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SNIE 83.4-63
Advance Copy of the Estimate
6 March 1963

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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

SECURITY CONDITIONS IN COSTA RICA

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Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and NSA.

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 6 March 1963. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

6 March 1963

SUBJECT: SNIE 83.4-63: SECURITY CONDITIONS IN COSTA RICA

THE PROBLEM

To assess security conditions in Costa Rica with particular reference to the possibility of incidents which would endanger or embarrass President Kennedy during his impending visit (18-20 March).

SUMMARY

President Kennedy's visit to Costa Rica is likely to prove a great popular success, and it is highly unlikely that there will be any sizable demonstration directed against him. Should a large-scale disorder occur, however, the security forces of Costa Rica probably would be unable to handle it.

No guarantee can be given against the possibility of an act of violence by some fanatical individual or small group. An unconfirmed report of a plot by Castroist terrorists to assassinate President Kennedy in Costa Rica is under investigation by Costa Rican and US security

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agencies. There may be attempts at violence against Presidents Somoza of Nicaragua or Ydigoras of Guatemala in Costa Rica, and it is possible that President Kennedy might be endangered in such disorders.

THE ESTIMATE

I. THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE

1. The political situation in Costa Rica is relatively stable. The government of President Orlich, elected in 1962, has considerable public support, and there is presently no serious challenge to its right to retain office until the end of its constitutional term. The Costa Ricans take great pride in their traditions of orderliness and rule by law. The vast majority of the population, students included, is pro-US and anti-Communist in outlook. There is a spontaneous feeling of strong friendship for President Kennedy and of national pride in his impending visit.

2. The only source of organized opposition in Costa Rica to President Kennedy's visit is the small Communist Party -- the Popular Vanguard Party (PVP) -- and its front groups.^{1/} The PVP has an estimated membership of 370. It would have great difficulty in marshalling significant support

^{1/} The PVP has assets among labor, youth, teacher, and women's groups and also controls the leadership of the Popular Democratic Action Party, which has one deputy in the legislative assembly.

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for an anti-Kennedy demonstration. The PVP was outlawed in 1948, but the generally peaceful activities which it pursued until 1962 were tolerated by successive administrations in Costa Rica. During the past year, with support from Cuba and the USSR in the form of training, funds, and arms, an element in the party has advocated a more activist policy and attempted a few acts of violence. This new course led to a government crackdown against the party's political and propaganda activities and to a mobilization of strong anti-Communist sentiment among the population. However, a small number of trained terrorists might attempt an act of violence against President Kennedy during his visit.

3. Security conditions in Costa Rica during President Kennedy's visit will be complicated by the presence of the Presidents of the other four Central American Republics and Panama. Costa Rican university students are strongly opposed to Presidents Somoza of Nicaragua and Ydigoras of Guatemala and to a lesser extent to President Rivera of El Salvador. Demonstrations of protest against them may be attempted with or without Communist complicity. More importantly, there is in Costa Rica a large colony of anti-Somoza Nicaraguan exiles, some of whom are Communists or under strong Castroist influence. There is a danger from this source, not only of demonstrations of protest, but also of armed violence directed against Somoza and his party. Anti-Ydigoras Guatemalans in Costa Rica also are a possible source of disorders. Demonstrations by exiles directed against the Presidents of El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama are

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not likely. Panamanians in Costa Rica are likely to take advantage of President Kennedy's presence to call attention to Panama's claims with respect to the Canal and may obtain support from other Central Americans, but significant anti-US demonstrations on this score are unlikely.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT TOWARD THE VISIT

4. The Costa Rican Government is dedicated to the success of the visit and will attempt to forestall incidents which might prove embarrassing or dangerous to President Kennedy or to any of the other Presidents. It is planning to launch a "pride campaign" which will emphasize that the dignity of the nation calls for the suppression of particularist grievances during the course of the visit. President Orlich also can be counted on to put pressure on exile groups, which are considerably dependent upon the toleration of the government of Costa Rica, to refrain from disorderly actions. An effort will be made to limit the number of foreigners admitted to Costa Rica during the period of the visit. If so requested by the US, the Costa Rican Government probably would arrange for the temporary detention of known PVP leaders, key exiles, and suspected terrorists.

5. Costa Rica has no army. The capabilities of the civil security forces are limited. These forces normally have a strength of some 2,700 men,^{2/} about two-thirds of whom will be deployed in San Jose during the

^{2/} The security forces consist of a civil guard of approximately 1,500, a fiscal or border guard of some 500, a provincial police force of 500, a traffic police detail of 120, and a small directorate of detectives.

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visit. The security forces are inadequately trained and equipped and their leadership is inexperienced, largely because of the extensive turnover in officers which followed the change in political administration in May 1962. The officers are reliable politically and are disposed to cooperate with US advisers. The civil guard is now receiving from the US supplies of sophisticated communications and riot control equipment, but has had almost no experience in their use.

6. The current infusion of US advice and specialized equipment should improve the capabilities of the Costa Rican security forces. Nevertheless, they will be heavily taxed merely to keep order among the large crowds that will turn out for the visit. They probably would also be able to contain scattered small-scale demonstrations. However, they probably would not be able to handle a large-scale disorder, in the unlikely event that one should occur. They would probably not be able to give efficient support to US security agents in the event of attempted violence against President Kennedy. Furthermore, the security situation is likely to be complicated by the presence of security details from the other visitor countries, whose reactions in an emergency might endanger President Kennedy.

III. PROSPECTS

7. US capabilities are good for providing warning of hostile actions involving the general membership of the PVP. The PVP has launched various

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propaganda efforts directed against President Kennedy, but so far has apparently not adopted an overall strategy with respect to the use of violence during the visit.

8. US capabilities are limited for providing warning of hostile actions by any Castroist or other extremist elements who might act in Costa Rica without the cooperation of the PVP. We have an unconfirmed report from a Cuban refugee source that 10 men were being trained in Cuba in early February to assassinate President Kennedy. We have been informed that 10 Costa Ricans arrived in San Jose on 19 February from Havana via Mexico City and Managua; the Costa Rican Government has undertaken to detain and interrogate them.

9. Combined US and Nicaraguan capabilities for providing information on the plans of anti-Somoza Nicaraguans in Costa Rica are good. There is unconfirmed information that there is a plot to assassinate Somoza in Costa Rica. US capabilities for providing warning of plotting by anti-Ydigoras Guatemalans in Costa Rica are more limited, but there is a good chance that any elaborate plan would be uncovered in advance.

10. In short, we think it highly unlikely that President Kennedy will be embarrassed or endangered by any sizable demonstration against him at San Jose. On the contrary, it is likely that his visit will prove to be a great popular success. However, no guarantee can ever be given against the possibility of an act of violence by some fanatical individual or small group.

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