

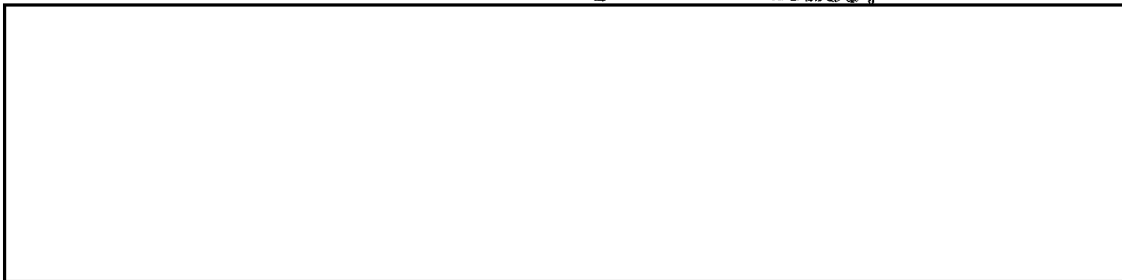
OCI No. 2354/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
16 September 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Terrorism in Venezuela

1. The terrorists in Venezuela--primarily the Communist-dominated Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN)-- have a threefold objective. By weakening public confidence in democratic processes, they hope to reduce popular participation in the national election, which must be held no later than 1 December 1963. Secondly, they hope to provoke the government into strong repressive measures, thereby giving substance to their claim that it is dictatorial. Finally, they believe that the government's inability to control terrorism may tempt military leaders to mount a coup against Betancourt, which the Communists would attempt to exploit to gain influence.



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3. In the face of terrorist efforts to demonstrate the impudence of the government prior to the national elections, the administration is attempting to preserve its popularity and enhance its voter appeal.

4. President Betancourt is ineligible for reelection. The lineup of candidates and parties for the upcoming election to choose his successor has not yet solidified. Parties may change their nominees until one month before the election. Even when the final lineup is known, assessment of election prospects will be difficult because there has been no

State Department review completed



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electoral test of voter trends since Betancourt's 1958 victory. In fact, one-third of the electorate will be comprised of new voters or of old voters who, since 1958, have moved from a rural to an urban environment and whose attitudes may have changed. It is difficult to anticipate the relative influence of such factors as party loyalties, candidate personalities, and campaign issues. Should the three principal anti-Betancourt candidates join forces for the election, the opposition would probably win the election.

5. The attitude of the military probably will continue to be the key to the survival of constitutional government. The possibility of a military coup to prevent the president-elect from taking office cannot be ruled out, although such a move would be likely only in the case of a candidate who accepts the support of the extreme left.

6. Betancourt's domestic policy is to walk a narrow line. He must attempt to contain terrorist activities without exposing his government to the charge that he is using unduly repressive measures. He must be sufficiently forceful in his dealings with the FALN to retain the confidence of the people and the loyalty of the military. Above all, as he sees it, he must conduct a free election late in 1963 and turn the government over to elected civilians in March 1964.

7. The major subversive threat is from the extreme left, from Communist and Castroist forces hoping to reshape Venezuela along the lines of Castro's Cuba. These forces are aligned in the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the FALN, its paramilitary subsidiary. The Castroist groups which participate in the FLN, most notably the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), often initiate terrorist activities

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8. The extremists in Venezuela are resourceful and are ably led but are limited in numbers. The FALN

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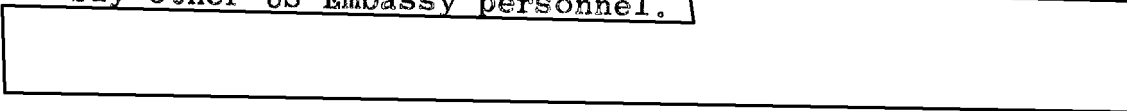
is estimated to have a maximum of 200 terrorists in Caracas and some 300 to 400 members elsewhere in the country, including those in rural-based guerrilla bands. For the most part, members are recruited from among urban youth.

9. In May and June 1963, it was reported that the FALN terrorists had decided to concentrate their attacks against Americans because they felt they were alienating themselves from the masses by attacking Venezuelan targets. Although there have been some attacks on bridges, on gas and oil lines, and on Venezuelan police and military personnel, the majority of the terrorist activities have been against American targets.

10. Betancourt's Democratic Action (AD) party held a meeting on 13 September in observance of its 22nd anniversary. US Ambassador Stewart reports that in an evident effort to disrupt this rally, extremist forces made a major push to intimidate the capital's police. For the first time in several months, they exploded home-made bombs in various parts of the city, strewed tacks downtown to puncture tires, burned cars and carried out hit-and-run shootings.

11. FALN terrorism failed to disrupt the AD rally completely, but attendance was only about half of what had been expected. Police were placed on full alert and a number of suspected terrorists were rounded up, but Caracas continued to be shaken by explosions and gun-fire.

12. FALN spokesmen have several times indicated their intention to kidnap the US Ambassador and possibly other US Embassy personnel.



13. The Venezuelan Government, aware of this serious and embarrassing problem, in July provided personal bodyguards for the US Ambassador and the

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Deputy Chief of Mission. The Ambassador's residence and the Embassy building are guarded by the national security force and municipal police guards, and guards have been assigned to the homes of the political and economic counselors of the Embassy.

14. According to the US ambassador, Venezuelan officials "from the President on down" are well aware of growing public exasperation with terrorism and lawlessness and of unrest this is causing in armed forces. The US Ambassador reports that there have been rumors and speculation in the Caracas press all week about the nature of strong measures the government intends to take in this field. Thus far, however, public announcement has been made only of a plan to search cars and persons for arms and of a project to commission and train 2,700 special policemen for guard duty to release regular forces for patrol.

15. To date, the Venezuelan Government has not met with much success in its attempt to control urban violence and terrorism. This is attributable in large part to the inefficiency of the local police organs and the failure of the courts to mete out swift and adequate punishment. Identified terrorists are known to walk with impunity on the streets of Caracas, and policemen have taken no action to counter some FALN attacks.

16. In August 1963, Betancourt finally established a centralized control of anti-terrorist operations. As a result, a unified police command was superimposed on the several independent Caracas security and police forces.

17. While it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new set-up, it is obviously not the complete answer to the problem of controlling violence in the capital city. Unfortunately, electoral considerations have apparently militated against more positive steps by the President to curb the intensified FALN terrorism. This situation has been of considerable and increasing concern to military circles.

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