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INSURGENCY AND COUNTER INSURGENCY
IN DEMOCRATIC VENEZUELA (1959-1964)

by

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Abstract of

INSURGENCY AND COUNTER INSURGENCY
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Venezuela was a weak but developing Latin American country with a typical background of previous dictatorships when democratic President Romulo Betancourt was inaugurated in February, 1959. Both right-wing factions and the radical left, supported by Fidel Castro from Cuba, sought to thwart the continuation of democratic processes in Venezuela. The main threat was from the Communists, who had selected Venezuela as their number one target in Latin America. Urban terrorism and rural guerrilla activities, nurtured by socio-economic conditions upon which Communism thrives, were a "way-of-life" during Betancourt's term of office. Nevertheless, the democratic government survived in the face of a determined Communist threat and made substantial progress in social and economic reforms.

This paper focuses on the attempts to unseat Betancourt and analyzes the Communist strategy and tactics, particularly their use of terrorism. The conclusions are that the Communists can mount an extremely dangerous internal threat especially against governments recently converted to democratic procedures, and that the presence of Cuba in the Western Hemisphere presents a grave new

dimension to this threat. The government must gain the active support of the people and demonstrate to them and to the armed forces its ability and will to counter the threat without resorting to police-state methods.

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INTRODUCTION

At noon on 11 March 1964, the presidential sash of Venezuela was bestowed upon Raul Leoni. In a short ceremony that included the transfer of the key to the tomb of Simon Bolivar, Romulo Betancourt ended his five year constitutional term and passed on the authority of his office to his successor.

For the first time in that country's history one duly elected president was succeeded by another duly elected president. Appraised against the background of Latin America as a whole, this simple act was one of major significance in contemporary Latin American politics. The transfer of power represented a victory for democratic processes of government and a defeat for dictatorship and international communism under the influence of Castro-Cuba.¹

The achievement of this political goal was by no means an easy task. Both right wing elements and the radical left sought the overthrow of the democratic government. Military revolts, rural guerrilla activities, and a massive communist terrorist campaign were some of the problems faced by President Betancourt. These problems

¹John D. Martz, Accion Democratica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 366.

were nurtured by gross economic imbalance, social upheavals, political strife, and the trials and stresses of socio-economic development.

The whole orientation of the Betancourt regime was toward establishing a firm base for political democracy in Venezuela. It was especially important that he succeed because of the concurrent rise of communist Cuba. There is no doubt that the rivalry between the Cuban totalitarian revolution and the Venezuelan democratic revolution will have a profound effect on the future of the whole of Latin America. Leaders of governments, political parties, labor movements, and business communities are carefully watching the results achieved by these two states with fundamentally opposed ideologies.²

Essentially, Betancourt set out to accomplish three goals: first, he wanted to make sufficient progress in the economic, social and educational fields to convince the people of the ability of a democratic regime to provide for their welfare; second, he made every effort to convince the the military of the necessity to support a democratic, constitutional government; third, he wanted to convince the political parties of the value of functioning in a

²Robert J. Alexander, The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), p. 4.

democratic manner; and to prevent political elements from succeeding in attempts to violently overthrow the government.³

This paper will discuss the methods used and success achieved by Betancourt in attempting to accomplish these goals. However, it will focus on the attempts to overthrow the government by extremists, especially the left-wing terrorist campaign, and the methods used by Betancourt to counter these insurgencies.

³Ibid., p. 9.

INSURGENCY AND COUNTER INSURGENCY
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CHAPTER I

IMPORTANCE OF VENEZUELA

Importance to the United States. Venezuela is important to the U. S. for strategic, economic and political reasons. Strategically, the proximity of the U. S. and the Panama Canal make it essential that it remain a western ally. Military reconnaissance of Venezuela's 352,000 square miles and 1750 mile coastline bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean would be a formidable task. It's petroleum and high grade iron ore are an important close source for the U. S. of these vital resources. Economically, Venezuela is one of the world's largest exporters of oil, and this industry represents the bulk of U. S. capital investment in Venezuela. Total U. S. investment in 1962 was an estimated 3.5 billion dollars which was exceeded in the Western Hemisphere only by U. S. investment in Canada.¹ The political significance is perhaps the most important. Can a democratic Latin American

¹U.S. Dept. of the Army, Area Handbook for Venezuela (Washington: The American University, 1964), p. 464.

government with a typical background of previous dictatorships survive in the face of strong Communist, and, to a lesser extent, right wing subversive activity, and accomplish social and economic reforms in a democratic manner? Venezuela, as the testing ground of democratic processes and the capitalistic system, is being watched carefully throughout the world especially by the remainder of Latin America and the underdeveloped nations.

Importance to the Communists. Venezuela is the number one target for Communism in this hemisphere. Castro-Cuba has directed a concentrated propaganda and terrorist campaign against Venezuela and has provided training in subversive warfare to more nationals from Venezuela than from any other country.² Castro himself announced to the world in his speeches of 2 January and 26 July, 1963, that he was pressing the revolution in Venezuela and that he particularly hated the imperialist "puppet", Betancourt.³ But why

²U.S. Congress, House, Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Castro Communist Subversion in the Western Hemisphere, Report, 4 April 1963 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 7.

³Fidel Castro, Havana, 2 January 1963 and 26 July 1963, as translated in U.S. Congress, Senate, Sub-Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, Documentation of Communist Penetration in Latin America, Hearing, 2 Oct. 1963 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1965), p. 165, 172.

should the Communists be more interested in Venezuela than any other Latin American country? Socio-economic conditions upon which Communism thrives were present to a more or lesser extent in most Latin American countries. First, and most important, was the political reason. In the Caribbean, Venezuela represented an alternate way from that of Cuba to attack political, social, and economic problems. By contrast with Cuba, Venezuela was making substantial progress. If the Venezuelan effort succeeded there was a good possibility that political democracy would become general throughout Latin America. The democratic revolution had to be discredited. Secondly, Venezuela had a large built-in economic asset in the form of oil and other raw materials. The Soviet Union and the Communist world could not afford another economic liability like Cuba.⁴ Venezuela could carry its own weight and relieve some of the resupply of Cuba, especially of oil, which now has to be shipped from Black Sea ports. Thirdly, as noted before, Venezuela's strategic position and long coastline made it a threat to the U.S. and the Isthmian Canal. Lastly, the Communists had long desired a continental base for subversion.

⁴Herbert S. Dinerstein, Soviet Policy in Latin America, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1966), p. 42-43.

Venezuela's access to the sea would allow easy supply of subversive materials, and from its central location, subversive activities could range both north and south.

CHAPTER II

VENEZUELA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND ASSETS

BACKGROUND

Until the 1920's the economy of Venezuela was agrarian in nature based upon agriculture and stock raising. The main exports were tobacco, sugar, cocoa, and hides. Production of foodstuffs, corn, beans, and beef, were barely adequate to fill the needs of a population of under three million. During these early years, the meager economic wealth was in the hands of a series of dictators often in league with the conservative oligarchy consisting of military leaders, land barons, wealthy merchants and leading professional men. Although some progress was made toward social and economic reforms, most regimes were personalistic benefiting the government leaders rather than the people. General Juan Gomez, who came to power in 1908, viewed the nation as his own personal estate. He succeeded in becoming Venezuela's leading live stock raiser, its largest landholder, and wealthiest citizen. He outlawed all political parties, the press, and generally used police state practices.¹ By 1929, however, the oil industry,

¹"Venezuela", Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966, v. XXIII, p. 53.

built mostly by foreign investment enticed by Gomez's liberal concession policy, had reached the point that Venezuela had become the world's second largest producer. Oil provided about two-thirds of government revenue.² Despite the money the government realized from petroleum, almost nothing was accomplished toward alleviation of the basic misery of the people. Little was invested in programs of health, education, and public welfare. Similarly, almost nothing was done to improve or stimulate domestic agriculture or industry. But the flood of oil money inevitably benefited the whole economy by creating new industry and a paid laboring force. It accelerated the development of a hitherto almost nonexistent middle class. A modest program of social and economic reform was inaugurated by Gomez's successors from 1935 to 1945. In 1945 a civil/military revolutionary junta seized control of the government. Sweeping social and economic changes were projected, designed to benefit the rural and urban workers, improve the economy, eliminate illiteracy, combat disease and redistribute the land. These, in addition to political reforms, generated increasing opposition in the military and civilian oligarchy. In 1948 the liberal government

²U.S. Dept. of the Army, Area Handbook for Venezuela (Washington: American University, 1964), p. 339.

was overthrown by a military coup d'etat.³ Again a military dictatorship governed Venezuela for the next 10 years. Perez Jimenez ran a police state. People who opposed him were jailed, deported, or forced into hiding. Large numbers of labor leaders, students, and teachers were arrested. The jails were filled. The dictator made himself immensely wealthy by cooperation with foreign oil companies to the country's disadvantage. He lavished revenue on impressive construction in Caracas and the coastal regions but gave scant attention to the creation of a sound economy or the development of the interior. In January 1958, after bloody rioting and fighting, Jimenez was overthrown by patriotic liberals with the aid of the military.⁴

With the dictator's departure, a five-man civil-military junta became the provisional government. The democratic junta came to power on a wave of popular hope that all deficiencies of the past, the social and economic rehabilitation so long overdue, would be corrected, and rapidly. At the same time various political and social forces were not enthusiastic about the democratic form of

³Ibid., p. 19-20.

⁴Raymond Estep, The Latin American Nations Today (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: U.S. Air University, 1964), p. 263-266.

government and were waiting to see if the promise for a better future was actually fulfilled. Under these conditions the junta government felt obligated to initiate programs which would be immediately striking in their effect and would demonstrate the break with the past. For example, in order to cope with the growing unemployment problem, the government established a public works program under which many unemployed, unskilled workers were given "make-work" jobs on construction and maintenance projects which were of low productivity from an economic point of view.⁵ Popular elections held on late 1958 brought President Romulo Betancourt to power for a five year term in February 1959.

Socio-Economic Problems Facing Betancourt

Sociological Problems. Two of the most pressing problems facing Betancourt was that of unemployment and inadequate housing. In the rural areas the typical dwelling was the rancho. The rancho, containing three rooms, was inadequate for the average family which consisted of five or six people. Both the size and design made it

⁵International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The Economic Development of Venezuela (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1961), p. 8-9.

unhygienic and generally unhealthful.⁶ The economic deprivation of the farmer allowed little else. The farmers, who represented twenty per cent of the work force, accounted for only three to four per cent of the Gross National Product (GNP).⁷

A fundamental cause of housing and unemployment problems was the population explosion. Venezuela had one of the highest population growth rates in the world. During the period 1958 to 1964 the average annual rate of population increase was 3.4 per cent.⁸

Housing and unemployment problems were associated to a large extent with Venezuela's economic expansion and modernization made possible by the rapid growth of the oil industry. The lure of better jobs in the cities resulted in a large scale rural to urban migration. People living in localities of 2,500 or more increased from fifty per cent of the population in 1950 to seventy per cent in 1960.⁹ Increases in Caracas and Maracaibo were 59 per cent

⁶Area Handbook, p. 122.

⁷International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, p. 6.

⁸"Comparative International Statistics," U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1966 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off. , 1966), p. 898.

⁹International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, p. 4.

and 79 per cent respectively.¹⁰ Creation of new jobs and housing construction did not keep pace with the population increase and urban concentration. The unemployment rate in Caracas during this time was as high as twenty per cent.¹¹ Serious congestion problems arose and large slum areas grew around the major cities. In 1960, it was estimated that 300,000 people in Caracas were living in ranchos within the city or on the surrounding hills.¹² The health and sanitation conditions in the slums also left much to be desired.

The society was characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty even though Venezuela had one of the highest per capita incomes of the less developed countries. In the late 1950's some twelve per cent of the population received almost half the personal income, while 45 per cent received less than ten per cent of the wealth.¹³ Further aggravating the problem was the fact that the cost of living was one of the highest in South America.

In the educational system the building of schools and the availability of teachers failed to keep up with the

¹⁰Area Handbook, p. 49.

¹¹Ibid., p. 124.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 340.

population expansion and the rapid growth of the cities. The low level of education placed a continuing strain on the economic and political stability of the country.

Another social problem was a factor in the national psychology of the Venezuelans. They had a tendency to look to the government for everything and to blame the administration for social problems or for failure in a business enterprise.¹⁴

Economic Problems. The Betancourt regime was faced immediately with an acute financial crisis. Reckless spending by the Jimenez regime caused a sizable national debt and depletion of the treasury. The financial crisis, and the unsureness of the political future felt by businessmen, undermined the public confidence in the commercial banking system resulting in capital flight from the country. This flow of capital abroad, coupled with the no-new-foreign-concession policy which limited capital inflow, made it impossible for the government to initiate as many programs and projects as they might have wished.

The principle vulnerability of the economy was its lack of diversification. Oil accounted for over sixty per cent of government revenues and over twenty-five

¹⁴Robert J. Alexander, The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 5.

per cent of GNP.¹⁵ The overdependence on petroleum, the large volume of imports, and the minimal agricultural production represented an extremely unbalanced economy. Additionally, Venezuela did not have the required infrastructure to support a diversified industrial and agricultural economy.

The government lacked an overall economic and social development plan to create a balanced economy. There was also a deficiency in administrative capacity. Many new officials were either in exile or forced retirement during the Jimenez regime. With the return of the constitutional government, there was an initial period of adjustment during which many senior assignments were shifted. The result was a lack of continuity of direction of the major agencies within the government.¹⁶

There was a great need for agrarian reform. Most of the land was owned by a few people and the government. The bulk of the farm population lacked credit and land of their own. Many only cultivated land at a subsistence level.¹⁷

¹⁵John L. Sorenson, Unconventional Warfare and the Venezuelan Society (China Lake, California: U.S. Naval Ordinance Test Station, 1964), p. 2.

¹⁶International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, p. 9.

¹⁷Area Handbook, p. 360.

Socio-Economic Assets. The Venezuelan society had several cohesive forces. Some of these were a common language, a common religion, and little racial discrimination. They also had an increasing nationalist sentiment, a firsthand awareness of the evils of dictatorship, and a widely accepted commitment to social and economic reforms. Economically, Venezuela had a well organized petroleum industry and a substantial GNP.

Socio-Economic Dangers. As a result of the socio-economic conditions there was considerable social unrest. Communism thrives where large numbers of people are poor, jobless, illiterate, and landless, and where there is a vast difference between the rich and the poor. These conditions foment restlessness and rioting providing a fertile ground for Communist growth. In Venezuela, especially in slum areas, some lower class elements were exploited by extremists and participated in violent public demonstrations against the government. Betancourt was well aware of the dangers. Tangible progress had to be made. He knew that popular tolerance of subversion and overthrow of constituted authority resulted from government inability to solve perennial and pressing social and economic problems. Past regimes, established on the basis of promises of reform, saw their popular support vanish when pledges went

unfulfilled. It had always been possible for the opposition to rally support for a forcible ouster of the government from the disappointed masses, who saw no prospect of relief from their poverty.¹⁸

Betancourt's Program. President Betancourt undertook an ambitious program in 1959 to raise the standard of living of the mass of the population. The objectives were: agrarian reform; diversification of the economy; establishment of a greater degree of government control over the economy; the development of a modern educational system; and, the provision of public welfare in terms of housing, electricity, water supply, and sewerage for both the rural and urban population.¹⁹ This set of problems was not soluble in the near future. But, it was imperative that a clear rate of progress be shown in order to keep the constitutional government in power.

The first order of business was to restore international and national financial confidence. The government honored and paid all debts incurred by the Jimenez regime. This was accomplished largely through a loan from the U.S. amounting to two hundred million dollars which was paid back by March 1964.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 524.

¹⁹Alexander, p. 7.

²⁰Area Handbook, p. 462.

The costly junta public works project was discontinued, but unemployment relief was provided by carefully planned public projects distributed throughout the country. Betancourt pared the government budget by a ten per cent reduction in government salaries in 1960. In 1961, in a future effort to balance the budget, salaries, including those of the military, were cut another ten per cent. The government budget for the first time in many years showed a surplus in 1962. Efforts to reduce the size of the bureaucracy were largely ineffective because of political reasons.²¹

Money shortages did not delay action on a land reform program. The agrarian reform was one of the most fundamental economic and social changes necessary for a modern, diversified economy, and would also serve to limit the migration to the cities. Plots were given to landless peasants from the Public Domain and large estates. The reform was carried out in accordance with the law. There was no arbitrary seizure of land as in Castro's Cuba; landowners were compensated by the government.²² The long range goal was to increase agricultural self-sufficiency

²¹Alexander, p. 155-156.

²²Area Handbook, p. 368-370.

by producing surpluses. In contrast to many countries, Venezuela had not tended to favor industrial growth at the expense of agricultural expansion.

In 1960 the government initiated an ambitious program of overall social and economic planning over a four year period. CORDIPLAN provided fundamental guidelines for government policy decisions. These plans were reviewed and revised every two years.²³ The presence of approved socio-economic plans strengthened the political position of Betancourt. By having CORDIPLAN make the decisions, he avoided political controversy over types and locations of government projects.²⁴

Government spending was concentrated on the basic industries and domestic manufacturing with the aim of reducing the country's dependence on oil. Foreign capital was encouraged as long as it did not create monopolies contrary to the national interest. Heavy government spending to improve the infrastructure was concentrated in communication, transportation, and energy, in order to expand domestic markets.

During the Betancourt administration the basis was

²³Ibid., p. 347.

²⁴John Friedmann, Venezuela From Doctrine to Dialogue (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 50-51.

laid for a new nationalistic policy in dealing with petroleum. The policy of giving no further concessions was firmly established. The organization of the Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation laid the foundation for a government owned sector of the nations oil industry.²⁵

A wide variety of programs to build houses and to improve and extend health facilities and public services was begun. From 1959 to 1962 almost ten thousand houses were constructed. To complement the housing program, projects to supply electricity, running water, and sewage disposal were carried out.²⁶

The most spectacular progress was made in the field of education. The number of students in primary school doubled during the Betancourt term in office. Teacher training facilities were increased and the staff and facilities of the university system were greatly expanded.²⁷

Substantial progress was made on all fronts despite a determined political opposition which will be discussed in the following chapters.

²⁵Alexander, p. 300.

²⁶Area Handbook, p. 138.

²⁷Alexander, p. 300-301.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND ASSETS (1959-1964)

BACKGROUND

In addition to the social and economic problems Venezuela has also been beset with political difficulties. Political stability has been under almost constant attack by extremists from both the left and the right. Looking back into history it is obvious that political instability has been a "way-of-life" in Venezuela as well as many other Latin American countries. Though the power of Spain was finally broken in 1821 under the leadership of Simon Bolivar, the truly independent history of Venezuela did not begin until 1830 when conservative separatist groups caused Venezuela to withdraw from the Republic of Gran Colombia, a political union with Columbia and Ecuador.¹ But for more than a century after independence, political parties, if they may so be called, were of little importance. The traditional labels of Liberal and Conservative were variously employed by a succession of military dictators to mobilize personal followings for the military

¹Martin C. Needler, Political Systems of Latin America (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), p. 238.

seizure of power.² Most parties had no platform or ideology and, indeed, were almost exclusively formed on the basis of traditional Latin American admiration for the strong leader or on the "charismatic appeal of the 'caudillo'."³ This characteristic has to some extent spilled over into modern times. One of the minor parties in the 1958 presidential election in Venezuela was the Independent National Electoral Movement party consisting of about fifteen thousand members. This party was the personal vehicle of Vice-Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, and, upon his defeat, was disbanded.⁴ Political parties during the early years were notorious for their transient, precarious existence and high rate of mortality. Real political parties, as we know them, based on broad popular support did not develop until after the death of Dictator Juan Gomez in late 1935.⁵ The one exception to the general rule of "personal" parties was the Communist Party based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Whether operating under its

²U.S. Dept. of the Army. Area Handbook for Venezuela, (Washington: American University, 1964), p. 267.

³Alexander T. Edelman, Latin American Government and Politics, (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1965), p. 336.

⁴Ibid., p. 335-336.

⁵Area Handbook, p. 267.

own name or some other label, or in the open or underground, it was the only political organization that was able to function during the Gomez regime.⁶ Popular reaction to the tyranny of Gomez constrained his successor, Lopez Contreras, to modernize the government and grant a number of liberal reforms including legalization of political parties and recall of political exiles. Among the most important returning exiles were such political figures as Romulo Betancourt, Jovito Villalba, and Raul Leoni, former university students; the "Generation of 1928", who rebelled against Gomez.⁷ During the following years various regimes moved slowly toward satisfying the demands of the people for representative government. Foremost among the early parties was the Venezuelan Organization (Organizacion Venezolana-ORVE), a leftist group that joined with other new leftist organizations to form the National Democratic Party (Partido Democratica National-PDN). After forcing out the Communist members in 1937 the party changed its name to the Democratic Action Party (Partido Accion Democratica-AD) and under this title achieved legal

⁶Raymond Estep, The Latin American Nations Today (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: U.S. Air University, 1964), p. 260.

⁷Area Handbook, p. 267.

status in 1941.⁸ It was largely this party that seized power in 1945 and introduced the first attempt at democratic government in the form of a revolutionary junta largely composed of civilians. The new government acted rashly and with considerable political naivete. It assumed the existence of an all powerful popular support for its own policies, when, in fact, strong emotional commitment to a democratic order did not exist. The junta regarded itself strong enough to move ahead rapidly on all fronts but after some gains it alienated simultaneously the military and civilian elements of the oligarchy. In a dramatic show of strength Colonel Marcos Jiminez engineered a coup d'etat in 1948 and initiated a decade of the most ruthless dictatorship the country had ever known.⁹ Three years (1945-1948) had not been sufficient time to demonstrate the superiority of democratic institutions.

After ten years of military dictatorship, the armed forces, with overwhelming popular support, on 23 January 1958 deposed the Jiminez government and formed a junta composed of three military officers and two civilians. The junta promptly announced that its primary objective

⁸Estep, p. 268.

⁹John Friedmann, Venezuela from Doctrine to Dialogue (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 7.

was to establish a lawful and honest democratic regime under which individual liberties would be guaranteed. In the first few hours of its existence the provisional government restored civil liberties, removed censorship, released political prisoners and invited exiles to return. It promised it would transfer power to a constitutional government to be elected by the people by the end of 1958. In the ensuing period of transition to democracy the established political parties, whose activities had been curtailed severely under the previous regime, were reactivated and new parties were formed. All political parties pledged their support to the junta and entered into a truce declaration to avoid bitter partisan strife that might have resulted in the re-establishment of a dictatorship.

The provisional government convened free national, state, and municipal elections on 7 December 1958 in an atmosphere of public order. The three major political parties nominated their own candidates. Admiral Larrazabal accepted the presidential candidacy of the Democratic Republican Union Party (URD) and shortly before the election was endorsed by the Communist Party (PCV). The Christian Social Party (COPEI) nominated its top leader, Rafael Caldera, and the Democratic Action Party (AD) named Romulo Betancourt.

The elections were accomplished peacefully and

honestly with Romulo Betancourt winning a near majority. The new government was nominated for a five year period in February 1959. Let us take a closer look at the major political parties during the time 1959 to 1964.

Political Parties¹⁰

Democratic Action Party. This party was Venezuela's largest and strongest political party and was the forerunner of the other non-Communist parties. It also was the best organized party having a nationwide organization structure more complete than any other party. The party ideology was generally left of center, or moderate socialism. It supported democratic government processes, civil rights, agrarian reform, a mixed economy, centralized economic planning of industry and agriculture, and government responsibility for social welfare. It drew most of its support from farmers, laborers, and middle-class businessmen. Its basic strength throughout the years was from peasant and labor groups outside of the Caracas area. The party has won both presidential elections, electing Romulo Betancourt in 1958 and Raul Leoni in 1963 though its majority was

¹⁰ Information presented in this section concerning political parties has been taken from Area Handbook, p. 267-277; Estep, p. 259-261, 266-267; and Needler, p. 249-251.

considerably reduced in the latter from 49 per cent to 33 per cent.¹¹

Social Christian Party. The correct name of this party is the Committee Organized for Independent Elections (Comite Organizado por Elecciones Independientes-COPEI) but was popularly called the Social Christian Party. Formed in 1946 it was part of the international Social Christian movement. Though it was the third largest party, it was the second strongest in both the 1958 and 1963 national elections receiving sixteen per cent and twenty per cent of the vote respectively.¹² The party's structural organization was also nationwide but not as efficient or complete as that of AD. COPEI was ideologically located center-left but more conservatively oriented. Emphasis was placed on the Social Christian aspects such as civil liberties, freedom of action of all groups, social goals, and democratic methods. Its program was essentially the same as that of the AD party calling for agrarian reform, government control of some basic industries, central economic planning, and priority given to social reforms. It was the least radical of the older and larger parties getting its support

¹¹Edelmann, p. 356.

¹²Ibid.

from the more conservative elements of the military, the Church, the more wealthy business community and landowners. Rafael Caldera, a lawyer, was the founder and major political figure in the party.

Democratic Republican Union Party. The Union Republicana Democratica (URD) was the second largest party. Its ideology was not clearly defined. It had tended to be a refuge for those politicians who left other political groups; therefore it had elements that ran the gamut from left to right. Founded in 1945 it had practically the same platform as the other "national revolutionary" parties of AD and COPEI. However, it was considerably more liberal and often advocated its reforms in an extreme manner. It was not as well organized as AD and COPEI. It tended to capture the independent vote when offering a popular candidate. It derived its main support from the middleclass and unorganized labor groups. The party was dominated by its chief, Jovito Villalba, one of the "Generation of 1928".

Communist Party. The Venezuelan Communist Party (Partido Comunista de Venezuela-PCV) is the oldest modern political party in Venezuela having been founded by a group of university students in 1931. In 1935 it gained admittance to full membership in the Communist International and became one of the largest Communist parties in Latin

America. It gained recognition in 1958 for its prominent role in the overthrow of Jimenez. It advocated the Communist ideology of government control and complete ownership by the state. It had a well-organized nationwide structure. It drew most of its support from student groups, urban labor, teachers and intellectuals. In 1958 the party decided not to put up a presidential candidate but supported the URD candidate, Wolfgang Larrazabal. In the subsequent election the Communists won six per cent of the vote, two seats in the Senate, and seven in the Chamber of Deputies. Included in the seven was Communist Party leader, Gustavo Machado. Open Communist participation in subversive activities prompted the government to suspend the political rights of the party in May 1962. These rights remained suspended even though much political pressure was exerted on the government by both COPEI and URD to rescind the suspension prior to the 1963 election.

Minor Parties. Although only four parties competed in the 1958 elections, several minor parties appeared on scene. In 1963 a total of seven were registered for the new elections by 1 November 1963, the closing date for political parties to qualify. The seven included the three older parties, AD, URD, and COPEI but not the PCV party as mentioned above. These minor parties tended to be

"personal" parties with the same goals as the major parties but in disagreement on how to achieve these goals and what priorities to assign. The best these parties could hope to do was to enter a coalition with the winning party. Probably the most important of these was the National Democratic Front (FND). It was made up of many elements who supported Arturo Petri, a businessman-novelist, for president in 1963. It eventually formed a coalition with the AD party in 1964.

Coalition Problems

The newly elected President Betancourt had an extremely difficult time holding the new government together. His first major political difficulty was his determination to work with a coalition government although his AD party had simple majorities in both houses of Congress. Named Vice-President and Chamber of Deputies presiding officer was Rafael Caldera, COPEI presidential candidate. The first cabinet consisted of two AD members, three URD members, three COPEI members, four Independents, and one with no party affiliation.¹³ This almost impossible task of equally dividing the cabinet and other governmental posts among

¹³Estep, p. 268.

rival political parties was a continued source of embarrassment to Betancourt, often hindered his socio-economic program, and was a constant threat to his political life. It is difficult for Americans who have a pragmatic, give and take approach to understand why political instability was involved. But it stems from the fact that partisanship is so strong in the political parties that it makes compromise, the very heart of a coalition, extremely difficult. This partisanship fosters plotting against the government and any such encouragement in a country with a long tradition of coup d'etat's is politically dangerous. In addition, lack of political consensus was interpreted by the people as a lack of national unity. Democratic order was not firmly entrenched in their minds. They were impatient with the tedious discussions and shifting alignments inherent in democratic procedures and wished for a strong-willed government which would cut through the entanglement of uncertainty.¹⁴

Armed Forces

The nature of Latin American politics dictates that no administration, least of all a civilian elected one, could

¹⁴Friedmann, p. 10-11.

possibly remain in office without the acquiescence of the military, nor can it alter the privileged status of the armed forces. The military is always essential for a successful comeback of the conservative civilian oligarchy.¹⁵ Its voice in government cannot be ignored as the civilian regime learned in 1948.¹⁶ Venezuela has been classified as one of the states in which the military is in transition from a political to a nonpolitical body.¹⁷ It normally is neutral, but, if the situation is not normal and there is a feeling of danger or crisis in the air, this neutrality can change drastically.¹⁸ Should a danger or apparent danger threaten with which the civilian government appears unable to cope, the top military group may be persuaded to take over or feel that it has a constitutional duty to "save the nation".¹⁹ As Theodore Wyckoff stated it, ". . .the actors on the political stage are well aware that but one step off-stage the military stands--an

¹⁵Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶Needler, p. 251.

¹⁷Theodore Wyckoff, "The Role of the Military in Latin American Policy," Western Political Quarterly, September 1960, p. 745.

¹⁸Edwin Lieuwen, Arms and Politics in Latin America, (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 163.

¹⁹Wyckoff, p. 746.

attentive and critical observer of everything that goes on."²⁰ Betancourt's plan to win military support was to bring about its acceptance of constitutional government. Of necessity, he used the carrot instead of the stick. He often voiced confidence in the military seeking to inhibit illegitimate action by its leaders. He showed continuous interest in the armed forces by providing material benefits and keeping close contacts with the officers and men. In addition, he sought to improve their technical proficiency and thereby increase professionalism.²¹ This program, and the rise of reform elements in the officer corps supporting social and economic revolution, provided a balance of military power vis-a-vis the conservatives²² and enabled the Betancourt administration to survive numerous overthrow attempts. These attempts will be described in more detail in Chapter V.

Leftist Threats

As discussed in Chapter II, Venezuela, like many other countries in Latin America, had the type of socio-economic

²⁰Ibid., p. 745.

²¹Ronald K. Shelp, "Latin American Leadership in Transition: Legitimacy vs. Personalism," SAIS, Winter 1966, p. 32.

²²Friedmann, p. 8.

environment upon which Communism thrives. The country became a prime target of the Communists for the reasons outlined in Chapter I. Perhaps the reason why they carried on such a vigorous campaign of infiltration, subversion, terrorism, and sabotage was the fact that it looked like the democratic government was going to succeed. President Betancourt recognized the threat when in his inaugural address in February 1959 he declared that the philosophy of Communism was not compatible with the development of Venezuela, and warned that he would punish disrespect for constituted authority.²³ The strategy of the Communists was to mount a sabotage, terror, and guerilla campaign of such magnitude that the government would be unable to cope with it. The military would then take over to dispell the danger and the government would evolve into an unpopular dictatorship. Once a dictator was in power the Communists would cause his overthrow and take over the government.²⁴ Toward this goal they used anyone who might facilitate the success of their campaign such as right wing reactionary elements and the party called the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria-MIR). The nucleus of the latter was the more radical

²³Estep, p. 268.

²⁴Area Handbook., p. 273, and Estep, p. 272.

elements of the AD party who rebelled against the slow processes of democratic government in 1960. Their program was virtually indistinguishable from the Communists. It was Marxist, anti-U.S., and pro-Castro. A terrorist campaign was also mounted by a paramilitary, Cuba-trained group who adopted the title, Armed Forces of National Liberation (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional-FALN).²⁵ This is a typical Communist-inspired militant organization which aspired to unite all left-wing opponents to the Betancourt regime. A detailed discussion of terrorist tactics is presented in Chapter V.

Political Assets

A favorable factor in the political climate was the general recognition by all, including the military, of the need for social and economic reform. There was widespread demand for the transformation of the Venezuelan people into a democratic society with cultural and economic plenty for all. This in itself tended to provide for political compromise and conciliate rival ambitions among the various elements.

Another asset was the strong revulsion of dictatorships

²⁵Area Handbook., p. 269.

felt by almost everyone. Members of the upper class and commercial segments of the middle class were virtually unanimous in condemning the unstable and arbitrary rule of the dictators. They saw the best hope for economic development in a popular and stable government.²⁶ This feeling had been consolidated by the first-hand exposure to the Jiminez regime, one of the most scandalous and tyrannical that Latin America had seen in the present century. Its tyranny was matched only by its corruption.²⁷ This experience served to dampen the inherent attraction felt toward the personally dynamic and impressive military figure, "the man on horseback",²⁸ and tended to stabilize the Betancourt government.

The third political asset was the leadership of President Betancourt. He seemed to exhibit the traditional "personal" characteristic of the "caudillo" but not at the expense of the party, in which he was supporting a tradition of diversified leadership. This was shown in his support of the 1963 constitutional amendment preventing a president from succeeding himself in a ten year period.

²⁶Ibid., p. 329.

²⁷Robert J. Alexander, Prophets of the Revolution (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 135.

²⁸Area Handbook., p. 266.

He also showed strength but was not intolerant to the opposition as evidence by his coalition cabinet. He represented the correct blending of the traditional style of leadership with the ideals of a revolutionary democratic party.²⁹ He fit the description at least one observer claimed was essential: "If democratic regimes are to succeed, they must be able to bring forth strong, intelligent, and progressive leaders who can command the respect of both the general public and the military."³⁰

²⁹Shelp, p. 31-32.

³⁰Wyckoff, p. 763.

CHAPTER IV

INSURGENCY AND COUNTER-INSURGENCY

THE INTERNAL THREAT

Insurgency activities in Venezuela can in general be broken down into two periods. The first half of Betancourt's term or until early 1962, the primary militant threat was from the right wing elements.¹ The left wing was also busy, but their basic tactics were centered on agitation against the government coupled with riots and strikes in an attempt to overthrow the regime by popular insurrection. However, in 1962, it appears the primary threat shifted, as the militant left embarked on an organized, ever increasing, massive reign of terror. To be sure there were sporadic outbreaks of terrorist and guerilla activities prior to 1962, mostly engineered by extremists, but it was not until that time that the Communist Party of Venezuela apparently decided officially to adopt terrorism as a device to achieve its objectives.²

¹Jules Dubois, Operation America (New York: Walker, 1963), p. 184.

²U.S. Congress, House, Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Castro-Communist Subversion in the Western Hemisphere, Hearings 18 Feb. 6 Mar. 1963 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 13.

Even the two major military revolts in late spring of 1962 were predominately leftist inspired.³

Right Wing Activities. Except for the brief flirtation with democracy from 1945 to 1948, Venezuela had been under a military regime for its entire independent life as a nation. Both military and civilian right-wing elements believed the way to change a government was by a "golpe", or "coup d'etat", instead of by electoral processes. The right wing opposition consisted of discontented military officers, business men who had prospered on the graft of the Jimenez dictatorship, and ideologically conservative people who could not distinguish between Communism and the moderate left government of Betancourt.⁴

From 1948 to 1958 Perez Jimenez conducted a campaign of persecution and propaganda against the AD party and Betancourt. He pictured the organization as composed of a violent band of conspirators who were attempting to organize a civilian militia to replace the armed forces, were unpatriotic, and were foes of law and order.⁵ As a result

³Raymond Estep, The Latin American Nations Today (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: U.S. Air University, 1964), p. 270-271.

⁴Robert J. Alexander, The Venezuelan Democratic Revolution (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 105-106.

⁵John D. Martz, Accion Democratica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 139-145.

of this campaign a great majority of the armed forces, especially the officers, were suspicious of the nature and intentions of Betancourt. By a careful wooing of the military as described in Chapter III, Betancourt won the confidence of the military chiefs and the masses of the armed forces. He successfully kept them out of the political controversy by issuing strict orders that the military could make no statements concerning political issues either for or against the government. On the other hand, he defended his military leaders when they were attacked for political reasons. Concurrently, he kept all the armed forces leaders advised of important government policies and decisions during periodic meetings.⁶

Nevertheless, there remained some military who continued to be disaffected with the constitutional government. The first serious insurrection occurred early in April, 1960, in the city of Cristobal, capital of the state of Tachira. It was led by former Defense Minister General Castro Leon. Leon had been retired from the Air Force in 1958 during the junta provisional government because he demanded, in retaliation for the Communist attack against the motorcade of Vice-President Nixon, the imposition of

⁶Alexander, p. 108.

press censorship, dissolution of leftist parties, and a three year postponement of scheduled elections.⁷ Leon went to the Dominican Republic (home of the exiled Perez Jimenez) where he and his followers were issued diplomatic passports to Columbia.⁸ After illegally crossing the border from Columbia to Tachira in Venezuela, Leon went to San Cristobal where he succeeded in getting the army garrison there to join his revolt. Since a large part of the officer corps comes from Tachira, he believed other units would rally to his support.⁹ His forces captured the radio station from which an appeal was made for others to join them. A combined government air-ground counterattack overwhelmed the rebels after two days, and led to the arrest of the leaders and some two hundred followers.¹⁰ Leon himself was captured before he could get back to Columbia and was sentenced to a long period in prison by a military court.¹¹

⁷Estep, p. 267.

⁸Organization of American States, Text of Resolution of the Sixth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 8 July 1960, as stated in U.S. Dept. of State Bulletin, 5 Sept. 1960 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1960), p. 358.

⁹Alexander, p. 110-111.

¹⁰Estep, p. 268.

¹¹Alexander, p. 111.

The right-wing militants, with moral support and material assistance from the Dominican Republic, made another attempt to overthrow the Betancourt government by assassination of the President. The assistance provided was the electronic device and explosives along with the instructions on how to assemble these materials into a remote control bomb.¹² The bomb, placed in a parked car, was triggered as Betancourt's car passed. The President barely escaped with his life. A military aide was killed, and the Defense Minister was severely wounded. Betancourt suffered painful burns on his hands and face. Despite his injuries, he showed great physical courage. His first concern was for the other people who had been hurt. Within 24 hours he made a radio address to the nation from his sick bed ensuring the people that he was all right and that the government had control of the situation. He then took personal charge of the efforts to find those responsible for the attempt on his life. There is little doubt that his behavior during this critical time won him the respect of the military and the people.¹³

On the basis of information obtained during the

¹²OAS Resolution, 8 July 1960, as stated in U.S. State Dept. Bulletin, 5 Sept. 1960, p. 358.

¹³Alexander, p. 112.

investigation of the San Cristobal revolt and the assassination attempt, official charges were brought against the Dominican Republic before the Organization of American States (OAS). As a result of these charges, a Conference of American Foreign Ministers met at San Jose, Costa Rica, and, on 20 August 1960, unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the Dominican Republic and agreeing to impose economic sanctions against it and to break diplomatic relations.¹⁴

In February 1961, a right-wing group consisting mostly of civilians, but led by an army Colonel, attempted to seize the military school and police headquarters in Caracas. They succeeded only in seizing a radio station from which they falsely announced the Army had taken control of the government. The Army, however, remained loyal and put down the revolt.¹⁵

Another military insurrection occurred in the city of Barcelona in the eastern part of Venezuela in June 1961. The rebellion affected only part of the garrison which was aided by some civilians. The uprising was suppressed in a

¹⁴OAS Resolution, 8 July 1960, as stated in U.S. State Dept. Bulletin, 5 September 1960, p. 358.

¹⁵U.S. Dept. of the Army, Area Handbook for Venezuela (Washington: American University, 1964), p. 525.

few hours by the loyal troops of the garrison.¹⁶

There were numerous other reactionary rightist plots which were discovered before any violence took place. The officers and men who were implicated in these plans were severely punished.

Two other significant military rebellions occurred in May and June of 1962, but these were in liaison with the left-wing instead of right-wing elements and will be described later. The significant point about all the incidents as a whole is that in none of these cases did the other military units join the movement, in particular the two largest installations at Caracas and Maracay. In the past, all successful armed forces rebellions included these two garrisons.¹⁷ These, at all times, remained loyal to Betancourt. By the summer of 1962 it appears that the traditional dominance of Venezuelan political affairs by the armed forces had changed. Although a few officers still opposed the democratic government, they were rapidly being purged. The government was constantly alert for the slightest sign of disloyalty but without the services of a "gestapo" system, such as employed by Jimenez, which would

¹⁶Alexander, p. 111.

¹⁷Ibid.

in itself breed discontent. As a result the great majority of the armed forces were at least passively loyal, while a considerable number became quite enthusiastic about democratic processes of government.

Leftist Agitation. The general plan of the extreme left organizations was a four step program which was to culminate in a violent overthrow of the government: agitation against the government; demonstrations, disturbances and strikes; sabotage, guerrilla activities, and terrorism throughout the country; and, finally, insurrection.¹⁸ Basic means of subversion were the dissemination of propaganda, use of intensive ideological indoctrination, exploitation of nationalist and ultra-leftist groups, and development of anti-government forces through guerrilla training.¹⁹

The Communist Party (PCV) enjoyed an advantageous position at the beginning of Betancourt's term of office. Although treated leniently by the Jimenez regime, the PCV joined the opposition during the last stages of the struggle against the dictator. With the purge of Jimenez appointees, the PCV was able to fill many key jobs of the

¹⁸ Area Handbook, p. 527.

¹⁹ House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 150.

provisional government. As noted in Chapter III, they garnered some six per cent of the vote in the 1958 election and were able to seat nine candidates in Congress. In addition to government jobs, the PCV had heavily infiltrated education, the unions, and the professions. Therefore, they were in a perfect position to agitate against the government.

A conflict between Betancourt and the Communists was inevitable. In his inaugural speech on 13 February 1959, he declared that the philosophy of Communism was not compatible with the development of Venezuela.²⁰ He declared that he had no intention of consulting with or otherwise including the Communists in his coalition government.²¹

The most important focus of agitation against the government was in the public schools, and was the area in which the ultra-leftists had the greatest success. In the national universities, where political participation was as much a part of life as education, Communist indoctrination was carried on by both faculty and students. The traditional autonomy of the university grounds, from which police were barred by law, except with permission of the

²⁰ Estep, p. 268.

²¹ Alexander, p. 90.

university rector, was a sanctuary for agitators and a base for propaganda dissemination and other subversive actions. The students had a strong voice in running the university, and among them, the Communist influence was great. The disciplined core of the PCV controlled the student body and taught the Communist ideology which for many students was the only coherent doctrine they received.²²

Communist control of the universities was one of the most difficult problems facing Betancourt. He could not remove the autonomy of the university, traditional in Latin America, because he would be accused of controlling the universities and taking away freedom of education. However, he began ferreting out the Communist professors in the public school system. By early 1963 some fifteen hundred had been removed, but many still remained.²³ Additionally, youth groups of the Social Christian COPEI party, a member of the government coalition, were organized at the universities. These groups advocated the Social Christian doctrine as an alternative to Communism. They formed strong-arm squads to meet leftist force with force

²²Area Handbook, p. 528.

²³House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 150.

when required. In this manner, they were able to neutralize some of the left-wing influence. Also a natural reaction set in against agitation and disturbances on the campuses which were often closed during these activities with subsequent loss of study time.²⁴

The Communists had considerable influence in the ranks of organized labor with much of their strength among the urban workers. Nevertheless, AD had a slight majority and steadily gained control as time went on. AD had overwhelming support by the Peasants Federation. Betancourt "personalism" among the peasants and his agrarian reform policy put him even more firmly in control of this group.²⁵

Public disorder began almost immediately in Betancourt's term of office. In April 1959 an estimated twenty-five thousand students went on strike when a number of citizens were arrested for plotting against the government. In August, riots followed demonstrations against the government when Betancourt decided to halt the non-productive, dole-dispensing Emergency Public Works Project initiated during the provisional junta regime. Police restored order after killing one and wounding a great number.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 51-52.

²⁵ Area Handbook, p. 528.

Betancourt, the champion of individual liberties, was forced to suspend the constitutional guarantees of freedom from arrest and freedom of assembly for 30 days. These rights were restored in September but removed again in October after a series of bomb explosions in Caracas. More than a hundred people were arrested for acts believed designed to overthrow the government.²⁶

The suspension of constitutional guarantees was the chief legal weapon Betancourt used against the rioters. A traditional provision of most Latin American constitutions provided for the temporary suspension of certain individual freedoms in case of emergency, of commotion that might disturb the peace of the Republic, or of grave circumstances that affect economic or social life. The President and the cabinet were empowered to take this step, but must submit the decision to Congress within ten days of the suspension. Congress has the right to pass on the validity of such action.²⁷

The principal limitations placed on democratic rights were four in number, though all were not suspended in every case. First, outdoor political meetings were forbidden except with permission of the government. Second, the

²⁶Estep, p. 268.

²⁷Alexander, p. 121-122.

freedom of the press was limited. Third, the government was free to search homes or building without a warrant. Fourth, the government could arrest people without having to bring them before the courts within a specified period of time.²⁸

The year 1960 brought more disturbances. In August, three hundred Castro sympathizers were arrested in Caracas for inciting riots to protest the Declaration of San Jose which, without specifically mentioning Cuba, condemned intervention in the Americas by the Soviets and Chinese Communists. The municipal and national police with the help of the National Guard finally quelled the disturbance. As a result of this action the United Kingdom and Chile sent advisory police missions to train Venezuelan police in modern methods. Cuba, thereafter, stepped up its campaign of opposition to Betancourt.²⁹

The radical left came out overtly for the overthrow of the government when Foreign Minister Arcaya resigned because of Betancourt's anti-Castro stand. An editorial in the MIR weekly newspaper, Izquedia, in October 1960 advocated violent means to replace the existing government.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁹ Area Handbook, p. 529, and Estep, p. 269.

When three MIR leaders were arrested as a result of this editorial, two thousand students in the Central University rioted. Rioting spread to other schools. PCV headquarters was searched by the government and subversive leaflets and posters were found. Left wing students were so prominent in the riots that Betancourt closed all public and private schools. According to official reports, fifteen persons were killed, one hundred wounded, and three hundred arrested.³⁰

In November of 1960, the PCV and MIR made an all out attempt to bring about a popular insurrection. The occasion was a strike of some five thousand government telephone workers. The strike degenerated into riots when leftist led students burned buses and automobiles and attacked stores. University students barricaded themselves on campus grounds and fired on police and soldiers outside. MIR leaders of the bank clerks union declared a national strike. MIR and PCV labor leaders and other extreme leftists including congressional deputy Alberto Rangel issued proclamations calling for a revolutionary general strike. Betancourt remained firm but cautious. He allowed the insurrection to run its course for four

³⁰ Ibid.

days. It was a sound decision. The bank strike lasted only one day, and there was virtually no response to the call for a general walkout. The telephone workers grievances were submitted to arbitration. The leftists had made a serious miscalculation of their labor strength. The rioting, however, continued particularly at the universities and schools. Betancourt simultaneously moved in units of the regular army and suspended several constitutional guarantees, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom from seizure. Within a few hours the uprising was suppressed. The government closed public schools and suspended operation of Tribune Popular, the Communist newspaper in Caracas. Some fifteen were killed and over a hundred were injured.³¹

Betancourt's action in this case was typical of the tactics that he was to use during many other disturbances during his term in office. On one hand, after ten years of Jimenez dictatorship, the people had a revulsion to the use of force to put down disorder. Modest responses to outrageous acts by rioters and subversives drew charges of police brutality. Suspension of constitutional guarantees of freedom drew bitter criticism especially from the left.

³¹Estep, p. 269 and Alexander, p. 122-123.

PCV and MIR members of Congress during debates on the suspensions lambasted the government on every conceivable occasion. Typical of the attacks is the following comment from a speech by MIR deputy Jorge Dager, published in the July 1961 issue of the magazine Pensamiento Revolucionario, organ of the National Propaganda Commission of the MIR:

" . . . If we have said it once, we have said it a thousand times, that indefinite suspension of guarantees, the total limitation of rights for the sectors of the opposition, the arbitrary strangulation of the rights that we Venezuelans have acquired through struggle, dedication, and effort, can lead to nothing other than the conversion of this government into a despotic and dictatorial government.

. . . The only difference that we who have a permanent and consistent revolutionary and democratic line can see between the repression carried out by Perez Jimenez' dictatorship and the repression carried out by the present government is that the Perez Jimenez' repression was carried out by a dictator who admitted that he was a dictator. . . "32

On the other hand, the government was accused by right wing elements of being soft on Communism and for not taking sufficient decisive steps to stamp out violence and disorder.³³ Of course there was always the military who might decide it was time to step in and restore order.

³²Quoted from Pensamiento Revolucionario, July 1961, as stated in Amexander, p. 124.

³³Area Handbook, p. 532.

In this instance, and like so many to come during the terrorist campaign, Betancourt's primary problem was one of timing. Thus, while public discontent mounted and the military became increasingly restive, he patiently held his hand. At the right political moment, he suspended guarantees and used the armed forces to bolster police. Outraged public sentiment caused by the violence created a climate of opinion which generated wide popular approval for the President's actions. He eliminated the militarist atmosphere as soon as possible by restoring guarantees and relinquishing military direct participation in maintaining law and order, leaving this mission to the civilian police.

This political Russian roulette paid dividends. Betancourt's fundamental strategy was first to draw his enemies into the open by allowing them considerable freedom of action and then to put as much pressure on them as public sentiment would allow. As mentioned earlier, during the Jiminez and provisional governments, Communists and sympathizers had become entrenched in critical sectors of society, operating from positions of respectability. As noted, domestic political considerations prompted Betancourt to move cautiously in the treatment of this problem. Early in his term he permitted these elements to indulge in propaganda dissemination and other subversive activities.

It was almost as if he purposely allowed the extreme left to overplay its hand in order to turn public opinion against them. In the last analysis, ultraleftist tactics to subvert the government provided Betancourt with the justification he needed to use progressively stronger measures against the PCV and its allies.

In June 1961, leftist led students took advantage of anti-U.S. sentiment and burned the U.S. Ambassador's car when he visited the campus of Central University in Caracas. Later the same month Communist-led agitators in Maricao staged another riot when he visited that oil capital.³⁴

On 11 November 1961, Betancourt broke diplomatic relations with Cuba. This was followed by widespread disorder and violent student demonstrations. As a result, university classes were suspended.³⁵

Beginning in January 1962 it appears the extreme left organizations moved into phase III of the general plan, which included sabotage, guerrilla operations, and terrorism throughout the country. On 22 January, the opening day of the Punta del Este Conference of the OAS Foreign

³⁴Estep, p. 269.

³⁵Area Handbook, p. 529.

Ministers on the Cuba problem, a bomb was exploded in the American Embassy. This act appears to be the start of institutionalized violence as a political program backed by the full resources of the extreme left groups and eliciting broad support from the Castro regime in Cuba.³⁶

Why Terrorism and Violence? The question naturally arises as to why the PCV and its allies choose terrorism at this time? Actually, the PCV had within its ranks proponents of the terrorist approach as early as 1959 when the victory of Castro in Cuba fired up the imagination of young extremists throughout the hemisphere.³⁷ MIR had always advocated terrorism. The alliance of these two groups with extreme leftist and rightist military officers also brought them in contact with those who favored terrorist tactics. But, for three years the PCV was steadily being removed by Betancourt from its former position of power and influence. The Communists probably perceived they lacked the resources to overthrow the government by popular insurrection.

³⁶House Hearings. 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 13,64; Area Handbook, p. 529; Estep, p. 270.

³⁷U.S. Congress, Senate, Sub-Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, Documentation of Communist Penetration in Latin America, Hearing, 2 October 1963. (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1965), p. 132.

They did have the capacity to create a situation in which the military might be provoked into taking over the government. As mentioned previously, the PCV strategy was based on the assumption that a military coup, incited by the inability of the constitutional authorities to maintain law and order, would be succeeded by a fluid situation from which the Communists might benefit. At any rate, the chaos and confusion might forestall the December 1963 general election with the resultant breakdown and discrediting of democratic processes.

Another factor that probably influenced the decision by the PCV to adopt terrorism was the loss of control of the Congress by the Betancourt regime. In January 1962, a split occurred in the AD party over policy differences. Four AD senators and 22 AD deputies broke from the party. This, coupled with the loss of the MIR deputies in 1960, negated AD's majority in Congress.³⁸ With two splits within two years it seemed as if the AD party was in the process of disintegration. The time appeared ripe for the PCV to further split the party and to drive a wedge between AD and its coalition partner, the COPEI. The break-up would render the government ineffective and intensify tensions

³⁸Area Handbook, p. 269-270.

between the military and the regime. The new AD split, however, was not ideological in nature as it had been with MIR in 1960. Though it appeared quite serious in the beginning because several of the party leaders were lost, it did not fundamentally weaken the AD party.³⁹

Internationally, the position of Cuba was deteriorating as its economy weakened requiring more and more outside Communist aid. By this time Betancourt and Castro were outspoken enemies. The improving Venezuelan capitalist economy offered a sharp contrast to the failing Cuban Communist one. Therefore, the PCV may have turned to terrorism in an effort to discredit the international image of Venezuela.

Terrorist-Guerrilla Activities and Military Uprisings.

To implement the new tactics the extreme leftist organized a national command named the Army of National Liberation later called the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) which was to be the instrument for carrying out guerrilla and terrorist activities.⁴⁰ The role of this paramilitary organization was to conduct a terrorist and sabotage campaign against cities and industrial installations, engage

³⁹Alexander, p. 79-82.

⁴⁰House Hearings, 18 February-March 1963, p. 13,64,195.

in guerrilla warfare in the countryside, and support any military uprising that the leftists might be able to foment.⁴¹

The pace of subversive activities picked up rapidly in late January. The day of the bombing of the U.S. Embassy, other bombs were exploded at the Pan-American World Airways offices in Caracas, at a tire factory in Valencia, and beneath oil pipelines in Barcelona. The government reported that by the end of January, 19 had been killed, 116 wounded, and 1053 arrested.⁴² The violence continued in the ensuing months with sabotage of selected facilities and installations and with terrorist actions aimed at selected individuals almost entirely in law enforcement agencies.⁴³

Clashes between guerrillas and soldiers occurred regularly in the countryside. Large amounts of subversive material, explosives and weapons were seized.⁴⁴ Most guerrilla activity was by necessity limited to sabotage.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 13-14, 195. John L. Sorenson, Unconventional Warfare and the Venezuelan Society (China Lake, Calif.: Naval Ordnance Test Station, 1964), p. 52, 60.

⁴²Estep, p. 270.

⁴³House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963; p. 195.

⁴⁴Senate Hearings, 2 October 1963, p. 310-311.

Support given to Betancourt by the peasants proved to be a critical factor in frustrating the attempts of the PCV to mount a meaningful guerrilla action in the rural areas.⁴⁵ Indeed, many of the peasants captured the guerrillas and turned them over to the authorities.⁴⁶ Evidence that rural operations were relatively ineffective was underscored by the fact that urban terror was given decidedly more emphasis.

In late spring of 1962 there were two attempted insurrections by naval elements. In May, at the Caribbean port city of Carupano, marine and navy personnel under the command of rebel naval officers revolted against the government. They were surpressed by a 4000 man force rushed to the area. FALN guerrillas assisted in this rebellion particularly as snipers. A month later a similar uprising was staged at Venezuela's largest naval base at Puerto Cabello. It was aided by numerous civilian Communist sympathizers and a number of FALN personnel. Farmers from the vicinity, loyal to Betancourt, blocked roads until government military reinforcements arrived. The rebels were put down in what proved to be the bloodiest uprising

⁴⁵House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 13-14.

⁴⁶Senate Hearing, 2 October 1963, p. 309.

of the Betancourt presidency.⁴⁷

After the collapse of the Carupano uprising, PCV deputy Elory Torres was captured while trying to escape with rebel naval personnel. Additionally, one PCV and two MIR deputies were implicated in the Puerto Cabello insurrection. The PCV and the MIR propaganda organs had openly supported these revolts.⁴⁸

Following the uprising in Carupano Betancourt suspended constitutional guarantees. Communist Deputies, however, continued to enjoy immunity from arrest, and, sheltered behind this constitutional protection, kept up a steady barrage of propaganda, praising the mutineers as martyrs to the cause of freedom, and denouncing the government's defensive actions as tyranny. PCV deputies Torres and Teodoro Petkoff were jailed when they were directly incriminated in insurrectional activities but only after the Chamber of Deputies had lifted their parliamentary immunity.⁴⁹ Congressional immunity also allowed FALN to keep a large segment of its high level command structure intact. On 10 May Betancourt went even further and suspended the

⁴⁷Alexander, p. 111, Area Handbook, p. 529, Estep, p. 270-271, and Sorenson, p. 52.

⁴⁸Alexander, p. 111, and Estep, p. 271.

⁴⁹Alexander, p. 130.

operations of the PCV and MIR indefinitely. After a new outbreak of terrorism in Caracas in November, the government officially requested the Supreme Court to cancel the legal recognition of the two parties on the grounds that they had violated the conditions established by law for the functioning of political parties.⁵⁰ On 3 October 1963, the Court handed down a decision upholding the suspension of the two parties but did not declare them illegal.⁵¹

Despite the suppressive measures taken by Betancourt, the FALN was able to execute a series of terrorists attacks in the fall of 1962 which, in October, climaxed in the destruction of four strategic transformer stations belonging to the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, Lake Maracaibo complex.⁵² The sabotage of the power stations attracted world-wide attention, precisely the intention of the terrorists in their effort to discredit the government. The government reacted by placing large sections of the country under military control.

By the end of 1962 further political complications entered the picture. The defensive measures employed--suspension of guarantees and martial law--constituted a

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 103.

⁵¹Area Handbook, p. 272.

⁵²House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 14.

grave threat to the possibility of carrying out was considered the most important political objective of the regime. A successful general election in December 1963 for President, Congress, state legislatures, and municipal councils and the subsequent turnover of power to the victor was considered an essential goal for a continuing democracy in Venezuela. Never before had a democratically elected government served out its full term and then given up its power to a duly elected successor.⁵³ Betancourt faced a dilemma. On the one hand, suspension of emergency measures risked a large escalation of terrorist activities; on the other hand, continuance of the measures would greatly hamper candidates in carrying out their campaigns and might lead to withdrawal of the opposition parties from the election on the ground that excessive repression was not compatible with a genuinely free election. Both alternatives were unattractive, but Betancourt chose the former. By mid-December martial law was ended and most constitutional guarantees were reinstated. In January 1963 all guarantees were restored. Taking advantage of the fact that Betancourt had to put the best possible light on the administration and on AD's role as a responsible

⁵³Alexander, p. 131.

party, the FALN began an all out terrorist campaign.⁵⁴

The main attack of the terrorists in 1963 was concentrated on Caracas. For the first nine months of the year the police of Caracas were clearly outmatched. One fundamental problem was that the police were relatively inexperienced, since their forces had to be largely reconstituted after the elimination of Perez Jimenez followers.⁵⁵ Conversely, the terrorists were well organized and were able to maintain the initiative as the skill and boldness of their operations increased.

Aside from what might be termed supply and rescue operations, such as raids on police stations to obtain weapons, on banks to obtain money, and on jails to release prisoners, the terrorists concentrated on actions designed to embarrass the government. They also destroyed property, mostly American owned, hoping to exploit anti-U.S. feelings.

The most spectacular stunt was the hijacking of the Venezuelan freighter Anzoategui on the eve of Betancourt's state visit to the United States. FALN also gained a measure of international notoriety with the theft of five French paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts in Caracas and the kidnapping of the star player of a visiting

⁵⁴Estep, p. 271-272.

⁵⁵Area Handbook, p. 53.

Spanish soccer team. Since the freighter, the paintings, and the soccer player were all eventually returned unharmed, the purpose was clearly to make the government look ridiculous.

The prestige of Betancourt was enhanced by the numerous tokens of friendship and support given by the U.S. government. The state visit of Betancourt to the United States, the public assurances given at that time regarding privileged access of Venezuelan oil to U.S. markets, and the measures taken in fulfillment of these promises, all contributed to enlarge Betancourt's stature at home and to convince the military leaders and the public in Venezuela that Betancourt's policies enjoyed confidence abroad and were in the long term interest of Venezuela.⁵⁶ This offset the efforts of the terrorists to bring his administration into ridicule and contempt.

The assaults on American and government property were for the expressed purpose of destroying that property. Among those bombed or burned were properties belonging to Sears Roebuck and Company (\$4,500,000. fire), Dupont, MGM, Otis Elevator and Twentieth Century Fox.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 314, 475.

⁵⁷ Estep, p. 272-273.

The American business community responded extremely well to the challenge. In spite of the destruction of valuable property by arson and sabotage, they voiced public confidence in the Venezuelan government and affirmed their intentions to continue in operation.

In April, the government suspended the freedom of the press. Alarmed by the widespread dissemination of reports of terrorist activities, a form of censorship was imposed on the press, radio, and television media forbidding them to publish or broadcast "war propaganda" which was defined as that giving aid to those groups warring against constitutional government.⁵⁸

In the first nine months of 1963 personal injuries were kept to a minimum. Personal violence was threatened but seldom inflicted. The single important exception to this policy was the police. However, this campaign of terror directed against the police increased their feeling of solidarity.⁵⁹

The Municipal Police of Caracas gradually increased their effectiveness. A major reform, long advocated by the U.S. advisory police commission, was realized in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 272.

⁵⁹ Area Handbook, p. 511.

April 1963. The reform was in the area of vehicles and communication equipment designed to make police more mobile and to provide direct communication between the vehicles and central headquarters. With the arrival of this equipment zones were set up in Caracas. In each zone policemen in patrol cars worked with radio equipped footpatrols. In July, Caracas municipal police joined with the national police agencies to establish a unified command for directing the campaign against the terrorists.⁶⁰

At the end of September the character of the terrorist program appeared to change radically. By that time, the elections seemed to be firmly scheduled. Beginning in August the candidates had made a determined effort to win the endorsement of the electorate. Although opposition parties strove to make political capital out of the government's order of 10 May 1962 which suspended the open political operations of the PCV and MIR parties, Betancourt refused to be swayed by the many different attempts to pressure him into restoring political privileges.⁶¹ Thus, it was apparent to the PCV party in late September that the effort to obtain a role in the elections had failed. They

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 511-513.

⁶¹ Estep, p. 274.

instituted a new and brutal wave of terrorism which was still primarily aimed at provoking a military takeover. If that failed, the secondary objective was to prevent the election. If that too was frustrated, the third objective was to terrorize a large percentage of the population into abstaining from voting thereby making the results of the election inconclusive.

The trump card of this strategy was apparently the so-called "Caracas Plan". The Castro regime was the sponsor of this major effort to prevent a successful election.⁶² Cuba clandestinely delivered to Venezuela three tons of arms including machine guns and bazookas. The plan called for use of these weapons in the city of Caracas at election time when the army was dispersed at the polling places.⁶³ But, win or lose, the operation would have been timed so as to precipitate a bloody battle on the eve of the election, and, in the subsequent chaos and confusion, the election would be cancelled or at least considerably delayed.

⁶²Report of the Investigating Committee, Organization of American States, Resolution of 3 December 1963 (Washington: Pan American Union, 1964, Council Series, OEA/Ser., G/IV. c-1-658), as reported by Arthur P. Whitaker, "Cuba's Intervention in Venezuela: A Test of the OAS," Orbis, Fall, 1964, p. 514.

⁶³U.S. Dept. of State Bulletin, 30 March 1964 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1964), p. 500.

September 29th marked the opening shot of this final phase. Five national guardsmen assigned as a security patrol on an excursion train were murdered by members of the FALN. The terrorists had turned their guns on the military. The military coup in the Dominican Republic had taken place a few days earlier, and there were widespread rumors that the military was thinking of taking the same road. Immediately following this incident, which outraged the public who had been indifferent to the destruction of American property and the shooting of policemen, Betancourt assigned military units a leading role in offensive operations against the terrorists in Caracas. Troops patrolled the city along with the police. Betancourt believed the time was ripe to take another important anti-Communist step. He did not suspend constitutional guarantees, but struck at the brains of the PCV and MIR by ordering the arrest of their members who held seats in Congress. Those arrested attempted to plead congressional immunity, but Betancourt turned them over to a military court to be tried on charges of inciting a rebellion. Other suspected terrorists were similarly rounded up and detained.⁶⁴ The aroused public and the military, who had long urged such

⁶⁴Estep, p. 274.

actions, greeted the strong measures employed by Betancourt with approval and relief. Likewise, the government's action aroused virtually no opposition among the democratic opposition parties since the election campaign was in full swing and the last session of the Congress, elected in 1958, had been completed.⁶⁵ Thus, Betancourt's shrewd sense of timing had once again paid off. The armed forces remained loyal to the government, the political parties did not fall into serious disagreement, and an important blow was struck against the terrorists. Betancourt also influenced the directors of the Central University to close its doors which denied the terrorists an important sanctuary.

The "Caracas Plan" was thwarted by the detention of Communist leaders and terrorists who were to execute the Plan, and the discovery on 2 November of the Cuban arms cache which resulted in the confiscation of the weapons intended for the action.⁶⁶ The extremists continued a frenzied campaign of terror which by mid-November turned Caracas into a frontline battlefield. The FALN groups called for a general strike and attempted to enforce it by

⁶⁵Alexander, p. 130.

⁶⁶Whitaker, p. 511.

bombing and attacking store owners who remained open. Snipers dueled with police from the rooftops, a mass assassination of presidential candidates was attempted by mailing them bombs, and the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Military Mission was kidnapped.⁶⁷

In desperation the extremists brought their terrorist campaign to a peak in an effort to keep the people from voting. They announced a curfew, threatening that anyone on the streets after dark on the two nights before the election would be murdered, and provoked severe shooting incidents in various parts of Caracas.⁶⁸ They issued leaflets warning the people to stay away from the polls or be shot.⁶⁹ The battle between the government and the PCV-MIR-FALN combination continued down to election day on 1 December. Despite the intensification of terror and psychological warfare, the political organization built up under the astute and dynamic Betancourt reached and influenced the voters to an uncommon degree, impelling them to exercise their franchise. Over ninety per cent of the registered voters went to the polls. The importance of

⁶⁷Area Handbook, p. 531, and Estep, p. 273.

⁶⁸Alexander, p. 131.

⁶⁹Area Handbook, p. 531.

this vindication of democratic forces could hardly be exaggerated. It was a resounding set-back to international Communism in Latin America.⁷⁰

The External Threat

Though the threat from the Dominican Republic was substantial, the primary threat came from the Communists. Latin America has been a target for Communist conquest since the early 1920's when the Third Communist International (Comintern) initiated a program to organize and coordinate political and organizational activities in Latin America. By 1929 the First Conference of the Latin American Communist Parties was held in Buenos Aires with delegates from 14 of 20 Latin American nations attending. The movement grew rapidly in the 1930's and 1940's. Moscow's control over party activities was complete and thorough. With the coming to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba in 1959, the existence of a base of operations in the Western Hemisphere brought a grave new dimension to the Communist threat. By 1960 outside Communist influence and control over the Cuban revolutionary apparatus became obvious, when in December 1961, Castro publically proclaimed

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 532-533, and Alexander, p. 135.

his allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.⁷¹ For the reasons stated in Chapter I, Venezuela became the primary target for Cuban-based subversive aggression.⁷²

Venezuela-Cuba Relations. With the victory of Castro in 1959, there was vast enthusiasm in Venezuela for the new regime. In 1958, Castro's guerrilla fighters had received considerable support in arms and ammunition from the Venezuelan provisional government to aid in the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista. However, when Castro's leftist leanings became apparent along with his advocacy of turning the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of the Americas, relations cooled.⁷³ A further deterioration occurred when Venezuela signed the Declaration of San Jose in August 1960, which condemned Communist intervention in the Americas and generated riots in Caracas by Castro-sympathizers.⁷⁴ As the tyranny of the Castro regime increased and encouragement of riot and sabotage activities in Venezuela became more evident, Betancourt broke diplomatic relations with

⁷¹U.S. Congress, House, Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Castro Communist Subversion in the Western Hemisphere, Report, 4 April 1963 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 1-2.

⁷²Ibid., p. 7.

⁷³House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 5.

⁷⁴Estep, p. 269.

Cuba on 11 November 1961.⁷⁵ At the Punta del Este Conference of American Foreign Ministers in January 1962, Venezuela supported the move to suspend Cuba from the OAS.⁷⁶ During the crisis over the Soviet government's introduction of missiles in Cuba, Betancourt mobilized the armed forces and strongly supported President Kennedy's insistence that they be removed. Relations progressively worsened and climaxed in December 1963, when Venezuela laid before the OAS specific charges of Cuban intervention in Venezuelan affairs.

Castro-Communist Subversive Techniques. Propaganda was an important arm of the Communist subversive apparatus in Latin America. Essentially, the aim of this propaganda was to destroy the foundations of democracy by fomenting and exploiting any social, political, economic, religious, or racial problem that might exist.⁷⁷ The principal medium to carry subversive propaganda was shortwave radio. Castro

⁷⁵Area Handbook, p. 315.

⁷⁶U.S. Dept. of State Bulletin, 19 February 1962 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1962), p. 267-269.

⁷⁷U.S. Congress, Senate, Sub-Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, Cuba as a Base for Subversion in America, Study, 8 February 1963 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), p. 17.

inaugurated an international broadcasting service, Radio Havana, on 1 May 1961, and increased its broadcast time to over 266 hours a week.⁷⁸ Betancourt was the target of a very heavy Cuban attack. For example, in January 1963, on Radio Havana, Blas Roca, a veteran Communist, expressed Cuban appreciation for the acts of sabotage committed in the Venezuelan oilfields during the October 1962 missile crisis in Cuba, calling it "proletarian internationalism". He promised, "We shall continue to give out support, each day in greater proportions, to the Venezuelan people."⁷⁹ Other media such as books, magazines, and newspapers disseminated subversive and Communist ideological propaganda. Much of this material was aimed at students from the grade schools to the universities.

A second technique was provision of material support, largely financial, to subversive groups. There was complete evidence that transfer of funds was being carried out from Cuba to Latin America.⁸⁰ An example was Venezuelan Deputy Fabricio Ojeda, who, while traveling under congressional immunity, returned from Cuba in March 1962 and was seen by several witnesses to have a large quantity of U.S.

⁷⁸House Report, 4 April 1963, p. 3.

⁷⁹House Hearing, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 9,109.

⁸⁰Senate Study, 8 February 1963, p. 20.

currency stuffed in a false-bottomed suitcase.⁸¹

The third subversive technique used was indoctrination and training of hundreds of Latin Americans, including training in sabotage, terrorism, and guerrilla tactics. Some two hundred Venezuelans received training in 1962.⁸² There were at least eight training centers located throughout Cuba. Instructors were not only Cubans and other Latin Americans, but also came from other Communist countries; these spoke Spanish.⁸³ Instructions included: making of explosives; demolition of bridges, railroad tracks, and army motorized units; sabotage of troops; terror techniques to force cooperation of farmers and peasants; silent liquidation of undesirables; methods of infiltrating enemy organizations; and, techniques of dominating from within.⁸⁴ Questionnaires filled out by each trainee were a source of invaluable intelligence information.⁸⁵ Normally a prospective trainee entered Cuba indirectly via another country, usually Communist. In summary, Castro took revolutionaries from Venezuela, made arrangements for

⁸¹House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 67.

⁸²Ibid., p. 64.

⁸³Ibid., p. 87 and Senate Study, 8 February 1963, p.7.

⁸⁴House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 87.

⁸⁵House Hearings, 2 October 1963, p. 4-6.

and paid their way to Cuba, trained them in underground organization techniques, guerrilla warfare, sabotage, and terrorism, and made sure they got back to Venezuela. Once they were back, he kept in contact with them, gave them propaganda support and materials, provided training aids to expand their forces, and delivered military equipment and funds to operate.⁸⁶

The most dramatic proof of Cuban material support for the terrorists in Venezuela was obtained by the discovery of a cache of arms on 2 November 1963 at Punta Macama on the Maracaibo oil fields. On 4 November the government uncovered the FALN "Caracas Plan", which called for the capture of the city of Caracas to stop the December 1963 election. The Plan contemplated use of weapons like those in the recently discovered cache. After a preliminary investigation, Venezuela requested an emergency meeting of the Organ of Consultation of the OAS. On 3 December the OAS appointed a committee to investigate and report on Venezuela's charges that Cuba was inciting a rebellion in Venezuela and was shipping arms to the rebels. The five member committee made a detailed report on 18 February 1964 fully substantiating Venezuela's charges.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ House Hearings, 18 February-6 March 1963, p. 63.

⁸⁷ OAS Investigating Committee Report as reported in Whitaker, p. 511, 514.

The cache consisted of 81 automatic rifles, 31 machine guns, 5 mortars, 20 rocket launchers or bazookas, ammunition for these weapons, numerous demolition blocks and charges, and a 40 horsepower outboard motor. Proof was obtained from Belgium that the automatic rifles were made in Belgium, and that no other country possessed rifles of this type. In this and other cases, unsuccessful efforts had been made to obliterate the distinctive markings on the weapons, such as those identifying them as belonging to the Cuban army. Additionally the outboard motor had been sent to Havana from Canada on 1 October 1963 consigned to the National Institute of Agrarian Reform.⁸⁸

After reviewing all the evidence in the light of Castro's hostile course toward Venezuela since 1959, the Investigating Committee unanimously concluded that ". . . the acts of intervention that have been outlined, and, in particular, the shipment of arms, constitute a policy of aggression on the part of the present government of Cuba against the territorial integrity, the political sovereignty, and the stability of the democratic institutions of Venezuela."⁸⁹

⁸⁸OAS Investigating Committee Report, Appendix 5, p. 49-60, as stated in Whitaker, p. 513.

⁸⁹OAS Investigating Committee Report, p. 37, as stated in Whitaker, p. 514.

Venezuela sent two missions to various South American countries to show proof of its charges against Castro and whip up support for sanctions against Cuba.⁹⁰

At the Ninth Meeting of American Foreign Ministers in July, the U.S. came out strongly in favor of sanctions. Secretary of State Dean Rusk concluded his speech with, "Today it is Venezuela which is under attack. Is there anyone of us who can say with assurance, 'It cannot be my country tomorrow?' So let's say to our brothers in Venezuela, its government and its brave people, 'We are with you in full solidarity and will act with you to insure the safety of your democracy'."⁹¹

After almost eight months of work by Venezuela, and despite vehement rebuttals by Mexico, the sanctions resolution passed. Essentially, the OAS "condemned emphatically" the government of Cuba for its acts of aggression, agreed to break diplomatic relations with Cuba, to suspend all trade both direct and indirect, and to suspend all sea transportation with Cuba.⁹² Mexico remained adamant and

⁹⁰Whitaker, p. 515,523.

⁹¹U.S. Dept. of State Bulletin, 10 August 1964 (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1964), p. 179.

⁹²Organization of American States, Text of Final Act of the Ninth Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 26 July 1964, as stated in U.S. Dept. of State Bulletin, 10 August 1964, p. 181-182.

refused to comply with the resolution.⁹³

After the December 1963 Election

Since Betancourt could not succeed himself, the AD candidate was party president Raul Leoni. Although Leoni was an easy winner with 32.8 per cent of the vote, the margin of victory was drastically reduced from Betancourt's 49.2 per cent in 1958. Second place was won by COPEI's Rafael Caldera with 20.2 per cent.⁹⁴ A new coalition government was formed by Leoni in 1964 consisting of the AD, URD, and FND parties. The COPEI formed the loyal opposition and thus were of great importance to the future of democracy in Venezuela. No democratic system could be secure unless power groups limit their behavior according to the rules by which democracy operates. COPEI's willingness to do this will help to establish a tradition of democratic opposition, another step forward in the democratic process.⁹⁵

The terrorist and guerrilla campaign has slowed down for the time being but by no means has stopped. It was

⁹³Ibid., p. 184.

⁹⁴Martz, p. 355.

⁹⁵Robert J. Alexander, "Political Experiment in Venezuela," Current History, December 1965, p. 338.

but one phase of the program of subversion that the Communists have directed against Venezuela. Undoubtedly they will reconstitute their forces and plan a new strategy, or more likely another version of the old strategy, in their effort to overthrow the government.

CHAPTER V

LESSONS LEARNED IN VENEZUELA

Based on the foregoing material, the nature of the threat and methods for countering the threat are as follows:

The Nature of the Internal Threat

Right-Wing.

1. The right-wing opposition usually consists of discontented military officers, the civilian oligarchy, and ideologically conservative people who cannot distinguish between a moderate left government and that of Communism.

2. Their tactics generally consist of inciting insurrections on military bases, and then appealing for other armed units to join the rebellion.

3. Should a danger or crisis occur with which the civilian government appears unable to cope, military leaders may be persuaded by conservatives to take over, or they may feel they have a duty to save the nation.

Left-Wing.

1. Communist infiltration of the government, education, unions, and professions is attempted.

2. Inciting of a popular insurrection is attempted by propoganda, strikes, riots, and exploitation of social unrest.

3. Sabotage, terror and guerrilla warfare are important tactical devices used to overthrow a democratic government. The goal is to seize control of the government directly or to provoke the military into executing a "coup". After the military are in power, the Communists will attempt to seize direct control of the government by exploiting the people's revulsion of dictatorships.

4. Successful guerrilla activities require support of the people. Popular support is not essential to successful terrorist activities. Terrorists are greatly aided by public apathy and indifference.

5. The terrorists will attempt to discredit and embarrass the government both nationally and internationally by attempting to demonstrate the government's inability to maintain law and order. To this end they will utilize sabotage, arson, murder (usually law enforcement personnel), intimidation, hijacking, kidnapping and armed robbery. They are usually well trained and are able to make sophisticated bomb and arson attacks which inflict serious damage. Murder of policemen is designed to demoralize law enforcement personnel and intimidate others. The public is likely to be indifferent if the police have

been using extreme repressive measures. Hijacking of aircraft and kidnapping of foreign nationals are "stunts" to gain international notoriety thereby holding the government up to ridicule. Raids on police stations garner weapons, and armed robbery of banks is undertaken to obtain funds to finance terrorist and other subversive activities.

6. Sabotage is normally directed toward foreign businesses and industrial installations, especially those of the U.S., to exploit any anti-foreign feelings which might tend to keep the people apathetic towards the violence. This will also tend to discourage foreign investment and undermine the economy. Should saboteurs decide to attack nationally owned enterprises or public utilities, they run the risk of outraging the public.

7. Communists may collaborate with both left-wing and right-wing extremists who seek to overthrow the government. For discontented military, a coup is an end in itself, for the Communists, a means to an end.

8. If the government uses emergency measures, such as suspension of constitutional guarantees, the Communists will denounce the administration as undemocratic and liken it to previous dictatorships.

9. If national universities are autonomous they generally will be used by terrorists as sanctuaries and operating bases.

10. Communist and extremist members of Congress will use their parliamentary immunity for propaganda purposes and subversive activities.

The Nature of the External Threat

Right-Wing.

1. Right-wing dictators may be persuaded to aid over-thrown friends. This may take the form of moral and material support to incite a rebellion, or engineer an assassination.

Left-Wing.

1. A close Communist country, such as Cuba, will provide propaganda support for extremists in nearby nations. This is generally in the form of shortwave radio broadcasts and subversive literature.

2. Material support will be provided in the form of money and weapons.

3. Indoctrination and training of terrorists and guerrillas will be conducted allowing the scope and sophistication of terrorist and guerrilla activities to markedly increase.

Ways to Counter the Internal Threat

1. It is imperative that early in the administration's

term of office that a definite tangible rate of progress be made in social and economic reforms. Communist appeal and ability to exploit the masses are greatly reduced if at least the most pressing socio-economic demands of the bulk of the population are satisfied.

2. The government should have effective intelligence which will uncover signs of military disloyalty and Communist infiltration but without using police-state practices. These elements should be legally purged.

3. The government should have some legal method for suspending, or declaring illegal, extremist political parties. A party does not illicit a favorable popular response when it is unable to exercise political activities and lacks the respectability of legal status.

4. If there is a history of military distrust of a civilian administration, military leaders should be kept fully informed of the government's plans and intentions during periodic meetings. This is particularly important during strikes, riots, and terrorist activity so that the military does not misjudge the government's actions or underestimate its ability and will to cope with these activities. Budgetary money should be provided to increase the technical proficiency of the armed forces thereby directing their energies toward increasing professionalism rather than activity in the political arena.

5. The students and educated groups are attracted by the ideological basis of Communism. This need for political ideology should be directed toward an opposition political doctrine such as the international Social Christian movement.

6. The government should develop an efficient, professional, mobile and well-equipped law enforcement agency for countering urban terrorism. The threat of terrorism should not be underrated; counter measures should be initiated immediately.

7. Anti-guerrilla warfare should normally be waged by elements of the armed forces. They are usually better equipped for this type warfare, and it gives the military a role in countering the threat.

8. The government should have legal authority to enable it to limit certain basic rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom from arrest, in times of emergency. These rights should be restored as soon as possible. During emergencies military units should be alerted but not called in unless absolutely necessary. Brute force should only be used as a last resort keeping in mind its possible adverse psychological effect. The use of indiscriminate terror tactics by the government may render Communist terror a lesser evil in the eyes of the people.

9. If the universities are autonomous, the cooperation

of university authorities should be enlisted to eliminate their use as a terrorist base of operations. Democratic political groups should be organized on campus to counter communist groups.

10. The government should inform the people of the nature and cause of the conflict with terrorists and guerrillas and what the government is trying to achieve. It should exploit the nationalistic tendencies of the country so that the people will resist the terrorists and guerrillas, and make counter insurgency a common cause. Evidence such as provided by the discovery of the Cuban arms cache, should be widely publicized to forcefully bring home proof of Communist foreign intervention. The government must not allow the people to become disinterested observers.

11. Foreign governments and in-country foreign businessmen should be prompted by the administration to express public confidence in the government to offset unfavorable publicity caused by terrorist activities.

Ways to Counter the External Threat

1. The government should have methods and agencies to enable it to counter Communist propaganda that is transmitted through any medium. Actions of international labor organizations and cultural societies should be closely observed.

2. Effective customs regulation enforcement is required to prevent introduction of subversive materials. Regulations to inhibit international transfer of funds and credit to Communist Parties and front organizations should be provided.

3. Effective travel control regulations and immigration laws are necessary to prevent international movement of subversives to and from foreign training bases.

4. Effective multinational coastal patrol and surveillance is necessary to prevent introduction of weapons and supplies for subversives from Communist bases.

5. The government should maintain a complete record of evidence which will show Communist involvement in terrorist and guerrilla activities, will track terrorist travel to and from foreign bases, and will trace Communist propaganda, arms, supplies, and funds from foreign bases. This evidence should be presented to the OAS or United Nations to dramatize the seriousness of the threat and to obtain multilateral support for sanctions and other measures to counter these activities.

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