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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

Assessment of the Internal Security Threat in Latin America

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
13 October 1969

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Assessment of the Internal Security
Threat in Latin America

1. Much of Latin America is experiencing growing social unrest generated by strong pressures for change, and the internal security problem must be seen in this context. Student, labor, church, and other groups are becoming increasingly active proponents of early and profound change, but governments remain limited in their ability to find solutions to the complex problems. In many countries, such as Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, and Brazil, extremists of various shades including Communist parties and splinter groups are seeking to exploit this unrest by carrying out campaigns of propaganda, agitation, and, in some instances, open violence. In some countries (e.g., Guatemala, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela) the extreme leftists have resorted to rural guerrilla operations or urban terrorism or both to achieve their objectives. Although the strength of the various elements that make up the far left is not in itself sufficient to allow them to seize power by force, their efforts, combined with other factors such as large-scale protest demonstrations and strikes, could exacerbate the instability prevailing in some countries.

Cuba and Revolution

2. Cuba continues to encourage local revolutionaries in the Hemisphere and to provide support in the form of propaganda, training, and funds. But the evidence is that Castro, since the Che Guevara debacle in Bolivia two years ago, has been placing less emphasis on the "export of the revolution" and

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has become much more selective in the allocation of resources for insurgency in Latin America. Cuban training of guerrillas and propaganda support, for example, have thus been reduced during the past year or so. Castro has reportedly urged local insurgents to become more self-sustaining and he is prepared to provide substantial assistance to revolutionaries only if they show strong potential for achieving success.

3. Castro has, therefore, not renounced the policy of armed revolution. Cuban aid does continue to flow in moderate amounts to insurgents in Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Castro's de-emphasis on the export of the revolution may be due to his preoccupation with domestic matters as well as to his at least temporary disillusionment with guerrilla methods.

The Soviet Union and Communist China

4. Another reason for Castro's modifying his tactics probably is pressure from the Soviet Union, which has cautioned Havana to exercise more discretion in promoting revolution in the Western Hemisphere. Moscow is anxious to avoid being tied in with misguided revolutionary undertakings doomed to failure and exposure that would interfere with its present, so far successful, campaign to expand diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relations with Latin America. Soviet officials are not above diverting blame for such adventures on the Chinese when they do occur. The Soviet Union has also sought to have Cuban-supported groups cooperate with the more orthodox Communist parties in the Hemisphere, but Castro's earlier stress on armed revolution makes such efforts difficult. The Soviets are pursuing normal relations with Latin America, but this is not to say that the Soviet Union is necessarily opposed to violent revolution there. Moscow's view is that nonviolent methods of subversion should be pursued, with violence to be used only when circumstances warrant. Soviet diplomatic missions continue to provide useful bases for Soviet espionage and subversion and channels of communication to local Communist parties. (There are approximately 3,000

Soviet advisers in Cuba; virtually all are engaged in technical assistance and advisory roles and only a handful are involved even indirectly in insurgency programs.)

5. Peking had provided minor support, particularly training, to small groups several years ago, but even this aid has dwindled sharply during the past year or two and is now insignificant. The Chinese support that still persists consists largely of propaganda and is confined almost completely to a few splinter groups in Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. Cuba has shown little interest in collaborating with pro-Chinese extremists in the Hemisphere, but individual wrought-up revolutionaries trained in China have gravitated toward the more active and serious pro-Cuban groups rather than the ineffective pro-Peking local ones.

6. Where extremists have important impact is in the realm of ideas falling on fallow ground. Che's "martyrdom," Chinese extremism, and Ho Chi Minh's prestige, all offer an appeal attractive to the radical youth of the Hemisphere's ghettos. And in many cases this is without organic ties to Peking or Havana, without outside funds or arms, and without the terrorists ever having dealt with external Communist subversive forces of any description.

Insurgency

7. Guerrilla movements have been formed from time to time in a number of countries and still exist in Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, and Guatemala. The main threat that they present today is that of further unsettling already somewhat unstable societies and draining away scarce national resources into resulting counterinsurgency efforts, plus the occasional increase in terrorism that may result (e.g., Guatemala last year and Venezuela). Over the past few years local security forces have developed increased capability for responding to insurgency as evidenced by the successful antiguerrilla campaigns of recent years, for example, in Bolivia and Peru. There seems, therefore, to be little likelihood of a successful rural-based revolution for the foreseeable future. In a few

politically fragile countries, notably the Dominican Republic and Haiti, a small but well organized guerrilla movement might become a serious threat indeed, but none exists now.

Urban Terrorism

8. Urban terrorism in Latin America has been on the rise in the past year or so. It is a symptom as well as a cause of the political difficulties facing many countries. Events such as the kidnaping of Ambassador Elbrick in Brazil last month probably will inspire others to consider similar dramatic incidents. Terrorists want to polarize further the struggle between government and opposition forces. Others may hope to gain publicity, lift the morale of a sagging revolutionary movement, and make a propaganda impact on the establishment. Still others have different motives such as to release political prisoners, to embarrass an already unpopular regime like those in Brazil or Argentina. Nationalism with the obvious anti-US cast is also rising steadily throughout Latin America and is another factor that could well give impetus to further terrorist attacks against US or other foreign representatives.

9. Although security forces in most countries appear able to prevent terrorism from becoming widespread, conditions could change if public discontent in a given country should reach major proportions. In all cases, the total number of people involved in the terrorism is relatively small. It is also a leftist tactic to exaggerate their numbers and increase the propaganda return by frequent changes of group names and manifestos.

10. Communist and other extreme leftist groups have been unsuccessful in overcoming their deep differences and expanding their generally small memberships. The far left is badly fragmented--most countries have two or three rival Communist parties. Some factions have at best only several hundred active members and some as few as 50-100, whereas in Brazil membership reaches 30,000.

11. In the long run politically motivated violence in the cities seems likely to increase until governments find solutions to some of the underlying social and political problems contributing to public unrest. Violence, however, has long been commonplace in most of the Hemisphere. When combined with other opposition forces, leftist groups might play a key political role by using this tool of political action.

12. In most countries the extreme left, composed as it is of disparate groups, will remain a troublesome problem, but more as a source of agitation and pressure than an immediate threat to any government. Only in Chile does there seem to be a possibility that extreme leftist groups might come to power through elections in the near future. This would depend on whether various groups including Socialists and Communists could form a successful coalition for the September 1970 presidential election. A few individuals on the far left, however, stand to gain prominence in those countries in which very nationalistic governments have been installed, such as in Peru. By parading their irresponsible ultranationalism some extreme leftists, including Communists, may gain in personal influence and publicity without altering the situation profoundly. The degree to which Communists and other leftists succeed in increasing their influence in Latin America will depend more on their ability to exploit local issues and nationalist sentiment than on Cuban or Soviet actions.

Conclusions

13. There are strong forces of change in Latin America that will probably become even more intense. In the long run pressures by the rapidly growing populations, particularly in the cities, will lead to serious disruptions by extremist groups of varying persuasion. In reaction to the unrest and disorders military leaders will continue to exert control over governments in a number of countries and be prepared to impose their authority in others if conditions become too unsettled. Authoritarian regimes may in turn lead to further rebellious actions by segments

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of the population. Nationalism will contribute to this general unrest, with US interests suffering the brunt of much of the ultranationalistic outbreak. Elements of the extreme left will seek to ride the wave of nationalism but, except possibly in Chile, they are unlikely to develop sufficient strength to play the dominant role in the immediate future.

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