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# Intelligence Memorandum

*Status of Insurgency in Venezuela*

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31 October 1968  
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
31 October 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Status of Insurgency in Venezuela

Summary

Active insurgency in Venezuela in the past year has been sporadic and small scale when compared with the high level of leftist activity that preceded the 1963 presidential elections. This is attributable in part to the government's increasingly effective counterinsurgency program as well as to divisions within and between the guerrilla bands. The insurgency effort is further hampered by the present policy of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Venezuela to postpone armed struggle in favor of participating in the political processes through its electoral front, the Union for Advancement. In anticipation that some extremists may attempt to disrupt the general elections to be held in December, the government has increased its security precautions and appears capable of coping with the problem.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Services.

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### The Nature of the Insurgency Movement

1. The insurgency movement in Venezuela is a long-standing effort which has persisted despite the insurgents' inability to seize power, disrupt the economy or political processes, or provoke a military coup. Over the years the insurgents have faced--and survived--government sweeps, internal bickering, logistical problems, and undependable outside support. By surviving, the insurgents have accumulated experience and have demonstrated that they are not to be destroyed easily. Their numbers have been reduced, but they retain a harassment capability and continue to conduct operations in both urban and rural areas.

2. The insurgency movement is split into three separate forces: the dissident Communist Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) under the command of Douglas Bravo Mora; the predominantly hard-line Castroite Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR); and the now dormant guerrilla force of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV).

### The Armed Forces of National Liberation

3. Douglas Bravo, leader of the FALN, or Unified Command FLN/FALN (CUFF) as its members prefer it to be called, is a former PCV politburo member and one of the hard-liners expelled from the Communist Party in July 1966 for refusing to accept the party's decision to de-emphasize armed struggle. Bravo's guerrillas operate in the states of Yaracuy and Falcon, and in the traditional guerrilla areas of Lara, Trujillo, and Portuguesa states. Estimates of the FALN strength vary, with somewhere between 45 and 60 the most probable. There have been recent reports, however, that Bravo's group has become badly split over tactics and that one faction under the command of his chief lieutenant, Luben Petkoff, has agreed to merge with the MIR. Radio Havana has sharply criticized Bravo recently for refusing to engage the enemy directly in urban areas. Petkoff reportedly adopts a more aggressive line, which is

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more to the Cubans' liking. [REDACTED]

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4. Although it is not yet confirmed, there is some evidence that another group of Bravo's followers has deserted him and is operating independently in the west. Despite these internal problems, the Bravo forces have been credited with many recent actions in the west, including attacks on electoral registration boards, bank robberies, and raids on small towns to obtain supplies, including medicines.

#### The Movement of the Revolutionary Left

5. Potentially, the most important of the guerrilla forces is the Castro-supported MIR. It can probably muster a strength of 100-125 hard-core members plus an unknown number of partisans. This force has been painstakingly rebuilt since the virtual wiping out of the terrorist forces in the east in 1964-1965.

6. The MIR maintains a guerrilla force in eastern Venezuela--the Ezequiel Zamora Front with about 50 members located in the El Bachiller Mountains, and the Antonio Jose de Sucre Front of some 75 men operating in the states of Monagas, Sucre, Anzoategui, and Delta Amacuro. There are unconfirmed reports that most of the El Bachiller force moved in September to join with the Antonio Jose de Sucre band. The MIR also has a smaller group of unknown size and composition in the western part of the country.

7. MIR forces operating in the east recently received a large supply of explosives that should enable them to attack bridges, pipelines, transportation routes, and power relay stations--vulnerable targets which have not been exploited in recent months. In addition, it appears that as a result of the government's recent amnesty of political prisoners, several former members may soon be able to rejoin the MIR band. Others who have

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been abroad for guerrilla training may even now be in transit to Venezuela.

8. Like the Communist Party, the MIR has one faction that favors armed struggle and another that sees greater gains in peaceful participation in elections. Moises Moliero, the secretary general of the MIR, recently published an article in the MIR organ Izquierda calling for participation under certain conditions in the general elections to be held in December. Moliero's article, reportedly written at the urging of the Communist Party, is a departure from traditional MIR policy and may well signal yet another dispute in a leadership long troubled by internal strife.

#### The Communist Party's Attitude toward the Elections

9. Communist Party policy at the moment is to avoid all types of subversion and terrorism prior to the elections. The guerrilla forces of the party, consisting of a nucleus of some 30 men, are reportedly at present concentrating on organizing and building for future operations. In line with this policy, party leaders have sought as far as possible to prevent the MIR and the FALN from initiating actions that would provoke government repression and undercut the party's electoral front, the Union for Advancement (UPA). In the event of a military golpe or a breakdown in civil order, however, the Communist Party would quickly abandon its pacific role and attempt to be in the vanguard of the protesters.

10. Although the official position of the Communist Party is the temporary abandonment of violence as a road to power, the clandestine wing of the party, the Metropolitan Military Commission (MMC), is working as in the past on an elaborate contingency plan for insurrection in Caracas and is attempting to organize cells throughout the city. The actual organization work, however, is proceeding slowly, and apparently no action cells have been formed in Caracas. Most of the planning is on paper and the members of the MMC seem to be resigned to the fact that it will still be on paper at the end of the year. Although MMC members have specific

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authority and instructions from the party leadership, they are getting little support from party leaders and cadres, who are concentrating their efforts on the UPA and preparations for the elections.

11. If the party decided to abandon its pacific policy, it could probably count on a fairly large number of men who are already trained and experienced in guerrilla tactics. The Simon Bolivar Front in the west is still technically in existence, but it is not presently organized as a fighting unit and reportedly suffered major losses in a recent government raid. The Manuel Ponte Rodriguez Front in the east is also engaged only in training and organizational activities. Its membership is believed to be about 70 men.

12. The capabilities of the PCV for violence are fairly high in terms of its ability to harass and create a problem for the government, but relatively low from the strategic standpoint. The guerrillas in the field are armed and could ambush army units and attack small towns, but they would probably suffer high losses in the process. Recent amnesties have released many capable, trained guerrillas and terrorists who could contribute greatly to the launching of organized violence should the PCV decide that the time is ripe.

#### Government Counterinsurgency Capabilities and Problems

13. Against this array of guerrilla forces, the government has fielded 13 battalions of specialized and heavily armed antiguerrilla troops supported by Bell 47G and Alouette 111 helicopters.

14. Although the majority of the population supports the federal government, a historical antipathy of mountain people to any government has been exploited in some areas by the guerrillas. This is especially true in the east, where a reduction of the labor force by the oil companies in 1968 has caused an economic slowdown that the government has been unable to reverse.

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15. In Falcon State, the FALN has made extensive use of Douglas Bravo's family ties to gain logistical support and information. In Yaracuy State, long disregarded by the government, the Communists were able to build a series of rest areas and to gain the support of the residents.

16. In an effort to counter this situation, the government through its military civic action program has engaged in basic development projects in rural areas, including the construction by Army engineers of access roads, schools, and buildings. In addition, the army and national guard provide medical and dental facilities in rural towns and settlements.

17. The general effectiveness of the government's counterinsurgency campaign and the present disarray in subversive groups make it unlikely that the subversive forces will be able to carry out more than token harassment of the elections.

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# VENEZUELA: Areas of Insurgent Activity

