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THE OUTLOOK FOR THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

THE PROBLEM

To estimate political prospects in the Dominican Republic in the light of recent developments.

THE ESTIMATE

The Trujillo Regime

1. In our last estimate dealing with the Dominican Republic (SNIE 80/1-59, 29 December 1959, paragraphs 7, 53-60) we stated that the 30-year Trujillo dictatorship was in trouble, but concluded that it probably would remain in power through 1960. Since then anti-Trujillo sentiment has gathered momentum and the regime's prospects have materially declined. We cannot predict the time or the circumstances in which the regime would be likely to come to an end, but this could happen before the end of the year.

2. A notable change in the country's political atmosphere has developed since the wholesale arrests in January, in which members of almost every prominent Dominican family were seized, in many cases with great brutality, and subjected to heavy fines and jail sentences. Drastic action may in fact have been necessary to break what appears to have been an extensive revolutionary conspiracy; precise information as to how far plotting to overthrow Trujillo had proceeded is still lacking. However, the mag-

nitude and severity of the government's crackdown revealed the regime's nervousness, made it more intolerable to leading elements in Dominican society, and alienated the Catholic Church. The latter is now Trujillo's most outspoken opponent inside the country.

3. Continuing arrests and new trials of alleged plotters suggest that public unrest is spreading. Within the armed services, which remain the mainstay of the regime, a few new signs of rivalry and dissension have appeared; six army officers have been imprisoned and an air force officer is the latest in a series of defectors. The arrest of close relatives of high-ranking officers and some terrorist activities directed against individuals in these forces are probably also having an adverse effect on their loyalty to Trujillo.

4. Since our previous estimate, the economic situation has deteriorated further. Business is stagnant, and an increasing number of people are suffering economic hardship. In addition to some flight of private capital, members of the Trujillo family are reported to have made sub-

stantial withdrawals from the national reserve bank—a development which might seriously weaken the government's financial position. Even if these reports prove unfounded or exaggerated, the spread of rumors that such withdrawals were taking place would obviously contribute to a decline in public confidence in the regime.

5. On the other hand, Trujillo himself shows no signs of relinquishing control, and there is no information to indicate that discontent in the military is widespread. The plans of the internal opposition probably have been set back by the regime's repressive measures. The numerous exile groups lack cohesion and effectiveness, despite the encouragement and support given them, not only by Castro, but also by moderate leaders such as Venezuelan President Betancourt. There are deep divisions between pro-Communist and anti-Communist elements within these groups.

The Succession

6. The character of the regime which will eventually succeed Trujillo will depend upon the time and circumstances of Trujillo's departure. In present circumstances, we think it unlikely that Trujillo will be overthrown by a Castro-type invasion or revolution. It is more likely that Trujillo will eventually be forced to leave by the military acting with the encouragement and support of the upper and middle classes and the Church. The longer his departure is delayed, the more explosive the situation is likely to become.

7. Castro has already failed in an attempt to overthrow the Trujillo regime through an invasion by Dominican exiles with

Cuban support. His agrarian reform program has had no appreciable impact on the Dominican peasantry, who remain generally unaware of it. They generally still regard Trujillo as the Benefactor. The upper and middle classes, though increasingly disaffected toward Trujillo, are repelled by the excesses of the Castro regime in Cuba. The military also are repelled by what they have seen happening in Cuba. Thus there is now in the Dominican Republic no important element likely to support a Castro-type invasion or revolution.

8. Nevertheless, tension is rising in the Dominican Republic and the eventual fall of the Trujillo regime will be increasingly anticipated. In such circumstances, persons of property and military officers, apart from Trujillo's personal associates, will become increasingly anxious to effect a change of regime before uncontrollable disorder develops. At the psychological moment in this progression, it would be in accord with Latin American custom for the military to call upon the dictator to depart before the situation got out of hand. In such matters, however, timing is of the essence. A premature move could be fatal. On the other hand, to hesitate too long would permit an uncontrollable situation to develop.

9. If its timing were right, a junta with military, upper and middle class, and Church participation could probably take over the Dominican Republic without serious resistance. Such a junta would probably also take over in the event of Trujillo's flight, natural death, or assassination. Once in power, however, such a regime would face serious difficulties. The fall of the dictatorship would entail

a considerable amount of disorder and confusion. Although its fall would mean liberation to the upper and middle classes, the new regime would not automatically command the support of the urban proletariat and the peasants. Returning exiles, who are generally radical in their political views, would probably seek to incite these elements against a moderate government. Within the government itself, there might be a struggle for power between military and civilian elements. Finally, the Trujillo family has so dominated the Dominican economy that the confusion attendant upon their sudden departure would probably worsen an already bad economic situation.

10. Although Castro is probably incapable of overthrowing the Trujillo dictatorship, the political turmoil which would follow the fall of that dictatorship would afford him opportunities for political intervention in the Dominican Republic. Castro would certainly do all in his power to incite the masses against a moderate regime and to call for a radical revolution on the Cuban model. Unless a moderate Dominican government received prompt support from sympathetic governments of an undoubtedly liberal character (Venezuela, for instance), Castro might emerge as the ultimate victor.

US-Dominican Relations

11. The fall of the Trujillo regime would present new problems in US-Dominican

relations. Even among moderate opposition elements, there is considerable resentment of past US support for and failure to intervene against the Trujillo dictatorship. Furthermore, almost any new regime would feel a need to demonstrate to the Dominican people and to other Caribbean peoples that it was not under US domination. However, a moderate government would also be in desperate need of US assistance. If the US were to render essential aid discreetly, while tolerating occasional demonstrations of Dominican sovereignty, such a government would probably cooperate in fundamental matters. If, on the other hand, a Castro-type government were eventually to come to power, the US would inevitably be presented with problems similar to those it has with Cuba.

12. The Trujillo government has declared that it will not renew its missile tracking station agreement with the US at its expiration in 1961. This may be an attempt to extort US support for the regime in its present difficulties. If Trujillo should fall before the expiration of the agreement, the attitude of a successor regime would depend on the contingencies set forth in paragraphs 10 and 11 above. A moderate government would probably feel obliged to demonstrate Dominican sovereignty, but would also be influenced by its need for US aid. A Castro-type government would probably denounce the tracking station agreement.