiernos modernos, planificadores, auxiliados por las nuevas técnicas de la Administración Pública."

by most to have been the legitimate winner of the election. In December 1957 the dictator staged another election, this time a plebiscite on continuing his rule for an additional five years. On December 20, the rubber stamp Supreme Electoral Council confirmed Pérez Jiménez's tidy landslide victory of 82 percent of the vote.⁶¹ Unlike in 1952, however, there was widespread public opposition to such political theatrics. Within six weeks, a broad swath of typically opposed Venezuelan constituencies united to force the long-reigning dictator out of power. While a ruling junta quickly emerged to provide stability and a climate of political moderation, Betancourt and several other prominent exiles returned to Caracas hoping to influence the future course of the nation. After a decade of right-wing rule, almost all constituencies favored a shift leftward. The only question was how far to the left the populace was willing to go. This political dynamic immediately aroused the interests of the Eisenhower administration and dictatorial regimes like those of Rafael Trujillo and Fulgencio Batista, the former because of its concerns about the direction of Latin American reform, and the latter two regimes because of their interest in preserving the political status quo.

Immediately before the plebiscite, there had been widespread student riots in opposition to Pérez Jiménez, but security forces maintained order and the discontent did not spread beyond dissident student groups. That changed, however, with an abortive military coup on New Year's Day 1958. That morning at Maracay airbase just west of Caracas Brigadier General Hugo Fuentes and Colonel Jesús María Castro León attempted to spark a revolt, complete with an isolated jet fighter attack against the capital. The coup

⁶¹ "Venezuelan Vote Tallied," *New York Times*, December 20, 1957, p. 8.

quickly fizzled, and the government dismissed the action out of hand, seeking to restore calm and a sense of normalcy. *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc, in Caracas at the time, noted that all mention of the uprising—save the occasional blanket condemnation of “traitors”—disappeared from the press. The government announced that Pérez Jiménez would go ahead with his traditional New Year’s Day banquet, which had been postponed during the crisis. Aside from the continued presence of a detachment of troops and tanks at the Miraflores presidential palace, Szulc observed, the country appeared calm.⁶²

Pérez Jiménez soon began to overreach in his efforts to restore order. He required all national newspapers to run an editorial condemning the Maracay uprising. When the Catholic Church refused to run the editorial in its *La Religión* periodical, state police arrested Monsignor Jesús Hernández Chappellin and forced his successor to carry the article. During the first week of January, the Catholic Church agreed to grant asylum to Rafael Caldera, leader of the opposition Copei Party, prompting the government to arrest four more priests. The incident rapidly escalated, and soon the Vatican intimated that it might issue an official censure of the Pérez Jiménez government.⁶³ The Venezuelan army became increasingly qualified in its support of the dictator. This hedging was an ominous sign for Pérez Jiménez, since the army functioned as his strongest and most conservative power base, in contrast to the more liberal and left-leaning air force and

⁶² Tad Szulc, “Venezuela Quiet After Rebellion; Caracas Guard is Continued—Rebel Fugitives Detained,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1958, p. 6. As will be discussed later, Colonel Castro León was far from finished with such political intrigue.

⁶³ Tad Szulc, “Caracas Widens Rift with Church; Police Still Hold Five Priests—Pérez Jiménez Revises Cabinet in Shake-up,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1958, p. 2.

navy. On January 10, the army forced the release of the jailed priests and directed a reorganization of the cabinet to better reflect its conservative interests. Out were Interior Minister Laureano Vallenilla Lanz and secret police chief Pedro Estrada, two of the dictator's close and longtime collaborators; in were seven new members, including five generals. The armed forces, and principally the army, now controlled a majority of the thirteen cabinet positions, and the service chiefs intimated that Pérez Jiménez was rapidly exhausting the patience of the military because of his inability to restore calm. In the estimation of Szulc, who observed Pérez Jiménez's abbreviated press conference announcing the reshuffling, the dictator appeared grim and tense and exhausted. To make matters worse, leftist student rioting and demonstrations had resumed, such that the dictator was being squeezed from both extremes of the political spectrum.⁶⁴

The situation deteriorated over the next several days. Each evening running battles erupted between students and police. The government rounded up suspected subversives from all walks of Venezuelan life. Of Venezuela's 1300 military officers, for example, 250 soon sat in jail while many of the rest remained under secret police surveillance. Pérez Jiménez maintained tanks and armored cars around the Miraflores presidential palace and at key points in the city, giving the lie to claims that his government had restored order. The business community became increasingly restive as Caracas commerce ground to a halt. Further, a petition demanding restored civil liberties—written by 350 of Venezuela's leading intellectuals, artists, doctors, and

⁶⁴ Tad Szulc, "Venezuelan Chief Shuffles Cabinet on Army's Demand; Drops Interior Minister and Secret Police Aide—Picks Officers for Key Posts," *New York Times*, January 11, 1958, p. 1.

lawyers—was circulating. On January 18 a second major manifesto emerged featuring the signatures of 88 major political and business figures, including eleven ex-cabinet ministers and two former mayors of Caracas. Undaunted, the secret police continued arresting protest leaders, among them several university professors and the dean of the Central University of Venezuela School of Engineering.⁶⁵

Over the weekend of January 18 to 19, it became apparent that enough coordination existed among the opposition to call a general strike for January 21. A group referring to itself as the Junta Patriótica—widely understood to consist of AD, Copei, URD, and probably the Venezuelan Communist Party—had distributed leaflets asking for the closure of all schools and businesses and the suspension of bus services and newspaper distribution. The position of the armed forces was unclear, though a widely-circulated leaflet from the “Military Committee of National Liberation” warned that the military stood ready to act if provoked by civilian rioters, or if ordered into service by their “true leader.” January 21 dawned with the schools, shops, and streets deserted, save for the presence of riot police. At noon, however, thousands of protestors convened near the center of Caracas and traded blows with the police until nightfall. The government declared a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Around midnight a large Patriotic Junta contingent armed with machine-guns engaged security forces in northern Caracas in a gunfight that lasted until dawn on January 22. That day, the uprising and strike spread to the cities of Maracay, Bariñas, and Cabimas, and paralyzed the western oil fields of Zulia

⁶⁵ Tad Szulc, “Caracas Students Stage Five More Riots,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1958, p. 1. Tad Szulc, “New Demands Put to Caracas Chief; Military Said to Urge Easier Policy—Civil Outcry Rises,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1958, p. 1.

and Falcón states. Seeing the writing on the wall, Pérez Jiménez boarded an air force transport plane and fled the country at 3:00 a.m. on January 23.⁶⁶

In just over a month, one of Betancourt's lifelong political goals—the toppling of dictatorship in his homeland—had gone from remote dream to reality. But like his earlier experience following the death of Gómez in 1935, the political field in Caracas was crowded upon the ouster of Pérez Jiménez. A seven-man civilian-military junta under the leadership of the commander-in-chief of the Venezuelan Navy, Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal, took temporary control of the nation, promising free elections as soon as practicable. Further, as Betancourt prepared to return from his exile, Rafael Caldera of Copei and Jóvito Villalba were also heading back to Venezuela. Relations between the three men were cordial but competitive, and each man sought to win leadership of the nation in the upcoming elections. More forcefully than the rest, however, Betancourt sought to make the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez a pivotal episode in the political history of the entire hemisphere.

Betancourt returned on January 25 and set to work on casting himself as the leader of democratic forces in Venezuela and in the Americas as a whole. He paid homage to the work of these reformers and outlined a new age in which American

⁶⁶ Tad Szulc, "Venezuela Is Set for Strike Today; Caracas Tense, Its Schools Closed, as Hour Nears for Anti-Regime Action," *New York Times*, January 21, 1958, p. 1. Tad Szulc, "Ouster of Ruler Is Aim," *New York Times*, January 22, 1958, p. 3. Tad Szulc, "Caracas Revolt Ousts Dictator; Dead Exceed 100; Pérez Jiménez Overthrown in Two-Day Battle—Flees Venezuela," *New York Times*, January 23, 1958, p. 1. In addition to Larrazábal, the junta had four other officers, and two members of the Patriotic Junta: industrialist Eugenio Mendoza, and intellectual and former university professor Blas Lamberti. As the junta worked to stabilize the mechanisms of government, anti-authoritarian spirit found outlet in the next few days in Caracas. In a notable example, mobs converged at the embassy of the Dominican Republic to protest the flight of former Argentine dictator Juan Perón, who had been granted asylum by Pérez Jiménez, to Ciudad Trujillo.

governments would be both progressive and rooted in what he saw as the traditional political values of liberty shared by all Americans. In Caracas on February 5, 1958, he delivered a speech, “The OAS, a Front against Dictators,” that called for closing the gap between rhetoric and reality in the commitment of U.S. and Latin American governments to civil and human rights. The postwar decade of dictatorships and right-wing reaction, he asserted, was drawing to a close; the hemisphere could now re-embrace the general movement toward democratization that had occurred during the Second World War. The curious irony, of advanced cultures like those of the Americas producing dictatorships typical of emerging or immature societies, could now be resolved through multilateral action. No longer, he said, would nations kick out the despots and then turn to the infighting that allowed new dictators to slip into the breach. “Only a united civil front,” he declared, “can create an insurmountable front against a new totalitarian entity...If serious doctrinal debate about pressing national questions is subsumed within inflamed parochial quarrels, a propitious climate will be created for the return of dictatorship.”⁶⁷ The ability of the various political parties—and, in many cases, the armed forces—to set aside their differences and seek compromise was therefore an important first step in building a sustained democratic system.

Devoting as much of his presidential campaign to global matters as to domestic ones, Betancourt pounded home his position that the eradication of the dictatorship was crucial to the realization of the promise of the OAS. Betancourt used later speeches to

⁶⁷ Betancourt, *Posición y doctrina*, p. 30. The original Spanish reads, “Sólo un férreo frente unido de la civilidad opondrá obstáculo insalvable a una nueva experiencia totalitaria. Si los Partidos se hacen otra vez Guerra a cuchillo, si se substituye el sereno debate doctrinario de las grandes cuestiones nacionales y universales por la enconada pelea subalterna, se creará clima propicio para la recaída dictatorial.”

argue that the moral authority of the Western, “free,” world rested on the institution of free government. The 1948 Bogotá Conference that created the OAS, he reminded his listeners, had articulated just such a commitment to democratic governance. Betancourt had been at that conference, he noted, and he recounted how he had steadfastly insisted at that moment that membership in the new organization would be predicated upon representative government. The OAS now had the opportunity to close this rhetorical gap by ensuring that dictatorships would be legally extinguished throughout the hemisphere. He called for an Inter-American Tribunal for the Defense and Guarantee of Human Rights. Such a partnership throughout the Americas, he said, would ensure the realization of human and civil rights, and would also remove anti-American sentiment associated with U.S. support of dictatorships. The final result would be a “Free World decisively immune from the contagion of totalitarianism,” Betancourt concluded.⁶⁸

While the Eisenhower administration did not necessarily embrace Betancourt’s call for a campaign against such ills, it quickly recognized the provisional government in Venezuela and offered U.S. support following Larrazábal’s pledge to fulfill Venezuela’s international obligations and hold free elections as soon as possible.⁶⁹ As we have seen, through 1958 the Eisenhower administration moved relatively quickly to address the economic problems of the hemisphere, and more slowly in reconsidering the basic contours of the political status quo, and this instance was consistent with this trend. The

⁶⁸ Betancourt, *Posición y doctrina*, p. 36. The original Spanish reads, “Un Mundo Libre inmune definitivamente al contagio totalitario.”

⁶⁹ Acting Secretary of State Christian A. Herter to the President, “Recognition of New Government of Venezuela,” January 28, 1958, Venezuela (1) folder, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File): International Series, Box 54, DDEPL.

dominant political parties in Venezuela were essentially centrist, so Washington paid less attention to the affairs of Caracas than with more pressing concerns of communist penetration elsewhere developing world. Within Venezuela, Betancourt, Caldera, and Villalba continued the collegial relations they had maintained while in exile; all sought the presidency but observed a gentleman's agreement to conduct their campaigns in an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility. Under Larrazábal's leadership, the provisional government scheduled elections for December 1958. Significantly, AD, Copei, and the URD—the three main political parties—met in October to sign the Punto Fijo pact. Under this agreement, whichever party won the upcoming presidential election would include the others in its cabinet and national appointment decisions, and the losing parties would honor the election results. On December 5, two days before the election, Betancourt, Caldera, and Larrazábal (Villalba had ceded the URD nomination to him) met publicly with the Supreme Electoral Council to reaffirm their commitment to the election results.⁷⁰ In a solid victory, Betancourt won the election with 1.3 million votes, or 49.2 percent of the electorate. Larrazábal garnered 900,000 votes, or 34.6 percent, with the addition of 84,000 votes cast for the PCV. Caldera came in third, with 420,000 votes or 16 percent of the electorate.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Rómulo Betancourt, "A Government Program: Address Delivered on His Inauguration as Constitutional President of Venezuela before the National Congress, February 13, 1959, Caracas, Venezuela," pp. 5-6, BLAC.

⁷¹ Government of Venezuela Supreme Electoral Council, "Elecciones Presidenciales Cuadro Comparativo 1958-2000 (Voto Grande)" website (<http://www.cne.gov.ve/estadisticas/e006.pdf>), accessed February 25, 2010.

Having seen the fall of Pérez Jiménez, and now president-elect, Betancourt had the chance to make his “new” Venezuela, and perhaps a “new” Latin America, a reality. But what would this “new” nation and region look like? Who would be the winners or losers in this new project? In his February 1959 inaugural address he delivered both soaring rhetoric and precise details about problems and solutions. He invoked past glories and sacrifices and offered predictions of glory and sacrifice in the future. Overall, he seemed to offer something for everyone, but on the edges of the address it was clear that not every constituency would flourish under the new regime. Some would be pushed to the margins of society if not eliminated altogether.

Betancourt began by praising those Venezuelans who remained dedicated to the cause of democracy—and in some cases gave their lives—during the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. He celebrated the heroism of the students and air force officers in denouncing the fabricated plebiscite, and valorized the actions of the elites and popular classes in the ensuing general strike. Especially admirable was the responsible and orderly behavior of the nation in the months of interim rule. Such conduct, he said, gave the lie to those who reckoned that Latin Americans could not develop political systems based on laws and justice. Instead, he continued, various political parties and constituencies had cooperated and sought common solutions. While there had been some instances of popular discontent, Betancourt insisted that they were either the work of certain groups of committed malcontents or of “agents of the old regime still operating in the country.” Regardless, Venezuela had demonstrated its dedication to a “mature, civic-

minded nation fully capable of following the peaceful path of democratic law toward the achievement of stability in its institutions.”⁷²

Emphasizing the idea that the political parties had committed to a principled sharing of power, rather than a selfish wrangling, Betancourt described concrete steps taken towards a new era of unity. The constituents of the Patriotic Junta, formed in secret to oppose Pérez Jiménez in 1957, had endured throughout 1958 and resisted the temptations of factionalism, of undercutting one another in pursuit of parochial solutions to the problems of the nation. As president-elect, Betancourt had honored this mandate, seeking to include representatives of the other parties in his cabinet, in some cases passing over qualified members of his own party for the sake of national unity and cooperation.⁷³

At this point, however, Betancourt began to discuss those who did not have a place in the new government. By mutual agreement with the leaders of Copei and URD, the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) would be excluded from mainstream politics. As the new president asserted, “the Communist political philosophy is not consonant with the democratic structure of the nation and...the Party’s views on the course Venezuela should follow in international affairs are not in keeping with the best interests of the country.”⁷⁴ Neither would profligate, self-aggrandizing constituencies be welcome in the new Venezuela. Betancourt noted the endemic borrowing from foreign banks, the showy

⁷² Betancourt, “A Government Program...,” p. 3. BLAC. This portion of the inaugural functions as a thinly veiled attack on Pérez Jiménez, who repeatedly defended his dictatorship by claiming that Venezuelans could not practice democracy without descending into anarchy. The only way to achieve national progress, he often said, was through the strict stifling of dissent.

⁷³ *ibid*, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 6.

but useless public works, and the endemic graft that had characterized the final years of the Pérez Jiménez regime. Austerity was the new order of the day. Betancourt admitted that taxes would be increased but promised in the spirit of José Martí to root out bribery and corruption at the local and national level through newly created tribunals and courts of inquiry.

Rather than rely on precedent and convention, the new regime would endeavor to bring greater prosperity to the individual and to the nation at large. No longer would Venezuela simply squander petroleum revenues on the purchase of expensive imported goods. Now, Venezuela would promote nascent industries, build infrastructure, and, perhaps most importantly, renegotiate the percentage of oil revenues the nation received from foreign corporations. At the local level, Betancourt declared that he would redress staggeringly levels of illiteracy, poor access to education and health care, and sorely lacking supplies of housing and basic infrastructure. According to Betancourt, infant mortality rates in Venezuela were ten times higher than in the developed world, and the nation devoted less than half of the amount of funds to social security services than did the poorer nation of Chile. Venezuela faced nothing less than a revolutionary time bomb, he warned, given the fact half of the nation was younger than 20 years of age and that this demographic was beset by chronically high rates of unemployment.⁷⁵

Betancourt then moved to foreign affairs, where he stated frankly his opposition to *caudillo* strongmen in the hemisphere. If he stood for democracy at home, he would demand it across Latin America. While pledging to uphold Venezuela's international

⁷⁵ Betancourt, "A Government Program...", p. 9.

obligations, he invoked the Charter of Bogotá restriction of OAS membership only to “governments of respectable origin, born of the will of their people as expressed in the only legitimate source of power: free elections.”⁷⁶ He argued that regimes that refused to respect basic human rights, and that instead relied on totalitarian police power, should be quarantined and vanquished through the peaceful collective action of the American community. In this effort, he called for cooperation from the United States as well as the armed forces of Venezuela. He further sought closer beneficial relations with the Catholic Church. In short, Betancourt envisioned taking the first steps in a golden age for people within his own nation and throughout the hemisphere.

Though Betancourt fired a potential warning shot in his attack on foreign capital and business interests, he made it clear he remained friendly to the United States. Indeed, his purposefully austere inauguration audience nonetheless included longtime establishment Republican Thomas E. Dewey and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Roy R. Rubottom. Further, Representative Charles Porter of Oregon, who had spearheaded the investigation against Trujillo associated with the Charles Murphy disappearance, had been a personal guest of Betancourt for several days. Tension was in the air in the Caribbean Basin, however, almost immediately. Only six weeks before the inauguration, longtime U.S. ally Fulgencio Batista had been forced out of power in Cuba, replaced by the nationalist Fidel Castro, with whom Betancourt had carried on an occasional correspondence. Batista had fled to the Dominican Republic, joining Marcos Pérez Jiménez in the company of Rafael Trujillo, now perhaps the most

⁷⁶ Betancourt, “A Government Program...,” p. 10.

visible and notorious of the remaining Caribbean strongmen. Regional sparks were not long in coming. The week of the inauguration, the Venezuelan Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo reported that Dominican authorities were impeding the delivery of mail and foodstuffs, as well as preventing the safe conduct abroad of thirteen political refugees housed at the embassy. The following day, Representative Porter revealed that Batista had given \$1 million to Trujillo immediately upon being granted asylum. The said money was now being distributed to six U.S. advertising agencies as part of Trujillo's continuing quest to enhance his standing in the United States. Back in Ciudad Trujillo, the government hastily organized a demonstration—attended by about 100,000 Dominicans—that featured President of the Supreme Court Hipólito Herrera Billini denouncing Betancourt as a “Communist agent.”⁷⁷

Trujillo found himself increasingly on the defensive. While Representative Porter vowed to expose Batista and Trujillo's propaganda campaigns, Betancourt, Costa Rica's Jose Figueres, and other regional leaders issued a statement calling for dictatorial governments to be expelled from the OAS. In Washington, President Eisenhower praised Betancourt at the unveiling of a statue of Simón Bolívar, at the Pan-American Building near the Washington Monument. Betancourt, he said, could be considered the direct heir of Bolívar's campaign for the “true meaning of democracy” in the Americas. Undaunted, Trujillo issued a stern challenge to his regional enemies on March 11. Referencing Castro and Betancourt in order, Trujillo warned aggressors to stay away at the risk of

⁷⁷ “Dominican Curbs Cited; Venezuela Says Embassy Food Service Has Been Halted,” *New York Times*, February 14, 1959, p. 6. “Batista Gift Charged; Representative Asserts Cuban Gave Trujillo \$1,000,000,” *New York Times*, February 15, 1959, p. 12. “Dominican Rally; 100,000 Assembled to Hear Attacks on Betancourt,” February 16, 1959, p. 2.

having their “beards and brains flying around like butterflies.” Intervention was a two-way street, he noted, since the distance “from Cuba to the Dominican Republic is the same distance as from the Dominican Republic to Cuba and it is the same distance from Venezuela to here as from here to Venezuela.”⁷⁸ Clearly, the gloves were coming off in the Caribbean. In his last two years in office, Eisenhower would increasingly have to deal with this problem. As his brother noted, the president had always planned on addressing Latin America, but could not because of problems in Europe and Asia. Now, he had less and less of a choice.

CONCLUSION

Long before Vice-President Nixon’s motorcade rolled precariously through the streets of Caracas, the Eisenhower administration had been giving the economic and political problems of Latin America a hard, new look. Washington had taken important initial steps in rectifying these problems, joining Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek’s call for Operation Pan-America, for example, and beginning the process of distancing itself from dictators like Rafael Trujillo. The darker days of the U.S. approach to Latin America, typified by Eisenhower’s decisions to intervene in Guatemala in 1954 or to award Legions of Merit to authoritarian anticommunists, were slowly being overcome. Nixon’s narrow escape from the Caracas mob was certainly an embarrassment, but it did not prove the bankruptcy of Eisenhower’s Latin America policy, as many critics claimed at the time and have claimed since.

⁷⁸ “Dictators Under Fire; Latin Leaders Issue Democratic Plea,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1959, p. 6. “Eisenhower Hails Free Venezuela,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1959, p. 1. “Warning to Aggressors Is Sounded by Trujillo,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1959, p. 15.

To shift the metaphor, the “bank” of Eisenhower’s Latin America policy remained solvent and was making strides in expanding its capital, but it struggled to keep up with clients who were aggressively drawing against its reserves in advancing their own ventures. Indeed, Latin American leaders were giving hemispheric relations a fresh look just like their counterparts in Washington. For many of them, the time was ripe to assert their selves in a new nationalist critique. As had been the case in previous generations, many Latin American leaders acknowledged the great power of the United States. Now, however, they insisted it was time that the profit of Latin American labor remained within the borders of the nation that created it, and that local leaders be free to direct their own affairs without the interference of the White House or Wall Street.

It was anyone’s guess, however, as to the manner in which this new Latin American nationalism would ultimately manifest itself. Rómulo Betancourt, as we have seen, made it clear that he sought an end to U.S.-supported dictatorships and predatory U.S. corporate policies, but had no interest in ending the relationship with the United States itself. He was certainly a reformer, but also relatively conservative and thus regarded by many in the United States as a very attractive partner. Yet within Betancourt’s constituency there were committed leftists who carried at least a faint tinge of communism. Many of those who made up Venezuela’s Punto Fijo coalition were sympathetic to Fidel Castro, who had recently come to power in Cuba. While coy on his identity as a potential communist or simply a dedicated nationalist, Castro certainly made many moderates nervous with his rhetoric concerning the nationalization of private industries. Last but certainly not least in the concerns of moderates in the United States

and in Latin America, there were those nationalists who sought an aggressive return to the old days of hemispheric politics. Leaders like Rafael Trujillo worked to turn back the clock to the days when the United States turned a blind eye to hemispheric despotism as long as the despot in question shepherded U.S. interests. Ominously, this sort of leader was willing to engage in international intervention, and even to challenge the United States directly, in the pursuit of these goals. Such a situation could only exacerbate the tensions already roiling the hemisphere and put intolerable strains on the United States and its partners in reform. The end of 1958 and the beginning of 1959 thus ushered in a bizarre twist in hemispheric politics. The United States, so often criticized as the font of conservatism and right-wing reaction in the Americas, would find itself at the forefront of an effort to beat back right-wing reaction and despotic interventionism, and in the vanguard of the effort to make Latin America safe for democracy.

Chapter 2: The Contest for a New Political Order: The Last Stand of the Caribbean Right Wing & the Triumph of Nationalism, 1959-1961

With two years left in office, the Eisenhower administration confronted the fact that, despite great efforts to adjust hemispheric policy and master Latin American problems, the Caribbean Basin continued to come apart at the seams. Disaffection at the local level combined with long-simmering interstate rivalries to produce ongoing violence, resistance, and protest. The recent collapses of the Pérez Jiménez and Batista regimes suggested the ascendance of democracy. Yet the endurance of strongmen like Trujillo, and conservative reaction in places like Venezuela and Brazil, suggested that radicalism was ascendant, too. The right wing, and in particular a virulent form of right wing international intervention, remained a viable force in Latin American politics. Throughout 1959 political and legal constraints complicated Washington's efforts at managing raging conflict between the three principal antagonists of the Caribbean: Fidel Castro of Cuba, Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela, and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Though ideological and political orientations between the United States and the Caribbean Basin fluctuated, a U.S.-Venezuelan partnership began to emerge, committed to moderate and progressive policies in the face of right-wing and left-wing extremism. Yet the Venezuelan government relentlessly pressed Washington to adopt a more assertive role in altering the hemispheric political order. Such a situation owed much to the fact that Betancourt found himself in the literal and figurative crosshairs of an intense right wing campaign to destroy him and that for which he stood. Because of the ability of Venezuelan moderates to blunt the right wing attack, establish themselves

as a force in the OAS, and shepherd U.S. interests, by the summer of 1961 the Caracas-Washington axis would be the key force for moderate democratic capitalism as new threats from the left wing arose.

This chapter discusses the ideological and political struggle that gripped the Caribbean Basin between the spring of 1959 and the spring of 1961, a struggle that brought Washington and Caracas together in alliance, first against the Dominican Republic and then against Cuba. The chapter also examines Betancourt's tenuous domestic position as he confronted sustained ideological and armed attacks from conservative domestic and foreign constituencies; in particular the chapter explores the decision of Trujillo to sponsor numerous efforts to depose Betancourt by force. Thwarted in these efforts and isolated from the hemisphere, the Dominican dictator launched a final gambit to gain support from Cuba or the Soviet Union, an effort that ended with his assassination in May 1961. The discussion concludes with a brief stock-taking of the hemisphere in the spring of 1961, when the right's credibility was at its nadir and the left an unknown quantity. The chapter argues that U.S. and Venezuelan policymakers enjoyed success in marginalizing anachronistic strongmen and articulating new approaches to economics, an important triumph that nonetheless proved fleeting.

OLD GRUDGES, NEW POLITICS: CARIBBEAN CRISES AND THE SANTIAGO CONFERENCE, SPRING AND SUMMER 1959

Immediately upon Castro's assumption of power in Cuba and Betancourt's inauguration as president of Venezuela, Trujillo began excoriating these apparent harbingers of democracy. The Dominican dictator cast them as bandits at best, if not

outright spearheads of a communist invasion. Within Venezuela, remnants of the Pérez Jiménez constituency echoed these warnings. Transferring thought into action, these *perezjimenistas* initiated a strident clash against moderate constituencies over the proper political orientation of the hemisphere. The intensity and scope of the struggle raised important questions about the role of the OAS in settling historic American debates over theories of democracy and non-intervention. After spending the first half of 1959 on the defensive, the Betancourt government succeeded in chastening the hemispheric right at the OAS Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers in Santiago, Chile, an event that established Venezuela as a growing force in the maelstrom of hemispheric politics.

Trujillo had long presented his regime as the shepherd of social progress and conservative order in the hemisphere. His leadership, so went the rhetoric of the Dominican propaganda apparatus, ensured harmony in his own country and provided an example for neighboring countries to follow. As Betancourt and Castro emerged as powerful figures in Venezuelan and Cuban politics, respectively, Trujillo's rhetoric changed. Paradise was on the verge of being lost, warned Ciudad Trujillo and the task fell to Trujillo and his followers to save it. The main Ciudad Trujillo daily, *El Caribe*, ostensibly an independent paper but in fact a mouthpiece for Trujillo's Dominican Party, functioned as a good barometer for this rhetorical shift, and for the growing hostility of Trujillo toward his Caribbean counterparts. A week after the coup that deposed Pérez Jiménez, for example, the paper predicted communists to be an active and potentially subversive presence in the new Venezuelan government. By the end of 1958, these warnings had evolved into a full-fledged attack against Betancourt and his supporters as

masked communist provocateurs. Front-page stories suggesting a wedge between Washington and Caracas became commonplace, like the coverage of U.S. Senator Carl Curtis' call to investigate whether Betancourt had conspired with communists to undermine U.S. national security during the 1950s.⁷⁹

The editorial page, *Foro Público*, complemented and amplified the version of reality that the paper presented in its "news" section. By early September—after running a full week of anti-Betancourt pieces—*El Caribe* editorials established a propaganda thread that would be maintained for several months: Betancourt was a cynical double-dealer seeking to establish a left-wing government by legitimate or illegitimate means. Columnist Dr. Miguel Agustín Gracel, for example, accused Betancourt of altering electoral rules to his advantage, of railing against *yanqui* imperialism while surreptitiously negotiating with Standard Oil, and of pledging friendly relations with the United States while maintaining covert ties to Latin American communists and "superior agents" of the Soviet Union.⁸⁰

Trujillo's propaganda machine during the final years of the decade emphasized his energetic support of U.S. interests and his ability to see through Soviet pretensions of peaceful coexistence. *El Caribe* devoted half of its September 12 front page, for example, to coverage of a visiting delegation of U.S. senators—including staunchly anti-communist Republicans James O. Eastland of Mississippi and William E. Jenner of

⁷⁹ "Señalan Comunistas Están muy Activos en Venezuela," *El Caribe* [Ciudad Trujillo, Dominican Republic], January 30, 1958, p. 1. "Proponen Investigar Conducta Betancourt como Asilado," *El Caribe*, September 2, 1958, p. 1. Articles such as these are only the most prominent examples of an overwhelming amount of similar coverage published by the Dominican press during 1958.

⁸⁰ Dr. Miguel Agustín Gracel, "La Postura Dubitativa de Rómulo Betancourt," *El Caribe*, September 6, 1958, p. 4.

Indiana—who had accepted Trujillo’s invitation to address his National Congress. Here, Trujillo received accolades as “a great world leader,” “the leader of the Latin Americans,” and “the George Washington of Latin America.” As much as Trujillo worked to construct a cult of personality about himself as father of the nation, he also sought to portray himself as Washington’s most reliable ally and closest adherent to U.S. values and national mythology.⁸¹

At the same time, Trujillo warned that the United States and the West underestimated the menace emanating from the Soviet Union and China. Any moderate, peaceful postures Moscow or Beijing might adopt only masked their fundamentally hostile commitment to communist domination, his propaganda machine insisted. It was therefore incumbent upon the neighbors of the Dominican Republic to accept this reality, as Trujillo and his government had already done.⁸² It was in this regard that Trujillo issued his earliest, subtlest criticisms of the United States. Certain U.S. constituencies went just a bit too easy on communists, Dominican propaganda suggested, overlooking the ways in which lackeys like Betancourt tricked the naive Latin American public into admitting communists to the corridors of power.

Betancourt’s impending inauguration and the presence of Dominican political refugees in the Venezuelan embassy in Ciudad Trujillo further strained Dominican-Venezuelan relations as the spring of 1959 progressed. Trujillo monitored the inaugural

⁸¹ “Senadores de EU Elogian Liderato Mundial de Trujillo: Exaltan Resguardo de Honor Nacional,” and “Senador Eastland Dice RD es Lider Latinoamérica,” and “Senador Jenner Exalta Realizaciones de Trujillo,” *El Caribe*, September 12, 1958, p. 1.

⁸² “Dos Huesos a Elegir,” *El Caribe*, September 21, 1958. p. 11.

festivities, greatly displeased with the overwhelmingly positive response to them throughout the Americas. Oregon congressman Charles O. Porter, for example, had been in Caracas as a special guest of Betancourt, and on February 10 he publicly predicted Trujillo's imminent downfall. Porter expanded on his comments the following day, calling for a harder line in U.S. relations with Latin American dictatorships, lumping the Dominican strongman with those in Paraguay, Haiti, and Nicaragua.⁸³

Porter's sympathetic posture paled in comparison to the warm embrace that Castro and the new Cuban regime gave president-elect Betancourt. Three weeks before the inauguration, Castro had chosen Venezuela as the site for his inaugural foreign visit following his victory over Batista, accepting the invitation of the Caracas University Students' Federation to observe the anniversary of the collapse of Pérez Jiménez. Arriving at Maiquetía airport early on the afternoon of January 23, Castro received the cheers of some 50,000 spectators. The crowd quickly threatened to overwhelm police lines, and Venezuelan authorities hustled Castro and his entourage of 50 out of a side exit and into open trucks for the ride into Caracas. Interim president Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal, who had governed since the coup the previous January, stood ready to receive him.⁸⁴

⁸³ Unpublished UPI Press Releases, Caracas, February 10-11, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic [hereafter AGNDR]. Senator Porter, it will be recalled, had spearheaded the investigation into Trujillo's involvement in the disappearance of Oregonian Robert Murphy, in the context of the 1956 Galíndez affair.

⁸⁴ "Hero's Welcome Given to Castro at Caracas," *New York Times*, January 24, 1959, p. 3. "Castro Asks Move to Curb Dictators; Cuban Rebel Leader Speaks to Venezuelan Congress—Calls for Unity," *New York Times*, January 25, 1959, p. 12.

The following day Castro held a series of private consultations with the incoming Venezuelan leadership. Publicly, he spoke of forming a regional or hemispheric league that would oppose military governments and dictatorships. Privately, he solicited Betancourt concerning entering into a partnership against Trujillo. This thinking closely complemented Betancourt's; what the press had come to call the Betancourt Doctrine held that dictatorships could no longer be tolerated in the hemisphere.⁸⁵ With regard to the United States, however, the two had their differences. Castro told Betancourt that he considered "having a game with the gringos," and hoped that Venezuela might underwrite such a challenge to the United States with \$300 million in loans and oil subsidies in case his actions garnered a U.S. embargo. Betancourt demurred, indicating that he had committed to political evolution rather than revolution.⁸⁶ Disagreeing over only this point, and with opposition to Trujillo a much more unifying theme than potential opposition to the United States, Castro left Betancourt a friend. Indeed, by March many on the right denounced Betancourt and Castro as the "Caracas Group" and accused the two of fomenting revolution in places like Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

While dignitaries from various other nations began arriving in Caracas for the inauguration, the embassy crisis continued. On January 29, the Venezuelan government released a list of 14 refugees staying at its embassy in Ciudad Trujillo and insisted on their safe conduct out of the nation. The Dominican government rejected Venezuela's

⁸⁵ "Castro Urges U.S. to Revise Policy; Calls Members of Congress and Press Hostile to Cuba," *New York Times*, January 26, 1959, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 1089-1090.

demand on February 10, noting that as of 1954 it was not party to any international conventions regarding diplomatic asylum.⁸⁷ That same day Caracas invited the Dominican Republic to join 41 other accredited missions at the inauguration. Dominican foreign minister Porfirio Herrera Báez denounced the invitation in energetic terms. Indeed he expressed surprise, asserting the consistently hostile attitude of Betancourt and his promotion of subversion against the Dominican Republic.⁸⁸ Just as Herrera Báez expressed surprise at the invitation, the Venezuelan government deemed the Dominican rejection and position on the asylum seekers “unacceptable.”⁸⁹ Neither side budged; February came and went with the political refugees remaining at the embassy and Dominican diplomats maintaining a hostile attitude in Caracas.

The diplomatic clash between the two nations culminated in June. Throughout the spring, the Dominican government postured in the embassy refugee affair, declaring Venezuelan Embassy Chargé d’ Affaires Humberto Fernández Albert persona non grata in March and recalling its ambassador, Rafael Bonnelly, from Caracas in May.⁹⁰ At this point Caracas fired back. On May 29 Venezuelan foreign minister Ignacio Luis Arcaya complained to Dominican Chargé Dr. José E. Villanueva of a cache of anti-Betancourt literature found in a storage space used by the Dominican diplomatic mission in Caracas.

⁸⁷ Unpublished UPI Press Releases, Caracas and Ciudad Trujillo, January 29, February 10, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR.

⁸⁸ Unpublished AP Dispatches, Ciudad Trujillo and Caracas, February 10-11, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR.

⁸⁹ Unpublished AP Dispatch, Caracas, February 20, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR.

⁹⁰ Transcript of “La Voz Dominicana” Radio Broadcast, May 25, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR.

On February 14, Arcaya charged, a Pan-American Airways plane landed at Maracaibo carrying two crates—weighing over 30 tons—from the Dominican Ministry of Foreign Relations, marked “diplomatic pouch” and destined for the local Dominican consulate. When three months passed and no one claimed them, the Venezuelan authorities lawfully considered them abandoned and opened them on May 14, revealing a massive store of anti-Betancourt literature. Because such subversive literature violated mutual agreements concerning the use of diplomatic pouches, Venezuela demanded that the Dominican Republic conduct an immediate and thorough investigation, and reserved the right to inspect Dominican diplomatic pouches until the affair was settled.⁹¹ Herrera Báez retaliated on June 9, insisting that military attaché to the Venezuelan embassy Colonel Pedro Antonio Bracho Urdaneta be removed from the country. The Dominican foreign minister included an eight-page memo detailing nine separate episodes in which Dominican intelligence agents had observed a habitually drunk Bracho Urdaneta either frequenting houses of prostitution or meeting with anti-Trujillo conspirators.⁹²

During this exchange, Venezuelan port authorities at Maracaibo seized a Norwegian freighter, the *Tronstad*, on grounds that it contained subversive literature against the national government. Because the ship had made an extended port of call in Ciudad Trujillo immediately before sailing to Maracaibo Venezuela determined the subversive literature to be of Dominican origin. On June 12, following a four-hour

⁹¹ Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ignacio Luis Arcaya to Dominican Chargé d' Affaires Dr. José E. Villanueva, May 29, 1959, Embajada Dominicana en Venezuela, Código 30111, Unnumbered Box, Años 1956-1985, AGNDR.

⁹² Dominican Foreign Minister Porfirio Herrera Báez to Chargé d' Affaires, Venezuelan Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo, Héctor H. Arismendy, June 9, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR.

cabinet meeting at the Miraflores presidential palace, Venezuelan leaders announced an end to diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic.⁹³ The following day, Miraflores accused the Dominican Republic of financing a vast network of spies and agitators within Venezuela and promised to add this issue to the growing list of grievances against the Dominican Republic it was preparing to present to the OAS.⁹⁴

Nearly simultaneously, Cuban-Dominican relations collapsed as well. On June 14 Dominican exiles based in Cuba launched an invasion against the Trujillo regime. Though exile and Dominican government accounts differed—Ciudad Trujillo claimed the invaders arrived with the aid of the Cuban Navy while the exiles claimed to have commandeered a Dominican transport plane—it appeared clear that some 200 men had established a presence in the northwest town of Constanza before fleeing into the mountains. Official Dominican sources stated that local peasants hunted down the few remaining survivors, spurred by a 1000-peso bounty for each rebel captured. “Machete in hand,” gushed *El Caribe*, “the farmers climbed the mountains in their prosecutions against the intruders, urged on by their identification with the postulates of the General Dr. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, the genial statesman and undisputed leader of the Dominican people, to whom the Republic owes its brilliant Era of Peace and Progress.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Transcript of AP dispatch, Maracaibo, Venezuela, June 13, 1959, Fondo Presidencia de la República, Sección Palacio Nacional, s/c, Fecha 1958-1959 Documentos—Cuba, Caja A, AGNDR. “Venezuela Cabinet Ends Dominican Tie,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1959, p. 8.

⁹⁴ “Caracas Charges Dominican Spying,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1959, p. 29.

⁹⁵ “Invaders Liquidated, Trujillo Forces Say,” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 1959, p. A6. “Dominican Rebels Hunted Down,” *The Washington Post*, June 25, 1959, p. A6. Santiago Lamela Geier, “Lealtad del Pueblo a Trujillo Mostróse en Horade Combate,” *El Caribe*, July 1, 1959. The original Spanish reads, “Machete en mano, el campesino se lanzó al monte en persecución de los intrusos, dando buena cuenta de su identificación con los postulados del Generalísimo Doctor Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, el genial

The Dominican government immediately charged Havana with complicity in the affair. Cuba denounced the charge vehemently. On June 26, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa announced the end of Cuban-Dominican relations in a letter to the OAS outlining widespread Dominican human rights abuses and hostility toward the Cuban people.⁹⁶ In the course of a month, then, the Caribbean feud had moved from informal to official. Further, all three aggrieved parties shifted the conflict into the arena of the OAS.

Ciudad Trujillo took the initial lead, though with mixed results. At the end of June Dominican ambassador to the OAS Virgilio Díaz Ordoñez demanded hemispheric action to prevent an alleged impending attack by 3,000 Cuban-sponsored men and 25 Venezuelan aircraft.⁹⁷ *El Caribe* scored the OAS on July 4 for its recent equivocation in the apparently Cuban-sponsored expeditions against Panama and Nicaragua. Only decisive action by the body to correct the Caribbean crisis could restore OAS credibility, the paper claimed. It was “as clear as the light of day” that both the Cuban and Venezuelan governments were intimately involved in plotting and executing armed expeditions against the Dominican Republic.⁹⁸ Venezuela, however, quickly turned the tables against its Dominican antagonist. Betancourt insisted that an OAS investigation of the Dominican claims would suggest equivalence between his country’s democracy and

estadista y líder indiscutido del pueblo dominicano, a quien debe la República esta brillante Era de Paz y Progreso.”

⁹⁶ “Cuba Breaks Ties with Trujillo Regime, Charges Killing of Defenseless Civilians,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1959, p. A4.

⁹⁷ Major John S.D. Eisenhower, “Synopsis of State and Intelligence Material Reported to the President,” June 29-July 1, 1959, Intelligence Briefing Notes, Vol I (8), White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-1961, Subject Series; Alphabetical Subseries, Box 14, DDEPL. “O.A.S. Delays Action,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1959, p. 6.

⁹⁸ “Meridiano del Caribe: Ahora no Puede haber Imprecisiones,” *El Caribe*, July 4, 1959, p. 1.

the Dominican Republic's despotism.⁹⁹ Cuban foreign minister Raúl Roa echoed Betancourt, intimating that Cuba might consider leaving the OAS if the Dominicans succeeded in securing an investigation. On July 7 the tide turned decisively against the Dominican request. Nine other OAS nations signaled their support of the Cuban-Venezuelan position. Ciudad Trujillo therefore had no hope of gaining the two-thirds majority required for a major resolution within the OAS.¹⁰⁰ On July 10, Díaz Ordoñez withdrew his government's complaint. The momentum now lay squarely with Venezuela and Cuba, which succeeded in scheduling an OAS consideration of the broader problem of Caribbean unrest.¹⁰¹

On July 13 the issue facing the OAS officially expanded beyond the original Dominican charge against Venezuela and Cuba, as the United States, Peru, and Chile advanced a resolution to investigate the broader national security problems affecting the hemisphere. Venezuela, Ecuador, and Uruguay went a step further, broadening the resolution to consider problems in the "exercise of representative democracy and respect for human rights."¹⁰² The Venezuelans and Cubans, initially resistant to the meetings altogether, were succeeding in framing the coming conference as a referendum on dictatorships versus democracy, thus further isolating and weakening Trujillo. The

⁹⁹ "Venezuela Rejects an Inquiry by O.A.S.," *New York Times*, July 6, 1959, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ "9 Latin Countries Support Venezuela," *New York Times*, July 8, 1959, p. 10. The supporting countries were Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, Bolivia, Panamá, Ecuador, Peru, and Argentina.

¹⁰¹ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Dominicans Drop Charges of Plot; Halt Complaint Against Cuba and Venezuela—O.A.S. Delays Action on Unrest," *New York Times*, July 11, 1959, p. 1. Later in the day the Dominican representative denied he had completely dropped its accusation. Instead, he insisted, the Dominican Republic had simply withdrawn its request that the OAS, under the Rio Treaty, investigate the charges.

¹⁰² Dana Adams Schmidt, "Hemisphere Talk on Unrest Called; Foreign Ministers to Meet on Caribbean Situation—Site to be Decided," *New York Times*, July 14, 1959, p. 1.

Dominicans, on the other hand, were losing their battle to use the OAS to reaffirm a strict interpretation of the doctrine of non-intervention. In another era, perhaps, the narrow Dominican appeal to legalism might have succeeded. But modern Latin Americans appeared more interested in testing the boundaries of OAS collective action, particularly with regard to dealing with dictatorial governments. The United States, essentially desiring a gag order and ceasefire among these camps, would have to negotiate this divide.¹⁰³

The moderate course championed by the United States and many Latin Americans met severe challenges once the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Dominican delegations shared the same room in the August meetings in Santiago, Chile. At a dinner on the eve of the conference a Dominican diplomat confronted a Cuban counterpart, warning him “blood would flow” in the event of any public attacks on Trujillo during the coming meetings. In the evening session the following day, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa charged the Dominican Republic with responsibility for an abortive uprising in Cuba the previous week. Seated directly across from him, Dominican Foreign Minister Herrera Báez compared Roa to a squid spouting ink. The battle between the two men was joined: while the chairman banged his gavel to restore order, observers overheard Roa calling Herrera Báez a “moron” and Herrera Báez’s aides threatening to kill the Cuban. In a classic understatement, *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc observed, “Today’s

¹⁰³ Tad Szulc, “Caracas to Press Case on Trujillo; Americas Parley in Santiago Expected to Develop Into Debate on Dictatorships,” *New York Times*, August 2, 1959, p. 2.

outbreak could conceivably make more difficult the hard task of agreeing here on a Caribbean peace formula acceptable to all.”¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, the moderate bloc pressed on. The South American contingent invited the Venezuelan, Dominican, Cuban, and Nicaraguan delegates to individual, closed-door meetings, urging them to compromise. By August 16, the American republics had committed in principle to forming a commission that could investigate interstate disputes on its own authority, or at the request of a given government. At Cuban and Venezuelan insistence, however, the commission would need the consent of a local government before it could undertake an investigation on national soil. The key differences between the Caribbean antagonists remained unresolved. Yet the American republics avoided the worst-case scenario of open war and the collapse of the OAS. The consensus held, and on August 18 the Council of the OAS adjourned after issuing what came to be known as the Santiago Declaration. Building on the precedent of its 1948 charter, the OAS recognized that “the effective exercise of representative democracy is the best vehicle for the promotion of [American] social and political progress;” therefore, “harmony among the American republics can be effective only insofar as human rights...and the exercise of representative democracy are a reality within each of them.” Further, the body ruled that “anti-democratic regimes” violated its founding principles and subsequently called upon members to adhere to the principles of non-intervention *and* democratic governance. Most importantly for the future, the Declaration authorized

¹⁰⁴ Tad Szulc, “Caribbean Clash Causes an Uproar at Americas Talk; Cuban and Dominican Trade Should Insults During Santiago Meeting,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1959, p. 1.

the previously dormant Inter-American Peace Committee to investigate acts of interstate intervention and situations in which human rights and democratic institutions appeared to be in jeopardy.¹⁰⁵

As the ministers returned to their capitals at the end of August, observers remained ambivalent concerning the results of the meetings. Eighteen American republics had reaffirmed their commitment to the OAS, and insisted that Ciudad Trujillo, Havana, and Caracas bury their hatchets and tend to their own affairs. The delegation of investigative authority to the Inter-American Peace Commission also represented an unprecedented strengthening of hemispheric cooperation and oversight. Washington managed to avoid ensnarement in the debate among the warring parties. Perhaps most significantly, Venezuela had demonstrated its ability to be a decisive and leading actor within the hemispheric diplomatic framework. While Caracas essentially favored Washington, the Pérez Jiménez days in which Venezuela could be counted on as a rubber stamp were no more. Betancourt was transforming Venezuela into the progressive, democratic conscience of Latin America. Ultimately, though, the political and ideological debates and disagreements in the Caribbean remained barely dressed sores. Each side deeply hoped for the downfall of its counterpart. Exhausted politically, however, and beset by domestic economic problems, Castro, Trujillo, and Betancourt looked to their own business as summer turned into autumn. As much as domestic issues

¹⁰⁵ *OAS Official Records: Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1960).

consumed the focus of Caribbean leaders, though, the interstate feud remained a going concern, and Trujillo soon resumed his pattern of subversion and intervention.

THE PEREZJIMENISTA-TRUJILLO UNION I: RHETORIC AND INVASION, 1959-1960

The setback suffered by the Trujillo regime in the OAS paralleled domestic crises. Tad Szulc remained in Ciudad Trujillo, observing the convulsions of Dominican politics. A subtle but sustained social discontent brewed. Rampant corruption and reckless defense spending threatened to cripple the government. With or without Trujillo's knowledge, his political favorites had created a vast network of graft and influence peddling, siphoning as much as 25 percent of the gross income of the private sector. The secret "special funds" section of the \$150 million national budget approached 50 percent of the total. In response to government harassment and intimidation, the Roman Catholic clergy prepared to withdraw their support from the regime. Trujillo's hold on his people appeared to be slipping, as Venezuelan and Cuban propaganda broadcasts enjoyed large audiences among the populace.¹⁰⁶

Yet rather than concede the struggle or consider moderation, Trujillo raised the stakes. As Betancourt built his reputation as a leading hemispheric statesman, the Dominican dictator laid plans to silence him by any means necessary. Ever the purported champion of law and order, decency, and progress, Trujillo became the leader of an outlaw movement operating outside the bounds of all diplomatic conventions, aligning with right-wing Venezuelan extremists who sought to destroy Betancourt and the

¹⁰⁶ Tad Szulc, "Corruption Held Peril to Trujillo; Dominican Observers See Public Revulsion Sapping Dictator's Supremacy," *New York Times*, July 12, 1959, p. 1.

movement he represented. In the process of reorienting its policy toward Latin America, the Eisenhower administration came to see in Betancourt everything it desired in a Latin American ally, and in Trujillo everything it wanted to avoid. A nasty and virulent propaganda campaign in the winter of 1959 culminated in a Dominican-sponsored invasion and assassination attempt against Betancourt in the spring and summer 1960. By the end of this episode Betancourt had not only survived, but also increased his stature throughout Latin America and become a central figure in U.S. hemispheric policymaking considerations.

The right-wing rhetorical campaign during the final months of 1959 manifested itself through spectacle and a vast body of propaganda literature. On November 25, for example, Dominican courts convicted 113 persons associated with the invasion attempts of the previous summer. Notable defendants included the Castro brothers and Betancourt, tried in absentia, who received sentences of decades in hard labor and a collective fine of \$100 million dollars.¹⁰⁷ Ciudad Trujillo continued to celebrate the defeat of the July invasions, painting Castro and Betancourt as depraved communist tyrants who callously sent young men to die in these suicide missions. The best example of this propaganda thread was the apocryphal story of Edwin Erminy, who, in widely-circulated Dominican accounts, was an innocent Venezuelan college student duped into being a tool of the anti-Trujillo communists.

In July 1959 the Free Venezuela Anti-Communist Movement—believed by the U.S. State Department to operate from Ciudad Trujillo—published what it claimed to be

¹⁰⁷ “Castro Ordered Jailed in Dominican Republic,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1959.

a diary found next to the body of Erminy following the abortive Constanza invasion. In the diary, Erminy was a promising student preparing to apply to medical school. Out of money and desperate, he fell under the thrall of a Marxist professor who promised him a scholarship in exchange for training as an auxiliary in the Cuban Army. Erminy and several other students soon found themselves in Cuba as near-prisoners. They completed rudimentary military training before being forced onto boats headed for the Dominican Republic. Poorly supplied, they succumbed to the machete-wielding peasants who fought with devotion to Trujillo in their breasts. At the end—as Erminy’s wounds sapped his life and his ability to write—the doomed student realized that he had been deceived by Cuban and Venezuelan leaders who espoused democracy but practiced communism. Yet he found solace in his impending settlement of accounts with “the pederast” Betancourt in heaven, so went the tract. The Free Venezuela Anti-Communist Movement’s afterword portrayed Erminy’s death as an indictment not only of Betancourt and the Punto Fijo coalition, but also the array of all centrist and leftist Venezuelan media outlets. Already awash in the blood of innocents, these constituencies could soon expect to face the vengeful wrath of the Venezuelan people.¹⁰⁸

The State Department also tracked another group—the Anti-Communist Liberation Movement of Venezuela—that portrayed itself as homegrown but was in fact an arm of the Dominican propaganda machine. In January 1960 the U.S. Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo intercepted a copy of the movement’s 81-page polemic, *Proof of*

¹⁰⁸ *A Diary About the Cuban-Venezuelan Expedition to the Dominican Republic, Found Next to the Body of the Venezuelan, Edwin Erminy* (Caracas: Free Venezuela National Anti-Communist Movement Publications, July 1959), AGNDR.

Communist Domination in Venezuela, essentially a manifesto of the Pérez Jiménez-Trujillo assault against political moderation. The work asserted that Betancourt had been a tool of Soviet Communism since the 1920s and had fallen in league with Castro in an effort to deliver Venezuela to the Communist Bloc. “It is impossible for anyone to be unaware,” read the introduction, “of the great tragedy that is hanging over Venezuela...It is easy for both nationals and foreigners to realize daily that Venezuela is a country dominated by the Reds. Every single activity in the life of [Caracas] is controlled by the Communist Party.”¹⁰⁹ Betancourt, an “extremely bad and vulgar political writer...[and an] assiduous traveler along the dark paths of Sodom and Gomorrah,” had deceived the wider Caribbean into thinking him a worthy leader.¹¹⁰ Committing the “most atrocities and errors in the life of Venezuela,” Betancourt made his country a defenseless communist satellite by sacking politically unreliable army officers and creating a militia of peasants and rabble to marginalize further the military.¹¹¹ It was clear to all that, “Two Soviet agents, Betancourt and Fidel Castro, have been given the job by their Russian boss, agitating throughout the Caribbean for the purpose of opening a new front against the United States, this time on the very doorstep of the great northern nation.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Proof of the Communist Domination of Venezuela* (Caracas: Anti-Communist Liberation Movement of Venezuela, 1959), RG 59-250-63-1-5-7, Department of State, ARC# 2363836, #A1 3148, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Special Assistant on Communism, Subject Files, Presidents Trip to South America to Cuba—Anti-Castro Activities, Box 7, Venezuela folder, National Archives, College Park, Maryland [hereafter NACPM], pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁰ *Proof of the Communist Domination of Venezuela*, pp. 16-17.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, pp. 26, 39.

¹¹² *ibid*, pp. 15-16.

The Caribbean right wing backed up its invective by creating cadres of provocateurs in Venezuela and potential invaders in the Dominican Republic. In public statements, Trujillo called for the formation of an “anti-communist foreign legion”—a counterpoint of sorts to the earlier Caribbean Legion—that would be sponsored by the Dominican government. In late 1959 the Venezuelan government began monitoring what it believed to be a sophisticated network of *perezjimenistas* and Dominican secret agents operating within its borders. Using the Dominican consulate in Curaçao as a way station, Dominican Military Intelligence Service (SIM) agents cultivated contacts among the Venezuelan right and sponsored efforts to breed civic unrest and plant the seeds of a popular coup. In early 1960, the *perezjimenistas* unleashed the first salvo of their terrorist campaign, using Dominican-supplied explosives to bomb radio stations and trains in downtown Caracas. Before each attack, “Dominican Voice” broadcasts from Ciudad Trujillo would predict “grave events in Caracas,” while similar anti-government broadcasts circulated from clandestine transmitters in Venezuela. During this time the Venezuelan government learned that Jesús María Castro León, a former general and high functionary in the Pérez Jiménez regime who was in exile following a coup attempt against the Larrazábal provisional government, had visited Ciudad Trujillo and enjoyed an audience with the Dominican dictator.¹¹³

¹¹³ “El Terrorismo Está Dirigido Desde Santo Domingo,” *El Nacional* [Caracas, Venezuela], January 4, 1960, p. 1. Castro León had been active in Venezuelan public life for decades. Born in Capacho Viejo, Táchira state, on May 7, 1908, he was the nephew of General Cipriano Castro, who had been an ally of Juan Vicente Gómez. He graduated as a lieutenant from the School of Military Aviation in Maracay in 1928. He dabbled in revolution in the early 1930s before becoming an expert in air force tactics, the head the School of Military Aviation, and a member of the Ministry of Civil Aeronautics in the 1940s and 1950s.

Writing for *El Nacional* on January 5, celebrated poet and essayist Juan Liscano commented on the scope of the right wing insurgency aimed at Venezuela. “The real threat against our nascent democracy,” he began, “is not that of communism but rather that of dictatorial reactionaries.” Any radicalism espoused by the center-left parties was balanced by their articulation of coherent and constructive political ideologies, he argued. The center-left therefore had something to offer the masses—a popular democratic system—that the right wing simply could not match. Leftist and mainstream constituencies worked to avoid a civil war while the right sought to catalyze one. As Liscano saw it, the local right-wing attacks “formed a part of a vast international conspiracy, of the last Latin American dictatorships and their supporters, seeking to prevent any possibility of democratic consolidation in our nations.”¹¹⁴

Betancourt, meanwhile, held a series of meetings at Miraflores to galvanize public support against the right wings terrorists. During the morning he hosted fellow AD leader Raúl Leoni, as well as Rafael Caldera and Jóvito Villalba of Punto Fijo coalition members Copei and URD. Later he hosted leaders of the Caracas Chamber of Radio and Television, and also of the Association of Venezuelan Journalists. Betancourt’s message was that all responsible public constituencies ought to unite and

Though he was active in toppling Pérez Jiménez, he quickly fell out of favor with the provisional government in 1958.

¹¹⁴ Juan Liscano, “Evolución o Revolución,” *El Nacional*, January 5, 1960, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “El peligro real que amenaza nuestra naciente democracia no es el comunismo sino la reacción dictatorialista.” And, “Las bombas lanzadas en la madrugada del 2 de enero forman parte de una vasta conspiración internacional: la de las últimas dictaduras hispano-americanas y la de sus partidarios, empeñados en evitar toda consolidación democrática en nuestros países.”

deprive the terrorists of any chance to cripple the country through chaos and discord.¹¹⁵ Later in the month Venezuelan authorities broke up a web of civilian and military right-wing conspirators sponsored by the Dominican government. Documents seized at the hideout of ringleader Dr. Savelli Maldonado revealed plans for bombing, sabotage, and the formation of a new government headed by the exiled Castro León.¹¹⁶ The United States had also been tracking these developments. In a January 1960 assessment of the political order of battle in Venezuela, the CIA noted the efforts of local leftists to defend the emerging democracy. As early as September 1958 the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) had arranged for the formation of a secret military force to repel right-wing attacks against the democratic government. Fearful of the return of a military or authoritarian government, the PCV had assigned Douglas Bravo, member of the PCV Federal District Regional Committee, to head this military force and supervise its training at various sites throughout the nation. As odd as it seems that the PCV would protect the government that excluded it from the Punto Fijo coalition, the communists apparently feared that they would fare much worse if the *perezjimenistas* returned to power. According to the CIA, this force remained a viable unit at the dawn of 1960, and perhaps had even been strengthened by the support and leadership of the Italian Communist Party.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “La Opinión Pública no Debe Hacer Juego al Terrorismo,” *El Nacional*, January 6, 1960, p. A1.

¹¹⁶ “Caracas Reports Smashing a Plot; Elaborate Plans Discovered for Coup—Officers and Civilians Arrested,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1960, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ CIA Memo, “Establishment or Strengthening of Illegal Apparats by Free World Communist Parties,” January 1960, p. 24, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST) [hereafter CREST], NACPM. As later chapters will show, the Italian Communist Party came to play a significant role in Venezuelan politics by acting as a go between in PCV relations with Cuba and the Soviet Union. Such an association probably resulted from the large population of ethnic Italians residing in Venezuela during the 1950s and 1960s.

Around this time the Trujillo regime put Castro León at the head of an invasion force against Betancourt. The Venezuelan exile had spent November in Puerto Rico, meeting with various anti-communists and railing against Betancourt. Former Dominican Ambassador to Venezuela Rafael F. Bonnelly had kept Trujillo informed of these affairs, and perhaps arranged Castro León's arrival in Ciudad Trujillo in late November.¹¹⁸ Regardless of the timing, Trujillo had a ready-made army for the Venezuelan's use, as the redirecting of funds from the armed forces budget to the shadowy anti-communist foreign legion continued unabated. Based at FERIA Ganadera, some 67 officers and several hundred men had consumed at least \$17,000 a month for rations since August 31, for example. At the end of 1959 the Secretary of State for the Armed Forces José García Trujillo submitted a budget request of over \$658,000—approximately 2 percent of the average defense budget—to keep the foreign legion intact and maintained during the first months of 1960.¹¹⁹ The Trujillo regime also worked on plans to sneak coup leaders into Venezuela via Colombia. In March Castro León and his lieutenants obtained Dominican diplomatic passports, and in April the Dominican foreign ministry made an arrangement with the Colombian embassy to provide the men diplomatic visas for the purpose of attending “agricultural courses” in Colombia. The

¹¹⁸ Rafael F. Bonnelly to Trujillo, Untitled Memos, November 3 and November 23, 1959, Fondo Presidencia, Sección—Palacio Nacional, Código 30111 Embajada Dominicana en Venezuela, Año 1959, Box 1617, AGNDR.

¹¹⁹ Secretary of State José García Trujillo to Trujillo, “Informe de Gastos Efectuados en Raciones para los Miembros de la Legión Extranjera, desde el Día Primero al 31-8-59, Inclusive,” September 11, 1959, and “Remisión de Presupuesto de la Legión Extranjera, para el Año 1960,” October 26, 1959, Fondo Presidencia, Sección—Palacio Nacional, Código 20111-5 Legión Extranjera Anti-Comunista, Años 1958-1991, AGNDR.

Dominican government followed up on that request four days later, this time for diplomatic visas to accompany the aforementioned diplomatic passports.¹²⁰

Back in Venezuela, right-wing agitators continued their campaign against the Punto Fijo coalition. Throughout March controversy raged over budget reforms and austerity measures, as well as a recently passed Agrarian Reform Law. Nevertheless, high-level officials insisted that conditions were stable. On March 4, for example, dignitaries painted a picture of democratic and institutional normalcy on the occasion of the handover of command of the army from Colonel Marco Aurelio Moros Angulo to General Pedro José Quevedo Delgado. In departing, Colonel Moros called on his former charges to maintain the honor of the army as an apolitical guardian of national security. The army should avoid conspiracy as well, he said, “because conspiracy is a threatening blow to decency, loyalty, and patriotism, and nationhood.” Affirming his own commitment to professionalism and public responsibility, General Quevedo laid out his own vision of the future of the army. “We should always think and act,” he stressed, “as the military complement to those members of the Republic who hope, with all justification, that we are the constant, impeccable guarantors of the constitutional order

¹²⁰ *Informe que rinde la Comisión del Consejo, constituido provisionalmente en Organo de Consulta en el caso resentado por Venezuela, para dar cumplimiento al Tercer Punto Dispositivo de la Resolución del 8 de Julio de 1960* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Organization of American States, 8 August, 1960), pp. 5-6. On December 5, 1959, the Dominican government issued diplomatic passports for Castro León and Luis M. Chafardet Urbina, who had been Venezuelan ambassador to the Dominican Republic during the Pérez Jiménez regime. The March 12, 1960, passports—without clear indication of the nationality of the holders—were for a “Jesús M. Castro,” a “Juan M. Vidal,” and a “Oscar T. Suárez.” The passport for “Juan M. Vidal” was presumably for the Venezuelan Juan de Dios Moncada Vidal, Castro León’s lieutenant during the San Cristóbal uprising.

and of the institutions of the nation.” For his part, Betancourt proudly noted the role of the army in defending the emerging constitutional order.¹²¹

In early April it appeared that the Castro León group stood ready to take advantage of the unsettled political situation in Venezuela. Sources near Aves Island on the Venezuela coast reported the presence of unknown ships that might be involved in an invasion attempt. Other sources reported new contacts between various national leaders and foreign conspirators. On April 12 the government sought to quash these rumors and assure the public that there was no chance of a coup, inviting Caldera and Villalba to Miraflores again, where they appeared with Betancourt. The trio insisted that the Punto Fijo coalition remained strong and that no one in their parties had any association with conspirators either inside or outside of Venezuela.¹²²

Despite such public displays of confidence, Castro León succeeded in launching his invasion. He and several hundred men had infiltrated into Colombia, and on April 20 they attacked the city of San Cristobal, in Venezuela’s southwestern Tachira state about 300 miles from Caracas. The raiders forced the surrender of the local army garrison and for several hours controlled the town. Making use of two local radio stations, Castro León declared his intention to save the country from communism and demanded that Betancourt surrender. The Trujillo propaganda apparatus breathlessly supported the

¹²¹ “El General Quevedo Asumió el Comando del Ejército,” *El Nacional*, March 5, 1960, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “No conspirar, porque la conspiración es derrota y es azote de decencia, de lealtad, de mística y de Patria.” “Tarea principal de todos nosotros será la de dedicarnos específicamente a las cuestiones de orden técnico-profesional. Debemos pensar y actuar siempre en función de militares de quienes la República espera, con justa confianza, que seamos en todo momento insospechable garantía del orden constitucional y de las instituciones nacionales.”

¹²² “Es Absolutamente Firme el Orden Constitucional,” and “No Tienen Fundamento los Rumores de Golpe,” *El Nacional*, April 13, 1960, p. A1.

invasion, even jumping the gun by announcing the event hours before it occurred. Ciudad Trujillo portrayed it as a popular movement embraced throughout Venezuela and immediately announced its recognition of the Castro León government and its intention to send a new ambassador as soon as practicable. By April 22, however, Venezuelan National Guard units—supplemented by a 500-man militia of local farmers—had defeated the force and put Castro León in flight.¹²³

Few Venezuelans doubted Trujillo's direct involvement in the invasion, and such overt intervention did more harm than good to the prospects of the right wing. Indeed, public discontent with Betancourt tended to transform into strong support whenever the government appeared threatened from abroad. Ciudad Trujillo's insistence that millions of Venezuelan workers had gone on strike against the government, and that foreign nationals were preparing to flee the country, was patently false. The million-member strong Confederation of Venezuelan Workers had indeed struck, but they did so in favor of the government and in opposition to the government. Immediately going on record that Castro León was a Dominican agent, the Betancourt government sought to shift the public focus from domestic discontent to foreign policy problems.

Venezuela's neighbors showed their solidarity by breaking relations with the Dominican Republic. On April 30, Colombia severed ties with Ciudad Trujillo, determining that the Trujillo regime had been fully complicit in arranging the invasion of

¹²³ "Venezuela Reports a Rebellion Halted; Venezuela Sees a Revolt Curbed, Leader of Rebels," *New York Times*, April 21, 1960, p. 1. "Ya Trujillo Había Nombrado Embajador ante Castro León," *El Nacional*, April 25, 1960, p. A1.

Venezuela.¹²⁴ Peru followed suit on May 7, echoing Venezuelan and Colombian charges of Dominican recklessness.¹²⁵ Bolivia and Ecuador broke ties on May 18 and May 27, respectively. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States preached patience, however. Absent a direct provocation, these bigger countries felt that unilateral breaks in relations would weaken the authority of the OAS and make it more difficult to manage Dominican politics in the event of a successful coup against Trujillo.¹²⁶ Ciudad Trujillo responded by filing an OAS complaint accusing Venezuela of poisoning relations between the Dominican Republic and its neighbors. Trujillo's *El Caribe* found the proper tone of righteous indignation. "With all the weight of its moral authority," asserted the editors, "the Dominican Republic will accuse Rómulo Betancourt, author of the worst crimes against American peace, before the Organization of American States." While Dominican propriety and observance of the principle of non-intervention prevented the complaint from mentioning "widespread human rights abuses" occurring in Venezuela, the paper continued, Caracas would nonetheless be held to account for its irresponsible behavior in the international arena.¹²⁷

The United States signaled its immediate support for the Betancourt government, though Washington chose not to address the issue of Dominican complicity in the Castro León affair. As the dust settled from the invasion attempt, a consortium of U.S. banks

¹²⁴ "Colombia in Protest; Cuts Dominican Republic Ties Over Venezuelan Revolt," *New York Times*, May 1, 1960, p. 2.

¹²⁵ "Peru Suspends Dominican Ties," *New York Times*, May 8, 1960, p. 71.

¹²⁶ "3 Latin Lands Shun Anti-Trujillo Move," *New York Times*, May 22, 1960, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Henry Ramont, "La R.D. Acusa Betancourt Ante la OEA: Dicen Azuza Paisés a Romper Relaciones," and "Una Acusación Fundamentada," *El Caribe*, May 24, 1960, p. 1. The original Spanish reads, "Con todo el peso de su autoridad moral, la República Dominicana acusará ante la Organización de los Estados Americanos a Rómulo Betancourt, autor de los más graves delitos contra la paz internacional de América."

and the Venezuelan Ministry of Finance finalized a \$200 million loan to cover short-term government expenditures. The loan represented a victory for Betancourt, given that he had secured congressional exemption from laws preventing government borrowing from foreign banks.¹²⁸ The Eisenhower administration remained cautiously optimistic in the aftermath of the invasion, feeling that Betancourt had once again proven himself as a resilient and tough-minded democratic reformer. The administration's chief worry was that extreme right or left wing constituencies might attempt to exploit Betancourt in exchange for their support. According to notes provided to the president by John S.D. Eisenhower:

The Communist-influenced Venezuelan Workers' Confederation...has presented a set of recommendations to President Betancourt, allegedly including a demand that Communist be included in the present three-party government coalition. The admission of Communists into the government is adamantly opposed by the majority of the officer corps. The combination of CTV pressure on the regime and leftist attacks on the military could lead to a break between the armed forces and the left-wing elements in the government, thereby forcing Betancourt to side with or oppose the military—in either case precipitating a new power struggle.”¹²⁹

The Eisenhower administration's satisfaction with Betancourt's policies did not extend to the Dominican Republic and Trujillo. Indeed, as far as the White House was concerned the post-Trujillo era could not begin soon enough. During a March 24, 1960, meeting with the president, CIA Director Allen Dulles relayed information provided by sources recently returned from the Dominican Republic. The situation there had deteriorated rapidly, to the extent that the Trujillo family had begun funneling money out

¹²⁸ “Loan to Venezuela Signed Officially,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1960, p. 41.

¹²⁹ John S.D. Eisenhower, “Synopsis of State and Intelligence Material Reported to the President,” April 25, 1960, Intelligence Briefing Notes, Vol II (2), White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-1961, Subject Series; Alphabetical Subseries, Box 14, DDEPL.

of the country in anticipation of a government collapse that might occur within weeks. Accordingly, Dulles and the president agreed that the United States ought to move rapidly to groom an alternative to a Castro-type government in Ciudad Trujillo, a task that might be assigned to Ed Clark, a Dulles operative closely connected to Dominican affairs. Though several portions of the memorandum of the meeting remain classified, it is clear that the main concern of the administration was not whether to support or abandon Trujillo but to figure a way to usher him out while avoiding the appearance of U.S. meddling.¹³⁰

The State Department also continued its work on the Trujillo problem. On April 14 Herter wrote a secret memo to Eisenhower, advising him that, although he lacked clear evidence that the Trujillo regime would collapse within the next several months, he and his advisors could no longer rule out such a precipitous deterioration. As a result, Herter judged that the administration needed a back-up plan if it could not groom a “moderate, pro-United States leadership” from the existing civilian or military opposition in the Dominican Republic. He therefore submitted a basic plan in which the United States would make prior arrangements to support a suitable dissident group if it could successfully topple Trujillo. Specifically, the United States ought to be willing to employ “U.S. Armed Forces at the request of the provisional government under Article III of the

¹³⁰ White House Memorandum, “Memorandum of Conference with the President, March 24, 1960—8:45 a.m.,” March 25, 1960, University of Texas at Austin Declassified Documents Reference System website [hereafter UTDDRS], <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/servlet/DDRS;jsessionid=4597F5552B5A6A4D96086CD29AB7A937?locID=txshracd2598> (accessed January 4, 2011).

Rio Treaty to deter or prevent Castro- or Communist-inspired invasions or armed insurrections.”¹³¹

In Ciudad Trujillo, meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador Joseph Farland cultivated contacts among a number of dissidents seeking to establish a democratic government with Washington’s blessing and support. Eisenhower approved Herter’s memo on April 21, during the Castro León insurrection, compelling the ambassador to continue his contacts. At a cocktail party with several dissidents, Farland fielded initial requests for materiel support—in the form of sniper rifles—in the effort to depose Trujillo. In May, as Farland’s tour in Ciudad Trujillo expired, he introduced the dissident group to Deputy Chief-of-Mission Henry Dearborn, who would now be their unofficial link to the CIA.¹³²

Back in Caracas, the crackdown against the Castro León conspiracy continued. On April 26, the Minister of Defense, General Josué López Henríquez, announced the arrests of 65 active and retired military officers suspected of involvement in the plot.¹³³ Several leaders from across the political spectrum pledged support for Betancourt, writing editorials for *El Nacional* that called for patience, sacrifice, and moderation in shepherding the country through a needed political transformation. Central University of Venezuela political scientist and writer José Ramón Medina argued that the nation enjoyed an historic opportunity to move beyond autocracy to political maturity. Each

¹³¹ Secretary of State Herter to the President, “Memorandum for the President: Possible Action to Prevent Castroist Takeover of Dominican Republic,” April 14, 1960, UTDDRS, <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/servlet/DDR;jsessionid=4597F5552B5A6A4D96086CD29AB7A937?locID=txshracd2598> (accessed January 4, 2011).

¹³² *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 192-193.

¹³³ “65 Militares Detenidos,” *El Nacional*, April 27, 1960, p. A1.

citizen, he wrote, had a “responsibility and an intellectual obligation to assume a constructive—perhaps risky—position, firmly and openly articulated, oriented toward conciliation, unity, and common effort.” Few favored a return to dictatorship, yet a critical mass of reactionaries managed to torment the political scene and endanger the democratic consolidation, he concluded. PCV leader and national legislator Pompeyo Márquez concurred, noting the recent alignment of most of the nation’s mainstream political, business, and labor leaders under the aegis of the Pro-Venezuela Association, and denunciation of the right wing adventurism of Castro León and his clique. At stake was nothing less than a choice between two starkly opposed visions of the future: the left and mainstream sought constructive change and popular empowerment; the right sought “the limitation of democratic liberties, cessation of mass demonstrations, the application of a plan that served only the interests of the powerful classes, and the indiscriminate opening of the nation to the whims of foreign capital.”¹³⁴

Betancourt sought to shore up his support among the armed forces, as well as remind them of their sworn duty to uphold the constitution, as his administration prepared its case against Trujillo. On May 4, the minister of defense and the chiefs of the army, air force, and national guard accompanied Betancourt on a speaking tour of several military installations. He praised the armed forces’ almost complete rejection of the Castro León

¹³⁴ José Ramón Medina, “La Tolerancia Necesaria,” *El Nacional*, April 30, 1960, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “Responsibilidad que implica, en lo que respecta al intelectual, asumir posición constructiva—fecunda—y riesgo de afirmar criterio y voz que tienda a la conciliación, al entendimiento, a la unidad, al esfuerzo mancomunado.” Pompeyo Márquez, “La Tregua y el Momento Político,” *El Nacional*, April 30, 1960, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “Hay quienes sostienen la necesidad de un cambio, pero en sentido regresivo: limitación de las libertades democráticas, cesación de la actividad de las masas, aplicación de un plan que solo contempla los intereses de los sectores poderosos, apertura indiscriminada de las puertas del país a la colocación de toda suerte de capitales extranjeros.”

rebellion, and refusal to succumb to Trujillo's call for coups and conspiracies. At the same time, however, Betancourt warned of the severest consequences for those engaged in treason. As he pointed out, the uniform code of military justice provided for 30 years of incarceration for traitors, a penalty he would seek for both for the scores of officers soon to stand trial for involvement in the Castro León affair and for those officers who might be tempted to engage in similar future activity.¹³⁵

THE PEREZJIMENISTA-TRUJILLO UNION II: THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST BETANCOURT AND ITS AFTERMATH, 1960-1961

Like the previous summer of 1959, Dominican and Venezuelan diplomats prepared to confront each other within the forum of the OAS. Unlike the previous summer, however, Trujillo found not even a shred of support from the hemispheric community. In fact, he suffered so many setbacks at the hands of Betancourt that, around the middle of May, Trujillo ordered his assassination. On June 8, the OAS Inter-American Peace Committee—chaired by U.S. Ambassador John C. Drier—concluded a four-month investigation into the Dominican human rights situation. The committee found Ciudad Trujillo to be complicit in “flagrant and widespread violations” of widely accepted norms relating to free speech, freedom from arbitrary arrest, and freedom from torture and political terrorism. This decision signaled, first, the OAS commitment to expand on its 1959 Santiago Declaration on human rights, and second, the firm and open

¹³⁵ “Traidores a la Patria son los Sublevados,” *El Nacional*, May 5, 1960. p. A29.

U.S. condemnation of the Trujillo regime.¹³⁶ For Trujillo the decision was doubly catastrophic, given that the judgment passed against him was unprecedented in American politics, and that he was losing his vital sponsor and partner. Dominican dissident Juan Isidro Jiménez Grullón had noted earlier in the month that U.S. participation was crucial to any hemispheric ostracism of Trujillo. After all, for decades Trujillo had eschewed close economic relations with his Latin American neighbors, preferring instead to closely wed his economy with that of the United States and England. In Jiménez Grullón's estimation, the rupture of U.S. relations would be the blow from which the Trujillo regime never recovered.¹³⁷

The Dominican government also had to confront continuing Venezuelan efforts to isolate it. Dominican Foreign Minister Porfirio Herrera Báez, and one would assume Trujillo himself, followed closely the movements of Venezuelan diplomats in those countries that had not yet broken ties with Ciudad Trujillo. On May 19, Dominican ambassador to Panamá Dr. Héctor B. Castro Noboa alerted the foreign minister to just such a mission in Panamá City. According to Castro Noboa's sources, Betancourt had dispatched diplomats and fellow AD members on a secret mission with the express purpose of convincing President Ernesto de la Guardia to suspend relations with Ciudad Trujillo. Castro Noboa signaled his especial frustration with affairs, given that Panamanian Ambassador to Venezuela Diógenes de la Rosa—according to Castro Noboa

¹³⁶ E.W. Kenworthy, "Trujillo Accused by O.A.S. Inquiry of Curbing Rights; Americas Committee Says Dominican Actions Raise Tension in Caribbean," and "A Blow for Trujillo," *New York Times*, June 9, 1960, pp. 1, 32.

¹³⁷ J.I. Jiménez Grullón, "¿Basta el Cerco Continental para Derrocar a Trujillo?," *El Nacional*, June 7, 1960, p. A4.

a “former member of the Caribbean Legion” and a “well-known Communist”—appeared to be acting as a liaison.¹³⁸

Castro Noboa cabled a month later with new warnings of the “sinister” and “Machiavellian” workings of Ambassador De la Rosa to break Panamanian-Dominican relations. Betancourt’s “perverse campaign” moved on apace, Castro Noboa continued, and now the Colombian government had apparently jumped on board to exercise influence on President De la Guardia. Further, De la Rosa sought to use his close personal relationship with the Panamanian president to affect his considerations. The Panamanian ambassador had returned from Caracas on June 9, and immediately gained a private meeting with the president that lasted for over two hours. According to Castro Noboa’s information, the main line of De la Rosa’s argument was that Panamá was the last of the “Bolivarian” nations—Venezuela, Colombia, Perú, Ecuador, and Panamá—that had not broken relations with the Dominican Republic. During this time, de la Rosa also maintained close contact with Arturo Briceño, the Venezuelan ambassador to Panamá.¹³⁹

Meanwhile, the assassination attempt against Betancourt took shape. On May 8, 1960, Venezuelan businessman Juan Manuel Sanoja left Venezuela, headed for the

¹³⁸ Dominican Ambassador to Panamá Dr. Héctor B. Castro Noboa to Dominican Secretary of State for Foreign Relations Dr. Porfirio Herrera Báez, “Gestiones del Gobierno Venezolano Frente al Presidente de Panamá con Relación a la República Dominicana,” May 19, 1960, Box 0/30101-47: Relaciones Diplomáticas, 1958-1962, AGNDR. In reality the Caribbean Legion was a non-communist entity. As we have seen, however, the Trujillo government constantly tried to paint the Legion and other democratic challengers as dyed in the wool communists.

¹³⁹ Castro Noboa to Herrera Báez, “Gestiones del Gobierno Venezolano Frente al Presidente de Panamá con Relación a la República Dominicana,” June 13, 1960, Box 0/30101-47: Relaciones Diplomáticas, 1958-1962, AGNDR.

Dominican Republic by way of Haiti. He had lived in the Dominican Republic off and on for 14 years, and his passport showed numerous trips between the two countries, but now Dominican authorities made no record of his entry into the country. Sanoja soon secured a Dominican passport and headed for Madrid, Spain, intent on recruiting ex-Venezuelan Navy captain Eduardo Morales Luengo to help lead a military coup in Venezuela. The two returned to Ciudad Trujillo on May 30, where they were received by SIM (Dominican Military Intelligence Service) Director Johnny Abbes García and taken to consult with Trujillo. Sanoja then made another trip to Venezuela to inform a group of conspirators that Morales Luengo had returned from exile and agreed to lead the rebellion against Betancourt. On the morning of June 17, Sanoja, along with fellow Venezuelans Luis Cabrera Sifontes, Manuel Vicente Yáñez Bustamante, and José Morales Hernández, left Maiquetía airport in a Venezuelan commercial plane piloted by Jesús García and Juvenal Zavala Chávez. Their declared destination was El Piñal, in Venezuela's Apure state, but shortly after takeoff they detoured and headed for the Dominican Republic. The plane landed at San Isidro air base, near Ciudad Trujillo, where officials of the Dominican army waited. The Venezuelans met again with Abbes García, who introduced the idea of using a remotely detonated car bomb to kill Betancourt. The conspirators agreed and asked for arms to supply 200 civilians allegedly waiting to join elements of the Venezuelan armed forces in a coup. The following day Dominican soldiers loaded the arms and munitions onto Sanoja's plane prior to its return to Venezuela. On the morning of June 24 Cabrera Sifontes and Yáñez Bustamante parked an Oldsmobile sedan that had been fitted out with the explosives along the route that Betancourt's motorcade

would travel, en route to Armed Forces Day celebrations at the Miraflores presidential palace. Cabrera Sifontes stationed himself some 300 meters away with a radio transmitter, and, when the motorcade passed by at 9:15 a.m., detonated the bomb.¹⁴⁰

Betancourt's driver and aide-de-camp died instantly. The president and the other passengers—including the minister of defense, other military officials, along with their wives—suffered major burns. By the end of the day, Betancourt had undergone surgery and recovered enough from anesthesia to address the nation. “Today's attack,” he declared, “is the clearest example that the national and international enemies of Venezuelan democracy will stop at nothing in order to establish despotism in this nation.” “That which has happened will not dissuade me,” he continued, “and I will maintain my loyalty to the mandate given me in free elections by the Venezuelan people.”¹⁴¹ Interior Minister Dr. Luis Augusto Dubuc also addressed the nation that evening, declaring that the government remained completely stable and functional. Nevertheless, Betancourt signed a decree suspending certain constitutional guarantees as the investigation into the attack progressed. In particular, the government suspended the right to travel outside the country, and the right to assembly by those organizations not officially recognized.¹⁴²

Despite the loss of such guarantees, public support for the government far exceeded even those levels seen in the aftermath of the Castro León affair. Editorialist

¹⁴⁰ *Informe que rinde la Comisión del Consejo, constituido provisionalmente en Organo de Consulta en el caso resentado por Venezuela, para dar cumplimiento al Tercer Punto Dispositivo de la Resolución del 8 de Julio de 1960* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Organization of American States, 8 August, 1960), pp. 8-20.

¹⁴¹ “El Presidente solo Sufrió Heridos Superficiales en el Atentado de Ayer,” *El Nacional*, June 25, 1960, p. A1.

¹⁴² “Suspendidas Garantías con Salvedad de Reuniones Políticas y Sindicales,” *El Nacional*, June 25, 1960, p. A1. “Bomb Injures Venezuela President; Venezuela Chief Injured by Bomb,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1960, p. 1.

Juan Liscano portrayed the attack on the president as nothing less than an attack on the entire nation, perpetrated by the depraved and marginal Pérez Jiménez-Trujillo clique. For over two years a loose conspiracy had festered, contended Liscano, composed of remnants of the old regime, ex-Nazis, and other stateless right-wingers throughout the Caribbean and across the Atlantic. They intended their attack against Betancourt to spark a conflagration that would restore the dictatorial regime. They nearly succeeded, given the ineffectiveness of the national security services and the “excessive weakness” of the democratic regime, continued Liscano. But the conspirators’ key failure lay in their inability to appreciate the new social and political reality in Venezuela. Despite popular frustration with the Betancourt administration, the people had no desire to return to the old ways of dictatorship. “In order to succeed,” claimed Liscano, “the conspirators would have had to unmask themselves and show themselves in the streets, running the risk of being chastised and crushed by a people already incensed by the repeated threats of political regression.” The right wing, concluded Liscano, ignored the fact that the “nation today is not the same as that of November 24, 1948 [the date of Pérez Jiménez’ accession to power].” Having sacrificed so much to topple despotism, he concluded, the people would not allow its recurrence.¹⁴³

Liscano nicely summed up the state of Caribbean politics and Venezuelan public sentiment. Whatever dissatisfaction the citizenry harbored with the transition to

¹⁴³ Juan Liscano, “Terrorismo Contra el Pueblo,” *El Nacional*, June 25, 1960, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “Para Triunfar, los conspiradores tendrán que descubrirse y echarse a la calle, corriendo el riesgo de ser derrotados y castigados por un pueblo ya exasperado por las reiteradas amenazas de regression política. Es preciso convencerse que la nación de hoy no es la misma que la del 24 de Noviembre de 1948. Los 10 años de dictadura Pérezjiménista le han enseñado que más vale pelear hast fin que plegarse, pues ninguna posibilidad de vida cívica le espera bajo el imperio una nueva dictadura.”

democracy and the poor distribution of wealth across social strata, there was little sentiment favoring a return to the autocratic politics of the postwar decade. By trying to force the issue through assassination and overt violence, the right-wing constituency made their plight that much more desperate. In the wake of the June attack, Venezuelans that had been ambivalent or hostile to Betancourt rallied around him. Liscano accurately judged that Venezuelans saw the assassination attempt as an affront to the nation. After a difficult first year and a half in office, Betancourt found himself to be a national hero and a symbol of democratic progress in the face of right wing reaction. As 1960 progressed, it would become clear that the right wing attack against political moderation had reached its high water mark. Venezuela enjoyed an unprecedented moment of unity behind its democratically elected leader. Political divisions temporarily faded away and there was little room for the remnants of the *perezjimenistas*.

The OAS collectively condemned the attack and several nations, including the United States and Cuba, extended individual support and condolences to Betancourt. Fidel Castro, despite being on shaky terms with the Venezuelan, declared the attack to be “an example of the reactionaries, the warmongering class, and the international gangsters, that are capable of carrying out an act so cowardly and repugnant.”¹⁴⁴ The link between the attack and the Dominican government was also immediate. General Josué López Henríquez, the Venezuelan defense minister and a survivor of the attack, declared from his hospital bed that he possessed evidence of Trujillo’s complicity. The intelligence services of Venezuela, the United States, and Argentina corroborated that Dominican

¹⁴⁴ “Repercusión Internacional del Atentado Contra Betancourt,” *El Nacional*, June 25, 1960, p. A8.

officials had arranged the entry into Venezuela of technicians to assemble the bomb.¹⁴⁵ As Betancourt recovered from his injuries, a mountain of evidence revealed that the highest levels of the Dominican government had been involved in the attack against him. Within days the OAS resolved to meet in San José, Costa Rica, to consider Venezuela's complaint of Dominican involvement in the assassination attempt.

Meanwhile the defiance of the Dominican dictator continued unabated. The Dominican press relentlessly painted the Cuban and Venezuelan governments as communist tools, and called the Eisenhower administration and State Department to task for its apparent willingness to surrender the hemisphere to Red agitators. In many cases, the propaganda thread sought to tap into fears of communism among the American public, circumventing the government in Washington. U.S. citizens had every reason to be alarmed by Communist inroads, and to question why there was no sense of panic in Washington, among those who ought to be looking out for the average American.¹⁴⁶ Finally, the Trujillo propaganda machine sought to cast the Dominican Republic as the victim of OAS juridical processes. The Dominican daily, *El Caribe*, praised Trujillo's stoicism in allowing the OAS investigative committee to visit the country, though there was little chance of fair treatment by the hemispheric body. These days, apparently, the investigators favored the accusers and required little burden of proof; the OAS, *El Caribe*

¹⁴⁵ Raúl Eduardo Romero, "El Dictador Trujillo Complicado en Atentado Contra Betancourt," *El Nacional*, June 25, 1960, p. A23.

¹⁴⁶ César Hernández Pérez, "El Pacto Rojo Entre Cuba y Venezuela," *El Caribe*, April 7, 1960, p. 4.

wryly observed, had bought Betancourt's tale about Dominican involvement lock, stock, and barrel.¹⁴⁷

By the eve of the August San José conference, the Trujillo propaganda machine had dispensed with any qualification in its attacks on Washington. The Dominican press asserted, for example, that the United States was and always had been a threat to Latin America. One needed to look no further than the Monroe Doctrine for evidence of U.S. designs on making Latin America an exclusive sphere for economic and political domination. The history of the Dominican Republic—up to the Era of Trujillo—was a case in point, a classic example of weak, complicit Latin leaders and exploitative U.S. businessmen combining to rob Latin America of its patrimony. Any U.S. declarations to the contrary were falsehoods, so went this propaganda thread.¹⁴⁸

The conference opened at an extremely delicate moment in the multilateral relations between the United States, Venezuela, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Washington had concluded that it could not have a constructive relationship with Castro or Trujillo, and that Betancourt was its best prospect within the Venezuelan political scene. The critical problem involved deciding which relationship ought to be terminated first—between Castro or Trujillo—and doing so in a manner that did not empower the remaining dictator or prejudice relations with Betancourt. CIA Director Allen Dulles had counseled Eisenhower that the Dominican problem might have to be solved first, despite the fact that Cuba represented a greater long-term threat to U.S. interests. After all,

¹⁴⁷ “La Visita de la Comisión de la OEA,” *El Caribe*, July 30, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ernesto Sánchez Rubirosa, “La Agresión Económica de los E.U. Contra América Latina,” *El Caribe*, August 4, 1960, p. 5.

Castro appeared capable of slipping into any void created by a Trujillo collapse, and Betancourt indicated he would abandon his partnership with Washington if it equivocated with Trujillo. White House Adviser Andrew J. Goodpaster echoed this counsel, noting that Latin American sentiment was generally identical to the Venezuelan desire to marginalize Trujillo before Castro. The best Washington could expect was to keep the Cuban and Dominican problems linked.¹⁴⁹ The difficulties experienced by the Eisenhower administration in allocating the U.S. sugar quota illustrate this problem. Throughout 1960 Eisenhower and the U.S. Congress had agreed to reduce Cuba's above-market price share of the domestic sugar market. Many senators sympathetic to Trujillo, however, had worked to funnel this share toward the Dominican Republic, a situation that enraged the Venezuelans.

From Caracas' perspective, no connection existed between the Cuban and Dominican issues. To Betancourt, Trujillo represented the clear threat, and the OAS needed to work against him first, and only later, if at all, against Castro. During a July 1960 National Security Council Meeting, Dulles and Herter noted this focus; Herter had even overheard the Venezuelan foreign minister advising his colleagues in the United Arab Republic and Bolivia that the non-aligned nations of the world ought to support

¹⁴⁹ National Security Council [hereafter NSC], "Discussion at the 450th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, July 7, 1960," July 11, 1960, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), NSC Series, Box 12, 450th Meeting of NSC July 7, 1960 folder, DDEPL. "Synopsis of State and Intelligence Material Reported to the President," August 19, 1960, White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-1961, Subject Series; Alphabetical Subseries, Box 14, Intelligence Briefing Notes, Vol II (5) folder, p. 2, DDEPL.

Castro.¹⁵⁰ The Venezuelan leader still thought Castro could be brought back into the political mainstream. In recent conversations with U.S. Ambassador Edward J. Sparks, Betancourt called for a one-month interval between the passage of anti-Trujillo sanctions and the consideration of anti-Castro sanctions. The Venezuelan president hoped that a group of neutral Latin American nations could use such time to secure a more positive posture from Castro.¹⁵¹

The San José conference ultimately became two conferences, as the OAS protocol dictated that the Sixth Meeting would consider the Venezuelan complaint against the Dominican Republic, and the Seventh Meeting would occur a few days afterwards and consider U.S. charges of communist infiltration in Cuba. With regard to the Sixth Meeting, Venezuela favored outright expulsion of the Dominican government from the OAS, while Herter proposed that Trujillo agree to hold internationally supervised elections. Ciudad Trujillo rejected even this moderate solution, portraying it as a flagrant violation of national sovereignty. The Dominican Republic had its own constitution and political institutions, said Ciudad Trujillo, and it could decide on its own whether to alter such institutions. Given as always to hyperbole, *El Caribe* declared that Herter's plan would constitute "the clearest and most humiliating example of intervention ever

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum of Discussion at the 452nd Meeting of the NSC, July 21, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume VI: Cuba* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 1022.

¹⁵¹ Lieutenant Colonel John S.D. Eisenhower [Major Eisenhower received a promotion to Lt. Col. in May 1960], "Synopsis of State and Intelligence Material Reported to the President," August 10, 1960, White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-1961, Subject Series; Alphabetical Subseries, Box 14, Intelligence Briefing Notes, Vol II (5) folder, pp. 4-6, DDEPL. Earlier in the summer, Betancourt had had a conversation with Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa in which he made plain his distaste for much of Cuba's domestic policy, but pledged immediate support for the Cuban government in the event of foreign intervention.

realized.”¹⁵² At the last minute, however, Herrera Báez tried to throw a curve ball, asking that an OAS commission be sent to his country to observe political processes with an eye towards possible presidential elections in 1962, as a way to forestall almost certain punitive sanctions. This move—coming on the penultimate day of the conference—did not pay dividends for Ciudad Trujillo. The United States, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay had already arranged a compromise that would punish the Dominican Republic, keep it inside the OAS, and oversee any potential reforms in the island republic.¹⁵³ In the final meeting of the conference, the OAS conclusively condemned the Dominican Republic. The body determined that a November 1959 attempt to drop anti-government leaflets over Caracas, along with the April 1960 Castro León invasion and the June 1960 assassination attempt against president Betancourt, had all been carried out with the knowledge and assistance of the highest levels of the Dominican government. As a result, the OAS called on its members to break immediately diplomatic relations with Ciudad Trujillo and to take part in an economic sanctions protocol that would begin with war materiel and broaden if the Dominican government continued its belligerent posture.¹⁵⁴

When the OAS published its sanctions, *El Caribe* adopted a suitable tone of outrage. Under the title “La Agresión Internacional,” the paper declared that all inter-American laws concerning sovereignty, security, and solidarity had been broken in a

¹⁵² “La Fórmula de Herter,” *El Caribe*, August 19, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁵³ Tad Szulc, “OAS Drafts Plan on Trujillo Regime; OAS Maps Steps on Trujillo Rule,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1960, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ *Sixth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Serving as Organ of Consultation in Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Final Act* (Washington, D.C.: The Secretariat of the Organization of American States, 1960).

totally arbitrary fashion. While the OAS employed perhaps more subtle methods than the U.S. gunboat diplomacy of an earlier era, continued the paper, the results still amounted to nothing less than aggression, intervention, and denial of the popular will of the Dominican people.¹⁵⁵ Trujillo played the theme of national solidarity in the face of international insult to the hilt. On August 24 he dispatched first lady Doña María Trujillo to receive the Dominican OAS delegation at the airport and lead them back through a gauntlet of cheering crowds to report to him at the national palace. Meanwhile, Trujillo disseminated a defiant speech made by Herrera Báez before he walked out of the San José meeting. On August 25, *El Caribe* signaled another step away from the United States. Under the sway of the deceitful State Department, said the periodical, Eisenhower now pursued a policy of appeasement toward Cuba and unwarranted hostility toward the Dominican Republic, developments that Trujillo refused to tolerate. Accordingly, media outlets like Radio Caribe would now be cooperating with Soviet news agency TASS as means to provide the Dominican people with unbiased information from abroad. The preponderance of U.S. reporters in Ciudad Trujillo, concluded *El Caribe*, simply ensured that their calumnies would be the only image of the nation portrayed in the world press.¹⁵⁶

THE DEATH RATTLES OF THE RIGHT WING, SEPTEMBER 1960-JUNE 1961

Following the OAS sanctions, the union between Trujillo and the Venezuelan right ruptured under the pressure of international isolation. Nevertheless, the right wing

¹⁵⁵ "La Agresión Internacional," *El Caribe*, August 21, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ "El Supremo Error de Eisenhower," and "Meridiano del Caribe: La Agencia TASS en Radio Caribe," *El Caribe*, August 25, 1960, p. 5.

in both countries managed a lingering existence for several more months. The budding partnership between Washington and Caracas would have several obstacles to negotiate during this political sea change from extremism to moderation.

In early September, all of the American republics except the Dominican Republic convened in Bogotá, Colombia, to consider the approval of Operation Pan-America. While Cuba railed against the plan as a cover for continued U.S. economic exploitation, by and large the meetings served to reinforce a spirit of hemispheric unity and signal a return to normalcy following the convulsions of the summer. Indeed, back in Caracas Interior Minister Dr. Luis Augusto Dubuc hosted a meeting of representative of the Punto Fijo coalition to discuss the imminent restoration of the constitutional guarantees suspended after the June attack against Betancourt. By September 11 the government had followed through on these promises. As the Venezuelan president informed the nation in an address on September 13, there was cause for guarded optimism. The coalition stood on solid footing, and proof of economic recovery could be seen in the vast increases in government revenue and significant new levels investment by foreign capital. The forces of right wing reaction, said Betancourt, had been “damaged but not eliminated.” The focus of the nation, he declared, should be on internal improvement, both in terms of projects like the construction of affordable public housing, and in the elimination of the last threats to public peace and order.¹⁵⁷ In October Caracas played host to a large gathering of Dominican exile groups. The consensus here was that “Chapita” would disappear, almost as if by osmosis, at the beginning of the New Year

¹⁵⁷ “La Coalición Debe Mantenerse,” *El Nacional*, September 14, 1960, p. A1.

with or without sugar markets or any other ability to secure U.S. aid. As far as the exile community was concerned, the dictator now faded away like a ghost under the weight of his crimes. The only issue to be settled now was whether he and his supporters would finally comport themselves in the spirit of justice and respect for the rule of law, or be brushed aside.¹⁵⁸ Publicly, Trujillo and the right seemed to have already been relegated to the dustbin of history.

In private, however, both the United States and Venezuela continued to undermine the weakened *perezjimenista*-Trujillo faction. In the spring of 1960, the Eisenhower administration authorized the construction of a radio station on Swan Island, a guano island off the coast of Honduras, for the purpose of broadcasting anti-Castro propaganda throughout the Caribbean. As 1960 progressed U.S. policymakers sought to use Radio Swan to promote and exploit domestic opposition to Trujillo as well. Radio Swan programming focused on the deepening conflict between Trujillo and the Catholic Church—suggesting that he should be opposed not simply for being a tyrant but also for being a poor Christian—and featured news and editorials from various Dominican dissident groups. A typical example of this format was a letter from an opposition group—“25th of November”—that general consul and *de facto* CIA Chief-of-Station Henry Dearborn recommended in January 1961. The letter criticized the waffling of the Church in alternately denouncing and supporting Trujillo. The opposition called to account those who, like Archbishop Octavio Beras, pursued an accommodation with the dictator. “Perhaps Archbishop Beras forgets,” the letter suggested, “that the dignity of

¹⁵⁸ “Chapita Desaparecerá a Comienzos de 1961,” *El Nacional*, October 18, 1960, p. A25.

his office imposes unavoidable responsibilities and obligations, and that the reputation of the Church essentially demands a permanent commitment to self-sacrifice. Does this Cardinal ignore the fact that he has aligned the Church with a tyranny that denies Christ?”¹⁵⁹

The Radio Swan broadcasts quickly came under fire from the Dominican propaganda apparatus. On August 26, for example, *La Nacion* portrayed the radio station—whose existence was not acknowledged by the United States—as the spearhead of a U.S. imperialist conspiracy. The island ought to be the property of Honduras, said *La Nacion*, but instead the United States had seized it and stationed Marines and spies there to spread lies into sovereign countries and weaken them in advance of naked military intervention. Daily, *La Nacion* continued, the United States encouraged terrorism and sabotage, promising to provide arms to dissident groups to be used in insurrections. Further, Dominican propaganda insisted, Washington employed Venezuela as a lackey in this “immoral and provocative” campaign. Swan Island typified the larger pattern of U.S. imperialism. “There is no difference between Swan and Puerto

¹⁵⁹ U.S. General Consul Henry Dearborn to Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Frank J. Devine, January 18, 1961, RG 59-250-63-1-5-7, Department of State, ARC# 2363836, #A1 3148, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Office of the Special Assistant on Communism, Subject Files, Dominican Republic-Chronology to Peru, Box 9, Dominican Republic-(Misc) 1961 folder, NACPM. The original Spanish reads, “¿Olvida acaso el Arzobispo Beras que las dignidades imponen responsabilidades y debes ineludibles y que esencialmente las dignidades de la iglesia exigen una permanente vocación de sacrificios? Ignora este purpurado que aliarse la iglesia con la tiranía en negar al mismo Cristo?” Papal Nuncio Lino Zanini ordered a Pastoral Letter to be read in Catholic Churches throughout the country in January 1960. The letter drew attention to a recent wave of detentions and human rights abuses by the SIM. The letter also informed congregations that they were not obligated to support a government that was so out of step with universal laws of justice handed down by God. It is worth noting what a threat a Pastoral Letter could be for a Latin American dictator. The issuing of a similar letter by the Venezuelan Catholic Church in December 1957 played a crucial role in the erosion of public support for Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and helped pave the way for the January 1958 revolution which deposed him.

Rico or Saint Thomas or Hawaii,” the editorial stated. “A colony is a colony. Possession is possession, although rights and legal norms have been discarded by the wayside.”¹⁶⁰

The United States, meanwhile, also remained in contact with dissident groups inside the Dominican Republic. At least within the CIA, there was a tacit understanding that these groups intended to assassinate Trujillo. In February 1961 CIA agents met with dissidents in New York City and discussed specific plans in which U.S. weaponry and expertise would be used in killing the Dominican leader. Specifically, the dissidents requested planning assistance and training to accomplish the task, as well as the provision of silenced sniper rifles, grenades, and various sorts of exotic poisons. By March these requests had circulated through channels in Washington, but no firm action had been taken beyond the decision to send a minute quantity of small arms to the U.S. Embassy in Ciudad Trujillo for potential distribution to the dissidents.¹⁶¹

Trujillo, not surprisingly, sought to spin the increasing isolation of his nation in a positive manner during the autumn of 1960. Commenting on the recently passed Act of Bogotá, pro-Trujillo writer José M. Pichardo insisted that the Dominican Republic would remain a hemispheric leader in economic development and social progress. The fabric of the nation was simply too strong for there to be any other outcome. After all, in the Dominican Republic Trujillo had ensured social justice, protection for the working

¹⁶⁰ “El Mano Imperialista de Swan,” *El Nacion*, August 26, 1960, RG 59-250-63-1-7, Department of State, ARC #2068468 #A1 3151: Records Relating to the Dominican Republic; 1956-1966, Press (July-Dec 1960) Thru OAS 1961, Container #4, Press, Dominican Republic, (July-Dec) 1960 folder, NACPM. The original Spanish reads, “No hay diferencia entre Swan y Puerto Rico o Saint Thomas, o Hawaii. Colonia es colonia. Posesión es posesión. Aunque el derecho y la legalidad estén echados a un lado.”

¹⁶¹ *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders...*, pp 198-199.

classes, basic human wellbeing, and the spirit of democracy and altruism.¹⁶² The Dominican nation had no reason to lament its own condition, continued Pichardo and could only bear sad witness to the destruction wrought upon the hemisphere by Cuba, Venezuela, and the United States. On October 11, *El Caribe* asserted that Betancourt teetered on the verge of collapse, and that he was manufacturing imaginary problems abroad in a desperate attempt to prop up his regime domestically. Meanwhile, the Dominican people found strength through their enduring devotion to Trujillo. Trujillo's critics "thought that if they destroyed Trujillo they could destroy the Dominican people. [Yet] they did not know the Dominican people and were unaware of the immortal work of Trujillo, whose work placed him on par with the greatest statesmen of the century."¹⁶³ Assessing the prospects for the upcoming U.S. presidential elections on October 18, *El Caribe* suggested that the issue was not whether Kennedy or Nixon won, but if the eventual winner would recognize the need for the United States to reassess its approach to Latin America. The clumsiness of Washington's relations with its Latin neighbors had significantly deteriorated the state of inter-American solidarity and empathy. Under Trujillo's leadership, the newspaper concluded, the Dominican Republic stood with its sister states, waiting hopefully for a new era in U.S.-Latin American relations.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² José M. Pichardo, "Labor de Trujillo Supera Programa del Acta de Bogotá," *El Caribe*, September 21, 1960, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Salvador Martínez, "Al Vuelo: Rómulo Betancourt Camino de su Fin," *El Caribe*, October 11, 1960, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, "Pensaron destruir a Trujillo y se destruyen todos ellos. Parece que no conocen a los Dominicanos ni saben nada de la obra inmortal de Trujillo, esa obra que lo acredita como el más alto estadista de su siglo."

¹⁶⁴ "Día a Día: Las Elecciones en E.U.," *El Caribe*, October 18, 1960, p. 9.

While making this public bluster, it appears evident that during the winter of 1960-1961 Trujillo made a desperate and ultimately unsuccessful overture toward Cuba and the Soviet Union in an effort to stay in power. Given his enmity towards Castro and towards communism such an overture seems strange, but also indicative of his level of desperation at the time. What is perhaps even stranger is that both the Cubans and the Soviets apparently gave audience to these overtures before rejecting them. In the case of Cuba, there was even a short period of *modus vivendi* and partial reciprocal public support in the propaganda realm. Such a situation appears quite bizarre, but the extant sources do corroborate the existence of the episode. In the months since the San José conference the Dominican government had suffered two critical setbacks: it appeared unlikely that the country would get as much extra income from gains of Cuba's share of the U.S. sugar quota as it needed; and the Eisenhower administration gradually expanded economic sanctions arising from the August meetings. Over the summer, Trujillo's allies in the U.S. Congress had prevented Eisenhower from blocking portions of the cancelled Cuban sugar share away the Dominican Republic. Trujillo, therefore, stood to get nearly 320,000 tons of sugar added to his 1960 quota of 130,000 tons, providing a windfall of nearly \$170 million dollars over the next two years. Eisenhower nonetheless succeeded in imposing a \$0.02 per pound tax on Dominican sugar, making the U.S. price equal to that of the international market and depriving the Dominican Republic of \$13 million in income in the last three months of 1960 alone. Though the tax hurt Trujillo, it did little to mollify Venezuela, which insisted that the United States could not justify taking income away from Cuba and redirecting it to the Dominican Republic. As a result, the

Eisenhower administration felt compelled to support expanded OAS sanctions such as those favored by Caracas.¹⁶⁵

In October, Eisenhower and Herter huddled to discuss renewed criticism from Mexico, Venezuela, and other Latin governments that the United States was being overly harsh towards Castro while treating Trujillo with kid gloves. No easy solution presented itself, since there was no viable alternative leadership in Ciudad Trujillo, and the Dominican government provided no outright provocation to justify U.S. intervention. In December Eisenhower and Herter wrestled with the fact that the United States was obligated to purchase approximately 228,000 tons of Dominican sugar in the first three months of 1961. The administration sought to mollify Betancourt by asking the U.S. Congress for discretionary authority to block further purchases. Herter felt, however, that Eisenhower would have to do more to support Venezuela, given that the news of the purchase would give ammunition to Betancourt's domestic critics, particularly within leftist and communist circles. Accordingly he advised the president to make concessions in other areas if he hoped to avoid Venezuelan charges of bad faith. Eisenhower therefore approved prohibitions of petroleum products, trucks, and spare parts to the Dominican Republic to go into effect in the New Year.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Hall, *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic...*, pp. 97-98, 101-102.

¹⁶⁶ Herter, "Memorandum of Conversation with the President October 13, 1960," October 15, 1960, White House Office: Office of the Staff Secretary, 1952-1961, Subject Series; State Department Subseries, Box 4, State Department—October 1960-January 1961 (1) folder, DDEPL. Herter to the President, "Application of Additional Economic Measures against the Dominican Republic," December 8, 1960. White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-1961, International Series, Box 4, Dominican Republic [May-December 1960] folder, DDEPL.

Dominican-Cuban détente, if not alliance, seemed to be in the air as the summer of 1960 progressed. As *Washington Post* journalist Gerry Robichaud observed at the end of July, the radio propaganda war of words between the two nations had essentially ceased at the beginning of the summer. While the two governments still despised one another, the ceasefire suggested that they had found the cycle of conflict between them exhausting and unsustainable. It was especially curious, then, that, when the OAS announced its judgment of Dominican government guilt in the commission of widespread human rights abuses, Raúl Castro issued a strident defense of the Trujillo government before Ciudad Trujillo even had time to formulate a response. Robichaud admitted that Castro's assertion of Dominican sovereignty and immunity from OAS sanctions might have been self-serving. After all, a key Cuban fear at this time was that the OAS would use judgments against the Dominican Republic as pretexts for later action against Cuba. Still, the journalist felt it unlikely that Castro would extend himself on Trujillo's behalf unless he had some assurance that the Dominican dictator would follow suit if the roles were reversed.¹⁶⁷ *New York Times* writer Will Lisners echoed these feelings in August, following the Sixth Meeting of Consultation. Whereas Robichaud's assertions relied on circumstance, Lisners relied on observers and informants in Washington and Ciudad Trujillo. His sources indicated that Trujillo and his advisers were frustrated enough with their inability to gain more access to Cuba's sugar quota to forswear continued trade relations with the United States. Accordingly, they considered the utility of pursuing an

¹⁶⁷ Gerry Robichaud, "Is Gen. Trujillo Cuba's New Ally?," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1960, p. A18.

accommodation with Cuba. In the longer run, they probably at least explored the likelihood of securing a beneficial trade agreement with the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸

New York Times correspondent Max Frankel also picked up on this story during an assignment in Ciudad Trujillo. Having culled information from his contacts there, as well as from Havana and San Juan, Frankel reported in early January on apparent high-level meetings between Cuba and the Dominican Republic designed to lighten each party's load of foreign policy concerns. Senior Trujillo assistants Johnny Abbes García and General Arturo Espaillat had met with Castro representatives in eastern Cuba near the end of 1960. At these meetings, the representatives had formalized an agreement to observe a mutual propaganda ceasefire and to make common cause against Venezuela and the United States. If these reports were credible, it would therefore be no coincidence that Radio Caribe chose this time to begin a new campaign of concerted praise for Cuba and vitriol against the United States and the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶⁹ In December 1960 broadcasts, for example, Radio Caribe criticized president-elect Kennedy and suggested that his inability to fix the mess in the Caribbean left by Eisenhower would force the Dominican Republic to turn to the Soviets for help.¹⁷⁰

Also following this story was Tad Szulc, whose sources in Washington indicated that Trujillo's foreign policy plans involved far more than simply an accommodation or

¹⁶⁸ Will Lissners, "Dominicans Calm after OAS Move; People Show Little Concern over Diplomatic Crisis—Opposition is Silent," *New York Times*, August 25, 1960, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ Max Frankel, "Castro and Trujillo Call Truce, Diplomats in Caribbean Believe; They Say Cuba and Dominican Republic Have Put Aside Quarrels to Avoid Adding to Their Troubles," *New York Times*, January 5, 1961, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ "Radio Scores Kennedy; Dominican Broadcast Predicts U.S. will not Solve 'Snarl'," *New York Times*, December 27, 1960, p. 3.

alliance with Cuba. Either immediately before or after the Cuba overture, secret police boss Abbes García had traveled through the Soviet bloc soliciting economic and moral support for the flagging Trujillo regime. Just as Castro had acceded only to a *modus vivendi* with Trujillo rather than a formal pact, the Soviets and Eastern Europeans had apparently listened politely before wishing the Dominican diplomat well on his journey home. According to Szulc's sources, not even the propaganda victory of having another Caribbean country declare loyalty to the USSR could offset the damage that would be done to the Soviet image by reaching out to someone as universally detested as Trujillo. The fact that the Dominican economy continued to falter in the first months of 1961 increased the probability that the Soviets had given Abbes García the cold shoulder. In response, Trujillo had reportedly begun plotting a last ditch effort to replicate the Castro program, expropriating U.S. property and somehow forcing the USSR to welcome him into the socialist camp.¹⁷¹

Whatever happened during Abbes García's tour, signs of détente continued to emanate from Havana and Ciudad Trujillo throughout the spring of 1961. As far as the outgoing Eisenhower administration was concerned, the Castro-Trujillo denouement had become formalized. According to an Eisenhower administration brief provided to president-elect Kennedy in January 1961, "a Hitler-Stalin type of cooperation between Castro and Trujillo appears to exist."¹⁷² On January 6, Che Guevara announced during a

¹⁷¹ Tad Szulc, "A Dominican Bid to Moscow Seen; Diplomats Report on Mission by Trujillo Agent in 1960," *New York Times*, May 15, 1961, p. 13.

¹⁷² Task Force on Immediate Latin American Problems, "Report to the President-Elect," Box 1074, Pre-Presidential Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts [hereafter JFKL].

radio broadcast that Trujillo was “now our friend.” Radio Caribe reciprocated this gesture in its observance of May Day, suggesting that *trujillismo* had been a “vanguard of socialism” long before the Cuban revolution.¹⁷³ In April 1961, shortly after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Ciudad Trujillo made it known that it would be willing to exchange the few surviving prisoners from the June 1959 Cuban raid against the Dominican Republic, for those prisoners in Cuba who had participated in a similar raid originating from the Dominican Republic.¹⁷⁴

In mid-May, however, Ciudad Trujillo publicly put an end to any potential alignment with the socialist camp. The *New York Times* issued new reports that Trujillo had pursued an accommodation with Castro and the Soviets, prompting the Dominican government to issue a statement declaring that its opposition to Castro and Communism, and support for democracy, was as strong as ever. “I’d like to remind those who have suggested the possibility of a so-called Ciudad Trujillo-Havana axis,” Consul General Luis R. Mercado said, “that the Government of the Dominican Republic has not at any moment moved an inch away from its firm position alongside the democratic nations in the Western Hemisphere.”¹⁷⁵ It would appear, then, that any accommodation by Trujillo with Cuba or the Soviet bloc never reached an advanced or formal stage. Thus ended a rather bizarre episode in an already-confusing Caribbean drama. Perhaps the only way to

¹⁷³ Peter Kihss, “News Held a Day; Murder of Dictator Laid to a General Seeking Revenge, Trujillo Is Shot Dead by Assassins but His Regime Reports Army Is Still in Control,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1961, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ “Cuba Gets Captive Bid; Dominican Republic Suggests Exchange of Prisoners,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1961, p. 20.

¹⁷⁵ “Dominicans Deny Deal; Consul General Says There Is No Cuban Understanding,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1961, p. 4.

make sense of someone as idealistic as Guevara offering praise to a tyrant such as Trujillo was that the Cuban leadership had made the conclusion that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Perhaps Castro and Guevara determined that their opposition to the United States would somehow be abetted by a more relaxed relationship with the Dominican Republic. Because this situation ceased almost as soon as it began, and because the sources on such a situation are almost nonexistent, historical conclusions must be largely speculative. While rumor and innuendo persisted for a time, in any case, Trujillo apparently had returned to the notion of going it alone.

Indeed, a survey of *El Caribe* writings in the first months of 1961 indicates that Trujillo had decided to attempt to close off his nation from the problems of the hemisphere. The paper minced no words in its assessment the Eisenhower presidency, and U.S. policy toward Latin America, on the day of new U.S. president John F. Kennedy’s inauguration. “President Eisenhower today abandons the White House,” the editors declared, “leaving behind a series of vexatious problems in the realm of international relations, the fruit of his clumsiness and bad faith in the treatment of those nations that traditionally maintain friendly relations with the United States.” Eisenhower’s actions had severely damaged U.S. prestige, and it would take the greatest effort by the incoming administration to repair Washington’s image abroad. The outgoing president was a pale shadow of previous U.S. statesmen like Washington and Jefferson.¹⁷⁶ The island nation had no need, either, of the incoming president’s economic imperialism masked as aid and bilateral uplift, or of the Caribbean states in the thrall of

¹⁷⁶ “Ante el Retiro de Eisenhower,” *El Caribe*, January 20, 1961, p. 4.

communism. On March 21, for example, *El Caribe* not only denounced the Alliance for Progress, but also suggested that aid program was actually the intellectual heir to the work carried out by Ciudad Trujillo for the last three decades. Under the leadership of Trujillo, the nation stood for the greatest ambitions of American society, and for the greatest accomplishments in economic and social progress. The Alliance for Progress, therefore, was simply a replication of the Dominican national agenda. Furthermore, the sole reason for the Dominican Republic's exclusion was the fact that Betancourt had infiltrated Kennedy's inner circle, based on historic friendships with liberal advisers to the president like Adolph Berle.¹⁷⁷

Back in Venezuela, the public discourse centered on the evolving relationship between Betancourt, Kennedy, and Castro: Trujillo, Pérez Jiménez, and their constituents were becoming afterthoughts. As the next chapter will explore in greater detail, much of the work of Venezuelan politicians involved the apportionment of power among the newly ascendant center-left coalition. In the wider Caribbean Basin, leaders and pundits attempted to make sense of the embryonic Alliance for Progress, and of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Yet the “ghost of Chapita”—“chapita” being a slang term for bottle caps that Venezuelans used to make fun of Trujillo's vast array of medals and decorations—still lingered, as *El Nacional* columnist José Ramón Medina suggested, like some sort of immutable force of universal evil. For decades Trujillo and those like him had manipulated Caribbean politics and authored countless crimes that offended basic

¹⁷⁷ Pascual Federico Germán, “La Obra de Trujillo en el Ambito del Discurso de Kennedy,” and Frank Farris, “No Necesitamos el Plan de Colonización de Kennedy,” *El Caribe*, March 21, 1960, p. 4.

values of human decency and popular government, Medina wrote. New political trends had crippled these “artisans of black magic,” yet they retained a lingering potency to inflict suffering on the unfortunate remaining captive peoples of the region. Though the progressive powers of the hemisphere could easily eliminate these last vestiges of “medieval” tyranny, the simple fact was that history had left behind the Caribbean right wing, judged Medina. As he noted, recent events had brought the Cold War into the hemisphere in an unprecedented degree. As a result, the great powers of the world targeted the region for their most spirited avowals of national democracy and individual liberty. Apparently, however, the Dominican Republic had ceased to matter in the considerations of Cold War policymakers. Therefore this subject population could not count on outside assistance to free itself.¹⁷⁸

U.S. policymakers, of course, had lost much sleep trying to find a way to remove Trujillo from power without ushering in a communist regime. But on May 31, 1961, a group of Dominicans took matters into its own hands to accomplish that which the “great powers” identified by Medina could not. At approximately 10:00 p.m., seven assassins opened fire on Trujillo as his car left the capital city on the way to the dictator’s estate in San Cristobal. Among the assassins were two brothers of Octavio de la Maza, the man whom the Dominican government had accused of killing American pilot Robert Murphy before his own staged jailhouse suicide.¹⁷⁹ The participation of the De la Maza family in the assassination thus provided a curious bookend to the Galíndez affair, and to the

¹⁷⁸ José Ramón Medina, “El Fantasma Chapita,” *El Nacional*, May 25, 1961, p. A4.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Kihss, “Killers Still at Large,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1961, p. 8.

campaign of terror and intimidation waged by the right wing in the Caribbean Basin since 1956. Tragically, the assassins failed to catalyze the spontaneous uprising for which they had hoped in their homeland. The dictator's son, Ramfis, initiated a brutal crackdown on dissidents and managed to maintain power until fleeing the country at the end of 1961. Nevertheless, their actions helped empower the forces of political moderation and modernization in the hemisphere, and helped energize the debate over the future of hemispheric politics.¹⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

In a 1960 letter to Thomas C. Mann, Henry Dearborn had compared Trujillo to the fictional Count Dracula, suggesting that only by driving a stake through his heart could the Dominican people conclusively free themselves from the curse he wrought. Such language invoked the sentiments expressed by Rómulo Betancourt during his years in exile and his first years as president of Venezuela, when he suggested that the right wing dictatorships of Latin America were dinosaurs, relics of a primitive age in hemispheric politics who relied on dark and unnatural powers to postpone their own extinction. If such imagery had any validity, June 1961 marked the lifting of a curse and the dawning of a new age in the public affairs of the Americas. Ciudad Trujillo, so long the last resort for vanquished dictators like Batista and Pérez Jiménez, had itself

¹⁸⁰ It has been a matter of continual speculation as to the level of U.S. involvement in the Trujillo assassination. In particular many have questioned whether the CIA supplied the weapons that killed the dictator. The research done for this dissertation indicates that U.S. authorities cultivated ties with dissidents whose known intention was to carry out an assassination, and that the CIA and the State Department were in the process of smuggling weapons into Ciudad Trujillo that might be supplied to potential assassins. As of May 1961, however, there was no direct U.S. involvement in such affairs, and the eventual assassins carried out their deed with weapons they had procured independently of the United States.

vanquished the ultimate example of the American *caudillo*. The revolution for social justice—predicted by leaders like Milton Eisenhower and Juscelino Kubitschek years before—appeared to be gathering momentum. Moreover, as presidents Betancourt and Kennedy had observed in their inaugural addresses, it appeared to be a revolution guided by democratic moderation and not by the caprices of far right wing or left wing ideologues. The “decade of maximum effort” promised by the Alliance for Progress was barely a few months old, and for the burgeoning center-left constituency in the Americas the moment seemed propitious for the redress of 140 years of U.S.-Latin American ambivalence and acrimony. In the leading nations of the hemisphere, democratically elected leaders stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the new U.S. president.

Despite such bright prospects for the centrist coalition, however, ominous storm clouds had already formed on the political horizon. Fidel Castro had recently made official his devotion to communism and his allegiance to the Soviet Union. Such a development added only a bit of venom to the already-poisoned relationship between the United States and Cuba. But it bore the potential to put subtle fractures in the Venezuelan political scene into far bolder relief. There had been many tense and tender ties between leaders in Caracas and Havana for several years and, despite key differences in their posture toward the Washington, the two groups had largely made common cause in the struggle against Trujillo and the Caribbean right wing. Now, there could be no fudging of Castro’s devotion to nationalism or communism, and the Venezuelan center-left would have to decide where their loyalties lay. In terms of potential divisions, the Venezuelans needed little help. Almost as soon as the San José conference had wrapped

up, it became clear that all was not well within the Punto Fijo coalition. Jóvito Villaba's URD had always been an uneasy partner in the arrangement, and as 1960 concluded the party made clear that it nurtured deep sympathies for the Cuban revolution, and that it felt poorly treated by its AD and Copei brethren. One of the great victories of U.S. policy toward Latin America had been the cultivation of the Betancourt government as a bulwark against political extremism, and the Kennedy administration had inherited a key partner in the implementation of socioeconomic modernization in the form of the Alliance for Progress. Yet the extreme left wing had its own agenda to pursue. For the Caracas-Washington partnership, the transition from managing right-wing agitation to left-wing agitation suggested that its future was a case of "out of the frying pan and into the fire."

Chapter 3: Contesting Liberalism: Kennedy, Betancourt, & the Newest Left in Latin America, 1960-1963

The decline of right-wing dictatorships in the wake of Latin American democratization combined with John F. Kennedy's victory in the 1960 U.S. presidential election to contribute to a general air of optimism in the hemisphere. Yet this apparently positive picture obscured significant problems. Democracy and "democratization" remained hotly contested ideas, as demonstrated by the erosion of Venezuela's governing coalition throughout 1960. Splinters from this coalition joined already-excluded leftists in a quickening embrace of violence in 1961 and 1962, making the Venezuelan armed forces restive guardians of democracy or potential usurpers of it. In Washington, meanwhile, the president-elect advanced a bold vision of democratic expansion and socioeconomic modernization while also intimating that armed force and coercion might be necessary to protect such an agenda from predation. The hemisphere would be a land of unprecedented peace and prosperity, or the U.S. and its allies would eliminate communist enemies to make it so. By the middle of 1963, these competing views churned in a strong and bitter brew: Venezuela labored under the weight of rural insurgency and urban terrorism; Cuba supported this insurgency and undermined Soviet leadership in the communist world; and Washington harbored increasing doubts about the strength of Latin American democracy in the face of leftist extremism.

This chapter examines the growth of the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (*Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario*, or MIR) in Venezuela and the subsequent MIR-PCV-Cuban creation of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (*Fuerzas Armadas de*

Liberación Nacional, or FALN) as a tool for urban terrorism and rural insurgency. The chapter then explores Betancourt's efforts to defeat these challengers while preserving the basic democratic character of his government, an especially difficult task given the stridency with which many Venezuelan leaders demanded the return of law and order. From there, the chapter studies the dynamics of U.S.-Venezuelan relations, as the Betancourt and Kennedy administrations confronted the problem of Caribbean communism and the influence of the communist world in the Western hemisphere. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the 1960-1963 leftist attempt to topple Betancourt failed because it could not catalyze either the military takeover or government abandonment of democracy it sought, and because it could not overcome the growing skill of the Washington-Caracas alliance in isolating and weakening leftist extremism through diplomatic and military means.

INTO THE WILDERNESS: THE LEFTISTS DEPART THE PUNTO FIJO COALITION

Throughout early 1960 a schism deepened between the youth wing and senior leadership of the governing Democratic Action Party (AD). The elders believed that the idealist activism of their juniors threatened to go beyond youthful folly and become genuinely dangerous. The younger activists suggested that the elders had traded away the revolutionary mandates of 1928 and 1958 for comfort and power. This feud soon became both public and irreconcilable. The old guard eventually ejected the youth, settling affairs in their own house but also unleashing a potentially dangerous force into regional politics. The youth felt compelled to prove their ideological bona fides, and the anti-status quo message of Cuba's Fidel Castro and structuralism of Leninism proved

attractive and empowering. By 1961 a strengthening youth movement, bent on settling its scores with Betancourt and AD, openly flirted with violent revolution and aligned itself with foreign powers opposed to U.S. regional interests.

Writing in *El Nacional*, poet and essayist Juan Liscano criticized the youth for advancing foolhardy rhetoric and demagogic ideology. Liscano asserted that they portrayed themselves as enlightened progressives, heroic in their opposition to the United States, support for Castro, and dedication to purging the senile old guard from Venezuelan politics. Yet once stripped of this glossy façade, Liscano claimed, it became clear that the youth actually clamored for a generational civil war. Such carnage would indeed be spectacular and revolutionary, but also patently counterproductive. To Liscano, the young and the old were complimentary rather than oppositional: the competent and credible political leader was one who alloyed the spirit of youth with the maturity of age. The great Venezuelan politicians—the PCV’s Gustavo Machado, Jóvito Villalba of the URD, and of course Betancourt—had devoted decades to the careful construction of durable political movements, rather than bandy about for instant, radical change. Someday the youth of the 1960s would be called to lead the nation, Liscano concluded, but in the meantime their task was to improve themselves through moderation and self-control.¹⁸¹

Senior AD leader Luis Esteban Rey further chided the youth for shortsighted recklessness. Rey warned that a normally benign youthful spirit was morphing into a

¹⁸¹ Juan Liscano, “Sobre la Juventud,” *El Nacional*, March 8, 1960, p. 4. Liscano and the older generation had reason to fret about the orientation of the youth. As he noted in this editorial, 70 percent of the population of Venezuela was under 30 years of age and 52 percent of the population between the ages of 18 and 20.

selfish pursuit of goals at odds with AD, the broader Punto Fijo coalition, and the Venezuelan populace itself. By parroting the PCV line that AD was “selling out” the popular classes, the youth stumbled into the game of coups and reactionary intrigue, a game they were far too foolish to play successfully. Rather than dedicate their selves to a *process* of responsible development, Rey said, the youth “flirted with the ghosts of other revolutions that do not correspond to our classes, circumstances, and social reality.” True, many of AD’s policy prescriptions had been unpopular with the citizenry, but the party took responsibility and accepted public scrutiny, something that authoritarian regimes could not claim, and something for which the youth demonstrated little inclination.¹⁸²

The AD youth, styling themselves the “Generation of ’58,” felt differently. They believed that Venezuelan politics had matured to the point where the masses, rather than the elites, could assert themselves in national debates. As AD youth leader and eventual MIR co-founder Américo Martín recalled, the fall of Pérez Jiménez ushered in a period when he and his peers “had the false sensation that whatever thing we proposed to achieve we could attain.”¹⁸³ The youth admired the Generation of ’28 for its spirit and vision, but felt that the mantle of dynamism had passed to the youth. It was the youth, claimed the self-styled Generation of ’58, who did the hard work of clandestine

¹⁸² Luis Esteban Rey, “La Juventud y los Partidos,” *El Nacional*, March 25, 1960, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Lo más correcto como línea política, es cerrar filas en torno a este proceso y no dedicarse a coquetear con el fantasma de otras revoluciones que no corresponden a nuestro medio, a nuestra circunstancias ni a nuestra realidad social.” And, “Esta es historia presente, solo invisible para los ciegos, para los que se atienen únicamente a la propaganda o a una visita turística superficial.”

¹⁸³ Alfredo Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín* (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978), p. 26. The original Spanish reads, “El período que siguió fue de reconstrucción; nuestras ideas cambiaron y tuvimos la falsa sensación de que cualquier cosa que nos propusiéramos la podíamos conquistar.”

organization and party discipline while the senior leadership remained in exile throughout the 1950s. Despite two years in power, the elders who returned to participate in the Larrazábal and Betancourt governments had done little to improve socioeconomic conditions; they had exacerbated them through deepening austerity measures. The Cuban revolution seemed to be an attractive model. It appeared to make headway in improving socioeconomic conditions, and suggested that socialism could “speak Spanish,” as Martín and many leftists were fond of saying.¹⁸⁴ Thus the rift yawned: Liscano and Rey regarded the youth as unwitting pawns of the communists, and Castro as little more than a conjurer of cheap tricks; Martín and his cohort viewed themselves as vanguards for a new era of hemispheric justice, and looked to Castro as a visionary pan-American statesman.

On April 12, the rift tore open as AD Secretary General Dr. Jesús Paz Galarraga announced the expulsion of 16 members of AD including Domingo Alberto Rangel, Martín, and Simón Saez Merida. The catalyst was a series of pieces Martín had written for the *La Esfera* daily, in which he suggested that the youth might abandon the mainstream AD for its anti-democratic inadequacies, as had occurred with the APRA Party in Peru. Referring directly to the articles, Galarraga accused the offenders of an unacceptable breach of party discipline; they had every chance to discuss their grievances internally but continually criticized the leadership publicly. Further, the dissidents advocated policies and doctrines that blatantly contradicted the tenets of the party. Since they were so purposefully out of step with AD, nothing could be done but to remove

¹⁸⁴ Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*, pp. 34, 36.

them and eliminate the party Youth Bureau entirely, he declared.¹⁸⁵ AD thus isolated and purged a malignant ideological strain. In the process, however, they sliced off another portion of their governing base.

Remaining defiant, the expelled leaders formed the AD Left. Having chosen this route they faced a paradox of having little tangible local support but an ambitious agenda largely informed by foreign ideologies. Senior dissident Domingo Alberto Rangel admitted that leaving the umbrella of AD forced them to develop a constituency and support network on the fly. In Rangel's mind the AD Left was a vanguard that could rapidly unite middle class intellectuals and the urban poor based on common suffering under the Betancourt regime. But in reality the Punto Fijo coalition enjoyed at least moderate support within these demographics. Nor could the new party count on rural support, where the *campesinos* either endorsed AD or remained apolitical, in large part because many of them were ethnic Colombians.¹⁸⁶ As dim as the AD Left's prospects were for building a significant local constituency, however, the party needed only to look across the Caribbean to see an apparently magical solution. The Cuban Revolution promised a wholly new political reality, replacing the old paradigm in which a progressive class formed an alliance with the armed forces to capture the state without fundamentally altering it. Further, this revolution suggested that radical change could

¹⁸⁵ "Expulsados 16 Líderes de la Izquierda de AD," and "Despues de la Expulsion," *El Nacional*, April 13, 1960, p. 33. The complete list of those expelled consisted of: Rangel, Martín, Sáez Mérida, Aníbal Molina Blanchard, Gumersindo Rodríguez, Gabriel Quintero Luzardo, Lino Martínez, Rómulo Henríquez, Jr., Héctor Pérez Marcano, Eduardo González Reyes, Moisés Moleiro, Raúl Lugo Rojas, Argenis Gómez, Jesús A. Petit, Freddy Melo, and Rafael José Muñoz.

¹⁸⁶ Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: La izquierda revolucionaria insurge, Domingo Alberto Rangel, Simón Saez Mérida, Celso Fortoul, Jorge Dager, Héctor Pérez Marcano* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981), pp. 27, 31.

occur rapidly. For a party lacking, as Rangel admitted, discipline, organization, and a coherent ideology, the growing fame of the Castro band made it a seductive role model for the young Venezuelans.¹⁸⁷

On April 24 *El Nacional* published an AD Left position paper justifying the new party's opposition to the constitutional regime. According to principle signers Rangel, Martín, and Gumersindo Rodríguez, the government was in the process of accommodation with the right—the avowed enemy of the popular interests—in hopes of ending ongoing political turmoil. While the AD Left favored preserving democracy and eliminating the threat of coups, it could not stand idly by while the shepherd delivered the sheep to the wolves. The Punto Fijo coalition forfeited its ability to govern credibly, said the dissidents, through “conciliation, vacillation during the most critical moments, and negligence with regard to public welfare, [that] has practically disarmed the nation.”¹⁸⁸ The party pledged to defend the *principle* of a constitutional regime, without necessarily endorsing the *current* constitutional regime. Opposing coups but endorsing social revolutions, the party presented itself as a vanguard of a popular drive for a “free Venezuela for the Venezuelans.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Muñoz, *La lucha armada: La izquierda revolucionaria surge...*, pp. 27-29, 31.

¹⁸⁸ “Jóvenes de Izquierda de A.D. Fijan Posición Ante Situación Política del País,” *El Nacional*, April 24, 1960, p. 29. The original Spanish reads, “Su tendencia a la conciliación, sus vacilaciones, más notable en cuanto más conflictive sea el momento que se viva, y su negligencia a apoyarse en el pueblo, prácticamente desarman al país.” Referring to the Trujillo-supported coup attempts of early 1960, the AD Left suggested that the Punto Fijo coalition gave concessions to the *perezjimenistas* to avoid further right-wing intrigue.

¹⁸⁹ “Jóvenes de Izquierda de A.D. Fijan Posición Ante Situación Política del País,” *El Nacional*, April 24, 1960, p. 29. During this time period leftist writing tended to connote a “golpe” with a right-wing coup. A left wing social revolution, therefore, would not constitute a “golpe.”

After several months of establishing closer connections to marginalized national constituencies like the URD, the PCV, and military officers out of favor with the government, the AD Left reemerged as the MIR towards the end of 1960 and sought to present an image of peaceful responsibility. On October 17 Rangel and other MIR leaders criticized their former mentors for forbidding AD members from associating with the new youth party. The men who now constituted the MIR had supported the old guard during numerous right wing coup attempts, Rangel said, and now AD smeared them to draw attention away from its secret combination with the right wing. It was the government, not the MIR, he continued, which embarked on a campaign to eliminate political parties and restrict civil liberties. If, by highlighting Betancourt's incompetence, the MIR critique accelerated a military coup d'état, then so be it. The public, suggested Rangel, would oppose the new military leadership and look to the MIR as the only reasonable democratic option.¹⁹⁰

Not even the highest ranks of AD were immune to pessimism in light of the challenges to its leadership. AD leader Ramón Escovar Salom judged that the Punto Fijo coalition had done little to recommend itself in its two years in power. Instead, it had “fully demonstrated its impotence, inefficiency, and lack of historical reach.” The body politic, he lamented, seemed racked by impatience, an aversion to self-criticism, and a

¹⁹⁰ “El Comando Nacional del MIR Rechaza Acusaciones de A.D.,” *El Nacional*, October 18, 1960, p. 28. The MIR referred to violence associated with government breakups of recent labor protests, and AD-Copei accusations that Punto Fijo partner URD fostered leftist subversion. By November 16, URD leader Jóvito Villalba took his party out of the coalition in protest. This departure undermined the coalition, but AD and Copei proved capable of keeping the government functioning. Ultimately, the MIR proved a more powerful opposition party than the URD. Therefore I have chosen to avoid significant mention of Villalba's party.

multiplicity of oppositional ideologies. In such an environment, a coalition simply could not work, he concluded. The coalition government seemed doomed to paralysis while the people bickered and the economy stagnated. In the last year the central bank of Venezuela had paid out nearly a billion bolívares to creditors, pointed out Salom. In October alone national reserves declined by more than 257 million bolívares. Assigning collective blame, Salom wondered if perhaps Venezuelans simply lacked the political maturity to create and maintain a functioning democratic government.¹⁹¹

In this atmosphere of uncertainty and political upheaval, Betancourt convened a special session of the Council of Ministers on November 28 to announce the suspension of certain constitutional guarantees. In the last four days at least five people had died and eighty persons suffered wounds in rioting throughout Caracas. Speaking before the heads of the armed services, labor unions, student organizations, and the Catholic Church, Betancourt declared that the recent wave of disorder left him no choice but to restrict freedom of travel, assembly, communication, and expression. He singled out the PCV and MIR by name as extremists who sought to “establish a regime here like that of Cuba.” The suspension was indefinite and would be revoked only “at the cessation of the causes that motivated it.”¹⁹² A week of protest ensued in which police rounded up approximately 250 leftist leaders and shut down the daily newspapers of the PCV and

¹⁹¹ Ramón Escovar Salom, “El Pacto de Punto Fijo: Balance de una Frustración,” *El Nacional*, November 3, 1960, p. 4.

¹⁹² “Suspendidas las Garantías,” *El Nacional*, November 29, 1960, p. 1. “Venezuela Limits Rights; Two Killed in New Rioting,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1960, p. 1.

MIR. Meanwhile the National Guard patrolled Caracas and laid siege to the Central University of Venezuela campus to restore order.¹⁹³

Thus, while Betancourt enjoyed unprecedented influence and popularity in the arena of American politics at the close of 1960, he resorted to extraordinary means to maintain order in his own country. The Punto Fijo coalition, a political grouping of which he was exceedingly proud, had not lasted intact even up to the midpoint in his five-year presidency. AD and Copei could probably survive the departure of the URD, but the ranks of the opposition were certainly growing. The AD-led government found itself in a curious position. It had drifted a little further to the political center, thus satisfying moderates and conservatives who equated leftism with communism. Yet as far as the PCV and MIR were concerned, the new arrangement was nothing more than an accommodation with despotism. The government might take all the right steps to improve its clout in the hemisphere, but at home it could not act without alienating one constituency or another. The hemispheric right wing was withering, but the domestic left wing burgeoned. As Domingo Alberto Rangel wryly observed in a November editorial, in Venezuela the upcoming Christmas season “would not be a model of homely tranquility and pleasant concord.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Tad Szulc, “Venezuelans Ignore Leftists’ Strike Call,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1960, p. 1. Tad Szulc, “Caracas Stiffens Security Control; Betancourt Keeps Military Forces at Hand,” December 4, 1960, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ Domingo Alberto Rangel, “La Crisis y la Unidad Popular,” *El Nacional*, November 29, 1960, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Las Pascuas venezolanas no serán este año modelo de hogareña tranquilidad y risueña concordia.”

KENNEDY AND BETANCOURT, EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY, 1961

Optimism was indeed in short supply. Even Betancourt loyalists could offer no solution to the frustrating economic malaise. Political violence subsided for the time being, but rumors that government workers might not receive holiday bonuses threatened to renew agitation. Internationally, the Dominican threat remained muted but relations with Cuba were worse than ever. The triumphant mood of January 1959, when Betancourt and Castro embraced as reporters spoke of bright prospects for this new “Caracas Group,” had long since passed. Still, glimmers of hope endured: John F. Kennedy’s impending inauguration in the United States; the pending unveiling of the long-awaited replacement of the Pérez Jiménez-era constitution. Betancourt had long admired Kennedy and hoped for a U.S.-Venezuelan partnership for expanded democracy and economic prosperity. In a letter of congratulation to the president-elect, Betancourt expressed his desire to cooperate and share burdens in the eradication of dictatorships and underdevelopment.¹⁹⁵ Kennedy reciprocated with a personal note of thanks. He, too, looked forward to a new era of mutually beneficial hemispheric relations. Kennedy hoped that the “cooperative effort of our two great countries may demonstrate to a watching world that prosperity is the handmaiden of liberty.”¹⁹⁶ Left unsaid was the constant concern of both men that communists might use underdevelopment and shaky democratic institutions as springboards to the establishment of authoritarian rule, and such fears naturally invoked Cuba. As the two men set lofty goals for their relationship,

¹⁹⁵ “Betancourt a Kennedy,” *El Nacional*, November 11, 1960, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ President Rómulo Betancourt to President John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961; President Kennedy to President Betancourt, January 30, 1961, National Security Files [hereafter NSF], Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, “Venezuela, General, 1/61—6/61 Folder,” JFKL.

therefore, the messier business of what to do about Castro and those who looked to him for direction remained a nagging cause for concern.

Betancourt put a positive spin on the political situation, using the third anniversary of the fall of Pérez Jiménez to sign into law the first constitution created by a democratic government in Venezuelan history. Addressing the nation via television and radio, he pledged that the new document would endure long past the 1964 presidential succession as a guarantor of liberty and democratic norms and as a symbol with which all Venezuelans could identify. Now was the time, therefore, for the opposition to make common cause with those who already supported the government. “Whatever one’s own subjective conceptions are, of governing systems and ideological loyalties, one ought to adjust their public conduct to the norms outlined in the Supreme Law” of the constitution. The law, he concluded, functioned as a guarantee from the government that each citizen could live, work, become educated, and achieve prosperity within a peaceful and safe nation.¹⁹⁷

Speaking for the MIR, Rangel was unimpressed. In *El Nacional* he sarcastically reckoned that the “long awaited” constitution would probably not generate the public enthusiasm it perhaps deserved, given that the nation that had already witnessed “more than twenty” such governing documents. “With only a bit of literary license,” he continued, the latest constitution “qualified as part of our ancestral agony.” Some of the most revered politicians in the nation’s history had crafted charters that were well

¹⁹⁷ “El Presidente Promulgo la Nueva Constitución,” *El Nacional*, January 24, 1961, p. A1. The original Spanish reads, “Sea cual fuere su propia concepción subjetiva de los sistemas de gobierno y su bandería ideológica, que ajusten su conducta pública dentro de normas de respeto a esta Ley de Leyes.”

received at the time. Yet the “hard life of Venezuela” had, in each instance, “reduced the noble visions to ashes.” Gómez’s constitutions, for example, were “models of democratic perfection,” guaranteeing universal suffrage and full human rights, but they simply camouflaged the dungeons and jails housing those who actually tried to exercise such rights. Whatever the virtues of the current constitution, it did not address the fundamental problem of class inequality. Rather, it overwhelmingly advantaged the bourgeois at the expense of the working class and functioned as another weapon in the aristocracy’s offensive against the disfranchised. Rangel, as champion of social equality and democratic justice, could not in good conscience support it.¹⁹⁸

Into this unsteady situation stepped the Kennedy administration, which had done much thinking about solving the sorts of problems racking Venezuela. A key tenet of the Kennedy approach towards Latin America and the developing world was that the United States could promote modernization and prevent communist influence by providing proactive economic and military assistance to reliable regional partners. President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow—a former professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—was perhaps the leading proponent of this notion of “guns and butter” uplift. He argued that Karl Marx’s stages of development and inevitable capitalist collapse represented a misreading of history and of the human spirit. Through a careful blend of private capital and state management, Rostow asserted, the developing world could mature in concert with the West and enjoy the benefits of a “high mass-consumption” economy. The danger lay in

¹⁹⁸ Domingo Alberto Rangel, “La Nueva Constitución,” *El Nacional*, January 24, 1961, p. 4.

the transition from traditional, pre-industrial societies to societies with modern economic and political infrastructure. At this “take off” point, where rising expectations engendered friction and popular frustration, lurked communist agitators seeking to portray societal discontent as a symptom of Western modernity and exploitation. Rather than surrender the field, Rostow concluded, enlightened policymakers should assist the developing world in the implementation of economic and military policy, ensuring prosperous societies free of communist domination.¹⁹⁹

As the administration confronted the instability of the Latin American class structure, it also concluded that regional armed forces remained unprepared to stave off the unique threat Castro presented. Pursuant to Kennedy’s directives, Walt Rostow spent the spring of 1961 leading a reevaluation of the U.S. and Latin American military approach to leftist agitation. On April 13, the U.S. Army presented Rostow with its findings. Because of the shaky balance of power between developing world governments and insurgents, the Army argued, a wide swath of the Caribbean Basin lay vulnerable to Sino-Soviet sponsored or indigenous subversion. The region resembled a revolutionary cocktail, as communists had spent a generation infiltrating nationalist, intellectual, and student organizations, training their focus on poorly functioning local governments and insisting that the root cause was U.S. imperialism. The Army study also pointed to communist success in infiltrating local armed forces and co-opting disaffected officers, as a means to either direct a coup attempt or prosecute a civil war. The Army study deemed

¹⁹⁹ Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 162-164.

it imperative that regional armed forces closely identify themselves with U.S. ideals of military neutrality in politics, making them unavailable to the communists and instead servants of the public good.²⁰⁰

In especially vulnerable countries, however, the United States would have to make sure that its military allies adopt a much more proactive posture against insurgents. Countries that possessed a “weakened or unconsolidated regime,” a “population of strong character,” and a “favorable terrain,” could be taken over by leftists adept at clearly defining political goals and building consensus among disparate civic factions. Just as a communist-influenced intelligentsia could build support among the disfranchised masses, a nascent guerrilla movement could ally with a strong, sympathetic minority and co-opt a passively neutral majority population. In such a country, the U.S. Army judged, local armed forces needed to deny the communists the time and space necessary for such a consolidation. The means for this denial would be found in small, highly mobile and “thoroughly indoctrinated” teams capable of keeping guerrilla forces off-balance, exhausted, and separated from supplies and sanctuary. If continually resupplied and provided with current intelligence these counter-guerrilla forces would always be smarter, faster, and better equipped than their guerrilla prey.²⁰¹

The White House also created its own team, the Special Group Counter-Insurgency (commonly referred to as the Special Group CI), to deal with these sorts of

²⁰⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, “Unconventional Warfare,” April 11, 1961, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Reference Copy, Box 326, Staff Memoranda, Walt W. Rostow, Guerrilla and Unconventional Warfare, 4/11/61 folder, pp. 3-8, 13-14, JFKL.

²⁰¹ U.S. Department of the Army, “Unconventional Warfare,” pp. 16-18, JFKL.

problems. As General Maxwell Taylor saw it, the Special Group CI would be responsible for quickly identifying “problem areas”—Southeast Asia and northern South America for starters—and developing a coordinated response among the various Special Group agencies. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy judged it critical that the Special Group CI “obtain recognition throughout the U.S. government that subversive insurgency (‘wars of national liberation’) is a new and dangerous form of politico-military conflict” that required as much attention from policymakers as the threat of conventional warfare.²⁰²

Despite the Betancourt and Kennedy administrations’ efforts, underdevelopment and insurgency problems continued nibbling at the foundation of the Venezuelan polity as 1961 continued. Cabling from Caracas, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires C. Allen Stewart advised Secretary of State Dean Rusk of impending difficulties on May 5. Prominent business leaders had written an ultimatum—circulated unsigned because Betancourt made it known that he would regard signatures as treasonous—criticizing national economic policy and demanding drastic changes to the cabinet. It was well known that the writers of the ultimatum maintained contacts with plotters inside the military, a fact that gave birth to a fresh round of coup rumors. At the same time, however, there was a moderate consensus emerging in support of a new round of austerity measures announced

²⁰² General Maxwell D. Taylor to the Members of the Special Group, “Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency),” January 2, 1961, Bundy to the Members of the Special Group, “National Security Action Memorandum No. 124,” January 18, 1961, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Box 333, NSAM 124: Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) folder, JFKL. At this time the Special Group consisted of the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, the Director of the United States Information Agency, and the Military Representative to the President.

by Betancourt before the Venezuelan congress earlier in the month. Many Venezuelans had come to accept the need for strong medicine to fix the economic malaise, it seemed. Stewart welcomed such attitudes. “Reforms, long overdue, must be carried out with firmness,” he judged, “[with the government] meanwhile maintaining with equal firmness public order essential to economic recovery.”²⁰³

Yet coup rumors soon proved to be credible. In mid-May, former Pérez Jiménez high military officers Oscar Tamayo Suárez and Martín Parada infiltrated across the Colombian border seeking to set up a military regime under the leadership of the jailed Jesús María Castro Leon. On June 26 about 250 Pérez Jiménez sympathizers at the Barcelona garrison of Anzoátegui state revolted and temporarily occupied the surrounding city. Around the same time a handful of dissident officers in the major port city of La Guaira attempted to launch a coordinated revolt. All of these coup attempts, however, were put down within hours by local troops loyal to Betancourt.²⁰⁴ The government was quick to characterize the uprising as further instances of Dominican meddling. By late June, according to new U.S. Ambassador Teodoro Moscoso, the country had returned to complete calm, as business, labor, political, and professional groups published statements supporting the government and opposing this latest instance

²⁰³ U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Venezuela C. Allen Stewart to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, May 5, 1961, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 1/61-6/61 folder, JFKL.

²⁰⁴ “Movimiento Conspirativo Encabezado por Tamayo Suárez,” *El Nacional*, May 12, 1961, p. 34. “Rebellion Crushed in Venezuela; Military Unit Holds City Briefly,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1961, p. 14.

of “fascist” agitation. As Moscoso saw it, the “constitutional government [was] clearly [the] gainer in this last series of military coup fiascos.”²⁰⁵

Betancourt used the occasion of the June 30 graduation ceremonies at the Venezuelan Naval Academy to demonstrate that he maintained the loyalty of the armed forces. Flanked by Defense Minister General Antonio Briceño Linares and the heads of the armed services, the president declared that the people and the military had conclusively rejected the recent scheme to return the country to the “lost paradise” of the military dictatorship.²⁰⁶ AD leader Gonzalo Barrios welcomed the show of support by the military and other mainstream constituencies but saw in the uprisings a chance for popular self-criticism. Why should it be necessary, he asked, for scions of civic virtue like the magistrate, the professor, the politician, and the worker, to constantly declare their opposition to crimes against decent society? Should not their support be taken for granted? And how should the MIR and its fellow travelers be judged, who simultaneously opposed coups and deemed it legitimate for “popular organizations” and “the masses” to solve political problems by any means necessary? The fact was that local citizens and armed forces put down the revolt not because they saw themselves as part of a class struggle but simply because it was the right thing to do under the watchful eye of

²⁰⁵ U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela Teodoro Moscoso to Secretary Rusk, June 27, 1961, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 1/61-6/61 folder, JFKL.

²⁰⁶ “Las Fuerzas Armadas y el Pueblo Han Repudiado a los Aventureros del Golpe de Estado,” *El Nacional*, July 1, 1961, p. 1.

God. Perhaps it was the citizenry who could teach the leftists a lesson in behavior regarding Western norms of civic comportment, Barrios concluded.²⁰⁷

As Kennedy and Betancourt cooperated more closely, the Cuban government pursued an ever more erratic policy toward Caracas. Castro alternated between open hostility to former allies like Venezuela and insistence that Cuba was a neutral country without a stake in hemispheric and global tensions. Havana publicized its involvement with the international neutralist movement, for example, in advance of a meeting of 20 non-aligned nations in Cairo in June. Yet if Cuba indeed observed the tenets of neutralism, it was certainly a hostile strain. Foreign Minister Dr. Raúl Roa used the conference to call for a future meeting of the neutralist countries to be held in Havana, which he termed “the center of resistance to United States imperialism.”²⁰⁸ Illustrating the gulf between Havana and Caracas, Venezuela declined Cuba’s invitation to attend. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Marcos Falcón Briceño mustered only enough diplomatic spirit to state that the decision did not indicate hostility towards Cuba, but rather that Venezuela had no wish to associate itself with international bodies other than the OAS and UN.²⁰⁹

Castro amplified Roa’s critique, stating that Cuba sought no direct involvement in toppling those nations aligned with the United States, since by associating with Washington those nations had already sowed the seeds of their own destruction. Cuba

²⁰⁷ Gonzalo Barrios, “La Lección de Barcelona,” *El Nacional*, July 1, 1961, p. 4.

²⁰⁸ “Roa Asks Neutrals to Meet in Havana,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1961, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ Ambassador Moscoso to Rusk, May 16, 1961, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 1/61-6/61 folder, JFKL.

did not need to export its revolution to other Latin American nations, Castro asserted. The germ of revolution was already present in “exploited nations.” Categorically rejecting calls for moderation similar to those issued by Gonzalo Barrios, Castro stated that the Cuban Revolution could not be forced to adhere to democratic norms like elections because they would be frivolous. “If we are building a new society,” Castro said, “we cannot use senile methods. We cannot play the game of bourgeois elections every four years because we cannot afford to waste the time.”²¹⁰

In October, it became clear that Venezuela and Cuba could not mend their fences. Miraflores continued to criticize the lack of elections in Cuba, and now suggested that collective OAS action might be required to rein in Castro’s revolution. On October 24, Venezuela sharpened its attack, asserting an “evident link” between the Castro government and extra-continental powers, such that Cuba had become a “negation” of the OAS democratic system. Venezuela therefore supported collective OAS action against the Cuban government. Cuban Foreign Minister Roa responded on October 30, stating that Betancourt was little more than a parrot reciting statements dictated to him by the U.S. State Department and the CIA.²¹¹ On November 5 Foreign Minister Falcón Briceño bluntly characterized Roa’s statements as “insulting and unacceptable.” On November 11, Venezuelan officials delivered the note to the Cuban chargé d’affaires announcing the end of relations. Because of “violent and unjustified attacks” against the political order

²¹⁰ Carlos María Gutiérrez, “Castro Dice que no Exporta la Revolución,” *El Nacional*, June 10, 1961, p. 7. The original Spanish reads, “Si estamos haciendo una sociedad nueva, no podemos usar formas caducas. No podemos ponernos en el juego de elecciones burguesas cada cuatro años porque no se puede estar perdiendo el tiempo.”

²¹¹ “Venezuela Cuts Ties with Havana: Break Follows Roa’s Attack on President Betancourt,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1961, p. 34.

of Venezuela, its government, and its head of state, asserted Falcón Briceño, it was impossible that Venezuela maintain relations with Cuba. Despite considerable patience, the note continued, Venezuela could no longer suffer insults at the hands of Cuba that violated not only the traditional friendship between the Cuban and Venezuelan people but also the decorum and respect characteristic of “civilized nations.”²¹²

Mutual recrimination and unrest ensued as news of the break spread throughout the Caribbean Basin. In Havana, the communist daily *Hoy* picked up on Roa’s earlier accusations, calling Betancourt a “puppet of the imperialist Yankees” and declaring that Betancourt had now completely betrayed the Venezuelan people. In Caracas, the pro-Castro URD sponsored the creation of an anti-Betancourt daily, *Clarín*, which managed to survive only ten days before the government shut it down for subversive and incendiary statements. On the streets, meanwhile, youth groups associated with pro-government and pro-Castro parties clashed, causing several deaths. The Central University of Venezuela initiated another round of class cancellations.²¹³ From the U.S. embassy in Caracas, Chargé d’Affaires Stewart advised that the opposition was highly motivated but unable to overcome a determined stance by Betancourt. “Coordinated planning and decisive action on the part [of] government forces,” he wrote, “...have considerably strengthened [the] government’s hand and will tend to increase national

²¹² “Anuncio el Canciller: Inminente Ruptura con Cuba,” *El Nacional*, November 6, 1961, p. 1. “Copia del Documento de Rompimiento,” *El Nacional*, November 12, 1961, p. 25.

²¹³ “Red Paper Calls Venezuela Chief Yankee’s Puppet,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 1961, p. B16. “Five Venezuelans Dead in Riots Over Cuba,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1961, p. 4. “Caracas Halts Paper; Anti-Regime Organ Put Under Temporary ‘Suspension’,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1961, p. 32.

confidence [in the] government's ability [to] withstand internal threats and act decisively when necessary.”²¹⁴

AD leader Ramón Escovar Salom eulogized what he saw as the tragedy of the Cuban revolution and the subsequent rupture between Cuba and Venezuela. Castro ought to have been the answer, he judged, for the latest Latin American generation's search for a governing system that credibly addressed the needs and aspirations of the majority of the population. Decade after decade, “reactionary dictatorships” and “wordy and sterile democracies” quibbled amongst one another without accomplishing “anything important” in South America. Desperate for bread and hoping for a better future, lamented Salom, the old and the young instead could count on little more than “vague and solemn allusions to ‘continental solidarity,’ ‘brotherhood among the peoples of America,’ ‘the historical destiny,’ and the inevitable citations of Bolívar, Martí, or San Martín.”²¹⁵ Castro promised a new way forward free from U.S. indifference and Latin impotence, but he squandered his chance, substituting personal caprice for justice. Venezuela could have nothing to do with this fall from grace, Salom concluded. Venezuelans, like many Latin Americans, hungered for social transformation but could only do so by pursuing “pacific

²¹⁴ Chargé Stewart to Rusk, November 16, 1961, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 10/61—11/61 folder, JFKL.

²¹⁵ Ramón Escovar Salom, “La Revolución Cubana,” *El Nacional*, November 23, 1961, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Las cancillerías quedó casi totalmente reducido a la cursilería declamatoria y a las vagas y solemnes alusiones a la ‘solidaridad continental’, ‘la hermandad de los pueblos de América’, ‘el destino histórico’ y las inevitables citas de Bolívar, Martí o San Martín.”

methods, without subordination to foreign powers, without sacrificing the core values of humanity, but rather with Western culture in a hard struggle of centuries.”²¹⁶

FROM THE PEN TO THE SWORD: THE MIR-PCV UNION AND ITS EMBRACE OF VIOLENCE

Following the break with Cuba, the Venezuelan government pursued a two-prong strategy against leftist extremism, advertising its commitment to regional diplomacy while pledging to deal forcefully with subversion. Significant challenges to this apparently reasonable policy existed, however. Based on his past behavior, there was no evidence that Castro would pursue moderation following Caracas’ decision to sever relations. Rather, all signs pointed to increased pugnacity. The Venezuelan left acted with greater recklessness, too. PCV and MIR rhetoric shifted from relatively vague endorsements of “greater levels of democracy” to thinly veiled invocations of violent revolution. In secret planning, the far left made initial forays into coups d’état and guerrilla insurgency. Such plans brought them into contact with disaffected elements of the Venezuelan armed forces and with the still-shadowy revolutionary export apparatus of Cuba. As 1962 began, then, Caracas and Washington shared common concerns and challenges regarding the maintenance of national security and the reduction of Cuba as a wellspring for regional revolution.

Kennedy’s mid-December 1961 trip to Colombia and Venezuela sparked the first clash between the Washington-Caracas union and the leftist conglomeration in Venezuela

²¹⁶ Ramón Escovar Salom, “La Revolución Cubana,” *El Nacional*, November 23, 1961, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Pero ese camino puede emprenderse y cumplirse con métodos pacíficos, sin subordinación a potencias exteriores, sin sacrificar los valores más entrañables de la persona humana, conquistados por la cultura occidental en una dura lucha de siglos.”

and Cuba. The announcement of the visit in early December elicited joy among hemispheric moderates as well as ire among the revolutionary left. U.S. press secretary Pierre Salinger predicted success if for no other reason than Kennedy's great popularity among most Latin Americans. Seeking to reveal the limits of Kennedy's popularity in the region, however, Venezuelan leftists staged protests and riots that resulted in the deaths of five students and police. Betancourt dismissed the unrest as the work of "four dozen irresponsible persons" whose sympathies lay with Castro and Communism. Just as the Venezuelan leftists acted as lackeys for the "despotic" and "totalitarian" Castro, Betancourt continued, so too was the Cuban at the beck and call of the Soviets. Castro, for his part, kept up a steady stream of criticism of Kennedy and those nations maintaining relations with the United States. Association with Washington meant being a willing tool of imperialism, claimed Castro, and party to an unjust parley with right wing reactionaries intent on the "destruction of progress and culture."²¹⁷ Kennedy's goal for the trip, in such a view, was to reinforce the "treasonable and submissive" Betancourt and underwrite his campaign of betrayal against his people, the heirs of "Bolivian dignity."²¹⁸

Despite the heated rhetoric issued by Betancourt and Castro, however, Kennedy's swing through Venezuela resulted in a relatively flawless exercise of political theater. *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Robert Hartmann, a witness to the 1958 Nixon motorcade disaster, remarked on both the overwhelmingly positive public response to

²¹⁷ "No Danger for Kennedy Expected on Latin Trip," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1961, p. A1.

²¹⁸ "Kennedy Plans New Aggression on Latin Trip, Castro Charges," *Washington Post*, December 10, 1961, p. A35.

Kennedy and the overwhelming presence of security forces. Retracing Nixon's route, Kennedy waved to some 300,000 friendly Venezuelans behind a screen of approximately 30,000 police who pointed their weapons directly at onlookers as the presidential motorcade passed. The president and Mrs. Kennedy toured rural development projects outside of Caracas, showcases for the Venezuelan commitment to the human uplift of the Alliance for Progress. After speeches by the heads of state that dedicated such projects as testaments to the Alliance's success, the U.S. president and first lady mingled with hundreds of thoroughly screened Venezuelan *campesinos*. In Hartmann's estimation, even the hardcore anti-government elements had resigned themselves to the visit's inevitable success. He noted sarcastically that prominent graffiti throughout the city shouted "¡Jackie Sí, Kennedy No!"²¹⁹

Drew Pearson, adopting a geopolitical perspective, saw the trip as a possible turning point in the precarious U.S.-Latin American relationship. Kennedy had made bold strides in erasing the Eisenhower legacy of neglect, yet "most of South America [was] drifting toward its own homemade brand of communism." It was a tenuous moment, he concluded, but the intangible magnetism exuded by the president and first lady, combined with the tangible resources of the United States, might prove more attractive to disfranchised Latin Americans than the radical message of Castro.²²⁰

As always, U.S. security planning paralleled the president's public diplomacy and charm offensive, and during this time the administration narrowed its

²¹⁹ Robert Hartmann, "Friendly Crowds Greet Kennedy in Venezuela; Threat of Violence Vanishes," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1961, p. 1.

²²⁰ Drew Pearson, "Kennedy Trip May Be Turning Point," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1961, p. B13.

counterinsurgency planning to regional levels. The president queried Defense Secretary Robert McNamara on September 5, for example, regarding the development of crowd control and unconventional warfare training programs and the number of Latin American countries participating in such training. Echoing the earlier Army study, Kennedy endorsed these interactions for their potential to strengthen regional security forces, which occupied an “extremely important strategic position in Latin America,” and to forge closer ties between them and the United States.²²¹

National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy forwarded National Security Action Memoranda (NSAM) No. 88 to the president on October 16 in response to Kennedy’s September query. Included in the document were the assessments of Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, who inventoried planning for the expansion of hemispheric internal security training through fiscal year 1963 and beyond.²²² According to the data, 936 Latin Americans would attend internal security courses at U.S. military schools in 1962, up from 601 in 1961. U.S. instructors now taught 10-week internal security courses entirely in Spanish to classes comprised exclusively of Latin Americans at Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone. At Fort Bragg, 52 Latin Americans in three classes recently graduated from a counter-guerrilla course. Whereas only four Latin American students attended a specialized “counter-guerrilla” course in 1961, 341 were to take the course in

²²¹ The President to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, “Training for Latin American Armed Forces,” September 5, 1961, NSF, Subjects, Box 331, NSAM 88: Training for Latin American Armed Forces folder, JFKL.

²²² National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy to the President, 10/16/61, “Training for Latin American Armed Forces—Your NSAM No. 88, dated September 5, 1961,” October 16, 1961, NSF, Subjects, Box 331, NSAM88: Training for Latin American Armed Forces folder, JFKL. Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, “Memorandum for the President,” [undated], NSF, Subjects, Box 331, NSAM 88: Training for Latin American Armed Forces folder, JFKL.

1962. Similarly, Latin American participation in “intelligence/counter-intelligence” training would rise from 95 to 122 Latin American students. U.S. in-country activity was due to increase as well. Military Assistance Program mobile training teams were to multiply from four to 17, with eight teams rather than the previous one team able to teach intelligence gathering techniques. “Psychological warfare,” a non-existent training category in 1961, would be the province of two teams in 1962. The drive to expand unconventional warfare training and teach “the dangers of Castro-Communism” was well underway throughout the hemisphere and expanding rapidly, the memo concluded.²²³

A U.S. multi-department assessment team toured South America at the end of 1961 and gave an in-depth report to the White House on the prospects for a continental communist takeover. The combination of a sizeable communist constituency and an unevenly developed security apparatus pushed Venezuela into the category of “moderately” endangered. The Communist and Communist Youth parties counted 30,000 dues-paying members, as well 75,000 “sympathizers,” out of a population of 7.4 million people. While the PCV secured a modest 6 percent of the votes nationwide in the 1958 elections, the party enjoyed stronger support in and around Caracas, winning 17 percent of the vote there. If elections were held immediately, the U.S. team argued, the PCV and its MIR and URD allies could expect to garner between 25 and 30 percent of the vote. In its effort to maintain security, the Betancourt government could wield the following armed forces: 750 officers and 15,000 men in the army; 550 officers and 7,500

²²³ Department of Defense Memorandum, “Summary of Training for Latin Americans in U.S. Military Schools and Installations,” [undated], NSF, Subjects, Box 331, NSAM88: Training for Latin American Armed Forces folder, JFKL.

men in the National Guard; and nearly 1300 men in the relatively undisciplined and fanatically pro-AD Digepol national police. Local police had a negligible impact on security, judged the U.S. team, since each precinct had been dismantled and rebuilt from scratch following the January 1958 coup. The army's "highly professional" office corps and two-year conscripts could provide basic internal security but lacked counterinsurgency capability or any "finesse" in riot control operations and resented doing police work. The Guard, on the other hand, was a far more professional force of career officers and men who demonstrated considerable skill in riot suppression and devoted at least some attention to rural counterinsurgency. Neither branch, however, appeared interested in anti-communist indoctrination programs for its personnel despite U.S. warnings. On the whole, the assessment team concluded, each branch grew more robust but such strengthening could be a double-edged sword, since centralized and aggressive police forces were hallmarks of the deposed regime.²²⁴

In Caracas, meanwhile, 1962 dawned on a restive political environment. AD leader Ramón Escovar Salom charged the left with poisoning the public sphere, such that the two years leading up to the next election would be an exercise in endurance. Venezuela's problems could not be solved through animosity, though the left continued

²²⁴ "Report and Recommendations of Washington Assessment Team on Internal Security Situation in South America," January 10, 1962, and Rusk to the President, February 20, 1962, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Box 335, NSAM 134: Report on Internal Security Situation in Latin America folder, pp. 102-110, JFKL. Betancourt also had at his disposal 5,315 officers and men in the navy and 2,736 officers and men in the air force. The air force at this time could provide limited air support, but the Army and National Guard were essentially alone in combating the insurgency in 1962. It is also interesting to note the disparity in officer-to-men ratios in the Army (1:20) and National Guard (1:13). Given that post-World War II officer-to-men ratios in the U.S. Army have often been between 1:10 or even less, it would appear that the Venezuelan Army was approaching the upper limit of enlisted men-to-officers that a modern army could employ and still be an effective fighting force.

to ignore such a fact. “Neither political sectarianism, nor *golpismo*, nor *fidelismo*, constituted solutions,” he said. Opposition could be worthwhile only if it was peaceful and articulated without hatred, he insisted, since the laws of politics dictated that all parties would “inevitably meet good fortune or misfortune together.”²²⁵ URD and future FALN leader Fabricio Ojeda, however, rejected the call for unity. “The government,” he said, “would remain obstinately committed to short cuts like the arbitrary use of force, and to the indefinite maintenance of the restriction of fundamental rights, rights which all [Venezuelans] regarded as essential to right living.” As in the Pérez Jiménez years, he continued, brave young men and women faced the hardening experience of combat against a regime that sought to cripple popular aspirations. Each citizen was obligated, he concluded, to take a role in the destruction of arbitrary and capricious rule.²²⁶ While the political center called for a renewed spirit of compassionate cooperation, then, the left essentially called for the nation to storm the gates of the Miraflores presidential palace.

As January progressed Venezuelan politics resembled Ojeda’s vision of chaos. U.S. Chargé Stewart relayed a steady stream of bad news: the fourth anniversary of the 1958 coup brought various extremists into the streets, forcing the National Guard to disperse crowds and dismantle barricades consisting of burning cars and other flotsam and jetsam; a transportation strike continued in response to legislation requiring transit

²²⁵ Ramón Escovar Salom, “1962, Año de la Encrucijada,” *El Nacional*, January 5, 1962, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Ni el sectarismo gobernante, ni el golpismo, ni el fidelismo constituyen solución...a un presente y a un porvenir que nos reúne en la fortuna o en la desgracia inevitablemente a todos.”

²²⁶ Fabricio Ojeda, “Balance y Perspectivas,” *El Nacional*, January 8, 1962, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Ha resultado evidente que el gobierno, no obstante su origen democrático está aferrado a continuar por el atajo del la arbitrariedad y la fuerza, al mantener en forma indefinida la restricción de derechos fundamentales que para toda colectividad representan la esencia de su vida misma.”

drivers to carry insurance; rumors abounded that Betancourt had been arrested by the armed forces or that Cuba had invaded the country. More ominously, credible sources reported unprecedentedly close links between communist agents and left-leaning military officers who prepared to launch a coup upon the conclusion of the current Punta Del Este conference, called to consider suspending Cuba from the OAS on charges of having an un-American system of government.²²⁷ In response to these problems, Venezuelan security forces continued a massive sweep and crackdown, initiating a program of 15-day “political arrests” for hundreds detained in riots and shuttering PCV and MIR offices throughout the country. In a January 31 communiqué, the Betancourt government accused the PCV and MIR of working to dismantle the constitutional system, thereby justifying over recent 1,000 arrests and a hunt for PCV and MIR caches of weaponry and subversive propaganda.²²⁸

According to scholar Agustín Blanco Muñoz, who interviewed dozens of prominent Venezuelans from the 1958 to 1968 period, the leftist connection to sympathetic elements of the armed forces played a major role in the PCV-MIR endorsement of armed insurrection as 1961 concluded. PCV-MIR theory held that a

²²⁷ Stewart to Rusk, January 23, 1962, and January 30, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 12/61—1/62 folder, JFKL. The OAS did indeed suspend Cuba from “participation in the inter-American system” when the VIII Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers adjourned on January 31, 1962. The resolution stated that, having aligned itself with the foreign and anti-democratic system of Marxism-Leninism, the Cuban government could no longer be considered a friendly and responsible member of the inter-American community.

²²⁸ “Allanadas Sedes del PCV y del MIR: Varios Militantes de esos Partidos Fueron Detenidos,” p. 26; “Resolvió la Gobernación: Arresto Policial de 15 Días para 42 Detenidos por DIGEPOL,” p. 32, *El Nacional*, February 1, 1962. “200 Bombas y Material Explosivo Decomisadas en Vivienda de Coro,” *El Nacional*, February 3, 1962, p. 33. Stewart to Rusk, February 1, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 12/61—1/62 folder, JFKL. The 15-day “political arrests” were an effective means of neutralizing protestors within the opposition without overburdening the justice system. The accused were never brought to a formal trial, but rather simply released after spending 15 days in jail.

revolution could succeed with or without the help of the armed forces, but could never succeed if the armed forces stood in determined opposition. Similar to the broader society, the leftists believed, there were moderate and extremist blocs within the military. These extremists held the potential to make the military a force for a new right-wing dictatorship, or for an embrace of the Cuban revolution.²²⁹ Support from the military left, therefore, could provide incredible potency for the PCV-MIR alliance if the bulk of the armed forces remained neutral during the coming revolution, or at least cancel out the military right wing in the event of civil war.

Like the leaders of the PCV and MIR, officers sympathetic to the left found that their elation following the collapse of Pérez Jiménez gave way to disillusionment and cynicism as the socioeconomic malaise persisted. Jesús Teodoro Molina Villegas, a navy captain who would be centrally involved in the May 1962 Carupano uprising, traced his opposition against Betancourt to the government employment of the military in violent crackdowns against the 1960 student protests. Morally offended, he regarded the emergence of opposition groups like the MIR to be an encouraging democratic development, and indeed had met many future MIR members during the 1958 coup, and Molina Villegas soon adopted the MIR line that Betancourt surrendered national independence to the United States and the forces of international capitalism. Still, the leftist officers shared little of the MIR embrace of Marxism. Rather, they simply espoused a raw patriotism in the face of Betancourt's apparent corruption. As Molina

²²⁹ Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *La conspiración civico-militar: Guairazo, Barcelonazo, Carupanazo, y Porteñazo* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981), pp. 5-8.

Villegas later told Blanco Muñoz, “If I told you that, when I rebelled in Carupano, I had a clear ideology, I would be lying to you.”²³⁰ Like many other Venezuelans of the time, he simply felt that something bold had to be done to solve national problems. Motivated by a strong sense of patriotism, officers like Molina Villegas did not consider themselves traitors, but rather saviors or redeemers.

On May 4 Molina Villegas led nearly 500 marines and military policemen—all of them shouting pro-Castro slogans according to CIA sources—in the seizure of the Carupano military base and city radio station. Defying air force strikes, the rebels broadcast denunciations of the Betancourt government as a usurper of the democratic process, promising to empower the people and solve national problems within a popular democratic context.²³¹ By May 6, however, Molina Villegas and his fellow conspirators surrendered with minimal bloodshed, and national police proceeded to raid communist residences in search of weapons and subversive literature. According to Interior Minister Carlos Andres Pérez, the failure of anyone beyond a small clique of leftist officers to support the coup indicated that Venezuela “cannot be Cubanized.”²³²

The Betancourt government initiated a crackdown using the harshest measures yet employed against the leftist parties. Holding the PCV and MIR in contravention of constitutional Article 114, which required political parties to “employ democratic methods in their participation in national politics,” Betancourt suspended them from

²³⁰ Jesús Teodoro Molina Villegas, in Blanco Muñoz, *La conspiración civico-militar...*, pp. 105-109.

²³¹ Richard G. Massock, “Venezuela Acts to Crush Revolt in Coastal City,” *Washington Post*, p. A1. CIA Telegram, “Leftist Military Uprising in Eastern Venezuela,” May 4, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 5/62 folder, JFKL.

²³² Stewart to Rusk, May 6, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 5/62 folder, JFKL. “Lack of Support Noted,” May 7, 1962, *New York Times*, p. 5.

political participation and subjected their property to immediate search and seizure. Those implicated in Carupano and all future uprisings, the president continued, were subject to military trials. Betancourt stopped short of outlawing the parties outright, however, allowing the PCV and MIR to retain their elected congressional representatives and associated parliamentary immunity from prosecution.²³³ On May 25, the military tribunals announced prison sentences of 10 to 15 years for the Carupano conspirators.²³⁴ Despite the apparent setback, however, the left felt empowered by recent events. For the first time, there had been a military uprising seeking to further the spread of Marxism-Leninism rather than to eradicate it. Speaking before the national assembly, PCV congressman Eduardo Machado cast Carupano as simply the “first stage” of a people’s war against the Betancourt government. It was only a matter of time before more elements of the military joined the popular classes in carrying through the promise of the 1958 revolution, according to Machado.²³⁵

While this “people’s war” did not emerge, a second leftist military coup soon did. On June 2, Pedro Medina Silva, executive officer of the Puerto Cabello naval base, led a takeover of the facility, the largest in the country. This rebellion proved much larger and bloodier than its predecessor. Silva’s mutineers numbered over 1,000 men strong and enjoyed access to the large base arsenal, allowing them to resist the government with

²³³ “Suspendidas las Actividades del Partido Comunista y del MIR,” *El Nacional*, May 11, 1962, p. 1.

²³⁴ “Penas de 10 a 15 Años Impone el Tribunal Militar a los Sublevados de Carúpano,” *El Nacional*, May 25, 1962, p. 1.

²³⁵ F. L. McCarthy, “Venezuela’s Dilemma: Liberty vs. Survival,” June 10, 1962, *Los Angeles Times*, p. F2.

vigor.²³⁶ By nightfall columns of tanks and National Guard paratroopers moved against the rebels.²³⁷ The bloodshed continued throughout the night and into the next day, as the government steadily reduced the remaining pockets of resistance. On June 4 Ambassador Stewart reported the death toll in the 200-400 range, with at least 1,000 wounded.²³⁸ Evidently a leftist uprising was to have begun in Caracas to complement the Puerto Cabello takeover if popular support emerged. Radio Havana, for example, had called on the Venezuelan people to support the uprising and instructed the rebels to contact Cuba by radio.²³⁹ CIA and State Department sources indicated the involvement of MIR deputy Raúl Lugo Rojas and guerrilla leader Teodoro Petkoff, leading to their arrest in the Puerto Cabello vicinity. PCV leader Gustavo Machado, too, was summarily arrested at Maiquetía airport as he returned from a trip to the Soviet Union.²⁴⁰

The Puerto Cabello uprising presented Betancourt with yet another challenge. In a conversation with ambassador Stewart on June 4, he admitted that the heavy casualties suffered by the armed forces in putting down the rebellion had probably exhausted the patience of the military moderates; the president could not expect further support absent a strong response against the subversives. He planned to suspend PCV and MIR members

²³⁶ Stewart to Rusk, June 2, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/1/62—6/4/62 folder, JFKL. Stewart became the U.S. ambassador on March 14, 1962.

²³⁷ “Sublevación en Puerto Cabello: Rescatada la Base Naval,” and “Bombardeada la Base por Aire y Mar”; “Recapturada la Base Naval de Puerto Cabello,” *El Nacional*, June 3, 1962, pp. 1, 37, 38.

²³⁸ Stewart to Rusk, “Situation Report, Noon, June 4,” June 4, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/1/62—6/4/62 folder, JFKL.

²³⁹ Stewart to Rusk, June 3, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/1/62—6/4/62 folder, JFKL.

²⁴⁰ Stewart to Rusk, “Situation Report, Noon, June 4,” June 4, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/1/62—6/4/62 folder; CIA Information Report, “Disturbances in Caracas,” June 5, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/5/62—6/30/62 folder, JFKL.

of congress, which would represent a step up from the previous suspension of party activity but fall short of outlawing the parties outright. Yet Copei opposed such a move on the grounds that it would further erode the democratic character of the government. From Copei's perspective, the growing leftist insurgency and the apparent decision by Castro to make Venezuela his prime target for subversion made it more critical than ever to preserve free democratic institutions and avoid the trappings of a police state. CIA sources gave credence to Betancourt's fears: the army general staff appeared ready to issue an ultimatum to the president demanding the outlawing of the PCV and MIR and arrest of their congressional deputies. To give force to this ultimatum, the CIA learned, plotters planned to use units based at the Urdaneta and San Carlos barracks in Caracas, and the 99th National Guard unit at La Guaira, to set up a new regime if Betancourt balked.²⁴¹

By the middle of June, Betancourt, Caldera, and the moderates within the armed forces had reached a compromise, the details of which Minister of the Interior Carlos Andres Pérez related to Ambassador Stewart on June 13. Congress was due to adjourn on July 6, allowing the government to confine disloyal congressmen to house arrest without violating parliamentary immunity protections. The lack of quorum would prevent the senate from creating an interim delegated committee to extend parliamentary immunity, said Pérez. The government could therefore function without congressional

²⁴¹ Stewart to Rusk, June 4, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/1/62—6/4/62 folder; CIA Information Report, "Demands on President Romulo Betancourt by Moderate Military Personnel to Take Measures to Crush Leftist Conspiring," June 7, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/5/62—6/30/62 folder, JFKL. The exact wording of the CIA cable is that Venezuela "has become Castro's number one target for subversion."

interference through the 1963 elections. As far as the military was concerned, advised Pérez, it remained dissatisfied with the lack of a severe crackdown against the leftists but recognized the futility of a coup since the popular response to a military takeover would likely be negative in the extreme.²⁴²

Throughout 1960 and for most of 1961 the leftists pursued moderate means, yet by the beginning of 1962 it was apparent that the movement was radicalizing. Pledges by leaders like Domingo Alberto Rangel that the left was committed to non-violence and was simply a channel for popular frustration with poor government gave way to public statements that the left was “at war” with the government. The uprisings at Carupano and Puerto Cabello indicated that the MIR, now in close cooperation with the PCV, saw a route for quick success in toppling the government. In classic Marxist-Leninist theory, elements of the armed forces, already possessing the “means of coercion” against the masses, could be made to serve the masses by defeating the government and preventing “reactionary” elements of the armed forces from resisting them. As we have seen, however, this gambit failed, and indeed the cycle of *military* uprisings that had tormented Venezuelan political life from 1960 through 1962 ended. It would appear that the politicized officers lingering from the Pérez Jiménez years had faded from the scene by 1961. Those officers compelled, by the uncertainty associated with the democratic transition, toward the patriotic appeal of the leftists in 1962 also seemed to acknowledge the apparent national consensus for political moderation. Yet the Betancourt government

²⁴² Stewart to Rusk, June 13, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 6/5/62—6/30/62 folder, JFKL.

now had to grapple with a new kind of extremist challenge, that of guerrilla warfare. Such a threat, long nothing more than a vague possibility, naturally invoked the spirit of the Cuban revolution, and the counterinsurgency resources of the Kennedy administration.

THE COMMUNIST WORLD AND THE FIRST STAGES OF INSURGENCY

In early 1962 the MIR dispatched several guerrilla teams to the countryside for the first time, intent on adding to the government's challenge of containing urban terrorism and rioting. This decision reflected the MIR's basic frustration with the failure of its campaign to topple Betancourt through propaganda and agitation. At a deeper level, however, the decision for rural insurgency marked a pivot point in Venezuelan leftist and communist ideology and in world communist thinking on national liberation movements in Latin America. In general, the younger Latin American generation of leftists had pushed for immediate and if necessary violent change in political structures, while the older generation of communists gravitated toward gradualism and moderation. But in 1962 the older generation signaled its willingness to give extreme methods a chance and to throw in their lots with the youth. Internationally, Moscow began paying greater attention to Latin American politics and, in its growing feud with China over leadership in the communist world, indicated a willingness to entertain extremism and to tolerate if not sponsor the assertive young Latin Americans.

As political scientist William Taubman has argued, Nikita Khrushchev and the post-Stalin Soviet leadership were eager to build alliances with revolutionary movements in the developing world at the end of the 1950s. Though they were uncertain about

whether to support Fidel Castro initially, and wary of provoking the United States by encouraging Latin American instability, by the end of 1959 Khrushchev saw to it that Moscow had a stake in the Cuban Revolution. Cuba became an outlet for Soviet frustrations over its inability to achieve strategic parity with the United States, and a potential gateway towards gaining the allegiance of other Latin American nations whose loyalties the United States took for granted. This situation became more pronounced as U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated as U.S.-Latin American relations grew more tenuous in 1960 and 1961.²⁴³

As part of its increasing interest in the Western hemisphere and in regional revolution, the Soviet Union gave qualified support to the Venezuelan leftist turn to violence. Because the PCV hewed closely to the Moscow line, the Venezuelan Community Party duly gave its blessing to the MIR campaign. In December 1960, PCV delegates took part in a meeting of 81 communist parties in Moscow and affirmed peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world while also endorsing national liberation movements. The resolution emanating from this meeting held that inferior capitalism would continue to give way to superior socialism and that organic revolutions in certain countries would hasten this transition, as illustrated by the Cuban example; foreign intervention by communist powers would not be needed. Incipient national liberation movements, such as the one beginning in Venezuela, deserved sympathy but could not be directly supported by world communism. “The Communist parties, which guide

²⁴³ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man & His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), pp. 532-533.

themselves by the Marxist-Leninist doctrine,” stated the resolution, “have always been against the export of revolution. At the same time, they fight resolutely against imperialist export of counter-revolution.”²⁴⁴

Foreign service officer and visiting Harvard scholar Joseph B. Norbury concluded that the Soviets saw Cuba and Venezuela as means through which they might establish a semi-neutral enclave in the Western Hemisphere. Unprecedented Soviet interest in Latin America, he claimed, manifested itself in the amount of research and literature recently devoted to the area. Soviet-produced titles on Latin America, held by the U.S. Library of Congress, had increased from barely 40 in 1948 to 361 in 1958.²⁴⁵ The December 1960 communist joint statement, judged Norbury, indicated Soviet interest in the emergence of an “independent state of [Latin American] national democracy.” This new Soviet ideological-political status called for cooperation between workers, bourgeois, and other groups in the creation of a highly nationalistic state capable of maintaining economic independence from capitalist-imperialist nations. Moscow apparently had Cuba in mind when it created this category, asserted Norbury, but was probably uncomfortable with the quick erosion of the national-democratic model as Castro purged his government of potential opponents. Norbury thought that the Soviets hoped to use Venezuela as a second chance to create this “independent state of national democracy.” Moscow closely tracked the nation since Pérez Jiménez’s fall, for example, referring to its history post-

²⁴⁴ “Text of Statement by Leaders of 81 Communist Parties After Meeting in Moscow,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1960, p. 14.

²⁴⁵ Norbury, “Latin America Through Soviet Eyes,” May 1961, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., White House Files, Box WH-13, Latin America, 5/4/61–7/17/61 folder, pp. 1-5, JFKL.

1958 as a “national liberation” period and accusing Betancourt of failing to promote his people’s democratic aspirations. Moscow did not suggest that Venezuelans should become communists, but rather that they should realize that association with Betancourt meant association with U.S.-supported militarists, oligarchs, and monopolists.²⁴⁶ If the Soviets had their way, apparently, Venezuela would become a Cold War neutral, plucked from the U.S. sphere of influence and at least sympathetic to the Communist bloc.

As these ideological debates evolved, then, several younger Venezuelans found room to assert themselves as proponents of guerrilla war. Douglas Bravo, who joined the Communist Youth in 1948 and worked as a PCV labor leader later in the 1950s, was a prime example of this phenomenon. Like so many others, his jubilation and optimism regarding the events of 1958 soured dramatically as gulfs widened between the Punto Fijo coalition, the PCV, and the armed forces.²⁴⁷ He found the Betancourt government to be an anti-democratic sham. “There had to be something more profound,” he lamented, “a true democracy with vocal and decisive participation by the popular and progressive sectors” of the population.²⁴⁸ Luben Petkoff and his brother Teodoro felt even more disgusted, having lost faith not only in the Punto Fijo coalition but also in the PCV for so passively accepting its exclusion from government. The PCV, in Luben’s estimation, considered the Betancourt administration to be “a good government because it was

²⁴⁶ Joseph B. Norbury, “Latin America Through Soviet Eyes,” May 1961, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., White House Files, Box WH-13, Latin America, 5/4/61—7/17/61 folder, pp. 9-10, 48-55, JFKL.

²⁴⁷ Alfredo Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo* (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978), pp. 33-35.

²⁴⁸ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, p. 43. The original Spanish reads, “Tenía que ser algo más profundo, una verdadera democracia con participación más amplia y decisiva de los sectores populares y avanzados.”

composed of gentlemen,” rather than because it truly advanced the interests of the people.²⁴⁹

During 1960 these men devoted serious attention to the problem of applying Che Guevara’s guerrilla warfare theories in their own country. To them the low coastal mountain range to the west of Caracas in Falcón state, as well as the high mountains and peasant villages to the southwest in Lara, Yaracuy, Portuguesa, and Trujillo states, appeared ideal. These areas provided cover as well as access to the capital and the massive oil installations in Falcón and Zulia states, near the Colombian border. The failure of the PCV congress of March 1961 to achieve a consensus on the endorsement of rural insurgency cemented Bravo and the Petkoffs decision to force the issue on their own.²⁵⁰ The guerrillas separated into rural cells in the spring of 1962, with Petkoff operating in Yaracuy, Bravo operating in Falcón, and Luna Márquez and Argimiro Gabaldón operating in Lara and Portuguesa. They were off to replicate and perhaps improve upon the Cuban revolution, Luben Petkoff recalled. They would bond with the people of the rural areas and complete the overthrow of Betancourt by the end of 1963, thus completing the revolution in less time than it took Castro and Guevara to depose Batista in Cuba.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes: Magoya, Luben Petkoff, Anselmo Natale, Luis Correa, Juan Vicente Cabezas, Alfredo Maneiro* (Caracas: Venezuela Central University-FACES, 1981), p. 99. The original Spanish reads, “Y se consideraba que era un bueno gobierno porque estaba constuido por gente buena.”

²⁵⁰ Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 105-106.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 106-111.



Illustration 1, Venezuelan States: The vast majority of the guerrilla struggle occurred to the west and southwest of Caracas, though a significant guerrilla presence emerged in the mountains east of Caracas. By the late 1960s, sporadic guerrilla violence broke out in the eastern states as well. Source: World of Maps, <http://www.worldofmaps.net/typo3temp/pics/ff65ae598c.png> website (accessed March 23, 2012).

On March 2, reports of guerrilla activity in the remote and mountainous La Culebra region, near Los Teques, Miranda state, prompted a party of local and national police to spend the day combing the area. Locals insisted they had seen as many as 200 guerrillas operating in the extremely dense wooded environment, but even with guides the government forces failed to locate any insurgents. After four days of patrolling in

extreme cold and across broken terrain, the government forces called off its search.²⁵² Authorities in Maracaibo, Falcón state, also fielded reports of guerrilla activity, in this case discounting them out of hand. According to Dr. Gilberto Urdaneta Besson, state secretary general for Falcón, “the guerrillas only exist in the mind of those who have lost the political struggle and have instead dedicated themselves to insurrectionary coups.” The government of Falcón, he insisted, preempted any guerrilla presence by dedicating the majority of its budget to public works projects and education initiatives benefitting the rural population.²⁵³

Genuine guerrillas struck on April 4, in the remote town of Humocaro Alto in Lara state west of Caracas. For more than three hours a force of approximately 50 guerrillas attacked the town hall, held off by four policemen and an army reservist barricaded inside. The reservist was killed and the policemen escaped out a window just before running out of ammunition. The guerrillas themselves also soon fled, taking their wounded to a local doctor who agreed to treat them. According to the doctor, they were young, polite, and by all mannerisms probably average college students.²⁵⁴ *El Nacional* reporters Elídes J. Rojas and Alejandro Rojas investigated the incident and learned that this guerrilla band had been in the area for some time. Farmers throughout Lara—at Morán and El Tocuyo and even Barquisimeto, the state capitol—advised officials of the

²⁵² “Se Cree Operan Guerrillas en el Estado Miranda,” *El Nacional*, March 3, 1962, p. 43. “Interrumpen la Búsqueda de Guerrillas en el Cerro La Culebra” and “Es Normal la Situación en el Estado Falcón,” *El Nacional*, March 6, 1962, p. 27.

²⁵³ “Es Normal la Situación en el Estado Falcón,” *El Nacional*, March 6, 1962, p. 27.

²⁵⁴ “El Asalto a la Alcaldía: Más de Tres Horas Resistieron 5 Hombres el Ataque de Guerrillas,” *El Nacional*, April 5, 1962, p. 30.

presence of groups of armed men, clearly not from the region, who occasionally stole and slaughtered cows for food.²⁵⁵

Following this attack, two National Guard battalions searched the region for the guerrilla band, capturing two solitary rebels after struggling against extremely difficult terrain and climate. *El Nacional* reporters found a local restaurant owner who claimed to have spoken with the rebels. The guerrilla leader, Lino Díaz, had bought coffee, cookies, and soft drinks just prior to the assault and assured the restaurateur that the rebels fought to destroy the government rather than sought to harm the citizenry.²⁵⁶ On April 9 the National Guard established contact with the main guerrilla force. In two days of sporadic clashes, Guardsmen killed at least 10 guerrillas and captured 10 more. Government sources claimed that the remainder fled to the edges of the state.²⁵⁷ The guerrilla band again attacked Humocar Alto on April 15, however, exchanging heavy fire with government forces before retreating in the afternoon. The government withheld information concerning army casualties but claimed that six guerrillas had been wounded and 10 captured.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ “En Humocar Alto: Los Campesinos Habían Denunciado la Presencia de Guerrillos,” *El Nacional*, April 6, 1962, p. 32.

²⁵⁶ “Por Montañas y Paramos de Occidente: El Batallón Piar y la Guardia Nacional en Persecución de los Guerrilleros,” *El Nacional*, April 6, 1962, p. 34.

²⁵⁷ “Consideran Liquidada la Acción de las Guerrillas en Humocar,” *El Nacional*, April 10, 1962, p. 32.

²⁵⁸ “6 Guerrilleros Muertos y 2 Heridos en Choque con Militares,” *El Nacional*, April 16, 1962, p. 31. Subsequent interrogations revealed that the band called itself the Libertador Simón Bolívar Commando unit. Pedro Pablo Linárez’ *La lucha armada en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2006) reveals that this unit was the pioneer guerrilla force in the insurgency. Though it was reorganized several times, the Libertador Simón Bolívar *foco* would play a leading role in the insurgency throughout the mid-1960s.

A week later Defense Minister General Antonio Briceño Linares spent four hours before the Chamber of Deputies Defense Commission, explaining the government response to the recent guerrilla activity. “We are almost in a state of revolutionary war” against a growing communist insurgency, he said. Eight guerrilla groups, General Briceño Linares continued, spearheaded an offensive planned and executed by leftists within Caracas, designed to continue at least through July or August. After enduring boilerplate patriotic speeches by AD and Copei deputies—and coy questions from MIR deputies regarding whether the armed forces received anti-guerrilla training at U.S. schools in Panamá—the defense minister dug further into the problem. The insurgency seemed to be following a classical, systematic pattern, he observed. The first two stages, in which guerrilla leaders created a “nuclei of agitation” and then trained insurgent cadres to be led by them, were complete. The third stage was underway, as rebel leaders responsible to a central command continuously employed these forces in given rural and urban areas. The guerrilla threat, aide Colonel Martín García Villasmil insisted, “could not be underestimated.”²⁵⁹

Writing in *El Nacional* on May 2, Domingo Alberto Rangel rebuked Briceño Linares. The government and the ruling class, he claimed, were the true perpetrators of

²⁵⁹ “Estamos Casi en Guerra Revolucionaria Informa Briceño Linares,” *El Nacional*, April 25, 1962, p. 19. The defense minister cataloged the initial contacts with each of the eight known guerrilla *focos*: the first, in Turimiquire, Sucre state, on January 16, which resulted in the capture of 11 insurgents; the second, in Falcón state, at Santa Cruz de Bucaral, on February 20, netting 19 guerrillas captured; the third, on March 1 in La Azulita, Mérida state, resulted in the capture of 16; the fourth, on March 3 in the El Charal region of Portuguesa, where the armed forces killed one insurgent and captured 23 others; the fifth and sixth on March 24, in Trujillo state at Agua Viva and in Yaracuy state at Aroa, in which one guerrilla was killed and five captured, and in which the armed forces suffered three deaths while killing five insurgents and capturing 17, respectively; the seventh, in Vigirima, Carabobo, on March 30, featuring the capture of 21 rebels; and the eighth, the recent clash in Humocar Alto which resulted in the deaths of two government troops and eight guerrillas as well as the capture of 21.

the ongoing violence. The people were far from engaging in “revolutionary war” but rather were simply defying government injustice. If the defense minister thought he currently faced such a war, he would be in for a rude shock when the real one came. Egotists like Briceño Linares, said Rangel, sought to make the army the master of the government and continue their repression, thus satisfying the “tendency towards monarchy” so much in vogue with those in and around Miraflores. Such monarchical pretensions simply engendered more hostility and violence on the part of a people already burdened by socioeconomic depression and malaise, dramatically shortening the time in which the government could use the leftists as whipping boys to postpone the emerging historical conditions of a true revolutionary war.²⁶⁰

The U.S. Special Group CI (Counter-Insurgency) kept Venezuela on its “Countries Threatened by Subversive Insurgency” list as the violence continued. According to information provided by Ambassador Stewart, the Betancourt government believed it had blunted the guerrilla offensive, and could eliminate it all together by the beginning of 1963. U.S. police and anti-guerrilla training appeared to be paying dividends, though Betancourt still preferred that police training be conducted beyond Venezuelan borders.²⁶¹ After ranking dead last among Latin American recipients of U.S. military aid in 1961, Venezuela now led the region in terms of proportional increase. The \$1.5 million in 1962 aid represented a 3400 percent jump, while the average increase for

²⁶⁰ Domingo Alberto Rangel, “El Estado de Guerra del General Briceño,” *El Nacional*, May 2, 1962, p. 4.

²⁶¹ “Minutes of the Special Group (CI) Meeting 2 p.m., Monday, 30 July 1962,” July 30, 1962, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Box 319, Special Group (CI) Meetings, 6/8/61—11/2/62 folder, JFKL.

the 12 Latin American countries participating in U.S. military aid programs hovered around 300 percent for the same time period.²⁶²

While strengthening the Venezuelan counterinsurgency capability remained a U.S. priority, the White House also continued studying the question of Cuban involvement. State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research staffer Roger Hilsman advised Secretary Rusk in September 1962 that perhaps “several hundred” men had received guerrilla training in Cuba in recent months. While many of these trainees were intended to be future guerrillas, a significant number had already seen action in Venezuela. State Department sources tracked Cuban agents and trainees in Brazil, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Ecuador, but it was clear that Venezuela was the “main focus” for Castro. Hilsman described the Cuban tactics in Venezuela that could be used as a model elsewhere: the employment of “widely scattered, small-scale guerrilla outbreaks synchronized with terrorism in urban centers and subversion of armed forces units,” and the provision of funds and propaganda to sympathetic front groups. These insurgents had gained little traction thus far, being effectively suppressed by the Venezuelan armed forces and a generally hostile peasantry. The insurgent strategy, however, budgeted for these losing clashes with the army in the countryside because they had the potential to disperse government forces and leave the capital vulnerable. No evidence implicated Castro in arms shipments to Latin American insurgents, but the amount of weaponry he inherited from Batista and now received from the Soviet bloc

²⁶² “A Summary of U.S. Military Counterinsurgency Accomplishments Since 1 January 1961,” July 23, 1962, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Box 319, Special Group (CI) Military Organization and Accomplishments, 7/62 folder, JFKL.

would certainly make him a significant supplier of arms to the region “as the need arises.”²⁶³

In mid-September the Venezuelan Ministry of Interior Relations announced the arrest of PCV congressional deputy Eduardo Machado and seizure of incriminating PCV and MIR documents in his possession. Correspondence between Machado and various leftist activists discussed the need to sow enough disorder to prevent the 1963 elections from occurring, detailed the various materiel needs of guerrilla *focos*, and listed numerous targets for sabotage and methods for their destruction.²⁶⁴ Ambassador Stewart also picked up on signs that subversion would probably increase towards the end of the year. Schools and the congress prepared to resume as the summer vacation period ended—thus providing both potential perpetrators and targets of urban terrorism—and the various political parties were beginning their presidential nominating processes. Guerrillas in Portuguesa state, for example, had recently inflicted several casualties on a detachment of local and Digepol national police. As the military high command wrapped up their vacations, evidence of guerrilla activity in Falcón and Trujillo states emerged. In Caracas, meanwhile, extremists carried out a graffiti and mural campaign publicizing and praising the guerrilla activity.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Roger Hilsman to Rusk, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America, 1962,” September 1962, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL.

Venezuelan sources periodically reported that they had proof of Cuban infiltration of agents or arms, but U.S. bureaucracies could not prove or disprove such reports. During this time staffers at various U.S. agencies simply forwarded the reports and rumors to their superiors.

²⁶⁴ “Comunicado de Relaciones Interiores en Torno a Actividades Subversivas,” *El Nacional*, September 13, 1962, p. 20.

²⁶⁵ Stewart to Rusk, August 30, 1962, NSF, Countries, Dominican Republic, Box 66, Venezuela, General, 8/20/62—8/31/62 folder, JFKL.



Illustration 2, Urban Centers and Roadways: A more detailed look at Venezuela. Roadways proved to be a double-edged sword in the guerrilla struggle. Generally the guerrillas could avoid the army by staying in undeveloped areas, but once the army established a continual presence in an area, guerrillas were forced to skirt the roadways in moving to a new area, thus exposing them to military and police surveillance. Source: Ezilon <http://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/southamerica/map-of-Venezuela.gif> website (accessed March 23, 2012).

On October 1 and 2 guerrillas struck near Guarico, in Lara state, and in El Hatillo, just to the southeast of Caracas in Miranda. In the Guarico attack government troops

inflicted two guerrilla deaths as well as lost two of their own; at El Hatillo the insurgents routed local security forces and held the town for about an hour before fleeing.²⁶⁶ Such disorder prompted a rebuke of the government by Ramón Escovar Salom. “We are presiding over the disintegration of the state,” he lamented, “because the government does not exercise power.” Instead of preserving law and order, the Betancourt regime offered a meaningless pledge to try harder, or empty accusation against a given political party, to each attack against a town or a bank or a government office. Real power, he concluded, was “in the streets, in the hands of whomever.”²⁶⁷

Apparently the armed forces approached the breaking point as well. According to CIA sources, leading military officers delivered an ultimatum to Betancourt on October 9, 1962, demanding the outlawing of the PCV and MIR and the arrest of their leaders in congress, regardless of parliamentary immunity. That same afternoon the Venezuelan president met with the Supreme Court to discuss the feasibility and legality of such a measure. The CIA sources indicated that Betancourt would face a military coup by October 15 if he did not comply.²⁶⁸ Following the meeting with the Supreme Court, Betancourt held a parley with Copei leader Rafael Caldera and the chiefs of the armed forces. By the end of October 12 the parties resolved two matters: there was no alternative to outlawing the PCV and MIR; there was no reasonable option but for the

²⁶⁶ “Bandas Armadas Tomaron El Hatillo y lo Tuvieron Media Hora en su Poder,” *El Nacional*, October 1, 1962, p. 1. “4 Muertos y 6 Heridos en Combate entre Guerrilleros y el Ejército,” *El Nacional*, October 2, 1962, p. 31.

²⁶⁷ Ramón Escovar Salom, “La Disintegración del Estado y la Grave Situación Nacional,” October 5, 1962, p. 4. The original Spanish reads, “Estamos presenciando la desintegración del Estado, porque el Gobierno no ejerce el poder. ¿Dónde está la acción ejecutiva para preservar el orden y la estabilidad del país?”

²⁶⁸ CIA telegram, “Ultimatum Given to President Betancourt by Officers of the Armed Forces,” October 10, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 9/20/62—10/31/62 folder, JFKL.

armed forces to cooperate with AD and Copei, as none of the three constituents could survive independently. Betancourt announced the illegalization in a national radio and TV address on October 15. A crackdown on the renegade parties was already underway, he said, that would continue until order was restored. By dawn on October 16, security forces made in excess of 600 arrests, including that of guerrilla chief and ex-URD leader Fabricio Ojeda in Portuguesa.²⁶⁹ Tensions eased briefly across Caracas, but within a week Washington and Havana locked swords over the issue of Soviet missiles in Cuba, catalyzing a new campaign of subversion in Venezuela.

During the summer of 1962 the CIA notified the president that the Soviet Union had begun sending large supplies of military hardware to the island. Though disturbing, these shipments appeared to include no offensive weaponry. After all, the NSC estimated in May 1961 that only a “remote possibility” existed that Castro might “attempt to convert Cuba into a Russian base for [a] strategic attack on the United States.”²⁷⁰ In response to congressional Republican criticism and allegations of weakness, Kennedy publicly acknowledged the buildup on September 4 but insisted that he had no evidence of the presence of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. If any weaponry of this sort emerged, Kennedy pledged, he would respond aggressively. When the administration

²⁶⁹ CIA Telegram, “Plans of the Government of Venezuela to Take Action Against Leaders of the Communist Party of Venezuela and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left,” October 12, 1962; Stewart to Rusk, October 16, 1962, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192, Venezuela, General, 9/20/62—10/31/62 folder, JFKL. “Detenido Fabricio Ojeda en Montaña de Portuguesa,” *El Nacional*, October 14, 1962, p. 36. “Ilegalizar al Partido Comunista y MIR Pidió el Gobierno a la Corte Suprema” and “Anuncia el Ministro del Interior Demanda Penal Contra los Dirigentes de los Dos Partidos,” *El Nacional*, October 16, 1962, p. 1.

²⁷⁰ Paper Prepared for the National Security Council by an Interagency Task Force on Cuba, “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere,” May 4, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume X: Cuba, 1961-1962* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1997) [hereafter FRUS 1961-1963 X], p. 460.

discovered the existence of ballistic missiles on the island on October 16, policymakers assumed that this development constituted a direct and premeditated threat by the Soviet Union, abetted by its equally hostile Cuban satellite. For the next two weeks, Kennedy stood poised to order a full-scale invasion of Cuba and engage in nuclear war with the USSR. Yet Khrushchev ultimately consented to withdraw the Soviet offensive weaponry, and Kennedy reciprocated by removing similar weaponry from Turkey and giving Moscow a secret pledge not to invade Cuba. Significantly, the crisis sobered American policymakers to the extent that they sought closer relations and an improved dialogue with the Soviets to prevent a similar crisis. Having regained control of the hemispheric status quo, Kennedy wanted to be sure of smoother superpower relations.²⁷¹

While the crisis contributed to U.S.-Soviet cooperation, it strained Cuban-Soviet relations and became a cautionary tale for Cuban leaders. At the beginning of 1962 both the Soviet and Cuban leadership agreed on the imminence of a U.S. invasion of Cuba. Such an interpretation was sound, given the existence of Operation Mongoose, a multi-faceted CIA plan to end the Castro regime approved by Kennedy on November 10, 1961. Further, Khrushchev and his domestic critics increasingly feared a U.S. nuclear first strike, a concern intensified by the Soviet deficit in strategic weaponry. These circumstances drew Cuba and the USSR closer together. Pursuant to Castro's December 1961 acknowledgement of Marxism-Leninism as the guide to the Cuban revolution and February 1962 reaffirmation of the necessity for Latin American revolution, the Soviet Union recognized Cuba as a socialist nation and, within a few weeks, arranged for the

²⁷¹ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 2-3, 28-29.

transfer of weaponry that would include the ballistic missiles. For Cuba this union meant several things. First, the nation staked its revolution and its existence on the assumption that it possessed the full backing of the Soviet Union against the overtly hostile United States. Beyond this risk-reward consideration, the nation could claim the prestige of being a full-fledged member of the socialist camp, as well as the honor of being the first Third World nation to enter such company. Finally, the union indicated a crucial step closer to an international socialist victory. When Khrushchev reached his accommodation with Kennedy—without any prior consultation with Castro—and ordered the withdrawal of the missiles and the vast majority of the Soviet garrison in Cuba, Castro felt betrayed and never again could bring himself to trust the Soviets. Having run the ultimate risk Cuba became more vulnerable than before to U.S. aggression, as well as more likely to receive it given the intensity of the crisis.²⁷² Castro confronted a two-fold legacy: first, he ceased to believe in the imminent victory of world socialism; second, he began to perceive that the smaller nations of the developing world could not expect real aid or empathy from the superpowers and instead should cooperate within a non-aligned movement.

As always, a natural outlet for Castro's frustration was the Venezuelan government. Caracas stood shoulder to shoulder with Washington during the missile crisis, pledging full diplomatic and military support in preventing communist aggression in the hemisphere. Citing Article 8 of the Rio Treaty, Venezuela cut all travel and communication and travel with Cuba. As a Copei spokesman phrased it, the missile

²⁷² Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 22-27.

crisis indicated a broader pattern in which communist forces targeted Venezuela for concerted attack.²⁷³ And while no overt conflict occurred between the Caribbean powers, evidence suggested Cuban complicity in violence and disorder within Venezuela. Beginning with Kennedy's announcement of a Cuban quarantine, a massive campaign of sabotage began in the oil fields of Zulia and Falcón state. The campaign continued until the first weeks of December, when even the Venezuelan antagonists tended to retire and observe the Christmas holiday. Copei congressman Luis Herrera Campins declared such sabotage to be criminal activity carried out "on Cuban orders."²⁷⁴ The government presented evidence of Cuban complicity at the trials of several captured guerrillas during this time, but such evidence remained anecdotal and inconclusive. Foreign Minister Marcos Falcón Briceño admitted as much at the U.S. embassy on December 21. He had little direct proof of Cuban intervention, but was "convinced personally" of ties between Cuban and Venezuelan communists at "higher levels."²⁷⁵

In fact there had been a deepening of Cuban and Venezuelan communist ties at the end of 1962. During this time the PCV and MIR, in conjunction with Havana, had made the decision to form a National Liberation Front (FLN), which would be an umbrella for concerted political action, and the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), which would be the military wing of the front. It was the FALN that

²⁷³ "De Acuerdo al Pacto de Rio: Venezuela Cumplirá con sus Compromisos Internacionales," and "Dice COPEI: Venezuela Está Amenazada por la Agresión Comunista," *El Nacional*, October 24, 1962, p. 25. Article 8 of the Rio Treaty provides a list of sanctions that the OAS Organ of Consultation may enact when a member country commits an act of aggression against another.

²⁷⁴ Luis Herrera Campins, "Ejército, Paz, y Guerrillas," *El Nacional*, November 1, 1962, p. 4. Campins refers a major attack on the Zulia oilfields carried out on October 27, with the blessing of Radio Havana.

²⁷⁵ Undated White House Memorandum, "Cuban-Communist Activities in Latin America—Venezuela." NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL.

spearheaded the violent campaigns of October-December 1962. The FALN proved especially potent because it contained many former soldiers and officers who had been involved in the military coups of early 1962. They brought their military training to bear, and in many cases they had access to more sophisticated weaponry and explosives than had been employed previously in the insurgency. With the coming of 1963 the issue of Venezuelan insurgency and Cuban involvement would intensify.

TEST OF WILLS: THE 1963 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN VENEZUELA

As 1963 dawned, Betancourt's plate featured many new problems heaped upon those problems leftover from previous New Year's Days. The economy lagged as always, and political violence loomed. In dealing with the former problem, the good news was that the economy was stagnant rather than in decline. But in dealing with the latter problem it was clear that the level of violence and subversion was increasing rapidly. The FALN proved a capable and dangerous entity beginning with the Cuban missile crisis. Castro's fury at having been sold out by the Soviets meant that the Cuban leader would intensify his interest in revolutions across the Caribbean Basin, regardless of whether he actively supported them. In addition, the secret U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba hindered Washington's ability to stop Cuban intrigue at its source, instead compelling Washington to preempt or cripple Cuban policy abroad. In this environment, the elections scheduled for year's end represented a tantalizing prize. If polling booths stayed open, it meant vindication for Betancourt's experiment in democracy, and for U.S. support of it. Similarly, a successful election in Venezuela might give the lie to the notion that communism and the Cuban revolution "spoke Spanish," as Castro's

Venezuelan supporters often claimed. The obverse was true, of course. If the Betancourt government collapsed—either through a military coup or via a descent into right wing dictatorship—it would prove the bankruptcy of the sham democracy peddled by the United States and its Latin American front men. The vision of Miraflores as a trump card for hemispheric advantage put several powerful constituencies on a collision course as 1963 wound to its conclusion.

Castro's initial 1963 public appearances—his customary speech commemorating the anniversary of the January 1 revolutionary victory and an address to the Congress of American Women—advertised aggressive intentions. U.S. analysts took note of his insistence upon the equal validity of the Beijing line in the Sino-Soviet dispute, judging that, by refusing to recognize the superiority of Soviet moderation, he effectively endorsed Beijing's doctrine of revolutionary export. In assessing current Latin American politics, Castro also dropped his customary qualification that Cuba did not export revolution nor interfere in the internal affairs of other nations. In his 1962 anniversary speech Castro had stated, "Our policy is not one of intervention in other nations' affairs." Now, instead, he praised the "Venezuelan people [for] extraordinary revolutionary spirit," and asserted that it was time to "bring them the struggle" with "experts on changing the situation [and] on leading peoples in revolutions." While not quite saying

that Cuban personnel and materiel would be involved in foreign revolutions, Castro came close.²⁷⁶

In Caracas, Domingo Alberto Rangel of the MIR also portrayed 1963 as a decisive year. By year's end, he predicted, the contradiction between the government's false democracy and its very real program of repression would finally topple the Miraflores house of cards. Using "all possibilities of political action" the people would finally be able to be free in their rights to meet, organize, and express themselves. The clock was therefore ticking. Betancourt could either loosen his hold on the political process or the popular classes would do it for him, warned Rangel.²⁷⁷ Meanwhile FALN guerrillas initiated their first operations of the New Year, clashing with government forces in Falcón at Santa Cruz de Burcal. In Caracas leftist terrorists attacked the national museum of fine arts, making off with a Picasso and several other works from a visiting French exposition.²⁷⁸ In Portuguesa, guerrilla commanders Douglas Bravo, Domingo Urbina, and Elías Manuit Gamero, were brazen enough to reveal their identities and taunt the armed forces in letters circulated to the local populace and authorities.²⁷⁹ U.S. and Venezuelan intelligence officials, for their part, had determined that the FLN

²⁷⁶ U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Radio Propaganda Report, Report on Cuban Propaganda—No. 3: The Fourth Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution," January 18, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL.

²⁷⁷ Domingo Alberto Rangel, "El Gran Dilema," *El Nacional*, December 4, 1962, p. 4.

²⁷⁸ "Dice el Secretario de Gobierno: Quedan unos 60 Guerrilleros en las Montañas de Falcón," *El Nacional*, January 5, 1963, p. 25. "Asalto Armado al Museo: Robaron Cinco Obras Maestras de la Exposición Francesa," *El Nacional*, January 17, 1963, p. 1. "Aviones y Helicopteros Sobrevuelan Montañas Cercanas a Santa Cruz de Bucaral," *El Nacional*, January 20, 1963, p. 26. While the works were recovered within several days, it was certainly an embarrassment to the government and local security forces.

²⁷⁹ "Identificados 4 Comandantes de las Guerrillas," *El Nacional*, February 4, 1963, p. 28.

was the conduit through which Castro now supported the Venezuelan insurgency, and that the connection between the PCV and the FALN was airtight as well.²⁸⁰

The Kennedy administration struggled to achieve consensus in combating the isolated but increasingly aggressive Latin American insurgency and its Cuban sponsor. Some, such as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Sterling J. Cottrell and Travel for Subversion Subcommittee Chairman Major General Victor H. Krulak, favored a quarantine of Cuba that would prevent insurgents from entering or leaving the island. Others, like NSC staffer Gordon Chase and Cuban Coordinating Committee member Robert Follestad, urged that more be done to undermine Cuban subversion at local “target areas” like Venezuela.²⁸¹ A paper produced by the Travel for Subversion Subcommittee, for example, offered the novel solution of establishing a fund to “offer attractive short-term tours or study opportunities in the U.S. or elsewhere in the Free World to selected Latin Americans who have completed training in Cuba.” Apparently, some would be disillusioned by the “attractions of communism” and therefore “amenable to [a] post-training reorientation in the U.S.”²⁸² These individuals, having completed indoctrination into *fidelismo* in Cuba and a subsequent re-

²⁸⁰ Undated White House Memorandum, “Cuban-Communist Activities in Latin America—Venezuela” [undated], NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder; White House Briefing Notes, “The Communist Threat in Latin America,” February 16, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 2/18/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL. The White House briefing paper, for example, cited a “usually reliable member of the [Venezuelan] communist party” who stated that guerrilla and terrorist operations had been put under a unified command toward the end of 1962.

²⁸¹ National Security Council Member Gordon Chase to Bundy, “Cuban Subversion in the Hemisphere,” February 12, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL.

²⁸² Travel for Subversion Subcommittee to Coordinating Committee of Cuban Affairs, “Measures to Restrict Travel to Cuba for Subversive Training,” February 11, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 1/19/63—2/13/1963 folder, JFKL.

indoctrination into the ways of Uncle Sam, would presumably return to their homelands as inoculated and innocuous citizens.

After receiving general presidential approval on March 15, the work of the subcommittee found its way into resolutions adopted at the April 1963 meeting in Managua of the foreign ministers of the United States, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Panamá, and El Salvador. The ministers resolved to restrict further travel to and from Cuba. There would be a multilateral Caribbean surveillance system, and a mechanism to ensure periodic multilateral review of Cuban problems and a system of referral between the conferees and the OAS. In the opinion of General Krulak, the results of the meetings “exceeded considerably” U.S. expectations going into the conference.²⁸³

Yet dissension and doubt persisted within the White House, as a rather candid April 1963 memo from Gordon Chase to Special Assistant to the President Ralph A. Dungan and McGeorge Bundy revealed. The Bureau of Inter-American Affairs prepared to quash the Krulak committee’s work based on the bureau’s belief that Krulak overestimated the problem of Cuban subversion. Chase had his doubts about Krulak but felt that such action would be premature. “The fact is,” he complained, “that we don’t really know the extent of the subversion problem; however, the lack of plenty of good, hard evidence does not necessarily mean the absence of subversion.” Future Krulak recommendations would require a grain of salt, but further investigation and stone turning needed to be done. If Krulak’s work continued, Chase judged, “there is a good

²⁸³ Sub-Committee on Cuban Subversion Memorandum, “Ministerial Meeting, Managua, Nicaragua, 3 April 1963,” April 6, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 4/63 folder, JFKL.

chance that he will stimulate and initiate some thought and work...and we may at long last know what it [subversion] is all about.”²⁸⁴

Back in Venezuela, meanwhile, guerrillas clashed with security forces in Lara and Falcón states. The engagements typically involved either a chance encounter between the two sides in the hinterlands or the guerrilla occupation of a remote town until government reinforcements arrived. The casualties incurred in these encounters remained modest, with combatant deaths in the single digits and the numbers of wounded hovering in the dozens. The government enjoyed some success in intelligence gathering and interdiction, including the capture of a number of suspected FALN leaders and noted insurgent leader and PCV member Teodoro Petkoff.²⁸⁵ By April, after the government announced a firm December 1 election date, the pace of guerrilla action increased to a near constant level. At the beginning of the month the government announced a major operation against two guerrilla groups—those led by Domingo Urbina and Douglas Bravo—in Falcón. According to army commander Colonel Gonzalo Murillo, units from all branches of the armed forces had encircled the insurgents and, following aerial bombardments carefully designed to avoid loss of civilian life or property, closed the trap upon them. In the process government troops killed as many as 17 men and seized documents, weapons, and medicine, from abandoned camps. This operation was evidence, claimed Colonel

²⁸⁴ Chase to Special Assistant to the President Ralph A. Dungan, “Krulak Subcommittee,” April 10, 1963, NSF, Countries, Cuba: Box 59, Cuba, Subjects, Cuban Subversion, 4/63 folder, JFKL.

²⁸⁵ “Capturado en Barquisimeto Presunto Dirigente de las FALN,” February 19, 1963, p. 28; “Muerto un Guardia Nacional y Herido Otro en Choque con Grupo Armado en El Charal,” March 1, 1963, p. 30; “Grupo Armado Ataca Prefectura del Pueblo Cumarebo, Falcón,” March 15, 1963, p. 36; “Comunicado de la DNI: Capturado por la Digepol el Dirigente Comunista Teodoro Petkoff,” March 21, 1963, p. 36, *El Nacional*.

Murillo, of the armed forces' dedication to upholding the constitution, and of their capability to strike boldly and nimbly against the insurgency.²⁸⁶ Falcón governor Pablo R. Saher also portrayed guerrilla prospects as grim. The elements harried the insurgents as much as government forces did, he claimed. In intercepted letters to their families, guerrillas complained of constant torment from insects, disease, and hunger. Morale was low, as the incapacitation of each senior guerrilla leader forced the recruitment of a younger, inexperienced replacement.²⁸⁷

El Nacional reporters followed the offensive, interested in ascertaining exactly how effective the armed forces were against the guerrillas. Notwithstanding the fact that 1,000 government troops were now in the field, it became apparent that authorities inflated the estimates of guerrilla casualties. When government coroners arrived in provincial towns to view guerrilla bodies, none were there. Soldiers reported seeing blood trails, but nothing more. Press interviews with soldiers returning from operations suggested that the army, too, suffered from the rough conditions and was apparently in as poor a shape as the guerrillas they pursued.²⁸⁸ The bulk of the guerrilla forces managed to escape encirclement and capture. Both Urbina and Bravo would resurface again, and Falcón would again be the site of guerrilla fighting.

²⁸⁶ "Anuncia el Ejército: Copados Guerrilleros en Falcón y su Captura se Estima Inminente," *El Nacional*, April 3, 1963, p. 1. "17 Muertos en Combate en la Sierra de Coro: Unos Campesinos Revelan que Douglas Bravo Murió en la Acción los Muertos no Han Sido Aún Identificados," *El Nacional*, April 3, 1963, p. 34.

²⁸⁷ "Durante Seis Horas Bombardearon los Focos Guerrilleros en Sierra de Falcón;" "Grupos Guerrilleros Localizados en Pueblo Nuevo y Santa Cruz de Bucaral" *El Nacional*, April 4, 1963, p. 24.

²⁸⁸ "Mil Hombres Suben a la Sierra para Exterminar los Focos Guerrilleros," *El Nacional*, April 6, 1963, p. 32.

To complement these guerrilla efforts, the FALN in Caracas pursued a campaign of terrorism against government offices and businesses and against U.S. military and diplomatic personnel. Early in the morning of April 5, terrorist teams attacked and destroyed the transmitter of Radio Tropical, one of Caracas' biggest radio stations, as well as burned the Interior Ministry parking garage.²⁸⁹ On June 11 the FALN started a massive fire at the Caracas warehouse of the Goodyear Tire Company that caused \$500,000 in damages.²⁹⁰ Sabotage against U.S.-owned oil facilities between October 1962 and June 1963 numbered 15 attacks. According to *New York Times* correspondent Richard Eder, on assignment in Caracas, leading insurance executives suggested that American businesses could soon become uninsurable if the current level of sabotage persisted. Three recent attacks against Creole Petroleum electrical plants and warehouses owned by Sears and Goodyear alone had caused \$6 million in damages. Though Eder's contacts within the business community did not suggest an imminent U.S. corporate withdrawal, the Venezuelan investment community was clearly skittish.²⁹¹

Following a self-imposed truce in May, the FALN began zeroing in on U.S. personnel as targets for terrorism. On May 31 the CIA intercepted information detailing such plans, including a potential attack the U.S. military mission during a barbecue

²⁸⁹ "Estallo una Bomba de Tiempo en la Planta de 'Radio Tropical'," *El Nacional*, April 6, 1963, p. 34. Stewart to Rusk, April 5, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 3/63—5/63 folder, JFKL.

²⁹⁰ "Terrorists Burn U.S. Warehouse in Venezuela," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1963, p. A19. "Destruyeron con Bombas Molotov los Depósitos de la 'Good Year'," *El Nacional*, June 12, 1963, p. C12.

²⁹¹ Richard Eder, "Caracas Terror Perils U.S. Trade," *New York Times*, June 30, 1963, p. 27.

dinner reception on June 1.²⁹² The Venezuelan Ministry of Defense followed similar tips, but no attack materialized until the evening of June 5. Eight FALN terrorists overpowered the Venezuelan guards at the U.S. military mission, held the staff at gunpoint, and doused the building with gasoline. After issuing warnings to the effect of “next time we won’t be joking,” the attackers set fire to the building and made off with a cache of arms and ammunition.²⁹³ On June 15 terrorists raided the home of U.S. political counselor E. T. Long. Long and his children were away, but attackers bound his wife and maid and interrogated them as to his whereabouts. After painting various FALN slogans on the walls, the terrorists fled. A less successful incident occurred on June 27, when the FALN attempt to gain access to the home of U.S. commercial attaché Eldon Cassoday. After asking the maid whether Cassoday was home, terrorists brandished a gun and demanded entry, whereupon the made hid and alerted the U.S. embassy and local authorities.²⁹⁴

Towards the end of September, the leftist insurgency escalated its efforts to either provoke a dictatorial crackdown or military coup. CIA sources indicated that the summer insurgent strategy of avoiding attacks upon Venezuelans in favor of U.S. personnel and installations had drawn to a close. The FALN was now willing to risk losing public

²⁹² CIA Information Report, “Planned Attack on the U.S. Military Mission in Venezuela by the Armed Forces of National Liberation,” May 31, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 3/63—5/63 folder, JFKL.

²⁹³ Stewart to Rusk, June 5 and 6, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL. “Asaltaron y Dieron Fuego a la Sede de la Misión Militar de los Estados Unidos,” *El Nacional*, June 6, 1963, p. 40. “Venezuela Reds Raid U.S. Army Mission,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1963, p. 5.

²⁹⁴ “Frustrado atentado Revela Betancourt: El Presidente Dio Orden de Detener a los Miembros del PC y del MIR en Todo el País,” *El Nacional*, June 13, 1963, p. 1. Stewart to Rusk, June 15 & 27, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL.

sympathy by conducting bombings and sabotage against domestic political rallies and other public assemblies.²⁹⁵ On September 29 the FALN hijacked a train carrying some 400 vacationers to the popular El Encanto Park west of Caracas. Terrorists killed five National Guardsmen and robbed several civilians before stopping the train and fleeing in waiting cars. The attacks outraged the nation and garnered universal condemnation as an unprecedented affront to public decency. *El Nacional* devoted its entire September 30 front and back pages to the attack, exhaustively depicting the horror experienced by the numerous women and children who were forced to witness the violence.²⁹⁶ Ambassador Stewart called the attack “wholesale murder” and confided his fear to Washington that such barbarism could “only have the gravest consequences for the morale of the Armed Forces” and for their relationship with Betancourt.²⁹⁷

The following day the government announced that it held the PCV and MIR directly responsible for the attack. Members of the extreme left would be subject to arrest, regardless of political status or parliamentary immunity, said Miraflores. Interior Minister Manuel Mantilla called the attack an “act of war” and vowed to hold those responsible accountable for every attack that had occurred since November 1960. Within days police arrested PCV and MIR leaders Eduardo and Gustavo Machado and Jesús

²⁹⁵ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Terrorism in Venezuela,” September 16, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL. The terrorists’ most audacious goal, according to the CIA, involved the kidnapping of Ambassador Stewart and other embassy personnel.

²⁹⁶ “Muertos 5 Guardias Nacionales y 3 Heridos: Banda Armada Asaltó el Tren de Caracas a el Encanto que Conducía 400 Personas,” *El Nacional*, September 30, 1963, p. A1.

²⁹⁷ Stewart to Rusk, September 30, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL.

Faría, as well as Guillermo García Ponce, the suspected leader of the FALN.²⁹⁸ Police also sought the PCV's Pompeyo and Guillermo Márquez, Pedro Ortega Díaz, and MIR head Domingo Alberto Rangel, who was imprisoned later in the month.²⁹⁹ For the MIR in particular, there was now a leadership void into which younger and more radical members could step. The FALN retaliated immediately. During the night of October 5 to 6, terrorists shot five civilians and two National Guardsmen on the well-travelled La Guaira-Caracas super highway, as well as conducted drive-by shootings against police stations, army checkpoints, and AD political rallies.³⁰⁰ By the time Betancourt addressed the nation on October 7, vowing to defeat the terrorists and ensure that the elections be held as scheduled, the FALN had killed 20 people in response to the crackdown.³⁰¹

On the night of October 19 to 20 the FALN bombed the film depository of Colombia Pictures in Caracas. While the mixture of burning gasoline and film stock was spectacular enough, the attack also garnered headlines because two of the attackers were young women, and because a night watchman who sustained mortal injuries in the fire was the father of 14 children. That same day a major clash erupted between army units and the guerrilla band led by Douglas Bravo near Coro, Falcón state. At least four

²⁹⁸ Stewart to Rusk, October 5 & 11, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 10/63—11/63 folder, JFKL.

²⁹⁹ "Paratroop Unit Sent to Caracas: City Is Quiet as Venezuela Acts to Avert New Terror," *New York Times*, October 3, 1963, p. 9. With Rangel imprisoned, leadership of the MIR would devolve to younger members like Américo Martín, who sought to take the movement farther to the left and who embraced violent means, as we will see in chapter four.

³⁰⁰ "Terrorists Slay Two Venezuelan Guardsmen," *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1963, p. G8. "5 Wounded as Caracas Police Battle Terrorists," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1963, p. 31.

³⁰¹ "Alocución del Presidente: La Lucha Contra el Terrorismo ha Entrado en su Etapa Definitiva," *El Nacional*, October 8, 1963. p. A1. "Betancourt Vows Full Crackdown on Red Terrorists in Venezuela," *The Washington Post*, October 9, 1963, p. 45.

guerrillas died in this engagement, and Bravo and 10 other guerrillas reportedly sustained wounds in a narrow escape from the army.³⁰²

On October 21, John Goodyear, counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Japan, forward information to Rusk on direct Cuban assistance to the Venezuelan insurgents. According to an October 10 report from the Japanese embassy in Havana, embassy staff recently spoke with Cuban officers from the secret police and Cuban Engineering Corps regarding Cuban intervention in Venezuela. Apparently Castro had secretly addressed a Havana special police school on August 20, claiming that he had enlisted “priority” support from the USSR in spreading guerrilla war across Latin America. Recordings of the speech had been played to other select groups, including the “Commando Corps for Latin America” and the “destructive maneuvering corpsmen,” totaling about 120 men presumably preparing for action across the Caribbean Sea. The Cuban officers claimed that the Commando Corps received intensive training in infiltration and sabotage, for example learning how to swim as far as three kilometers from sea to shore. Furthermore, according to the report, the Venezuelan FALN leadership was “constantly” traveling to Cuba and infiltrating back into Venezuela for rest and refitting.³⁰³ On October 25, the U.S. Embassy in Paris forwarded the thoughts of the French ambassador in Havana, who believed that the Cuban leadership had opted to make revolutionary export its national

³⁰² “En la Sierra de Coro: 4 Muertos y 10 Heridos en Encuentro Entre el Ejército y un Grupo Armado, Efectivos Militares Allanaron el Campamento de Douglas Bravo”; “En la Plaza Venezuela Grupo Armado Asalto e Incendio Depositos de la Columbia Pictures,” *El Nacional*, October 20, 1963, pp. C11, C16. Stewart to Rusk, October 12, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 10/63—11/63 folder, JFKL.

³⁰³ U.S. Embassy to Japan Counselor John Goodyear to Rusk, “Transmittal of Information on Cuba from Official Japanese Sources,” October 21, 1963, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 44A, Cuba: Cables, 10/63 folder, JFKL.

industry. The ambassador asserted that the sluggish economy and recent spate of natural disasters combined to cripple Castro's plan for an industrialized and self-sustaining society. Instead, Castro gravitated toward his revolutionary past and hoped to keep the Cuban revolution alive by exporting it. Venezuela was singularly important in this enterprise, advised the ambassador, since it would provide vast natural resources and a beachhead to spread revolution further into the South American continent.³⁰⁴

On November 2 the scope of the threat against the Venezuelan elections and the degree of Cuban complicity in the local insurgency became clearer. That morning a National Guard patrol in the Paraguaná Peninsula, in Venezuela's Falcón state, captured four armed men and women loitering near a large motorboat on the beach and subsequently uncovered a three-ton cache of small arms and ammunition. Within hours authorities had trucked the weapons to Caracas, where they were to be inspected to determine their country of origin. By the middle of the month the Venezuelan government determined and was prepared to announce that the arms were of Cuban origin, intended to help disrupt the coming elections.³⁰⁵ Similar to U.S.-Venezuelan cooperation over earlier problems with Castro and Trujillo, Washington supported Caracas but counseled patience until the charges in question could be made airtight. Neither party publicly mentioned the arms discovery issue until the end of November. At that point State Department officials simply restated the U.S. commitment to halting the

³⁰⁴ U.S. Embassy to France to Rusk, October 25, 1963, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 44A, Cuba: Cables, 10/63 folder, JFKL.

³⁰⁵ "Descubrieron Enterradas Cuantioso Lote de Armas de Guerra en Paraguaná," *El Nacional*, November 3, 1963, p. A1. "Trajeron a Caracas Armamento Decomisado en Falcón," *El Nacional*, November 4, 1963, p. A1. Stewart to Rusk, November 18, 1963, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 44A, Cuba: Cables, 11/1/63—11/22/63 folder, JFKL.

Cuban spread of revolution across the Caribbean Basin. Betancourt was more explicit, saying that there could “not be peace in the hemisphere as long as Fidel Castro exists in Cuba” and calling on U.S. support to “end this bridgehead of Communism in America.”³⁰⁶ The United States, of course, was in late November 1963 still reeling from the Kennedy assassination and thus distracted from such problems.

Back in Venezuela, the month between the discovery of the arms and the election featured constant violence that nonetheless failed to rise to a level sufficient to seriously imperil successful balloting. Sporadic clashes continued between guerrillas and government forces in Lara and Falcón states, and several incidents of sabotage occurred in the oil refineries of Zulia and Anzoátegui states. By far the chief area of violence, however, remained Caracas and its environs. Here, each day brought new reports of sabotage, bombings, and voter intimidation by FALN terrorists. By the end of the month several dozen police, civilians, and terrorists had died in Caracas, with many more scores wounded. Yet the government maintained order through increases in security forces and police crackdowns. The Betancourt administration had called up 3,000 army reservists to provide security as the elections neared, and during the period between November 30 and the closing of the ballots the police would be 100 percent mobilized and on duty.³⁰⁷

On Election Day, polling was peaceful and relatively orderly, as over 90 percent of eligible voters cast ballots while 50,000 police and National Guardsmen kept a

³⁰⁶ Richard Eder, “Venezuela Seeks Drive on Castro: Betancourt Urges Action by Hemisphere to Erase Communist Foothold,” *New York Times*, November 30, 1963, p. 1.

³⁰⁷ Stewart to Rusk, November 18-21, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 10/63—11/63 folder, JFKL.

watchful eye. Raúl Leoni of AD emerged victorious, with 32 percent of the votes cast for president, trailed by Rafael Caldera of Copei with 23 percent. While it was not exactly a ringing endorsement of Betancourt's AD party—AD had won 49 percent in 1958—a plurality of 55 percent of voters chose either AD or Copei. This proportion was precisely the same as it had been in 1958. In short, Venezuelans still harbored doubts about the Punto Fijo coalition, but they harbored far greater doubts about the communists and the far left, and showed little enthusiasm for endorsing political violence or guerrilla war.³⁰⁸ At least for the time being, it seemed like the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership had held the line against leftist extremism in Latin America. The FALN and other leftist insurgents had conducted a nearly 24-hour per day campaign of bombings, snipings, and voter intimidation in the days before the election, but the overwhelming voter turnout prompted Betancourt to term the terrorist campaign a conclusive failure.³⁰⁹ On December 13, *El Nacional* triumphantly announced that the vote tally was official and that Raúl Leoni was president elect, the first democratically elected Venezuelan president to succeed another democratically elected president in the nation's history.³¹⁰

CONCLUSION

A few weeks before the train attack that decisively turned public opinion against the extreme left, MIR leader Domingo Alberto Rangel publicly reaffirmed his movement's ideological vigor and purity in the face of its bleak prospects for the

³⁰⁸ Richard Eder, "Caracas Case History of Castro Defeat," *New York Times*, December 8, 1963, p. 239.

³⁰⁹ "Venezuelan Vote Is 95% Despite Sniping, Bombs," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 1963, p. A1.

³¹⁰ "Termino el Computo: Raúl Leoni Electo el C.S.E. lo Proclamará Mañana," *El Nacional*, December 13, 1963, p. A1.

December election. Former foreign minister and URD member Ignacio Luis Arcaya had recently chided Rangel and the MIR for their inability to align with any credible candidate for president. The implication was that the leftist party, as a result of Rangel's poor leadership, flailed about in obscurity, hoping to somehow resurrect itself underneath a mainstream party's wing. Rangel asserted the opposite: every opposition party had solicited *his* support, but the MIR remained unaligned because it refused to compromise its principles for the sake of expediency. "It would be idiotic," he said, "if now, in the key moment of my public life, I became a businessman inquiring about prices in the [political] favors market." Indeed, he continued, it was the province of the half-hearted members of the leftist and rightist opposition to make deals and compromises rather than advance the agenda of the masses. "The responsibility for this latest fiasco is not ours," he concluded.³¹¹ Less than three months later—following the train attack and the subsequent government dragnet for leftist extremists—Rangel was in the hands of Digepol, being transported to San Carlos prison, the notorious destination for political detainees since the time of Gómez and Pérez Jiménez.³¹²

Despite three and a half years of concerted effort, Rangel and his party had failed in their effort to unify "the opposition"—as if the 45 percent of the electorate that voted against AD and Copei could be considered homogeneous—against the Punto Fijo coalition. The government perhaps came close to the dictatorial crackdown the MIR

³¹¹ "Rangel Responde a Arcaya," *El Nacional*, September 4, 1963, p. C1. The original Spanish reads, "Sería un necio si ahora, ya en la madurez de mi vida política, fuera a convertirme en papel comercial que busque cotización en el mercado de los favores." And, "La culpa de este último fracaso no es nuestra."

³¹² "Detenido Domingo Alberto Rangel y Traslado al Cuartel San Carlos," *El Nacional*, November 30, 1963, p. D12.

sought, and the armed forces did engage in coups as the leftists hoped, but the MIR was now an outlaw party and its leader was voiceless and imprisoned. On the other hand, the MIR was now perhaps the most visible opposition voice in Venezuela and, through its ties to the PCV and the Castro-supported FALN, enjoyed wide access to national and international communist movements and their funding. A younger cadre of leftists like Américo Martín considered themselves ready to take up the mantle of leadership now that Rangel was imprisoned. The revolutionary dialectic continued apace. Just as the AD Youth soldiered on while Betancourt and his contemporaries were in exile in the 1950s, the junior members of the MIR vowed to carry on the latest fight. Furthermore, these new leaders saw no point in splitting the hairs of Marxist and Leninist theory, and of contemplating their exact role in the societal structure, as Rangel and others had done in 1960 and 1961. Rather, they sought to speed up the revolution by whatever means necessary and prove their leadership to a watching world.

It was a mixed bag for the leftists' antagonists, too. Betancourt and Kennedy captured the imagination of a generation of political moderates and democrats throughout the hemisphere, pointing a new way forward free from the iron grip of despotism as well as the excesses of communist revolution. For perhaps the first time in hemispheric history, a U.S. president and a democratically elected Latin American leader cooperated in a spirit of truly mutual admiration and common purpose. If aid programs like the Alliance for Progress, and Betancourt's own plans for socioeconomic modernization, were delivering uneven results it was certainly not because of a lack of effort on the part of the two presidents. Yet the time for these two forceful and commanding personalities

on the world stage had reached its end; Kennedy's presidency ended in an instant in Dallas, Texas, while Betancourt was scheduled to hand control to Miraflores in a matter of months. The two men now in charge of the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership—Lyndon Johnson and Raúl Leoni—were competent and dedicated politicians who nonetheless lacked the star power of their predecessors.

Johnson and Leoni found their plates overflowing when they considered the problem of leftist insurgency in the Caribbean Basin. Many leftist leaders were imprisoned, U.S. advisors and Venezuelan armed forces were more skillful in countering the insurgent threat, and joint U.S.-Venezuelan action within the OAS made it harder for Cuba to influence and assist such insurgencies. But the leftists in the Venezuelan hinterlands and in the streets of Caracas were more dangerous and committed than ever, as was Cuba in its efforts to aid them. That the mainstream democrats succeeded in holding the 1963 elections in Venezuela certainly counted as a victory, but it was only a victory in the first round of what appeared to be a long and arduous bout.

Chapter 4: Sharpening Swords & Ideas: Washington, Caracas, & the Deepening Insurgency

Following Kennedy's death, Lyndon B. Johnson assumed both the U.S. presidency and the problems posed by Latin American politics. The new administration vowed to continue Kennedy's foreign policy initiatives, publicly embracing the precedents of the Alliance for Progress, the OAS sanctions regimen against Cuba, and the commitment to hemispheric democracy. But in private the administration began to reconsider the promotion of socioeconomic modernization and democratization, and the effectiveness of efforts to contain Cuba through such legalistic devices as embargoes and sanctions. What if, the Latin America "hands" wondered, the best solution to hemispheric unrest lay in a renewed focus on stability and anti-communism at the highest levels of government, and in the crafting of juridical covers for military force against Cuban intervention at its source as well as throughout the Caribbean Basin? Instead of planting the seeds of democratization and painstakingly guarding them at the community level, in other words, maybe it was better to apply blanket pesticides to the overall environment to kill the communist contagion itself.

As had been the case since 1960, Venezuela played a key role in supporting and influencing U.S. policy. As 1964 began president-elect and fellow AD Party member Raúl Leoni vowed to remain true to Betancourt's vision of Venezuela as a dynamic force for Latin American democracy and self-determination. Unlike his predecessor, however, Leoni focused less on capturing imaginations and winning hearts and minds. He was instead more intent on the steady and tedious work of shepherding the glacial economic

recovery and on restoring peace to the nation. He and his administration made it clear that those opposed to this less-than-glamorous program could either come out of the wilderness and jump on the bandwagon, or be ground down blow by blow. Such a situation meant renewed confrontation with Cuba and with the conglomeration of leftist and communist entities within Venezuela who, despite their inability to disrupt the 1963 election, were undeterred and in the process of recommitting to their vision of revolutionary democracy.

In Havana and in the secret councils of the Venezuelan left, meanwhile, the mood was one of defiance and of preparation to tighten belts and carry heavier loads. A year and a half after the Cuban missile crisis, Castro strengthened his commitment to accelerate revolution in Latin America as a means to weaken the United States and increase his influence within the communist world. The formal Cuban-Soviet Union alliance remained a going concern, but a steady stream of evidence indicated Castro's determined resistance to the Moscow line of political moderation and peaceful coexistence with the capitalist bloc. Four years after the beginning of their resistance movement—and 18 months after the creation of dedicated military cadres—Venezuelan communist leaders confronted these national and international trends. In the spring of 1964 leaders of the Venezuelan Community Party (PCV) and the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR) leaders agreed, in a shaky compromise, that the moderate Moscow line and the strident Havana line could be employed in Venezuela simultaneously. In addition, these leaders resolved to push these two lines and to place their lives and liberty in the balance more forcefully than ever. This chapter examines the new round of

confrontation between the Washington-Caracas partnership and the Cuban-Venezuelan leftist revolutionary movement. Both constituencies became more powerful and skilled in pursuing their agendas, with the Washington-Caracas group maintaining the marginal superiority they had enjoyed since 1959. The stress of this struggle simultaneously forced the United States and Venezuela to engage in the messy business of anti-communism, at the expense of democratization efforts, and forced an open breach in the communist movement in the Caribbean Basin and the wider world.

LBJ'S INHERITANCE: THE DILEMMA OF LATIN AMERICAN INSTABILITY

By mid-1963 a growing number of observers judged that U.S. policy towards Latin America, if not falling behind the curve of hemispheric problems, was certainly having trouble keeping up the pace. Many U.S. and Latin American politicians signaled diminishing faith in the Alliance for Progress. Castro appeared as secure as ever in his control of Cuba. And the democratic wave that swept over much of the hemisphere at the end of the 1950s now ebbed significantly. This section discusses the last efforts of the Kennedy administration and the first efforts of the Johnson administration to remedy these problems in consultation with key hemispheric allies like Venezuela. The picture that emerges is one in which the White House struggled to retain the initiative and clarity of message it had enjoyed in 1961 and in which the meaning of Latin American democracy became ever more tenuous and contested.

Betancourt, approaching potentially chaotic 1963 elections in his country, drew attention to Washington's waffling on the role of Latin American militaries as guardians of democracy. On July 11 the Ecuadorean army overthrew President Carlos Julio

Arosemena Monroy, an opponent of many Alliance reforms and a generally difficult partner for the United States. Writing on July 14, *New York Times* correspondent Henry Ramont suggested that U.S. officials welcomed the coup because Arosemena had lost control of his country and because the United States was reassessing the value of the military as a political force. In Ramont's opinion, Washington concluded that, "Communist subversion, taking advantage of deep social unrest, had reached alarming proportions and that President Arosemena had been unwilling or unable to do anything about it." Despite the Kennedy administration's expressions of concern regarding recent military coups in Argentina, Peru, and Guatemala, said Ramont, "high officials" in the State Department now regarded the military as a stabilizing factor in Latin American politics and went so far as to praise the "sense of mission" displayed by this force. Indeed, the White House asserted none of its customary interest in democracy when the Ecuadoran army pushed Arosemena into exile.³¹³

Despite basic differences between Arosemena and Betancourt, enough similarities in their situations existed—the problems of "communist subversion," "deep social unrest," and a president perhaps "unable to do anything about it"—to warrant concern on Betancourt's part. Most U.S. officials and media outlets hailed Betancourt as a tireless worker for his people who made decent strides in managing a near-impossible political and economic situation. The consensus on Arosemena, on the other hand, was that he was an eccentric and erratic alcoholic who displayed little interest or ability in behaving

³¹³ Henry Ramont, "Washington Sees Gain for Ecuador: Coup Welcomed as Ending Incompetent Regime," *New York Times*, July 14, 1963, p. 20.

as a competent public servant. Still, communist insurgencies plagued both Venezuela and Ecuador; many doubted whether the government could extinguish them while moderating local military demands for a harder line. The choice appeared to be either the toleration of a low-level, but perpetual, guerrilla war or the dismantling of democratic rule. Betancourt could be forgiven for pondering whether Washington might back the return of a military strongman like Pérez Jiménez.

Betancourt denounced this article immediately and asked Washington for clarification. In a letter hand delivered by Venezuelan Ambassador Dr. Enrique Tejera París to Kennedy, Betancourt worried about the possibility of a coup against his successor, if not himself, and warned that the United States would lose a great deal of good will if indeed Washington had departed from its policy against regional dictatorships. The Kennedy administration faced a future nightmare, asserted Betancourt, since military coups had the effect of undermining initiatives like the Alliance for Progress, perpetuating the threat of communism rather than eradicating it, and intensifying latent Latin American distrust of the United States.³¹⁴ Kennedy replied to Betancourt on August 16, reassuring him of Washington's commitment to democracy—an “unalterable” support of “representative, constitutional processes”—while insisting that Latin American coups had more to do with specific local conditions than with a particular U.S. policy stance. Kennedy insisted that the remedy for those cases that veered from democracy was not the ostracism of such governments but rather the effort

³¹⁴ President Betancourt to President Kennedy, July 22, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL.

to attain the “earliest restoration of civilian, constitutional government.” In any case, he asserted, military coups sprang from poorly developed institutions and bureaucracies, rather than from U.S. approval or disapproval. “It remains essentially the task of the people of a given country,” said Kennedy, “to transform its own institutions.” Addressing the Ramont piece specifically, Kennedy pointed to numerous State Department statements that U.S. recognition came only in the light of the Ecuadoran junta’s pledge to restore a constitutional form of government in a timely fashion. There was no praise of a “sense of mission” by Latin American militaries.³¹⁵

The prospect of hypothetical U.S. support for military coups and associated friction with the Latin American democrats soon resurfaced, in the form of an editorial written by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Edwin M. Martin for the October 6 edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Martin declared U.S. support for constitutional civilian governments, stressing the need for Latin American militaries to play an active and constructive supporting role. He then proceeded to hedge and qualify this support. While coups d’état were certainly anti-democratic, argued Martin, in some cases military action dislodged dictators, initiated reform, and returned government control to civilians. In any case, he continued, it would be inappropriate for the United States to intervene in any coup d’état. Rather, Latin Americans themselves should create and maintain conditions for the prospering of democratic governments.³¹⁶ By Monday

³¹⁵ Kennedy to Betancourt, August 16, 1963, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A, Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL.

³¹⁶ Editorial Note, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XII: American Republics, 1961-1963* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), [hereafter FRUS 1961-1963 XII], p. 149.

morning, the press was referring to these articulations as the “Martin Doctrine” and wondering whether the White House had gone a step further towards endorsing military governments.

Writing from Santo Domingo, Henry Ramont noted the high level of Latin American disappointment with the “timing” and “tone” of the Martin piece. Viewed in isolation, the assistant secretary’s views had some merit, since socioeconomic reform and democratization provided the same benefits whether initiated by civilians or officers. But in the context of the apparent flagging of such reform movements and historic U.S. support for Latin American strongmen, the Martin editorial could not be viewed in anything other than a negative light.³¹⁷ The Martin editorial ran in the October 8 edition of *El Nacional*—as “La Política de EE.UU. Sobre los Golpes Militares en Latinoamérica Destacada por Edwin M. Martin, Subsecretario de Estado para Asuntos Interamericanos”—and it met with an overwhelmingly negative reaction on the Venezuelan street and within Miraflores. A top secret and heavily redacted memo circulated between Washington and the U.S. embassy referred to the timing and content of Martin’s article as “absurd.” It was impossible to overestimate, the embassy advised, the level of sensitivity among Venezuelans regarding the prospect of a new military government installed with U.S. support.³¹⁸

³¹⁷ “Some Gains Seen from Latin Coups: U.S. Opposes Military Rule but Notes Improvement,” and Henry Ramont, “View Disputed by Latins,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1963, p. 7.

³¹⁸ “La Política de EE.UU. Sobre los Golpes Militares en Latinoamérica Destacada por Edwin M. Martin, Subsecretario de Estado para Asuntos Interamericanos,” [The translation from the Spanish is, “The U.S. Policy Regarding Military Coups in Latin America, Detailed by Edward M. Martin, Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs] *El Nacional*, October 8, 1963, p. C10. Undated and unattributed State

In advance of a presidential press conference scheduled for Wednesday, October 9, the administration spent Tuesday debating how to clarify that the United States had not endorsed military regimes to solve Latin American problems. In a memo to the president, Special Assistant Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. argued that the *Herald Tribune* falsely characterized the Martin piece as official U.S. policy; the White House, Schlesinger stressed, needed to distance itself from the editorial as quickly as possible. He maintained that, at the very least, the tone of the article suggested U.S. insensitivity to the long struggle of Latin Americans to keep the military out of politics and foster greater participation by the popular classes. More likely, said Schlesinger, the Latin Americans interpreted the editorial as evidence of a basic U.S. preference for military rule as a guarantor of stability. Ultimately, this new “doctrine” smacked to Latin Americans of “an unconscious paternalism and contempt in American policy,” Schlesinger concluded.³¹⁹ Taking this advice, Kennedy advised the press that U.S. policy remained consistently opposed to governments established by coups d’état; Martin was simply “explain[ing] some of the problems in Latin America” and their association with military coups.³²⁰

In his last six weeks in office, Kennedy tried to return the Latin American focus to Castro as the real threat to regional democracy and civilian government. There were much greater problems than academic debates over military rule, he asserted. The final

Department telegram, NSF, Countries, Venezuela, Box 192A Venezuela, General, 6/63—9/63 folder, JFKL.

³¹⁹ Special Assistant to the President Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. to President Kennedy, “The Martin Doctrine,” October 8, 1963, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, pp. 150-152.

³²⁰ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, Volume Three, 1963* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 767-775.

manifestation of this effort was a speech Kennedy delivered in Miami on November 18, in which the president emphasized the U.S. commitment to preventing Cuban aggression against hemispheric nations and called on his neighbors to join him in this effort using every weapon at their disposal. While encouraging the Cubans themselves to resist Castro, Kennedy also encouraged those in Venezuela who challenged Cuban-sponsored subversion.³²¹ This statement received reinforcement from Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who intimated that the United States stood ready to take direct action to prevent future Cuban agitation in the hemisphere. The administration became increasingly sensitive to situations in which Castro appeared to be making an end run around U.S. quarantine efforts, using non-state actors in a given country to upset both national and regional stability.

Upon assuming the presidency after Kennedy's assassination, Johnson sought to reassure the public of the soundness of U.S. hemispheric policy while ensuring behind closed doors that it in fact was sound. At a White House reception on November 26, 1963, for example, the president announced a recommitment to improving the U.S. role in the Alliance for Progress as a memorial to President Kennedy. Privately the administration regarded the Alliance initiative as underfunded, bogged down by bureaucratic inertia and local ambivalence, and a poor counterweight against the romantic example provided by Castro. Johnson solicited the input of CIA Director John A. McCone regarding the personnel changes involved in regaining leverage on the Alliance.

³²¹ Robert E. Thompson, "Kennedy Urges Cubans to Rise Against Castro: Promises U.S. Friendship and Economic Aid for Island if Leaders Are Ousted," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1963, p. 1.

McCone responded on December 3, arguing that the program suffered from such malaise that no administrator could remedy these errors absent changes at the highest levels. McCone suggested the creation of a new position staffed by someone well acquainted with the problems bedeviling the Alliance and instantly credible with the leaders of Latin America and the U.S. Congress. On December 9 Johnson offered the job—a broad portfolio as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Special Assistant to the President, and United States Coordinator of the Alliance for Progress—to Ambassador to Mexico Thomas C. Mann. As Johnson characterized it during a December 14 announcement, Mann would have the power, capability, and commitment to address and resolve all policy problems relating to the United States and Latin America.³²²

Mann, the bilingual product of Laredo, Texas, and the Baylor law school, rose from middle class origins to play a pivotal role in U.S. efforts to manage the Alliance and contain Cuba. Mann served as a junior State Department official at the 1945 Chapultepec Conference, which laid foundations for the 1947 Rio Conference and the formation of the OAS in Bogotá in 1948, and continued working on Latin American problems under the Eisenhower administration. During this time he wrestled with the key ideological debates of U.S. foreign relations, including the merits of “exporting democracy” versus

³²² Editorial Note #1, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXXI: South and Central America; Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2004) [hereafter FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI], pp. 1-2.

absolute respect for national sovereignty and self-determination.³²³ Mann found flaws with the export of governing systems, the result of what he termed “an illusion of omnipotence” held by certain leaders, in which Americans could simply conceive policy and watch the world embrace it. Because democracy represented such an elusive ideal, Mann concluded, policymakers should recognize the right of sovereign nations to manage their own affairs. Even as he subscribed to the concept of non-intervention, however, he recognized the vagaries of international law. Ultimately, Mann admitted, terms like democracy and non-intervention remained subjective, able to become both “a signpost for the guilty and a trap for the innocent.”³²⁴ As part of the Johnson administration, Mann was at once pragmatic, possessed of certitude, and challenged by the murky moral and political boundaries of the hemispheric environment.

The Paraguaná arms incident and the ongoing Venezuelan insurgency were among Mann’s first challenges as assistant secretary of state. Because of the potential of the Paraguaná to embarrass and isolate Cuba, the Venezuelan government did little to tamp down a near carnival atmosphere as the hemispheric press reacted to the announcement of the arms discovery. Mann, meanwhile, quietly set to work on the best way to respond to this latest Cuban provocation. On the morning of November 28 officials from the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Relations and the National Armed Forces hosted a lively meeting of representatives from 13 American nations—along with

³²³ Richard D. McKenzie, “Oral History Interview with Thomas C. Mann,” June 12, 1974, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum website (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/mannt.htm>), accessed October 28, 2007, pp. 26-28.

³²⁴ McKenzie, “Oral History Interview with Thomas C. Mann,” pp. 29, 35-38.

representatives from England, France, and Holland—where diplomats and journalists were invited to examine row upon row of firearms and ammunition and consider scientific evidence as to their Cuban origin.³²⁵ Over 80 foreign journalists attended a Betancourt press conference the following day, where the Venezuelan president called for “joint definitive action to finish with this bridgehead of communism in America.”³²⁶ Betancourt expanded on this condemnation on December 3, suggesting the possibility of a partial air and naval blockade of Cuba and a rupture in relations by those American republics still in diplomatic contact with the island. Within the Council for American States (COAS), the Venezuelan representative sought an investigation to be followed by a “clear and heavy judgment” against Cuba.³²⁷

Venezuela’s strong reaction revived latent policy ruminations carried on in the final days of the Kennedy administration. As Secretary of State Rusk noted in a memo to President Johnson on November 27, the secretary and President Kennedy’s statements regarding containment of armed Cuban expansion did not mention the export of arms shipments to local insurgents. Yet the Venezuelan announcement would fuel public

³²⁵ “Venezuela Llevará a la OEA el Caso de las Armas Descubiertas en Falcón,” *El Nacional*, November 29, 1963, p. C1.

³²⁶ “Conferencia de Cancillares Pide Venezuela a la O.E.A.,” *El Nacional*, November 30, 1963, p. A1. Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Posts in the American Republics, December 4, 1963, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, pp. 353-354; U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela C. Allen Stewart to Secretary Rusk, “Cuban Arms Cache,” November 28, 1963, NSF, Country File [hereafter CF]: Venezuela, Box 74 (1 of 2), Cables 11/63–7/64 folder, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas [hereafter cited as LBJL]. Stewart had attended the previous days meeting to review the alleged Cuban weapons, and he related the details of the Venezuelan case. Venezuelan Armed Forces laboratories had raised traces of the Cuban Army shield logo on Belgian-manufactured Uzi submachine guns and FN assault rifles. Venezuelan Defense Minister Antonio Briceño Linares invited foreign ambassadors and the international press corps to view this evidence, claiming that he had compared serial numbers and technical modifications on the FN rifles with their Belgian manufacturer to prove that they were part of a consignment provided only to Cuba.

³²⁷ Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Posts in the American Republics, December 4, 1963, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, pp. 353-354.

speculation that the nascent Kennedy Doctrine could be invoked in this instance, thus committing the United States and its regional allies to reducing the communist salient by all necessary means. Rusk sought a balance between promoting hemispheric cooperation to counter the Cuban threat, on one hand, and downplaying the possibility of a U.S. invasion of the island, on the other.³²⁸ On November 29, State Department spokesman Richard I. Phillips issued a statement concerning the Cuban arms cache and the Venezuelan response to it. The discovery of the arms cache, according to Phillips, represented clear evidence of the Castro regime's aggression against its neighbors and gave the lie to Castro's repeated statements that Cuba offered nothing more than its ideological example to hemispheric revolutionaries. In response to this new provocation, the United States vowed to support endangered American Republics as well as any OAS actions advanced against Cuba.³²⁹ The U.S.-Venezuelan partnership appeared to have weathered the difficulties associated with 1963, but its challenges in 1964 appeared more complicated than ever. And while the efforts of Castro and the Venezuelan left had not had their desired effect, no credible observers believed that these players would spend the future resignedly licking their wounds.

A MOMENT OF CONTINGENCY: VENEZUELA AND THE COMMUNIST WORLD, SPRING 1964

The year 1964 opened with both auspicious and inauspicious prospects for a broad range of political actors. For the Venezuelan government, the upcoming transfer of

³²⁸ Memorandum from Rusk to Kennedy, "Venezuelan Announcement of Cuban Origin of Discovered Arms Cache," November 17, 1963, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, pp. 352-353.

³²⁹ State Department Telegram, Washington to Caracas, November 29, 1963, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74 (1 of 2), Cables 11/63-7/64 folder, LBJL.

power between Betancourt and Leoni—the first democratic transition in national history—served as a bright spot in the tenuous process of institution building. Venezuelan communists, meanwhile, emerged weakened but intact from the post-election government crackdown, burdened by questions of identity and viability. Internationally, U.S. policymakers could check but not eliminate Castro’s presence and influence in the hemisphere; for their part, Castro and the leaders of the Soviet Union and China asserted the unprecedented strength of world communism but differed sharply over methods. In this contingent atmosphere, factions resisted significant change to their own agendas; as long as no combinations emerged among them, danger and opportunity balanced each other.

From April 17 to April 19, the PCV held its Fifth Plenum to discuss the recent election and current politics.³³⁰ At stake was nothing less than the survival of the party and the legitimacy of its challenge to the government. In its official self-critique, the National Liberation Front allowed that it had weakened itself somewhat during the previous winter by wavering between an accommodation with the legal opposition and a principled boycott of the election; the FALN, for its part, admitted that its campaign of guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism had been sensational but ultimately ineffective. The Central Committee concluded, however, that the failure of the combined peaceful-armed effort to disrupt the election resulted from poor timing and execution rather than from any flaw in strategy or misreading of the political environment. Leoni’s victory, the

³³⁰ During this time any high-level meeting of the PCV would naturally include representatives of the National Liberation Front (or FLN, the umbrella group formed as a result of the PCV-MIR partnership) and the Armed Forces of National Liberation (or FALN, the armed wing of the PCV-MIR front).

communists maintained, failed to rise to the level of a mandate, since no party garnered a majority of the votes. His capture of 33 percent of the vote might have been enough to win, but it also meant that 67 percent of the country had opposed the president-elect. The government, the PCV concluded, suffered from inevitable internal contradictions: the public would soon recognize that the AD-Copei coalition represented U.S. imperialist interests rather than those of the average Venezuelan; the conditional and lukewarm support of the military meant that Leoni would be constantly looking over his shoulder in his efforts to maintain government stability.³³¹

Agreeing on the past, however, proved easier than finding common ground for the future, since the hard-liners and soft-liners felt equally justified in advancing their beliefs. The hard-liners—led by long-time PCV leader Pompeyo Márquez, rising MIR lieutenant Américo Martín, and guerrilla leaders Douglas Bravo and Luben Petkoff—asserted that only military force could defeat the government. They asked that the PCV therefore adopt *lucha armada* (“armed struggle,” as opposed to the *via pacífica* or “peaceful way”) in the official party line, as the MIR had done on January 30, 1964, and advocated increased training and funding of the FALN guerrilla units.³³² Staying true to orthodox

³³¹ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Conclusions of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Venezuela,” May 19, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63–7/64 folder, LBJL. It will be recalled that the tallies for the top three candidates in the 1963 election—AD’s Raúl Leoni, Copei’s Rafael Caldera, and Jóvito Villalba of URD—were 33 percent, 22 percent, and 18 percent, respectively. The PCV was certainly correct in pointing out that 67 percent of the electorate cast a ballot for someone other than Leoni. On the other hand, the Punto Fijo coalition constituted the top two vote getters, with 55 percent. As mentioned previously, this proportion was essentially the same as AD and Copei’s tallies in 1959. Perhaps most significantly, Leoni outperformed the most credible leftist challenger—the URD’s Jóvito Villalba—by a 2 to 1 margin. It would therefore appear that Venezuela’s party and political loyalties had changed little despite five years of right-wing and left-wing agitation.

³³² Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*, pp. 44, 48. CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Conclusions of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Venezuela,” May

PCV doctrine and the Moscow line, however, Pedro Ortega Díaz's soft-liners believed that the education of and interaction with the masses remained the only truly effective means to a communist victory. As a compromise, the Central Committee agreed to refine the unified peaceful-violent national front strategy. The leadership recognized *lucha armada* as the only way to defeat the relatively strong and stable central government; but the communists could not create a "patriotic government" without using the *via pacífica* to secure mass support. Violence and politics would work in tandem. However, the exact relationship between these tactics, and between the various wings of the movement, lacked express clarification. As Bravo noted, the meeting served less to unify the movement than to pass imprecise resolutions whose "shades of meaning could be subject to different interpretations."³³³ To him, the National Front appeared viable only when its constituencies glossed over imprecision in doctrine, but this simply meant that the meetings adjourned with the Front projecting the illusion of strength, rather than strength itself. Regardless, the PCV diligently prepared to pitch the benefits of socialism and the ills of the present government while the FALN reprised its appeal as the only effective tool for national liberation.³³⁴

19, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63–7/64 folder, LBJL. Martín, it will be remembered, was present at the founding of the AD Left and the MIR. After Domingo Alberto Rangel was jailed, Simón Sáez Mérida became secretary general of the party and Martín also took a greater leadership role. Martín related, in his interviews with Peña, that the MIR felt it necessary to give its guerrilla groups a greater political consciousness at the beginning of 1964. It was at this point that Martín became a guerrilla leader since, he reckoned, he could not send someone to do his job for him.

³³³ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 106-107. The original Spanish reads, "...con matices que se prestaban a diferentes interpretaciones."

³³⁴ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Conclusions of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Venezuela," May 19, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63–7/64 folder, LBJL.

Meanwhile, Cuba, the USSR, and China continued to pursue fundamentally different aims with regard to Venezuela. Betancourt's ability to maintain a critical mass of public support and his durability against rightist and leftist challengers cooled much of Moscow's interest in converting or neutralizing Caracas. While the USSR still aimed to create difficulties for the United States, it privately recognized U.S. primacy in the Western hemisphere. The Soviets continued to provide material and political support to Castro yet, particularly after the 1962 missile crisis and the Paraguaná discovery, sought to rein in their ally in the interest of global stability. China, as the Sino-Soviet split widened, seized upon those moments in which the USSR appeared lacking in revolutionary zeal and advertised them across the communist world. In the case of Latin America, however, geographic distance prevented Beijing from expanding its reach beyond mere agitation and propaganda dispersion. Instead of providing any significant materiel aid China focused on inculcating Maoist theory into key Venezuelan fighters. Douglas Bravo, for example, expressed keen interest in revolutionary literature provided to him by China. Cuba, as always, remained the nation most interested in the success of the Venezuelan communist movement. Castro continued advocating the manufacture of revolution through violence rather than through the emergence of revolutionary preconditions. Yet Cuban reliance on Soviet aid limited his ability to exploit Sino-Soviet tensions and engineer the overthrow of governments like that of Venezuela.³³⁵ Still, Castro insisted that Cuba spearheaded a world socialist movement that challenged both

³³⁵ CIA Intelligence Study, "Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958–Mid-1965," December 6, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables & Misc Vol II, 8/64–8/66 folder, LBJL.

revolutionary and reactionary constituencies, that avoided intervention in Latin American internal affairs but still supported the right of the Venezuelans to “make their revolution” against the “political corpse” of Betancourt and his imperialist masters.³³⁶

For Raúl Leoni, it was time to honor the sacrifices of the past five years and gird Venezuela in face of arduous tasks ahead. In his March 11 inaugural address, Leoni thanked the Betancourt administration for its “intelligence, firmness of character, and sleepless dedication to statesmanship,” which enabled the nation to survive extremist subversion, political discord, and a tenuous economic recovery. Under his leadership, the new president pledged, the government would respect human rights since such respect was crucial to the success of the democratic nation-building process, but would not tolerate those who abused such rights to sow civil unrest. Leoni made the rehabilitation and reintegration of the extremist parties a goal, but only when they “abandoned the ways of violence and terrorism, and of gangsterism and banditry.”³³⁷

In a CIA memo written shortly before Leoni took office, analysts judged that the Venezuelan communist movement and its Cuban sponsor would remain a viable threat to the Leoni regime, though the new president appeared robust enough to prevent the

³³⁶ *Cuba Confronts the Future: Five Years of the Revolution, a Speech by Fidel Castro, January 2, 1964* (Toronto: Fair Play for Cuba Committee, 1964), BLAC, pp. 3, 19. It is interesting to note that, in the 24-page transcript of the speech, Castro’s only two mentions of Soviet aid omit any suggestion of Soviet influence or consultation in the crafting of Cuban domestic or foreign policy.

³³⁷ “Alocución del Presidente ante el Congreso: Me Pongo desde el Comienzo Lograr un Gobierno de Acción,” *El Nacional*, March 12, 1964, p. C6. The original Spanish reads, “Gracias a la inteligencia, a la firmeza de carácter y a la desvelada preocupación nacionalista con que el Presidente Betancourt y su equipo de gobierno, manejaron los negocios del Estado, todas esas calamidades han sido felizmente superadas.” And, “Es decir, que cuando éstos abandonen el camino de la violencia, del terrorismo, del pandillaje y del bandolerismo, y con hechos reiterados y concretos demuestren que quieren reintegrarse a la legalidad democrática, entonces, y sólo entonces, no se alzarán objeciones para facilitarles su reincorporación al libre juego democrático.”

communists from taking power in the near term. Venezuela would likely remain closely associated with the United States as a model participant in the Alliance for Progress and as the site of \$3 billion in U.S. capital investments, the greatest in the hemisphere in per capita terms.³³⁸ The new president might finally have the full support of the Venezuelan armed forces, too, since the current military leadership had shown no serious signs of disloyalty since the summer of 1962.³³⁹ As U.S. Ambassador C. Allen Stewart noted in a March 1964 telegram to Mann, Venezuela currently offered a “classic example of how [the] military can be brought around to support constitutional government under good local leadership and judicious assistance from [the United States].”³⁴⁰

Based on data compiled by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in early 1964, the Leoni and Johnson administrations could indeed be cautiously optimistic about the near-term prospects of maintaining the upper hand against leftist extremism. Like the majority of Latin Americans, most Venezuelans favored leftist and socialist ideologies, but such beliefs did not equate to communist sympathies or to overt opposition to the United States. Rather, they reflected what the USIA termed “domestic leftism”—the belief that “businessmen have too much influence and workers too little”—or what U.S. experts might term “social welfare.” Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Caracas, for example, scored among the highest in the world in terms of favoring labor interests over business interests, rating at 87, 83, and 65, respectively. These cities thus fell in a class

³³⁸ CIA National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 89-64, “Prospects for Political Stability in Venezuela,” February 19, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 1081-1084.

³³⁹ CIA Information Report, “Continued Plotting by Exiled Venezuelan Military Officials,” December 24, 1963, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63–7/64 folder, LBJL.

³⁴⁰ U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela C. Allen Stewart to Undersecretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas C. Mann, March 2, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63–7/64 folder, LBJL.

with Karachi and Dacca, Pakistan, as the most anti-business cities in the world, with sample scores of 113 and 97, and at odds from relatively anti-worker locales like Rio de Janeiro and an aggregation of British cities, which scored a negative 3 and negative 14 on the scale, respectively.³⁴¹

The Venezuelan dissatisfaction with the economy did not necessarily translate into pro-Soviet or anti-U.S. attitudes. Caracas and Mexico City—scoring a 111 and 117, respectively—trailed only Manila, an aggregation of West German cities, and Ankara as the most pro-U.S. and anti-Soviet cities polled by the USIA, with respective scores of 154, 152, and 141. In general, the data suggested significant dissatisfaction but little inclination to solve such problems outside of moderate, local, and pluralistic means. Though 54 percent of Caracas felt “politicians” had “too much influence” over economic and social problems, 60 percent favored having at least two political parties in the nation.³⁴² Widespread discontent remained among Venezuelans, in other words, but the populace remained committed to democracy and leery of the one-party rule advocated by the communists. As had been the case throughout the early 1960s, the extreme left in Venezuela struggled to gain traction in its effort to convince the masses that the solution to national problems lay in the hands of the PCV-MIR combination.

³⁴¹ United States Information Agency [hereafter cited as USIA], “Some Indications of Potential Movements Toward the Left,” May 14, 1964. RG 306-230-47-48-4, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, ARC# 1216458 #A1 1009: Special Reports, 1964-82, 1964 S-1 THRU 1965 S-2, Box 1, S-14-64 folder, NACPM.

³⁴² USIA, “Some Indications of Potential Movements Toward the Left,” May 14, 1964, RG 306-230-47-48-4, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, ARC# 1216458 #A1 1009: Special Reports, 1964-82, 1964 S-1 THRU 1965 S-2, Box 1, 5-14-64 folder, NACPM.

Other USIA studies, however, suggested that the lack of a communist voice in the Venezuelan public arena might indicate the effectiveness of government censorship more than the absence of communist sympathies in the nation. Miraflores restored partial constitutional guarantees in January 1962 but still reserved the right to confiscate subversive materials and to shutter “flagrantly subversive” publishers. Only three communist and pro-communist periodicals currently circulated—*La Extra*, *Intermedio*, and *Que Pasa en Venezuela*—and these did so only sporadically, while most of the major dailies steadily forced out Communist journalists. *El Nacional*, for example, the nation’s largest and most influential daily, purged itself of communist influence in March 1963, leaving the School of Journalism at the Central University of Venezuela as the largest remaining salient of communist press influence. A limited amount of communist propaganda entered the country from Cuba, China, and the USSR, but aside from abundant copies of Che Guevara’s guerrilla warfare manual, examples of this sort of literature were rare. A clandestine radio station calling itself The Voice of the Armed Forces of Liberation broadcast sporadically, but for all practical purposes the sole radio voice of communism in Venezuela was Radio Havana. University and high school students still overwhelmingly supported the communists and continued to supply the majority of the human fodder for the insurgency. The PCV and MIR, however, remained largely unable to convert labor and peasant groups.³⁴³ In short, the extreme leftist

³⁴³ USIA, “Communist Propaganda in Venezuela,” May 28, 1964, RG 306-230-47-48-4, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, ARC# 1216458 #A1 1009: Special Reports, 1964-82, 1964 S-1 THRU 1965 S-2, Box 1, 5-28-64 folder, NACPM.

movement persisted but found it exceedingly difficult to give voice to its agenda for change.

These developments set the stage for a new round of conflict. Each side felt confrontation to be necessary to achieve its ends, and harnessed its resources to resume the struggle. The root problem, as Ambassador Stewart saw it, was the continued devotion of the Latin American left to the ideology of revolutionary communism. Despite its setbacks in the public arena, there was just enough sympathy for communism to encourage the far left to continue. Notwithstanding frequent victories by the Venezuelan armed forces, the military was just clumsy enough to allow insurgents to reconstitute themselves and to learn lessons that translated into sporadic triumphs against the military.³⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the communists cemented their dual strategy, carrying on a propaganda campaign in the cities of Venezuela and rearming rural guerrillas for a new round of attacks on government and U.S. installations throughout the country. For the extreme left, it was time to put the half-measures and clumsiness of 1963 behind them. The lack of clarity in this environment, however, hampered the ability of the forces in action to gauge either their own strength or that of their enemies.

CONTAINMENT, THE PARAGUANÁ ISSUE, AND THE 9TH OAS MEETING OF CONSULTATION OF FOREIGN MINISTERS

Once the Venezuelan government determined that the Paraguaná arms were of Cuban origin and forwarded its complaint to the OAS, the Johnson administration sought to exploit the issue to the maximum diplomatic and legal advantage. The State

³⁴⁴ Ambassador Stewart to Under-Secretary Mann, March 2, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables, Vol I, 11/63-7/64 folder, LBJL.

Department offered two policy alternatives for National Security Council (NSC) and presidential review on December 10, raising the possibility of OAS-authorized force in searching vessels suspected of carrying Cuban arms on the high seas, or avoiding the OAS altogether by coordinating bilateral searches of shipping in the waters of a cooperating American republic.³⁴⁵ Mann and a State Department working group, meanwhile, began drafting a declaration that articulated a much broader and conclusive censure of Castro's behavior. Fundamentally, the draft declaration condemned the Cuban government for its continued violation of Venezuelan sovereignty through subversion and the export of arms, and warned Cuba to cease this activity. The critical language of the draft, however, lay in the second paragraph, which called for an individual or collective military response—justified by Articles 6 and 8 of the 1947 Rio Treaty—to prevent further Cuban aggression.³⁴⁶ “Paragraph 2” instantly focused standing debates concerning the most effective way to check Cuba's hemispheric activities.

As early as April 1961—in the wake of the Bay of Pigs invasion—the State Department declared the communist orientation of Cuba to be evidence of an extra-continental intrusion and a threat to the security of the hemisphere under Article 6. U.S. policy therefore held that action to reverse Cuba's orientation would not constitute “intervention” in the state's internal affairs, but rather the collective or unilateral “defense against [a] widening area of domination by extra-hemispheric powers,” a veiled reference

³⁴⁵ NSC, “Record of Actions by the National Security Council Standing Group,” December 10, 1963, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, p. 355.

³⁴⁶ Mann to Rusk, “Draft OAS Resolution Re Cuban Aggression Against Venezuela,” March 2, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 22-24.

to the USSR.³⁴⁷ In a February 19, 1964, meeting to discuss the Cuban problem, Mann reprised these ideas, suggesting that paragraph 2 demonstrated consistency not only with the Rio Treaty but also with the Kennedy Doctrine pledge to roll back communism in the hemisphere. Responding to criticisms that paragraph 2 would escalate U.S.-Soviet tensions, or surrender U.S. initiative to Cuban provocation, Mann portrayed the passage as a win-win proposition. Such language, Mann hoped, would demonstrate U.S. resolve to the Soviets, forcing them to rein in the Cubans, and would also provide a “juridical umbrella” for any future action or retaliation against Cuba. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy agreed with this line of reasoning, noting that while the United States might have to get used to living with Castro, the proposed declaration would allow the United States to prevent the occurrence of “another Cuba” at a future date.³⁴⁸

Mann sought to make the short and long term objectives of paragraph 2 legally airtight the following week. Mann noted that UN Article 51, which guaranteed the right to individual or collective self-defense, fell silent on whether “self-defense” pertained strictly to a discrete incident. In this vein, Cuba’s aggression against Venezuela could establish precedent for the use of force in the event of a future similar episode; a properly crafted OAS sanction would justify military action and then “suspend the pushing of the

³⁴⁷ Editorial Note #109, FRUS 1961-1963 XII, p. 250.

³⁴⁸ State Department Memorandum, “Cuba Meeting—Wednesday, February 19, 1964,” February 19, 1964, NSF, CF: Cuba, OAS Resolution (Arms Cache), Vol II, Memos, 11/63-9/94 folder, LBJL.

button,” as Mann put it.³⁴⁹ The net effect of the arms episode and the draft declaration would be a blank check for future U.S. action against any provocation that appeared Cuban-sponsored. Mann presented the declaration to Rusk on March 2, and to the NSC on March 5. In addition to calls for the physical quarantine and diplomatic censure of Cuba, the document authorized unilateral or bilateral force against Havana if it committed “aggression of comparable gravity against another American state.” The administration intended to forward the document to Betancourt and, upon his approval, have it presented as a Venezuelan initiative.³⁵⁰ From the president’s perspective, the resolution would have the advantage of creating the appearance of Cuba being censured by its Latin American neighbors rather than by the United States, and would provide Washington the trump card of not having to return to the OAS for the authorization of force in the event of another comparative action by Castro.³⁵¹

Venezuela, while open to such U.S. input, was even more strident in its condemnation of Cuba for the arms incident and in its demands for new OAS sanctions. *El Nacional* revealed on January 4 that Marcos Falcón Briceño, the former foreign minister of Venezuela, made a private presentation to OAS authorities that characterized the Paraguaná discovery as a stroke of luck that barely prevented a grand international conspiracy to destroy the Venezuelan government. Cuba, according to Falcón Briceño, intended the arms as a spearhead for two operations across Venezuela: ex-army colonel

³⁴⁹ Mann, “Paper Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs,” February 25, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 21-22.

³⁵⁰ Mann to Rusk, “Draft OAS Resolution Re Cuban Aggression Against Venezuela,” March 2, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 22-24.

³⁵¹ Summary Record of the 523rd Meeting of the NSC, “Secretary McNamara’s Mission to Vietnam; OAS Action on Venezuelan Arms Cache,” March 5, 1964, NSF, NSC Meetings, Vol 1, Tab 4, LBJL.

and current FALN leader Juan de Díos Moncada Vidal was to lead decisive attacks against key communication networks and military garrisons, while Eduardo Sánchez Mercado was to execute “Operación Moto,” a wholesale destruction of Caracas’ power and telephone grids to be followed by a mass uprising. The work of the Venezuelan armed forces in discovering the arms cache, in the foreign minister’s estimation, had just warded off such an eventuality.³⁵² Venezuelan Embassy Counselor Walter Brandt amplified this critique on January 7, advising that his government was in the process of forwarding new documents to the OAS that bolstered the complaint against Cuba. It was an “irrefutable fact” that Cuba was the culprit, Counselor Brandt said, and this new information would make the case conclusive.³⁵³

By April Venezuelan and U.S. authorities were cooperating closely in shaping and shepherding the collective sanctions against Cuba. Venezuela decided—with or without the aid of Mann’s draft declaration—to seek blank-check authorization to use force against Cuba in the event of further provocations by Castro. On April 6 the *Los Angeles Times* gained access to a draft resolution, circulated by Venezuelan Foreign Minister Dr. Julio Iribarren Borges, demanding a censure of Cuba and a mechanism by which the island could be attacked in the future without advance OAS authorization.³⁵⁴ On May 2 ex-foreign minister Falcón Briceño, in Washington as head of a special Venezuelan diplomatic mission, spoke to *El Nacional* correspondent Ary Moleon

³⁵² “Reveló Falcón Briceño: El Descubrimiento de la Armas Frustró Complot de Gran Alcance,” *El Nacional*, January 5, 1964, p. A1.

³⁵³ “Nuevos Documentos Sobre las Armas Halladas en Paraguaná,” *El Nacional*, January 8, 1964, p. C1.

³⁵⁴ “Venezuela Urges Use of Force Against Cuba: Blank Check Asked of OAS for Any Nation to Reply to Acts of Aggression,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1964, p. 16.

following meetings with Assistant Secretary of State Mann regarding the Paraguaná incident. Falcón Briceño would not specify exactly what sanctions Caracas and Washington sought but insisted that Venezuela had enough votes to enact them. The American republics faced a basic question of the “security of the continent,” he said, so there was almost no way that they could “elude their responsibilities.”³⁵⁵

Caracas insisted that it would tolerate neither half-measures nor waffling by its Latin American neighbors. On May 12 Venezuelan envoys Falcón Briceño and Dr. Jaime Lusinchi projected confidence and resolve at a press conference marking the conclusion of a month-long, eight-nation tour of Latin America. Venezuela had lined up the support of 16 nations, they said, in the complaint against Cuba, with only a handful of abstentions and no contrary votes, and impressed upon them the existential threat to all American republics presented by Cuban foreign policy. Caracas continued to be interested in peaceful solutions, they continued, but a brief sampling of Cuban radio and press—to say nothing of the arms cache incident—demonstrated clearly that Cuba harbored nothing but ill will towards Venezuela. Caracas, then, was prepared to meet force with force, and Briceño assured reporters that all methods of retaliation remained on the table for Venezuela. The trick appeared to be making sure that such retaliation remained consistent with the OAS and the Rio Treaty.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ “Venezuela con Mayoría Suficiente en la OEA para Aplicar Sanciones a Cuba,” *El Nacional*, May 3, 1964, p. A1. Dr. Ignacio Iribarren Borges had replaced Falcón Briceño as foreign minister.

³⁵⁶ Euro Fuenmayor, “Acción Armada Contra Cuba Puede Decidir Conferencia de Cancilleres Pedida por Venezuela,” *El Nacional*, May 13, 1964, p. A1.

In late May, Venezuelan Ambassador to the United States Enrique Tejera París returned to Caracas where he met with President Leoni, Foreign Minister Iribarren Borges, and Falcón Briceño, to finalize the Venezuelan position ahead of the OAS meeting. *El Nacional* correspondent Ary Moleon, following the story, judged that Venezuela would ask for a “rapid and firm warning” against Cuba and all nations who supported Cuba that future aggression against Venezuela or other similarly situation nations. To this point, Venezuela and the United States had formulated four ideas—which had been leaked to public sources—to respond to the arms cache discovery provocation. In order of their severity, Moleon asserted, they included: first, an OAS condemnation of Cuba for its attempt to topple the democratic government of Venezuela; second, a suspension of all economic relations between the American republics and Cuba; third, a collective OAS rupture of diplomatic relations between the American republics and Cuba. The potential fourth sanction, a warning that future aggression “would not be tolerated,” indicated that the Leoni and Johnson administrations were of the same mind in the potential embrace of Mann’s “paragraph 2” language from the draft declaration.³⁵⁷

As the July 21 date for the opening of the OAS meeting approached, the U.S. and Venezuelan delegations continued discussing the prospects of the conference and the

³⁵⁷ Ary Moleon, “Venezuela Pedirá a la OEA una Rápida y Firme Advertencia Contra Cuba,” *El Nacional*, May 26, 1964, p. A1. At this point only Chile, Mexico, Bolivia, and Uruguay maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba. As was usually the case, the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, along with Mexico, tended to champion Latin American sovereignty and oppose OAS action that tended to impinge upon such sovereignty. Brazil, following the April coup, was now firmly in the U.S. camp, but at the risk of generalization Chile and Mexico would tend to be strongest in their opposition to harsher sanctions, or to the U.S.-Venezuelan “warning against future aggression.”

potential resolutions emanating from it. The resolutions had been finalized, and McGeorge Bundy briefed the president on their language and the positions of the various Latin American constituencies with regard to them. Resolution 1 recommended that those nations that still maintained air and diplomatic contact with Cuba break such relations, and *required* that members break commerce relations and maritime contact with Cuba, with the exception of humanitarian supplies. Bundy predicted that this measure would pass with a strong majority, despite the opposition of Chile and probably Mexico. Resolution 2 would warn Cuba that the OAS viewed “subversion” as constituting “aggression,” and that future subversion would “trigger an immediate OAS meeting” to consider punitive measures, without circumventing the victim nation’s right to “individual or collective self-defense.” Bundy estimated that this resolution also enjoyed good prospects for passage, but was likely to be watered down during negotiations. While the United States and Venezuela sought to keep the warning focused on Cuba, many other American republics wanted a more general condemnation of both left and right wing subversion, a possible check, as Bundy saw it, against U.S. efforts to undermine Cuba by covert subversion. Resolution 3, which Bundy expected to pass with ease, called on non-OAS countries outside of the Soviet bloc to cooperate in OAS sanctions against Cuba. As Bundy saw it, the sanctions would further isolate Havana, provide initial juridical precedent for a possible OAS-authorized use of force against Castro, and increase the cost to Castro and his Soviet sponsors in maintaining the communist regime.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Bundy to the President, “OAS Resolution on the Cuban Arms Cache in Venezuela,” June 26, 1964,

Rusk and Mann, along with Iribarren Borges and Tejera París, expanded on these ideas in a meeting several days later. Iribarren Borges now sought to make the Resolution 1 severance of diplomatic relations *mandatory* rather than “recommended.” Yet both Rusk and Mann’s sources indicated that Chile and Mexico were “adamantly” opposed to such a modification in language. If this amended resolution passed against Chilean and Mexican opposition, the U.S. diplomats judged, Santiago and Mexico City might even consider breaking away from the OAS. Iribarren Borges and Tejera París insisted, however, that Venezuelan support for a watered-down resolution would discredit Leoni and further destabilize domestic politics. Leoni had, after all, publicly committed his presidency to the demand for a mandatory OAS break in relations with Cuba, while the communists had renewed their anti-government offensive using the OAS meetings as a mandate. Rusk sought a compromise with the Venezuelans: might the passage of the entire resolution—even if there were “recommendations” rather than “requirements” for particular sanctions—be another sign of progress on the Cuban issue, with which Washington had cooperated with Caracas since 1960? Might it be worthwhile to allow Resolution 1 pass in neutered form, so that Resolution 2 could also pass and establish a clear deterrent against future Cuban aggression? Iribarren Borges stated flatly that he disagreed with Rusk’s bright assessment of Resolution 2, but agreed to hear Mann’s views, which the under-secretary promised to provide at a future meeting. The meeting broke shortly thereafter, and only after the intervention of President Leoni did Secretary

Rusk finally relented to support for the Venezuelan position on July 20, the night before the conference was to open.³⁵⁹

Between July 21 and July 26, the OAS foreign ministers meeting convened to consider the Venezuelan complaint against Cuba associated with the arms cache discovery. As the meeting opened, Argentina joined Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia in opposing Venezuela's push for a mandatory break with Havana.³⁶⁰ Most observers assumed that Venezuela could cobble together 13 votes—thus barely satisfying the needed two-thirds majority—for its hard line sanctions, but felt that such a result would represent a political embarrassment for the OAS and even a slight victory for Castro. On July 22, Rusk advanced Venezuela's argument that Cuba be condemned as an aggressor and be subjected to a loss of diplomatic and trade relations absent humanitarian needs. Castro was an existential threat to the hemisphere, he said, and the OAS had to warn Castro that he faced “the full weight of the regional security system” in the event of another provocation similar to the Paraguaná incident. The American republics acted “resolutely” before, he continued, in censuring the “dictator of the right” Rafael Trujillo. Now, they bore a similar obligation against the “dictator of the left,” Fidel Castro. Today Venezuela was under attack, Rusk concluded, and he challenged those present to say definitively that their country could not be subject Cuban attack tomorrow.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ State Department Memorandum of Conversation, “Prospects for Adoption of Venezuelan Resolution at OAS Foreign Ministers’ Meeting,” July 16, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 56-59.

³⁶⁰ Tad Szulc, “Split Threatens at Talks on Cuba: 5 Nations Oppose Sanctions,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1964, p. 6. “Venezuela Issues Warning,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1964, p. 6.

³⁶¹ Tad Szulc, “Rusk Urges OAS to Punish Havana as an Aggressor: He Demands Sanctions and Assails Attempt to ‘Export Revolution’ to Venezuela,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1964, p. 1.

The final resolution served as a significant diplomatic rebuke of Cuba and satisfied the basic requirements of the United States and Venezuela. The OAS approved the mandatory severance of trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba, as well as the warning to Cuba that future aggression would be met by collective action up to and including armed force. The fact that the mandatory sanctions passed by a 15-4 margin—over the dissensions of Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay—gave Washington and Caracas the meaningful majority they sought. On the other hand, the OAS refused to authorize the “blank check” for the use of force envisioned in Mann’s original draft declaration; future Cuban aggression would still have to be referred to the OAS prior to any collective or unilateral retaliation. Still, there was no doubt that Cuba had been further isolated. The sanctions marked the first such penalty against a Latin American state since the 1960 sanctions against the Dominican Republic. The OAS resolutions, therefore, established a moral equivalency between the former Trujillo government and the current Castro government.³⁶²

The United States failed to achieve the broad juridical quarantine it sought. Because it dealt Castro another check while preserving OAS unity, however, Washington adopted a posture of cautious optimism. At the July 28 NSC meeting, Rusk reviewed the outcome of the conference. At the very least, he thought, the OAS expanded on the message it sent to Castro—that his devotion to communism made him a hemispheric outlaw—at Punta del Este in February 1962. More importantly, the idea that

³⁶² Tad Szulc, “OAS, by 15 to 4, Votes Sanctions Against Havana: Conference Orders Severing of Ties to Punish Castro Regime as Aggressor,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1964, p. 1. *Ninth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Serving as Organ of Consultation in Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1964).

“subversion” constituted “aggression” was now a tenet of inter-American law.³⁶³ In Caracas, there was a similar feeling of satisfaction. On July 28, President Leoni addressed the nation, echoing Betancourt’s triumphant statements following the 1960 OAS sanctions against the Dominican Republic. The resolute judgment of the foreign ministers at Washington, he said, had reinforced the confidence of Venezuela in the OAS.³⁶⁴ On July 30, President Johnson addressed the press, noting that the OAS demonstrated “effectiveness and vitality by dealing resolutely with Cuban aggression against Venezuela.” The condemnation of Cuba, he continued, illustrated a general hemispheric feeling that “although Venezuela was the target of Communist aggression today, another country might be the target tomorrow, and that we must stand all for one and one for all.”³⁶⁵ By September 8, Chile, Bolivia, and Uruguay had joined the OAS resolution and severed their diplomatic ties with Cuba, leaving Mexico as the sole OAS nation still in contact with the island. The crisis arising from the discovery of Cuban arms on Venezuela’s Paraguaná Peninsula appeared at least partially resolved.

THE LIMITS OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: BRAZIL, APRIL 1964

While 1964 had seen relatively smooth U.S.-Venezuelan cooperation on the Cuban containment problem in the OAS, by April 1964 evidence suggested that Washington might be heading in its own direction with respect to democratic governance.

³⁶³ Summary Record of the 536th Meeting of the NSC, July 28, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 63.

³⁶⁴ “Dijo Ayer el Presidente Leoni: La Resolución de la Conferencia de Cancilleres ha Fortalecido la Confianza de Venezuela en la OEA,” *El Nacional*, July 29, 1964, p. A1.

³⁶⁵ *The Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No. 1311, August 10, 1964 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 174-190.

An apparent U.S. preference for pragmatism at the expense of idealism—in this case a so-called “Mann Doctrine” and a military coup in Brazil—compelled the Leoni government to confront the tension between democratization and anti-communism. It appeared that the United States was favoring the latter at the expense of the former, and Leoni had to decide how far he was willing to walk with Johnson in this regard. At a basic level the U.S.-Venezuelan relationship worked because both sides pledged themselves to the promotion of hemispheric democracy. After all, Betancourt had staked his life and his presidency on the idea that anti-democratic rule had no place in the Americas, and Kennedy had made the embrace of the new wave of Latin American democrats a key feature of his hemispheric policy. Now, the Johnson administration appeared to be equivocating, particularly in those cases where democratic instability appeared to open the door to the expansion of the communist salient in the hemisphere.

The emergence of the Mann Doctrine and the U.S. support for the military coup in Brazil in April 1964 illustrates these trends. The White House continued to believe that Venezuela was the central target for communist subversion in the Americas and that it was the primary arena in the confrontation with Castro. U.S. policymakers also worried, however, about potential Cuban intrigue in Brazil, another nation plagued by instability that would provide Castro enormous material and psychological advantages if converted to communism. In early March, while Mann and his Venezuelan counterparts tailored the sanctions against Cuba, relations between Brazilian President João Goulart and Brazilian conservatives deteriorated precipitously. Goulart had never ingratiated himself with the rightist elements of the Brazilian polity; now his calls for land expropriation,

nationalization of industry, and reduction of military autonomy directly threatened elite power. Goulart's ambivalent and occasionally hostile attitudes toward U.S. interests engendered hostility from Washington as well. On March 18 the U.S. Embassy in Rio de Janeiro sounded the alarm that an unprecedented crisis had emerged between Goulart and the Brazilian general staff.

The Johnson administration had scheduled a series of meetings and conferences with the ambassadors and foreign ministers of the Americas to address U.S.-Latin American relations generally and the Alliance for Progress specifically. Because the local situation in Brazil had appeared under control, U.S. Ambassador Lincoln Gordon returned to Washington on March 13.³⁶⁶ On March 16 President Johnson opened the conference with his first major speech on Latin America, a keynote address marking the third anniversary of the Alliance. The Alliance's devotion to democracy and socioeconomic development, the president said, constituted "the only path for those who believe that both the welfare and the dignity of man can advance side by side." With the help of Assistant Secretary of State Mann, who enjoyed his "highest confidence," he vowed both his personal interest in the initiative and his "complete determination to meet all the commitments of the United States to the Alliance."³⁶⁷

Back in Brazil, Goulart and his supporters had held a Rally for Reform at Rio de Janeiro's Cristiano Ottoni Square the previous Friday, March 13. The approximately

³⁶⁶ Telegram from the Embassy in Brazil to the Department of State, March 18, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 405n.

³⁶⁷ "Excerpts from Johnson's Talk," *New York Times*, March 17, 1964, p. 16. Tad Szulc, "Johnson Renews Pledge to Latins; Sees a Bright Era," *New York Times*, March 17, 1964, p. 1. The assertion that the March 16 speech was Johnson's first to focus on Latin America rests on the Szulc article.

150,000 people in attendance—partisan union members and students, as well as citizens taking advantage of a state holiday and nice weather—heard Goulart deliver his usual stump speech on the need for land reform and improved services for urban residents. His call for sweeping expropriations of private industry and major constitutional reforms to empower the masses, however, represented something new.³⁶⁸ Though Goulart did not advocate toppling the constitutional order or inserting himself as dictator, his opponents quickly spread the word that these were indeed his intentions. On March 18, U.S. Deputy Ambassador to Brazil John G. Mein cabled Gordon, advising him that the reaction to Goulart's speech had elevated tensions to unprecedented levels. In the opinion of conservative observers, Goulart finally defined himself as a communist and showed no signs of his usual retreats and equivocations. According to Mein's sources, Goulart now felt powerful enough to bypass the Brazilian Congress and implement a program of labor strikes and leftist agitation that held the potential to bring the country to a standstill.³⁶⁹

Meanwhile, *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc, in Washington to cover the American foreign ministers meeting, caught wind of potentially seismic changes in the Johnson administration Latin policy. He was increasingly disillusioned with the Johnson White House's handling of foreign relations, but Szulc felt that the administration might still be able to use the conference to reassure hemispheric allies of

³⁶⁸ Julian Hartt, "Goulart to Unveil His Land Reform Program: Seizure of Five Private Brazilian Oil Refineries to Be Announced at Same Time," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1964, p. 11. "Goulart Pressing Drive for Reform: Calls Form of Government in Brazil 'Outmoded,'" *New York Times*, March 15, 1964, p. 24. Ruth Leacock, *Requiem for Revolution: The United States and Brazil, 1961-1969* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990), pp. 173-175.

³⁶⁹ Leacock, *Requiem for Revolution...*, pp. 173-175. Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy in Brazil John Gordon Mein to Department of State, March 18, 1964, NSF, CF: Brazil, Box 9, Vol I (2 of 2), 11/63-3/64 folder, LBJL.

its intention to maintain continuity in regional policy, if not give it new energy. In a March 15 editorial, for example, Szulc claimed that Johnson's lackluster promotion of the Alliance created "a certain malaise" in U.S.-Latin American relations.³⁷⁰ Now, according to Szulc, the administration moved in the exact opposite direction of Kennedy's policy of democracy promotion. Most dramatically, according to Szulc's sources, Mann had recently addressed high-ranking Latin America hands on March 18 and outlined an end to the U.S. policy against dictatorships. U.S. opposition to Latin American dictators, Mann reportedly said, failed to prevent or unseat them, so efforts to distinguish between democratic and anti-democratic regimes served little practical purpose. In the future, then, there would be no "good" or "bad" Latin heads of state, and the United States would only be concerned with *de facto* rather than *de jure* recognition of foreign governments. The priority for the region, Mann concluded, was the protection of U.S. investments, adherence to a policy of non-intervention, and continued anti-communist vigilance. As Szulc saw it, with a stroke Mann had cut the Alliance for Progress in half, rejecting its premise that economic growth and democracy worked hand-in-hand, and that one was useless without the existence of the other.³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ Tad Szulc, "U.S. Takes Stock of Hemisphere Policy," *New York Times*, March 15, 1964, Section 4, p. E5.

³⁷¹ Tad Szulc, "U.S. May Abandon Effort to Deter Latin Dictators: Mann Is Said to Be Against Trying to Separate 'Good Guys and Bad Guys,'" *New York Times*, March 19, 1964, p. 1. The United States and the other American republics periodically wrestled with the balance between *de facto* and *de jure* recognition, the question of non-intervention, and the problem of non-democratic rule. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, for example, encountered major difficulties and criticism for his decision during the Mexican Revolution to condition *de jure* recognition of the José Victoriano Huerta government on U.S. conceptions of good government. By the early 1930s the American consensus embraced *de facto* recognition, as embodied in the Estrada Doctrine and the Good Neighbor Policy. As dictatorships flourished throughout Latin America in the 1930s and beyond, however, many Latin democratic leaders asserted that U.S. *de facto* recognition of dictatorial regimes constituted an endorsement of them. U.S. non-recognition, the

As was the case with the Martin Doctrine controversy, officials denied the existence of a radical policy shift. On March 19, State Department spokesman Richard I. Phillips declared the U.S. devotion to “principles of democracy” to be a “historical fact.” At the same time, however, Phillips reserved Washington’s freedom of action when democracy was undermined. U.S. policy toward unconstitutional government, he said, would be “guided by the national interest and the circumstances peculiar to each situation as it arises.” It was still unclear, though, whether U.S. policy had changed. The “interpretation could be drawn,” Phillips said delicately, that his stress on the independent assessment of individual situations meant that *nothing* had changed; on the other hand, since the Johnson administration had not yet confronted the prospect of a coup d’état, it was impossible to say whether Washington would follow past precedent. An official White House rebuke of the Szulc piece came later that day. Undeterred, Szulc reiterated his earlier findings, stating that this embryonic Mann Doctrine established that the “United States would no longer punish rightist dictatorial regimes or markedly distinguish between them and democratic governments” and that “Mr. Mann had started a gradual change of emphasis, leading to a basic modification of the entire United States philosophy on dictatorships.” The State Department and White House were simply dissembling, Szulc concluded.³⁷² As the Brazilian situation deteriorated, the U.S.

democrats argued, would dissuade potential dictators. These leaders suggested that the doctrine of non-intervention could be legally suspended, and collective action employed, in the course of restoring a given country to democratic rule. The Betancourt Doctrine took these ideas further, suggesting that the protection of democracy was the prime directive of the inter-American system.

³⁷² Tad Szulc, “U.S. Denies Switch in Its Latin Policy: Cites Support of Democracy—Attitude in Coups to Be Decided Individually,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1964, p. 1. Editorial Note #10, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 27-29.

government found the wiggle room provided by Phillips to be quite useful, regardless of whether a Mann Doctrine had yet been firmly established.

Ambassador Gordon returned to Brazil on March 22, presumably aware of the apparent Mann Doctrine, and began consulting with civilian and military leaders to get up to speed on the problems emanating from Goulart's Rally for Reform speech. On March 28, Gordon cabled Washington, discussing in grave detail the immediate prospects within Brazil. Goulart was unequivocally campaigning to seize dictatorial power with the complicity and assistance of the Brazilian Communist Party, judged Gordon. Though this constituency accounted for less than 20 percent of the polity, Goulart's machinations placed it in control of much of the national bureaucracy. The best U.S. hope, concluded Gordon, rested with the "crystallization of a military resistance group" under the leadership of Army Chief of Staff Humberto Castello Branco. Unlike previous Brazilian military conspiracies with which the United States associated, Gordon regarded the Castello Branco group as competent enough to create a legitimate post-Goulart government. The stakes could not be higher, feared Gordon, as the current situation had the makings for a disaster "which might make Brazil the China of the 1960s."³⁷³

After further consultations with Gordon confirming the gravity of the situation, Rusk, Mann, and several other advisors placed a call to the president at his ranch in Texas. During this March 30 conversation, Rusk suggested that Brazilian military action against Goulart could begin in the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Johnson

³⁷³ U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Dr. Lincoln Gordon to Department of State, March 28, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 412-415.

concurred with Rusk's assessment that the United States faced a choice between acting decisively or allowing Goulart to "take Brazil down the road to a Communist dictatorship." Though Johnson was not scheduled to return to Washington until April 1, following the conversation Johnson informed aide George E. Reedy to prepare for an early return, noting "I don't see anything to be gained to be in Johnson City with the hemisphere going Communist."³⁷⁴ On April 1, Gordon informed the White House that he expected the coup to begin within hours. By mid-day, the coup began.

Contrary to the expectations of Castello Branco and the United States, Goulart's leftist and communist constituencies did not muster for battle against the armed forces, giving the coup an air of anticlimax. Accordingly, Mann stressed the need to avoid any appearance of U.S. interference.³⁷⁵ At an NSC meeting on April 2, the committee advised the president that the coup remained simply a legal nicety to be wrapped up. Following a half-joking question by Johnson about what the administration was doing in Cuba "just to make a nuisance," Rusk commented to the effect that, if the situation in Brazil continued on its present course, U.S. leverage on the Cuban problem would be significantly increased.³⁷⁶ That afternoon, Johnson released a presidential message to Pascoal Ranieri Mazzilli offering congratulations on being installed as the new president of Brazil, commending "the resolute will of the Brazilian community to resolve [its]

³⁷⁴ Recording of Telephone Conversation between President Johnson and Rusk, March 30, 1964, Recordings and Transcripts, Tape F64.21, Side B, PNO 1, LBJL.

³⁷⁵ Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs David E. Boster to Special Assistant to the Secretary of State Edward S. Little, "Brazil," April 1, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 439.

³⁷⁶ Summary Record of the 525th Meeting of the NSC, "U.S. Policy Toward Brazil and Other General Topics," April 2, 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 453-454.

difficulties within the framework of constitutional democracy and without civil strife.”³⁷⁷

The American people, Johnson concluded, looked forward to “intensified cooperation in the interests of economic progress and social justice for all.”³⁷⁸

Venezuela, not surprisingly given Leoni’s dedication to the Betancourt Doctrine, did not share Johnson’s enthusiasm toward the new Brazilian government. For several days Miraflores refused to comment on the coup, other than to say that it continued to study the situation intently. The Venezuelan government was wary of Goulart’s drift toward communism but was unprepared to endorse a military coup, which of course had been a constant concern in Venezuela for the past five years. The new Brazilian government, for its part, quickly reached out to Venezuela to insist that there was no cause for alarm. Provisional government official Ambrosio Perera, for example, insisted that the recent action had not offended the Betancourt Doctrine, since the constitution was still in effect and the Brazilian congress remained in session. What had happened, he continued, was not a coup d’état, but the evolution of constitutional rule in full accord with the traditions and customs of the nation. Nonetheless, Venezuela suspended relations with Rio on April 18. In a communiqué issued by Leoni, the government found the coup to be offensive to both Venezuelan conceptions of proper government as well as to its understanding of the conventions of the inter-American system. While recognizing

³⁷⁷ Teleconference, Washington-Rio, 2030Z April 2, 1964, NSF, CF: Brazil, Box 9, Mazzilli Correspondence, 4/64 folder, LBJL.

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*

that Goulart was pursuing a reckless national agenda, Leoni determined that the action of the armed forces represented an affront to the Brazilian constitution.³⁷⁹

Venezuela ultimately came to recognize the new reality of Latin American politics, however. By September Miraflores agreed to recognize the military government of Guatemala, with which it had severed relations years earlier. The Leoni administration also indicated that it would find a way to square the Betancourt Doctrine with the military regime in Brazil and restore relations with Rio. All trends suggested that the Brazilian military intended to institutionalize a constitutional—if not democratic—government, and to focus on many of the socioeconomic reforms outlined by the Alliance for Progress. And, since comfort with institutional military rule seemed to be the semi-official policy of the United States, it was in Venezuela's best interests to soften its stance of anti-democratic regimes. In any case, a lucrative bilateral trade agreement between Venezuela and Brazil was up for renewal, and Brazil made it clear that recognition was a precondition for sitting at the negotiating table.³⁸⁰ If the Betancourt Doctrine was not dead, it was certainly beginning to look like a quaint relic from a more idealistic era.

Washington's firm support for the coup reflected Mann's subtle tailoring of the ideological approach of the administration toward Latin America. During Kennedy's tenure and the early months of Johnson's presidency, U.S. policy had remained Janus-faced; public support of democratic initiatives paralleled private debate over the wisdom

³⁷⁹ "Invariable la Posición ante Brasil," and "No es Aplicable la Doctrina Betancourt en el Caso de Brasil," *El Nacional*, April 6, 1964, pp. A1 and C6, respectively. "Suspendidas Relaciones Diplomáticas con Brasil," *El Nacional*, April 18, 1964, p. A1.

³⁸⁰ Richard Eder, "Venezuela Eases Recognition Curb: Modifies Policy on No Ties to Regimes Installed by Force," *New York Times*, September 19, 1964, p. 6.

of substituting these initiatives for conventional diplomacy and force. The arms discovery in Venezuela gave these debates critical urgency. Whereas the Martin and Kennedy doctrines moldered in ideological purgatory, Mann dusted them off and reenergized them. When the crisis in Brazil emerged, U.S. policymakers acted in an environment of intellectual clarity: from their perspective Cuba stood behind the Venezuelan problem, and now Cuba waited in the wings of the Brazilian turmoil. The Alliance might still be a going concern, but policymakers in Washington and Caracas judged that the way out of the wilderness lay through rolling back Cuban influence with varying degrees of force.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT IN VENEZUELA, AUGUST 1964-DECEMBER 1965

As Washington and Caracas stepped up their efforts against Havana, the PCV and MIR initiated their plan to resume the *via pacífica* and *lucha armada* side by side. Following the April PCV Plenum and prior to the July OAS meetings, guerrillas initiated more than a dozen major attacks against rural towns and local security forces, catalyzing a cycle of government crackdowns and insurgent reprisals that resulted in death and injury to hundreds. The armed forces continued to preserve a basic level of law and order, but the Leoni administration's efforts to crack the core of the insurgency paid no dividends. Neither the public nor the leftists showed any enthusiasm for the latest government amnesty plan. Indeed, the PCV and MIR saw reason to continue their struggle, as the world communist movement showed increasing sympathy for wars of national liberation like their own, allowing greater autonomy from the Moscow line without risking the loss of Soviet materiel support. Events like the Brazil coup and the

OAS decision against Cuba, however, also served to steel the resolve of the United States and Venezuela in eliminating the leftist threat in the hemisphere. The stage was thus set for a renewal of the struggle suspended at the end of 1963, this time between more capable and committed antagonists. The communist coalition blinked first in this confrontation, leading to critical splits in the leftist movement at the end of 1965.

The PCV-MIR plan emphasized propaganda prepping and a temporary restriction on violence as a foundation to make subsequent action by the FALN more logical to the average Venezuelan. Seeking the high road, the FALN opened 1964 by declaring a unilateral truce designed, it said, to give the new administration a chance to prove its commitment to peace and reconciliation. This posture could buttress PCV claims that the leftist front stood for virtue and rationality. The communists asked only to be included in the political process, the PCV would insist, making them a studied contrast to the illegitimacy, instability, and indeed vindictiveness of the Leoni regime. Once the government rejected such overtures, as they could be counted on to do, the masses would welcome the FALN resumption of attacks. The FALN also worked to improve relations with the rural population, recruiting a small but growing number of fighters, such as Elegido Sibada, who was soon a lieutenant of Douglas Bravo and a guerrilla unit leader in his own right. Sibada and others like him emphasized that the government repression of the masses continued unabated, especially in the countryside away from the Caracas media. Even though the FALN and the rural population maintained an ambivalent

relationship, Sibada recalled, the leftists were learning better how to overcome the twin challenges of surviving against the government and cooperating with the *campesinos*.³⁸¹

The FALN duly kept its fingers off the trigger throughout April and May. There were occasional exceptions, like the temporary seizure of a radio station in Maracaibo, but the leftist focus remained on propaganda distribution and image rehabilitation. The URD's Jóvito Villalba, for example, claimed to have good faith assurances that the communists were interested in ending the violence and returning to the legal political process.³⁸² The noticeable improvement in the economy, however, helped the Leoni administration to maintain a cool and gradualist policy with regard to its dealings with the PCV and the leftist insurgency. As oil revenues jumped 33 percent between 1963 and 1964, overall government revenues and public expenditures increased by nine percent and four percent, respectively, during the same period. These increases made Venezuela one of the few countries capable of meeting the Alliance for Progress target of five percent annual economic growth to stay ahead of the three percent annual population increase typical of Latin America. These figures continued the 12 percent and nine percent respective increase in public earnings and expenditures seen from 1962-1963, and suggested that the dismal 2.7 percent increase and 6.8 percent *decrease* in respective

³⁸¹ Elegido Sibada, in Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada: hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 23-26. CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Communist Decision to Start a Guerrilla and Terrorist Offensive as Soon as Possible," September 6, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables & Misc folder, LBJL.

³⁸² "Cinco Hombres Armados Asaltaron Radioemisora y Trasmisieron Mensaje," *El Nacional*, April 18, 1964, p. C16. Al Burt, "Venezuelan Communists Seek New Plan to Overthrow Regime: Clash of Theories," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 1964, p. A14. "URD Promovera Entendimiento con las Fuerzas Democráticas para Eliminar la Violencia Terrorista y Lograr un Gobierno de Integración," *El Nacional*, April 27, 1963, p. A1.

earnings and expenditures from 1961-1962 might be a thing of the past.³⁸³ Leftist policy began to reverse itself as the economic recovery progressed. The FALN would now emphasize its violent character in words and deeds, allowing the PCV to present itself as a peacemaker and negotiator to save the people from further sacrifice. FALN leaders acknowledged that a new campaign would be a tactical failure but felt that violence was the best way to demonstrate their continued viability. MIR statements during this time reflected such a strategy: the leftists had always been interested in operating as responsible, lawful parties; it was the government that instigated violence and repression; the government had to make the first good-faith move towards amnesty to jumpstart the reconciliation process.³⁸⁴

The FALN launched a new series of attacks across the nation in as the summer concluded. On September 2 guerrillas arranged an ambush—a local guide had led a group of 30 Digepol agents right to the waiting guerrillas—in the Villanueva region of Lara state that resulted in the deaths of three government officials and two insurgents. The next day saw renewed clashes in the area, though no casualties were reported.³⁸⁵ Guerrilla attacks against government forces and oil installations subsequently flared up

³⁸³ Jorge Salazar-Carrillo and Bernadette West, *Oil and Development in Venezuela During the 20th Century* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 168. Oil revenues in 1963 were Bs. 3.6 billion, and Bs. 4.8 billion in 1964. Public sector revenues, from 1961 to 1964, were as follows: Bs. 6.366 billion, Bs. 6.359 billion, Bs. 7.34 billion, and Bs. 8.036 billion. Public expenditures, from 1961 to 1964, were: Bs. 8.54 billion, Bs. 7.954 billion, Bs. 8.678 billion, and Bs. 9.05 billion. Petroleum revenues for the same period were: Bs. 3.289 billion, Bs. 3.280 billion, Bs. 3.659 billion, and Bs. 4.803 billion.

³⁸⁴ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Communist Decision to Start a Guerrilla and Terrorist Offensive as Soon as Possible,” September 6, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 74, Cables & Misc folder, LBJL. “El MIR Fija Posición Frente al Gobierno de Amplia Base,” *El Nacional*, September 8, 1964, p. D2.

³⁸⁵ Elides J. Rojas & Alejandro Rojas, “5 Muertos y 5 Heridos en Choque con Hombres Armados en Montañas de Lara,” *El Nacional*, September 3, 1964, p. D14. Elides J. Rojas & Alejandro Rojas, “Nuevo Choque entre Fuerzas del Gobierno y Hombres Armados en Montañas de Lara,” *El Nacional*, September 4, 1964, p. D10.

elsewhere in Lara state, as well as in the states of Zulia, Falcón, and Trujillo, and in the El Bachiller mountains just to the east of Caracas. Within Caracas, terrorists carried out a series of attacks against government buildings and government officials.³⁸⁶ Government forces succeeded in discovering and destroying several guerrilla camps in Lara, along with attendant supplies and PCV and MIR propaganda materials, but failed to engage and destroy the guerrilla cells themselves. Indeed, military leaders continuously pulled troops out of guerrilla territory before nightfall because of the difficulty of the terrain. As was so often the case during this time, the armed forces allowed insurgents to escape at the crucial moment. The situation grew serious enough to require Lara governor Romero Antoni to return to Caracas for consultations with the central government.³⁸⁷

The government insisted that it retained control of the country, but the guerrilla offensive continued. On September 10 Minister of Defense Brigadier General Ramón Florencio Gómez denounced the violence as the work of “common delinquents” who carried out cowardly but insignificant attacks on remote rural population centers. The nation could remain confident, General Gómez said, that the armed forces remained the effective guardians of peace and democratic government.³⁸⁸ Whatever the case, reports of random skirmishes, acts of sabotage, and police roundups continued almost daily throughout the balance of September. Authorities at the Ministry of Defense felt compelled to issue another declaration of control over national security on October 7.

³⁸⁶ Bundy to Special Assistant to the President Jack Valenti, October 9, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

³⁸⁷ “Ocupados Tres Campamentos de Hombres Armados en Lara,” *El Nacional*, September 5, 1964, p. D11.

³⁸⁸ “Anuncia Defensa: Control Absoluto de las FF.AA. en Todo el País,” *El Nacional*, September 10, 1964, p. A1.

Similar to the September 10 communiqué, the Ministry of Defense derided the guerrillas' potency and prospects. Whatever the merits of surprise attacks against isolated mountain regions, authorities said, the guerrillas were being steadily reduced by close cooperation between civilian and military authorities in the regions affected, and by the fact that the "armed criminals" enjoyed no support from the local *campesinos*.³⁸⁹

If the goal of the FALN was to make a spectacle, it certainly succeeded; but if the goal was to gain lasting momentum, it probably failed. In what would prove to be a fitting climax for the campaign, terrorists kidnapped U.S. Air Force Assistant Chief of Mission Lieutenant Colonel Michael Smolen outside of his Caracas residence on October 9 and narrowly missed kidnapping Colonel Henry Lee, the mission head.³⁹⁰ Later that day Caracas newspapers received phone calls from persons identifying themselves as Smolen's kidnappers. They would kill the U.S. officer, the kidnappers said, if the South Vietnamese government executed Nguyen Van Troi, who had been sentenced to death for attempting to bomb a motorcade carrying U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in Vietnam the previous May. By the next day authorities in Caracas and Washington wondered whether they were dealing with an isolated, local provocation or with an act of global terrorism. Washington and Caracas stated that, until definitive proof to the contrary arose, they would treat the kidnapping as the work a local group with possible ties to Cuba, but authorities privately speculated that the kidnapping might have been

³⁸⁹ "Declaro el Ministro de la Defensa: Las Fuerzas Armadas Mantienen Absoluto Control en Todo el País," *El Nacional*, October 7, 1964, p. A1.

³⁹⁰ "Secuestrado el Segundo Jefe de la Mision Aerea de EE.UU.," *El Nacional*, October 10, 1964, p. A1. Bundy to Valenti, October 9, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

planned from Hanoi or Beijing. On October 11 the FALN issued a note to the Caracas press saying that Smolen would be tried and judged the crime of complicity in the “blatant interference that his country continues in our affairs.”³⁹¹

The Smolen kidnapping, however, rapidly turned into a fiasco for the FALN. The kidnapers released Smolen, blindfolded, onto a Caracas street on October 12, but Digepol had already begun arresting suspects and uncovering safe houses used by the plotters, soon discovered the apartment where Smolen was held. Evidence at this site led to the arrest of 29 key FALN members wanted for more than twenty high profile terrorist actions since 1962. The State Department regarded these arrests as a critical setback for the communist movement and a significant accomplishment for the Venezuelan police.³⁹² By late October, PCV officials elected to shut down two entire guerrilla brigades because their commanders were now under arrest. Further, the police crackdown emanating from the kidnapping caused the PCV leadership to question the judgment and competency of FALN leaders, and the wisdom of the FALN popular front strategy. Despite these setbacks, and open criticism from advocates of peaceful methods, the FALN pressed

³⁹¹ “Venezuelan Terrorists Kidnap U.S. Colonel and Threaten Him,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1964, p. 1. John M. Hightower, “Analizan en Washington: Conexiones Mundiales de los Secuestradores del Comandante Smolen,” *El Nacional*, October 11, 1964, p. A1. “Kidnappers Plan to ‘Try’ Colonel: He Is Tied to U.S. Meddling in Venezuela, Note Says,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1964, p. 3.

³⁹² “Libertado Smolen,” *El Nacional*, October 13, 1964, p. A1. “Caracas Leftists Free U.S. Officer: Colonel, Held 3 Days, Is Put Out of Car Blindfolded,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1964, p. 1. State Department Telegram, Embassy in Caracas to Washington, “Joint Weekly Update No. 44,” October 30, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

ahead with planning for new strikes, including the bombing of Digepol and Caracas Municipal Police headquarters.³⁹³

In the last week of October 1964 the FALN launched a final round of attacks. On October 25 guerrillas occupied the town of La Hoyadita, immediately east of Caracas. The following day terrorists kidnapped the cashier and manager of a Caracas bus line from their homes and brought them to the company offices, forcing them to open the safe and hand over \$5,000. Saboteurs then bombed Mene Grande Oil Company's Pariaguán facility, producing a fire visible from 20 kilometers and reducing the facility's output by 10,000 barrels a day. Meanwhile, west of Caracas, guerrillas renewed clashes against government forces. In general, however, the army blunted the momentum of the insurgent offensive.³⁹⁴ Authorities announced a major crackdown in Lara state. The armed forces captured numerous guerrillas who were wounded and suffering from pronounced dehydration and malnutrition. Soldiers also tracked a band of 30 insurgents involved in an attack on the town of Guaitó in the Cerro del Burro mountain range and dismantled as many as 17 guerrilla camps along the border between Trujillo and Lara.³⁹⁵ As Douglas Bravo recalled, government troops established a virtual state of siege along the coast in Falcón, and in the low mountains of Lara and Yaracuy. In concert with

³⁹³ CIA Intelligence Cable, "Dissatisfaction within the Communist Party Toward Party Leaders/Future Plans of the FALN to Continue Terrorism Despite Police Crackdown," October 28, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

³⁹⁴ State Department Telegram, U.S. Embassy in Caracas to Washington, "Joint Weekly Update No. 44," October 30, 1964, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL. "Volados e Incendiados 5 Tanques de Petróleo en Pariaguán," *El Nacional*, October 26, 1964, p. D12. "Por Día: 10,000 Barriles de Petróleo Deja de Producir Mene Grande por la Voladura de la Estación de Pariaguán," *El Nacional*, October 29, 1964, p. D10.

³⁹⁵ "Abandonados 17 Campamentos por Grupos Armados que Operan en Montañas de Lara," *El Nacional*, November 1, 1964, p. D8.

round-the-clock bombardment, these forces initiated a campaign of repression and relocation of villagers in guerrilla-occupied areas that, claimed Bravo, led to the arrest, torture, and shooting of hundreds of men and women.³⁹⁶ By the first week of November insurgent activity fell to nearly nothing. The FALN got the tactical defeat it foresaw, but it was unclear whether they had provided sufficient strategic fodder for PCV propaganda campaigns.

While the dust from this abortive campaign settled, international communists leaders met in Havana in November 1964 to discuss the prospects of the movement in Venezuela and the state of world communism. In statements leading up to the conference, Castro continued to stress his independence in foreign relations, highlighting his control of Soviet weapons in Cuba and refusing to concede the struggle with the United States. Yet he also demonstrated an interest in flexibility and compromise. *New York Times* correspondent C.L. Sulzberger had recently interviewed Castro, and he sensed Castro's focus on negotiating the rift between Beijing and Moscow in a way that kept him in the good graces of each power. "Revolutions develop differently in different countries," he said, and "I feel that existing differences between Russia and China are transitory and they can find common points to overcome their divergencies [sic]."³⁹⁷ The

³⁹⁶ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 109. Bravo and other guerrillas claimed that the government periodically initiated retribution against rural civilians for aiding the insurgents. The mainstream Venezuelan press questioned officials and conducted investigations in this regard from time to time, but evidence remained anecdotal and unsubstantiated. It is my judgment that local civilians aided government forces far more often than they aided guerrilla forces, and that both the guerrillas and the armed forces carried out some degree of intentional violence against the peasantry. At the same time, however, each side remained heavily invested in presenting themselves as the champions of the peasantry.

³⁹⁷ C.L. Sulzberger, "Castro Asserts Cubans Control Soviet Missiles: Says in Interview that They Will Be Used Against U-2's if Flights Do Not Cease," *New York Times*, November 8, 1964, p. 1.

Venezuelan left displayed a similar ambivalence. A letter from a Comrade C of the FALN, published in the Cuban newspaper *Revolución*, called for help from the “world revolutionary camp,” which is “as indispensable to us as the wind is to the sail.”³⁹⁸ The PCV, for its part, reiterated its support of the *via pacífica* as a nod to the Soviets, and the *lucha armada* as a nod to Cuba and the Cuban-supported FALN. The Soviet Communist Party leadership, having deposed Premier Nikita Khrushchev in mid-October and returned to the task of downplaying the Sino-Soviet split, hoped to use the conference to buttress its leadership of the developing world, emphasizing its revolutionary bona fides while gently reminding the radicals of the wisdom of Soviet moderation.³⁹⁹

Given the ambivalence of the parties going in, it was perhaps unsurprising that the conference produced only a limp Soviet endorsement of local revolution and a tepid Cuban-Venezuelan endorsement of Soviet leadership. Rather than demand that developing nations declare their loyalties in the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet delegation recognized the right of “fraternal parties” to pursue their own independent “patriotic” programs based on their own evaluation of local conditions. The USSR deemed violent “national liberation” to be appropriate in certain cases throughout the world in general and Venezuela in particular, a position that diminished inter- and intra-party schisms. This gentleman’s agreement, according to the CIA, meant that the USSR, China, and Cuba simply accepted the status quo rather than resolved their differences. Those

³⁹⁸ “Reds of Venezuela Ask Help in Revolt,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1964, p. 18.

³⁹⁹ CIA Intelligence Study, “Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958–Mid-1965,” December 6, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables & Misc Vol II, 8/64–8/66 folder, LBJL.

movements already engaged in violent national liberation could continue to do so, such that Venezuelan communist efforts received Soviet approbation.⁴⁰⁰ In January 1965, *Pravda* duly noted that communists engaged in the struggle against imperialism would be called upon to “render active support to those who are at present being subjected to brutal reprisals, such as...the Venezuelan, Colombian, Guatemalan, Honduran, Paraguayan, and Haitian fighters.”⁴⁰¹ In exchange for this recognition, the USSR gained assurances from Cuba and China that they would avoid influencing local revolutionaries and communist parties in favor of armed or peaceful action. Further, Cuba pledged that it would interact only with local orthodox communist parties that, like the PCV, traditionally hewed to the Moscow line. Yet Havana also publicized its unequivocal support for the Venezuelan insurgency, announcing on November 9 that November 14 through 21 would be a “week of solidarity” with the FALN, and that it would be naming new schoolrooms for “martyrs” of the Venezuelan movement.⁴⁰²

CONTINUING VIOLENCE AND AMBIVALENCE, JANUARY 1965-JANUARY 1966

Because the November 1964 Havana Conference did little more than put a seal of approval on a disjointed relationship, the international communist movement experienced neither further rupture nor reunification, a situation paralleled in Venezuela. Communist leaders reprised earlier rationalizations that attributed failure to poor timing rather than

⁴⁰⁰ CIA Intelligence Study, “Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958–Mid-1965,” December 6, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables & Misc Vol II, 8/64–8/66 folder, LBJL.

⁴⁰¹ State Department Memorandum, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group,” April 8, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 75.

⁴⁰² State Department Memorandum, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group,” April 8, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 75. “Cuba Again Joins Venezuela Reds,” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 1964, p. A17.

flawed strategies, and the veneer of unity remained upon the National Liberation Front. In early 1965, however, the FALN renewed planning for operations against the Venezuelan government that the PCV ultimately deemed unacceptably radical, leading to months of tension between the two factions. Caracas and Washington used the time to hone their counterinsurgency skills and take advantage of cracks within local and international communist groups. At the end of 1965 the militants publicly denounced the proponents of peaceful political action. The PCV-MIR relationship came to an end, and in its place several leftist groups vied for the leadership of a fractured movement. The dawning of 1966 therefore closed the second phase of a guerrilla struggle begun with so much optimism in the first months of 1964.

The PCV and MIR again confronted their inability to reveal the flaws of the Punto Fijo coalition and generate a consensus for revolution, and they now had to face the fact that their two most visible anti-government campaigns—the effort to preempt the 1963 elections and to unseat the Leoni government in 1964 and 1965—had failed as well. From MIR co-founder Moisés Moleiro’s perspective, there was no rational reason for the leftists’ lack of public support, given what he saw as the glacial pace of the economic recovery. “This discontent,” argued Moleiro, “should have translated into political action, but what manifested itself was a passive resignation.”⁴⁰³ Leftist leaders began crafting a new party line that placed Venezuela within the international struggle between the developing and capitalist world. The capitalists in the White House and in Miraflores

⁴⁰³ Moisés Moleiro, in Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan tres comandantes de la izquierda revolucionaria: Lino Martínez, Moisés Moleiro, Américo Martín* (Caracas: Central University Press, 1982), p. 200. The original Spanish reads, “Ese descontento debe traducirse políticamente, sin lo cual no pasa de ser una resignación pasiva.”

were stronger than previously recognized, said the new line, and a long struggle would be required to dismantle such a structure. Yet cracks in the U.S. armor existed, so the rhetoric went, as evidenced by the survival and even flourishing of the Cuban revolution, so victory was possible if those who knew the truth could tighten their belts and redouble their resolve.⁴⁰⁴

Consistent with this “long struggle” strategy, the Venezuelan communist movement worked to broaden its base of human and materiel resources. Early in 1964, the PCV established close contacts with the Italian Communist Party, using Rome as a communications channel between Havana and Moscow. By early 1965, this channel carried Cuban and Soviet funds to the FLN in Venezuela, complementing direct funding from the Cuban Directorate of Intelligence and raising foreign funding of the FLN to at least several thousand dollars a month. Going the other way, Cuban and Soviet agents used Rome as a means to gather information concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the Venezuelan communist movement.⁴⁰⁵ FALN leader German Lairer, meanwhile, spent February 1965 in Havana delivering a series of lectures, entitled “The Tactics of Revolutionary Struggle in Latin America,” that emphasized his movement’s recommitment to victory. These addresses reprised the Cuban line that, while association with politicians and the middle classes served some purpose in the intermediate stages of

⁴⁰⁴ Moleiro, in Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan tres comandantes de la izquierda revolucionaria...*, pp. 265-266.

⁴⁰⁵ CIA Intelligence Study, “Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958–Mid-1965,” December 6, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables & Misc Vol II, 8/64–8/66 folder, LBJL. CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Developments in Countries on the Counterinsurgency List,” April 14, 1965, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST) [hereafter CREST], NACPM. CIA Special Report, “Cuban Subversion in Latin America,” April 23, 1965, CREST, NACPM.

the struggle, Marxist-Leninist governments ultimately could only be established through armed struggle. The FALN, Laird continued, harbored no illusions about the difficulties ahead. The failure of the 1963 campaign in particular taught them that a quick victory against the imperialists would be unlikely, and they were steadily building strength for a long battle. Their cadres now consisted of at least 2,000 Venezuelans, many of whom were Cuban-trained, and were more demographically diverse than ever. Previous setbacks, Laird admitted, had educated the FALN against over-reliance on urban students, and in areas like Falcón the proportion of peasant fighters in the *focos* had increased from 14 to 44 percent.⁴⁰⁶

The case of Elegido Sibada, mentioned previously, provides a good example of the FALN interest in peasant fighters. On one hand, it was a central goal of the guerrillas to improve their standing among rural residents, so peasant recruitment would help in this area. Beyond that, the FALN found that urban residents took a long time to become acclimated to the demands of operating in remote and inhospitable areas. Sibada had grown up in the countryside, and was accustomed to surviving on a poor diet and laboring with little respite. Both he and Américo Martín recalled at length how quickly the transplanted city dwellers became sick and debilitated in their first months operating as guerrillas.

Significant clashes between guerrillas and the armed forces resumed in March, and the full PCV-MIR propaganda campaign and rural insurgency was underway by April. On March 9, military spokesmen confirmed publicly that over 1,000 troops were

⁴⁰⁶ CIA Special Report, "Cuban Subversion in Latin America," April 23, 1965, CREST, NACPM.

conducting a sweep of the Morán, Giménez, and Torres districts of Lara state. Rather than following the traditional tactic of a single-day operation, these troops had enough logistical support to stay in the field indefinitely, allowing them build the current operation towards a decisive climax, the army said. Field commanders established a military tribunal to try cases of rebellion and insurgency on the spot, as well as brought in a staff to administer the region during the military's stay. In the words of government officials, the operation would continue until the last guerrillas in Lara were eliminated. By March 12 over 2,000 troops, supported by helicopters and warplanes, patrolled Lara, discovering over 20 guerrilla campsites and arrested dozens of suspected guerrillas. That same day guerrillas launched attacks against the town of Villa Nueva, in Morán district, and skirmished with troops arriving to defend the town before retreating into the countryside. The stakes for each side increased, as rumors spread that Douglas Bravo was among the insurgents. Regular army troops were soon reinforced with a Marine battalion, a detachment of paratroopers, as well as the special National Guard *cazadores* battalion. Upon ending its operations on March 24, the government declared that any guerrilla survivors had probably fled to the boundaries of Lara and Portuguesa states.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ "Penetración Militar en Montañas de Lara se Efectuará este Fin de Semana," *El Nacional*, March 10, 1964, p. D10. "Anuncia Gobernador de Lara: La Operación Militar se Mantendrá Hasta Eliminar los Focos Guerrilleros," *El Nacional*, March 12, 1964, p. D2. "Fuerzas del Ejército Iniciaron Operación de Cerco Progresivo en Montañas de Lara," *El Nacional*, March 13, 1964, p. D12. "Continuó Ayer Acción Militar de Penetración en Montañas de Lara," *El Nacional*, March 14, 1964, p. D12. "Se Desplazan Guerrilleros de Lara Hacia Límites con Portuguesa," *El Nacional*, March 25, 1964, p. C3. Suffice to say that the *cazador*, or "hunter," units were the best-trained counterinsurgency troops the Venezuelan military could field. The problem for the government was that it took a long time to field them. The military had only one such unit in 1964, and only three in 1966. As we will see, U.S. assistance in creating several new ones in 1967 drastically tipped the scales in favor of the government's counterinsurgency efforts.

Just as the Lara operation hit its high point, other clashes broke out in Falcón. For several days army troops pursued a band of guerrillas who attacked the town of Aracua, in Petit district. On March 18, government soldiers sprung an ambush on these guerrillas, killing the leader of the group and another guerrilla while suffering four wounded among themselves. This guerrilla group had the misfortune of being the subject of another government ambush on March 20. According to *El Nacional* correspondent Ildemaro Alguíndigue D., approximately 25 guerrillas had located themselves near La Cruz de Taratara, in Bolívar district, where they apparently felt secure enough to throw an evening party. Acting on a tip, elements of the National Guard *cazadores* battalion flew by helicopter to the area. Around 10:00 p.m. the soldiers encircled the area and surprised the guerrillas. In the ensuing melee, six guerrillas were killed, while the rest fled into the night, to be the target of air force bombings the next day. Government casualties were three enlisted men and one officer wounded.⁴⁰⁸

Back in Caracas, the PCV staged its first major demonstration since the end of the 1963 election campaign on April 1, 1965. Spearheaded by Central University and high school students, the protests defied a government ban on such demonstrations and the police duly used force in dispersing them. The MIR pointed to the incident in an April 8 press release observing the fifth anniversary of the party's creation. In defying the government ban, according to the MIR, the public had made known the "irrevocable decision of Venezuela to prevent a reactionary clique [i.e. the Leoni administration] from

⁴⁰⁸ "Muertos 2 Guerrilleros Cerca de Curimagua," *El Nacional*, March 19, 1965, p. D11. Ildemaro Alguíndigue D., "Seis Guerrilleros Muertos en Dos Encuentros entre Grupos Armados y el Ejército," *El Nacional*, March 22, 1965, p. D10.

treating the nation as conquered territory.” The hour of unity and mass struggle had arrived, continued the communiqué, and the MIR, “indifferent to the threats” against it, looked forward hopefully at the head of the revolutionary vanguard.⁴⁰⁹ The PCV also sought to exploit the April U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic to promote class-consciousness and mass solidarity, organizing a series of high profile riots that featured the burning of tires and of U.S.-owned property. Communist propaganda stressed that the heavy hand of the United States, now so firmly upon the people of Santo Domingo, could easily be felt in Venezuela and elsewhere in the hemisphere. Particularly in poorer districts surrounding U.S.-owned oil installations, the PCV sent information teams to foment anti-American sentiment. Meanwhile, in keeping with the unified-action theme discussed in the spring of the previous year, the FALN sent “action-teams” into the oil facilities to conduct sabotage and generally sow disorder.⁴¹⁰

Given the initial success of the protest campaign, the PCV-MIR leadership decided to expand upon it significantly. Rather than simply attack U.S. oil interests, the PCV now directed armed cells to attack the U.S. Embassy and the General Motors and Chrysler plants. The FALN discussed the possible kidnapping, trial, and execution of a high-ranking U.S. military mission chief, as well as other provocations that would undercut government claims of control over the country.⁴¹¹ Yet the extremist point of

⁴⁰⁹ CIA Intelligence Bulletin, “Current Intelligence Relating to National Security,” April 1, 1965, CREST, NACPM. “Disuelta por la Policía Manifestación de Estudiantes,” *El Nacional*, April 3, 1965, p. D12. “Declaración del MIR con Motivo de sus 5 Años de Existencia,” *El Nacional*, April 9, 1965, p. D5.

⁴¹⁰ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Communist Plans for Anti-American Terrorism Throughout Venezuela,” May 8, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

⁴¹¹ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Communist Party Intentions to Continue Terrorist Campaign Against American Interests in Venezuela,” May 11, 1965; CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Reason for

view—a government teetering on the edge of collapse—did not correspond to the perceptions of the Venezuelan and U.S. governments. Indeed, the new U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela, Maurice M. Bernbaum, reported to Washington on March 22 that the Venezuelan president appeared to have a firm grasp on the reins of the nation. Leoni regarded subversion to be a fact of life as long as Castro remained in office, but insisted that Venezuelan intelligence services kept him abreast of, and the country relatively safe from, developments within the communist movement. While the president's critics scolded him for his regular release of political prisoners, he claimed such moves to be calculated to sow discord among the communists by returning divisive actors into their ranks. As recently as March 9, for example, Leoni had approved the release of 60 detainees from military custody. In remarks to the press, Minister of Defense Ramón Florencio Gómez said that the detainees had yielded greatly damaging intelligence on the guerrilla movement in general and on the insurgents in Falcón in particular. Leoni also advised Ambassador Bernbaum that he had essentially secured the loyalty of the armed forces, pointing to a March 13 address by Minister Gómez to the national congress pledging the armed forces to guardianship of the political process and outlining the military's progress in eliminating the insurgency. President Leoni, Ambassador Bernbaum concluded, seemed "pretty well on top of his job...[He] has a practical

the Movement of the Revolutionary Left to Resume Terrorism," May 14, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

politician's rather than a theoretician's approach...[and] is someone we can work with."⁴¹²

The government had already dealt a major blow to insurgent financing by arresting Italian Communist Party couriers carrying \$330,000 destined for the PCV on March 26. Now, according to the CIA, Interior Minister Gonzalo Barrios gained approval from the president to initiate a psychological warfare campaign against the PCV in which Digepol would capture one or two of the highest-level communist leaders. One of these potential targets was Bravo, at the time in hiding at Central University.⁴¹³ Bravo had returned to Caracas in April to meet with Martín and other guerrilla leaders, as well as attend the Seventh Plenum meeting to discuss strategy with PCV leadership.⁴¹⁴ Paralleling the plan of the FALN to capture and assassinate a U.S. military official, Leoni gave Barrios permission to "liquidate" potential captives if the communists persisted in their offensive.⁴¹⁵ While this plan never came to fruition, the Leoni government again succeeded in weathering the communist storm. In terms of concrete results, Digepol announced the capture of 20 guerrillas and destruction of four insurgent camps in Falcón

⁴¹² U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela Maurice M. Bernbaum to Washington, March 22, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL. "60 Procesados Militares Serán Libertados esta Semana por Orden del Presidente," *El Nacional*, March 10, 1965, p. A1. "Firme Determinación de las Fuerzas Armadas de Sumar su Aporte al Resurgimiento Nacional," *El Nacional*, March 14, 1965, p. D3.

⁴¹³ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "Developments in Countries on the Counterinsurgency List," April 14, 1965, CREST, NACPM. CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Government Plans to Harass Communist Party of Venezuela," May 13, 1965. NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

⁴¹⁴ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 116-117.

⁴¹⁵ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Government Plans to Harass Communist Party of Venezuela," May 13, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

and, by month's end, the government announced that the armed forces had killed at least 24 guerrillas in Lara in the past six weeks.⁴¹⁶

In mid-June the CIA learned of FALN plots to attack U.S. installations or kidnap more U.S. officials and in July uncovered PCV planning to initiate and then resolve a nationwide strike of transportation workers, thus showing the communist power to facilitate a national crisis as well as act as saviors of the people.⁴¹⁷ Guerrillas and government forces continued playing hit and run in Trujillo, as well as in the eastern states. By summer's end the FALN had created a new guerrilla unit for action in Bolívar state in the east, where Miranda, Anzoátegui, Sucre, and Monagas states were already grappling with incipient insurgencies.⁴¹⁸ These actions bore little fruit, however, as communist violence fell to nearly nothing by the autumn of 1965. Venezuelan intelligence suggested that the guerrilla movement was falling into disarray. Some of its leaders were defecting, said the intelligence services, while the government continued capturing men and materiel, and PCV-MIR relations returned to a fractious state.⁴¹⁹ Following the 1965 plenum meeting, which Bravo described as one of the most

⁴¹⁶ "Anunció la Digepol: Detenidos 20 Guerrilleros y Allandados 4 Campamentos en Zonas de Falcón," *El Nacional*, May 16, 1965, p. D4. "24 Guerrilleros Muertos en Lara en los Últimos 45 Días," *El Nacional*, May 22, 1965, p. D13.

⁴¹⁷ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Resumption of Planning by the Armed Forces of National Liberation to Attack American Personnel and Installations," 18 Jun, 1965; CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Plans of the Communist Party of Venezuela to Call for a Nationwide, General Transport Strike in an Attempt to Create a Political Crisis for the Government of Venezuela," July 9, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

⁴¹⁸ "Ofensiva a Fondo Contra Grupos Armados Lanazará el Ejército en Zonas de Monagas," *El Nacional*, June 19, 1965, p. D15. "Cinco Guerrilleros Muertos en Choque Armado en Montañas de Trujillo," *El Nacional*, July 1, 1965, p. D16. CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "Review of Insurgency Problems," September 1, 1965, CREST, NACPM.

⁴¹⁹ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "Review of Insurgency Problems," September 1, 1965, CREST, NACPM.

acrimonious yet, he had remained in Caracas for part of June and July to confer with guerrilla leaders—among them Alfredo Maneiro of the eastern states, Tirso Pinto, Luben Petkoff, and Rafael Martínez of Lara, and Bravo as leader of the Falcón-Yaracuy *focos*—and discuss his plan to consolidate in the Portuguesa-Lara-Trujillo interior and create a much more formidable force. The presence of these guerrilla leaders in Caracas did not go unnoticed by the government, and the governor of Falcón state announced on July 2 that Bravo had abandoned the field and was probably in the capital. In a search for the insurgent chiefs, Digepol raided the Central University medical building and more than 35 private houses, arresting several leaders and barely missing Bravo. By his own admission “miraculously able to escape... [but] in a truly tight spot,” Bravo returned to the mountains to reunite with his fighters.⁴²⁰

In the capital district, meanwhile, the government demonstrated redoubled determination to root out the insurgents. On October 29 security forces unearthed a massive underground munitions factory and storehouse, hidden under a farm in the vicinity of Los Teques that was maintained by the communist movement. Authorities estimated that they captured \$300,000 of weapons and ammunition including small arms, mortars, mines, and improvised bombs. After touring the facility with members of his cabinet, President Leoni characterized the seizure as the “biggest blow yet” to the insurgency. On November 4 Caracas police arrested a suspected communist courier who travelled under a Spanish passport and carried \$300,000, presumably intended for the

⁴²⁰ Bravo, in Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 117-118. The original Spanish reads, “Milagrosamente pude escapar...de modo que fue un momento de verdadero apuro.” “Declaró el Gobernador de Falcón: Douglas Bravo Abandonó Sierra de Coro y Posiblemente se Encuentre en Caracas,” *El Nacional*, July 3, 1965, p. D12.

PCV-MIR combination. On December 6 the Caracas communists struck back, perhaps doing more harm than good to their prospects. That day AD congressman Martín Antonio Rangel received a statuette of the Virgin Mary in his office mail. Rather than open the package at work, he took it home to his wife. When she removed an attached tag the statuette exploded and killed her instantly. The bombing was the day's biggest news story, and a joint session of congress immediately condemned the attack as an affront to public decency and popular sovereignty, laying the woman's death at the feet of the PCV and MIR. *El Nacional* devoted nearly a full page to a Ministry of the Interior press release that featured photographs of 15 PCV and MIR "co-authors" of the attack.⁴²¹

It was right around this time, apparently, that the PCV finally lost its patience with the *lucha armada* and its practitioners, determining that the strategy and FLN arrangement was doomed to failure. In a sobering self-diagnosis, PCV leaders determined that its organizational apparatus was in shambles. The insurgency had run the party into the ground and driven it farther from rather than closer to the masses. Without some rejuvenation the movement could not remain viable, the leadership concluded. The Moscow line of gradualism was the right one after all, yet the worn down state of the party made it impossible to engage with various leftist and labor parties and actually play a meaningful role in national politics. While the PCV gave recognition to the sacrifices

⁴²¹ CIA Intelligence Memoranda, "Review of Insurgency Problems," November 10 and December 14, 1965, CREST, NACPM. "Fábrica Subterránea de Armamento y Centro de Instrucción de Guerrilleros Ocuparon Ayer las Fuerzas Armadas en Los Teques," *El Nacional*, October 30, 1965, p. A1. "Atentado Contra la Soberanía Popular Denuncia el Congreso ante el Crimen Terrorista," *El Nacional*, December 8, 1965, p. A1. "Fichas con sus Fotografías de 15 Dirigentes del PC y MIR," *El Nacional*, December 10, 1965, p. D13. Among the accused, the most notable names included Américo Martín, Germán Lairret, and Pedro Ortega Díaz.

of its members engaged in armed struggle, it advocated the suspension rather than continuation of armed action, declaring the need to rebuild clandestinely the military structure. Moreover, the leadership issued a sustained critique of the follies perpetuated in the name of armed struggle and intimated that the method might have congenitally fatal flaws.⁴²²

The inherent tensions within the movement finally split into open rupture. Almost as soon as Bravo returned to the countryside, he received a letter from fellow FALN leader José Rafael Núñez Tenorio, advising him that lingering tensions from the plenum meeting approached the boiling point. Bravo duly returned to Caracas; the Political Bureau presented Bravo and Núñez Tenorio with two letters written by communist leaders proposing that the movement withdraw from *lucha armada*, reemphasize the legal political efforts of the party, and disband the party's armed forces. Predictably, the first letter possessed the signatures of Gustavo Machado, Guillermo García Ponce, and Eduardo Machado, longtime opponents of the guerrilla campaigns. The second letter, however, carried the signatures of Pompeyo Márquez, Teodoro Petkoff, and Freddy Muñoz, men who had either supported the *lucha armada* doctrine or fought in the FALN ranks. After three days of inconclusive debate, the Political Bureau denounced Bravo for sowing factionalism and division, suspended him from the party, and called for a vote on December 3 to elect new leaders for the party.⁴²³

⁴²² CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency," June 7, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

⁴²³ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 118-120.

On December 29, 1965, Bravo, Núñez Tenorio, and other FALN hard-liners responded by declaring themselves in open opposition to the established communist structure. These actors gained the allegiance of all guerrilla commands with the exception of the Simón Bolívar brigade in Lara state. In addition to forming a separate, parallel structure to the FALN, these dissidents also formed a union with an MIR faction—led by Américo Martín—that left the FALN following the December 3 election. As a means to solidify and legitimate the new group, Bravo and the other dissidents captured a PCV-owned radio transmitter and broadcast news of the split to Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union. Though the dissidents referred to themselves in their initial communiqué as “the New PCV-FALN Leadership,” in the opinion of the CIA this new group devoted itself less to seizing control of the central leadership than to the formation of an entirely separate group totally committed to armed struggle. In the face of this development, and the plans of the dissidents to resume terrorist activities in the first months of 1966, the main-line PCV and FALN issued criticism but remained essentially powerless, passive, and inert.⁴²⁴

CONCLUSION

The end of the PCV partnership with the MIR and FALN, along with the consolidation of the Leoni regime and the emergence of the so-called Mann Doctrine in Washington, created the paradox of resolving several questions while creating many more. Whether the MIR-FALN conglomeration resigned from the front, or were ejected

⁴²⁴ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Revolt of Hard-Line Dissidents in the FALN Against Established Leadership, and Plans of the Rebels to Resume Terrorism in Caracas in January 1966,” December 30, 1965, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL.

by the PCV, it was clear that the *via pacifica* and the *lucha armada* could not exist under the same umbrella. As members of the violent and moderate constituencies recalled, theirs had been a classic marriage of convenience and, aside from transfers of funding and exchanges of vaguely worded memos on doctrine, there had been very little cooperation or attempts to control resources centrally. The collapse of the “front” concept in Venezuela seemed consistent with developments within the international communist movement, as Soviet Union found it almost impossible to reconcile its differences with radical powers like China and Cuba. The only difference between Venezuelan and international communist policies was that the USSR, Cuba, and China placed a premium on their role as leaders in a unified global struggle for socialist victory. They had to keep up the appearance of unity that the Venezuelan communists did not. Further, while several armed national liberation struggles appeared to be achieving success around the world, the armed struggles in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America seemed to be capable only of maintaining a bloody stalemate. So, while the international communist powers were compelled to remain committed to violent revolution, the PCV was free to renounce it.

One might have expected, therefore, that the PCV would begin gravitating toward the Soviet Union, and that the Soviets would point to the apparent failure of armed revolution in Latin America as a rationale for abandoning it. One might also have expected that the MIR and FALN, having failed in their 1963 effort to disrupt the elections and in their 1964-1965 efforts to cripple the Leoni government, would pause in the *lucha armada* and reassess their approach to victory. As we have learned, however,

the Soviets remained committed to preserving a fig leaf of unity in their relationship with Cuba, limply endorsing armed national liberation as long as Cuba pledged to interact only with well-established local communist parties. Moscow's interest in engineering significant political change in Latin America during the early 1960s, then, was at least temporarily suspended. The PCV, as a result, found that it had little to look forward to as 1965 concluded beyond simply closing up its shop for a holiday of indefinite length. The MIR and FALN constituencies, on the other hand, continued to behave in a curiously paradoxical way: the more they failed, the more they insisted that they were on the path to victory if only they tried harder. The struggles of 1963, in their view, had been prosecuted with insufficient energy, and in 1964 and 1965 their resolve was complete. If only they had not had to deal with PCV ambivalence, the MIR and FALN insisted, they might have achieved their aims. Now, they were free to pursue the *lucha armada* to its successful conclusion, following the example of Castro and Guevara. In 1966, then, they would not only be fully committed to the task at hand, but would not be held back by the moderates. Indeed, both Castro and Guevara showed no signs of giving up on the idea of direct revolutionary export as a means to assert leadership in the communist world and to distract the focus of the United States. Whether based on pride or a rational assessment of internal and international politics, the Cuban leaders moved further out of line with the moderates in the absence of any real evidence that their revolution could be successfully replicated across the Caribbean.

In the case of U.S. policy towards Latin America, it was clear that Washington held at least a slight advantage over hemispheric leftists, but it was less clear how much

Washington remained committed to the old Kennedy goals of socioeconomic development and democratization. Through their work in the OAS, U.S. leaders had progressively isolated Castro and made it harder for Cuba to sow revolution directly. The efforts of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and moderate allies in Latin America had also taken advantage of the Cuban missile crisis and Castro's apparent recklessness to diminish the heroic posture that the Cuban once held in many Latin American quarters. On the other hand, despite many speeches to the contrary, it seemed that Washington's commitment to the Alliance for Progress was decidedly on the wane, and evidence like Washington's warm embrace of the new military government in Brazil suggested a new premium on stability at the expense of democracy. But, as this dissertation has argued, the United States and its communist antagonists continued to regard success in Venezuela as the barometer for the overall success of the policies in the hemisphere. So while the Alliance wavered and the Mann Doctrine waxed, the fact that Venezuela continued its economic recovery as well as consolidated its democratic institutions dramatically lessened the urgency of questions about continuity between the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In the areas that mattered most, therefore, U.S. policy remained relatively successful and relatively consistent.

But if the Washington-Caracas partnership did not have to concern itself as much with questions of democracy and democratization, it certainly had not divined the way to eliminate the threat of insurgency, rather than simply keep it at bay. The Venezuelan government continued to expend resources in rural civic action programs, and promote the armed forces' role in nation and institution building. Yet a vital minority of

campesinos, urban citizens, and military defectors continued to believe in the insurgency enough to replace the losses suffered by the *focos* and put their lives on the line for the idea of the revolution. For the Venezuelan government and its armed forces, as well as for U.S. policymakers increasingly involved in strengthening Venezuela's counterinsurgency capabilities, this fact and the apparent decision of the insurgents to try even harder in 1966 constituted an urgent and nettlesome problem.

In the wake of limited victories and defeats perhaps the only real dividend paid to the antagonists involved in the struggle for the ideological soul of Latin America was a bit of clarity. Each side saw more clearly the futility of trying to mesh incompatible ideas and ideologies, and perceived better where they stood among real and potential allies and enemies. But any wisdom gained in stock taking was offset. None of the antagonists had yet found the solution that would fundamentally expose the weaknesses of their opponents and open the door to their ultimate destruction. The years 1964 and 1965 therefore did much to energize the political dilemmas and debates of the hemispheric Cold War, but it did not do much to resolve them.

Chapter 5: A Coalescing Center & Splintering Radicalism, 1966-1967

As 1966 began the Venezuelan revolutionaries committed to the *lucha armada* pushed all their chips to the center of the table. They abandoned any further support from the more established Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV)—and by extension the deep pockets of the Soviet and Italian communist parties—just as the PCV abandoned them. Further, they severed any remaining connections to mainstream, moderate constituencies within their own nation. The newly minted dissident National Liberation Front-Armed Forces of National Liberation (FLN-FALN) and the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR) could only hope for two outcomes: either deal the armed forces unprecedentedly harsh blows, somehow goading the military into a self-destructive coup; or use their constant presence in the countryside to encourage a population weary of violence and upheaval to embrace it in striking down a heretofore-resilient government. They staked everything—up to and including their lives—on the idea that a revolution could be manufactured in the absence of significant and favorable objective conditions. For them, revolution was becoming not a means to an end but rather an end in itself.

But if Douglas Bravo, Luben Petkoff, and other guerrilla leaders had chosen to wander in the wilderness, they still had a lifeline. They could count on firm ideological and materiel support from Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and the Cuban government, though the OAS quarantine made the delivery of materiel difficult. Indeed, Castro and Guevara opened 1966 with the articulation of a concerted world revolutionary movement encompassing Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Observing the deepening U.S.

involvement in Vietnam, Castro sensed that Washington was becoming too distracted to police the politics of the Caribbean Basin with the vigor displayed in the 1962 to 1964 period. Without ongoing U.S. support, he mused, perhaps lackeys like the Venezuelan government would finally succumb to the pressure of the people's revolution. Some evidence existed to support Castro's supposition that Washington might be losing its ability to focus on Latin America. U.S. troops remained in the Dominican Republic, but as 1965 progressed relations between Washington and Caracas appeared to loosen somewhat; overall, the White House seemed to be paying relatively little attention to Latin American security problems. After the failure of two distinct revolutionary campaigns in Venezuela—the effort to disrupt the 1963 election and the subsequent campaign leading to the December 1965 schism—the third time might be the charm for Castro and the Venezuelan revolutionaries. With better weaponry and a clearer ideological mandate this time around, they worked to take luck out of the equation. The Venezuelan guerrillas—short on allies but long on hope—assiduously protected the flickering flame of revolution on a windy plain. If only they could spread the flame to the kindling.

Against this deepening radicalism in the Caribbean Basin, the United States began returning to a closer working relationship with its allies in Caracas. Washington never seriously feared that the guerrillas would march victoriously through the capital. Yet policymakers perceived by early 1967 that the Venezuelan military was approaching a breaking point when it might lash out at the government of President Raúl Leoni or abandon large areas of the countryside to the insurgency. Influenced by the durability

and tenacity of guerrilla movements in Southeast Asia, Washington moved closer to a complete embrace of dedicated anti-guerrilla forces in Latin America in general and Venezuela in particular. The Leoni government arrived at much the same conclusions regarding the new dangers posed by Caribbean extremism and the need to reinforce its counterinsurgency capability. Increasingly, however, President Leoni found himself short on time and funds to accomplish such a reorientation. Throughout 1966 and 1967 Venezuelan and U.S. officials consulted in strengthening the anti-guerrilla capability of the Venezuelan military, paralleling leftist efforts to make the Venezuelan guerrilla forces stronger and more dangerous themselves. By the spring of 1967 this planning reached the executive level. President Lyndon Johnson and Leoni met in Uruguay to discuss ways to conclusively eradicate the guerrilla threat.

This chapter has three main objectives: to consider how the most extreme left in the Caribbean Basin conceived of itself, and of its relationship with the wider world, beginning in 1966; to discuss the ways in which the Johnson and Leoni governments sought to master the problems presented by this strain of extremism; and to analyze the trajectory created as these competing visions collided. The chapter begins in Havana in January 1966, during the heady moment of the first Tri-Continental Congress, and concludes in May 1967, shortly after presidents Johnson and Leoni used a hemispheric summit meeting at Punta del Este to make a plan to “chase the communists” out of Venezuela, as Johnson would phrase it. Along the way the chapter examines the efforts of Douglas Bravo, Luben Petkoff, Américo Martín, and others, to make operational the most powerful guerrilla forces yet seen in the hemisphere, as well as the U.S.-Venezuelan

development of ranger battalions whose success would influence counterinsurgency forces across Central and South America. Further, the chapter discusses the struggle of communist intellectuals in Venezuela and beyond to rationalize the uncertain role of the hemispheric revolutionary, and to divine the elusive path to revolutionary victory. The chapter argues that the 1966 to 1967 period presented the Latin American extremists with a cruel paradox. They had never been better organized, equipped, and supported—both ideologically and tangibly—but, because of renewed U.S.-Venezuelan cooperation and intensified doctrinal strife throughout the communist world, the extremists had never faced steeper odds of achieving success.

CATALYZING A WORLD REVOLUTION? THE TRI-CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE AND REVOLUTIONARY ADJUSTMENTS IN VENEZUELA, WINTER 1965-1966

The last months of 1965 were a time of soul-searching and self-critique for leftists across the Caribbean Basin. While Douglas Bravo, Américo Martín, Luben Petkoff, and other Venezuelan radicals had to balance basic day-to-day survival with their ideological reconsiderations, Fidel Castro had at least the luxuries of time and relative security to think deeply about the next step forward for Latin American revolution. Castro became convinced that the conventions of the world system had to be challenged and broken at their very core: his enemies and antagonists now included not only U.S. imperialism and its array of Latin American allies, but also Moscow, Moscow-subscribing Latin American communist parties, and any number of other half-hearted and feeble revolutionaries across the globe. As Castro exiled moderate and semi-radical constituencies to the margins of his worldview he articulated a vision in which his

revolution merged with those across the developing world, putting him at the head of a campaign to transform the status quo of global politics.

The writings of Régis Debray and the proceedings of Havana's 1966 Tri-Continental conference reflect this emerging ideological architecture.⁴²⁵ Debray, a French high school teacher and Marxist who became fascinated with Latin American revolution, had spent several months in 1965 living with various guerrilla bands across the region before travelling to Havana. Here, he came to Castro's attention and soon became Castro's *de facto* court philosopher. In a series of articles published beginning in September 1965, Debray channeled Castro and Guevara's thinking on guerrilla warfare into a theorization of the *foco*—a small guerrilla group that would focus popular frustrations against the the government and catalyze a general insurrection—as an instrument of national liberation. Further, he articulated Castro's belief in Venezuela as the crucial arena for proving the continued validity of the *foco* model. By hosting the Tri-Continental conference, scheduled to run from January 3 to 13, 1966, Castro sought to wrench leadership in regional and international leftist ideology from the Soviet Union, and lay the foundation for a revolutionary wave that would engulf Latin American and overwhelm the resources of the United States and its allies.

Debray's "The Long March in Latin America, Guerrilla Movements: Theory and Practice" essay in the September-October 1965 issue of *New Left Review* vacillated between a classic Marxist-Leninist critique and a Castro-style rant against moderation in

⁴²⁵ The Tri-Continental, or Tri-Continental Conference, was officially known as the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. "Tri-Continental," however, is a much more wieldy term and, since contemporary observers used it regularly, this chapter will follow suit.

its evaluation of revolutionary efforts in Latin America in general and Venezuela in particular. Debray reprised what he regarded as the core of *fidelismo*. The masses—even those sympathetic to revolution—needed strong prodding and leadership if the status quo was to be overturned, since the state and its monopoly on coercion made mass repression and suppression of revolutionary conditions relatively easy:

The entire apparatus of organized violence belongs to the enemy. The violence with which the people can strike back, ‘mass action,’ is easily dismantled by the enemy’s organized violence. A military coup can overnight pulverize democratic parties, trade unions, the combativity [sic] of the masses and their hope: the Brazilian example is valid for the whole continent. What, then, is to be done?⁴²⁶

As Debray lamented dourly, *focos* sprang up throughout Latin America to push the masses toward greater political awareness, only to disintegrate in the face of state repression. Venezuela seemed to be the sole exception to this trend, and even there the flame of *fidelismo* flickered precariously. These misfortunes compelled Debray to ponder the applicability of *fidelismo* in Latin America. He returned to the consideration of the Venezuelan case and found that the communist movement there seemed to survive by virtue of its unusual flexibility and durability. From the start it possessed many leaders and constituents—the original PCV, the MIR, and the later FALN-FLN fusion formed with the help of military defectors—so arrests in Caracas did not cripple the rural *focos*, and vice versa. Further, the ability of the guerrilla forces to survive in the field for three years meant that there was a solid core of hardened leaders who came to garner near-mythic status among the population. The Venezuelans, therefore, deviated slightly

⁴²⁶ Régis Debray, *The Long March in Latin America, Guerrilla Movements: Theory and Practice* (Ann Arbor: The Radical Education Project, 1966), p. 23, BLAC.

from the Castro-Guevara model in employing multivalent leadership. Regardless, however, the rural *focos* had formed slowly and steadily and developed the capability to survive independent of the city during the intermediate phases of the revolution, just as Fidel and Che had done. Venezuela, apparently, partially avoided the problem, besetting Latin American revolutionary efforts in general of applying the Cuban model incorrectly and with too much haste. “A rapid analysis of the reasons for these failures,” asserted Debray, “shows that they were due to a too hasty imitation of the Cuban model, and did not combine all the necessary conditions for success.”⁴²⁷

Debray then revealed the roadmap to victory. Foremost, he argued, a better job had to be done in recruiting and training the *focos*. Similar to the recollections of several Venezuelan guerrilla leaders, Debray criticized the first recruitments, consisting primarily of urban workers and students incapable of meeting the physical demands of rural operations and keeping the secrets of the unit in the face of government infiltration. Much more had to be done to increase the proportion of *campesinos* in the ranks. Further, the overall communist movement had to subordinate itself to the military and political efforts of the *foco*. Any extant vanguard parties could advance the *via pacífica* line as long as they recognized the primacy of the *lucha armada* and acted more as an accessory than a critical component of the struggle. According to Debray, during Castro and Guevara’s time in the Sierra Maestra there had not been an authentic Marxist-Leninist party in Cuba. In Venezuela, therefore, the FALN could go on without the

⁴²⁷ Debray, *The Long March in Latin America...*, pp. 27, 44-45.

PCV.⁴²⁸ Indeed, Debray celebrated the FALN's independent evolution through years of struggle and survival into "proletarianized" exemplars of revolutionary spirit, possessed of both "confidence and modesty." They had transcended the fleeting world of urban insurrection and urban crackdown and embraced the sustained rural guerrilla movement, the highest form of revolution.⁴²⁹

Switching gears, Debray took the debaters and theoreticians to task for hobbling the march to victory. Controversies over revolutionary methods posed a "false problem" that did nothing more than inhibit "engagement in the concrete struggle of a united anti-imperialist front." He suggested that doctrinal problems and questions could be solved on the fly, according to local needs and conditions, rather than through rigid adherence to dogma. A *fidelist* revolution could never be applied uniformly across Latin America, he said; it could "only conquer through originality."⁴³⁰ If Debray's ideas were attractive in their simple call to get out in the field and survive using one's wits, they were also problematic. As Castro's philosopher, Debray told followers in Venezuela and elsewhere to do things as local conditions dictated, as long as they observed Castro's prime directive of privileging the rural *focos* and guerrilla combat at the expense of all else. As we will see later, when Venezuelan guerrilla leaders began to question whether they could sustain their movement in keeping with Castro's dictum, and whether it might be advisable to pause and recover, Castro leveled the same accusations at them as he had

⁴²⁸ Debray, *The Long March in Latin America...*, pp. 36-42. The implication here would be that the Cuban People's Socialist Party, with whom Castro had had no little contact in the 1956 to 1958 period, was not worthy of the Marxist-Leninist title.

⁴²⁹ *ibid*, pp. 50-51.

⁴³⁰ *ibid*, p. 58.

against the PCV. They had become parlor communists and had lost their revolutionary zeal, Castro would insist. The Venezuelans could do it their own way, as long as it was done Castro's way, and this paradox provided the seeds for future schism among those who embraced violent revolution.

As 1966 began, Castro prepared to put these ideas into concrete action at the Tri-Continental conference, which was ostensibly called to promote world communist unity but in reality served to advance a radical developing world agenda. Writing from Mexico City, *Los Angeles Times* correspondent George Natanson picked up on the multi-faceted nature of the Tri-Continental. On one hand, he perceived, the conference provided communists around the world a forum to bash the United States and link Latin American revolutionary movements with those in Asia and Africa. On the other hand, the conference allowed radical revolutionaries to air their grievances with the moderate Soviet line. Articulating the radical Latin American line, the Mexican Communist Party hailed the Tri-Continental as an opportunity to transcend geographic boundaries and unite peoples dedicated to "liberty, democracy, independence, progress, and sovereignty," and to the fight against the "enemy of all peoples of the earth, the Yankee imperialist." Hence, Natanson predicted with a tinge of sarcasm, "the Cuban capital should be in for 10 happy, joyous days. The air will resound with thundering anti-U.S. chants...and Havana will be hung with enough Marxist slogans and blown-up photographs of Communist leaders to satisfy the most fanatic left-wing extremist."⁴³¹

⁴³¹ George Natanson, "Red Schism May Split Cuba Parley: Communists From 3 Continents Set to Denounce U.S.," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1966, p. D1.

Beneath the surface, however, another irreconcilable clash between the Beijing and Moscow lines loomed. Quite probably there would also be a clash between the Soviets and the Latin Americans as well. Most Latin American delegates appeared ready to take the Beijing line and run with it, as evidenced by their insertion of an item on the agenda to consider intensification of “all forms of struggle” against the United States. This radical posture reflected the statements of Moroccan communist leader Ali Mahdi Ben Barka, who, during a visit to Havana, argued that the U.S. adoption of a “global strategy in its aggressions” meant that world revolutionaries would similarly have to up the ante in their efforts. At the same time, the CIA predicted, the Soviets would protect their interests. Moscow, for example, would intimate that its funding of the Venezuelan FALN rested at least in part on FALN recognition that an overreliance on armed struggle tended to diminish the influence of “progressive forces” and damage the overall prospects of the leftist movements.⁴³²

True to Natanson’s predictions, the 500 delegates from 100 countries quickly used the Tri-Continental forum to advocate an intensified revolution and highlight Soviet ambivalence toward the prospect of it. On January 5, for example, Chinese delegate Wu Hsueh-tsien painted Moscow as a collaborator with U.S. imperialist designs. Among other things, according to Wu, Moscow secretly pledged to maintain a peaceful posture in

⁴³² CIA Central Intelligence Bulletin, [title redacted], December 31, 1965, CREST, NACPM. George Natanson, “Red Schism May Split Cuba Parley: Communists From 3 Continents Set to Denounce U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1966, p. D1. Ben Barka’s assertion of U.S. “global aggressions” undoubtedly referred to the growing American involvement in Vietnam. It is interesting to note how quickly communist revolutionaries in the developing world came to regard the Vietnam War as a decisive moment in their struggle. This link was clear in 1965, and would only become more pronounced as the 1960s progressed.

Europe so that the United States could increase troop levels in South Vietnam.⁴³³ The Soviet delegation led by Sharaf R. Rashidov did its best to put a positive spin on internal communist relations, downplaying schisms as it had since 1959. Rashidov's January 6 address expressed Soviet "fraternal solidarity with the armed struggle being waged by the patriots of Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, [and] Guatemala, for freedom against the puppets of imperialism." As proof of Soviet support for "fighters for liberty," Rashidov pointed to recent shipments of sophisticated arms to the Viet Cong. Regardless, however, the Soviet reputation as a revolutionary state spoke for itself. Moscow bore no obligation to prove its bona fides in support of "people's wars of liberation," Rashidov concluded, and the rostrum of the Tri-Continental "should be a rostrum of unity, not dissension."⁴³⁴ Ultimately, the conference items that garnered universal approval were relatively boilerplate: the United States should be condemned as an "imperialist aggressor," conference attendees should provide unspecified "material aid" to ongoing national liberation movements, and a permanent headquarters for the Tri-Continental solidarity body should be established in Havana.⁴³⁵

The net result of the Tri-Continental appeared to be an unprecedented assertion by the developing world that it would no longer be bound by the established communist powers. Most importantly for Latin America, the conference suggested that Castro was

⁴³³ "Around the World: U.S. Aids Russia, China Says," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1966, p. A8. Left unsaid was what, if anything, the United States pledged to the Soviet Union in return.

⁴³⁴ "Head of Soviet Delegation Sharaf R. Rashidov, Speech to the Tri-Continental Conference," January 6, 1966, NSF, Intelligence File: Guerrilla Problem in Latin America, LBJL. "Russia 'Doing Everything Possible' to Aid Viet Reds, Cuba Parley Told," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1966, p. 2.

⁴³⁵ "Reds' Choice of Havana Rebuffs Moscow, Cairo," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1966, p. A10. The offshoot of the Tri-Continental was the Latin American Solidarity Organization, or LASO. As we will see, LASO exercised a significant amount of political influence during 1967.

bidding to expand his leadership in the hemisphere and beyond. Whereas in 1962 Castro took his cues from his Soviet master, the situation began to resemble one in which the tail might be looking to wag the dog. The Soviets publicly approved of armed struggle, but it was tepid at best; they had been losing their taste for Latin American revolution for years. As historians James G. Blight and Philip Brenner argue, the Tri-Continental essentially disintegrated the façade of communist unity lingering since the Havana Conference in 1964. In October 1965 Castro had made public—and publicly endorsed—a “farewell letter” from Che Guevara in which Guevara pledged to go abroad and foment revolution. In so doing Castro reneged on his agreement with Moscow to interact only with established, pro-Soviet, communist parties in Latin America, as well as his commitment to let each communist party assess the value of peaceful or armed struggle. As the conference concluded, Castro pummeled the moderates in the Soviet Union and the Moscow-line parties in Latin America. “Sooner or later,” Castro said, moderate communists would dispense with resolutions and navel-gazing and realize that the “hour of liberation” would probably only come once people took up arms against the forces of imperialism.⁴³⁶ Rather than heal the divisions racking the hemisphere and the international communist movement, Castro drove the wedges deeper.

Although it was not public knowledge at the time, Castro and Guevara were indeed working to put teeth in their plan to hasten the arrival of the “hour of liberation.” Guevara had been out of sight since March 1965. Rumors abounded that he was either dead or banished from the Cuban government. As Blight and Brenner reveal, he was

⁴³⁶ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 102-103.

around the time of the January 1966 Tri-Continental concluding his failed revolutionary efforts in the Congo and preparing a revolutionary spearhead into Latin America. In the closing session of the Tri-Continental, Castro made cryptic references to Guevara's whereabouts and plans. A "few revolutionaries" knew the location and activities of his compatriot, he said, and the "imperialists" would be "most interested in knowing all the details." The mystery of Guevara's status would be resolved, teased Castro, "when circumstances permit it."⁴³⁷

The American republics immediately denounced the Tri-Continental. In Venezuela, Democratic Action (AD) leader Jesús Ángel Paz Galarraga publicly condemned the meeting on January 4. The insurgency in his country, he said, was the work of isolated miscreants with misguided affections and connections to Castro and the Cuban revolution. But it was clearly not part of a wider developing world revolution and it was foolhardy and dangerous for the Tri-Continental conferees to attempt to make it so. On January 24, 17 of the 20 OAS nations approved a Peruvian-sponsored denunciation of the Soviet Union and China for endorsing the Tri-Continental conference and its call for guerrilla warfare throughout the hemisphere. Only the Chilean, Uruguayan, and Mexican delegations held back, and this reserve reflected their traditional support for the doctrine of non-intervention rather than any approbation of the Tri-Continental conference's resolutions. The OAS response was noteworthy, since the body had never before extended its criticism to nations beyond the hemisphere. Cuba, of course, often came in

⁴³⁷ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, p. 102. "Castro Denies Guevara Is Slain or Disgraced," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 1966, p. A8.

for criticism for its support of regional revolution, but now the OAS denounced the Soviet Union and China for their open advocacy of revolution in the Americas. The resolution passed the following week, and while no concrete action arose as a result, OAS members intimated that it could be the basis for further action in the event that communist provocation increased.⁴³⁸

The Leoni government, meanwhile, moved on multiple tracks to reduce the insurgency and assimilate the radical parties back into public life. In December 1965 the AD and Democratic Republican Union (URD) parties attempted to engineer an arrangement in which moderate elements of the MIR, including a group led by Américo Chacón and endorsed by the still-imprisoned Domingo Alberto Rangel, would merge with the legal and relatively mainstream Nationalist Revolutionary Party, or PRN. As AD leader and National Congress president Dr. Luis Beltrán Prieto Figueroa advised the press on December 20, such a merger would benefit both parties and make them more positive actors in the political future of Venezuela, and indeed would do much to improve the health of the body politic. URD leader Jóvito Villalba expanded on these thoughts a few days later. Not only would a potential PRN-MIR merger calm the political climate, he declared, but it also would advance work towards a successful pacification program in

⁴³⁸ “Dice Paz Galarraga: ‘Uno de los Graves Errores de los Comunistas es Considerar la Lucha de Aquí como la Afroasiática,’” *El Nacional*, January 4, 1966, p. D1. Dan Kurzman, “17 States Back Bid to Censure Soviets,” *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1966, p. A19. Arthur J. Olsen, “Argentina Finds New Soviet Aim: Chain of Right-Wing Coups Called Goal of Latin Policy,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1966, p. 29.

1966.⁴³⁹ Needless to say, these efforts only intensified the splitting of the various leftist parties and constituencies.

The government continued to strengthen its military ability to outpace the guerrilla threat. As the Tri-Continental conference got underway, *Washington Post* sources indicated that Venezuela was negotiating the purchase of 74 West German-made F-86K jet fighters. Venezuela had chosen these jets, apparently, because of their utility in intercepting planes that might be used in the Cuban effort to fly supplies to the guerrillas in the Venezuelan hinterlands.⁴⁴⁰ In short, the government worked to reduce the virulence of the extremist parties by breeding them with moderate ones and by preventing their ability to interact with supporters outside the country.

On a subtler level, it also appeared that Miraflores arranged to offer pardons and amnesty to leftist politicians and guerrillas in exchange for exile. Though the government declined to explicitly acknowledge or deny such an arrangement, sources close to jailed MIR and PCV leaders Domingo Alberto Rangel, Jesús Faría, and Jesús María Casal reported to *El Nacional* that the leftists were offered exile in early January 1966 but refused. As will be discussed below, the jailed leaders were soon released, and the fact that they were on planes out of the country within hours of their release suggests that an amnesty-for-exile arrangement had been made. In a moment of shocking candidness, Copei deputy Dr. Luis Herrera Campins related to *El Nacional* his belief that

⁴³⁹ “5 Miembros del MIR Declaran su Independencia Política por no Estar de Acuerdo con la Fusión,” *El Nacional*, December 1, 1965, p. D19. Miguel A. Liendo, “Dice Luis Beltrán Prieto: Es un Hecho Positivo la Fusión del MIR y el PRN,” *El Nacional*, December 21, 1965, p. D1. “Reitera Villalba: Fusión del MIR y el PRN es Favorable para la Pacificación del País,” December 24, 1965, *El Nacional*, p. C9.

⁴⁴⁰ “Around the World: Plane Deal,” *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1966, p. A8.

there were secret negotiations going on between Venezuelan guerrilla leaders, the Miraflores government, and perhaps even authorities in Havana, in which the insurgents would turn themselves in on condition that they would be rapidly sentenced and then given pardons on their way out of the country and into indefinite exile. By February the government announced that several guerrillas were pressing for safe conduct out of the country in exchange for their surrender.⁴⁴¹ *El Nacional* continued to follow up on potential government-insurgent negotiations as February progressed. Citing “totally credible” sources, the newspaper reported on February 10 that Fabricio Ojeda and Luben Petkoff—arguably the most famous and most-wanted guerrillas—prepared to surrender themselves and as many as 32 guerrillas to authorities in a matter of days. The only things to be worked out, apparently, were the exact circumstances of their surrender and the question of whether the government would guarantee their personal safety.⁴⁴²

It would probably be an overstatement to say that the conflict roiling the Caribbean Basin produced a fog of war, but the continuing insurgency and the international debates associated with it certainly seemed to be spreading a mist that obscured the balance of power. The volume and level of calumny issuing from the Tri-Continental indicated that the fight for Venezuela approached par with the most violent

⁴⁴¹ “Domingo Alberto Rangel, Jesús Faría y Casal Rechazan Conmutación de Carcel por Exilio,” *El Nacional*, January 3, 1966, p. A1. “Parece Existir Negociación Secreta para que los Jefes Guerrilleros se Entreguen,” *El Nacional*, February 9, 1966, p. D1. “Venezuela Guerrillas in Offer,” *New York Times*, February 15, 1966, p. 28. According to *El Nacional*, the military tribunals that tried the leftists had suspended their trials, sealed their dossiers, and sent them along to President Leoni for his consideration of their cases at an unspecified later date.

⁴⁴² “Fabricio Ojeda y Luben Petkoff se Entregarán antes del Sábado,” *El Nacional*, February 10, 1966, p. D11. As we will see, Ojeda was indeed close to surrendering himself. The Petkoff rumor, however, appears to be spurious. He had still not given up the fight, and in any case many other sources suggest that he was not even in Venezuela in early 1966.

struggles in the developing world, and that radical communists possessed the will and the resources to turn the tide conclusively against the government. And while some guerrillas appeared willing to give up the fight and even their homeland, many more signaled open-ended defiance and refused to compromise. Further, the radical communist movement led by Castro appeared to have isolated itself further by rejecting Soviet advice and leadership, and by earning the almost universal condemnation of the OAS community. But, from the communist perspective, the stridency of the OAS response indicated that Castro and his supporters still constituted a threat to hemispheric stability. Finally, it was less than clear whether the Venezuelan government's willingness to negotiate with various communists either in prison or in the field indicated strength or weakness. Was the government spearheading a magnanimous amnesty plan, showing compassion to longtime outlaws, or was it trying to find some solution to a political illness that it could treat but not cure?

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN PRESCRIPTION AND PRACTICE: LIFE AND DEATH IN THE VENEZUELAN GUERRILLA MOVEMENT, 1966

In the corridors of powers of Washington, Caracas, and Havana, well-fed leaders in clean clothes confidently predicted victory. In the Venezuelan hinterlands, however, the task fell to a few hundred grimy and hungry guerrillas, and a few thousand soldiers of various levels of training, equipment, and motivation, to prove or discredit the idea of communist revolution in Latin America. As foreshadowed in the previous chapter, the *focos* led by Douglas Bravo, Américo Martín, Luben Petkoff, and others faced both perilous and propitious prospects as 1966 began. They were free of the doctrinal debates

associated with the union with the PCV, but they were also separated from many of the funding sources maintained by the Moscow-line communist party. Following the Tri-Continental, however, they could count on increased support from Cuba, and leaders like Bravo and Petkoff felt that they had discovered the best means to prosecute their struggle against government security forces. For years now they had maintained guerrilla units throughout the country, seeking to disperse the government's resources and leave Caracas more vulnerable to urban terrorism. As 1966 progressed they took steps to concentrate various *focos* and give them the necessary strength to inflict enough damage to finally catalyze either the popular revolution or the anti-democratic military coup that would lead to it. The Venezuelan army also strove to improve its counterinsurgency capability, thus creating a race against time for the guerrillas. The heads of state had said their piece in January and February, and in the balance of the year personal triumph and tragedy would characterize the efforts of a handful of Venezuelan to alter the course of hemispheric politics.

One needed to look no farther than Lara state, about 150 miles west of the Caracas federal district, to see the paradoxical reality of the guerrilla movement and its day-to-day teetering between triumph and disaster. On February 28 the government discovered an underground arms factory and warehouse near Cerro Gordo that rivaled any other similar discovery in size and array of weaponry. In addition to the usual collection of small arms, grenades, and pipe bombs, the discovery also yielded anti-personnel booby traps, anti-tank mines and enough raw explosives to, in the words of officials, destroy entire sections of freeways or other large public works. Based on the

character of weaponry and the intelligence gleaned from the arrest of suspects in the area, the government concluded that it had barely preempted a major guerrilla offensive in the region, or at the very least prevented the planting of enough booby traps to plague army patrols for months into the future. In the estimation of the *New York Times*, the government had seized enough munitions to “supply a guerrilla army.”⁴⁴³

A few days later a clash between guerrilla and army unit resulted in the death of guerrilla leader Félix Linares—or “Sargento Vicente”—and the capture of a letter on his body that revealed the dire situation facing insurgents in Lara. Linares’ letter, addressed to leaders in Caracas, complained of a critical lack of leadership and supplies for the *focos*. Three senior leaders had recently been killed or captured, and a fourth had deserted, turning the bulk of the Lara guerrillas into a leaderless mob. Further, the army had intercepted a long series of shipments of food, medicine, weapons, and ammunition intended for the insurgency. Most critically, Linares’ letter continued, a growing number of rank and file guerrillas were choosing to desert rather than continue on hungry, sick, and defenseless. To stem this tide, Linares had given the order that those attempting to desert would be summarily executed.⁴⁴⁴

Indeed, an anti-guerrilla operation spearheaded by the Urica Anti-Guerrilla Commando unit had been underway since the beginning of March in Lara. While regular and constant military patrols sketched out the basic boundaries of the guerrilla operating

⁴⁴³ “Debelado Plan Terrorista en Lara con el Allanamiento Militar de una Fábrica de Explosivos,” *El Nacional*, March 1, 1966, p. D12. “Red Arms Found in Venezuela,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1966, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁴ “En las Montañas de Lara: Amenazan con Fusilamientos para Tratar de Detener Deserción de Guerrilleros,” *El Nacional*, March 7, 1966, p. C3

areas—uncovering caves and other hideouts where guerrillas had stashed munitions and medical supplies—small and lightly-equipped counterinsurgency units swept in and out of the triangular Lara-Portuguesa-Trujillo border region. As it became clear that the armed forces had potentially located the enclave in which Fabricio Ojeda's *foco* operated, *El Nacional* reported that government was transferring “strong military contingents” to the region to deal a potential deathblow to the insurgents.⁴⁴⁵

But just as the insurgents risked becoming caught between the hammer and the anvil, they soon found the opportunity to deal out some punishment as well. Throughout the morning of March 15 the Urica counterinsurgency unit tracked about 15 insurgents in the El Cepo region of Lara. Later in the day a government supply column headed for the Urica unit wound its way up a mountain road when it fell into a well-laid ambush by these same insurgents. The drivers of the convoy, according to subsequent government reports, had operated in the region only a matter of days and were insufficiently trained in recognizing the signs of potential ambushes. They drove virtually bumper-to-bumper as they rounded a particularly tight curve in the road, which also happened to be almost completely covered by trees and vegetation. The guerrillas set off several explosive charges—completely destroying a jeep and a truck—and raked the rest of the convoy with machine gun fire. The melee killed one officer and six men, as well as two civilians accompanying the convoy and two guerrilla attackers. The ambush was notable for inflicting one of the greatest single casualty tolls on the army in recent memory,

⁴⁴⁵ “Operación Anti-Guerrillera Extenderán a Zona Limítrofe de Lara, Trujillo, y Portuguesa,” *El Nacional*, March 4, 1966, p. D11.

according to *El Nacional*, as well as for some interesting facts revealed in the subsequent government investigation. The two dead guerrillas wore new uniforms, and their bodies showed no signs of exposure typical of men who had spent a long time in the field. The government could therefore assume that, despite recent setbacks, guerrilla leaders could field new men and new supplies. Further, these fighters slipped into the region unnoticed, and were skillful enough to plan operations several days in advance. *Campesinos* interviewed by the government claimed they saw men matching the guerrillas' description near the site of the ambush a few days before, working on their apparently disabled vehicle by the side of the road.⁴⁴⁶

Within 24 hours the government had sent 500 additional soldiers, as well as warplanes and helicopters, in search of the guerrilla band. Early in the afternoon of March 17 search helicopters located the insurgents near the site of the original ambush. After government forces and guerrillas clashed for a couple of hours, five air force planes arrived on site to begin bombing the area which, the government insisted, was uninhabited and thus free from the threat of civilian casualties.⁴⁴⁷ Back in Caracas, meanwhile, AD deputy Carlos Canache Mata spearheaded a congressional condemnation of the guerrilla ambush on March 21. The attack, he said, served only to put another stamp of crime on the blood-soaked flag of the insurgency. The guerrillas could not have been ignorant to the fact that civilians were almost always employed in resupply

⁴⁴⁶ "La Tragica Emboscada de El Cepo: Por las Montañas Limítrofes con Portuguesa Persigue el Ejército a los Guerrilleros," *El Nacional*, March 16, 1966, p. D8.

⁴⁴⁷ "Bombardean la Zona Montañosa Donde Sitiaron al Grupo Guerrillero," *El Nacional*, March 18, 1966, p. D14.

columns and placed in the first vehicles to act as guides. A similar attack had resulted in the death of several civilians and members of the armed forces in Lara on February 22, 1965, when guerrillas attacked a convoy carrying uniforms and other military supplies. Canache Mata concluded that a clear line could be drawn between the infamous September 1963 Los Teques train attack and the recent cold-blooded slaughter of civilians.⁴⁴⁸

By March 24 Digepol and the Army High Command determined that the ambush had been conducted on a grand scale. Terrorist leaders in Caracas, according to government sources, had sent several insurgents from the national capital, where they met in the town of Guarico before proceeding to El Cepo to lay the ambush. In keeping with the theme of a guerrilla movement both sputtering as well as reviving and perhaps even thriving, local peasants reported the presence of at least four more guerrilla groups in the Morán district, along the border between Lara and Portuguesa. The hunt continued for the guerrillas involved in the El Cepo ambush, but government forces managed to recover the bodies of only three of them, and had lost contact with the rest.⁴⁴⁹

At the same time a parliamentary committee consisting of representatives from AD, Copei, URD, and other parties, arrived in the eastern state of Monagas to investigate

⁴⁴⁸ Julián Montes de Oca, “La Camara de Diputados Condena la Emboscada del Estado Lara en que Perecieron Militares y Civiles,” *El Nacional*, March 22, 1966, p. D1. He went on to pledge the continued investigation into human rights abuses committed by the armed forces, as well as to reports that guerrilla chiefs conducted executions of potential deserters and others who had been summarily convicted of crimes against the *foco*. At that time the governor of Falcón was investigating a gravesite where two captured guerrillas claimed to have executed four guerrillas—on the command of Douglas Bravo—east of the state capital of Coro in April 1964. For this story, see Ildemaro Alguíndiguez & Simón Flores, “Ordenan en Falcón Exhumar a Cuatro Guerrilleros que Fusiló Douglas Bravo,” *El Nacional*, March 19, 1966, p. D12.

⁴⁴⁹ “Determinaron las Investigaciones: La Emboscada Guerrillera Contra el Ejército fue Planeada en Caracas una Semana Antes,” *El Nacional*, March 25, 1966, p. D16.

claims of widespread human rights abuses committed by security and anti-guerrilla forces operating outside of Maturín near Cachipo. In the course of a town hall meeting, the congressmen heard denunciations from local residents that their loved ones had been arrested and tortured as suspected guerrillas or sympathizers. In several cases residents reported that they had not seen detainees for many months and could not gain any information as to their whereabouts from authorities. After meeting with the residents, the congressmen met with state governor Alfaro Lucero who, according to the deputies, was completely cooperative and conducted secret talks with the area's military leaders. Before visiting the military base at Cachipo, the congressional deputies spoke to the press. The investigation, they asserted, would be "deep, exhaustive, and impartial," and would strengthen the nation's commitment to democracy by virtue of its openness.

While this delegation worked, Defense Minister Ramón Florencio Gómez addressed congress and insisted on the rectitude of the armed forces in its dealings with civilians. It had become a prerequisite for entry into the officer class, he said, to undergo indoctrination into the need for professionalism, patriotic spirit, and respect for democracy. In its efforts to combat the insurgency, the armed forces sought to avoid injury to civilians or damage to personal property. Indeed, General Gómez continued, the armed forces had devoted itself to a concerted civic action program, building infrastructure, schools, churches, and providing medical care and supplies. In every situation in which soldiers operated in the field, he concluded, they had demonstrated

responsibility and a spirit of self-sacrifice, as evidenced by the growing number of military casualties incurred in operations against “bandits” and “irregular forces.”⁴⁵⁰

In his annual message to the nation on March 11, Leoni revealed his intention to release about 170 prisoners from military custody who were awaiting trial for crimes related to the insurgency, thus reviving the question of whether the government was offering suspended sentences in return for exile. On March 18 numerous political prisoners gained their freedom, including former MIR head Domingo Alberto Rangel and former PCV leaders Jesús Faría and J.M. Casal. Neither the government nor the released prisoners had any comment as to the specifics of their deal. Within hours of their release they were at Maiquetía airport outside of Caracas. Addressing the press briefly, Rangel talked of taking a sabbatical from politics while Faría outlined thoughts that would soon appear in a PCV document calling for the complete suspension of guerrilla activities. They then boarded planes out of the country, Faría to Moscow, and Casal and Rangel to Rome. The government made it known that the men faced prison and prosecution if they set foot on national soil again.⁴⁵¹

After a spring in which the government and lesser known guerrilla leaders engaged in inconclusive battles, and in which Leoni exiled many of the principals of the 1958-1963 period, senior guerrillas Douglas Bravo and Luben Petkoff finally reemerged

⁴⁵⁰ “Numerosas Denuncias de Desaparecidos y Torturados Recibió Comisión Parlamentaria en el Estado Monagas,” *El Nacional*, March 18, 1966, p. D8. “Ante el Congreso Nacional Rinde Cuenta de su Gestión el Ministro de la Defensa,” *El Nacional*, March 12, 1966, p. D12.

⁴⁵¹ “Leoni Presento su Mensaje Annual y Anunció para Dentro de Pocos Días la Libertad de Varios Procesados Militares,” *El Nacional*, March 12, 1966, p. A1. “Excarcelados Anoche Viajaron a Europa: D.A. Rangel, Jesús Faría, y J.M. Casal,” *El Nacional*, March 19, 1966, p. A1. CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency,” June 7, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

in the summer of 1966. On June 11 Cuba's *Granma* propaganda magazine published an article written by a Venezuelan group calling themselves the FLN-FALN, essentially a dissident splinter of the group formed by the PCV and MIR years before. The new group declared its independence from the PCV and MIR, though the article intimated a sympathetic posture toward the latter organization. The group had all the trappings of a conventional party, but was essentially a dedicated guerrilla force wrapped in a thin veneer of political structure. The article named Elias Manuit Camero, often a liaison between Cuba and the old FALN, as president of the FLN Central Council, while Américo Martín was the front's secretary general. Heading up the military affairs of the FALN National Command was Douglas Bravo with Luben Petkoff—who had been in Cuba and Bulgaria studying and conferring on revolutionary tactics since the end of 1965—as his second-in-command. There were even plans to create a new communist party, concluded the article, to be called the Authentic Communist Party of Venezuela. But, according to a CIA evaluation of these developments, all of these men operated together in the mountains, such that there was a very fine line between the political activities of the FLN and the military actions of the FALN, and vice versa.⁴⁵²

The PCV found this article highly offensive and it prompted the party to make public its formal suspension and *de facto* expulsion of Bravo from the party. Shortly after the *Granma* piece ran, the Politburo of the Venezuelan Communist Party sent a May

⁴⁵² CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency," June 7, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. Blanco Muñoz, *La Lucha Armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, p. 137. In the Muñoz book, Petkoff also spoke of trying to arrange a trip to Vietnam to either study or participate in the guerrilla war. It is unclear, however, whether he ever made the trip.

16 letter to press outlets announcing these sanctions. While the party always welcomed debates and differences of opinion, the letter said, there was simply no ignoring of the fact that since the meeting of the VII Plenum of the Central Committee in April 1965 Bravo completely defied party doctrine. He had circulated documents outside of regular communication channels that flouted the established party line; he had compromised the secrecy of Central Committee files; he openly sought to usurp the control and identity of the existing liberation front and its armed forces.⁴⁵³ The days of PCV tolerance for the excesses of the violent left faded into obscurity, and the party amplified the message sent at the end of 1965 that it would no longer be an accessory to reckless adventurism.

The extremists paid little attention to the PCV, however, and instead maintained throughout June the same rate of medium-level unrest that had nibbled at the edges of society since the spike of violence in December 1965. The dissident FLN-FALN renewed the system of bank robberies and lootings that the leftist movement pursued years earlier, before they had established sophisticated funding networks in conjunction with the PCV and communist agents in Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Europe. Many insurgents returned to hideouts in and around Caracas' Central University, marking a brief return to their roots as urban insurgents and terrorists.⁴⁵⁴ Then, on June 19, the government announced that it had captured guerrilla leader Fabricio Ojeda, a former *El Nacional* reporter who became a national sensation by using his media post to mobilize

⁴⁵³ "Suspendido Douglas Bravo de Toda Actividad como Miembro del Buró Político del PCV," *El Nacional*, June 18, 1966, p. D20.

⁴⁵⁴ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency," June 7, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. "Un Guerrillero Muerto y Tres Heridos en Zona Próxima a Burbusay, en Trujillo," *El Nacional*, June 19, 1966, p. D13.

opposition to Marcos Pérez Jiménez in the last months of 1957. His fame had only grown when he became a leader in the URD party and then decided to renounce politics in favor of joining the incipient FALN insurgency in July 1962. Eventually captured, he managed to escape from the National Prison in Trujillo on September 15, 1963 along with Luben Petkoff and other revolutionaries, further burnishing his cult celebrity. His recapture was easily the news story of the day, to be followed on June 22 with the shocking news that he had hanged himself in government custody. Every major political party—from the staid parties of the Punto Fijo coalition to the outlawed PCV—issued statements expressing the most profound grief, characterizing Ojeda as the latest casualty of the January 23, 1958 coalition against Marcos Pérez Jiménez. The tragedy of Ojeda’s life, held this consensus, was that a promising young leader, naturally intoxicated by the enthusiasm of the post-Pérez Jiménez moment, had let himself be drawn from the noble calling of peaceful politics to the excesses of revolutionary violence.⁴⁵⁵ He exemplified, therefore, the misguided conceptions of so many Venezuelan youths that violence was somehow a means to the end of promoting the democratic process.

On or about July 24, Petkoff returned to Venezuela, landing in Falcón with 15 Venezuelan fighters he had trained in Cuba, at least 10 other men of Cuban and other

⁴⁵⁵ Tad Szulc, “Venezuela Ruled by 7-Man Junta; Holdouts Yield,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1958, p. 1. “Venezuelan Party Expels Congressman as Member,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1962, p. 2. “Detenido Fabricio Ojeda Junto con Ocho Personas Más,” *El Nacional*, June 19, 1966, p. A1. “Se Suicidó Fabricio Ojeda a las 72 Horas de Haber Sido Capturado,” *El Nacional*, June 22, 1966, p. A1. “Impresiones de Dirigentes Políticos Sobre la Muerte de Fabricio Ojeda,” and “Declara Wolfgang Larrazábal una Oportunidad para que el Gobierno Inicie el Diálogo con el Pueblo Puede Ser la Muerte de Fabricio Ojeda,” *El Nacional*, June 22, 1966, p. D8. Revolutionaries such as Douglas Bravo insisted that Ojeda did not commit suicide, but rather was murdered by authorities. He claimed that marks on Ojeda’s body indicated that he was tortured severely, such that upon his death the government initiated a cover-up. In any case, Bravo continued, Ojeda was of too sunny and optimistic a disposition to ever contemplate taking his own life. For more, see Peña’s *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 121-122.

nationalities, and a large amount of weaponry and cash provided by the Cuban government. The reintroduction of Petkoff added a new degree of vigor and complexity to the hard-line movement. As the CIA saw it, the new FLN-FALN entity announced in June consisted of “dedicated fanatics to whom anything other than armed struggle [was] unthinkable,” and Petkoff certainly fit the bill. He remained undeterred by the setbacks of previous years and even in interviews given during the early 1980s maintained his commitment to revolution. Having made the decision to take up arms, he said, the only options were victory, death, or exile, and he wanted nothing to do with the latter two choices. During his time in Cuba, he solidly converted to Castro and Guevara’s thinking about the primacy of armed struggle and came to regard previous FALN efforts in Venezuela as a series of half-measures. He returned home stripped of the romantic notions of 1962 to 1964 period and committed to a long and arduous struggle. There could be no more stops and starts in the rural insurgency. Victory demanded the sustained presence of an armed vanguard in the mountains, capable of exhausting the will of the army and, by extension, the state. He had become perhaps the most radical of any Venezuelan guerrilla leader—including Bravo—and probably the most doctrinaire in his dedication to armed revolution.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ CIA Intelligence Information Cable, “Proof of Cuban Government Involvement in Landing of Guerrillas in Venezuela,” October 21, 1966, NSF, Name File, Box 1, Bowdler Memos [1 of 2] folder, LBJL. Blanco Muñoz, *La Lucha Armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 135-136, 140-141. Petkoff insisted that no Cuban nationals were among his band, though U.S. and Venezuelan authorities later determined that approximately half a dozen Cubans infiltrated with him. The CIA suggested that a high enough number of Cuban nationals had landed to diminish any nationalist appeals advanced by the Venezuelan leftists. Regarding his interaction with the Cuban leadership, Petkoff recalled his audiences with Castro and others as a series of mental purges in which they confronted the poor services rendered by the Venezuelan Communist Party. Even as they received funds and materiel from Cuba, Petkoff revealed,

While Petkoff achieved the element of surprise in preparing and executing his return, authorities soon discovered his presence. Word of a couple dozen heavily armed and well-equipped *barbudos*—including some who did not appear to be Venezuelan—patrolling across eastern Falcón quickly swept across the nation. By July 27 security forces had found the motorboats used by the Petkoff group and tracked the guerrillas progress to the Falcón-Yaracuy border. Local security forces lost track of the group as it climbed higher into the mountains, but by the end of the day 200 soldiers from the Sanare Antigüerrilla Detachment joined the search. A spate of guerrilla clashes ensued in the border area, as the Urica commando unit battled insurgents in the Lara-Falcón area and Petkoff's group along with 80 guerrillas led by Julio Chirinos attacked troops in Falcón. Captured documents indicated that Bravo and Manuitt Camero were in the process of consolidating and reorganizing various *focos* in Lara to make them more effective leading into 1967. On August 6 Bravo's *foco* united with Chirinos and Petkoff and the trio set up operations along the border of Falcón and Yaracuy states.⁴⁵⁷

After lingering at a relatively low level throughout 1966, the pace of rural insurgency and urban terrorism began a steady rise in September that eclipsed the peaks of the summers of 1964 and 1965. The disorder widened the cracks between the security

they withheld support from the rural fighters and insisted to Castro that the insurgency had been essentially destroyed.

⁴⁵⁷ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo...*, pp. 122-123. "Logró Internarse en Montañas Falconianas el Grupo de Hombres Armados que Desembarcó por las Playas de Tucacas," *El Nacional*, July 28, 1966, p. D16. "200 Efectivos del Ejército Persiguen al Grupo Armado que Desembarco en Falcón," *El Nacional*, p. D20. "Documentos Claves Incautados por el Ejército a Guerrilleros Revelan Nuevas Tácticas Subversivas," *El Nacional*, August 1, 1966, p. D16. It would appear, then, that Venezuela now had three specialized counterinsurgency, or *cazador*, units (or "Rangers" as the White House would later call them): the original National Guard *cazadores* and the Urica and Sanare *cazadores* (sometimes referred to as "commando units" or "anti-guerrilla detachments" by the Venezuelan press).

services and the government. The central goal of the guerrilla movement—to catalyze a right wing coup—came close to fruition. On September 15, for example, terrorists in Caracas launched a machine gun and pipe bomb attack against the motorcade of Digepol chief Gabriel José Páez, wounding him and his chauffeur and killing a bystander. Later in the month Pedro Medina Silva, the naval officer who led the 1962 Puerto Cabello uprising and then fled the country after escaping from prison, reemerged at the head of a new guerrilla *foco*. In October guerrillas in Yaracuy launched a series of attacks that included assassinations of public officials and civilian guides for the armed forces. Security forces in Caracas returned to the high alert status of the end of 1965.⁴⁵⁸ U.S. analysts tracking the situation picked up signs of military restlessness and frustration over the strain of the apparently endless insurgency and a perceived lack of support on the part of the executive branch. As they had done prior to the 1963 elections, the high command intimated that it might be forced to step in to the political realm absent a decisive response by the Leoni administration.⁴⁵⁹

On October 30 Lieutenant Colonel Clemente Pacheco Ochoa attempted to lead the Ramo Verde National Guard officer training school in a revolt against President Leoni. Ochoa's efforts met with little success and National Guardsmen at the school succeeded in putting down the uprising by day's end. Ochoa himself was killed in a gun

⁴⁵⁸ Guillermo Ponce, "Atentado Criminal Contra el Jefe de la Digepol," *El Nacional*, September 16, 1966, p. D16. Germán Carias S., "Confirmación Oficial del MRI: Para Reasumir el Comando Guerrillero Entró Clandestinamente al País el Capitán Pedro Medina Silva," *El Nacional*, September 28, 1966, p. A1. "Sepultado el Oficial de Marina Muerto por Guerrilleros de Yaracuy" and "Fusilado por Grupo Armado un Guía del Ejército en las Montañas del Yaracuy," *El Nacional*, October 18, 1966, pp. D11-D12.

⁴⁵⁹ CIA Special Memorandum No. 1-67, "Latin American Insurgencies Revisited," February 17, 1967, CREST, NACPM.

battle. The government responded quickly, arresting over 100 military officers with connections to the coup attempt. AD national director Carlos Canache Mata, however, stressed that the coup attempt had done nothing to besmirch the reputation of the armed forces. Ochoa's actions, rather, simply represented the last lingering remnants of the *perezjimenistas* and the despotism for which they stood.⁴⁶⁰ The ease with which the coup was put down would seem to indicate that the Leoni government maintained the good graces of the populace and the national institutions and thus had little to fear in terms of more coups. The Ramo Verde incident, after all, was the first such coup attempt in Leoni's two and a half years in power. Yet it was clear that Leoni could not stand pat in the face of the renewed insurgency.

November proved even bloodier, featuring repeated clashes between guerrillas and security forces in Lara that caused dozens of deaths and injuries on both sides. Quiet rumblings within the military continued, compelling the Leoni administration to begin preparing the biggest crackdown of its term in office. Insurgent ambushes of state police in Portuguesa led to sustained air bombardment of the region. For the first time in years, terrorists in Caracas bombed foreign-owned facilities, including supermarkets, Sears-Roebuck warehouses and a Mercedes car dealership, causing millions of dollars in damage. By the end of the month the Interior and Defense ministries were compelled to acknowledge that guerrilla activity had increased dramatically in recent months. They insisted, however, they maintained the capability to ensure national security. Any

⁴⁶⁰ "Hay Más de 100 Presos por el Fracasado Alzamineto," *El Nacional*, November 1, 1966, p. A1. "El Brote Conspirativo de Ramo Verde es una Manifestación del Pérezjimenismo," *El Nacional*, November 1, 1966, p. D1. "Venezuela Says Coup Is Crushed: Rebel Officer Is Reported Slain During Skirmish," *New York Times*, October 31, 1966, p. 20.

commitment the government still had for the moribund pacification and amnesty plans withered precipitously.⁴⁶¹ Without doubt the government still had the edge over the insurgents in terms of resources. Still, the appearance of the leaders of Venezuela's security forces before congress or the press historically meant that the national political scene was approaching the crisis point.

The situation came to a head in mid-December. Terrorists assassinated Francisco Astufillo Suárez, a judge who had presided in the trials of several insurgents, and attempted to assassinate Army Chief of Staff General Roberto Morean Soto. On the evening of December 13 President Leoni announced the suspension of constitutional guarantees of due process, the first such suspension since the 1962 to 1963 period. Within days several thousand army troops patrolled Caracas, going so far as to violate the customary autonomy of Central University and occupy the campus, where they arrested several hundred suspects and seized a vast array of weaponry and propaganda material.⁴⁶² Over time Central University had become, in the words of U.S. Ambassador Bernbaum, "a virtual fortress of Communist activities." The government crackdown closed university residences that had housed communist agitators and converted them into classrooms. In addition, the army fenced off the university hospital, also a key arena for

⁴⁶¹ CIA Special Memorandum No. 1-67, "Latin American Insurgencies Revisited," February 17, 1967, CREST, NACPM. "Se ha Intensificado Actividad Guerrillera Confirma del Director del MRI," *El Nacional*, November 16, 1966, p. A1. "Bombardearon Montañas de Portuguesa Aviones y Helicópteros Atacaron el Guache," *El Nacional*, November 16, 1966, p. D9. "Declaró el Ministro de la Defensa: Somos Fuertes y Organizados para Enfrentar con Éxito Todas las Acciones Totalitarias," "Acción Terrorista en Caracas: 5 Millones en Perdidas en Almacenes de Sears," "Explotó Bomba de Tiempo en el Automercado Las Mercedes," *El Nacional*, November 26, 1966, pp. A1, D20, & B16, respectively.

⁴⁶² "Venezuela Chief Suspends Rights: Leoni Moves on Terrorists after Slaying of Lawyer," *New York Times*, December 14, 1966, p. 14. "Leoni Assumes Police Duties in Universities: Venezuelan Chief Challenges Inviolability Tradition by Keeping Troops on Campus," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1966, p. 11.

the communists, and integrated it within the general boundaries of Caracas. Most importantly, government police now patrolled the campus, replacing relatively passive university authorities. On January 27, 1967 AD Secretary General Gonzalo Barrios declared the communist presence on campus to be terminated once and for all.⁴⁶³

Bravo, meanwhile, was splitting time between his *foco* in Falcón and Central University, coordinating with about 200 dissidents from the old FALN, when the government crackdown began.⁴⁶⁴ As his international stature increased by virtue of praise from Castro in December speeches, Bravo quietly slipped out of Caracas returned to the guerrillas in Falcón, to convene what Petkoff described as the Conference of the Mountain. Just after Christmas 1966 delegates from more than 30 insurgent groups gathered to confer with Bravo and Petkoff. The total number of guerrillas gathered far exceeded 100 men, making it perhaps the largest in the history of the movement. The mood was “euphoric,” Petkoff recalled, and there was a level of optimism not seen since before the break-up of the communist movement a year before. For the first time in a long time, each man was well equipped and well armed. Petkoff had been postulating about increasing the size of the *focos* from less than a dozen men to as many as several dozen, and offered these thoughts to Bravo, who had been thinking along much the same lines. Petkoff predicted that a big guerrilla column, 80 to 100 men strong, offered the strength to deal a harsh blow to the army. The time might be right, he reckoned, since the guerrillas could now count on “support from the Cuban state, a support without

⁴⁶³ Bernbaum to Rusk, January 31, 1967, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 1117-1118.

⁴⁶⁴ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency,” June 7, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

restrictions and subject only to our own direction.” The earlier days of scrimping and scavenging for decent weapons and sufficient ammunition appeared to be over. The two leaders arranged to circulate these ideas in a pamphlet, *Por la Recuperación del Movimiento Popular*, and to rest and refit in advance of the employment of the big *foco* idea. In January 1967 they would transfer into the interior Lara-Portuguesa-Trujillo border area, a mountainous region more suited to guerrilla warfare yet still within 100 miles of Caracas.⁴⁶⁵

During 1966 the doctrinal splits and mutual recrimination gripping the Venezuelan communist movement the groups favoring the *via pacífica* or *lucha armada* had yawned painfully and, by the time of the Conference of the Mountain, were all but irreconcilable. The PCV, the advocates of peaceful methods since the beginning of the struggle against the Pérez Jimenéz dictatorship, concentrated on mending fences with the Soviet Union and reintegrating themselves within the Caracas political scene, either on their own or as parts of mainstream parties outside of the Punto Fijo coalition. The overarching PCV goal was to figure out a way to participate in the next national elections, scheduled for December 1968. The new FLN-FALN dissidents, on the other hand, unequivocally rejected political participation, concluding finally that the revolution

⁴⁶⁵ Drew Pearson, “Terrorism in Venezuela: Castro Revolutionaries Blamed for Attacks on Democracies in the Caribbean,” *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1967, p. E7. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 122-124. Muñoz, *La Lucha Armada*, pp. 140-141. The original Spanish reads, “Le hablé del apoyo que teníamos por parte del Estado cubano, un apoyo sin restricciones, sujeto solo a nuestro propio desarrollo.” In his interviews, Petkoff complained about the problem of guerrillas in the 1962-1965 period having to manage the problem of multiple types of often inferior weapons, gained through robberies or various one-time buys, and multiple types of often scarce ammunition. The aid he was most interested in from Cuba was a single type of rifle with a single type of ammunition. The Cubans appeared to be supplying Petkoff with the Belgian FAL assault rifle, made under license in Canada. The FAL, it will be recalled, was one of the primary types of small arms found in the Paraguaná Peninsula weapons cache.

would have to be manufactured after all. Now without a sanctuary in the capital city, Bravo, Petkoff, and the other guerrilla leaders made the countryside their primary home and staging area for the next campaigns.

These developments concluded the trend that had been playing itself out since the strategy deliberations of the spring of 1964; the hard-liners and the soft-liners no longer agreed to disagree. For the time being, such a stark split did not imperil the hard-liners. Though they had suffered much during the course of 1966, most of them survived and, if not thrived, learned many lessons. Indeed their very ability to survive in the countryside week after week, month after month, growing stronger bit by bit, served to validate their own existence and reinforce the theories articulated by Régis Debray on the eve of the 1966 Tri-Continental conference. During the spring of 1967, however, a series of international and domestic realignments occurred that pushed the hard-liners farther to the margins of society and to the limits of their will to survive.

“TWO, THREE, MANY VIETNAMS”: THE RADICAL COMMUNIST GAMBIT IN LATIN AMERICA, 1967

As 1967 began the extreme left in Latin America faced a crucial, perhaps existential challenge in aligning its revolutionary rhetoric with the political realities of the hemisphere. In speech after speech Castro had argued that the duty of the revolutionary was to make the revolution. Now he began to wrestle with the emerging paradox facing the radical revolutionary: the success of the Cuban revolution made it less likely that another such revolution could occur, and any tactical victories by Cuban-inspired revolutionaries might damage the movement's overall strategic prospects. Castro,

Guevara, and their Latin supporters were probably being only slightly hyperbolic as they worked out this challenge. The United States, they asserted, was “obsessed” with the prospect of “another Cuba” in the hemisphere. The various guerrilla *focos* now faced much stronger opponents by virtue of increased U.S. military aid, and communist theoreticians believed government forces would fight even harder because the Batista example illustrated their vulnerability against a relatively small insurgency.

Having so starkly defined their political philosophy, the radical communists had no choice but to maintain the fight, lest they become the revolutionary charlatans they so stridently denounced. They could only hope to weather the storm, until the *foco*'s ability to bleed the armed forces pushed military leaders towards a coup d'état, or the people rose up in support of the guerrilla bands. Yet even if such a coup developed—in Guevara's theories a crucial step in the popular revolution—it did not necessarily follow that the guerilla leaders would be able to step into the breach and be embraced as democratic saviors. Though Castro seldom acknowledged it, much of his popularity in the Sierra Maestra and abroad from 1956 to 1958 rested on his reputation as a *nationalist* rather than as a *communist*. As the previous chapter discussed, many Latin Americans maintained sympathies for the left and for the common worker, but such sentiments did not necessarily reflect a proclivity for communism or anti-capitalist ideologies. Further, if the military did indeed come into power, it was quite possible that the plight of the guerrilla would become less favorable, not more, because the armed forces could then release their full might free of civilian control. Lenin's famous question of “what is to be done?” never seemed more relevant. As we will see, Castro and his Latin American

allies decided to up the ante, even at the expense of placing themselves in an ever more precarious position.

Castro and his allies in Venezuela pursued the parallel goals of demonstrating their potency and legitimacy, while also marshaling their strength for the long term, as 1967 began. CIA studies concluded in the first months of 1967 detected tactical and strategic shifts in the Cuban relationship with Latin American guerrillas and in the behavior of the guerrillas themselves. In contrast to the early 1960s, Cuba essentially ceased its program of hosting and training revolutionaries from across the hemisphere. On the other hand Cuba had significantly honed its supply and command and control capabilities, thus increasing its support of former trainees who were now in the field. Havana now maintained an expanded radio and print propaganda distribution network, including a complex system by which it embedded encoded instructions to various *focos* in 170 weekly hours of Spanish, Portuguese, Creole, and Quecha-language broadcasts. Havana had also firmly established a reliable system of couriers and smugglers across the Caribbean to channel resources to these guerrillas. Finally, the Cuban government worked to institutionalize the Organization for Latin American Solidarity (OLAS, or as U.S. sources referred to the body, LASO)—an offshoot of the 1966 Tri-Continental Conference—into a fundraising and political body that would lend further legitimacy to the idea of a continent-wide revolution.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁶ CIA Briefing for Senate Subcommittee, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America,” April 4, 1967, CREST, NACPM. CIA Weekly Summary Special Report, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America: 1959-1968,” February 16, 1968, CREST, NACPM. If Luben Petkoff claims that the Venezuelan guerrillas could rely on limitless support from Cuba were correct, Castro indeed had set up a regular and durable smuggling route to Venezuela. The April CIA briefing noted that Radio Havana’s Quecha-language

As discussed above, the Venezuelan guerrillas kept a low profile in the first months of 1967. Douglas Bravo and Luben Petkoff worked on the delicate task of moving their *focos* further into the interior, to the border area shared by Lara, Portuguesa, and Trujillo states. MIR dissidents under the leadership of Américo Martín, meanwhile, established a presence in the El Bachiller mountains northeast of Caracas, an area that had previously been relatively free of guerrilla violence. Not surprisingly, Bravo and Martín recalled the difficulty of travelling long distances on foot—the Bravo-Petkoff group faced a march in excess of 100 miles—while avoiding contact with government forces. Bravo’s travels featured several small skirmishes with losses of life both for his compatriots and for the armed forces. During periods of rest they tuned in to transmissions of Radio Havana on small receivers they carried. Quite often, Bravo said, they would get mild chuckles out of listening to broadcasts of chapters of Régis Debray’s *Revolution in the Revolution: A Primer for Marxist Revolution in Latin America*, in which Debray expounded on his earlier writings on the primacy of the *foco* as conceived by Che Guevara. A lot of flexibility and only a modicum of theory were necessary to stay alive as a guerrilla in Venezuela, thought Bravo, so Debray might be making much ado about nothing.⁴⁶⁷ Indulging in a bit of dark humor, Martín recalled the difficulty associated with this period of reconsolidating and avoiding enemy contact, “the absurd thing was that our politics could only produce good athletes.” And when the El Bachiller guerrillas were not hiding or running from the government, they were fighting off insects

broadcast time expanded from 1.5 to 7 hours at the end of March. This timing would coincide with the expansion of Che Guevara’s activities in Bolivia, though the world still did not know that Guevara had been there since the end of 1966.

⁴⁶⁷ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 121-122, 126.

and associated infectious diseases. December and January were prime holiday seasons for most Venezuelans, but for Martín it was a world of solitude where one day soon blended into the next, and where dates and holidays ceased to have significance.⁴⁶⁸ By the end of February 1967, however, the reconsolidated guerrilla units were in place and prepared to harass government forces.

Meanwhile Caracas politics and Caracas-Havana relations featured high levels of readjustment and growing discord. As had been the case in past spates of urban and rural terrorism, mainstream Venezuelan constituencies issued statements condemning the violence. What was new, however, was the virtual consensus in favor of Leoni's suspension of constitutional guarantees and in favor of the reintegration of the leftist parties who had renounced violence back into the political mainstream. Venezuelan Cardinal José Humberto Quintero devoted his national Christmas address to such matters. The campaign of terrorism and guerrilla warfare was a violation of divine law, he said, which produced not a better government but rather a pitiful legion of orphans and widows. He appealed to the insurgents to return to the path of civilization for the good of the nation and for the good of humanity. Jóvito Villalba of URD, who had been harshly critical of Betancourt when he suspended the constitution, now felt there was no alternative but to support Leoni's policies. The magnitude and intensity of the current insurgent campaign now struck at the core of the Venezuelan nation and its democratic

⁴⁶⁸ Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*, pp. 45-46. The original Spanish reads, "Eso era lo absurdo: nuestra política solo podían ejecutarla atletas."

development, he concluded.⁴⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in announcing a massive civic action program to give industrial job training to some 700,000 Venezuelan citizens, Interior Minister Dr. Reinaldo Leandro Mora appealed to extremist groups willing to turn their backs on violence. Those “sincerely interested in pacification,” he said, would be warmly welcomed as equals at a “round table” hosted by the government. AD Youth Secretary Luis Sala called upon young Venezuelans who had lost their passion for the *lucha armada* to join the AD Youth and work for the betterment of the nation.⁴⁷⁰

The combination of the moderate communist renunciation of violence and the welcoming posture of the broader society raised the ire of Castro precipitously. Throughout January and February tension increased between the Cuban government and Miraflores and between Castro and his former PCV-MIR allies. Radio Havana pounded home its message that “ruling oligarchies” had defeated, and would always be able to defeat, all attempts to democratize society through legal political means. In the past, present, and future, therefore, the *via pacífica* was a worthless tactic that kept the opposition continually marginalized.⁴⁷¹ Within Venezuela, meanwhile, the atmosphere of apparent reconciliation continued. For weeks the Leoni government had studied the question of when to restore full constitutional guarantees. On March 1 centrist politicians argued that the circumstances justifying the suspension had passed. The nation, they

⁴⁶⁹ Nestor Mora, “Declara Jóvito Villalba: La Suspensión de Garantías es una Medida Lamentable pero Plenamente Justificada,” *El Nacional*, December 21, 1966, p. D1. “Los Actos Terroristas son Graves Violaciones de las Leyes Divinas,” *El Nacional*, December 24, 1966, p. A1.

⁴⁷⁰ “El Ministro del Interior en Rueda de Prensa: El Gobierno no Alienta Política Guerrerista,” *El Nacional*, January 5, 1967, p. D12. “Llamado a la Extrema Izquierda para que se Incorpore a la Lucha Cívica Hace la Juventud de AD,” *El Nacional*, January 19, 1967, p. D11.

⁴⁷¹ CIA Briefing for Senate Subcommittee, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America,” April 4, 1967, CREST, NACPM.

said, was returning to its normal rhythms. New Year's celebrations were over and Carnival and other spring holidays were right around the corner. The national congress and local municipal councils were resuming business, and Central University prepared to reopen with its usual debates and crises.⁴⁷² Later that same day, the Leoni government announced the restoration of constitutional guarantees, to coincide with the opening of the new congressional session on March 2.⁴⁷³ It seemed that, in Caracas at least, the vitriol of internal communist doctrinal debates and guerrilla warfare was fading into the background.

In an illustration of how quickly the Caribbean political scene could shift from stability to crisis, however, March 1 was also the beginning of a drama in which an FALN splinter group led by Eleázar Fabricio Aristiguieta kidnapped and subsequently executed Dr. Julio Iribarren Borges, former director of the Venezuelan social security administration and brother of the foreign minister. Dr. Iribarren Borges had been parking his car in a Caracas supermarket, prior to meeting his wife inside, when several gunmen forced him back into his car and sped away. Two days later the kidnappers dumped his body—shot through the head and apparently tortured with cigarette burns—and a handful of communist propaganda leaflets near the Pan-American Highway on the outskirts of Caracas. A subsequent police investigation determined that the kidnappers sought \$200,000 to finance ongoing guerrilla operations, and executed their captive when it

⁴⁷² José Angel Ciliberto “La Necesidad de las Garantías,” *El Nacional*, March 1, 1967, p. A4. The original Spanish reads, “En fin, toda una serie de cuestiones que ameritan discutirse en la calle, en la plaza pública y en la prensa, sin trabas y sin limitaciones odiosas.”

⁴⁷³ “Restitución de Garantías Decreta Hoy El Presidente en Consejo de Ministros,” *El Nacional*, March 2, 1967, p. A1.

became apparent that he would not cooperate.⁴⁷⁴ The Leoni government immediately condemned Castro for inspiring this act, and once again suspended constitutional due process. Following a March 6 declaration from Havana, by FALN chief Elias Manuitt Camero, that the extremist group had given Iribarren Borges “revolutionary justice” for crimes against the people, the Miraflores government accused Cuba of being directly involved and intimated that it would denounce Castro both within the OAS as well as at the UN. Manuitt Camero’s declaration went on to say that, for each revolutionary killed by the Venezuelan government, the guerrillas would retaliate by dispensing “revolutionary justice” to three government personnel.⁴⁷⁵

Castro responded defiantly to this latest crisis with a fiery three-hour speech, “Those Who Are Not Revolutionary Fighters Cannot Be Called Communists,” delivered at the University of Havana on March 13. Addressing the Iribarren Borges assassination, he denied knowledge of the “circumstances” around the crime, and called it an “error.” But he did not explicitly deny any connection to it, and only said it was an error because it appeared to provide ammunition for Venezuelan government attacks against the FALN. He went on to pursue a sort of syllogism: armed action was essential to sustain the revolution against imperialism; he was devoted to continuing the revolution; therefore he took responsibility for armed action committed in the name of the revolution. Assassinations might be considered regrettable “errors,” but Castro maintained that it was

⁴⁷⁴ Ezequiel Díaz Silva, “Según Investigó la PTJ: A Julio Iribarren Borges lo Asesinaron por Negarse a Entregar 200 Mil Bolívares,” *El Nacional*, March 14, 1967, p. A1.

⁴⁷⁵ “Responsabilidad de las ‘FALN’ en el Asesinato de Iribarren Borges Asumio en La Habana Elias Manuitt Camero,” *El Nacional*, March 7, 1967, p. A1. “Cuba Accused in Slaying,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1967, p. 8.

the duty of true Marxists to enact revolution by all means necessary, often against prohibitively strong opponents. In such a campaign, errors would inevitably occur. He then devoted the remainder of his time to an attack against the Venezuelan Communist Party for its endorsement of the *via pacífica*, and against Soviet bloc countries for pursuing trade agreements with hemispheric governments and thus being complicit in the elimination of Latin American revolutionaries.⁴⁷⁶

While the most obvious target of Castro's March 13 speech was the PCV, historians Blight and Brenner argue that this speech also provided Castro an opportunity to vent his frustration with the Soviet Union itself. In October or November of 1966, apparently, Raúl Castro or Bolivian Communist Party head Mario Monje informed Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev that Che Guevara had begun operations in Bolivia. The Soviet leadership was both blindsided and infuriated and quickly decided that Castro had crossed the line and needed to be reined in anew. He had already reneged on his pledge, from the November 1964 Havana Conference, to interact only with established Communist Parties in Latin America. While provocative, his open endorsement of armed revolution and rejection of the more pacific Moscow-line at the 1966 Tri-continental Conference was up to that point only rhetorical, despite evidence that he still funneled aid of one sort or another to various parts of the Caribbean Basin. Now, not only had Castro

⁴⁷⁶ Fidel Castro, *Those Who Are Not Revolutionary Fighters Cannot Be Called Communists* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1968), BLAC. Douglas Bravo, in his conversations with Alfredo Peña, suggested that the assassination of Iribarren Borges was directed by Castro and carried out by junior FALN members who were looking to establish their revolutionary credentials. It is also worth noting that no other guerrilla researched for the purpose of this dissertation endorsed this assassination, to say nothing of Venezuelan communists or centrists. This crime, then, seems to fall in line with the pattern of oversteps by certain Venezuelan extremist constituencies that ultimately generated popular sympathy for government officials rather than fostered disunity.

directly intervened in another Latin American country and flouted the local communist party, he had done so without any consultation with his Soviet sponsors.⁴⁷⁷

Early in 1967, therefore, the Soviet leadership informed Castro that Cuba could no longer expect support from Moscow in the event of an attack by the United States and that further provocations by Cuba would trigger the gravest of consequences. Undeterred, apparently, Castro accused the Soviet Union of betraying the cause of revolution in Latin America generally and in Bolivia specifically by instructing the Bolivian Communist Party to obstruct the Guevara mission. As will be seen in chapter six, the timing for this freeze in Cuban-Soviet relations could not have been much worse, since the two powers were in the midst of scheduling a June visit to Havana by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. So, when Castro denounced the “shilly-shalliers” and “pseudo-revolutionaries” at his March 13 speech, he directed his words not only across the Caribbean to the PCV but across the Atlantic to the Kremlin as well.⁴⁷⁸

While the nation wrestled with the shock of the Iribarren Borges assassination and the heightened tensions with Cuba, the *focos* of Bravo, Petkoff, Martín, and others renewed operations and began testing the idea of large unit operations and low-level but sustained guerrilla action. On March 9 guerrillas ambushed a military patrol in the El Guapo region of the El Bachiller Mountains, killing one soldier and wounding two others before withdrawing in the face of helicopter-borne counterinsurgency forces. A week later a guerrilla group dynamited a power station near Ocumare del Tuy, 30 miles south

⁴⁷⁷ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 121-123.

⁴⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 121-123.

of Caracas, in a failed attempt to occupy the town. March concluded with renewed clashes in El Bachiller, causing the deaths of several guerrillas. Among them was José Manuel Saher, a son of Falcón governor Pablo Saher Pérez, who had dropped out of college in 1962 to join the incipient FALN as “comandante Chema.” As the military operations continued, ultimately unsubstantiated rumors abounded that government forces had captured Américo Martín in the region. On April 6 guerrillas under Martín’s command struck back at San Antonio de Maturín, on the northern outskirts of Caracas, occupying the area and announcing that they were carrying out a special reprisal for the death of “Chema” Saher.⁴⁷⁹

For Petkoff, these operations indicated that the new tactics and strategy were bearing fruit. The old style of intense-but-brief campaigning, calculated to correspond to PCV propaganda campaigns or to agitate tensions between the government and the military, was over. The new “long struggle” strategy would demonstrate the continuing viability and perseverance of the guerrilla movement as well as its ability to outlast the will and resources of the Venezuelan government. Survival would be an end unto itself. The new tactical emphasis on guerrilla units approaching 100 or more appeared to be paying dividends as well. “We had several encounters with the army,” he recalled, “[employing] several ambushes, and we became certain that when we acted with

⁴⁷⁹ “Choque Armado en El Guapo Cuando Efectivos del Ejército se Internaron en las Montañas en Persecución de Guerrilleros,” *El Nacional*, March 10, 1967, p. D16. “Guerrilleros Querían Tomar por Sorpresa a Santa Lucía,” *El Nacional*, March 17, 1967, p. D12. “En Otro Encuentro en ‘El Guapo’: Muertos ‘El Chema’ Saher Hijo del Gobernador de Falcón y el Médico José Mendoza Ovalles,” *El Nacional*, March 25, 1967, p. D10. “El Ejército Intensificó Acometida a ‘El Bachiller’,” *El Nacional*, March 28, 1967, p. D8. “El Ejército Asumió el Control de San Antonio de Maturín,” *El Nacional*, April 7, 1967, p. D12.

sufficient personnel and some experimentation, we could achieve better results.”⁴⁸⁰ For perhaps the first time, he felt, they could deal the army a solid check. Throughout April and May this pattern of “checking” continued. No more than two or three days would go by without press reports of another encounter between guerrillas and the armed forces and without stories of several members of each side being killed or wounded.

Observers within the U.S. and Venezuelan governments took note of this qualitative shift in guerrilla operations as well. The State Department now estimated the Bravo-Petkoff group at around 250 guerrillas and the El Bachiller group under Martín at around 200. The guerrillas boasted a further 200 non-aligned or part-time fighters. Finally, at least 100 insurgents remained in Caracas to conduct low-level urban terrorism, the State Department judged. While the guerrillas remained consolidated in the western states around Yaracuy and east of Caracas in El Bachiller there were incipient signs that they sought to destabilize previously quiet sectors of Monagas state and the central plains. Though their numbers were smaller than they had been in 1963, this new strain of guerrilla fighter was more determined, better armed, and better trained. For the first time guerrilla units were attacking military units greater in size than themselves. According to a Joint Chiefs of Staff study, during February and March 50-man *focos* led by Bravo and other had shown their ability to successfully assault entire infantry companies. Sources indicated that the guerrillas had expanded their training network beyond Cuba, such that the new *focos* consisted of men trained in North Vietnam, North Korea, and China. The

⁴⁸⁰ Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 140-142. The original Spanish reads, “Ya habíamos tenido varios encuentros con el ejército, algunas emboscadas y habíamos constatado que cuando se actúa con suficiente gente y algo experimentada, lográbamos mejores resultados.”

Venezuelan Ministry of the Interior reported that about 10 Cuban nationals operated with the Bravo group. Additionally, the guerrillas appeared to be renewing their focus on recruiting former members of the armed forces who could advise on military operational weaknesses. Overall, the military appeared to be able to hold the line against the current level of insurgent activity, but just barely.⁴⁸¹

The looming problem was that the armed forces, already “badly overextended” according to an April CIA study, could expect to face greater threats as the 1968 presidential election approached. Evidence indicated that MIR and orthodox FALN units were building up their presence in the eastern states, which had been quiet since 1965. As matters stood, the Venezuelan armed forces had no more reserves to commit to counterinsurgency operations. Its transportation networks were overtaxed, and guerrillas were learning how to exploit weaknesses in military communications and control between headquarters and the platoons and battalions in the field. The military struggled to phase in a large number of recently-purchased French Alouette helicopters, for example, because they lacked significant lift capability in the mountains and had radios incompatible with the U.S. communications equipment carried by ground forces. Discontent brewed within the officer class, with rumored demands that the minister of defense be sacked for failing to properly equip the military and prosecute the

⁴⁸¹ CIA Memorandum, “Status of Insurgency in Venezuela,” April 5, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency Study, “Evaluation of Insurgency in Venezuela,” forwarded by Robert N. Ginsberg to Rostow, April 24, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk, “The Insurgency in Venezuela—A Reassessment,” May 9, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

counterinsurgency. “In the event of further guerrilla outbreaks,” the CIA concluded, “there is a good possibility that the military would be incapable of successfully meeting the threat.”⁴⁸²

This new vision of a guerrilla war of indefinite duration found its clearest articulation in Che Guevara’s written address to the Organization for Latin American Solidarity (LASO) in April 1967. Guevara’s whereabouts in the first months of 1967, of course, remained a matter of public speculation. Further, LASO’s First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Latin America was not scheduled to begin until July 28, 1967. But in April Havana published Guevara’s fiery address that famously called for Latin American revolutionaries to create multiple “Vietnams” to cripple the United States and its hemispheric allies. After finding parallels between the national liberation struggle in Vietnam and those throughout the developing and decolonizing world, Guevara presented an apocalyptic vision of Latin America. Though many had sacrificed previously—and here Guevara mentioned fallen guerrillas like Fabricio Ojeda by name—the time for true revolutionary struggle and sustained guerrilla warfare was just beginning, he said. The future called for an ever-expanding series of attacks against local government and military personnel. Soon, he predicted, U.S. military advisors already operating in several Latin American countries would be useless, and Washington would have to hazard its own regular troops who, while boasting immense firepower, were

⁴⁸² CIA Memorandum, “Status of Insurgency in Venezuela,” April 5, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

sorely lacking in the ideological mettle necessary to beat back the advance of *focos* led by men such as Douglas Bravo, also mentioned by name.

Yet there would be an unavoidable tragedy, as government forces carried out targeted reprisals against the families of the guerrillas as well as wholesale slaughter against sympathetic rural populations. Guevara perceived an almost interminable struggle in which the United States would be bled white following the collapse of its allies, and in which small groups of revolutionaries would emerge from a vast human carnage to relight the flame of liberty in the hemisphere. Wrestling briefly with the eternal dilemma of whether to await the emergence of objective conditions for revolution, or initiate a fight to create them, Che concluded that fighting would have to occur at some point to enact substantive change.⁴⁸³ The implication, therefore, was that the sooner the fight got started the better, regardless of the cost.

The extremist vision for 1967 in the Americas had thus been articulated and set into motion. From the addresses given during the 1966 Tri-Continental, to Castro's excoriating March 13 speech, to Guevara's address in advance of the summer LASO meetings, an ideological gambit was clearly emerging in which the most daring pushed all their chips to the center of the table. They had achieved supreme ideological purity and would look to no one else for support or guidance. The Soviets and the local communist parties were thoroughly discredited. As Guevara had noted, however, such an extreme and isolated course necessarily invoked the most extreme sacrifices. They could

⁴⁸³ Che Guevara, "Message to the Tri-Continental, April 16, 1967," in Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 170-173.

only hope for eventual support from the masses in the countryside—which in Venezuela had not happened despite the passage of years—or a progressively weakening of the will of the members of government and of the military. As we shall see, the revolutionaries’ antagonists had been busy working on their own response, and indeed their own plans for maintaining their military and political initiative.

TO PUNTA DEL ESTE AND BEYOND: JOHNSON AND LEONI CONFRONT CASTRO AND THE HARD-LINERS, SPRING 1967

While Castro and his allies in Venezuela strove to make 1967 the year in which they turned the tables on their enemies in the White House and in Miraflores, the Johnson and Leoni administrations worked to restore the close mutual focus that Kennedy and Betancourt had placed on the Cuban problem. The renewed stridency of the guerrilla movement at the close of 1966, along with the articulation of “many Vietnams” emanating from Havana, compelled Johnson and Leoni to redouble their efforts against the insurgent threat. An April meeting of heads of state of the American republics in Punta del Este, Uruguay, provided a forum for Johnson and Leoni to finalize plans to strengthen dramatically Venezuela’s counterinsurgency capability with specialized ranger battalions. If the card-playing analogy has any utility, Johnson and Leoni called the extremists’ “all-in” bet. By the end of the summer the actions of these leaders set the stage for a pivotal test of wills. Both Johnson and Leoni perceived the limits of diplomatic quarantine and conventional force; highly motivated guerrillas represented a serious threat to national stability, and new means represented the only way to roll back the extremist tide.

On December 21, 1966 the White House announced that Johnson would travel to South America to meet with 19 Latin American heads of state in early 1967. Among the topics to be discussed were arms control, trade policy, and socioeconomic problems relating to the Alliance for Progress. Striking an upbeat tone, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Lincoln Gordon and U.S. Ambassador to the OAS Sol Linowitz suggested that the conference would allow the United States and its hemispheric partners to continue socioeconomic and political improvements. Countering the conventional wisdom that the Alliance had stagnated and that democracy was on the wane, Gordon and Linowitz returned from a recent tour of South America feeling “bullish” about the economic environment and about Latin American views of the United States, they said. The continent, Gordon and Linowitz continued, was more democratic than it had been for many years.⁴⁸⁴ When the OAS finalized the meeting of chiefs of state to run from April 12 to 14 in Punta del Este, the declared purpose of the conference was to foster the “intensification of inter-American cooperation in order to accelerate the economic and social development of Latin America.”⁴⁸⁵

The administration was able to keep up the image of a focus on exclusively socioeconomic negotiations—rather than on the Cuban problem—to the extent that U.S.

⁴⁸⁴ David Kraslow, “Johnson to Attend Summit Conference in Latin America,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1966, p. 1. On the eve of the conference, Linowitz renewed his claim of a renewed U.S. focus on democracy in the hemisphere. On March 28, 1967, he spoke of the need for the United States to show a clear preference for democratic governments via acts of “special friendship.” In a slight twist of the 1964 Mann Doctrine, Linowitz argued that Washington should not act with prejudice towards military governments, but should act with pronounced favor towards democratic ones. In Juan de Onis’ *New York Times* piece of March 28 (“Linowitz Gives Latin Policy Aim”), he lined up Latin America’s military regimes—Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Honduras—against the regions democratic ones: Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru.

⁴⁸⁵ George Natanson, “OAS Summit Set for April 12-14,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1967, p. 1.

critics called Johnson to task for focusing on what they saw as peripheral issues. *The Washington Post* editorialist John Chamberlain, for example, suggested that Johnson was acting as though the 1966 Tri-Continental meeting and subsequent Cuban intervention in Venezuela and elsewhere had never happened, all in an effort by Johnson to secure productive negotiations with Kosygin on Vietnam.⁴⁸⁶ As much as the conference would facilitate high profile negotiations, however, it would also provide Johnson the chance to meet in private one-on-one sessions with leaders like Leoni in an effort to inhibit the Castro-inspired insurgency.

The day before the summit, Leoni received the U.S. president there at his private residence, thus culminating over a year of policy wrangling between U.S. and Venezuelan diplomats and specialists. As early as January 1966 Leoni had advanced a *quid pro quo* arrangement with Johnson in which Venezuela would support U.S. policy towards Vietnam in exchange for a sympathetic U.S. posture regarding Venezuelan oil exports, Venezuela's position in a border dispute with British Guiana, and Venezuela's need for increased military aid on grant or extremely favorable terms. Leoni confidant Dr. Gonzalo Barrios had come to Washington to work on these problems in early 1966. By year's end Venezuelan Ambassador to the United States Enrique Tejera París had concluded the year in consultations in Washington with the State and Defense departments, reevaluating the insurgency in his country and the proper methods to combat it. These efforts approached culmination when, prior to Johnson's departure for

⁴⁸⁶ John Chamberlain, "These Days: Cuba Missile Rumors Revived," *The Washington Post*, February 20, 1967, p. A18.

South America, Tejera París and his wife had attended a massive barbecue—featuring 1000 pounds of brisket, chicken, and ribs—thrown on Johnson’s ranch in Texas. As Johnson related to Leoni, he knew the ambassador well and had enjoyed visiting with his “charming” wife at the Johnson City soiree. Similar to the Betancourt-Kennedy days, there was genuine warmth between Leoni and Johnson, as they thanked one another for the years of cooperation in the OAS working on the Cuba problem, and expressed their desire to cooperate on reducing current communist threats to Venezuela.⁴⁸⁷

After a discussion of U.S.-Venezuela trade relations, Leoni introduced the matter of the insurgency. This problem had not been on the agenda, although Venezuelan foreign minister had hinted to the press that the “Cuban problem” might come up between the two leaders. Government sources, began Leoni, indicated that Venezuela would be the target of intensified “communist aggression” in the coming months. This escalation would present a problem in itself, but would become particularly critical as the elections approached and the need for an expanded security presence increased. Making matters worse, the Venezuelan Treasury was already at its limits. Put succinctly, Venezuela needed more weaponry immediately and was short on funds to buy it, the Venezuelan president admitted. Leoni referred to the recent work by Venezuelan and U.S. authorities in this regard and asked for Johnson’s help in securing a special outlay of

⁴⁸⁷ Bernbaum to Rusk, January 15, 1966; Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs Thomas C. Mann to the President, “Appointment for Dr. Gonzalo Barrios, Special Representative of the President of Venezuela,” January 19, 1966, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Venezuela Cables, Vol II, 8/64-8/66 folder, LBJL. Max Frankel, “Latin Envoys Enjoy Day at Ranch,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1967, p. 1. Memorandum of Conversation Between President Johnson and President Leoni, “Venezuelan Requirements for Additional Military Equipment,” April 11, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Filed by LBJ Library, LBJL.

equipment outside of regular channels to be delivered at the greatly accelerated pace of three months.⁴⁸⁸

Johnson responded that he wanted to help, but faced a number of problems in doing so. Congress had recently reduced military aid to Latin America to \$85 million—a tight budget given Venezuela’s current \$12 million in arms purchases—and the escalation of the war in Vietnam placed an increasing strain on U.S. materiel supplies. As a general rule of thumb, Johnson continued, he did not want the United States to be “the arms merchant of the world.” He asked, therefore, “precisely” what kind of equipment the Venezuelan president had in mind. Leoni emphasized that Venezuelan interest lay less in high-tech equipment—supersonic jet fighters for example—than in extra supplies of ammunition and transportation and communication equipment needed for the maintenance of internal security. The key, Leoni stressed, was speed; the 18 to 24 month delivery period typical of most arms transfers would be unacceptable. Ultimately, Johnson concluded, “We do not want the communists to take over Venezuela.” Accordingly, Johnson asked Leoni to provide a detailed and specific list of equipment, which he would review with Ambassador Tejera París. If the United States had the equipment available to sell, the Venezuelans could have it, and Johnson pledged his help in clearing up any delays in delivery after he returned to Washington. At the end of the

⁴⁸⁸ Bernbaum to Rusk, “Venezuelan Initiatives on Cuban Subversion,” March 11, 1967, UTDDRS. “Entrevista Leoni-Johnson es Posible en Punta del Este,” *El Nacional*, April 1, 1967, p. A1. Memorandum of Conversation Between President Johnson and President Leoni, “Venezuelan Requirements for Additional Military Equipment,” April 11, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Filed by LBJ Library, LBJL.

day, Johnson emphasized, “we don’t want Venezuela to have to wait one minute to chase the communists.”⁴⁸⁹

The rest of the conference between Leoni and Johnson and between the heads of state during the wider summit proceeded relatively smoothly, and there was no public awareness of this secret effort to rapidly supply Venezuela with new ranger battalions. The focus remained on U.S. cooperation, or lack thereof, in addressing Latin American concerns about bilateral trade and economic aid packages. There was minor grumbling over alleged U.S. recalcitrance but in general there was a relatively positive portrayal of hemispheric relations prevailed. The communists were relatively quiescent, and Leoni’s most forceful comments concerning U.S. military aid were that Venezuela would never allow foreign troops on its soil to assist in counterinsurgency efforts. A rumor, apparently, had sprung up that Johnson offered Leoni U.S. troops to combat the guerrillas in their meetings of April 11. The rumor gained enough momentum that Leoni again felt compelled to deny it in a private dinner with President Eduardo Frei Montalva of Chile on April 12. Leoni characterized his talk with Johnson as a discussion of matters of mutual concern and of a “general analysis of the problems of the Caribbean,” and in such a conversation it was unavoidable that the “Cuban case would be present.”⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation Between President Johnson and President Leoni, “Venezuelan Requirements for Additional Military Equipment,” April 11, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Filed by LBJ Library, LBJL.

⁴⁹⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Latin American Governmental Views of the Summit Meeting,” May 1, 1967, UTDDRS. “Leoni ante Periodistas en Uruguay: ‘Bajo Ningún Concepto Aceptaría en Territorio Venezolano Tropa Extranjera para Combatir las Guerrillas,’” *El Nacional*, April 14, 1967, p. D9. The original Spanish reads, “Mi entrevista con el Presidente de Estados Unidos fue un análisis general de problemas del Caribe y, concretamente en cuanto lo que respecta a Venezuela sobre los problemas que

A Department of Defense (DOD) team—36 officers and 40 enlisted men—traveled to Venezuela and set to work on implementing this agreement between Leoni and Johnson immediately. By the time Johnson returned to Washington authorities had agreed to provide, in the words of Secretary Rusk, “almost all” of the equipment desired by Venezuela. The outlay would total \$3.5 million, with \$2 million coming from 1966 credits and the balance being paid immediately in cash. Ambassador Bernbaum reported on the great strides made by this team, and the spirit of close U.S.-Venezuelan cooperation, as the special group departed Caracas on April 27. Earlier outlays by Leoni had authorized 3600 men to be transferred into new “Ranger-type battalions,” or *cazadores* as the Venezuelans called them. The work of the DOD allowed for the creation of ten of these new units, to be fully equipped and trained in anti-guerrilla operations. President Leoni hosted a birthday reception the previous evening, and Bernbaum happily received numerous accolades and statements of gratitude from the president and his ministry of defense officials. At one point, the embattled Defense Minister General Gómez cornered the U.S. ambassador and remarked effusively, “No one asked me why I wanted this material, or to justify it—they only asked ‘what do you need.’” According to one of Leoni’s advisors, U.S.-Venezuelan relations had never been better. The chairman of the Venezuelan joint staff, General Ríquez Iribarren, who in Bernbaum’s words “has rarely expressed himself positively about anything the U.S. does,” offered thanks and congratulations to the U.S. delegation. In Bernbaum’s

existen en las relaciones entre los Estados Unidos y Venezuela...En análisis de la situación del Caribe era lógico que el caso de Cuba estuviera presente. Cuba no podía estar ausente.”

estimation, “The importance of our successful response to Leoni’s request cannot be underestimated and will most surely facilitate U.S.-Venezuelan relations across the board.”⁴⁹¹

Back in Washington, Walt Rostow took personal charge of ensuring that these weapons deliveries went through rapidly. In a note to Johnson, Rostow reported that he had enlisted the help of Assistant Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance in clearing red tape at the Pentagon. In Venezuela the military worked feverishly, transferring officers from the National Guard to the army, graduating lieutenants from training schools two months early, and creating another officer candidate school to train 150 men in counterinsurgency tactics. Because of this accelerated pace, the State Department predicted that six battalions—approximately half of the projected 3600-man force—would be in action by December 1967.⁴⁹²

The new U.S. approach toward anti-guerrilla tactics in Latin America manifested itself most visibly in early 1967. This approach, however, took root in the first moments of the Kennedy administration. Indeed, while policymakers pursued OAS sanctions of

⁴⁹¹ Bernbaum to Rusk, April 27, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. Rusk to the President, “Progress Report on Implementation of Commitments Made in Bilateral Discussions at Punta del Este,” May 15, 1967, UTDDRS. Bernbaum to Rusk, “U.S.-Venezuelan Agreement on Equipment for Venezuelan Cazadores Battalions,” May 18, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. The sources do not clearly explain the exact manner in which the arms outlay was financed. What is clear is that Venezuela paid for some portion of the arms, and that President Johnson made sure that the sum was much smaller than such a transaction would typically be.

⁴⁹² Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency Study, “Evaluation of Insurgency in Venezuela,” forwarded by Robert N. Ginsberg to Rostow, April 24, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. Rostow to the President, April 28, 1967, and Department of State Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk, “The Insurgency in Venezuela—A Reassessment,” May 9, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2) Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

the type passed in July 1964, they pondered the extent to which such action effectively limited Castro's reach in the hemisphere. As early as December 1962, the administration had created the Special Group Counter Insurgency, as mentioned in the previous chapter. This group consisted of representatives from the State Department, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and National Security Agency, and met from time to time to assess the level of threat associated with, and formulate policy against, guerrilla movements in the developing world. On April 8, 1965, the group met to consider the problems that the United States faced in Latin America as a result of the November 1964 Havana Conference. According to CIA Director John A. McCone, the declarations made at Havana suggested that communist forces intended to pursue a new, more intensive round of subversion in the coming months, to which the governments of the threatened nations—Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Haiti—were unprepared to counter.⁴⁹³

At McCone's request, Chief of the CIA Western Hemisphere Division Desmond FitzGerald outlined recent CIA thinking on solving the counterinsurgency problem. In the earliest phases of an insurgency—a category in which McCone placed Latin America—basic subversion could be handled and thwarted by intelligence gathering. In a second phase, where outright violence and terrorism manifested itself, intelligence gathering served to position police forces to interdict and eliminate insurgents. In the overt guerrilla phase of an insurgency, a given government would employ regular

⁴⁹³ Executive Secretary, Special Group Counter Intelligence C.G. Moody, Jr., "Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group (CI) 2:00 p.m., Thursday, April 8, 1965," April 8, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 74-77.

military forces, fortified by intelligence and police services, to reassert control. Significantly, such a plan relied on what FitzGerald termed a “small strike force”—airmobile and specially trained in counterinsurgency tactics—that could be inserted quickly in threatened areas for maximum effectiveness. Such an entity, revealed FitzGerald, was already in the works as a pilot program in Peru, to be financed through the Public Safety service of the Agency for International Development (AID/PS) and administered by the CIA. After discussion, the group approved the CIA/AID program in Peru, as well as ordered a full review of current Latin American counterinsurgency methods relating to intelligence gathering, aid to police and military forces, and psychological warfare and anti-propaganda efforts.⁴⁹⁴

This Special Police Emergency Unit program officially began on June 26, 1965, under AID funding and after considerable jurisdictional wrangling between the CIA and the Department of Defense, with the signing of a provisional agreement between U.S. and Peruvian authorities in Lima. In an August 18 memo to Secretary of State Rusk, Jack H. Vaughn, who had replaced Thomas Mann as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in March 1965, characterized this new unit as a way to interdict an insurgency before it became powerful enough to challenge regular military forces.⁴⁹⁵ The White House, however, failed to develop fully the characteristics or capability of these “small strike forces.” Instead, the program languished. This inertia may have resulted

⁴⁹⁴ Executive Secretary, Special Group Counter Intelligence C.G. Moody, Jr., “Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group (CI) 2:00 p.m., Thursday, April 8, 1965,” April 8, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 74-77.

⁴⁹⁵ Editorial Note No. 471, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 990.

from a June 1965 Department of Defense study on future U.S. orientation and aid toward Latin American militaries. In a memo to McGeorge Bundy, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara revealed that the study called for a gradual reduction in Military Assistance Program aid to Latin American militaries beginning with fiscal year 1967 and continuing through 1971. Such an initiative, the study reasoned, would encourage regional militaries to be more self-sufficient and discourage them from attaining unnecessary levels of armaments. Yet, revealed McNamara, these recommendations met with opposition from numerous Washington corners. While the State Department, AID, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been consulted in drawing up the study, these groups fundamentally disagreed with its conclusions. The Joint Chiefs judged that the study understated the threat represented by hemispheric insurgents; the State Department opposed it on the grounds that it would alienate the militaries in the region crucial to regional stability and the success of the Alliance for Progress. McNamara recommended equivocation, “The new strategy proposed in this study [should] be regarded as a long-term goal, but one which must be approached without a rigid time frame.”⁴⁹⁶

The unprecedented radicalism of the Venezuelan dissidents resuscitated the U.S. counterinsurgency considerations of 1965. Indeed, the shifts in global and regional communism compelled a U.S. response. By the end of 1966 Washington had tracked rumors and clues to Che Guevara’s whereabouts, for example, from his abortive 1965 revolutionary campaigns in Zaire, back to Cuba, and now back Latin America proper

⁴⁹⁶ Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy, “Study of U.S. Policy Toward Latin American Military Forces,” June 11, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 77-79.

with a new guerrilla plan to destabilize South America, creating the “many Vietnams” that would cripple U.S. imperialism in its own back yard.⁴⁹⁷ Castro’s unrelenting stridency in supporting Petkoff and Bravo, and in denouncing the PCV and all other moderates in Venezuela, had culminated in the aforementioned assassination of Dr. Julio Iribarren Borges on March 4, and showed no signs of abating even as Venezuelan authorities laid the crime directly on the doorstep of Havana and threatened renewed OAS action. Now, however, the “small strike forces,” that the United States would train to roll back Castroism once and for all, would not be made up of police units, like in Peru in 1965. Rather, these forces would be specially recruited, indoctrinated, and equipped members of the Latin American armed forces, of a type yet unseen in the hemisphere. And while being “small” by the standards of conventional military forces, they would be of battalion size rather than the platoons or companies envisioned earlier. Finally, with 10 battalions numbering a total of 3600 men, Leoni would be devoting as much as 20 percent of his armed forces to this new mission. This new approach, he hoped, would give the armed forces an irresistible potency in “chasing the communists.”

CONCLUSION

The year and a half between the December 1965 Venezuelan communist split and the April 1967 Punta del Este conference perpetuated long-running political trends in the hemisphere; these months also marked a distinctly new chapter in the Latin American Cold War and in U.S. efforts to contain leftist extremism. The partnership between the

⁴⁹⁷ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 214-216.

proponents of the *via pacífica* and the *lucha armada*—the basis for the Venezuelan FLN—had always been an uneasy one. Few observers either inside or outside the movement were surprised to see it dissolve. Rather, it was surprising that the partnership lasted as long as it did. Given the difficulties it faced in Venezuela, as well as the divisions roiling the international communist world, it seemed like the only logical conclusion. The basic outlines of hemispheric and international relations remained the same, too. A spirit of friendship reigned between Caracas and Washington in stark contrast to the fundamental antagonism prevailing between Havana and the U.S. and Venezuelan capitals. Official friendship between Havana and Moscow masked pronounced differences of opinion. Official antagonism between Washington and Moscow partially concealed growing amity between the superpowers, meanwhile, as they continued working to make sure a moment of existential danger like that of the Cuban missile crisis never reoccurred.

On the other hand, the principals involved all recognized that an unprecedented degree of urgency and danger and sense of finality manifested itself the hemisphere. As for the Venezuelan guerrillas, they now possessed everything they wanted, or at least everything they could reasonably expect to receive, in their campaign against the Leoni government. They were free from debates over leadership and from haggling over supplies with communists who never fully embraced their cause. Their numbers had shrunk, but in a sense they simply shed the fat of the half-committed and became leaner and meaner. Everyone remaining deeply believed in violent revolution and perceived the arrival of a unique moment through the combination of their intense focus and the

promise of full support from Castro. But while basking in this aura of liberation and possibility, the leaders of the guerrilla movement also recognized that another round of failure would be theirs alone to bear. They would not be able to blame anyone for holding them back or depriving them of supplies in the crucial moment. Indeed, Castro had conditioned his apparent “blank check” to Petkoff on the Venezuelan’s pledge to observe the dictum of getting out and fighting to make the revolution, at whatever the cost. Like any investor, particularly one engaged in such a risky venture, Castro expected a high return on his investment. There could be no going backwards, and even a to pause to wait for an improvement in objective conditions probably meant failure, censure, and the end of Castro’s support.

The Cuban worldview, meanwhile, had drifted from its typical millennialism and now verged on the apocalyptic. The revolutionary struggle, in other words, would not result in the destruction of imperialism and the ushering in of a golden age. The result, rather, would simply be destruction for its own sake. The stridency of Castro’s attack on a long list of enemies by the spring of 1967 rivaled that of any previous moment in Cuban foreign relations. Yet the brazenly independent and defiant stance he presented to his Soviet sponsors was almost certainly unprecedented. He tore away the fig leafs of compromise from earlier agreements and conventions. For years he had said one thing and done another, in celebrating fraternal communist unity and then working to undermine it, and in pledging to cooperate with established local parties while working to circumvent them. Now, however, he both said *and* did exactly what the Soviets did not want him to, and he made no apologies or equivocations for such conduct. He even

appeared willing to risk the loss of Soviet support, long hinted at in Moscow but by 1967 a real possibility. This gambit was especially risky given the fact that Castro and Guevara regarded renewed U.S. invasion more likely after the missile crisis than before it. While the secret U.S. pledge to the Soviets not to invade Cuba had been honored for over four years, Castro and Guevara had to have known that openly sponsoring a new round of Latin American revolution, as well as directly intervening in Bolivia, would make their survival that much more precarious.

From the perspective of the antagonists of the Cuban-Venezuelan leftist combination—the U.S. and Venezuelan governments as always and now the Soviet Union as well—the Caribbean Basin appeared at least as problematic as in October 1962. For years published and classified U.S. and Venezuelan sources had characterized the insurgency as little more than a major nuisance or a minor threat. By the spring of 1967, however, the tone of these reports changed to paint the insurgency as a significant problem that held the potential to unravel the fabric of the Venezuelan government. The Venezuelan armed forces were holding the line, but just so. Thus, while the Johnson administration found itself increasingly burdened by the growing Vietnam War, it had to face a potential pivot point in Latin America, a region that had appeared quite manageable throughout 1966. As Johnson admitted to Leoni at Punta del Este, the escalation in Vietnam so taxed the U.S. defense industry that he would have to scramble to assist the Venezuelan armed forces in their new hour of need. The view from Washington indicated that Latin America was on the verge of reverting to what Kennedy had called the “most dangerous area in the world.”

In Guevara's written address to the Tri-Continental in April 1967, he had predicted an escalation in carnage as U.S. troops replaced local ones in the battle against the leftist insurgency. But Latin American national pride and the level of outside U.S. commitments made it clear that the insurgents would never have to face that possibility. Leoni and many other Latin American leaders made it clear that they would never welcome U.S. combat troops on their soil. In any case, in 1967 and beyond the United States could not have diverted such resources without compromising its standing commitments across the Atlantic and Pacific, even had the Latin Americans requested such assistance. This situation, of relying on outside help and proxies to solve Latin American problems, prompted closer U.S. relations with the Soviets. The Soviets, too, worried over the ramping up of international tensions in 1966 and 1967 and shared Washington's concerns about Castro's stirring of the pot in the Western Hemisphere. The hastily scheduled Glassboro Conference, the first U.S.-Soviet summit in six years, held the potential for close U.S.-Soviet cooperation or at least commiseration on these matters. If the previous 18 months had been a test for the principals, the next 18 months offered another test far more exacting than the first. If the Leoni administration could safeguard the December 1968 elections, it would ensure the defeat of the extremist movement for a third consecutive time and discredit it before the eyes of the world. If the insurgency could succeed in wrecking the elections, however, it would add substantial credibility to the idea that Castro had finally claimed the mantle, so long coveted, of leadership in a new Latin America independent of U.S. control and predation.

Chapter 6: “It Is Difficult to Take up Arms, but at Times More Difficult to Release Them”: The Twilight of the Guerrilla War, 1967-1968

For the extreme left in Venezuela and Cuba, the middle and late months of 1967 were a time of great optimism and desperate hope. The recent expenditure of so much intellectual and material capital must surely net significant dividends soon, the thinking went. By the first months of 1968, however, the renewed U.S.-Latin American effort to strengthen counterinsurgency efforts in key hemispheric nations had blunted the latest guerrilla offensive in Venezuela and eliminated Che Guevara in Bolivia. The guerrilla movement in the Caribbean Basin and South America, judged U.S. and Venezuelan analysts in early 1968, now lingered as a nuisance instead of a dire threat. Rather than allow this nuisance to linger as in previous years, however, the Venezuelan armed forces essentially wiped it out in an unprecedentedly violent and sophisticated May and June mopping up campaign. Both Castro and his Venezuelan allies put the best face that they could on these developments, the former vowing to honor Che’s memory by pushing harder for revolution, and the latter attempting to discover some way to disrupt presidential elections scheduled for year’s end. But men like Luben Petkoff and Douglas Bravo, who had carried the standard of violent revolution in 1966 and 1967, as so many others abandoned it, were compelled to pause and reflect on how far they were willing to carry the colors absent any objective signs of support. Over time, even what an earlier CIA study had termed “hardened fanatics” began to question whether they could succeed.

The leftist quest to sow “many Vietnams” in Latin America began disintegrating in the crucible of U.S.-Latin American counterinsurgency.

Following his meeting with Venezuelan President Raúl Leoni, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson returned to a host of concerns in Washington, including new evidence of direct Cuban subversion in Venezuela. Fortuitously, he had the opportunity to discuss this problem and many others at a hastily arranged June summit with Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin in Glassboro, New Jersey. During these meetings the two leaders were of much the same mind, agreeing that national liberation movements in Latin America and elsewhere distracted attention from the critical task of lessening international tensions. As Johnson and Kosygin parted, the latter moved on to Havana for an apparent showdown with Castro. Soviet-Cuban relations remained on a downhill trajectory, as noted previously, and the June Kosygin-Castro battle hastened the descent into deep recrimination and distrust between the putative allies. Castro’s attempt to use the August meeting of the Organization for Latin American Solidarity (LASO) as a lever to pry the region away from any loyalties save his own dragged Soviet-Cuban relations to rock bottom. In the course of two months, then, President Johnson held productive meetings with Leoni and Kosygin, perhaps the two most important figures for the containment of Latin American extremism, strengthening the front against a movement that was preparing its most forceful attempt to shatter the armor of hemispheric moderation.

This chapter argues that the final collapse of the Venezuelan guerrilla movement, and of the effort to export left-wing extremism, resulted as much from terminal internal debates and psychological crises as from the growing military capability of their

antagonists. The tensions plaguing the leftist camp finally tore it asunder, as Venezuelans turned away from what they perceived as discredited Cuban and Soviet sponsors. Having sacrificed so much for the revolutionary cause, however, the dream of victory died hard. As Américo Martín would later say, “It is difficult to take up arms, but at times more difficult to release them.” But ultimately the Venezuelans, by and large, came to realize that they had been trying force foreign solutions on local problems. Independently derived theories, this thinking went, were shown to be wanting in the context of clearly inhospitable local conditions. Increasingly they resented Castro for insisting that all they had to do was to fight harder. Castro himself even seemed to run out of steam as 1968 progressed: keeping Guevara’s memory alive did only so much to further the revolutionary cause, and he found it to his interests to mend fences with the Soviet Union, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The cycle that began with the 1962 missile crisis appeared to be coming full circle. The presidential election in Venezuela in December 1968 proved successful, and ushered into power the centrist leader of Copei, Rafael Caldera, a longtime critic of communism and of the insurgency, who now signaled his openness to amnesty and political reconciliation. After three consecutive peaceful and competitive elections, there was little the extreme left could latch onto to make a claim on national leadership. As the previous chapter discussed, there was a time when the leftists recognized that they faced long odds but were willing to gamble for the sake of an ideal. Because of subsequent local and global events, however, they now had nothing left to stake and little in which to believe.

Mauled to the core, few of them could resist the invitation to come out of the political wilderness and reintegrate themselves into Venezuelan society.⁴⁹⁸

EFFORTS AT CONCILIATION AND EFFORTS AT ESCALATION: FROM THE GLASSBORO SUMMIT TO THE LASO CONFERENCE

As 1967 continued, Washington nurtured closer ties with its official Soviet adversary in hopes of reducing world tensions. The idealism and bluster characteristic of the Kennedy-Khrushchev-Betancourt years gave way to workmanlike pragmatism in the dealings between Johnson, Leoni, and Kosygin. Just as the 1966 communist split formalized a de facto situation, the Glassboro Summit in effect put a seal on developments in motion for years. While Johnson expressed his concerns to his Soviet counterpart, he had already made the decision to alter fundamentally the Venezuelan military posture toward that country's communist insurgency. Kosygin, for his part, spearheaded a Soviet drive to cow the Cubans and blunt their efforts at revolutionary export. Yet Castro, always jealous of preserving his independence, sought to amplify his disagreement with the new international pragmatism and moderation. Indeed, he was ramping up his support for hemispheric revolution and honing the themes that would dominate the inaugural LASO meeting scheduled for late summer in Havana. He sought nothing less than primacy and unchallenged clout in pan-American and cross-Atlantic

⁴⁹⁸ In dealing with Che Guevara's fatal excursion into Bolivia and the fallout from the Soviet crackdown against the Prague Spring, this chapter veers somewhat from the primary U.S.-Venezuelan focus of the overall dissertation. This slight detour is necessary to understand more fully the circumstances leading to the final collapse of the Venezuelan insurgency. Che's death and the end of the Prague Spring proved devastating to the psyche of the Venezuelan left. Che's death at the hands of U.S.-trained Bolivian rangers also illustrates the potency of U.S.-Venezuelan counterinsurgency tactics employed to crush the Venezuelan guerrilla movement in 1967 and 1968. These events are treated here, therefore, only to assess their impact on the Venezuelan political environment and not to attempt to make a broader authoritative statement about the historiography associated with them.

politics. Thus, while one side tried to mend the frays in the hemisphere's political fabric, the other attempted to rip them apart irrevocably.

By the spring of 1966 the U.S. intelligence community regarded Premier Kosygin as a reliable partner in the American effort to reduce tensions in the developing world. Vietnam, of course, remained an incredibly thorny problem, but all signs pointed to Kosygin's interest in meeting the United States halfway in relatively quieter arenas of the Cold War. In contrast to Soviet Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev and his "conservative" bloc, Kosygin made clear that Vietnam posed the only major obstacle in U.S.-Soviet relations; there was reason to be optimistic at the prospect of improvement in other areas, like Latin America, since peaceful coexistence was in the best interests of both nations. Kosygin, at the head of the "moderates" in the post-Khrushchev USSR, concluded that revolutions in the developing world merited some support, but not at the expense of resources better used domestically. In a major March 6, 1967 address Kosygin put *détente* at the core of his worldview, rather than as a tactic or diplomatic means to achieve other ends. "For us," he said, "this is a line of principle, corresponding to the desires of hundreds of millions of people who hope that the future will bring a considerable relaxation of international tension."⁴⁹⁹

The White House therefore judged that a meeting with the Soviet leader would result in fruitful discussions and collegiality, in contrast to the icy interplay between Khrushchev and Kennedy in Vienna in 1961. Kosygin had travelled to New York in June

⁴⁹⁹ CIA Intelligence Report, "Policy and Politics in the CPSU Politburo: October 1964 to September 1967," August 31, 1967, CIA Electronic Reading Room (www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000969857, accessed January 18, 2012).

to attend an emergency meeting of the United Nations called to consider the Soviet condemnation of Israel's action in the recent Six-Day War. In this context U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko quickly and nimbly arranged a meeting of the two leaders at the neutral location of Glassboro State College in southern New Jersey, allowing Johnson to avoid association with the UN meeting and its criticism of Israel and saving Kosygin from criticism of selling out the Arabs in obeisance to Washington. Most observers agreed that the key topics of negotiation would include the Vietnam War and strategic arms control, but regional crises like that ongoing in the Middle East and Latin America were almost certain to pop up, too.⁵⁰⁰

Indeed, Vietnam, arms control, and the Mideast dominated the first two days of the summit, June 23 and June 24. On the last day of their meetings, however, Johnson raised the issue of Cuban subversion in Latin America. Calling it an "extremely important matter," Johnson claimed to have "direct evidence" of Cuban support of guerrilla movements in seven Latin American countries. He went on to review Castro's vitriolic March 13 speech, which proudly proclaimed Cuban support for such insurgencies, and the Venezuelan seizure of Soviet bloc arms in Venezuela in July 1966 and May 1967. In this latest incident Venezuelan security forces had captured seven Cuban nationals as well. As *El Nacional* reported on May 13, Venezuelan armed forces had intercepted Cuban launches on the beaches of Barlovento, near Machurucuto, the previous morning. During an ensuing melee, the Venezuelans killed a Cuban officer and

⁵⁰⁰ Stuart Loory, "Summit Talk Set Today in New Jersey: Kosygin, Johnson to Meet Today," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1967, p. 1.

captured other Cuban officers and men who carried identification as members of the Cuban Army. The Venezuelan case against Cuba was apparently airtight, as the prisoners freely revealed their nationality in subsequent interviews with the Venezuelan press. Johnson argued that this type of activity constituted a threat to both hemispheric and world peace and intimated that the Venezuelan government had resolved to put a stop to such activity. Could not, Johnson wondered, the Soviets persuade Castro to stop these provocations? Kosygin had no comment.⁵⁰¹

The meeting broke up soon after, but Kosygin promised to keep the issue in mind during his upcoming meetings with Castro. His ardent desire, Kosygin said, was to “eliminate the hotbeds of war” that hindered U.S.-Soviet rapprochement, though he refused again to get tied down when Johnson listed Cuba as a “dangerous situation” along with Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. In Johnson’s opinion Kosygin nonetheless revealed his commitment to circumscribing Cuban action in the interest of placating U.S. regional concerns. As he related to former President Dwight Eisenhower in a phone conversation later that evening, Johnson let it be known that the Cubans were “giving us hell” in “half a dozen places” and that Kosygin “ought to realize that this was very serious and we were going to have to take action.” Kosygin, of course, had only

⁵⁰¹ White House Memorandum, “Memorandum of Conversation: Middle East, NPT, Cuban Subversion, Viet-Nam,” June 25, 1967, 1:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m., UTDDRS. Carlos Fraser, “Muerto Militar Cubano y Capturados Otros Dos al Intentar Desembarcar en Playas de Barlovento en Expedición de Comando Salida de Cuba,” *El Nacional*, May 13, 1967, p. D21. The U.S. and Venezuelan governments had demanded an OAS investigation into the latest provocations. It is probable that Johnson was referring to these efforts and hinting at the recent U.S.-Venezuelan work on creating the ten new “Ranger” counterinsurgency battalions. For other information involving the discovery of Cuban nationals operating as guerrillas in Venezuela, see *El Nacional*, “Entre Portuguesa y Cojedes Muertos un Teniente del Ejército Cubano y Tres Guerrilleros en Emboscada Campesina,” May 17, 1967, p. D10, and “Tenía Botas de Campaña y Camisa Verde Oliva: En el Mar Hallaron el Cadáver del Guerrillero Cubano,” May 19, 1967, p. D14.

promised to “bear these things in mind” when he talked to Castro, but Johnson felt like the Soviet leader could not hide his displeasure with Castro.⁵⁰² The minutes of the Glassboro meetings show that Johnson never became specific concerning what “actions” would be taken, but it is quite possible that Washington and Caracas were considering using the process established at the July 1964 OAS meetings in Washington to authorize collective force against Cuba. Such a scenario had circulated among the Latin America hands at the White House in October 1966, when William G. Bowdler advised Walt Rostow, “If Castro keeps up this type of hanky-panky, we may well be faced with the type of situation contemplated in the warning given him by the 9th MFM [Meeting of Foreign Ministers] in the July 1964 resolution.”⁵⁰³

Soon after sharing these thoughts with Eisenhower, Johnson relayed the news of the apparently successful summit to Miraflores, where Leoni and his advisors had been anxiously awaiting news about Kosygin’s willingness to rein in Castro. Leoni responded to Johnson on July 25, relating his “great satisfaction” with the U.S. approach and regarding it as proof of Johnson’s goodwill not only towards Venezuela but also towards the rest of Latin America in solving the Cuban threat to hemispheric peace. Leoni also took the opportunity to once again thank the president for his help in securing additional military support at Punta del Este. U.S. cooperation, he said, “in making available to us

⁵⁰² White House Memorandum, “Memorandum of Conversation: Middle East, NPT, Cuban Subversion, Viet-Nam,” June 25, 1967, 1:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m., UTDDRS. Editorial Note #60, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, p. 146.

⁵⁰³ National Security Staff member William G. Bowdler to Special Assistant to the President Walt W. Rostow, “Fresh Evidence of Cuban Support for Guerrilla Activities,” October 28, 1966, NSF, Name File, Box 1, Bowdler Memos [1 of 2] folder, LBJL. For more on the OAS 9th Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and U.S. policy during this conference, see chapter four of this dissertation.

the military equipment necessary to fight the anti-guerrilla war in my country...has certainly been very effective, and I consider that it has been due to your personal intervention.” In Caracas, meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador Maurice M. Bernbaum briefed Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ignacio Iribarren Borges on the Glassboro conversations. According to Bernbaum, Iribarren Borges shared Leoni’s enthusiasm and gratitude regarding U.S. consideration. He was also interested in results, noting that he hoped the Soviets would realize that they could not improve trade relations with Latin America unless the USSR hobbled Castro. With an eye to the future, Iribarren Borges related that he would be watching the LASO meetings closely for evidence that Castro had taken any potential criticism from Kosygin to heart.⁵⁰⁴ It would appear, then, that Johnson was doing himself great favors with regard to his dealings with both Moscow and Caracas.

Kosygin departed for Cuba on June 26, where had scheduled at least two days to meet with Castro before returning to Moscow to present a three-year budget plan. He had an exceptionally tough time in Havana. He received no official welcome at the airport—indeed Cuban radio barely mentioned his impending visit—and found Castro more than ready to trade blows over Cuban foreign policy. In subsequent interviews with historians James G. Blight and Philip Brenner, Soviet interpreter Oleg Darusenkov recalled the conversation between the two leaders as “very hard.” Kosygin maintained that Castro’s call for hemispheric revolution and Guevara’s adventure in Bolivia demonstrated recklessness and belied a narrow view of global affairs. Yet this line of reasoning and

⁵⁰⁴ President of Venezuela Raúl Leoni to President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson, July 25, 1967, and U.S. Embassy in Caracas to Rusk, June 29, 1967, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Venezuela Cables, Vol III, 12/66-12/68 and Venezuela Cables, Vol III, 12/66-12/68, Memos & Misc [1 of 2] folders, LBJL.

implication of immaturity was precisely what Castro had criticized since the missile crisis debacle. From Castro's perspective, Soviet concern for "global affairs" was a euphemism for coddling to U.S. interests while abandoning the cause of socialism and ignoring the sacrifices being made by revolutionaries throughout the world. Ultimately, however, Castro and Kosygin were stuck with one another. Cuba could not survive without Soviet aid, and the Soviet Union, with its huge investment in the island, could not abandon Cuba without ruining its international credibility, though it desperately wanted to do so. In the past Cuba might have sought to manipulate the Sino-Soviet split to gain concessions from Moscow. But since the 1964 Havana conference Beijing and Havana had become alienated as they sparred over the ideological loyalties of Latin American communist parties and leftist organizations.⁵⁰⁵ At the 1966 Tri-Continental Conference Cuba formalized its grievance with China, rejecting outright Chinese ideological equality with the Soviet Union. As hard as it would be, the Cubans and Soviets could not simply agree to disagree. They would have to reconcile somehow, sooner or later.

Kosygin departed Havana, but the Soviets refused to abandon Latin America to Cuban influence. For some time the USSR had been working to strengthen diplomatic and trade relations with several Latin American republics—Venezuela included—and

⁵⁰⁵ Juan de Onis, "Soviet Influence at Issue: Kosygin Reaches Cuba for Talks," *New York Times*, June 27, 1967, p. 1. White House Memorandum, "Memorandum of Conversation at Luncheon," June 25, 1967, 1:30 p.m.-2:45 p.m., UTDDRS. Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 123-126. CIA Intelligence Report, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America," June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, pp. 1-12. The Chinese had leveled a significant criticism of the Cuban line in December 1966, suggesting that the Cubans were "revisionists" and repudiating the idea of a *foco* being able to win without relying on the support of the masses. The CIA study judged, however, that the overall influence of China in the communist world was in the wane. Apparently, Mao's cultural revolution was giving regional communists pause, and regional communists also appeared to resent Chinese calls for a clear choosing of sides between its party line and that of the Soviet Union.

strove to rehabilitate parties like the PCV (Venezuelan Communist Party) into legal and viable opposition entities. Moscow's overtures featured a disavowal of the militant statements made by the Soviet delegation at the 1966 Tri-Continental Conference. The USSR sought to maintain a delicate balance of offering itself as a partner in development while retaining anti-capitalist bona fides to shield against Cuban and Chinese accusations of weakness and "revisionism."⁵⁰⁶ This new Soviet trade offensive was well under way by the time of Glassboro. Moscow concluded an eight-year trade agreement with Brazil in mid-1966 and wrapped up a \$57 million trade deal with Chile in early 1967. The Soviets spent April loudly complaining of being shut out of the hemisphere at the Punta del Este summit; meanwhile they worked on trade deals with Ecuador and Uruguay and a similar deal with Colombia that would also reopen diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁵⁰⁷ At the time of the May landings of the Cuban guerrillas, a Soviet trade mission was in Caracas, making its pitch to an ambivalent Leoni, who made clear it he had no interest in trade with those who traded with Cuba. Thus the USSR sought to subsidize Cuba while currying favor among the outlets for Castro's aggressive foreign policy.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ CIA Intelligence Report, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America," June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, pp. 37-38, 43-44.

⁵⁰⁷ Richard Reston, "Soviet Seeks Foothold in Latin American Area: Initiatives Taken in Various Nations as Johnson Meets with Heads of State," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1967, p. 13. Juan de Onis, "Colombia Sounds Soviets on Rebels: Ties Trade to Hands-Off Stand on Guerrillas," *New York Times*, April 25, 1967, p. 29.

⁵⁰⁸ "Soviet May Rap Castro for Venezuela Landing: Guerrilla Incident Came When Russians Were Trying to Boost Trade With Latins," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1967, p. 4. CIA Special Report, "Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America, 1959-1968," February 16, 1968, CREST, NACPM.

Castro, meanwhile, continued preparations for the LASO meeting. By May, Cuban workers had begun decorating Havana with posters and signs advertising the LASO theme—“The Duty of Every Revolutionary is to Make Revolution”—and distributing conference pamphlets to the Cuban citizenry for advance study. The CIA had tracked these preparations since the adjournment of the 1966 Tri-Continental and concluded that the purpose of the body was less to promote “Latin American solidarity” than to create solidarity around Cuba and its leadership in a hemispheric guerrilla war. Castro sought to elevate his influence in Latin America to the status of that of Bolshevism in European communist circles; at the same time he directed the Havana propaganda apparatus to cast him as Lenin’s equal as a Marxist theoretician on the world stage. In January 1967, Cuba deemed Régis Debray’s *Revolution within the Revolution* as “Notebook Number 1” to be sold by its House of the Americas Cuban-Latin American organization. Cuban and European journals and Cuban government communiqués trumpeted the recent conclusion of a three-year reorientation of school curricula to deemphasize Soviet interpretations of Marxism and promote Castro’s more flexible view of the ideology. Castro’s proposition, as the CIA saw it, was that his transformation of Cuba into the “first socialist state in the new world [was] of such primordial value to the march of world Communism that the Soviets and East Europeans have an unalterable obligation to give Cuban economic and military support.”⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁹ “Cuba Carefully Lays Plans for Big Conference,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1967, p. E3. CIA Intelligence Report, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, pp. 37-42.

The LASO meeting, held between July 31 and August 10, reprised Guevara's vision of hemispheric apocalypse and articulated Castro's twin bid for leadership of a third force in world communism and uncontested supremacy in Latin American revolutionary thought. Everyone not selflessly dedicated to destroying imperialism, so this apparent thesis went, was an enemy. The United States therefore found itself with much company in the criminal stockade: joining it were the Moscow-line communist parties of the hemisphere, at least implicitly the Soviet Union itself, and any number of cowards, heel-draggers, and dilly-dalliers. As *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Ruben Salazar perceived it, the first task was to denounce Washington or, as a Guatemalan observer put it, to equate saying that "Johnson or McNamara should be killed" with saying "amen at church."⁵¹⁰

The next task was to enshrine Cuban communism as the only legitimate kind, or at least the only legitimate heir to true Leninism. Here, Castro appeared to be dovetailing the ideas presented in the November 7, 1966, *Granma* editorial, "Our Homage to the October Revolution," in which the Cuban propaganda apparatus avoided all mention of the current Soviet leadership and asserted an equivalence between Castro and Lenin in their early struggles with reactionaries and pseudo-revolutionaries. Castro stopped short of an explicit denunciation of the Soviet Union, in contrast to the previous year, allowing that some countries might be able to postpone violent revolution temporarily. The Cuban government renewed its suggestion, however, that the Soviets were not doing all they

⁵¹⁰ James Reston, "Radical Latin Reds Open Havana Parley," *New York Times*, August 1, 1967, p. 1. Ruben Salazar, "Havana Parley Boosts Castro Brand of Marxism on 3 Levels," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1967, p. 1. Salazar wryly notes the apparent contradiction between the thinly veiled discounting of Soviet communism and the daily Cuban receipt of approximately \$1 million in Soviet aid.

could to aid revolution and were “soft” on U.S. imperialism. Cuba made clear that armed revolution would have to come at some point, since violence was the only way to achieve true national liberation. Further, Castro dispensed with his 1966 equivocations that certain countries might not yet have the objective conditions for revolution. Now, violent revolution might be a “future” task, rather than an “immediate” one, but the *via pacifica* was without question a waste of time. From the perspective of the CIA and others, the conference represented the culmination of Castro’s effort to establish, or perhaps *reestablish*, himself as the principal leader of the Latin American people.⁵¹¹

By the end of the summer of 1967 an intricate diplomatic dance of hemispheric and world powers neared its conclusion, providing varying degrees of clarity and uncertainty. Paradoxically, the relationship between Washington and Moscow seemed chummy, and while Caracas still held Moscow at arm’s length, there was at least common cause in their desire to neuter Castro’s bid to sow the “many Vietnams” across Latin America. After many months of loose and distracted relations, Washington and Caracas nurtured the closest cooperation in countering the Cuban threat. Without question, Castro had made it clear that he would have nothing to do with any power—hemispheric or otherwise—that nurtured the slightest sympathy for political moderation, though of course he was still willing to receive Soviet aid rumored to amount to \$1 million per day. But it was unclear just how much influence Castro really had in the hemisphere despite the strong showing of the LASO conference. Had the delegates

⁵¹¹ CIA Intelligence Report, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, pp. 37-39. CIA Special Report, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America, 1959-1968,” February 16, 1968, CREST, NACPM.

articulated a new way forward, or simply spent two weeks in a self-congratulatory echo box? Perhaps more important, just how far would revolutionaries like those in Venezuela carry the flag of Castro's new ideology with their lives on the line? As Venezuela strengthened its counterinsurgency capability, might these brave revolutionaries lose heart and succumb to exhaustion, if not suffer outright physical annihilation? It is to this race against time that our study now turns.

THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED I: THE CRUCIBLE OF GUERRILLA WAR IN VENEZUELA, 1967

For nearly five years Venezuelan armed forces and guerrillas traded blows inconclusively, leaving hundreds dead and wounded on both sides and wreaking havoc among the rural *campesinos* and the residents of Caracas. While each side had taken incremental steps in increasing its effectiveness, the basic nature of the guerrilla war at the end of 1966 was much the same as in the summer of 1962. The success of Bravo and Petkoff's bigger guerrilla columns and the frenetic pace of guerrilla activity in the beginning of 1967 represented something new, however, and it threatened to overwhelm the armed forces and destabilize the Leoni government. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Leoni and Johnson governments had initiated a breakneck program to have approximately 3,600 specially trained Rangers—or *cazadores* as they were called in Venezuela—in the field to finally eliminate the estimated 500 remaining guerrillas by the end of 1967. A seesaw thus developed: if the guerrillas had become the hunters at the beginning of 1967, it was almost a mathematical certainty that they would become the hunted at some point later in the year unless they could realize a quick victory. Echoing

Castro's call for a revolutionary conflagration across Latin America, the guerrillas and their government antagonists ensured that 1967 would be the most violent and dangerous, and perhaps pivotal, year of the insurgency.

Shortly after the Punta del Este meeting between Leoni and Johnson, Venezuela hosted the Seventh Conference of the Chiefs of the Armed Forces of the Americas, including representatives from 15 other American republics, to coordinate a hemispheric response to communist insurgencies. President Leoni delivered the keynote address on May 15—just days after the Cuban guerrilla landings at Barlovento—in which he sought to frame Cuban-sponsored subversion a problem central to the security of all the attendees. Casting the problem in stark terms, Leoni suggested that he and his audience were guardians of the democratic doctrines of the Western world, under siege by those who opposed such norms, and that they had no alternative other than to fortify their position against such external threats. Following a review of Venezuela's approach to the problem and a tour of the eastern regions of the nation, the attendees resolved to improve cooperation in both counterinsurgency operations as well as civic action programs, which were deemed vital to drawing peasant support away from potential guerrilla bands.⁵¹²

As the Cuban guerrilla landings would suggest, however, the insurgency remained at a fever pitch as May continued. Clashes had occurred almost daily for weeks, leaving dozens of dead and wounded among the armed forces and the insurgents. Yet the armed forces began to be more proactive in prosecuting the anti-guerrilla efforts. While the

⁵¹² “Nuestro Continente Amenazado por Incursiones Provenientes de más Allá de las Fronteras,” *El Nacional*, May 16, 1967, p. D1. “Normas y Procedimientos en Operaciones Integradas de Contrainsurgencia,” *El Nacional*, May 17, 1967, p. A1.

army occasionally mounted concerted sweeps, during the spring it began sealing off entire regions, evacuating civilian populations and erecting roadblocks on local highways before mounting major bombardments and search and destroy missions. On May 19, for example, the army sealed off the El Bachiller Mountains region near the town of El Rosario in the predawn hours and evacuated the local *campesinos*. At 7 a.m. new heavy artillery pieces began shelling the area. Shortly before noon the shelling ceased and several army helicopters flew at low altitude over the area, machine-gunning through the treetops before dropping off a body of *cazador* rangers to sweep the area. The new tactics involved the ranger forces remaining in a guerrilla area indefinitely by virtue of helicopter support, and the armed forces employed this approach during the May operations against El Bachiller. Skirmishes quickly broke out, including one on May 24 that resulted in two *cazadores* being critically wounded. In an apparent effort to weaken the army's logistical support, guerrillas in the region commandeered a Shell oil tanker truck being used by the army, set it up to block a local highway, and then detonated it.⁵¹³

During this time the insurgents in the Caracas-El Bachiller area suffered a series of setbacks at the hands of the elements and the armed forces. MIR leader Américo Martín had become incapacitated with leishmaniasis disease and returned to Caracas in an attempt to leave the country for medical treatment and to attend the upcoming LASO meetings in Havana. Martín snuck across the border into Colombia, secured a forged passport, and managed to board a ship leaving from La Guaira when he was discovered

⁵¹³ “Bombardearon y Ametrallaron desde Helicópteros a ‘El Bachiller,’” *El Nacional*, May 20, 1967, p. D17. “Heridos 2 Soldados en Encuentro Armado en El Bachiller,” *El Nacional*, May 24, 1967, p. D14. “Cerca de San José de Río Chico: Con una Bomba 2 Guerrilleros Volaron un Transporte de Gas,” *El Nacional*, May 27, 1967, p. D22.

and arrested by port authorities. Within hours of his arrest, on June 2, he was on his way back to Venezuela to face trial. Meanwhile, the armed forces lost contact with the guerrilla *focos* in El Bachiller. The discovery and dismantling of several long-abandoned camps, combined with the absence of any peasant sightings of insurgents and the beginning of the rainy season, led the military to lift its blockade of the area. According to intelligence obtained by the *cazadores*, the guerrillas were in hiding and regrouping. They were down to their fourth and fifth commanders in terms of seniority, naming Fernando Soto Rojas and Máximo Canales to replace the fallen “Chema” Saher and the now-imprisoned Martín and Félix Leonet Canales. The capture of Martín dominated the national news cycle for days, and the public was keenly interested in his treatment by authorities. On June 9, in response to an official inquiry by Central University Rector Jesús M. Bianco, the government promised to conduct his trial fairly and within the guidelines of human rights and legal norms.⁵¹⁴

Authorities were also hot on the trail of Douglas Bravo at this time. Shortly after the news broke of the arrest of Martín, Digepol and military police forces compiled strong evidence of Bravo’s presence in Caracas. Throughout the day of June 9, police scoured numerous suspected safe houses and made a number of arrests. Under interrogation, one suspect revealed that he had been with Bravo within the last three days. On June 22 Digepol director Nelson Lehmann Guédez announced a major coup against

⁵¹⁴ Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*, pp. 64-66. “Grupos Guerrilleros Dejan El Bachiller,” *El Nacional*, June 4, 1967, p. A1. Ezequiel Díaz Silva, “Maximo Canales y Soto Rojas Asumieron el Mando Guerrillero en la Montaña de ‘El Bachiller,’” *El Nacional*, June 7, 1967, p. D12. “Dijo el Fiscal General: El Caso de Américo Martín Será Procesado Conforme a la Ley y a los Derechos Humanos,” *El Nacional*, June 10, 1967, p. D10.

the terrorist cells in Caracas. Acting on various tips, the police had just concluded the arrest of a cell of 16 terrorists with lengthy criminal records. The police also uncovered several safe houses, where they seized an enormous quantity of small arms and explosives. According to Lehmann Guédez, the terrorists had been on the verge of launching a major attack throughout the city. Ambassador Bernbaum wrote to Secretary Rusk of the arrests the following day. In addition to being well-armed and laden with FALN propaganda, these fighters apparently carried with them documents signed by Bravo as recently as June 6. From Bernbaum's perspective the government had clearly scored some blows upon the insurgency in and around Caracas in advance of the historically quiet rainy season. Embassy sources indicated, in any case, that guerrilla units in the area were deliberately ceasing operations to rest and refit. "While successes have been scored," he concluded "it is clearly premature to interpret this as a fundamental defeat for [the] terrorist threat." Walt Rostow forwarded this cable to President Johnson—who had just concluded his summit with Kosygin—noting, "The capture...is good news, although it does not justify complacency about the threat to Venezuela."⁵¹⁵

In keeping with this theme of cautious optimism, the Latin America hands in the White House tracked the steady process of building up Venezuela's ranger battalions. In a report prepared at the president's request on the eve of the Glassboro summit, Walt Rostow provided a "box score," as he put it, of the guerrilla problem in Venezuela and across Latin America. While Venezuela's estimated 400 active guerrillas were only the

⁵¹⁵ "Desmantelada Banda Terrorista Anunció la Digepol," *El Nacional*, June 23, 1967, p. D16. Ambassador Bernbaum to Rusk, June 23, 1967; Rostow to the President, June 28, 1967, NSF, Intelligence File: Guerrilla Problem in Latin America, LBJL.

second largest in the hemisphere—behind an estimated 800 in Colombia—they were by far the most hardened and effective by virtue of enjoying the gamut of Cuban support from arms and training to active involvement of Cuban nationals. Though these numbers might seem small, Rostow advised, “it is necessary to appreciate that each organized guerrilla can tie up 10-20 government soldiers. We do better in Viet-nam [*sic*] only because of airpower, mobility, firepower, etc.” And, as had been the case for years, Venezuela remained Cuba’s “primary target,” as far as Rostow could judge.⁵¹⁶ Extrapolating these numbers, the effective handling of the 400 Venezuelan guerrillas would require 4,000 to 8,000 soldiers, thus justifying Leoni’s request for U.S. help in training and equipping 3600 anti-guerrilla Rangers.

By early July, National Security Council staffer William G. Bowdler could report to Walt Rostow of the success in implementing the new units—apparently nine ranger battalions rather than the original ten requested by Leoni—in Venezuela as part of a region-wide strengthening of counterinsurgency methods. Since May 1962, Bowdler noted, U.S. advisors had trained 449 Venezuelans in the United States and trained another 10,000 in Venezuela. Characterizing the technical advice and training program as “tremendously successful,” Bowdler wrote that Venezuela now enjoyed a sophisticated intelligence communication, record keeping system, and riot control systems, which were nonetheless lacking because of the tendency of Venezuelan authorities to relax during down periods in the insurgency and to give insufficient resources to rural areas. More

⁵¹⁶ Rostow to the President, White House Memorandum, June 24, 1967, NSF, Intelligence File: Guerrilla Problem in Latin America, LBJL.

had to be done, therefore, than simply maintaining the status quo. For 1968 Bowdler recommended a 16 percent increase in counterinsurgency funding—from \$353,000 to \$403,000—over current estimates. This increase would allow for 13 AID/PS advisors to focus on training the Ranger battalions and other National Guard forces in the countryside.⁵¹⁷

Based on the recollections of leftist leader Américo Martín, it would seem that the focus on instructing the rangers in the countryside served a dual purpose of training in an environment ideal for guerrilla warfare, by men who were already accustomed to the rigors of such a setting. If the example of Martín's El Bachiller Mountains area can be extrapolated, then, the government recruited the men who would compose the new battalions from the ranks of *campesinos* more or less on the spot. In addition, the government began a gradual program of indefinitely relocating those *campesinos* not recruited into the army into quieter sectors of the country. As 1967 wore on, therefore, guerrilla units could not rely on even the occasional support of local populations. Based on his experiences, Martín assigned great respect and fear to the *cazadores*, the products, he recalled, of the United States and its advisors and training schools. In the place of the regular army, which performed like “a clumsy elephant, blind and impotent, staggering up the mountain,” came a far more formidable opponent.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁷ Bowdler to Rostow, “Our 4:30 p.m. Meeting on Subversion in Latin America,” July 5, 1967, NSF, IF: Guerrilla Problem in Latin America. LBJL. Bowdler also mentioned the anti-guerrilla training ongoing in Bolivia. At the time, he claimed, the United States was doing all it could to get the Bolivian armed forces up to speed, as they were at the “saturation point” in U.S. aid and training.

⁵¹⁸ Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan tres comandantes...*, pp. 271-272. The original Spanish reads, “Se creó un cuerpo especial, que fueron los cazadores, que sustituyeron al ejército regular, que parecía un elefante torpe, impotente y ciego, entrando al monte, por una especie de contraguerrilla.”

Around the time that Ambassador Bernbaum and Rostow were expressing cautious optimism, however, the guerrilla violence ground forward. On June 23 a group of 15 guerrillas—rumored to be under Luben Petkoff’s command—operating along the Trujillo-Portuguesa border occupied the towns of Tostós and Niquiato, damaging public buildings as well as burning the office of the local AD chapter before fleeing back towards the mountains in jeeps. Two days later this group ambushed an army patrol, killing a non-commissioned officer and a soldier and critically wounding another enlisted man. In what *El Nacional* sources described as the most skillful and rapid mobilization of counterinsurgency forces to date, the armed forces intercepted and attacked this group on June 30. Government forces killed four guerrillas, wounded three others, and claimed to be on the verge of capturing Petkoff, while losing two killed themselves. Guerrilla activity picked up along the Lara-Trujillo border to the southwest as well. After an ambush that resulted in the death of one government soldier, the military felt compelled to reinforce the area significantly. The summer concluded on a negative note for the guerrilla movement. Over the course of August 25 Digepol tracked down and killed three guerrilla chiefs in Caracas: Félix José “Comandante Claudio” Faría Salcedo, Eleázar Fabricio “El Loco Fabricio” Aristiguieta,” and Luis Fernando “Comandante Plutarco” Ver Betancourt. This coup, according to police sources, dismantled the nerve center that controlled as many as 10 different *focos* and urban terrorist cells and spent 180,000 bolívares monthly on supplying them. On August 28 the government made it

official that the guerrilla war was over for Américo Martín, as he received a prison sentence of 37 years for various crimes against the state.⁵¹⁹

The number of clashes fell off as autumn began, but as more ranger battalions began operating in the field, those clashes that did occur were increasingly violent and bloody. On October 15, for example, Luben Petkoff's guerrilla group laid an ambush, in Lara's Urdaneta district near the border with Falcón, which quickly turned into a prolonged and deadly exchange with the armed forces. By the end of the firefight three soldiers and four guerrillas were dead, with Petkoff and one other guerrilla rumored to be wounded.⁵²⁰ Three days later a group of approximately 25 guerrillas, who had just begun operations in the typically quiet area of Guatopo National Park south of Caracas, staged an ambush that resulted in the deaths of two National Guardsmen and injuries to three others. Authorities struck back, with the discovery of a guerrilla arms warehouse and factory that yielded over two tons of weaponry, including small arms, mortars, grenades, and 800 kilograms of raw explosive material. At the end of the month, counterinsurgency forces tracked the guerrillas operating in Miranda state—the ones presumably responsible for the Guatopo ambush—and intercepted them, resulting in the

⁵¹⁹ “Grupo Armado Dio Muerte a un Sub-Oficial y un Soldado al Caer en Emboscada una Patrulla Militar,” *El Nacional*, June 28, 1967, p. D10. “Cuatro Guerrilleros Muertos y 3 Heridos en Trujillo,” *El Nacional*, July 1, 1967, p. D20. “En Lara: Enviados Refuerzos Militares a Zonas Montañosa ante Desplazamiento Guerrillero,” *El Nacional*, July 16, 1967, p. D4. “Muertos a Tiros en Caracas Dos Jefes de Guerrillas Urbanas y el ‘Loco’ Fabricio,” *El Nacional*, August 26, 1967, p. A1. “37 Años de Prision para Américo Martín,” *El Nacional*, August 29, 1967, p. A1. Germán Carías S., “Presupuesto para el Terror: 180 Mil Bolívares Mensuales Meinhardt Lares Era el Jefe de las Guerrillas Urbanas,” *El Nacional*, September 1, 1967, p. D12.

⁵²⁰ “Muertos 3 Soldados y 4 Guerrilleros en Choque Armado en Montañas de Lara,” *El Nacional*, October 16, 1967, p. D16. “Dos Guardias Nacionales Muertos y Otros Tres Heridos en Emboscada Guerrillera Cerca de Guatopo,” *El Nacional*, October 19, 1967, p. D12.

deaths of two guerrillas and wounds to nine others.⁵²¹ According to Petkoff, the introduction of the *cazadores* changed everything. In previous years, the army would make contact and then let the guerrillas escape without pursuing them. The officers seemed uninterested in their work, allowing their soldiers to stumble up the mountain in such a way that the guerrillas could choose to engage or withdraw. The ranger battalions were different, Petkoff recalled:

They were a politically indoctrinated group, superbly trained and clever, that utilized guerrilla tactics to fight the guerrillas. They lived and slept in the mountains, keeping their camp as though they were themselves guerrillas. Therefore, of course, when you see that you are fighting an enemy that not only is not foolish, as we had believed, but is in fact clever and much more numerous than you, you have to begin changing your mind.⁵²²

While Petkoff and those with him tended to resist the urge to quit and instead stayed the course, they were increasingly proving to be the exception. Most other guerrilla cells that had been active throughout 1967 began suspending operations for the moment. Those that had remained dormant throughout the year, needless to say, showed no inclination to enter the ever more efficient meat grinder of the *cazador* forces. Perhaps most critically, fewer and fewer volunteers were signing on to replace the losses incurred in the last several months of intense combat. The Rangers were proving to be

⁵²¹ “En la Carretera de El Junquito Ocupado Arsenal Terrorista con 2 Toneladas de Armamento y Material de Explosivos,” *El Nacional*, October 22, 1967, p. D16. “Muertos 2 Guerrilleros y Nueve Heridos en Choque con Fuerzas del Ejército,” *El Nacional*, November 1, 1967, p. D12.

⁵²² Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, p. 125. The original Spanish reads, “Esta era gente adoctrinada políticamente, militarmente más hábiles, utilizaron tácticas guerrillas para combatir a las guerrillas. Grupos de cazadores dormían en la montaña. Hacían su campamento como si fueran unos guerrilleros. Entonces, por supuesto, cuando tú ves que estás combatiendo un enemigo que no solo no es tonto, como uno lo había creído, sino que además es hábil militarmente y muchísimo más numeroso que tú, tiene que cambiarte la mente.”

quick studies of U.S. tactics in Venezuela. In places like Bolivia, further, it appeared that U.S. training could essentially create effective ranger battalions almost from scratch.

THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED II: KILLING CHE GUEVARA AND THE IDEA OF “MANY VIETNAMS”

October and November was also the time in which U.S.-trained Bolivian Rangers succeeded in defeating Che Guevara's *foco* and executing Guevara himself in the heart of South America. The death of Castro's second in command provided another example of the clash between the Cuban effort to spread revolution across Latin America and the counterinsurgency response being implemented throughout 1967 by the United States and its allies. Around the same time that Leoni solicited Johnson's help in creating the new Ranger battalions to finish off the guerrillas in Venezuela, the White House received word from its embassies in Colombia and Bolivia of deteriorating conditions in those countries as a result of budding communist insurgencies. The situation in Colombia did not seem critical to either Washington or Bogotá, so the Colombians addressed that guerrilla threat independently. In Bolivia, on the other hand, the government in La Paz urgently requested U.S. military training and support, as it became apparent that Guevara was indeed alive and well and operating in South America. A review of the U.S.-Bolivian response to Guevara's fateful campaign reflects and amplifies the saga of the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership to deny the extreme leftist vision of a South American apocalypse. In microcosm, the final six months of the Bolivia incursion represent the most extreme examples of the way in which the new “bigger, better trained and armed” Venezuelan-Cuban approach to guerrilla warfare, and the rapid U.S. training of

specialized counterinsurgency units, was supposed to work. The larger size of Venezuela and of the military and guerrilla antagonists therein slowed the ascendancy of the *cazadores*. In Bolivia, on the other hand, Guevara's forces dealt crushing blows to an underequipped army before losing his life in short order to a counterinsurgency ranger battalion created essentially from scratch in the summer of 1967.

The U.S. intelligence community determined that Cuban planning for a foray into Bolivia had been underway for years. A June 1967 CIA study on the Sino-Soviet split and its influence in Latin America judged that the Cuban leadership began planning for a continent-wide revolution, with Bolivia as its base, as early as 1962. By 1963, contended the CIA, Castro used the Cuban embassy in La Paz to negotiate deals with Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) leader Mario Monje Molina and Bolivian president Victor Paz Estenssoro that would create of a guerrilla safe haven within Bolivia for operations against the Argentine government. At the same time, the Cuban embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay, pursued contacts with local Peronists in an effort to secure the exiled Juan Perón's assistance in creating an Argentine analog to the Venezuelan FALN. Throughout 1963, however, the Soviet Union made a major effort to firm up support among the Latin American communist parties and guide them away from potential subscription to the Beijing line in the growing Sino-Soviet dispute. In September 1963, for example, a group of Soviet functionaries arrived in La Paz posing as TASS newsmen and correspondents for the Soviet magazine *Problems of Modern History*. Under this guise, they held secret meetings with Monje Molina, encouraging him and other PCB members to denounce publicly the Beijing line and remain loyal to Moscow. As far as the CIA

could tell, these sorts of visits by the Soviet Union to various Latin communist parties were commonplace through the first months of 1964. Because of lukewarm support by Perón and by the local communists—apparently still in line with Moscow—these guerrilla efforts in central South America soon fizzled. By September 1964, of course, both Bolivia and Uruguay had severed relations with Cuba as a result of the OAS sanctions arising from the November 1963 Paraguaná arms cache incident.⁵²³

While Castro was certainly busy after losing his embassies in the region at the end of 1964, he kept the plan to make the Andes the “Sierra Maestra of Latin America” on the back burner. In November 1966 Monje Molina, according to the CIA, travelled to Havana to consult with the Cuban government on planning for a guerrilla war and, in December, began handpicking a guerrilla force back in Bolivia without any consultation with the PCB. Such an action, of course, would openly violate the Moscow line of avoiding the creation of new national liberation movements and only supporting existing national liberation movements with the advice and consent of orthodox communist parties.⁵²⁴

Yet in the spring of 1967 Guevara’s presence in Bolivia or anywhere else in Latin America was largely a matter of speculation. Neither the State Department nor the CIA saw reason to beef up Bolivian security forces or expend resources in trying to pinpoint his location based on conjecture. Once physical proof emerged that he was in fact

⁵²³ CIA Intelligence Report, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, pp. 79, 86.

⁵²⁴ CIA Intelligence Report, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” June 15, 1967, UTDDRS, p. 86. The November 1964 Havana Conference, it will be recalled, enshrined the policy that revolutionary activities could only be supported through the auspices of previously established communist parties.

leading a guerrilla band in Bolivia, however, U.S. authorities recognized the psychological value of defeating this thrust and began replicating the counterinsurgency aid and training project underway in Venezuela. In March the Bolivian government reported army contacts with a guerrilla force numbering as many as 100 men. In a series of ensuing skirmishes the guerrillas routed the army, killing at least 30 soldiers against the loss of only a few of their own. By March 31 the State Department was instructing its embassies in the region to prepare for the possible arrival of U.S. military advisors for the purpose of creating a Bolivian Ranger battalion. Soon after, U.S. advisors began training the first battalion of this counterinsurgency force soon after. Based on information gleaned from CIA and Bolivian government interrogations of captured rebels in April, Walt Rostow informed President Johnson on May 11 of “credible evidence” that Guevara was leading guerrilla fighters in South America. While the CIA could not pinpoint Guevara in Bolivia just yet, the agency determined that something important seemed to be in the offing there, and that the local armed forces were proving disturbingly fragile.⁵²⁵

In late April the Bolivian army’s capture of Castro confidant Régis Debray in the town of Camiri provided even greater evidence of Cuban involvement with the guerrilla force. Debray was exposed by local townspeople, who denounced him for involvement in the insurgency, and his subsequent interrogation strongly pointed to Guevara’s presence at the head of a large group of foreign fighters. Subsequent to Debray’s interrogation, the Bolivian government issued a June 12 communiqué claiming that it had

⁵²⁵ Editorial Note #163, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 369-372. Rostow to the President, June 23, 1967, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 372-373.

evidence that 17 Cubans, 14 Brazilians, 4 Argentines, and 3 Peruvians were among the *foco*, expertly trained and financed by Cuba. The government also admitted that another spate of skirmishes had resulted in 30 more armed forces deaths without any confirmed casualties on the insurgent side. As Rostow advised Johnson on June 23, Bolivia had apparently interrupted the guerrilla force as it prepared to become fully operational. Despite this interruption, however, the guerrillas were still far more skillful than government forces, prompting the dispatch of more CIA and Department of Defense advisors and equipment to create a second ranger battalion, even as the first was being formed. “On the military side,” Rostow noted, “we are helping about as fast as the Bolivians are able to absorb our assistance.”⁵²⁶

By July 1967, 16 members of the U.S. Special Forces were in Bolivia training the 2nd Ranger Battalion. The U.S. Country Team, meanwhile, provided ammunition, rations, communications equipment, and four new helicopters on an emergency basis. Because the rangers continued to demonstrate weakness in collecting and exploiting intelligence, the CIA dispatched two instructors to assist them. On August 30 the Bolivians finally scored their first victory, killing ten insurgents and capturing passports and other documents that, as Rostow informed Johnson, “rather conclusively” established that Guevara and several Cubans had infiltrated Bolivia via Spain and Brazil at the end of

⁵²⁶ CIA Intelligence Cable, “Guerrilla Band in Southeast Bolivia Under the Command of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara,” July 28, 1967, UTDDRS. Editorial Note #163, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 369-372. Rostow to the President, June 23, 1967, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 372-373. “French Red Captured, Bolivia Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1967, p. 15. “Las Guerrillas Bolivianas,” *El Nacional*, June 1, 1967, p. A3. “Denuncian las FF.AA. Bolivianas la Presencia de Extranjeros en las Guerrillas del Sureste,” *El Nacional*, June 13, 1967, p. D1. Georgie Geyer, “Who Is Régis Debray? Why the Fuss in Latin America over Debray?” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1967, p. E1.

1966. Captured photographs distributed by La Paz of a disguised Guevara in the Bolivian mountains quickly became front-page news across Latin America. The 2nd Ranger Battalion began operations at the end of September and isolated Guevara's *foco* on October 8 near the town of Higuera. After a clash, the rangers captured Guevara, who was wounded in the leg. Despite the efforts of the CIA to keep Guevara alive, the Bolivians executed him the following day.⁵²⁷

While Washington lamented the fact that Guevara had not been kept alive, analysts judged that his death constituted a heavy blow to Castro's plan to destabilize the hemisphere. State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research staffer Thomas L. Hughes characterized the guerrilla leader's death as "crippling" and a "perhaps fatal" setback for the extreme left in Latin America. Much of the mystique of the Cuban Revolution appeared to have died with Guevara, given the fact that the celebrated leader perished at the hands of perhaps the weakest army in the hemisphere. In Rostow's estimation Guevara's death signified that his revolution, which was supposed to grow to a "continental magnitude," had been nipped in the bud in less than a year. Regis Debray, for his part, pled guilty to Bolivian charges of espionage on the way to a 30-year prison sentence. The Frenchman was apparently grief stricken upon hearing the news of Guevara's death. After breaking down in tears throughout the day of October 11, Debray demanded that the Bolivian courts hold him equally responsible for the Cuban incursion.

⁵²⁷ "Fotos de Guevara en Bolivia Según el Gobierno en La Paz" *El Nacional*, September 23, 1967, p. A1. Memoranda by Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, "Capture and Execution of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara," October 11, 1967, and "Statements by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara Prior to His Execution in Bolivia," October 13, 1967, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 381-385.

Castro now lacked his most famous guerrilla fighter and his most sophisticated theoretician and philosopher.⁵²⁸

On October 15, following two days of official silence, Castro delivered an emotional two-hour speech in which he called the news of Guevara's death "painfully true." Having analyzed all available evidence, including photographs and diary excerpts distributed by the Bolivian government, he could only conclude that his compatriot had indeed met his end. He announced a three-day period of mourning in Cuba, to be followed by 30 days in which all flags would fly at half-mast. October 8, the date of Guevara's death, would be henceforth celebrated as the "day of the heroic guerrilla." The spirit of the Revolution, he admitted, had been dealt a "very strong" blow.⁵²⁹ At a memorial service attended by 500,000 Cubans three days later Castro celebrated Guevara's bold leadership but also lamented his recklessness and "scorn for danger." Presenting himself as a responsible statesman, in contrast to Guevara's crusading, Castro recalled his efforts to protect Guevara "from the risks of falling into some battle of not-too-great strategic importance."⁵³⁰

Castro found little sympathy abroad, however, even from putative allies. In Moscow, for example, *Pravda* denounced Maoism and "similar tendencies" (Cuban, for example) characterized by "extreme adventurism" and the belief that revolution could be

⁵²⁸ State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Staff Member Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk, "Guevara's Death—The Meaning for Latin America," October 13, 1967, UTDDRS. "Mourns Guevara: Frenchman Claims Guilt in Revolution," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1967, p. 24. "Reports Raise Question of How Guevara Died," *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1967, p. A12. Rostow to the President, "'Che' Guevara," October 14, 1967, FRUS XXXI 1964-1968, pp. 385-386.

⁵²⁹ "Castro Says Death of Guevara Is 'Painfully True,'" *New York Times*, October 16, 1967, p. 4.

⁵³⁰ "Castro Indicates That He and Guevara Disagreed: 2 Speeches on Slain Ex-Aide Cite His 'Impetuousness and Scorn for Danger,'" *New York Times*, October 20, 1967, p. 20.

“artificially stimulated across frontiers.” At November celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev laid into Castro, asserting that true Bolsheviks recognized that socialist revolution required careful cultivation of the party and observance of its theories. It was not the work of “a conspiracy of a group of heroes.” “Marxist-Leninists,” he continued, “have always understood that socialism cannot be transplanted from one country to the other by means of armed force.” This less-than-subtle lecture was only part of a series of insults traded between Cuba and the Soviet Union during the anniversary celebrations. Cuba had sent President Osvaldo Dorticós Torrados, who was only the third most powerful figure in Havana, to represent Cuba at the celebration. In Moscow Dorticós avoided presenting his congratulations to his host, boycotted the traditional receptions, and succeeded in being the first delegation to leave the country following the celebrations. The Soviets, meanwhile, published articles by Moscow-line Latin American leaders who condemned Castro’s Latin American policy and used Guevara’s death as a case study for the failure of Cuban policy.⁵³¹

In the judgment of officials in Caracas and Washington, the guerrilla movements still active in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America retained considerable potency, but would almost certainly need time to recover their morale. Even if they succeeded in this task, they would have to become more self-sufficient, since Castro would doubtless have to reconsider some of the assumptions that undergirded Guevara’s crusade and the

⁵³¹ Victor Zorza, “Pravda Attacks Castro as Extremist with Unsound Ideas on Revolution,” *The Washington Post*, October 26, 1967, p. A21. Sherman Kent, CIA Special Memorandum, “Bolsheviks and Heroes: The USSR and Cuba,” November 21, 1967,” CIA Electronic Reading Room website (www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000109059), accessed January 18, 2012.

defiant stance assumed by Havana in the summer of 1967. There was simply no getting around the fact that the high stakes race to create “many Vietnams,” even in the face of the rapid creation of specialized counterinsurgency forces, had failed in dramatic fashion. In the wake of this collapse, guerrilla activity across Venezuela fell off to nearly nothing, though November and December were historically times in which both the army and the insurgents ceased operations. As had been the case at the end of 1965, there was much soul searching among the left. Guerrilla leader Moisés Moleiro for example, who had taken command of the already splintered MIR upon the capture of Américo Martín, recalled how the crises of late 1967 contributed to another split of the party into three new factions.⁵³² As in 1960, MIR moderates again attached themselves to the PCV in search of leadership and strength in numbers, except now the momentum was for accommodation with the government and rehabilitation back into the mainstream, rather than the formulation of a new attack against the status quo.

Miraflores even felt secure enough to announce the commuting of the sentences of nearly 500 prisoners convicted by earlier military tribunals of rebellion and other crimes against the state. Among those released included the leaders of the May 1962 Carúpano naval revolt, and the 1963 kidnapping of U.S. Embassy Attaché Colonel Michael Smolen. While some of these men were required to leave the country, most were sentenced to time already served or pardoned outright. These releases seemed consistent with Leoni’s earlier statement to Ambassador Stewart, that government pardons were less a sign of weakness than a ploy used to sow discord among the ranks of

⁵³² Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan tres comandantes...*, pp. 208-209.

the leftist political opposition.⁵³³ Copei congressman Luis Herrera Campins sought to tie the struggles of Venezuela with the bloodshed of 1967 across the world, in places like Vietnam and the Middle East. As he stoically recounted the difficulty, conflict, and hatred that had plagued the world throughout the year, he wondered if the common pain and anguish suffered across the ideological and political front lines might actually bring mankind together in recognition of their mutual fragility and instinctive need for peace. Perhaps people might realize, he pondered, that “peace does not take root in an equilibrium of arms, but rather in a disarming of the spirit.” If the antagonists in Venezuela and across the world, he suggested, could allow their vulnerable spirits to know peace, then the goodwill of the Christmas season could extend forward and bring real, lasting harmony into the New Year.⁵³⁴ It remained to be seen whether the denouement of November and December 1967 would last long into 1968.

1968: THE YEAR OF THE HEROIC GUERRILLA?

After spending 1967 connecting to the broader currents of developing-world nationalism and international communism, throughout 1968 most Venezuelan leftists sought a divorce from these larger debates and a chance to contemplate national problems on their own merits. The sword cut both ways, as Castro had little guidance to offer Latin American insurgents in the wake of Guevara’s death, and the Soviet Union soon found itself struggling to manage the Prague Spring. Many guerrilla cells retained considerable size and resources. Yet leaders like Douglas Bravo soon realized that any

⁵³³ “Anuncio en Miraflores: Indultados 526 Procesados por Delitos Civiles y Militares,” *El Nacional*, December 20, 1967, p. A1.

⁵³⁴ Luis Herrera Campins, “La Paz: Tema de Siempre,” *El Nacional*, December 26, 1967, p. A4.

attempt to demonstrate their capabilities brought a decisive and overwhelming response from the strengthened Venezuelan security forces. Particularly after an intensely violent and bloody series of clashes in April, May, and June, the guerrilla movement showed signs of renewed splintering; one faction sought a pause to await improved conditions while the other urged a harder run against the gauntlet of the armed forces. Only the most committed, however, could ignore the fact that this gauntlet was becoming a terribly efficient meat grinder. After the major guerrilla clashes ended in June, most observers judged that the elections scheduled for December would go on without a hitch. These observers also judged that a third consecutive peaceful democratic election in Venezuela would signal the final defeat of the largest guerrilla movement in Latin America. This near inevitability set the scene for mutual recrimination among the Venezuelan left and between the left and its erstwhile Cuban sponsors. The hunted no longer sought to turn their tables on their hunters, but merely to call off the hunt.

Castro used his January speech commemorating the victory over Batista to call 1968 the Year of the Heroic Guerrilla. Far from seeing bright prospects, however, Castro struck a grim and stoic tone. He admitted that 1968 would be a “hard year” for Cuba. Despite the fact that the island docked a Soviet oil tanker every 54 hours, Cuba faced fuel rationing so severe that military vehicles could not participate in the customary January victory parade. Labor shortages and inefficiencies dictated that the army would have to help bring in the sugar harvest, which would in any case fall far short of expectations. Forecasts called for 1968 sugar production to be 5.5 million tons, a drop of 600,000 tons from the previous year. After subtracting the 2.5 millions tons allotted to Western

Europe, Japan, and to the Cuban people themselves, the government would still be two million tons short of the amount needed to pay the USSR for needed imports. Perhaps by 1970, Castro predicted, the economy could become more prosperous.⁵³⁵ Speaking for less than two hours—rather short by his standards—Castro advanced a markedly chastened and sobered line in contrast to his statements of the previous summer. In expressing gratitude for Soviet aide, Castro also appeared to bowing to the extreme pressure placed on him by his Soviet sponsors. Castro hence faced severe obstacles in sustaining his own economy, to say nothing of the difficulties in sustaining guerrilla movements across the Caribbean.

About 200 guerrillas remained active in Venezuela as 1968 began, a number far greater than Castro had enjoyed during most of his time in the Sierra Maestra but significantly less than the several hundred that Rostow and other U.S. experts estimated to be available in the summer of 1967. Many had been killed, arrested, or disabled, or had simply deserted. Few had volunteered to be replacements. It would appear that the hard but noble life of simply surviving in the field, mandated if not celebrated by Régis Debray, began to be too much for any but the most dedicated. Writing from Caracas, *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Francis B. Kent sensed that the death of Guevara and the presence of “determined government troops at virtually every hand” simply sucked the life and morale out of the insurgency. Further, Kent’s sources indicated that, just as in Bolivia, the presence of Cubans effectively reduced Venezuelan peasant support for the

⁵³⁵ Juan de Onis, “Castro Announces Curbs in Oil Crisis,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1968, p. 1. “Castro’s Big Worry Is Sugar,” *New York Times*, January 7, 1968, p. E2.

guerrillas, since the *campesinos* resented foreign meddling and indeed regarded the Cubans as ethnically inferior. In the estimation of the CIA, Cuba would continue its efforts to supply the insurgency and infiltrate Cuban officers into guerrilla areas, but as long as threatened governments continued making progress in political and economic reforms, guerrillas would only constitute “minor harassments” to local governments for the near future.⁵³⁶

If economic expansion was a key factor in drawing the public away from any potential support for the insurgency, most indicators suggested that the Miraflores government was doing a good job. Foreign investment had yet to return to the levels of the last years of the Pérez Jiménez regime, but this situation owed much to a conscious decision by the Venezuelan leadership to reduce incentives to foreign businesses and insist on equal terms. The government-owned Venezuelan Petroleum Company, for example, sought to control at least 33 percent of national retail gas stations by the end of 1968, and 51 percent of the petroleum industry nationwide by the end of the 1970s. The government could also boast some of the best foreign exchange, public savings, and interest rates in Latin America.⁵³⁷ After a series of rises and dips during the Betancourt years, total government revenue and oil revenue had climbed steadily during each year of the Leoni administration. Government receipts from 1967 were 31 percent higher than those in 1963, while income from oil rose 60 percent during the same period. National

⁵³⁶ CIA Special Report, “Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America: 1959-1968,” February 16, 1968, CREST, NACPM, p. 10. Francis B. Kent, “Venezuelans Spurning Hard Guerrilla’s Life,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1967, p. G9.

⁵³⁷ “Caracas Wants in on the Action,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1968, p. 70.

income was up 33 percent over the course of the Leoni presidency, and up over 70 percent since the collapse of Pérez Jiménez. Increases in per capita income were more modest, but still amounted to rises of 14 percent since Betancourt left office, and 22 percent since Pérez Jiménez fled into exile.⁵³⁸ The leftist critics who claimed that Betancourt was making the economy worse would have a much harder time leveling the same claims against Leoni as he began his final year in office.

Leoni said as much in his New Year's message, assessing the last year's accomplishments and the coming year's prospects in a spirit of cautious optimism. National GDP and oil revenue had increased by 6 percent over the course of 1967 he pointed out, again making Venezuela one of the most productive and wealthy countries in Latin America in absolute terms. On the other hand, he warned, the approximately 4 percent rate of population increase meant that increases in per capita prosperity remained minimal. Regarding the insurgency, Leoni asserted that the Venezuelan citizenry had "totally rejected" the efforts of local guerrillas, and those from the "unfortunate Cuban island," to defeat his democratic government. This victory, however, came at the expense of great loss of life by the armed forces and diversion of national wealth away from needed peaceful endeavors. Laying the deaths of so many Cubans and Venezuelans at Castro's feet, Leoni asked, "How much longer will this bloody and desperate adventure last?"⁵³⁹

⁵³⁸ Enrique A. Baloyra, "Oil Policies and Budgets in Venezuela, 1938-1968," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol 9, No 2 (Summer, 1974), pp. 28-72.

⁵³⁹ "Hubo en 1967 un Sensible Progreso Hacia la Paz Dijo el Presidente en su Mensaje de Año Nuevo," *El Nacional*, January 2, 1968, p. D1.

Rather than pledge retribution and vengeance, however, Leoni adopted a posture of equanimity and quiet dignity, suggesting that his government had the will, resources, and righteousness to outlast the last paroxysms of the totalitarian threat. In the coming days, he announced, hundreds more prisoners would be pardoned and released based on their commitment to dedicate their lives to the nation without resentment or hate. While Venezuela's foreign and domestic antagonists gave free rein to their violent passions, the government would act with reason and justice. The coming year, he predicted, would be one in which Venezuelans continued consolidating their institutions and their democratic revolution, a process closely watched and admired by the rest of the world. The elections in December would give the nation another chance to demonstrate its full commitment to taking part in determining its own political destiny. Drawing a contrast with Cuba, Leoni celebrated the fact that 1968 would be another year in which the country was independent and not a "satellite under the direction of a foreign power."⁵⁴⁰

During the first months of 1968, as the mainstream political parties prepared to mount their election campaigns in earnest, there was very little evidence of an insurgency in Venezuela. Interior Minister Dr. Reinaldo Leandro Mora, hosting a breakfast for 17 U.S. journalists, characterized January 1968 as one of the "happiest" times of the guerrilla struggle. In the last three years, he said, the number of insurgents had gone from 400 to 40. While government forces dismantled multiple guerrilla camps and captured several insurgents to the east in Monagas state, police arrested FALN leader and

⁵⁴⁰ "Hubo en 1967 un Sensible Progreso Hacia la Paz Dijo el Presidente en su Mensaje de Año Nuevo," *El Nacional*, January 2, 1968, p. D1.

longtime Bravo and Petkoff associate Lino Martínez Salazar on the island of Coche off the central Venezuelan coast. Authorities in Zulia state hunted Gregorio Lunar Márquez, Leandro Mora continued, another FALN leader with ties to Petkoff who was rumored to have infiltrated the country from Havana. Clashes between the armed forces and insurgents continued in Lara state and elsewhere but at a very minor and sporadic level.⁵⁴¹ January saw Colombia and Venezuela establish an ongoing cooperative security presence along the border between the two countries near the Guajira Peninsula, which Cuba used as an infiltration point for insurgents and supplies directed at both countries. At the same time, the Venezuelan armed forces had begun a comprehensive reorganization to prepare for “Plan República,” a massive effort to pacify the nation ahead of the December elections. This reorganization was significant enough to be front-page news on January 17, as the Ministry of Defense announced new leaders and reshuffling in the army high command as well as in the army’s five infantry divisions.⁵⁴²

It was as though Venezuela was moving on without the guerrillas. Late January brought a wave of celebrations, as Venezuelans from across the political spectrum celebrated the tenth anniversary of the fall of Pérez Jiménez. Many pundits went so far as to suggest that the project of peaceful democratic revolution had been completed. Former provisional president and central figure in the 1958 uprising Wolfgang Larrazábal

⁵⁴¹ “Detención de 6 Guerrilleros Anunció el Ejército en Monagas,” *El Nacional*, January 4, 1968, p. D12. “Miembro del Comando General de las FALN Detenido en Coche,” *El Nacional*, January 10, 1968, p. D8. “Muerto un Guerrillero y Otros 4 Heridos por una Patrulla Militar,” *El Nacional*, January 21, 1968, p. D12. “Informa Leandro Mora a 17 Periodistas de EE.UU. Los Efectivos de las Guerrillas no Pasarían Hoy de 40 Hombres,” *El Nacional*, January 23, 1968, p. D1.

⁵⁴² “Nuevo Comandante del Ejército el Gral. Roberto Moreán Soto,” *El Nacional*, January 17, 1968, p. A1. “Policías Colombo-Venezolanos Vigilarán Zona Fronteriza para Impedir Acción Guerrillera,” *El Nacional*, January 18, 1968, p. D10.

offered criticism of AD's handling of national affairs. Nonetheless he celebrated the strides made by Venezuelans in January 1958 and in the ensuing decade. Because of the sacrifices made that day his countrymen still enjoyed the opportunity to fulfill the national destiny of democracy, liberty, solidarity, and prosperity. According to jurist and Central University of Venezuela political science professor Cipriano Herredia Angulo, the preceding ten years served to shatter of old molds of Latin American governance. The old cycle in which despots took turns chasing one another out of power had given way to democratic revolution. It was clear that Venezuelans wanted to live under a democracy and not under despotism of the left or of the right.⁵⁴³

In the countryside, meanwhile, the lack of clear victories or signs of progress created tension among guerrilla leaders like Petkoff and Bravo. Another split in the leftist movement appeared imminent. Bravo never fully bought into Regis Debray's elevation of the *foco* at the expense of the popular front and urban agitation. Debray and Castro, Bravo felt, forgot the reasons why the Cuban revolution succeeded in deposing Batista. "The true history of the Cuban revolution," Bravo asserted, "was not that of guerrilla action exclusively, but rather the guerrilla struggle working in conjunction with the efforts of the entire Cuban populace." He now doubted the wisdom of concentrating forces *en masse* and questioned whether guerrilla action by itself could spark a social revolution. He advocated dismantling the larger guerrilla force into multiple units—a return to the tactics of the mid-1960s—and suggested the possibility suspending

⁵⁴³ Wolfgang Larrazábal, "El 23 de Enero," and Cipriano Heredia Angulo, "Diez Años en Democracia," *El Nacional*, January 23, 1968, p. A4.

operations until the political atmosphere in Venezuela became more suited toward socialism. Because the economy had improved, he reasoned, most people were comfortable with the Leoni regime. As 1967 progressed, Bravo increasingly voiced his doubts. Not surprisingly friction grew between Bravo and the Cubans in Venezuela and back in Havana. Towards the end of 1967 the Cuban leadership and the Venezuelan FALN leaders in Havana decided that Bravo should travel to Cuba to explain himself. Accordingly, Bravo tried to sneak out of the country. While trying to arrange passage Bravo learned of Guevara's death, leaving him further deflated and uninspired about the violent struggle. In particular, he found Castro's response wanting. The entire guerrilla movement across Latin America, Bravo thought, needed some sign of leadership from Havana to continue the struggle, and neither Castro nor Radio Havana had anything to say on these counts. By this time Bravo had found it impossible to leave the country, compelling him to return to his men, under the command of Petkoff in his absence.⁵⁴⁴

Petkoff, however, had decided that he and Bravo were no longer of the same mind, and that he must take his men from Bravo's command and set out on his own. To Petkoff, the guerrilla movement could not be viable unless it engaged the enemy, while Bravo seemed intent on turning them into politicians. He had grown disillusioned with Bravo when the latter decided to leave the guerrillas and attempt to influence politics in Havana. When Bravo returned, according to Petkoff, Bravo sowed discord among the guerrillas by trying to split them up and by giving contradictory orders concerning

⁵⁴⁴ Humberto Solani, *Douglas Bravo Speaks: Interview with the Venezuela Guerrilla Leader* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), pp. 9-10, BLAC. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 129-130.

operations. For Petkoff, breaking up their unit into smaller pieces represented retrogression, as the big guerrilla force represented an evolution of the *foco* theory, given that “an operation of 80 men is qualitatively better than an operation of five.” While it was certainly easier to maintain a group of only half a dozen or so guerrillas, it would take “a thousand years” for a group of this size to have any significant impact on the struggle.⁵⁴⁵ In Petkoff’s estimation, they had to continue to improve and strengthen themselves as vanguards, rather than rely on orthodox theory. In mid-March Petkoff took about 25 guerrillas—the Venezuelans and Cubans with whom he landed in summer 1966 and a few others—and departed, heading, he said, for the mountains of Falcón. Other guerrilla leaders took their men from the Bravo group soon after, leaving him with just over 30 men. Bravo re-designated his force the Unified Command FLN/FALN, or CUFF, and determined to march 150 miles along the Pan-American Highway from the southwestern tip of Portuguesa, through Cojedes state, and into the mountains of Yaracuy. *Persona non grata* with the Cubans, Bravo relied on raids against small towns and local banks to secure cash and supplies during this trip. In an ironic twist, when Bravo’s group finally made it to Yaracuy, they bumped into Petkoff’s men, who had not gone to Falcón after all and were trying instead to negotiate the same gauntlet of the military-patrolled Pan-American Highway towards the mountains.⁵⁴⁶

The time was not propitious for such stark divisions among the guerrillas, as the government prepared to renew anti-guerrilla operations in late spring. Between late April

⁵⁴⁵ Blanco Muñoz, *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 142-144. The original Spanish reads, “Una operación de 80 cualitativamente es superior a una operación de 5.”

⁵⁴⁶ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 132-134.

and late June, the guerrillas suffered a series of catastrophic setbacks at the hands of the armed forces. The march to Yaracuy proved exceedingly difficult, Bravo recalled. As they neared their destination, they found it necessary to hide out several days while waiting for a chance to move without government detection. Even such diligence did not always pay off, as ranger units inevitably caught up with Bravo's *foco*:

One column, transported by helicopters, crossed over us and attacked us from behind. The other column, also arriving by helicopter, established itself in front. The army outnumbered us, and besides, was better prepared. They opened fire against us from close range, from the front and back...[and forced us into desperate action] without which we would have been destroyed.⁵⁴⁷

On April 20 the Yumare Ranger Battalion caught a guerrilla group in the Sabana Larga region of western Yaracuy that local sources claimed was led by Petkoff. While the Ministry of the Interior would not comment on the potential presence of Petkoff, Interior Minister Dr. Reinaldo Leandro Mora issued a statement claiming that the *cazadores* had killed a confirmed seven guerrillas and probably wounded far more. After killing six in a morning ambush, continued Mora, the airmobile rangers had surprised the guerrillas around noon as they attempted to flee the area by way of a local highway. The following day a host of army and air force units arrived on the scene to support the ranger operations and patrol western Yaracuy to its border with Lara and Falcón. In Falcón,

⁵⁴⁷ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, p. 134. The original Spanish reads, “Una columna, transportada por helicópteros, no había alcance y nos atacó por detrás. Otra columna lo hizo de frente, también llevada por helicópteros. El ejército nos abrumaba por su número, además, iba bien preparado. Al comenzar el fuego cerrado contra nosotros, acosados por el frente y las espaldas...si no hubiera sido por esta valerosa acción nos hubieran barrido.”

meanwhile, elements of the National Guard searched for a guerrilla band that attempted to occupy the town of Zazárida on April 20.⁵⁴⁸

The CIA watched these developments with great interest, relaying news of the success of the rangers back to Washington. On April 22 the Venezuelan Ministry of Defense announced that the armed forces had confirmed the deaths of ten guerrillas in the western Yaracuy-Lara-Falcón area in the preceding three days. One of the recovered bodies, according to the army, had been identified as a Cuban naval officer. According to Venezuelan press reports the *cazadores* had executed a masterful anti-guerrilla operation. Upon hearing word of the presence of around 20 guerrillas in the Sabana Larga area, the rangers hiked up through the mountains for twelve hours and set up an ambush into which the guerrillas fell totally unawares. These rangers and others, the government claimed, were on the verge of snaring or killing Bravo or Petkoff and securing a great victory for the government. In their efforts to escape destruction, further, the guerrillas abandoned significant amounts of weaponry, medicine, documents, and foodstuffs. Clashes between the rangers and Bravo soon after resulted in the capture of several of his men and the deaths of about 15 others in the first two weeks of May. During this time the CIA had also caught wind of the Bravo-Petkoff split, and therefore estimated Bravo's strength to be no more than 40 men. The biggest remaining guerrilla contingent appeared to be the MIR faction east of Caracas, which numbered approximately 100 men under Moisés Moleiro, who had replaced Martín upon his arrest in 1967. For some time,

⁵⁴⁸ "Choque Armado en Yaracuy y Muerte de Siete Guerrilleros Confirmó el Ministerio del Interior," *El Nacional*, April 21, 1968, p. D16. "Intensa Persecución por Aire y Tierra contra Guerrilleros" and "Intensa Movilización en Montañas de Falcón," *El Nacional*, April 22, 1968, p. D12.

however, this group had been mostly dormant. Perceiving a leadership vacuum in Venezuela and Cuba, the CIA noted an April speech by Castro in which the Cuban leader backed away from his insistence on the primacy of the rural *foco* and revolution. He acknowledged that there could be “different theses” regarding the balance between rural and popular urban revolution, and perhaps most shockingly allowed that there had been a “mass movement” in Cuba prior to the ascendance of his *foco* in 1958.⁵⁴⁹

After two days of heavy rains, the TO-5 (Theater of Operations Five) Rangers spearheaded a force of about 2,000 men in the hunt for Bravo in the Yaracuy area. A series of especially violent clashes ensued, resulting in the deaths of approximately 20 more guerrillas, as well as several soldiers. The army claimed that the deaths included those of key Bravo and Petkoff lieutenants. Overall, the army judged, the columns of these guerrilla leaders had been “practically liquidated.”⁵⁵⁰ In keeping with the Ranger tactic of staying close to the guerrillas and living in the mountains for extended periods, the counterinsurgency forces remained in the Yaracuy area. By early May the rangers laid a new series of ambushes against the guerrillas, resulting in casualties on both sides. Local hospitals reported receiving several “gravely wounded” soldiers, and the government claimed the death of another 25 guerrillas across the western states region.

⁵⁴⁹ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “World-Wide Perspectives,” May 1968 [full title and date redacted], CREST, NACPM. “Defensa Confirma la Muerte de Diez Guerrilleros: El Ejército les Tendió una Emboscada Después del Asalto a Sabana Larga,” *El Nacional*, April 24, 1968, p. D12. The guerrillas appear to have been both gentle and forceful with the locals. Interviews of locals revealed that they demanded the use of three donkeys. They also went into Sabana Larga shops but instead of simply robbing the establishments they demanded that they be sold goods. Over the course of a day they spent approximately 600 Bolívares on bread, soda, cigarettes, and sardines.

⁵⁵⁰ “Dos Mil Efectivos Militares Estrechan el Cerco Sobre los Grupos Irregulares del Yaracuy,” *El Nacional*, April 27, 1968, p. D3. “Continúa la Persecución de los Grupos Guerrilleros que Huyen a la Desbandada por Yaracuy y Falcón,” *El Nacional*, April 28, 1968, p. D14.

Local intelligence suggested that guerrillas led by Bravo and Freddy Carquez were searching for an avenue by which to sneak out of Yaracuy and into Falcón or perhaps Portuguesa.⁵⁵¹ The government kept up the cordon, however, continuing almost daily operations and encountering the guerrillas at least every few days. By the time operations tapered off at the end of June, the government claimed the deaths of approximately 40 more guerrillas, compared to the loss of perhaps half a dozen soldiers.⁵⁵² In two months of clashes, therefore, the guerrillas had lost close to 100 men, or perhaps 25 percent of the total force across the nation. Given that most of the clashes had occurred in the Yaracuy area, however, it was probable that guerrilla losses in the region approached 100 percent.

Heavy rains returned towards the end of June, which slowed down government operations and probably saved the guerrillas from total elimination. Petkoff managed to sneak as many as 100 men to the El Bachiller mountain area east of Caracas. Here he was able to join with Moleiro's MIR splinter. Petkoff renewed contact with Cuba and began to reestablish a support network that could provide small arms and explosives. By the end of the summer Petkoff's group had the capability to carry out sabotage of bridges, pipelines, power stations, and other infrastructure. In general, however, none of these units sought to engage the Venezuelan armed forces for fear of heavy losses.⁵⁵³ For

⁵⁵¹ "Nuevos Combates Ayer entre el Ejército y Grupos Guerrilleros al Sur de Yaracuy con Saldo de Muertos y Heridos," *El Nacional*, May 6, 1968, p. A1. "En 4 Estados: 25 Guerrilleros Muertos en los Ultimos Veinte Días," *El Nacional*, May 8, 1968, p. D12.

⁵⁵² "Muertos un Oficial y 3 Soldados en Emboscada Guerrillera en Falcón," *El Nacional*, June 9, 1968, p. D16. "Límites Lara-Portuguesa Son Siete los Guerrilleros Muertos," *El Nacional*, June 22, 1968, p. D11.

⁵⁵³ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "Status of Insurgency in Venezuela," October 13, 1968, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box, 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL.

Petkoff, this need to avoid confrontation proved incredibly frustrating, as he felt that the division of the guerrilla *foco* occurred at the exact point in which they were poised to achieve success against the government. He insisted on the soundness of his strategy; he simply could not overcome critical internal dissension.⁵⁵⁴ By the middle of 1968 Petkoff was indeed one of the few guerrilla leaders who still possessed the nerve to challenge the army and the conviction that the guerrillas could succeed simply by concentrating *en masse* and trying harder. For former compatriots like Bravo, massing in greater numbers simply meant providing a more conspicuous target for the army. He and the others had concluded, too, that the *foco* could not succeed without corresponding dissident groups in the cities. Only Petkoff, then, truly believed in going it alone and in using raw violence as a means to effect political change.

“WE FELL INTO THE TRAP OF VANGUARDISM”: THE END OF THE GUERRILLA WAR AND THE ELECTION OF 1968

Guerrilla leaders in Venezuela and Cuba had often mocked government claims of victory, noting that it often took several “arrests” or “deaths” of a given guerrilla or *foco* group before the security forces actually accomplished the job, if they did so at all. The government, they insinuated, was either overly optimistic, inept, or both. Yet the government operations of May and June exhibited both grim determination to accomplish a long-postponed task and notable skill in its execution. Never had the army sustained an anti-guerrilla operation so long and inflicted such devastating casualties. The guerrilla movement lost as many fighters in two months as they had in the preceding 18 months of

⁵⁵⁴ Blanco Muñoz, *La Lucha Armada, hablan seis comandantes...*, pp. 147-148.

insurgency. While guerrilla leaders wrestled with this reality, the communist world appeared to be coming apart. At the end of August, the Soviet Union ordered troops into Czechoslovakia in a massive crackdown against the Prague Spring reform movement. The confusion and consternation associated with the reaction to this event was felt as far away as the Caribbean Basin, causing a new round of division and disillusion among the remaining communists and extreme leftists.

In the wake of this apparent decimation of the guerrilla movement, the amnesty initiative regained momentum. The leftist offshoot of AD, the People's Electoral Movement (*Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo*, or MEP), led by Luis Beltrán Prieto Figueroa, presented a bill in congress in July that would provide a general amnesty for all persons who had been charged with political crimes. With regard to insurgents still in the field, they would be pardoned as long as they surrendered their arms and took an oath renouncing their anti-government activities. As Prieto Figueroa presented it, a wide-ranging amnesty law was the only way to end the conflict conclusively and to bring peace to the nation. While it would apply to those guilty or suspected of political crimes, it would also apply to the police and security forces who had prosecuted right and left wing extremists over the past decade. It was well known, he asserted, that Digepol and other police forces had committed numerous crimes against the Venezuelan people in attempting to ensure law and order. The opposition parties quickly fell in line behind the amnesty movement. Almost incredibly, given the fact that the amnesty bill served as a partial indictment of his party's conduct, AD leader Gonzalo Barrios even offered qualified support, though he held reservations about whether it would apply to those who

had committed particularly bloody or infamous offenses. Even Caldera's Copei party, staunchly critical of earlier amnesty efforts, gave its support. While the various parties continued wrangling over the finer points of the proposed amnesty law, a clear consensus emerged that such a law would be passed in some form either prior to or immediately after the new administration came to power in 1969. AD soon switched to opposition to the law, for example, while Copei stayed on board. The debate was shelved for the time being at the end of August, as the MEP conceded that it could not gain quorum within the chamber of deputies.⁵⁵⁵

Political deliberations like these temporarily ceased in late August, in large part due to the shock of the Soviet decision to invade Czechoslovakia and end the Prague Spring. The heavy Soviet hand depressed still further whatever idealism remained within the leftist movement from the heady days of early 1967, to say nothing of earlier years. Indeed, many within the left had long resigned themselves to accommodation or deal making to remain relevant as political entities. Others had simply gone hiding or exile in order to ensure physical survival. Like the shelved debate over the amnesty law, the leftist rationalization of the Czech invasion acknowledged that hard choices were

⁵⁵⁵ "Amnistía General que Incluye a los Actuales Guerrilleros Propone Ley que Presenta Hoy el MEP," *El Nacional*, July 16, 1968, p. D2. "Declara Prieto Figueroa: El Candidato del Gobierno Quiere la Amnesia porque Necesita Olvidar Todos los Actos que Venezuela Recuerda con Horror" and "Candidatos de Oposición de Acuerdo con la Amnistía," *El Nacional*, July 18, 1968, p. D1. "Definitivamente Archivada la Ley de Amnistía," *El Nacional*, August 31, 1968, p. A1. There seems to have been some opportunism involved in Caldera's support for the amnesty law, as public support for amnesty was far greater than it had been in previous years. In addition, Caldera's support made the law appear more legitimate, since he had been such a harsh critic of the insurgency and had accused Betancourt and Leoni of softness on the issue. In some ways, it is reminiscent of U.S. president Richard Nixon—the famous red baiter of the 1950s and 1960s—being the one who formalized détente with the USSR and China.

imminent and that the only questions concerned the degree to which a given constituency would have to trade its ideals for the sake of expediency.

Blight and Brenner note, along with Piero Gleijeses, that Castro faced a devastating choice in confronting the Soviet invasion: denounce the Soviets, thereby demonstrating consistency in his critique of Soviet leadership but also joining the ranks of his enemies in the United States and elsewhere; or endorse Moscow, on the premise that it prevented a socialist nation from defecting to the capitalist camp, and in so doing making himself party to another unilateral, self-serving Soviet action. In a closely watched speech of August 23, Castro attempted to embrace the best features of each choice while simultaneously skirting the most noxious aspects of them. He stopped short of condemning the invasion itself, observing that it had been done to preserve international socialism. But he made clear that he thought everything else about it reeked of corruption. Crushing a brother socialist country could only be done if the international socialists practiced what they preached, Castro suggested, and the Soviets stood on very shaky ground in this regard. Having once again gone on record with his charges of Soviet hypocrisy, he also indicated that he would acknowledge Soviet leadership in the future but also reserve his right to act as Moscow's moral compass and hold Moscow's feet to the fire when it pursued policies at variance with the rhetoric of international socialism. In less than a year, then, Castro had both lost Che—the ultimate example of revolutionary purity, independence, and defiance—and the ability to emulate

him in words and deeds.⁵⁵⁶ In November 1964 Castro had insisted on his right and obligation to spread revolution, conceding only to Moscow that he would cooperate with preexisting communist parties in his efforts. In January 1966 he had declared a developing world revolution no longer beholden to the superpowers, obliquely acknowledging Soviet leadership while essentially rejecting the Moscow line. In the summer of 1967 he articulated a vision of hemispheric conflagration and conceded nothing to anyone. A year later all of this conflict—both real and rhetorical—was essentially over. Castro still had some cards to play on the Latin American table, but for him the game was decided. Cuba’s war for Latin America devolved into a rearguard action.

So too was there resignation and retreat across the Caribbean Sea in Venezuela, albeit on a smaller scale. The PCV was in the process of convening a Central Committee plenum to discuss ways to get on the election ballot, under its newly created Unity for Advancement (*Unidad para Avanzar*, or UPA) popular front, when the news broke of the Soviet invasion. The politburo leadership drew up what it thought would be an easily approved resolution in support of Moscow only to face a spirited revolt from several younger and mid-level leaders. As Teodoro Petkoff recalled, he and the dissidents were easily defeated when the resolution came to a vote, but the divergence of opinion over the Prague Spring sowed seeds for another division within the PCV. To Petkoff the Prague Spring represented a “renewal of socialism” and indeed an improvement of the theory to

⁵⁵⁶ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days...*, pp. 142-145. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions...*, pp. 217-221.

suit the modern world. Socialism, he suggested, did not have to remain tethered to Soviet ideologies lingering from the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, it belonged to each generation to mold and interpret. This view thus put Petkoff and his peers at odds with both the senior PCV leaders *and* Fidel Castro, who went on record in characterizing the Prague Spring as “counterrevolutionary” and a decadent detour towards capitalism.⁵⁵⁷

Douglas Bravo also had a strong reaction against the Soviet invasion, writing a brief letter of condemnation that was subsequently circulated in Spanish, French, and Italian. The Bravo letter called the invasion inconsistent with the principles of leadership of the international proletariat, and gravely damaging to the spirit of unity within the communist world. The Soviets were turning notions of internationalism and nationalism on their head, he said, and creating an atmosphere where communists fought amongst each other rather than against the capitalist world.⁵⁵⁸ The loyalties and focus of the communist world, then, could not be more disrupted. The PCV, the bull’s eye of Castro’s wrath for over a year, now joined him in endorsing Soviet unilateralism, despite mocking him as an “untouchable revolutionary oracle.” The foundation of the PCV itself showed a new crack and would indeed rupture again in less than a year. Teodoro Petkoff, a leader in the future PCV splinter, was on the same side with Douglas Bravo in opposing the invasion, and Petkoff and Bravo made no secret of their dislike for one another in

⁵⁵⁷ Norman Gall, “Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary, Part II: A New Party,” *American Universities Field Staff Reports: East South America Series* (Vol XVII, No 9, Aug 1973, Venezuela), pp. 9-10, BLAC. As noted in earlier chapters, Teodoro Petkoff had dabbled briefly the guerrilla war embraced by his brother Luben before returning to the fold of the PCV. While both brothers were leftists, the two of them should not be confused.

⁵⁵⁸ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, p. 210.

other matters. A February 1969 CIA study noted the lasting chaotic effect of Czechoslovakia on the communist world:

The degree of consternation, opposition, and disarray caused among Communist front organizations presumably surprised the Soviet and other Warsaw Pact invaders of Czechoslovakia...Given the fact that support of Soviet foreign policy and of Communist Party objectives is the overriding purpose of the fronts' existence, open disagreement with the Moscow leadership of the fronts is a most significant development, indeed one which has never occurred before.⁵⁵⁹

In the wake of these disruptions, guerrilla groups led by Bravo, Luben Petkoff, and others remained in the field but generally avoided contact with governments security forces. Discretion proved to be the better part of valor, given that Venezuela possessed, by the autumn of 1968, 13 complete ranger battalions and a full complement of Bell 47G, UH-1, and Alouette 111 helicopters. At the end of October, Bravo had been reduced to operating in Falcón, and in the opinion of the CIA, could survive only because of his access to a network of family members in the area. The most potent insurgent presence manifested itself in Yaracuy, where the government had historically had little contact with the mountain peasantry. As a means to reduce this sanctuary, the army stepped up the type of civic action programs undertaken in other regions of the country, building of roads and other infrastructure, while the government established educational and medical services, thus providing butter to the population to complement the guns wielded by the

⁵⁵⁹ CIA Background Material, "Effect of Invasion of Czechoslovakia on Communist Fronts" and "Castro's Personal Reign," February 1969, CREST, NACPM. Teodoro Petkoff would be out of the PCV leadership within a year, and his 1969 book, *Czechoslovakia: The Problem of Socialism*, would further earn him the wrath of Moscow-line communists.

armed forces.⁵⁶⁰ Over time the government outreach to the rural population, which had often been ambivalent towards both the guerrillas and Caracas authorities, was paying significant dividends.

On the other hand, it appeared that communist recruitment of students at Central University and elsewhere had not manifested itself into widespread support for the Soviet Union or Cuba, or widespread opposition to the United States, despite years of effort in this endeavor. The USIA had tracked Venezuelan university student political beliefs from their first year of study in 1964 to their graduation in the 1967-1968 academic year. The students, concluded the USIA, were remarkably consistent in their preference for *local* socialism, ambivalence toward U.S. capitalism, and distaste for world communism. Approximately two-thirds of 1964 freshmen and recent graduates rated socialism as “very good” or “good,” while well over half of these same students were either neutral towards capitalism and communism or regarded these ideologies as “bad.” With regard to the ideal system for Venezuela, socialism was the clear choice over capitalism by about 50 percent against 10 percent. Yet the preference for communism or a dictatorship had dropped from 5 percent in 1964 to barely 1 percent by 1967. The percentage of those who held “very good” or “good” opinions of Fidel Castro never exceeded 28 percent, while those who regarded the Cuban leader as “bad” or “very bad” hovered between one-

⁵⁶⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Status of Insurgency in Venezuela,” October 13, 1968. NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box, 75, Memos & Misc (2 of 2), Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. As noted earlier, in late 1966 many army officers were dissatisfied with the Alouette helicopters. The fact that the CIA now listed the Alouette as a net asset would suggest that the army had figured out a way to make the French helicopters more suitable for their needs.

third and one-half of the respondents.⁵⁶¹ Venezuelan youth therefore shared great similarities to the youth of the industrialized West in the later 1960s. They shifted to the left and criticized both capitalism and the U.S. implementation of the ideology. Yet this criticism did not necessarily translate into support for world communism. Because it was compiled in late 1967 the USIA study could not address the further shift to the left of youth across the world in 1968. However, it would stand to reason that Castro's relative retreat from the public eye in early 1968, coupled with the damage done to Soviet prestige in the wake of the Czech invasion, would moderate any substantial shift in the numbers compiled by the USIA.

On November 21, 1968, Ambassador Bernbaum reported that, despite a raucous and carnival-like electioneering atmosphere, all signs pointed to a peaceful election. The PCV remained "on good behavior," having thrown its support behind Prieto Figueroa and the MEP. Rather than attempt to disrupt the elections, far left groups such as the Moleiro MIR splinter had simply declared their intentions in September to boycott.⁵⁶² If any cause for optimism existed within the ranks of the communists, it was the fact that Prieto managed to garner 19 percent of the vote.⁵⁶³ On December 9, Rostow wrote to Johnson

⁵⁶¹ United States Information Agency, "Venezuelan University Graduates: Their Opinions on Politico-Economic Systems, U.S. Economic Policy, American Companies, Latin American Integration, and Castroite Cuba," August 12, 1968, RG 306-230-46-23-6, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research ARC# 1160786 #A1 1013: "R" Reports, 1964-1974, 1968 R-12 to 1970 R-13, Box 33, R-20 folder, NACPM.

⁵⁶² Bernbaum to Washington, State Department Telegram, "Venezuelan Elections 1968," November 21, 1968, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Cables, Vol III, 12/66-12/68 folder, LBJL. "El MIR se Abstendrá en las Elecciones Dice Sáez Mérida al Abandonar el País," *El Nacional*, September 13, 1968, p. D1.

⁵⁶³ Diego Abente, "Politics and Policies: The Limits of the Venezuelan Consociational Regime," *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, ed. Donald L. Herman (New York: Praeger Press, 1988), 140.

to announce that Rafael Caldera of Copei had won the presidency with 29 percent of the vote. Though this victory did not indicate a firm mandate—Gonzalo Barrios of AD ended up with 28 percent, or about 30,000 votes fewer than Caldera—the fact that Venezuela had executed its third consecutive peacefully contested election suggested optimism. Rostow advised that, while Caldera might “be somewhat more nationalistic in his dealings with American oil companies in Venezuela, the general lines of Venezuelan policy toward the United States should continue after he takes office.”⁵⁶⁴

Indeed, Caldera maintained a basic pro-U.S. orientation as well as the general trend toward reduction of the guerrilla threat. After his 1969 inauguration he promoted legal participation by the PCV, as well as by supporters of Pérez Jiménez, in the political process, and called for a peace commission composed of leaders from all segments of the nation to establish a dialog with the guerrillas. As Bravo admitted, Caldera and his Copei party adopted a much more accommodating tone with the guerrillas than the AD presidencies of Betancourt and Leoni. At the same time, however, the lingering elements of the guerrilla force that kept their arms were the target of a low-level counterinsurgency campaign that continued into the early 1970s. Though Petkoff remained committed to armed struggle, most Venezuelans abandoned Castro’s call for hemispheric revolution. According to Bravo, Castro and Guevara’s success against Batista made them hubristic, although in the heady days of the 1960s they could be forgiven for believing in the imminence of world revolution. The problem, as Bravo saw it, involved the rhetoric of

⁵⁶⁴ Rostow to the President, White House Memorandum, “Venezuelan Elections,” December 9, 1968, NSF, CF: Venezuela, Box 75, Filed by the LBJ Library, LBJL. “Caldera en la Ratificación del Triunfo: Ruego a los Dirigentes de la Política y la Economía Me Ayuden para Hacer en Buen Gobierno,” *El Nacional*, December 10, 1968, p. D1.

internationalism and the search for a uniform revolutionary prescription, something of which both the Soviets and Cubans were guilty. Latin America needed to be assessed on its own merits, rather than simply as another nation fighting imperialism. While believing in internationalism, Bravo concluded that the rhetoric surrounding the revolutions of the 1960s made it difficult to determine “when there is internationalism and when there is intervention” in the affairs of a given nation.⁵⁶⁵ In the final analysis, the efforts of Bravo, Martín, Petkoff, and others, to make the Venezuelan revolution conform to the Cuban one, and to international directives, may have done more harm than good to their prospects for success.

Martín concurred in the notion of a shattered dream, lamenting the paradox of having the courage to take up arms but needing even more courage to surrender them.⁵⁶⁶ According to him, the fighters believed that they were the vanguard of a new revolution and a new revolutionary method. The Soviets had accomplished the impossible in engineering a revolution in a nation of peasants, rather than in the ideal Marxian industrialized society. The Chinese had succeeded in revolution despite altering the Soviet model, and the Cubans had further modified the formula by overthrowing a powerful army with only a handful of motivated fighters in connection with the enlightened masses. Yet Castro and Guevara had forgotten their innovations and insisted that the Venezuelans follow their formula strictly. In so doing they ignored Lenin’s

⁵⁶⁵ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 135-140. The original Spanish, on p. 140, reads, “Se presta confusión saber cuándo hay internacionalismo y cuándo hay intervencionismo.”

⁵⁶⁶ Peña, *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*, p. 80. The original Spanish reads, “Es difícil tomar las armas, pero a veces es más difícil soltarlas.”

maxim of revolution in one country, according to local conditions. The Cuban model had become the new orthodoxy, and to the extent that the Venezuelans followed this model, they failed.⁵⁶⁷

Back in Washington, Kennedy's dream of a "decade of maximum effort" could not perpetuate itself; the Alliance for Progress lingered as a shadow. Granted, U.S. aid to Latin America had averaged about \$1 billion annually between 1961 and 1965.⁵⁶⁸ Further, Johnson touted several accomplishments of the initiative—price stabilization for basic commodities, increasing promotion of "social justice," and beginning steps toward regional economic integration and tariff reduction—during an August 1965 ceremony celebrating the Alliance's fourth anniversary.⁵⁶⁹ Yet the initiative did little to accomplish its goal of benefiting the average Latin American and reforming Latin American society. The GDP growth rate, forecast by Lincoln Gordon to achieve a five percent annual net increase, had proved to be negative as a result of Latin America's three percent annual population increase. By the middle of the 1960s, the Alliance functioned mainly as a whipping post for the far right and far left in Latin America, and as an unclaimed child in the U.S. policymaking community. To the reactionary right, the Alliance was utopian and unrealistic; leftists claimed it to be a cosmetic gloss on a typically imperialist program that ignored the real needs of the people. Vietnam had in any case consumed

⁵⁶⁷ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, pp. 81-82.

⁵⁶⁸ Eduardo Frei Montalva, "The Alliance that Lost Its Way," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1967, Vol 45 Issue 3), p. 446.

⁵⁶⁹ Vaughn to Rusk, "Celebration of Fourth Anniversary of Charter of Punta del Este (Alliance for Progress) August 17, 1965," August 4, 1965, FRUS 1964-1968 XXXI, pp. 79-80.

the mental energy of the shapers of public opinion in the United States.⁵⁷⁰ Beginning in 1967, while the anti-guerrilla ranger battalions came on line in Latin America, the U.S. Congress reduced Alliance for Progress aid for three consecutive years. By 1969, aid bottomed out at \$336.5 million.⁵⁷¹

CONCLUSION

Despite this pessimistic assessment of overall U.S.-Latin American relations in the final days of the Leoni and Johnson administrations, Washington had succeeded in assisting the key Latin American nation in finally defeating leftist extremism and solidifying democracy through a third consecutive peaceful and open election. The U.S.-Venezuelan partnership had been so successful, in fact, that it had bred a spirit of complacency and expectation. Writing from Caracas shortly after Caldera's confirmation as the victor in the elections, *New York Times* correspondent Paul Montgomery marveled at the prevailing mood. In a country that enjoyed only 13 years of democracy during the twentieth century—a precarious democracy marred by coup attempts and constant violence—the slow announcement of a victory margin of 30,000 votes out of almost 4 million cast had produced not a coup but only a “slightly late start on Christmas shopping.” Whereas the 1963 election had set the precedent of a democratic handover of power in Venezuelan history, 1968 set the stage for the first democratic transfer of power to an opposition candidate. Having passed what Montgomery termed “an important test of democracy” for a relatively prosperous but still-developing nation, “the election meant

⁵⁷⁰ Montalva, “The Alliance that Lost Its Way,” pp. 440-441.

⁵⁷¹ Michael J. Kryzaneck, *U.S.-Latin American Relations* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1996), pp. 76-77.

the firm establishment of a tradition of free balloting and the orderly transition of power to the man chosen.”⁵⁷²

In so many ways 1968 was a tragedy in the Western Hemisphere and across the world, but it was also a time of great triumph for the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership against political extremism. Students protested around the world against the apparent failings of the generation in power. Washington continued to wrestle with the fallout from the Tet Offensive, with the Johnson presidency being the most conspicuous casualty. Moscow continued mending fences within the communist world in the wake of its invasion of Czechoslovakia and crushing of the Prague Spring. Thousands upon thousands of combatants and civilians died in Vietnam and elsewhere in the conflagrations consuming the developing world. Venezuela had experienced much of this same chaos, albeit on a smaller scale: political controversy, student protest, and great loss of life. But in the country most targeted by the forces of extremism throughout the previous decade democracy had thrived and the country was well into an era of unprecedented prosperity at the national and per capita level.

In approximately 18 months presidents Johnson and Leoni had drawn to a close perhaps the most dangerous and volatile period in hemispheric history and played key roles in altering hemispheric and international affairs. The close cooperation between the two leaders in strengthening Venezuela’s counterinsurgency capability in 1967 guaranteed the success of the 1968 presidential election, which in turn closed the book on

⁵⁷² Paul L. Montgomery, “Venezuela: After the Vote, It’s on With Christmas Shopping,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1968, p. E4

the revolution of January 1958. With Caldera's victory, no credible voice could claim that the Venezuelan people sought to shift the political spectrum very far to the left. To the contrary, there was a clear consensus for moderation, and a preference for peaceful and democratic interplay between the opposition and the party in power, rather than for violence and communism. The firmness displayed by Johnson and Leoni in 1967 and 1968 also served to drive a wedge between Castro and many of his longtime supporters in Latin America, if not shatter the Cuban revolution itself. Those guerrillas and revolutionaries who survived the government counteroffensives saw the lie in Radio Havana's message to ignore objective conditions and to simply fight harder. Che Guevara's death at the hands of U.S.-trained rangers in Bolivia only underscored the inapplicability of this message in Venezuela. Chastened, Castro in 1968 was compelled to begin an accommodation with the Soviet leadership he had so often condemned for being too eager to compromise. For better or for worse, this Soviet leadership, in the person of Alexei Kosygin, enshrined the spirit of compromise and accommodation that had prevailed at the Glassboro Summit the previous year. In many ways Johnson and Leoni had carried the standards of their predecessors, who foresaw a new era of mutually beneficial and democratic U.S.-Latin American relations, to final success by alloying their own pragmatism to Kennedy and Betancourt's idealism. Yet the burdens of the journey concluded in 1967 and 1968 had weakened and consumed both themselves and the parties they led. In an earlier era, novelist Joseph Conrad, in *Typhoon*, observed the psychological effect of a long struggle for survival in stormy seas. "There is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and

insidious fatigue,” he said, “that penetrates deep into a man’s breast to cast down and sadden his heart...and of all the gifts of the earth—even before life itself—[he] aspires to peace.”⁵⁷³ For those protagonists and antagonists that survived the gales of 1967 and 1968, there was a great need for peace, a respite before returning to tasks circumscribed by a decade of upheaval and warfare, and to provide the material and psychological conditions that alleviate the suffering and sadness in men’s hearts.

⁵⁷³ Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1926), p. 52.

Conclusion

By March 1969 control of the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership had shifted to parties that had been in the political opposition for much of the previous decade. These opposition parties made it clear that they would chart their own courses in conducting domestic and international affairs. Taking the oath of office on January 20, President Richard M. Nixon looked back on recent history and found the United States “rich in goods, but ragged in spirit.” “We are caught in war, wanting peace” he continued. “We see around us empty lives, wanting fulfillment. We see tasks that need doing, waiting for hands to do them...After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation.”⁵⁷⁴ Twelve years earlier Dwight D. Eisenhower said that the destiny of the United States would remain unfulfilled if it did not bring freedom to those who yearned for it. Eight years earlier John F. Kennedy had signaled the resolve of the United States to bear any burden to bestow the blessings of liberty upon the world, and stand firm against those who would oppose this American mission. Now, Nixon signaled a national desire to step back from this crusade, to find honorable peace and a respite from heavy international burdens. He knew first hand the burdens associated with direct U.S. involvement abroad, having so narrowly survived the anti-American mob in Caracas eleven years earlier. Seeking to resolve war and turmoil abroad, the new president

⁵⁷⁴ First Inaugural Address of Richard Milhous Nixon, January 20, 1969, The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University, (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/nixon1.asp, accessed March 8, 2012).

indicated a desire for allies who could ensure stability, regardless of their commitment toward democracy and human rights.

Copei leader Rafael Caldera, in his March 11, 1969, inaugural address, expressed similar sentiments, signaling an end to what he characterized as an overly idealistic approach to policymaking and an embrace instead of pragmatism and ideological flexibility. He would maintain the economic initiatives shepherded by Raúl Leoni but would move away from the strict anti-communist and anti-authoritarian stance of his predecessor and of the Democratic Action Party (AD). He pledged to continue promoting amnesty for the crippled insurgency and to pursue diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Perhaps most significantly, he declared an end to the Betancourt Doctrine; Venezuela sought engagement with all sister American republics, he said, and a given country's form of governance could not be an impediment in this quest.⁵⁷⁵ The new president, who had been just a child when Betancourt and the Generation of '28 challenged Juan Vicente Gómez, appeared ready to retire that generation's fervent drive for democracy and self-determination in the hemisphere.

The United States and Venezuela had just concluded a major victory in stamping out right-wing and left-wing extremism and intervention, yet Nixon and Caldera seemed to be delivering eulogies for failed foreign and domestic policies. The struggles of the preceding decade had indeed been taxing. Yet these efforts had preserved the privileged position of the United States in the hemisphere, maintained U.S. economic access to

⁵⁷⁵ Paul L. Montgomery, "Caldera, Sworn, Calls on Parties to Join Quest for Progress," March 12, 1969, *New York Times*, p. 18.

Latin America, and saved Venezuela from new forms of despotism threatening to spread across Latin America. Ten years earlier Venezuela, like much of the hemisphere, had been in danger of becoming irreparably radicalized, yet cooperation between Caracas and Washington made Venezuela an island of democratic stability in a turbulent hemispheric and global environment. Caracas and Washington, in other words, had endured the “hottest” period of the hemispheric and global Cold War without fundamentally compromising their ideals. What accounts for the rapidity with which this triumph faded into obscurity?

Perhaps the biggest factor in the historiographical diminution of the U.S.-Venezuelan story is the fact that broader U.S.-Latin American relations entered a darker age beginning in 1969. The tone set by the new U.S. and Venezuelan presidents, combined with subsequent events in certain quarters of the hemisphere, support such conclusions. The bureaucratic authoritarian regime in Brazil took a harder line later in the year and officially outlawed political dissent; a “dirty war” began in the Southern Cone that would reach its zenith in the 1970s. Kennedy’s idealism and overreach from the measured approach of the Eisenhower years, or Johnson’s inability to manage foreign affairs with Kennedy’s vision and skill, some critics charged, left U.S. foreign policy in such disarray that Nixon’s harsh *realpolitik* became necessary. Others suggested that the Latin American right, emboldened by Washington’s linkage of anticommunism and national security, manipulated U.S. support to carry out a reign of terror against center-left political opponents who had only a tenuous connection to international communism. In these views the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership of the late 1950s and 1960s served as

only a slight detour in the overarching trend of U.S. exploitation of Latin America and complicity in the domination by Latin American elites of their own dispossessed masses. These decades become only flickers of light in a gloomy tale that runs from the early nineteenth century to the present day.

This dissertation has neither sought to distract attention from the tragedies in U.S.-Latin American relations prior to 1958 and after 1968, nor does it suggest that this train of tragic interventions and authoritarian abuses does not matter. The dissertation has simply argued that the forces of political moderation in Washington and Caracas helped ensure that despotic and interventionist extremism of an exceptionally dangerous kind failed to gain primacy during the 1958 to 1968 period, and that contemporary hemispheric circumstances made such success difficult if not unlikely. Further, the dissertation has shown that the dynamism and innovations of the second Eisenhower administration, along with the Kennedy, Johnson, Betancourt, and Leoni administrations, allowed for competent handling of perhaps the greatest challenges faced by the United States and regional allies.

In the 1950s and 1960s the hemisphere truly was in danger of being destabilized by far rightist military reaction and left wing export of revolution, by lingering local social inequities, and by the currents of the world communist movement. The leaders at the state and local level in the preceding study cooperated to institutionalize moderation and democracy in the place most threatened by such extremism. Hence, in the time period and arena in which the Cold War was most visibly at play in the hemisphere, the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership could be said to have “won,” to the extent that terms like

“winners” and “losers” have applicability in struggles of such a titanic and complicated scale. This study has clarified the story of how U.S. and Latin American leaders interacted between and among themselves, showing the inadequacy of binaries like “right” and “left,” and indeed even “U.S.” and “Latin American.” At the same time, this dissertation has revealed a crucial case study of the way in which these interactions played out in the most hotly contested forum of the hemispheric Cold War. The dissertation has therefore avoided attempting to rethink the long story of the Cold War in Latin America from 1945 to 1990. Indeed, it seems nearly impossible to say something truly incisive about the totality of such a long chronological period and such a large geographic area. Rather, this inquiry has argued that the story of the Cold War in Latin America in the late 1950s and 1960s needs to be rethought. This decade in Venezuela represented a special moment in a special place in which all of the dominant themes and debates of the hemispheric and global Cold War were in play. The study of this moment and place provides a unique history as well as a window into larger issues.

So, the question arises: “What is to be made of this apparent case of Venezuelan exceptionalism in the otherwise gloomy story of the Cold War in Latin America?” Was the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership a moderate and democratic tip of an iceberg that hides the much larger and more dangerous authoritarian portion floating below the surface? Or, perhaps, was the partnership the democratic heart of the hemispheric body that successfully warded off an especially malignant form of interventionist extremism that sought to corrupt the heart as a means to corrupt the body? This dissertation suggests the latter. Venezuela was the exception that proved the rule of what U.S. and Latin

American democrats were trying to accomplish during a particularly dangerous moment in the hemispheric and global Cold War. The goal of the second Eisenhower administration was to begin the modernization and democratization process in Latin America, a goal that meshed tightly with the agenda of an ascendant cohort of Venezuelan democrats. Such a policy trajectory continued during the Kennedy years. Yet as it became clear that both foreign and domestic extremists viewed control of Venezuela as the linchpin for the control of hemispheric politics, the original U.S. policy of wider modernization and democratization became focused on guaranteeing these outcomes in Venezuela to a degree approaching exclusivity. As the 1960s wore on this narrowing focus became more pronounced, such that the United States and its hemispheric and global antagonists viewed success in Venezuela as the springboard to success in the hemisphere, both because of its geostrategic position and vast natural resources. Venezuela became the heart of the Latin American Cold War, and in the 1960s Washington fought against an array of extremists for control of this heart, rather than of the larger body politic. The tragedy of this story perhaps was that, having saved the heart in the 1958 to 1968 period, U.S. policymakers passively or actively contributed to efforts by various regional allies to corrupt the body through authoritarian repression. Like in so many other U.S. foreign policy episodes, perhaps the war was won only to lose the peace.

As this dissertation has demonstrated, this “war” in which the United States and Venezuela were involved was from 1958 to 1968 featured both profound complexity and unlikely prospects for success. Venezuela was the target of Dominican and Cuban

revolutionary export beginning in the late 1950s, yet it resisted such hostile overtures time after time. Despite sitting atop vast oil wealth, Venezuela's economy was nonetheless in dire straits up to the mid-1960s, which of course was the same time in which the democratic movement in much of Latin America was succumbing to a wave of authoritarian crackdown. Military coups succeeded throughout the hemisphere and installed regimes that lasted for long years and even decades, but in Venezuela such coups failed time and time again. Perhaps Venezuela should have gone the way of its neighbors, but it did not.

The evidence suggests that Venezuela was able to chart its own path because of a deep-seated popular belief in the democratic experiment launched in January 1958, because of the special charisma and vision of a small group of Venezuelan leaders, and because of an intimate embrace between these leaders and the occupants of the White House. Granted, notions such as popular beliefs and charisma and vision are hard to quantify, but they seem to have been tangible and salient during the decade in question. Most Venezuelans determined after Pérez Jiménez's fall that they would never allow another dictatorship. Military coups failed both because they were poorly planned and because of the clear and prompt popular rejection of them when they did abortively occur. Over time the generals realized that they had little choice but to cooperate with the civilian government. On the other hand, though, the commitment of the civilian government to democracy hindered Miraflores in its efforts to end the long leftist insurgency. The popular classes demanded that the government pacify the country, but it would not allow the military to operate unchecked. Up until 1966, government

counterinsurgency efforts were only robust enough to parry the guerrillas' thrusts. As we have seen, the fact that the guerrillas survived meant that they were increasingly emboldened and better trained. As we have seen, too, the strong personalities of the guerrilla leaders were attracted to and encouraged by the even stronger personality of Fidel Castro. But, for most Venezuelans, Castro's charisma was no match for that of Rómulo Betancourt. In the face of ongoing political and economic difficulty, the majority of Venezuelans maintained faith in Betancourt and viewed him as the embodiment of the democratic project began in January 1958.

The successful elections in Venezuela in 1968 sounded the last notes of the insurgency there. There might be popular distrust among Venezuelans of the United States and U.S. motives and ambivalence towards local leaders, but there was little popular embrace of communism and the subservience to Havana or Moscow that went with it. While such sentiments were most conspicuous in Venezuela, they could also be seen in varying degrees throughout Latin America. As Martín, Bravo, Moleiro, and other rebels noted, the working and middling classes of Venezuela felt no special affinity for the governments of the Punto Fijo coalition. At the same time, these classes felt little enthusiasm for communist efforts to push society farther to the left of the political spectrum. After a century and a half under *caudillo* dictators, the popular classes signaled their desire to participate in a representative democracy and inherit their Bolívarian legacy, despite the fits and starts concomitant with such a democratic experiment. Growth-oriented macroeconomic policy often pinched the pocketbooks of non-elites, but most Venezuelans perceived a brighter future within the status quo than

within the fold of the communist movement. By 1968 per capita income was steadily rising, as oil prices rose above the depressed levels of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the nation was continually increasing its control over industries independent of foreign control. Centrist politics paid tangible dividends.

The communists, meanwhile, could never quite articulate the specific contours of their “more democratic” society. In the early 1960s the communists could perhaps credibly claim that they were the champions of true democracy, portraying the Punto Fijo coalition as a cynical power grab and pointing out the Betancourt government’s free use of police to crack down violently on dissent. By the middle of the decade, however, it was impossible for the communists to claim that they, too, did not have the blood of innocent civilians on their hands. By 1965 the Moscow-line Venezuelan Communist Party had officially abandoned the violent struggle. The extremists that remained committed to the struggle against the government vainly hoped that the populace would embrace the notion that a spiraling cycle of bloodshed could somehow lead to an improved society. Like most parties that arise and persist as essentially oppositional entities, they came to define themselves in terms of what they were not, rather than what they had to offer the broader society.

The proliferation of multiple poles of power and systems of political economy continued with dizzying rapidity. The superpowers had long since realized that a preponderance of military might did not translate into political or ideological primacy. Intellectual and rhetorical strength and intensity paid limited dividends, too, as one-time firebrands like Castro found themselves regarded as doctrinaire and out of touch after less

than a decade in power. Actors throughout the developing world accepted, reinterpreted, or discarded various tenets of the capitalist and communist orders at will. At times U.S. and Soviet policymakers reached out to these emerging powers and valorized their philosophical innovations. At times the developing world accepted or rejected the embrace. Quite often, the superpowers found it easier to reach out to one another. So it was in the U.S., Dominican, Cuban, and Soviet competition for Venezuelan loyalties, where categories such as “ally” or “enemy,” “victory” or “defeat,” came to carry multiple shades of meaning. The struggle for freedom among these powers had indeed been precarious, and depending on how one defined freedom before or after entering the fray, each constituency could be said to have achieved it. Some found freedom in the success of a policy or in the adulation of the masses. Some found it in the mind, having never compromised their ideals. Some found it in the long and comfortable sleep of the grave. Some, like one returning from an odyssey, found freedom in having simply survived to come home to friends and loved ones, able to tell the harrowing tale.

Bibliography

ARCHIVES:

Archivo General Nacional, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

National Archives of the United States, College Park, Maryland.

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

PUBLISHED COLLECTIONS:

Blanco Muñoz, Agustín. *La lucha armada: La izquierda revolucionaria surge, Domingo Alberto Rangel, Simón Saez Merída, Celso Fortoul, Jorge Dager, Héctor Pérez Marcano*. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981.

—. *La conspiración civico-militar: Guairazo, Barcelonazo, Carupanazo, y Porteñazo*. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1981.

—. *La lucha armada, hablan seis comandantes: Magoya, Luben Petkoff, Anselmo Natale, Luis Correa, Juan Vicente Cabezas, Alfredo Maneiro*. Caracas: Venezuela Central University-FACES, 1981.

—. *La lucha armada, hablan tres comandantes de la izquierda revolucionaria: Lino Martínez, Moisés Moleiro, Américo Martín*. Caracas: Central University Press, 1982.

Peña, Alfredo. *Conversaciones con Américo Martín*. Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978.

—. *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*. Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978.

Solani, Humberto. *Douglas Bravo Speaks: Interview with the Venezuela Guerrilla Leader*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.

United States. American Presidency Project. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, Volume Three, 1963*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964.

—. Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume V: American Republics*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1991.

—. *Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XII: American Republics, 1961-1963*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996.

—. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume X: Cuba, 1961-1962*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1997.

—. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXXI: South and Central America; Mexico*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2004.

OTHER PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES:

Betancourt, Rómulo. *Posición y doctrina*. Caracas: Editorial Cordillera, 1959.

—. *Acción Democrática: Un partido para hacer historia*. Caracas: Secretaría General del Partido Acción Democrática, 1976.

Castro, Fidel. *Those Who Are Not Revolutionary Fighters Cannot be Called Communists*. New York: Merit Publishers, 1968.

Guevara, Ernesto "Che." *Guerrilla Warfare*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Organization of American States. *OAS Official Records: Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs*. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1960.

—. *Informe que rinde la Comisión del Consejo, constituido provisionalmente en Organó de Consulta en el caso resentado por Venezuela, para dar cumplimiento al Tercer Punto Dispositivo de la Resolución del 8 de Julio de 1960*. San Jose: Organization of American States, 8 August, 1960.

—. *Sixth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Serving as Organ of Consultation in Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Final Act*. Washington, D.C.: The Secretariat of the Organization of American States, 1960.

—. *Ninth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Serving as Organ of Consultation in Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance*. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1964.

United States. Department of State. *The Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 51, No. 1311, August 10, 1964*. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964.

ON-LINE COLLECTIONS:

The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University.

Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room online.

Fordham University Modern History Sourcebook online.

University of Texas Declassified Documents Reference System.

NEWSPAPERS & PRINT MEDIA:

Dallas Morning News.

El Caribe [Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic].

El Nacional [Caracas, Venezuela].

Miami Herald.

Los Angeles Times.

New York Times.

Time Magazine.

Washington Post.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Abente, Diego. "Politics and Policies: The Limits of the Venezuelan Consociational Regime." *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, ed. Donald L. Herman. New York: Praeger Press, 1988.

Alves, María Helena Moreria. *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1985.

- Atkins, G. Pope, and Larman C. Wilson. *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- . *The United States and the Trujillo Regime*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972.
- Bender, Lynn Darrell. *The Politics of Hostility: Castro's Revolution and United States Policy*. Hato Rey: Inter-American University Press, 1975.
- Blight, James G., and Philip Brenner. *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Secret Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Press, 2002.
- Bonsal, Philip W. *Cuba, Castro, and the United States*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971.
- Brands, Hal. *Latin America's Cold War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Typhoon*. New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1926.
- Debray, Régis. *The Long March in Latin America, Guerrilla Movements: Theory and Practice*. Ann Arbor: The Radical Education Project, 1966.
- Eisenhower, Milton S. *The Wine is Bitter: The United States and Latin America*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963.
- Ewell, Judith. *The Indictment of a Dictator: The Extradition and Trial of Marcos Pérez Jiménez*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981.
- Frei Montalva, Eduardo. "The Alliance that Lost Its Way." *Foreign Affairs* (April 1967, Vol. 45 Issue 3).
- Friedman, Max Paul. "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations." *Diplomatic History* (Vol. 27, No. 5 November 2003).
- Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964*. New York: Norton Press, 1997.
- Gall, Norman. "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary, Part II: A New Party." *American Universities Field Staff Reports: East South America Series* (Vol. XVII, No. 9, Aug. 1973).
- Gleijeses, Piero. *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Gray, William H. *Venezuela, Uncle Sam, and OPEC: A Story for All Americans*. Austin: O.E.G. Foundation, 1982.

- Hall, Michael. *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Trujillos*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Jackson, D. Bruce. "Moscow, Havana, and the Venezuelan Communist Movement, 1964-1967." Unpublished Manuscript in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin (1967).
- Kryzanek, Michael J. *U.S.-Latin American Relations*. London: Praeger Publishers, 1996.
- Langley, Lester D. "Cuba: A Perennial Problem in American Foreign Policy." *Forums in History* (1973).
- Leacock, Ruth. *Requiem for Revolution: The United States and Brazil, 1961-1969*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990.
- Lináres, Pedro Pablo. *La lucha armada en Venezuela: apuntes sobre guerra de guerrillas venezolanas en el contexto de la Guerra Fría (1959-1979) y el rescate de los desaparecidos*. Caracas: Ediciones Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2006.
- Liss, Sheldon B. *Diplomacy & Dependency: Venezuela, the United States, and the Americas*. Salisbury: Documentary Publications, 1978.
- Martz, John D. "Venezuela's 'Generation of '28': The Genesis of Political Democracy." *Journal of Inter-American Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 1 Jan. 1964).
- Morley, Morris H. *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Patterson, Thomas G. *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Rabe, Stephen. "The Caribbean Triangle: Betancourt, Castro, and Trujillo and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1958-1963." *Diplomatic History* (Vol. 20 No. 1 Winter 1996).
- . *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- . *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Roorda, Eric Paul. *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Rostow, Walt W. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Sáez Mérida, Simón. *La cara oculta de Rómulo Betancourt: El proyecto invasor de Venezuela por Tropas Norteamericanas*. Caracas: Fondo Editorial Almargen, 1997.

- Salazar-Carrillo, Jorge, and Bernadette West. *Oil and Development in Venezuela During the 20th Century*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004.
- Scheer, Robert, and Maurice Zeitlin. *Cuba: An American Tragedy*. New York: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Skidmore, Thomas E., and Peter H. Smith. *Modern Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Smith, Peter H. *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*. New York: Oxford University, 2008.
- Taubman, William. *Khrushchev: The Man & His Era*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003.
- Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Tugwell, Franklin. *The Politics of Oil in Venezuela*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- Turits, Richard Lee. *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, Trujillo, and Modernity in Dominican History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- United States. Congress. Senate. *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975.
- Valsalice, Luigi. *La guerrilla castrista en Venezuela*. Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1975.
- Venezuela. Oficina Central de Información. *Seis años de agresión*. Caracas: Oficina Central de Información, 1967.
- Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.