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Instability and the Insurgency Threat in the Dominican Republic

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

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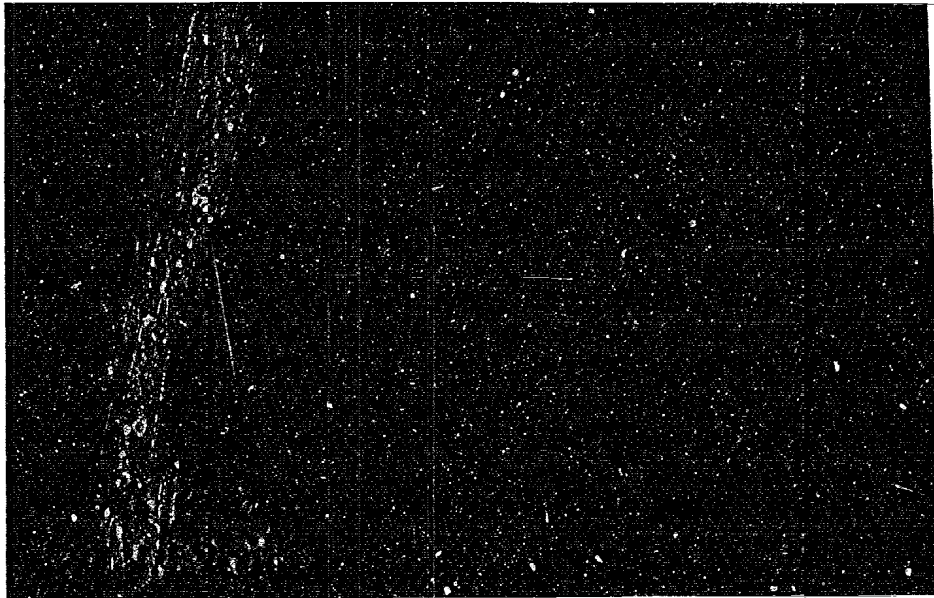
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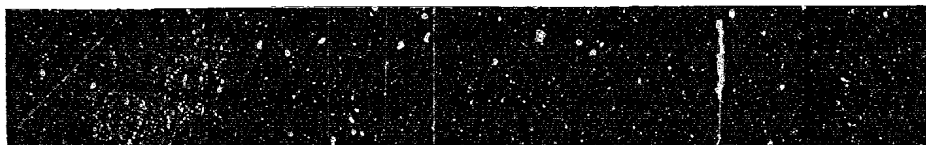
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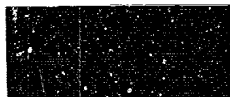
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Instability and the Insurgency Threat in the Dominican Republic

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INSTABILITY AND THE INSURGENCY THREAT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

CONCLUSION

We believe that the security forces of the Dominican Republic can control any subversive activities likely to occur during the next few months. Nevertheless, leftist leaders probably can increase hit-and-run terrorism in urban areas and, over time, may be able to resume guerrilla activity in the mountains. If they show ability to sustain such operations, Castro will probably supply them clandestinely with small amounts of material aid, and they may attract the support of other Dominican elements, including erstwhile moderates. Thus, over the longer run, the insurgency danger could increase, perhaps sharply. This development would be facilitated if the regime failed to show progress in meeting demands for restoration of political freedoms and for social and economic reforms.

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DISCUSSION

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Dominican Republic¹ is one of the Latin American countries least prepared for representative government. Its past has been characterized by a succession of foreign occupations, coups, and despotic administrations. In particular, the thirty years of Trujillo's dictatorship, ended only by his assassination in 1961, warped the political and economic framework of the country. Over the years, many Dominicans have come to doubt that they can accomplish anything by themselves; there are few who have the experience, honesty, and backbone to play effective roles as government leaders.

2. Along with this unfortunate political legacy, Trujillo left an economic jumble of major proportions. His economic policies were designed primarily to funnel funds into the coffers of the Trujillo family. As a result, most of the enterprises now operating in the Dominican Republic are unsound, having inefficient administrative structures and swollen payrolls. The Haina sugar complex, the Dominican Republic's most important producer for export, is a case in point. Moreover, some of the country's best land—formerly Trujillo-owned—is still lying fallow.

3. None of the governments which have ruled since Trujillo's death—including the Bosch administration which held power from February to late September of 1963—made appreciable progress toward solution of the country's political and economic difficulties. Although Bosch began with a strong popular mandate, he did not consolidate his electoral victory by decisive and constructive action. On the one hand, he failed to attract the cooperation of influential opposition elements in the business community, among the large property owners, in the military and church hierarchies; on the other hand, he failed to organize his mass popular following into an effective supporting political force. Bosch reacted vigorously against Communists and Castroists only when he thought they posed direct challenges to his own position. His refusal to adopt a strong anti-Communist posture left him vulnerable to rightist pressure for his removal. For many of those working for his overthrow, the Communist issue was the excuse; their own self-interest was the motive.

¹The Dominican Republic, with some 18,800 square miles, has about the area of New Hampshire and Vermont combined. About 50 percent of the land is arable and the ratio of population to land is favorable. The population of about 3.3 million is 13 percent white, 67 percent mulatto, and 20 percent negro; 64 percent of the adult population is literate. The economy remains underdeveloped (GNP: US\$780 million, \$236 per capita) and heavily dependent upon exports of sugar, coffee, and cocoa.

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4. The extreme leftists waited for the dust to settle after Bosch's overthrow before undertaking a campaign of violent opposition. This began in November and has consisted of a number of scare-bombings in the cities and the establishment, for a brief time, of several small guerrilla units in the mountains.

II. THE PRESENT REGIME

5. The military coup of 25 September was incited by anti-Bosch politicians and carried out by the top-level of the Dominican officer corps. The key military leaders² were strongly anti-Communist and inclined to believe that reformers and moderate leftists were actually Communists. The coup provoked surprisingly little popular reaction.

6. Upon assuming control, the military leaders called in the heads of six minority parties, only one of which has a significant popular following.³ In consultation with these party chiefs, the military leaders named a triumvirate of respected, basically apolitical men to head a provisional regime.⁴ The military leaders then invited each of the six participating political parties to name one or more of the members of the new cabinet—a process which produced a very mixed bag of ministers in terms of competence, honesty, and political judgment. The other parties, including Bosch's Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD)—which had polled some 60 percent of the votes in the December 1962 elections—have been given no role or representation in the present government. Bosch himself, and some other leaders of the moderate left, as well as a number of extreme leftists, have been deported and his party has been the object of official harassment.

7. The present regime has developed no clearly defined program to ease the country's basic economic problems—widespread poverty, low productivity, and growing unemployment. The triumvirate has, how-

²Secretary of state for armed forces, Maj. Gen. Victor Vinas Roman; chief of staff of the army, Brig. Gen. Renato Hungria Morell; chief of staff of the navy, Commodore J. A. Rib Santamaria; chief of staff of the air force, Brig. Gen. Miguel A. Luna; chief of staff of the armed forces training center, Brig. Gen. Elias Wessin y Wessin, and chief of the national police, Brig. Gen. Bellisario Peguero.

³Five of the six parties are to the right of center; the conservative National Civic Union (UCN), the only one with much popular support, obtained some 30 percent of the vote in the December 1962 elections.

⁴Dr. Emilio De Los Santos, a 60-year-old lawyer and former President of the Central Elections Board was named presiding officer of the triumvirate. Manuel Enrique Tavares Espailat, a 39-year-old US-educated engineer and former Director of the Dominican Industrial Development Corporation, is noted for his pro-US attitude; he is the member of the triumvirate concerned particularly with economic matters. Ramon Tapia Espinal is a 37-year-old lawyer who served as secretary of the Presidency of the Council of State government and at one time assisted in the organization of the UCN party. He has the reputation of being highly emotional though fairly intelligent.

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ever, made sensible policy statements and has undertaken some constructive measures, along with many dictated by expediency.

8. In the political field, the regime has taken a strong anti-Communist and anti-Castroist position and has acted to curb Communist and other extreme leftist activities. Under much pressure, internal and external, to hold elections soon, it has announced a five-phase scheme which would begin with several limited local elections and put off national congressional and presidential elections until mid-1965. Government spokesmen claim that the plan would provide "do-it-yourself" training for the populace in democratic procedures; the earthier motivation seems to be the opportunity it might afford for parties participating in the regime to improve their machinery and expand their following. It would be likely, however, to have an unsettling impact on the general political situation; beginning with the campaigning for the elections at the lowest local level in the fall of 1964, there would be voting every two or three months—and electioneering almost constantly—until the summer of 1965.

9. US recognition had a bolstering effect for the triumvirate, but its situation is still a very difficult one. The triumvirate has no independent base of support, is unable to exercise effective control over the actions of the military and police, and is subject to pressure from many sides. The Dominican military leaders retain the power to remove it at any time. Moreover, the triumvirate has been under fire from the extreme right as well as from the left, the ultrarightists accusing it, among other things, of failing to act vigorously enough to expel "Communists" from official positions.

10. Under these circumstances, De Los Santos, the triumvirate's presiding officer, became increasingly restive; he resigned when the military—against his strong urgings, but apparently with the approval of the other triumvirate members—used what he regarded as extreme brutality in dealing with a group of leftist insurgents. The governmental crisis provoked by his resignation was met by reconstituting the triumvirate with Donald J. Reid Cabral, the secretary of state for foreign affairs, as the new member.

11. The revised triumvirate has made a number of changes in the cabinet, narrowing its base essentially to two conservative parties (the UCN and the Dominican Revolutionary Vanguard). This will probably reduce political cross-currents within the cabinet and thus make it somewhat easier to work with; however, the new appointments and the shuffle of ministerial posts appear unlikely to bring any significant

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improvement in competence. The other four of the original six "in" parties, seeing their position and influence undermined, have shifted into opposition.

12. It now appears that the triumvirate, with the support of certain key military figures, is moving to displace the chiefs of staff of the three military services. Commodore Federico Betances Pierret has already replaced Commodore Rib as chief of staff of the navy. The primary target, however, is the air force chief of staff, Brigadier General Luna, who may try to resist. There is some danger that these developments may precipitate an open power struggle within the military leadership.

III. LEFTIST SUBVERSION AND INSURGENCY

13. The 14th of June Political Group (APCJ) is the most potent of the organizations of the extreme left.⁶ Its members and supporters probably number several thousand; this contrasts with the Communist-Castroist Dominican Popular Movement (MPD) and the regular Dominican Communist Party, which command the support of no more than a few hundred. The APCJ benefits from its role as a non-partisan underground group which fought against Trujillo. Ever since the extreme leftists gained control of the group in 1961, after Trujillo's death, it has planned for eventual subversive and guerrilla action. Since its resort to active insurgency, it has been outlawed by the government.

14. The APCJ has been the dominant force behind the guerrilla effort in the countryside as well as the frequent but ineffective bombings in the cities. A few members of the MPD have also been directly involved and others may have assisted in procuring weapons. Some of the captured insurgents have denied any Communist allegiance and insisted they were fighting simply for a return to constitutional government.

15. The total number of active guerrilla fighters was about 200, organized into six small groups in various mountainous areas of the country.⁷ The groups were not well prepared for any serious fighting and did not take any offensive action. They apparently hoped they could quickly attract significant support from other disaffected civilian and military elements. This was not the case. The government's

⁶The other parties of the extreme left are the orthodox Communist *Partido Socialista Popular Dominicano* (PSPD); the heterodox Communist *Partido Nacionalista Revolucionario* (PNR); and the Communist-dominated, pro-Castro *Movimiento Popular Dominicano* (MPD). Other, comparatively moderate, leftist parties are Bosch's *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD) and the bitterly anti-Bosch *Partido Revolucionario Social Cristiano* (PRSC).

⁷As in Cuba, the terrain is favorable for guerrilla warfare. See map.

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security forces have managed to mop up almost all of them and to scatter the others. Manuel Tavares Justo, the principal APCJ leader, and several other key APCJ figures have been killed.

16. The guerrilla effort followed the Castro model. A few APCJ members had earlier received guerrilla warfare training in Cuba. Havana press and radio were quick to provide propaganda support to the "insurrection" and to quote the APCJ's claims about its scope. We have no firm evidence that the Castro regime has, as yet, furnished material support to the Dominican insurgents, but Castro would probably supply them clandestinely with small amounts of such aid if they appeared capable of sustaining a program of violent opposition. The short distance involved—less than 200 miles from eastern Cuba to the western part of the Dominican Republic—would facilitate clandestine supply operations by small boat or by aircraft.

IV. SECURITY FORCES

17. The Dominican Republic's security forces are considerably more able and better equipped than is typically the case for a small Latin American country. Total strength of the military and security forces is 28,100: 10,500 in the army, 1,700 in the armed forces training center (which has the armor), 3,700 in the air force, 3,100 in the navy, and 9,100 in the national police. The army has three counterinsurgency-trained battalions, and the air force has two counterguerrilla security squadrons. Dominican personnel have received specialized counterinsurgency training from US instructors, and the national police has expanded its program of training for riot control. Key weaknesses affecting the overall capability of the Dominican military are insufficient field training and inadequate communications and transportation equipment.

18. The amount of subversion and insurgency the Dominican security forces have had to deal with to date has not provided a major test of their capabilities, but they have been effective in such fighting as has occurred. We believe that they will be able to cope with any insurgency likely to arise, unless it should be extensively supported from outside or combined with widespread civil disturbances.

V. THE OUTLOOK

19. For the immediate future at least, the leftists pose no serious threat to seize control. The present regime, in one form or another, may be able to hold on to power for an indefinite period. If this does not prove to be the case, the most likely alternative would be an extreme rightist government established through a direct military takeover. This might take place if the triumvirate resigned under pressure; it might come about as a military response to charges by ultrarightists

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that the present administration is soft on communism; it might occur through an increase in friction among the leading military men and a decision by one or more to take full control. The resulting new government would be even less likely than the present one to fulfill domestic demands for reform.

20. In any case, the extreme leftists will probably concentrate for the time being on trying to increase terrorism in urban areas, hoping gradually to build a new capability for guerrilla actions at a later date. Much of their support comes from the youth in the cities. They could almost certainly step up their bombing program; they might also undertake occasional shooting affrays, acts of arson, and other destructive measures. They may be able to attract additional Dominican supporters by exploiting a martyrdom issue; the belief has become widespread that the military, in one of its mop-up operations, murdered insurgents who had surrendered.

21. Perhaps the leftists' strongest card is the instability of the present regime and the magnitude of the problems that face it. These include the difficulty such a regime is likely to have in convincing the populace that it intends to undertake constructive social and economic programs and to provide for an eventual return to representative government. Some friction is probable among top-level military officers, along with a gradual increase in restiveness on the part of middle-ranking and junior officers. If official harassment of the PRD and other opposition parties continues, there will almost certainly be a tendency for some of the moderate civilian opponents of the regime to shift to a sharper opposition role. The extreme leftists' program of violent resistance might attract such erstwhile moderates. Thus, over the longer run, the present limited threat of insurgency could increase sharply.

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