

COLD WAR LATIN AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCIES:
A MIXED RECORD OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation process began with the goal of answering two primary questions and determining the methodology to employ. The first question was if there was a single model for explaining the success or failure of the Cold War Latin American Counterinsurgencies? The second, how did the sole superpower in the Western Hemisphere lose two of the three case study counterinsurgencies and yet win the other? While other questions arose during the research project, these two questions remained the main driving force of the dissertation. The methodology encompassed four main tracks. The first was to survey and critique existing models/theories of insurgency. The second was to survey and critique existing models/theories of counterinsurgency. The third was to use the analyses above, combined with existing social science data, to develop a new multidisciplinary model that explains the success or failure of a counterinsurgency. The last track involved choosing which case studies to incorporate and then process them.

The argument began with the definition of an insurgency/counterinsurgency as “a violent conflict over the control of the population of a nation or part of a nation.” The definition immediately leads to the observation that success in a counterinsurgency is to maintain the control/support of the population; failure is to lose it. Social science research of past conflicts where opposing intranational groups (sometimes with outside third-party assistance) violently contest for control of the population shows how the population will decide which side it supports. That research shows that the decision turns on a determination of which side provides the most personal security. While a variety of tactics and strategies can lead to the maintenance or acquisition of the most personal security, that status determines success or failure. The preceding leads to a new model of insurgency/counterinsurgency. The new model provides the

desired common explanatory framework for the success of counterinsurgencies both for the case studies and the wider regional cases. The new model also explains why the sole superpower in the region failed in two of the three cases and yet succeeded in the third case.

DEDICATION

Every dissertation project requires substantial assistance from the dissertation director. The dissertation contained herein posed additional challenges including its multidisciplinary nature, the large number of archival holdings, and the mixed structure of theoretical elements with historical interpretation. Dr. James C. Bradford provided assistance that began with the first week of my entry into the history program and continued throughout this dissertation in a manner that went above and beyond even the traditionally large amount of contribution. In recognition of this fact, I dedicate this work to him.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

A dissertation committee supervised this work with Professor James C. Bradford of the Department of History serving as Chair. The other Department of History members on the committee were Professors Andrew J. Kirkendall and Julia K. Blackwelder. Professor D. Bruce Dickson of the Department of Anthropology completed the committee. The committee provided many observations, suggestions, proposed revisions, and questions for further research. All other work conducted for the dissertation was completed by the student independently.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Insurgencies shape the counterinsurgencies they spawn. Hence, any analysis of a counterinsurgency should involve a study of the insurgency it fought. There have been a vast number of insurgencies down through history with the earliest recorded counterinsurgent document from the Hittite parchment, the *Anastas*, in 1500 BC.¹ There is a common assertion made by many who study counterinsurgency that Communist insurgencies have a unique character, one that requires special methods to counter.² The Communists in Latin America tried at least three main approaches of insurgencies during the Cold War or variations thereof. The types were *foco* as espoused by Che Guevara, Marxist-Leninist revolutions as advocated by the Soviet Union, and Maoist Protracted Wars as practiced by the Communists in their twenty-two-year struggle to come to power in China and later in Vietnam. This dissertation will analyze three Latin American insurgencies and the programs developed to oppose them—those in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. The goal is to determine whether there exists a common explanatory mechanism to account for the numerous successes and the only two failures of Latin American anticommunist counterinsurgencies during the period.

The historical literature on the Cold War Latin American counterinsurgencies provides different explanations as to why they succeeded or failed, and in general, usually finds little in common among most of them. Some counterinsurgencies defeated fledgling insurgencies before

¹ Ian F. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents since 1750* (2001), 1.

² E.g., McGeorge Bundy, "National Security Action Memorandum No. 124," John F. Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memorandum Series, 1; and Col. John Waghelstein, "A Latin-American Insurgency Status Report," *Military Review* 67, no. 2 (February 1987): 42-47.

they became rooted in the general population. The account presented herein differs in that a unified explanation of the successes and failures of the counterinsurgencies arises from the analysis of these events.

The following examination of the counterinsurgencies in one region over a limited period uses a foundation of historical inquiry in a more comprehensive multidisciplinary approach. The voluminous research appearing in other select social sciences and military institutions on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency since 9/11, along with theories from the counterinsurgency/insurgency discipline bolster the project. Despite the case studies' restricted space and time, the investigation suggests implications for the broader general theory of counterinsurgency as well as an improved history of the area and period. The approach herein turns the "lessons learned" methodology that dominates military science on its head. Rather than examining historical events to draw out useful strategies and tactics for employment today and in the future, the dissertation reverses the approach. The methodology begins with the latest cutting-edge research on counterterrorism or counterinsurgency. Next, it combines that research with traditional historical analysis to provide an interdisciplinary reexamination of historical counterinsurgencies that provides superior descriptive and explanatory power to either approach used in isolation.

The third chapter, insurgency theory, and the fourth chapter, counterinsurgency theory, include a selection of theories that concentrate on either explaining historic successes or failures or undertaking analyses from which to derive guidance for conducting current or future operations or to do both. The literature is extensive and often exhibits either explicit or implicit references to other standard works in the field. The chapters present each theory in summary form, mine them for crucial contributions, and then place them within an overall context that

provides the analytic framework for the rest of the dissertation. The analysis includes an examination of their strengths and weaknesses. Important factors examined include a determination as to whether a theory is more population-centric or enemy-centric, and whether cases involve groups of stand-alone insurgents or ones that are adjuncts to an army in the field. Additional questions surveyed include whether practice matches theory or if there is an appearance that the “theory” claimed to have guided the insurgency or counterinsurgency is more of a “rational reconstruction” than a historical explanation. Another question is whether results seem to have universal or at least general applicability or are most likely limited to the specific insurgencies/counterinsurgencies in question.

The insurgent theories appear in roughly chronological order with the first discussed being that presented by T.E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia,” in his book, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1922).³ Lawrence, a scholar of medieval fortifications and a British intelligence officer, details his participation in the Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule during World War I.⁴ While hardly the first account of the use of an insurgent strategy, or even the only World War I account, it does mark the beginning of the modern era of counterinsurgency as the airplane makes one of its first, albeit ineffective, appearances.⁵ The theory laid out in the book shows how Lawrence rethought conventional tactics and strategy as he reconfigured standard military principles, usually by turning them on their heads, to fit an irregular campaign. For example, he transformed the concept of a “defense in depth” that spread out actual defenses over an area such that a massed enemy force can only engage parts of the defense at once, trading

³ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, (1991 [n.d.]).

⁴ T. E. Lawrence, *Crusader Castles*, ed. Denys Pringle, (1989).

⁵ Cf. General von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (1920), wherein he described his use of guerrilla warfare in East Africa, for another account of the use of asymmetric tactics in World War I and Alan Johnston, “The First Ever Air Raid - Libya 1911,” BBC News, May 10, 2011, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13294524>.

space for time in holding the enemy, for an “offense in depth.” The “offense in depth” concept was that a raiding force could threaten attacks over a wide area preventing a numerically superior enemy from ever massing its troops to engage the far smaller offensive force, trading time for space. Thus, he was able to turn the point of engagement from the strong “front lines” of conventional battles, to the soft “rear area” usually considered safe territory.

The campaign utilized the strengths of his Arab allies to turn the strengths of his Ottoman and German opponents against them while exploiting their many weaknesses. The campaign harkened back to the medieval warfare that Lawrence had tremendous expertise in as opposed to modern warfare.⁶ The force he led served as an adjunct to the main British army eventually commanded by General Edmund Allenby.

The account implicitly makes use of many aspects of the “population-centric” versus “enemy-centric” approaches many years before the debate found formal expression. The Ottomans were using an “enemy-centric” approach as is appropriate for a conventional campaign. Lawrence realized that with a local population hostile to the Ottomans in some cases and often neutral at most in others, he could on “population-centric” grounds try to organize an Arab Revolt and use local warriors to carry out the fight. He moved with a mobile force that usually made agreements with local tribes to provide warriors for attacks in their territory. The practice gave Lawrence the advantage of using troops that had excellent knowledge of the terrain and easily blended back into the civilian population once the attack was over.

Mao Zedong also provided an insurgent account in the middle of the Chinese Civil War based on personal experience in his 1937 pamphlet, *On Guerrilla War*.⁷ He presented therein his

⁶ Scott Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2014), 209.

⁷ Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-Tung On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (2015).

theory of insurgency. The theory would contribute to countering the Japanese during World War II and eventually result in the Communist victory in 1949 in the Chinese Civil War that had initially begun in 1927.⁸ The pamphlet laid out the theory referred to as Protracted People's War. While standard Marxist-Leninist theory posited an urban-based revolutionary approach, Mao advocated a primarily rural approach that progressed through three phases to final victory. These are the initial period of "quiet" during which the movement establishes itself, a period of increased military activity as the movement progressively expands, and a final period during which the movement engages in conventional military actions to defeat the regime. Of course, during the actual Civil War, as opposed to the theoretical conflict Mao addressed in the pamphlet, the Second Sino-Japanese War did as much or more damage to the Nationalist forces as the Communist forces were able to inflict on their own. The work is essential not only in consideration of its limited explanatory power for the outcome of the Chinese Civil War but in its claimed role as a template for many subsequent insurgencies, including the First and Second Indochina Wars (French and American Wars in Vietnam).

Ernesto "Che" Guevara used his personal experience and study of several Marxist-Leninist works to write his book, *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961). The book describes the *foco* theory to which Che attributes the success of the Cuban Revolution and posits its availability as a template for further revolution throughout the world. Its three basic tenets are:

- (1) Popular forces can win a war against the army.
- (2) It is not necessary to wait for until all the conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them.
- (3) In underdeveloped Latin America, the countryside is the basic area for armed fighting.⁹

⁸ Harold Robert Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 2nd edition (1962 [1938]), 193.

⁹ Guevara, Ernesto Che. *Guerrilla Warfare*. (1998 [1961]), 3.

The latter two tenets directly contradict standard Marxist-Leninist principles that postulate that only history and economics can create objective conditions for revolution and that the revolution needs to be urban-based. More specifically, in Marxist theory, "... the proletariat must build class-consciousness through the development of advanced capitalism, revolutionary solidarity through the collective experience of class oppression, and then finally a revolution by the proletariat."¹⁰ The theoretical dispute between *foco* and traditional Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory, along with Maoist-Soviet schisms, had repercussions for much of the Cold War. The disagreement over theory caused friction between various Latin American groups and the Soviets, especially the Cubans, hampering Russian support efforts for Latin American Communist insurgencies.¹¹

The fourth chapter includes a canvass of a selection of significant works from the extensive literature on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, with the former emphasized in this dissertation. The examination provides the context for the historical analysis of the three case studies, and the conclusions reached on the entire set of Cold War counterinsurgencies in Latin America. The analysis of the typical breakdown in the counterinsurgency literature between "population-centric" and "enemy-centric" approaches yields a non-traditional conclusion. The dissertation arrives at the position that, properly understood, all counterinsurgencies are subject to treatment as "population-centric" even if the everyday campaign focuses almost exclusively on killing, capturing, or coopting the enemy. The observation that all counterinsurgencies are most properly population-centric, at least theoretically, is not merely an academic point. For example, American efforts in combatting

¹⁰ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory* (1991), 105.

¹¹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World - Newly Revealed Secrets from the Mitrokhin Archive* (2005).

Latin American insurgents, particularly in training and equipping local government forces to carry out “population-centric” strategies and tactics, often had unexpected results. Several counterinsurgencies seemed to owe their success to an “enemy-centric” approach that may have surprised the American engineers working on civic projects.¹² Such forces ignored their “population-centric” training and achieved a quick victory. Nevertheless, the failed counterinsurgencies in Cuba and Nicaragua, along with the successful counterinsurgency in Venezuela, all find their best explanations in terms of “population-centric” strategies and tactics. The following examination of Cold War Latin American counterinsurgencies makes clear the answer to this apparent paradox.

David Galula, a French military officer and scholar, combined personal experience, observation, and study to author one of the foundational modern classics on counterinsurgency, his *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* in 1964.¹³ Galula obtained his personal experience during parts of the Chinese Civil War 1927-1949, the Greek Civil War 1946-1949, the French Indochina War 1946-1954, and the Algerian war 1954-1962. The central concept in the book is that rather than focus on the territory or even the eradication of insurgents as the primary goal of the conflict, the real aim is the support of the population. Galula accepts Mao’s central contention that revolutionary war is essentially more political than military. He then builds his theory of counterinsurgency that serves as a major inspiration for many subsequent works, most notably *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* written

¹² Andrew J. Birtle, *United States Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (2010), 300.

¹³ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (2006).

under the direction of General David Petraeus.¹⁴ Galula constructs this theory based on his four laws of counterinsurgency:

1. The aim of the war is to gain the support of the population rather than control of territory.
2. Most of the population will be neutral in the conflict; support of the masses can be obtained with the help of an active friendly minority.
3. Support of the population may be lost. The population must be efficiently protected to allow it to cooperate without fear of retribution by the opposite party.
4. Order enforcement should be done progressively by removing or driving away armed opponents, then gaining support of the population, and eventually strengthening positions by building infrastructure and setting long-term relationships with the population. This must be done area by area, using a pacified territory as a basis of operation to conquer a neighbouring area.¹⁵

Galula provides a more comprehensive detailed roadmap of eight steps for gaining and maintaining the support of the population, although some of the steps are not mandatory in some circumstances.

Gregor Mathias, Ph.D., a researcher specializing in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) at the University of Paris – Sorbonne, finds fault with Galula’s account. He claims that an analysis of the operations that Galula commanded in the Algerian War reveals a significant mismatch between Galula’s claimed success using his theory in Algeria and the actual results. He shows in a meticulously documented book that Galula exaggerated his accomplishments in several ways. The

¹⁴ Sarah Sewall, John A. Nagl, David H. Petraeus, and James F. Amos, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, University of Chicago Press, (2007).

¹⁵ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 55-56.

exaggerations included reporting quantitative counterinsurgent activities that are notorious for being misleading in a counterinsurgency, e.g., body counts during the Vietnam War. Galula also claimed various villages were under control after some success in rooting out insurgent cells, while knowing that insurgent influence on the inhabitants continued. Mathias goes on to point out that even Galula's legitimate claims to success were often only temporary, something Galula probably knew when he reported them as successes both to his commanders and in the media.¹⁶ While Galula's theory still has many supporters, the most important of which is the U.S. armed forces official doctrine, some champion enemy-centric approaches.

John A. Nagl served twenty years in the U.S. Army as an armor officer who saw action in both Gulf Wars. He was a co-author of the well-received 2006 *The U.S. Army/ Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual*. He received a doctoral degree from Oxford University with a dissertation that became the basis for *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.¹⁷ The book contains an examination of the successful British counterinsurgent efforts in the Malayan Emergency 1948-1960 in comparison with the failed American counterinsurgent efforts in Vietnam from 1950 to 1975. One should note that the title of the book comes from a quote from T.E. Lawrence, who said, "(m)aking war upon insurgents is messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife."¹⁸ The connection between the two works is evident. Nagl uses a framework for examining whether an army is a successful learning institution or not. Successful learning institutions focus on flexibility and developing strategies/tactics from the bottom up. Unsuccessful learning institutions use an inflexible, top-

¹⁶ Grégor Mathias, *Galula in Algeria: Counterinsurgency Practice Versus Theory*, Translated by Neal Durando, Praeger, 2011, 18-54.

¹⁷ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹⁸ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 193.

down approach. Nagl's analysis of the different results of the two counterinsurgencies ultimately concludes with the observation that the British succeeded where the Americans failed because the British forces were a successful learning institution while the American forces were not. Nagl may have chosen the title in recognition of the quick manner that Lawrence had adapted conventional strategy to insurgency during the Arab Revolt in the local area rather than following orders from the top. Nagl probably took notice of Lawrence's rapid appreciation for the lessons taught by the few mistakes he made and turned into necessary changes immediately, i.e., the Arabs under Lawrence's leadership represented the better learning institution. Nagl's fundamental claim is theoretically agnostic on being population-centric or enemy-centric, although the British approach was population-centric, at least in its rhetoric. The following chapter emphasizes the fact that Nagl makes little of the fact that in Vietnam, the insurgents were adjuncts to an army in the field, but they were not in Malaya.

The next book, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual from 2005*, is a collaborative effort of just under one hundred experts from several diverse fields, including the military. The manual concentrates on a population-centric approach. Chapter IV examines the manual's central tenets concerning the 2007 "Surge" in Iraq that was a significant manifestation of the new Army/Marine approach to counterinsurgency detailed therein. The primary mission the manual presents is in terms of securing for the local population a basic quality of life with an emphasis on security. It states, "(i)nsurgents succeed by maintaining turbulence and highlighting local grievances ... [while] COIN forces succeed by eliminating turbulence and helping the host nation meet the populace's basic needs."¹⁹ Besides a bias, understandable as it may be, to envisioning counterinsurgency solely in terms of third party

¹⁹ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 55.

assistance to host nations, the account also focuses only on insurgencies that are not adjuncts to an army in the field. The chapter shows that while being flawed in its analysis of past counterinsurgencies/insurgencies, the manual suffers most from being a general-purpose document that is too much a result of a particular current set of contemporary circumstances. Nevertheless, the COIN manual is a significant improvement over past manuals and was instrumental in the success of “the Surge” in Iraq.

Mark Moyar earned his doctorate from Cambridge and has teaching experience at the U.S. Marine Corps University and Joint Special Operations University. He next became the director of the Project on Military and Diplomatic History at the Center for Strategic & International Studies. He wrote *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* after interviewing hundreds of officers with counterinsurgency experience.²⁰ He offers an alternative to the ongoing population-centric versus enemy-centric debate by claiming to show that it is leadership, especially at the small-unit level, that is the most critical factor in success or failure. He considers a variety of case studies in support of his theory.

Despite numerous problems with Moyar’s approach, few would argue that leadership is not important, even if not *the* essential factor. The problems arise when one asks what “leadership” specifically involves in winning the counterinsurgency-insurgency battle and whether focusing on “good leadership” leads to success during a campaign or only provides a plausible explanation for success in hindsight. After all, Che Guevara was part of the winning leadership in the Cuban Revolution but was the principal leader in the failed insurgency in Bolivia. Fidel Castro, as a behind-the-scenes backer, was unable to enable replication of his

²⁰ Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (2009).

Cuban success elsewhere other than in Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas did not follow much of his advice.

Many of the best examples of leadership in the military sphere, both in conventional and unconventional warfare, involve leaders who went against their training by either coming up with novel successful solutions to traditional challenges or achieved great results by intentionally violating it. An example of the former is the successful escape of the Lusitanians under Viriathus from Roman encirclement. Viriathus ordered his troops to form up their cavalry apparently for a hopeless frontal attack that, in actuality, served as a screen for their entire force fleeing individually in every direction catching the Romans helplessly off-guard.²¹ An example of the latter is Robert E. Lee's decision at the Battle of Chancellorsville to divide his forces in the face of a numerically superior opponent. Nevertheless, leadership appears to be more a significant component for success rather than a necessary or sufficient one. After all, Viriathus, Hannibal, Lee, and Erwin Rommel, along with a long list of other great leaders, have been on the losing side while many poor ones, George McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, and Robert Neville have been on the winning side.

David Kilcullen, an experienced Australian counterinsurgency unit commander and staff advisor turned scholar, wrote two seminal works, *The Accidental Guerrilla* and *Counterinsurgency*, based on his experience in East Timor, Indonesia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.²² He was the principal counterinsurgency adviser to General Petraeus in Iraq and one of the chief architects of "the Surge" there. Kilcullen was a vociferous proponent of population-centric counterinsurgency who believes that enemy-centric approaches, particularly heavy-handed ones,

²¹ Appian, *Roman History*, Book VI *Wars in Hispania* 6.62.

²² David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (2009); and *Counterinsurgency* (2010).

were counterproductive historically. He provides a twenty-eight item list of fundamentals for company-level counterinsurgency, as his emphasis is on unit-level local strategies and tactics that he claims supply the essential route necessary for success.²³ More importantly, his theory emphasizes both the insurgent and counterinsurgent circumstances and actions. His approach is preferable to the one-sided treatments usually given in the literature that focus on only the insurgent or counterinsurgent parts of the equation. While some of his generalizations about the historical record are partially in error, his overall theory surpasses most of the alternatives. The oft-observed prejudice of experienced military officers against purely civilian academics' theories also appears in the book even though said individuals might not make the erroneous historical claims he does. However, it is true that many academic treatments also fail to take into account relevant examples from other eras and geographic areas.

The last account examined in the counterinsurgency chapter is a part of the explosion of literature since 9/11 that considers not only counterinsurgency but also counterterrorism. This segment of the literature draws heavily on many of the social sciences as well as history and organizational science to characterize terrorist groups, and groups that use terrorism as do many insurgents. These theories have been able to provide detailed insights into all phases of such organizations that occupy one of four different stages: gestation, growth, maturity, and transformation. The particular exemplar included in the chapter is that of Troy S. Thomas, Stephen D. Kiser, and William D. Casebeer's *Warlords Rising: Confronting Violent Non-State Actors*.²⁴ All three authors are/were Air Force officers. Thomas served on the National Security

²³ David Kilcullen, "28 Articles Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency," Goodreads, accessed May 31, 2017, <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17381133-28-articles-fundamentals-of-company-level-counterinsurgency>.

²⁴ Troy S. Thomas, Stephen D. Kiser, and William D. Casebeer, *Warlords Rising: Confronting Violent Non-State Actors* (2005).

Council, Kiser was the Director of Operations at the 614th Space Intelligence Squadron at Vandenberg Air Force Base, and Casebeer was at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in its Defense Sciences Department. Many such approaches not only have the advantage of accessing large amounts of data, but they also have the virtue that they consider all the relevant factors, including the insurgents, counterinsurgents, and environmental factors such as the population at large. The use of actual data across many insurgent groups reveals several “intuitive” conclusions of previous theories were in error, such as the claim that most jihadi terrorists are from disadvantaged economic backgrounds when the data shows most have middle-class backgrounds. Thomas, Kiser, and Casebeer use an “open-systems” approach to analyze insurgent/terrorist organizations and networks that yields essential insights into determining what counterinsurgent strategies and tactics lead to success or failure.

The next four chapters of the dissertation use the theories set out in the insurgency and counterinsurgency chapters to examine three Latin American case study counterinsurgencies from the Cold War era that had support from the government of the United States. The examination seeks to construct a single analytical framework that can explain the success or failure of those counterinsurgencies that is extensible to explain the success or failure of the other counterinsurgencies during the period.

U.S. and Latin American views on the threats presented during the Cold War were almost opposites despite sharing a common hemisphere. The dominant factor in the Cold War counterinsurgencies in Latin America in the American point of view was the threat of the “world-wide Communist conspiracy” conceived and executed from the Kremlin in the Soviet Union. For example, the second progress report on NSC 144/1 explicitly stated that the “immediate central problem” of the Communist threat should outweigh “peripheral” anti-

colonial considerations.²⁵ The U.S. position was that the conspiracy presented an existential threat to all the countries of the region. The consensus Latin American position not only viewed the danger as minimal, it usually posited a hazard from the Western powers, especially the United States, as the much more likely source of concern.

The dominant factor in the point of view of many Latin Americans, particularly those involved in the insurgencies, was that the Cold War power most responsible for being a threat was the United States. For example, the *National Intelligence Estimate: The Caribbean Republics* of August 24, 1954, points out that Latin American countries worried more about U.S. military and political interventions as well-remembered historical occurrences rather than an indirect and long-term Communist threat.²⁶ The disagreement between the U.S. focus on anti-Communism and the Latin American focus on anti-Imperialism as to the principal threat to security remained at the heart of many counterinsurgent conflicts in the region during the period. It played a critical role in the two failed counterinsurgencies in Cuba and Nicaragua.

The United States viewed itself as fundamentally different from Latin America as to the social, economic, and political aspects of civilization. The official American government's attitude about the inferiority of Latin American political institutions, particularly concerning their instability and lack of readiness for complete democracy, played a central role in missteps in the region. One mark of such a low estimation of Latin American ability for self-government during the period was the constant support for dictatorships in the name of "political stability" and reliable "anti-Communism," dictatorships that often became targets for insurgencies. The

²⁵ Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, "Memorandum of the Under Secretary of State (Smith) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay)," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954 Volume IV: the American Republics* (1952-1954), S/S NSC Files lot D 351, NSC 144 series, 30, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRus/FRus-idx?type=turn&entity=FRus.FRus195254v04.p0052&id=FRus.FRus195254v04&isize=M>.

²⁶ "National Intelligence Estimate: The Caribbean Republics," August 24, 1954, FRUS, 1952-1954 Vol. IV, 398.

attitude found its way into official documents as utterances in support of dubious assessments of the need to support dictatorships or in hopeful estimations of the possibility that Castro would fall victim to a counter-revolution soon after taking power. The most glaring example of such a misstep was the absolute blindness to the chance that Castro's success would have profound long-term effects in the region. Instead, officials clung to their hope that the replacement of Fulgencio Batista by Castro would prove one of the ephemeral changes often associated with changes of government in Latin America in the view of the United States.

Many subsidiary issues arise during the pursuit of a common explanatory mechanism to account for the success or failure of the Cold War Latin American counterinsurgencies. The fundamental differences between the Latin American viewpoint and that of the United States played a role in many. The United States often excused its support for dictatorship over democracy during the Cold War in terms of the strong anti-Communist rhetoric of the dictatorships.²⁷ Differences between Congress and the executive branch and within the different departments of the executive branch played a crucial role at times, often in response to contending domestic and foreign policy concerns. The reshaping of the global community in the post-World War II period as most of the last vestiges of the European colonial period fell or were pushed aside saw many developing nations seek their place in a new world order dominated by the bi-polar Cold War powers. Nationalistic forces that were part of this process often took revolutionary paths to seek to become the controlling political powers in their countries.

Latin American governments during the period covered a wide range of modes from highly autocratic dictatorships such as that of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic to democracies such as Venezuela that had its first peaceful change of democratic government

²⁷ Ibid., 397.

during the 1960s while fighting an insurgency. The United States supported the dictatorships almost without exception. The close identification of dictatorships with colonial and imperialistic practices made them easy targets for nationalistic or Communist narratives of insurgents. Such insurgents claimed to be making anti-colonial, anti-imperialistic efforts to secure fundamental political rights for their people. Washington administrations usually mishandled dealing with these narratives. The U.S. government's focus mainly fell on either trying to "educate" Latin American governments about the threat of Communism or ignoring them if the governments in question sufficiently safeguarded perceived American interests. Thus, friendly anti-Communist dictatorships benefitted on both counts concerning American support. Democratic governments, meanwhile, that seemed unconcerned about the Communist threat, often a wholly justified stance, and who pursued their own people's needs without emphasizing American interests, were usually given far less support. The inability of the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua, and the United States to come to grips with the power of the insurgent's anti-imperialistic, nationalistic narratives played a vital role in the failure of the counterinsurgencies in the two Latin American countries.

Castro used Fulgencio Batista's clear-cut preference for his welfare and American interests to bolster not only an ultimately successful nationalistic narrative about the illegitimacy of the Batista government. Castro also made that narrative the foundation of his post-revolution anti-Americanism that became the centerpiece of his rule. The Sandinistas eventually targeted American imperialism and made it a part of their narrative, including a conscious effort to use a propaganda campaign in the United States against intervention to safeguard their success in Nicaragua. The United States failed to meet the challenge posed by the Sandinistas. The failure occurred despite the awareness of the success of Castro in Cuba in using such a narrative and the

United States not having any doubt that the insurgency in Nicaragua was Communist, unlike its Cuban experience. The defeat came about in large part because the United States again underestimated the insurgent narrative and overestimated the value of having a government in place that was staunchly anti-Communist and safeguarded American interests.

The new Jimmy Carter Administration directive on human rights in foreign policy had problems in implementation from the outset. Beginning with a statement in President Carter's inaugural address in January 1977 that human rights would be an "absolute," the administration struggled with establishing a practical implementation. The need to decide what human rights to promote, and work with different stakeholders, especially Congress on foreign aid, led to a long delay in implementation that injured the program's effectiveness. One of the many challenges was the problem many embassies had explaining to friendly governments what appeared to be an insulting policy when applied to them.²⁸ The delay, combined with the mistaken assumption that the cutoff of aid in February 1979 would be temporary and survivable for the Anastasio Somoza regime in Nicaragua, contributed to the failure of the counterinsurgency there.

Tensions between domestic and foreign policy goals exacerbated all of the problems faced by the United States in dealing with Latin America. One of the starkest results of the misalignment between American domestic and foreign policy considerations is the practice of using a mixture of political appointees and professional Foreign Service officers in crafting and executing foreign policy. The problem arises from the use of such appointees as ambassadors to foreign countries. The latter played an essential role in the failure of the Batista counterinsurgency in Cuba. It also played a prominent part in the collapse of the Somoza

²⁸ Lincoln P. Bloomfield, "From Ideology to Program to Policy: Tracking the Carter Human Rights Policy," *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1982): 3–8.

counterinsurgency in Nicaragua.²⁹ The story of how this occurred appears in Chapters V and VIII, respectively.

More generally, the dissertation shows that almost the entire foreign policy apparatus of the U.S. government is ill-suited to successfully carrying out, or supporting, counterinsurgencies. In general, successful counterinsurgencies most often require the majority of a set of particular attributes. These include specialized knowledge of local conditions with principle authority assigned local commanders for day-to-day operations with highly skilled adaptive leadership at all levels. The focus of operations must occur in the context of the long-range politico-military plan for success instead of merely reacting to the latest insurgent operations. There should be consistent access to sufficient resources, quick reaction to changing circumstances, and insurgent activities in line with the overall plan, and a clear priority on necessary counterinsurgent programs over competing government objectives. The American foreign policy apparatus usually has few, if any, of these characteristics. The above only represents a partial list of counterinsurgency needs not commonly found in the U.S. foreign policy apparatus. Combine the above with the changing congressional leadership and new administrations, sometimes in periods as short as two to four years, along with competing foreign, political, and domestic needs, and the magnitude of the problem becomes evident. The intrusion of domestic policy circumstances helped spell the end of the Vietnam commitment, a situation that recurred more recently in Iraq with the failure to secure a status of forces agreement in President Barack Obama's first term and may yet reappear in Afghanistan.

The preceding is true despite President John F. Kennedy's focus on counterinsurgency and the unity of rhetoric of fighting the Cold War overall. Thus, despite counterinsurgent

²⁹ See Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling: A Case Study of Washington at Work* (1990) for an extended discussion of the phenomenon.

successes in places like Venezuela and Bolivia, the bulk of U.S. military leadership clung to a “Big-War” model based on its World War II experience and training for armor-centric war in Europe against the Warsaw Pact. The Vietnam War became the dominating American experience, rather than the Latin American experience, in large part because the government prosecuted that war described in unabashedly anti-Communist rhetoric backed up by a big-war approach. That approach included a massive World War II-style draft, although one skewed towards minority and low-income individuals. The draft contributed to the domestic disaster of a “Generation Gap” and massive anti-war movement that ultimately helped contribute to a loss of will to fight the war and defeat. Kennedy’s efforts did start the development of the exceptional Special Forces capabilities of the modern U.S. armed forces more easily achieved later with an all-volunteer military.

A particular class of domestic factors that often intrude significantly into foreign affairs is that concerning domestic economic forces. Economic considerations, including those with domestic sources and those with contending foreign policy origins, often played a significant role in affecting U.S. relations with each government attempting to ward off an insurgency. The pressure from domestic producers of sugar in the United States to increase their production at the expense of foreign suppliers, especially Cuba, played an essential role in U.S.-Cuba relations during the Cuban Revolution. The oil and gas production facilities in Venezuela, especially those with American ties, provided favorite targets for the insurgents there. The budget constraints during the Eisenhower years provided significant obstacles that affected the specific options pursued in U.S.-Cuban relations. Congress was leery of funding foreign aid, the economy underwent two recessions during the period, and the Cold War exacted hefty expenses. The United States was also still giving preferential treatment to European needs in rebuilding

from the devastation of World War II. That preference contributed to a recurrent claim by Latin American countries that they received far less assistance than their European counterparts did. The heavy demands on the American military both in human and material resources during the Vietnam War placed ever-increasing constraints on what the United States could make available to Venezuela and Nicaragua during their counterinsurgencies. The similarity of U.S. effort in the two counterinsurgencies with such different results forces the analysis in the direction of the host nation and insurgent efforts themselves for the bulk of the explanation of success and failure.

The basic Marxist-Leninist approach to insurgency is an urban-based strategy that mandates the party has primacy. Many Communist insurgencies in Latin America have reversed the Marxist-Leninist approach. They have been rural-based and *foco* centered at least in their inspiration, i.e., ones in which a group of rurally based guerrillas, which could be quite small at the outset, is the focus (hence *foco* in Spanish) of the entire revolution, with the *foco* maintaining primacy over the party. The Communist insurgencies in Latin America have usually failed, and their failures have a great deal in common. The insurgencies discussed in the following pages make clear that the truth is that the *foco* theory is correct that the party need not be the vanguard. However, without preexisting conditions conducive for revolution, primarily a government deemed illegitimate, insurgent groups have failed. The position taken herein is that even the Cuban Revolution does not truly represent a successful *foco* insurgency. It did not match that approach because not only did the small groups not create the conditions for revolution but also because of accounts that credit *foco* theory ignore significant other non-rural, non-*foco* forces like the urban-based Cuban Student Directorate (known as the DRE in

Spanish).³⁰ Indeed, both victorious Latin American insurgencies, in Cuba and Nicaragua, employed both rural and urban components.

The only claimed *foco-centered* insurgency that succeeded was Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution. That revolution provides the first case study of his insurgency from July 26, 1953, to January 1, 1959. The success of the Cuban Revolution had three significant and related results. First, Castro, Guevara, and Regis Debray came to believe that *foco* had proven itself a new theory of insurgency for use as a template to replicate the Cuban success throughout the developing world, especially in Latin America and Africa. Guevara and Debray wrote books that laid out how to carry out a successful *foco* insurgency. Second, the successful Cuban Revolution spawned several other attempts that at least initially tried to use the theory to duplicate the Cuban success. Third, the "loss" of Cuba to Communism sent another shockwave through American Cold War thinking similar to the "loss" of China in 1949. The loss led to a renewed determination in the American policy of a commitment to try to prevent the loss of any other countries to Communism (e.g., President Johnson specifically mentioned this threat in deciding to intervene militarily in the Dominican Republic in 1965).³¹ The policy weakened during the presidency of Richard Nixon but returned in full force under President Reagan.

The second case study examines the insurgency in Venezuela that ran from 1960 to 1968. This insurgency initially followed the *foco* approach and failed, as did all the other insurgencies modeled on Cuban methodology. There were two groups dedicated to using violence to overthrow the democratically elected government. The first were the members of the Revolutionary Left Movement or MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*). The second

³⁰ Matt D. Childs, "An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 3 (October 1, 1995): 593–94.

³¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Situation in the Dominican Republic," May 2, 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26932>,

was the Communist Party of Venezuela or PCV (*Partido Comunista de Venezuela*) as the political arm with an associated action group, the Armed Forces of National Liberation or FALN (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*) to carry out missions. The former drew their inspiration from Castro's Cuban Revolution while the latter aligned themselves more with the traditional Marxist line of thought.

The third case study is that of the Sandinista National Liberation Front or FSLN (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) in Nicaragua, 1961 to 1979. The failure of the post-Fidel insurgencies, and their imminent danger of failing in 1965, led the Sandinistas to switch to a Prolonged People's War approach à la Mao. Continued failure caused the movement to splinter into three groups in 1975. One group remained committed to the Prolonged People's War theory. Another was an urban-based movement more in line with at least a part of the traditional Marxist-Leninist approach. A third group adopted the expediency of appearing to join other more moderate groups that it would oust after victory, more in the spirit of Lenin rather than Marx. The result was the only other successful Communist insurgency in Latin America during the Cold War (counting Cuba as ultimately a Communist insurgency only in the sense of the government eventually formed by Castro after winning declared itself Communist).

The United States was involved in many of the counterinsurgency efforts included in the case studies and broader region at least to the degree of initially trying to lend support to the maintenance of the governments in power. This effort eventually changed in the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua. The effort morphed into trying to find moderate alternatives to what the United States saw as the radical insurgents who would most likely institute anti-American or Communist governments to replace Batista and Somoza. That change meant that the previous counterinsurgency in each country had split into two separate counterinsurgencies that often

were in opposition to each other. The dissertation proceeds by examining the insurgencies with particular attention to tracking the, often erroneous, American viewpoint. The central question is the determination of what explains the successes and failures in the case studies, particularly regarding results that are subject to generalization across all insurgencies/counterinsurgencies. Within that question, special consideration arises as to the explanation of how the reigning superpower in the region failed to protect its interests in two of the three case studies while its lone success depended more on the positive actions of the host nation government.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Works examining the two failed anti-Communist counterinsurgencies in Latin America, Cuba and Nicaragua, cover a wide range of topics. The literature on the successful counterinsurgency in Venezuela is much less robust. Traditionally, most of the works on the insurgencies in Cuba and Nicaragua characterize them as being of a very different character from each other. Ultimately, the close examination of the two case studies points to an entirely different conclusion, i.e., that the two insurgencies have far more in common than previously recognized. Both Fidel Castro's group in Cuba, particularly in the form of Che Guevara's judgment recorded after the revolution, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua explicitly rejected Moscow's Marxist-Leninist prescription that one should wait until history and economics create the objective conditions for a revolution. Paradoxically, a strong case emerges in the following chapters that the two groups succeeded because history and economics had created such favorable conditions. The analysis of the two failed counterinsurgencies suggests why the Venezuelan counterinsurgency succeeded, most notably because the conditions necessary for a successful insurgency were not in place and did not develop during the period. The framework developed herein provides an explanatory framework for the success or failure of all the Latin American counterinsurgencies.

Assessments of the insurgencies and attempts to counter them separate into several readily identifiable categories. Each category breaks down further into secondary and primary source components. The first category, "country background," is composed of works that provide a general background for the countries involved during the relevant period. The second

category, “general counterinsurgency,” is composed of background works on counterinsurgency. The third category, “communist insurgency,” is composed of background works on communist insurgency, to include *foco* theory despite Castro’s late declaration of communism, with particular emphasis on those involving the United States. The fourth category, “American counterinsurgency,” is composed of works on American counterinsurgency. The fifth category, “case study insurgency,” is composed of works on insurgencies, including at least one of the three case study insurgencies. The sixth category, “related topics,” is composed of unique topics that are relevant to one or another of the case studies primarily as regional factors not directly addressed in detail in the other categories. These topics include discussions of the Cold War’s ramifications in Latin America, economic factors, and the changing relationship in the region between the Catholic Church and insurgencies. The seventh and last category, “American Foreign Policy,” includes works on the American foreign policy apparatus dealing specifically with the crises related to the counterinsurgency failures or successes of one of the case studies.

Some works combine elements from more than one category above; such works occupy a place in the following material in only one group based on the anticipated use of a title. The basic approach of the use of these sources is to present the background, narrative, and analytic elements of this work based on primary sources, with the secondary sources serving as a compass to keep on track.

The principal secondary work for country background for Cuba is Louis A. Pérez’s *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*.³² Pérez is a professor of Caribbean history at the University of North Carolina. The book covers the period from the late nineteenth century through the revolution and is the definitive account of the forces that shaped Cuba’s acquisition

³² Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (2008 [1999]).

of a unique identity and nationality. He contends that the United States had played a central role in Cuba's transition to a modern state from its roots as a Spanish-African culture.³³ The counterinsurgency fought in Cuba reflected this American influence. The book is particularly strong in showing that throwing off Spanish colonial influence while seeking North American cultural values as much as possible forged Cuban identity. The military coup of Fulgencio Batista in 1952 that the United States acquiesced to initially, and then warmly embraced, shocked the hard-wearing attachment to American culture to its core. The coup accelerated the perception of the vast majority of Cubans that their economy could not meet their expectations acquired from participating in a North American-determined culture. This disillusionment provided the perceived economic context for Castro's successful insurgency.

A work of similar focus and scope for Venezuela, Judith Ewell's *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum's Empire*, describes a fundamental change in Venezuela's approach to the United States from the inception of the Monroe Doctrine to the twentieth century.³⁴ Ewell is a retired professor of Latin American history at William and Mary University. According to her book, Venezuelans initially looked northward for assistance, but, consistently disappointed, they began to embark on a program to distance themselves from the influence of the United States. The work includes a discussion of the U.S. intervention against the government of General Cipriano Castro (1899-1908), reflecting similar interventions in Cuba and Nicaragua at the time. Ewell also relates how America's Cold War policy resulted in support for the harsh dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez from 1948-58 (similar to U.S. support for Fulgencio Batista and the Somozas), support which placed the United States at

³³ Juan M. del Aguila, review of *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, by Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4 (Mar. 2001), 1447-1449.

³⁴ Judith Ewell, *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum's Empire* (1996).

odds with many democratic forces in the region. The U.S. support for the dictator fits into Ewell's larger narrative that recounts the struggle for democracy in Venezuela. That struggle had a very tortuous path to the first electoral handoff from one democratically elected official, Rómulo Betancourt "the Father of Venezuelan Democracy," to another democratically elected official, Raúl Leoni, in 1964, the midpoint of the Venezuelan counterinsurgency. The successful electoral handoff is significant, not just in Venezuela's struggle for democracy, but also in the broader Latin American context where many governments faced insurgencies. Venezuela's democracy was a critical factor in its counterinsurgent success in the 1960s.

The twentieth century also saw twin developments in U.S.-Venezuelan relations as Venezuela sought to increase its ability to safeguard its interests in negotiations with the United States, and it adapted to an increase in the strength of its bargaining position due to the development of its oil industry. American racism plays a role through much of the book, something also seen in the case studies of Nicaragua and Cuba (although tracking closer to the form taken in Cuba concerning a stated belief that its people were not ready for self-government). Ewell recounts a general Latin American desire to develop a community focus faithful to its Hispanic cultural roots, one devalued by American racist attitudes that view such an approach as inferior to U.S. principles of individual competition.

For Nicaragua, an important secondary work for the country background is Michel Gobat's *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule*.³⁵ Michel Gobat is an associate professor of Latin American History at the University of Pittsburg. He presents a more balanced account of the effects on Nicaragua of the American interventions and influence than many older accounts that portray those effects as simplistically dominated by the

³⁵ Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (2005).

United States. Instead, Gobat describes the American interventions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, through 1933, as having complex and contradictory effects on the relationship. The ramifications of the interplay between the dominant nation to the north and various groups in Nicaragua provide the context for the period of 1961 to 1979 under study. The interaction helps explain three of the critical components of the era. The relationship helps explain the rise of the National Guard. In turn, Anastasio Somoza Garcia utilized the Guard to establish a family dictatorship eventually passed down to each of his sons, Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Finally, the interplay was a major component of the Nicaraguan Revolution that displaced the dictatorship.

Another secondary work for the country background is Thomas W. Walker and Christine Wade's *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*.³⁶ Walker and Wade are political scientists specializing in Latin America with Walker Professor Emeritus at Ohio University and Wade, a professor at Washington College. Besides the book's status as one of the best introductions to the history of Nicaragua, this book is central to the Nicaraguan case study because of its contention that the United States has played a definitive role in Nicaragua's entire history. The book's approach imminently suits it for use in a study examining American-influenced counterinsurgency in Latin America.³⁷ The long history of American intervention in Nicaragua led to a strange denouement. The Carter administration decided in February 1979 to withhold foreign aid and loan funds approved by Congress. The action appeared to the forces opposing the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua as so significant that one could

³⁶ Thomas W. Walker and Christine Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (2003 [1981]).

³⁷ Richard Grossman, review of *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*, by Thomas W. Walker and Christine Wade, *The Americas*, 60, no. 3, Special Issue on Material Culture, (Jan. 2004): 457-58.

claim that the nonintervention had even more effect than some past interventions.³⁸ The withholding of aid, incorrectly expected to be only temporary, signaled for many people in Nicaragua that the United States was pulling its support from Somoza, a crucial factor in the Sandinista victory.

Status in the field and usefulness for the case studies provided the filters for the selection of general works on counterinsurgency to use. One work that meets the criteria, David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, is an oft-cited basic primer on the nature of insurgency and effective counterinsurgency. Galula's military background included several key assignments. The first was an assignment in Beijing (1945-1948) during the Chinese Civil War. The second was in Greece (1948-1949) as an observer with the United Nations Special Commission on the Balkans during the civil war there. Finally, there was his posting to Hong Kong (1951-1956), where he was French military attaché and able to observe the French First Indo-China War in Vietnam through the French defeat in 1954. Galula volunteered for service in Algeria (1956-1958) during the Algerian War, where he employed the counterinsurgency methods he had been studying and developing earlier. Galula concludes that the control of the local population outweighs any consideration of acquiring control of territory for a successful counterinsurgency. While much of his work is derivative of already established French colonial warfare principles, his 1964 work brought the approach to a much wider audience, particularly in the United States.³⁹

David Kilcullen is a former officer in the Australian Army. He participated in counterinsurgency operations in Indonesia and then went on to get a Ph.D. with a dissertation on

³⁸ "Milestones: 1977–1980 Central America," Office of the Historian, accessed September 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/central-america-carter>.

³⁹ A. A. Cohen, *Galula: The Life and Writings of the French Officer Who Defined the Art of Counterinsurgency* (2012), 158-159, 199-201.

two counterinsurgencies in Indonesia. He served as Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to General David Petraeus during “the Surge” in Iraq, as well as an adviser to General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan. His book, *Counterinsurgency*, builds on the general notion of a population-centered counterinsurgency pioneered by Galula and others to give the best, and most complete, account in the field.⁴⁰ The analytical framework he uses to ground his work is Complex Adaptive Systems theory that posits an insurgency as a kind of organic system that interacts with its environment and adapts through self-reorganization to improve its success in that environment.⁴¹ He uses systems analysis to capture the complex interaction of insurgents and counterinsurgents in a way that allows him to be able to account for not only counterinsurgent successes and failures, but one that can also explain the successes and failures of the alternative theories that his theory supplants.

Ultimately, the theory of counterinsurgency that underlies the analysis presented in this study takes a similar approach but represents the next step in the evolution of counterinsurgency theory. The refinement arises from the observation that mistakes by either the counterinsurgents or the insurgents may have a similar weight to positive acts in determining victory. While Kilcullen’s account can address the results of such mistakes, the emphasis on positive acts of the systems approach degrades its predictive and explanatory efficacy.

Another work in the general category of counterinsurgency is *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* by Col. Thomas X. Hammes, USMC.⁴² Hammes retired from the USMC after thirty years of service that included tours in stabilization operations in Somalia and

⁴⁰ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (2010).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 194-198.

⁴² Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (2004).

Iraq. He holds a doctoral degree in modern history from Oxford University.⁴³ He examines several counterinsurgencies, including the Nicaraguan case study, but appears in this study primarily for the generational approach to warfare it lays out. Hammes posits that modern warfare has undergone an evolution of four generations with some indications that a fifth-generation is taking shape, wherein the Nicaraguan conflict was a fourth-generation conflict.

Hammes taxonomy of warfare starts with the first generation being the advent of Napoleonic conflict that harnessed the resources of the nation-state, rather than the limited resources previously available to monarchs. The second generation evolved as the benefits of industrialization vastly increased the resources available. That increase, along with improvements in transportation and communications, allowed governments to control vast numbers of troops in the field in World War I. The third-generation evolved as Germany utilized combined arms tactics to unleash *Blitzkrieg* on France in World War II. The fourth generation of war, created by Mao Zedong, is an evolved form of insurgency where participants use all networks — political, economic, social, and military — to try to convince enemy leadership that it cannot reach its strategical goals at a cost it is willing to pay.⁴⁴ He claims that the United States is less and less able to deal with each generational advance because those changes have outstripped the minor changes made in the U.S. politico-military response apparatus. While this work rejects his claim that modern insurgency represents a fourth-generation evolution of his characterization of three previous generations of warfare, the vocabulary of generational warfare appears because of its prominent use within the field. This study does support many of his

⁴³ “Hammes, T.X., Distinguished Research Fellow, Center for Strategic Research,” National Defense University: Institute for National Strategic Studies, accessed September 14, 2017, <http://inss.ndu.edu/Media/Biographies/Article-View/Article/571460/tx-hammes/>.

⁴⁴ Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 2, 16-17, 19, and 24.

observations about ineffectual changes in the U.S. response apparatus, particularly on the political side.

A third major work in the general category of counterinsurgency is John A. Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Nagl served twenty years in the U.S. Army as an armor officer. He saw action in both Gulf Wars. He received a doctoral degree from Oxford University with a dissertation that became the basis for *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*. He was a co-author of the well-received 2006 U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual.⁴⁵ Nagl employs the relatively new science of organizational theory to make a general claim about the key to success in counterinsurgencies. Nagl asserts that an army needs to be a successful learning institution to win a counterinsurgency. He specifies that an army is a successful learning institution if it has five characteristics.

The first is that the army promotes suggestions from the field. Next, it encourages subordinates to question superiors and policy. The organization regularly questions its underlying assumptions. It is an established practice for high-ranking officers to be in contact with those on the ground and open to their suggestions. Finally, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) come into being locally and informally.⁴⁶ He arrives at that claim while focusing on two case studies of Communist insurgencies, one fought by a British-backed government in Malaya and another by an American-backed government in Vietnam. He explains the success of the British in Malaya in terms of the British Army's capability as a learning institution. He attributes

⁴⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, "High-Profile Officer Nagl to Leave Army, Join Think Tank," *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/15/AR2008011503359.html> and Sarah Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

⁴⁶ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 10.

the failure of the U.S. Army in Vietnam to its inability to function well as a learning institution.⁴⁷ His analysis lends itself nicely not only to the two case studies he presents, but his approach provides an excellent basis for analyzing the case studies in the following chapters. This dissertation does take the position that such a theory is incomplete without an explication of what information is critical.

Three primary source works form the foundation of the category of works on Communist insurgencies: Che Guevara's Spanish language version *La Guerra de Guerrillas (Guerrilla War)*, French intellectual Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, and Mao Zedong's *On Guerrilla Warfare*.⁴⁸ The first two sources utilize the *foco* approach. Mao's book details the strategy of Protracted People's War that he used to overthrow the Chinese government and take power. The strategy includes three stages. The first stage is to gather strength in a remote area and establish a revolutionary base area. The second stage involves expanding to additional revolutionary areas and build support with the peasants. The third stage occurs when the movement has obtained enough strength to field a conventional army and take control of the country. The works by Mao and Guevara also fall into a common category of studies concerning insurgency or counterinsurgency based on the personal experiences of the author.

Two secondary works provide context for evaluating the activities of Guevara and Mao, respectively. Paul J. Dosal, a professor of Latin American history at the University of South Florida, examines the military career of Che Guevara in his book, *Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967*.⁴⁹ The material of most interest for the project

⁴⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁸ Ernesto Che Guevara, *La Guerra de Guerrillas* (2006); Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (2000 [1967]); and Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*.

⁴⁹ Paul J. Dosal, *Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967* (2003).

at hand is his presentation of Guevara as a strategist. Harold R. Isaacs, a journalist and later professor of political science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote a Marxist history *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* initially published in 1938.⁵⁰ The edition examined is the second revised edition wherein Isaacs had the chance to react to events after that of the 1925-1927 revolution that was the focus of the book, as well as to feedback on the earlier editions. The material serves as a backdrop to Mao's development of Protracted People's War.

The three secondary works used for obtaining background material on anti-Communist counterinsurgencies range over a considerable geographic area within a more restricted temporal frame. A former British army officer Sir Robert Thompson, one of the architects of the British plan to win the counterinsurgency in Malaya 1948 to 1960, wrote such a work. The central concept of the account provided a comparative analysis concerning the counterinsurgency in Malaya juxtaposed against the failed American effort in Vietnam.⁵¹ Thompson outlines five basic principles of counterinsurgency that provide one of the approaches to evaluate the counterinsurgencies of the three case studies. All five principles proscribe guidelines for the government. The first principle specifies the need for a clear political goal. Next, the government must act within the law. Third, there must be an overall plan. Fourth, the government must emphasize the defeat of political subversion. The last principle dictates that the government secures its base areas before taking other actions. These principles do not play a significant role in Nagl's account described above even though it analyzes the same two conflicts. The disagreement over even fundamental principles is typical in works on counterinsurgency, even those that focus on the same, or similar, events. This dissertation improves on accounts, such as Thompson's, Nagl's, and most others, by examining both sides of

⁵⁰ Isaacs, *Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*.

⁵¹ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (1978).

the insurgency-counterinsurgency discipline in a conflict rather than limiting itself to only one side.

Stephen G. Rabe's *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* covers the pivotal period during which the United States reacted to the success of the Cuban revolution by beginning to emphasize counterinsurgency assistance to Latin America.⁵² Rabe is a history professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, specializing in U.S. foreign relations, particularly with Latin America. Rabe's book focuses on the Alliance for Progress, a Kennedy Administration foreign aid program designed to help expand Latin American economies, foster social justice, and help democracy flourish. He argues that while Kennedy's desire to help Latin Americans was genuine, the program failed in large part because of Kennedy's overwhelming commitment to an anti-Communist crusade.

Kennedy's role as a crusader drives the primary importance of the book for the following analysis. This dissertation, while agreeing that the anti-Communist crusade aspect helped doom the Alliance for Progress, shows that the general approach to counterinsurgency of such programs is insufficient to explain what happened in Latin America. The approach is inadequate because several counterinsurgencies there succeeded with enemy-centric strategies incompatible with them. Indeed, such programs exhibit flaws such that they are insufficient to ensure the success of even population-centric strategies.

A broader source, Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley's *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956*, begins with the Cuban Revolution, moves through subsequent insurgencies including that in Venezuela, and goes up to

⁵² Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (1999).

the Nicaraguan Revolution and beyond.⁵³ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley is an associate professor of Sociology at Georgetown University. His book provides a context for the case studies at issue. The Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions offer bookends for the period when the two superpowers of the Cold War, in their minds, shadowboxed through proxies in Latin America. The real story goes beyond such a narrow view. Latin American nationalism and American blind support for anti-democratic governments also played a critical role. Wickham-Crowley concludes, following several others, that the Nicaraguan Revolution was a new type of insurgency as compared to the Cuban Revolution.⁵⁴ This dissertation argues that it was not a new type of insurgency, but rather a familiar type of insurgency with an added layer of sophistication, as implicit factors in previous insurgent planning became explicit in the Nicaraguan Revolution.

A secondary source, Andrew J. Birtle's *Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*,⁵⁵ provides the context wherein the examination of a large body of works occurs for the category of American counterinsurgency sources. Andrew J. Birtle has a Ph.D. in military history from Ohio State University and is a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History. Counterinsurgency represents a significant trend in military thought as the Cold War gave way to an era of limited wars around the globe, often involving insurgencies. The United States, as the world's lone superpower, is often involved directly or indirectly.

A primary source on American counterinsurgency is the latest field manual on the subject, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.⁵⁶ This dissertation

⁵³ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (1992).

⁵⁴ Waghelstein, "Insurgency Status Report," 42-47.

⁵⁵ Birtle, *Contingency Operations Doctrine*.

⁵⁶ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

generally takes the position that the manual is a distinct improvement over previous efforts and details an acceptable, if somewhat limited, approach to American counterinsurgency. However, the historical analysis therein is considerably flawed, and the manual overly slanted to host-nation counterinsurgency. The latter would most likely be a fatal flaw when the United States is fighting a counterinsurgency within the borders of a failed state, or any state incapable of obtaining the support of its people in governing. Afghanistan may turn out to be the example that proves the previous contention along with the failure of the Somalia expedition under the Clinton administration.

The principal secondary work for the case study counterinsurgency category for Cuba is Thomas A. Paterson's *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*.⁵⁷ Thomas A. Paterson is Professor Emeritus in History at the University of Connecticut, specializing in U.S. foreign relations and diplomatic history. He characterizes the crucial period leading into the Cuban Revolution very differently than Pérez in *On Becoming Cuban*. Starting from the same vantage point of close identification with the U.S. culture of Cubans, as does Pérez, Paterson claims that Cuba rejected a dependency on the United States earlier than Pérez. Part of this disagreement follows from the groups that the two authors focus on; Paterson is more concerned with Fidel Castro and other politically active Cubans, Pérez, with the masses. One can resolve the "dispute" by noting the difference of emphasis and clearly explaining the chain of events that reflected the change from a close identification of Cubans with the United States, to a firm public stand against dependency on the United States by the government and those Cubans that did not flee the island.

⁵⁷ Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (1995).

The chapter on Cuba supplements Paterson's account in at least two ways. Rather than Paterson's presentation of monolithic U.S. government anti-Castroism during the revolution, except for Ambassador Earl E. T. Smith, the mixture of pro, neutral, and con positions actually taken vis a vis Castro appears. Also, the view dominant at the time on the part of all American officials emerges that long-term American hegemony would survive any Cuban government change. Such officials thought Castro would not survive as a ruler for long if he continued anti-American policies, and some believed that any severe negative results could be reversed by "turning back the clocks" a la Iran or Guatemala with an American-backed coup.⁵⁸

The principal secondary work for the case study counterinsurgency category for Venezuela is *Prekarious Paths to Freedom: the United States, Venezuela, and the Latin American Cold War*.⁵⁹ The author, Aragorn S. Miller, a lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin, based the work on his dissertation in history. He undertakes the task of revising the traditional view that U.S. foreign policy in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s was a dismal failure. He argues that the U.S.-Venezuelan partnership in its counterinsurgency during the 1960s, on the contrary, was a resounding success achieved through mostly democratic means. Such an approach stood in stark contrast to the United States' problematic reliance on autocratic governments during the period.⁶⁰ The sixth and seventh chapters establish that most of the credit for the successful counterinsurgency goes to the Venezuelan government, particularly the leadership of Rómulo Betancourt, rather than the partnership with the United States. Whether or not the claim about the centrality of Venezuela, a special relationship in the U.S. Latin American

⁵⁸ Steven F. Grover, "U.S.-Cuban Relations 1953-1958: A Test of Eisenhower Revisionism," *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*, Günter Bischof and Stephen Ambrose, eds., (1995), 244-245.

⁵⁹ Aragorn Storm Miller, *Prekarious Paths to Freedom: The United States, Venezuela, and the Latin American Cold War* (2016).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ix-x.

policy at the time withstands scrutiny, the account of the insurgency presented in Miller's work is the best to date.

A secondary work for the case study counterinsurgency category for Nicaragua is Robert Kagan's *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*.⁶¹ Robert Kagan is a historian and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. He has served in the government in multiple posts. The Sandinista insurgency began in 1961 and ran through 1979. Despite the period specified in the book's title, Kagan does have material that covers the period examined in this dissertation. For the period of the insurgency, he deals mostly with the 1970s with a heavy emphasis on the last two years. Kagan covers the critical points of the corruption of the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle evident in the diversion of relief funds after the 1972 Managua earthquake. He covers the brutal martial law period declared in 1975 that practically wiped out the Sandinistas but also included such severe human rights abuses that eventually the United States decided to take action. That action was an aid cutback, especially after the election of President Carter and his Human Rights campaign agenda. He presents the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a leader of the moderate opposition to Somoza, on January 10, 1978, and the resulting backlash against the government. He analyzes the inadequacies of American efforts to help defeat the Sandinistas in the crucial final stages of the revolution. This dissertation closely follows the discussion in the book for the period of 1977 to 1979 as the case study's period covered ends with the success of the Sandinistas in 1979.

There were many significant events in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations before this period, but the assignment of U.S. Marines there, 1909-1933, lays the groundwork for the insurgency of the 1960s and 1970s. The period from 1927 to 1933 is particularly important in providing both the

⁶¹ Robert A. Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (1996).

background and the name, for the subsequent insurgency that Kagan's general account covers. Kagan's book supplements a work limited to the earlier period by Neill Macaulay, one of Castro's estranged lieutenants from the Cuban Revolution, *The Sandino Affair*.⁶² This excellent book thus provides a tie-in between two of the countries involved in this dissertation as the Sandinistas and Castro's M-26-7 group both tried to emulate Augusto Sandino's insurgent methods.

A significant challenge for dealing with the Communist insurgencies in Latin America, particularly concerning the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, is that of determining which of the three main categories of Communist insurgencies contains the conflict in question. The Cuban case is relatively straightforward, although not as a paradigm case of a successful *foco* as Guevara and Debray claim. Instead, the insurgency combined rural and urban components that the government sought to counter with an enemy-centric approach that not only failed to kill or capture enough insurgents, it ignored measures to gain and keep popular support. Indeed, its corrupt practices and abuse of human rights eventually pushed many to join the insurgents in a popular revolt, almost mimicking a Prolonged Popular War.

The Venezuelan case is also straightforward. The insurgents attempted an explicitly announced communist insurgency that tried both rural and urban approaches that failed against a population-centric government response. That response highlighted a consistent democratic alternative while giving the citizenry an evident option as to which side provided the best security. Ultimately, the insurgent approach most resembled a *foco* approach in the sense the insurgents were attempting to bring about the conditions for a revolution where they did not already exist. However, they did add the use of urban actions to the *foco*'s rural focus.

⁶² Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (1985).

The Venezuela insurgency followed a similar, although more abbreviated, arc of different theoretical approaches, as would that in Nicaragua. The literature is much sparser, however, and Miller's account remains the leading interpretative account. Miller's focus on the mistakes made by the insurgents while highlighting good government decisions in the counterinsurgency provides part of the basis for tying the three insurgencies together under a single explanatory model presented in this dissertation even though the insurgencies had different results.

The Nicaraguan case has additional complications. The counterinsurgency matched the Cuban government's approach by being enemy-centric and ignoring important popular support issues. Conversely, it was for most of the insurgency able to successfully kill or capture the insurgents and repress the population far more effectively than the Cuban government until the period after 1976. It fell just as the Cuban government did when its mistakes ignited a mass uprising. The complexity arises more because of the different approaches utilized by the insurgents and the greater sophistication of one line of effort employed near the end of the victorious revolution.

The examination of the issue for Nicaragua requires consideration of a much more comprehensive array of sources for which the best summary of the Sandinista progression of different insurgent strategies occurs in David Nolan's "From FOCO to Insurrection: Sandinista Strategies of Revolution."⁶³ Nolan, the author of *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, shows in his article that the Nicaraguan Revolution had phases that corresponded to all three major categories of Communist insurgency.⁶⁴ These three were the *foco* type, the Prolonged People's War, and a Marxist-Leninist party-based revolution. The latter

⁶³ David Nolan, "From FOCO to Insurrection: Sandinista Strategies of Revolution," *Air University Review* 37, no. 5 (July-August 1986): 71-84.

⁶⁴ David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (1988).

did diverge from the standard paradigm in that it sought to bring about the conditions for a revolution rather than wait for history and economics to produce them.

Colonel John Waghelstein, in his 1987 article “A Latin-American Insurgency Status Report,” lays out a claim that is fundamental to the heart of the following analysis.⁶⁵

Waghelstein retired from the U.S. Army with thirty years’ experience in low-intensity conflicts with two tours in Vietnam and five in Latin America. He takes the position that the Nicaraguan Revolution represents a new kind of revolution that is both more sophisticated and more dangerous than previous types of insurgencies. He outlines the arc of the Nicaraguan Revolution as beginning with a *foco* approach as the Sandinistas founders [erroneously] thought was successful in Cuba, which eventually evolved into a combination military and political path that was heir to the Vietnam legacy of General Vo Nguyen Giap.⁶⁶ The central feature of this new type of insurgency was the emphasis placed on establishing a multipronged approach to influence American policy decisions concerning Nicaragua to persuade the United States to forego direct military intervention and to drop support for Somoza. The strategy included the establishment of front organizations in the United States to function as public affairs offices to generate American support for the insurgents. Also, the insurgents would organize and finance guest speakers to U.S. academic, civic and church groups with the suggestion that attendees write letters to U.S. congressional representatives on key committees overseeing security assistance operations.⁶⁷ The presence of numerous Sandinista sponsored groups within the United States represented a new insurgent component that contributed to the Sandinista victory. This dissertation stops short of claiming the Nicaraguan Revolution represented an entirely new

⁶⁵ Waghelstein, “Insurgency Status Report,” 45.

⁶⁶ Vo Nguyen Giap, *How We Won the War* (1976).

⁶⁷ Waghelstein, “Insurgency Status Report,” 46.

type of insurgency. Instead, the project presents this change of the addition of the propaganda campaign in America as an explicit extra level of sophistication that resulted in an increased threat.

The full implications of the Cuban Revolution as a Communist foothold in the Western Hemisphere did not play a significant role until after Castro came to power. Because only then did most American officials begin to realize how completely he would break American hegemony on the island. The realization developed as the changes in Cuba occurred during 1959 and panicked American leaders. They set out on a new course in foreign policy to try to topple Castro and redouble efforts to prevent other nations in Latin America from following Cuba's lead in switching to a Communist government.⁶⁸ The failure to oust Castro despite repeated attempts, beginning with the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion, led to intensive efforts by the United States to keep Castro from exporting revolution to other third world nations, particularly in Latin America, but also in Africa.

Other sources reveal the efforts of the U.S. government adequately, but not so the efforts of the Soviet government. Hence, Timothy Ashby's *The Bear in the Back Yard: Moscow's Caribbean Strategy* and Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin's *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World – Newly Revealed Secrets from the Mitrokhin Archive*.⁶⁹ Ashby has a Ph.D. in international relations from the University of Southern California and a JD from the Seattle University School of Law. He has worked as a counter-terrorism expert for the U.S. Department of State and in the U.S. Department of Commerce. Ashby draws on documents recovered during the 1983 Invasion of Grenada and correlates them

⁶⁸ Jules R. Benjamin, "Interpreting the U.S. Reaction to the Cuban Revolution, 1959–1960," *Cuban Studies* 19 (1989): 149–54, 156, 160, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24487082>.

⁶⁹ Timothy Ashby, *The Bear in the Back Yard: Moscow's Caribbean Strategy* (1987); and Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*.

with others by Soviet policymakers, examples from the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments, and information about Soviet military or intelligence operations in the Caribbean. He identifies five goals that guided Soviet foreign policy in the Caribbean. The first was to achieve the erosion of America's traditional position of dominance in the region. The second was to garner an increase in the influence and power of the Soviet Union in the region. The third was to create and maintain Soviet proxy states. The fourth was to use the proxy states for the introduction into the area of Soviet military facilities, including command and control. The fifth was to force the withdrawal of the United States from other regions of the world in reaction to Soviet gains in the Caribbean. All five of these goals influence two of the case studies, directly or indirectly, as both Cuba and Nicaragua became the preeminent Soviet proxies in Latin America.

Ashby takes the Carter administration specifically to task for not realizing the implications of its decisions for promoting Soviet success in the region. The debate centers on the role of human rights policy versus geopolitical considerations. While one can validly take either side of this debate, the examination of the Carter administration's performance vis-à-vis Nicaragua leads to a negative appraisal. The inquiry results in the observation that the human rights component dominated the administration's approach more like a careless act of omission, rather than the result of a carefully considered weighing of alternatives.⁷⁰ Ashby's account draws this judgment into sharp relief. Christopher Andrew's presentation of the extensive KGB materials brought to the West by KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin in 1992 provides vast new

⁷⁰ See the following for different views on the interplay of Carter's human rights and geopolitical policies, Lincoln P. Bloomfield, "From Ideology to Program to Policy," 1–12; Jason M. Colby, "'A Chasm of Values and Outlook': The Carter Administration's Human Rights Policy in Guatemala," *Peace & Change* 35, no. 4 (October 2010): 561–93, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0130.2010.00656.x.; Debbie Sharnak, "Sovereignty and Human Rights: Re-Examining Carter's Foreign Policy Towards the Third World," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25, no. 2 (June 2014): 303–30, doi:10.1080/09592296.2014.907069; and Luis Da Vinha, "Revisiting the Carter Administration's Human Rights Policy: Understanding Traditional Challenges for Contemporary Foreign Policy," *Revista de Paz y Conflictos* 7 (January 1, 2014): 99–122.

information about Soviet activities in Latin America that contradicts most of the conventional wisdom about Soviet efforts in the region. Andrew is Emeritus Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Cambridge.

Another special topic that occupies the seventh category is the changing role of the Catholic Church in Latin America. During the fifties and sixties, the Catholic Church represented a conservative force that supported the rule of law and existing governments. The Church's political leanings began to change with the **Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican** that met 1962-1965. One trend that emerged from that council took the form of liberation theology, a belief system based on the central proposition that the downtrodden have a right to have their basic needs met and to be free from oppression from their government and that if the government fails in this regard, the oppressed may demand changes. This position became a central feature of the second **Latin American Bishops Conference** held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. Liberation theology became the dominant force in the Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1970s, particularly in radicalized younger priests and nuns. The change moved the Church from a conservative institution supporting governments, to a radical group supporting the insurgents. Liberation theology played a prominent role in the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua.

Four primary source documents from the Medellin conference, "Justice," "Peace," "Family and Demography," and "Poverty of the Church," form the basis for the consideration of the liberation theology movement in the Church in Latin America.⁷¹ The implications of the presence of liberation theologians for military operations in a counterinsurgency appear in a secondary work, *Saint, Sinner, or Soldier – Liberation Theology and Low Intensity Conflict*, a

⁷¹ Luis M. Colonnese, and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, vol. 2, *Conclusions* (1970).

monograph by Major Robert Drum, Jr.⁷² These works supplement the discussions in the other sources on the Nicaraguan Revolution that focus more on the revolutionary role the Church played.

The American foreign policy apparatus is extremely complicated. Much of it is unknown to the average American and can provide daunting challenges to even professional historians, chiefly because many documents are still classified. The routine changing of ambassadors, often for domestic political reasons rather than foreign policy needs, often degrades the United States' ability to have adequate representation. An example of this is the gap in the crucial year of the Nicaraguan Revolution 1979, when Ambassador Mauricio Solaún left the post on February 26, 1979, with Ambassador Lawrence A. Pezzulo arriving at the post on July 31, 1979.⁷³ The actions and inactions of the Carter administration played such a vital role in the failure of the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency that two accounts written by members of the apparatus are instrumental in that section of this work. The first is *U.S. Intervention and Regime Change in Nicaragua* by Solaún, covering the crucial last two years of the Nicaraguan Revolution.⁷⁴ Solaún relates how, despite his being the ranking official with intimate knowledge of what was going on in Nicaragua, he was unable to get Washington to take the steps he was proposing.

Furthermore, Solaún took up his position in Nicaragua with instructions not to communicate with the Sandinistas in any way, a prohibition guaranteed to hamper American efforts. The inconsistency of Carter administration policy comes out in his book, where the

⁷² Major Robert Drumm, Jr., *Saint, Sinner, or Soldier - Liberation Theology and Low Intensity Conflict* (1991), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a251314.pdf>.

⁷³ "Lawrence A. Pezzulo - People - Department History - Office of the Historian," Office of the Historian, accessed September 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/pezzulo-lawrence-a>; and "Mauricio Solaún - People - Department History - Office of the Historian," Office of the Historian, accessed September 13, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/solaun-mauricio>.

⁷⁴ Mauricio Solaún, *U.S. Intervention and Regime Change in Nicaragua* (2005).

Carter focus on human rights and “nonintervention” eventually led to Somoza’s forces killing a potentially avoidable 30,000 more Nicaraguans. It is interesting to note that some criticisms of his book take a position that emanates directly from Sandinista propaganda efforts covered in other sources.⁷⁵ This work, taken in conjunction with the work by Anthony Lake telling the story from the Washington side of the equation, provides insights, along with the other sources in the bibliography, for a vibrant analysis of the final two years of the Nicaraguan Revolution.⁷⁶

Anthony Lake authored his book, *Somoza Falling: A Case Study of Washington at Work*, based on his vantage point as the director of the State Department’s Policy Planning staff during the Carter administration. The work, covering 1978 through July in 1979, reflects the bifurcation of American foreign policy between career officers and political appointees. Lake presents a case that the interplay of conflicts between and within these two groups, combined with the inherent challenges of foreign policy led to a flawed result. He characterized it as a failure that might have been a success with better decisions from those at the top.

Under the usual conditions of incomplete information, in part due to the problems mentioned above, the State Department gave the American ambassador orders barring contact with the Sandinistas. The lack of contact blended with time constraints and domestic political pressures to compromise American foreign policy. Thus, officials were ill-prepared for the crisis that occurred in Nicaragua in the relevant period. These difficulties, combined with decision-makers who had an insufficient understanding of the appropriate history of the conflict and nation, led to a misguided policy that not only failed to achieve American goals, but also even

⁷⁵ E.g., see Hector Perla, Jr., review of *U.S. Intervention and Regime Change in Nicaragua* by Mauricio Solaún, *Latin American Politics & Society* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 197-201.

⁷⁶ Lake, *Somoza Falling*.

hastened the results that they tried to avoid.⁷⁷ Both Lake's book and that of Solaún strike a familiar chord of criticism of the Carter administration's handling of the Nicaraguan Revolution, one that provides a better fit with other works on it than the memoirs of the higher-level members of the foreign policy apparatus such as President Carter.

The sources described herein, along with those not mentioned except in the bibliography, cover the gamut of works relevant to the three case studies at hand. The most consistent strain of agreement among them is the conviction, implied or explicit, that the three counterinsurgencies under consideration achieved success or failure mainly through the mechanism of mistakes made. The three include the only two failures against anti-communist forces in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. Another common position taken by many of the sources is that the two victorious insurgencies had only a little similarity of approach concerning the explanation of why they succeeded. Many people working on Latin American insurgencies, indeed on insurgencies in general, point to the Sandinista version as representing a new, more dangerous, type of Communist insurgency as compared to the Cuban insurgency and its immediate progeny. Ultimately, one question for examination in this work is whether the Nicaraguan Revolution does represent such a new kind of insurgency.

Furthermore, if it is a new type, what provides the best explanation of the failure of Somoza's counterinsurgency? Paradoxically, whether the best explanation is that or not, contrary to accounts about the lack of similarity of approach in the two revolutions, both failures, Cuba and Nicaragua, have their basis in the grave mishandling of the counterinsurgency by the United States and its anointed dictators. The following will also assess whether the explanation of the failures in Cuba and Nicaragua can shed light on why the counterinsurgency succeeded in

⁷⁷ Abraham F. Lowenthal, review of *Somoza Falling: A Case Study of Washington at Work* by Anthony Lake, *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 3, (Summer 1989): 173.

Venezuela. The analysis of the fundamental similarity of reasons behind the failures of the two counterinsurgencies in Cuba and Nicaragua and the insurgency in Venezuela represents the most substantial contribution of this dissertation.

CHAPTER III

INSURGENCY THEORY

Counterinsurgency and insurgency theories have arisen from several different viewpoints. An ever-increasing number of authors have addressed one side or the other of the insurgency-counterinsurgency matrix. Efforts range from People's War in Clausewitz as a subset of an academic/philosophic treatise on warfare in general, to accounts of insurgencies by their practitioners such as Mao Zedong, to works on counterinsurgency designed to meet the challenge of stopping insurgencies. Only rarely has a work addressed both sides. The post-World War II period saw a significant increase in such studies as many unconventional, more aptly referred to as asymmetric, conflicts arose in the post-colonial creation and realignment of nations. Such literature exploded in the post-9/11 period. Many disagreements have arisen as to what approach best captures the field of study with fundamental disagreements on matters as basic as definitions of "insurgency" and "terrorism," whether counterinsurgency and counterterrorism are mutually exclusive topics, and what overarching strategy should dominate efforts.

Several analysts have even posited with varying degrees of supporting argument that each insurgency/counterinsurgency is unique and thus that no general theory can be instrumental in guiding counterinsurgent, and probably even insurgent, actions. The current work analyzes several seminal works in the field, insurgency in this chapter and counterinsurgency in the next, as the basis for the more effective predictive and explanatory model of insurgency/counterinsurgency presented herein. The analysis uses synthesis and distillation of previous accounts together with substantial newly available studies of relevant data, including ones from counterterrorism literature, to form the new model.

A preliminary examination of theories of either counterinsurgency or insurgency reveals many are not satisfactory. The paucity of accounts that consider counterinsurgency and insurgency together is surprising given the apparent fact that in a conflict the strategies, tactics, and actions of both sides would determine the outcome. The accounts based on personal experiences, such as those of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, raise issues of being overly subjective, particularly in focusing overmuch on the efforts of the side they fought on to the exclusion of analyzing the strategy, tactics, and actions of their opponents. Thus, such memoirs fall into the class of accounts that overemphasize only one side of the matrix. They also are in another class of accounts that share the weakness of considering far too few conflicts to adequately encompass the many historical variations insurgency/counterinsurgency has taken. The analysis begins with the following examination of three representative accounts of insurgency.

The difference between accounts that focus strictly on insurgency from those that emphasize counterinsurgency is dramatic. Indeed, the distance between the two types can make it appear that they are describing two different kinds of conflict. While references to asymmetric warfare in the written record date from at least 1500 BCE, the following discussion begins with an insurgency that occurred during World War I as the advent of airplanes marks the beginning of the modern era in insurgency/counterinsurgency.

T.E. Lawrence, or “Lawrence of Arabia,” led an insurgency against the Ottoman Turks and their German allies during the Arab Revolt that took place as part of World War I. The Arabs constituted an adjunct force to the British and Commonwealth troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force eventually commanded by General Edmund Allenby. Lawrence’s account focuses on his involvement as the British adviser to Feisal bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi.

Feisal was the son of the leader of the Arab revolt, Sherif Hussein bin Ali, and later King of Syria. Feisal commanded some 5,000 regulars with a fluctuating number of irregulars that often eclipsed the number of regulars. While *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* provides a detailed, almost daily journal of Lawrence's activities during the Arab Revolt strictly from his point of view, he pauses in relating the events of the revolt to report on the reflections he made on the nature of asymmetric warfare. Those reflections brought him to the strategy and tactics that led to victory.⁷⁸

Most of the "rules" that he discovered through analysis usually, or less often by experience, were either reconfiguring of traditional conventional warfare maxims or substitutions of maxims deemed inapplicable to asymmetric warfare. It is important to note that Lawrence always pursued a schizophrenic agenda. He presented the Arabs with an overall goal of obtaining independence from the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of one or more Arabic states. He did this while carrying out orders he knew would eventually lead to British or French control of the region with at most a limited amount of Arabic sovereignty. The mismatch between the rhetoric and the underlying reality reveals that while the narrative told by an insurgency's leadership plays a crucial role in its execution, the leaders do not have to be sincere in their adherence to it; they need only to convince their followers of it. The lack of a necessary link between a narrative and an underlying reality helps explain the oft-noted result in both successful and failed insurgencies that leaders often abandon the narrative used to attempt to take power once they have achieved some, perhaps secret, agenda. For example, a successful leader like Fidel Castro used rhetoric throughout the Cuban Revolution touting a return to constitutional democracy and then instituted a Communist government with a cult of personality soon after

⁷⁸ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 191-196.

taking control of the government. Many leaders of insurgencies that failed to overturn the government have become part of those targeted governments as part of deals that often leave the insurgent narrative ultimately unrealized.

Lawrence began his development of a strategy to defeat the Turks as early as January of 1915. He did that by examining a map of the Ottoman Empire and correctly identifying the significant political, military, and geographic obstacles for an Allied attack on Turkey. The most evident political obstacles were the buffers provided by the continued neutrality of Greece and Bulgaria, Turkey's European neighbors, cutting off access from the west. The critical military obstacle was the high cost Germany was extracting from Russian forces combined with the challenging terrain that would face an advance from the east. The geographical obstacles consisted of the buffers of distance that the Ottoman provinces provided the homeland of Turkey in almost every other direction. The lone exception, the Gulf of Alexandretta, was located in northwest Syria. The Turks, senior British officers based in Cairo, and the Arabs, appreciated that point of weakness, which included a deep natural harbor conducive to amphibious operations.⁷⁹ The Arabs made a British landing at Alexandretta one of their preconditions for taking up a revolt against Ottoman rule.⁸⁰ Only Lawrence, however, saw the conflict should be primarily an asymmetric insurgency rather than a conventional campaign.⁸¹ While the British command in Cairo agreed at least on Alexandretta as the point for attack and passed the suggestion on to London, the high command passed over the suggestion at the time based on what became the catastrophic alternative to send a naval force to attack up the Dardanelles.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia*, 93-96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

Thus, the ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign emerged with its half a million casualties for the participants and spawning of the Armenian genocide.⁸²

After the withdrawal from Gallipoli, Lawrence returned to examining the question of an insurgent campaign against the Ottomans. The extent of the land the Turks would need to defend he determined would be perhaps 140,000 square miles. He noted that if the Arabs used conventional military tactics, the Turks could defend the entire expanse by forming lines that they placed between the Arab forces and the territory under their control. However, given the irregular nature of the Arab forces, including the fact that many of the insurgents lived on the land in dispute, the Arabs could employ a strategy of attack-in-depth. Such a strategy reduced the combat power of a counterinsurgent force. Thus, "... a regular soldier might be helpless without a target, owning only what he sat on, and subjugating only what, by order, he could poke his rifle at."⁸³ The concept of an offense in depth turned the conventional military strategy of defense in depth, designed to allow an often-weaker opponent to array itself to slow the offensive thrust of a more powerful military adversary on its head. Now the less robust force would choose weak points to attack and force the more potent force to dissipate its forces over a vast area. Such a strategy involved a very high cost in men and materiel for the stronger force at a minimal cost to the insurgents.

Lawrence next considered the strengths and weaknesses of the two forces regarding men and materiel. The Turks held, in his opinion, life to be cheap and of little value, but materiel was in short supply and prized. The Arab Army had only small supplies of men and materiel, so both were highly valued. Furthermore, Arab martial tradition, especially of the irregulars, was as raiders where combat needed to involve few casualties in return for profit. The disparity in how

⁸² Ibid., 121.

⁸³ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 192.

the two sides viewed casualties combined with the shortage of supplies for the Turks indicated to Lawrence that the Arabs needed to target the materiel of the Turks without seeking to kill large numbers of them. Indeed, by attacking materiel and threatening many locations without actually attacking, the Arabs could place enormous strain on the logistical systems of the Turks as they struggled to maintain their troops in far-flung defensive outposts.⁸⁴ Since the Arab irregulars fought more as individuals rather than the disciplined masses of conventional government armies, the need to limit casualties called for great care. A single death could reverberate throughout an irregular's tribe to produce outsized negative results. He determined that the Arabs needed to concentrate on obtaining a materiel advantage in perhaps only a single category, one determined to be decisive.⁸⁵

Lawrence also turned the conventional warfare maxim to fight a war of contact in order to avoid surprise, into an unconventional war of detachment. He wanted to attack matériel targets, especially the rail system focusing on trains with a secondary target of bridges and tracks. The former Lawrence would undertake only under conditions of advantage and the latter preferably without presenting a target to the Turks at all. By following such tactics of attack combined with the insurgent advantage of having few, if any, static targets to defend that forced contact with the enemy, Lawrence could achieve the desired war of detachment. Therefore, most Turkish soldiers never fired on a single Arab during the entire campaign.⁸⁶

The need to avoid contact with the enemy except at selected points of temporary advantage required the highest possible degree of intelligence resources. The primary source of such intelligence came from the many Arabs in the occupied territory at issue. The practice of

⁸⁴ Ibid., see also 225.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 194.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

drawing irregular troops from each area of operations guaranteed that at least some of Feisal's men would be intimately familiar with the local terrain and conditions. The premium placed on intelligence in counterinsurgency and insurgency has become evident throughout the literature.

Lawrence then moved on to consider the intangible in asymmetric warfare after analyzing the tangible. His discussion of what he termed morale, propaganda, and spirit now appears under the heading "use of narrative" in twenty-first-century counterinsurgency and counterterrorism terms. He points out that in such a conflict as the Arab Revolt, one must consider ever-widening circles of concern about attitudes. The order of priorities must be the insurgents, followed by enemy troops, the supporting population, the enemy population, and then any neutrals paying attention. The section presages North Vietnamese efforts in Vietnam decades before the actual event.

Lawrence concludes his first musings on insurgent strategy and tactics by pointing out that, contrary to the incessant battles in the European theater's trench warfare, the Arabs should avoid battles whenever possible. This maxim follows from the fact that casualties would be more costly to the Arabs than to the Turks combined with the conclusion that the principal target should be the matériel since, in combat, the Turks would lose only the bullets they fired. Attacks on the tracks, and to a lesser extent on the trains, would pay a much larger dividend in matériel destroyed in return for a much smaller investment of lives risked.

Lawrence turned classic conventional warfare's primary aim of bringing the maximum force to bear at a decisive point of attack in a context of local advantage to an insurgent principle where range replaces force, and space replaces combat power. In essence, asymmetric forces deny the stronger force the ability to utilize its superior strength of force by using their vast range of possible attack points and cause it to disperse its more robust combat power over such a large

space that it dilutes that power. It also morphs the conventional warfare practice of “defense in depth” often used by weaker forces to slow offensive thrusts by stronger forces into the asymmetric warfare practice of “offense in depth” (Lawrence’s “attack-in-depth”).⁸⁷ Both strategies allow smaller forces to offset their numerical disadvantages.

Contemporary counterterrorism theory, thought by many of its originators to have application in counterinsurgency, includes a description of a standard template of most terrorist or insurgent groups that centers on a leader(s) that is(are) an identity entrepreneur.⁸⁸ The leader then uses a narrative to recruit, maintain, and motivate the group as well as giving the group its identity separate from its target. Lawrence, many years before the formal analysis of such groups, intuitively knew that without the right leader, one able to build such a narrative, the Arab Revolt would fail. Thus, he sought to learn if such a leader existed before embarking on helping the revolt. He found his leader in Prince Feisal. In Lawrence’s judgment only “... a Sunni prince, like Feisal, pretending to revive the glories of Ommayad or Ayubid ...” could unite the many factions of Arabic Bedouins and Syrian villagers into an independent Arab state.⁸⁹ The references are to the Ommayad dynasty of caliphs 661-750, the second group after the death of Mohammed, and the Ayubid dynasty founded by Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub, or Saladin as the West refers to him, from 1173-1250. The narrative thus included a return to the glories of the expansion of Islam into one of the largest empires of history, including a defeat of the West in the Third Crusade. This narrative included an implied comparison between the vigor of the earlier expanding Islamic world under Arabic control and a weakened, atrophied empire under the Ottoman Turks.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., M.A. Upal, “Confronting Islamic Jihadist Movements,” *Journal of Terrorism Research* 6, no.2 (2015), DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1155>.

⁸⁹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 337.

A close reading of Lawrence's book reveals his constant molding of the narrative of Arab independence to recruit and maintain the Arab Revolt. When the movement relied on the Bedouins, a raiding martial culture, he emphasized the profits available in fighting the Turks. When they moved out of the desert into the settled areas of Syria with its diverse peasant constituency, he remolded it into a peasant revolt.⁹⁰ Feisal was the natural leader he sought in part because he had already been acting on such a vision before Lawrence even entered the region. Together Feisal and Lawrence recruited influential leaders to their cause, for example, Nuri Shaalan, the Great Emir of the Rualla, whose very word was the law in the lands under his influence despite his lack of reputation as a war leader. His stature ranked him fourth, in Lawrence's estimation, of the princes of the desert. They also drew in leaders whose martial reputation made them not only the unquestioned masters of their tribes but men whose word carried weight even among their enemies. One such man was Auda Abu Tayi "... the greatest fighting man in northern Arabia ...," chief of the Eastern Howeitat, a tribe renowned throughout the region as fierce fighters.⁹¹ His presence brought the possibility of taking Akaba, the first substantial success of the revolt, into being.

Lawrence did more than rework conventional strategy into an asymmetric format. He also adopted a conventional strategy when it suited the circumstances, although in this case, he brought naval strategy of offense against port targets to warfare on land. The Arab forces would borrow the "... mobility, ubiquity, independence of bases and communications, ignoring of ground features, of strategic areas, of fixed directions, of fixed points." Camel raiding parties would replace ships, as self-contained combat vessels. Attacks would emerge from the desert

⁹⁰ Ibid., 328-337.

⁹¹ Ibid., 174.

“ocean” to land-locked “port” targets and then retreat into the trackless desert “... which the Turks could not explore.”⁹²

The key to obtaining the necessary range to operate an offense in depth was the camel and its Bedouin rider. Each rider carried a pint of water and a half-bag of flour and could go for six weeks without further supply other than stopping at the watering holes approximately one hundred miles apart. Thus, the camel attacking party roamed free of the traditional lines of supply and communication so necessary in the logistics of conventional warfare, lines that still tethered their Turkish opponents. The average pace was at least fifty miles a day, with eighty being a good day and one hundred ten in an emergency. The camels could travel three days on a single watering. The camels provided transportation of both men and equipment as well as emergency rations if the need to butcher them occurred. Attacking forces remained smaller than the maximum numbers possible, as contrary to conventional battles, the threat of attack was more important than the ability to pursue opportunities beyond the initial strike.

Much of the strategy Lawrence employed he had been able to deduce from his education and observational powers of analysis, some he learned by hard experience. Faced with an excellent opportunity of fighting a major battle under conditions of significant advantage, he had acquiesced at Tafilah (Talifah) in modern-day southern Jordan to engage in a conventional battle with a force of 900 outmanned and outgunned Turks. Despite practically destroying the entire Turkish force, the folly of the battle impressed him to the point that Lawrence resolved never again to waste Arab lives for no more profit than a pyrrhic victory. He developed this resolve as he watched the passage of the dead back to their tribes, reminding him how much more casualties hurt irregulars than the Turks.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 337.

⁹³ Ibid., 194

Finally, the fact that the Arab revolt was only an adjunct to the British efforts to win World War I with their army in the field makes clear the difference between such conflicts and those where insurgent efforts are the primary military force. It changed the activities of the insurgents as they often undertook actions to support the broader British effort that did little or nothing to advance the Arab Revolt, for example, their efforts to cut one of the railroad bridges in the Yarmuk Valley on the border of modern-day Jordan.⁹⁴ It is also even more easily seen in that victory led to British and French sovereignty in the region rather than complete Arab independence.

Mao Zedong also provided a primer on insurgency doctrine based on his personal experience as had Lawrence. Mao wrote his *On Guerrilla Warfare* in 1937 after fighting a Guerrilla war against the nationalists for ten years.⁹⁵ The work was unusual among insurgency theories written by participants in that he wrote it while the insurgency was ongoing. It is interesting to note that the entire pamphlet focused on defeating an occupying foreign power rather than using an insurgency to seize power from a national government as most Westerners associate Mao's overall campaign. He began by claiming that guerrilla warfare was mainly a political act, something that was an integral part of national policy. He does later assert that the defeat of the enemy must have precedence in both military and political affairs.⁹⁶ He also, as did Lawrence, dealt with a guerrilla campaign in conjunction with a regular army. However, while Lawrence focused on the guerrilla war and brought up conventional forces only at the very end of his campaign to win Damascus for the Arabs, Mao considers the guerrilla war as subservient and aims to build to a final conventional phase eventually. Admittedly, this also contributed to

⁹⁴ Ibid., 387.

⁹⁵ Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 112.

Lawrence's primary goal of aiding Great Britain and its allies to win conventionally in the Middle Eastern theater of World War I. Thus, while Mao insists that victory in a revolutionary war, or People's War, is only possible if there is a unity of purpose between the guerrillas and the main army forces, Lawrence fought a schizophrenic war with one track being the Arab Revolt and the other the more general World War I.

Mao declared that guerrilla war must flow from the people. Although he identified seven different sources of troops, only one was directly from the people. These were the masses, temporarily assigned regular troops, permanently assigned regular troops, a combination of recruits from the masses and regular troops, local militia, enemy deserters, and former bandits and bandit groups. The connection between the people and the guerrillas was to be a solid one as "(t)he former may be likened to water the latter to the fish who inhabit it."⁹⁷ One way the guerrillas were to keep the connection strong was to treat the people with respect. Mao suggests for a guideline the Red Army's "Three Rules and the Eight Remarks":

Rules:

- All actions are subject to command.
- Do not steal from the people.
- Be neither selfish nor unjust.

Remarks:

- Replace the door when you leave the house.
- Roll up the bedding on which you have slept.
- Be courteous.
- Be honest in your transactions.
- Return what you borrow.
- Replace what you break.
- Do not bathe in the presence of women.
- Do not without authority search those you arrest.⁹⁸

Mao even adds treatment with respect for any enemy soldiers captured, a policy that was unilateral vis-à-vis the Japanese. The Guerrilla leadership would forge the bond between the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 92.

people and the guerrillas by the use of constant propaganda and political indoctrination for both groups. The North Vietnamese emulated the practice in their wars against the French and Americans even to the point of denying reinforcements to a commander hard-pressed by the French in 1952 since none with "... full political indoctrination" were available.⁹⁹

Mao's adoption of ethical treatment of the general population and even of captured enemy soldiers was purely a matter of insurgent strategy and nothing to do with a "moral stance." He felt that the highest morality was complete selfishness, one's pursuit of one's welfare without restraint. Thus, he often taught his elementary school children in his first job naked from the waist up. His response to those asking him to dress more appropriately was to insist they were lucky he chose to dress at all to teach. After initially helping to find care for his ailing beloved mother, he told her at the point when she began to begin showing signs of her serious illness that he would no longer be visiting her as he wanted to save for himself a memory of her only in her healthy days.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Mao brought to his theory of insurgency the purity and ruthlessness of a philosopher in analyzing a course of action, and then steadfastly pursuing abstract principles to their logical conclusions. Such dedication presaged his governance that arguably led to the death of hundreds of thousands, if not millions.

Mao's pamphlet was very repetitive in discussing various rules of thumb. There was to be adaptability or flexibility of guerrilla operations to meet local conditions. Operations should focus on attacking whenever possible while eschewing defense. Political indoctrination was to be ongoing. Lastly, guerrilla needs would be subservient to conventional force needs. All flowed from a single source, the overriding dictates of the anti-Japanese war. While Mao went into significant detail in describing things such as guerrilla armaments, unit size, and command

⁹⁹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2006), 13-18.

structure, he was much less specific on targets, tactics, and overall execution. The overall approach amounts to Lawrence's attack-in-depth, although calling for a much quicker pace of operations. The different conditions of the two conflicts straightforwardly explained the difference in approaches as Lawrence used primarily the threat of attack from almost any point in a vast desert expanse against a somewhat feeble military opponent, while Mao advocated continuous actual attacks carried out by a vast human sea against a skilled military opponent.

Mao presented six "essential requirements" of guerrilla warfare strategy:

Retention of the initiative; alertness; carefully planned tactical attacks in a war of strategical(sic) defence(sic); tactical speed in a war strategically protracted, tactical operations on exterior lines in a war conducts strategically on interior lines.

Conduct of operations to complement those of the regular army.

The establishment of bases.

A clear understanding of the relationship that exists between the attack and the defense.

The development of mobile operations.

Correct command.

The first requirement came from two aspects of the assertion that guerrilla warfare by itself cannot be decisive and must subordinate itself to the needs of the conventional forces. The fact that the conventional forces cannot be victorious in a war of movement and position gave rise to the need for guerrilla operations and the need to protract the war. Those two needs drove the strategy until such a time that the conventional forces could win. This required guerrilla attacks to disrupt the enemy's operations, the first aspect of the first requirement. Defensive operations by guerrillas did not so disrupt the enemy. The second aspect involved the operations "behind enemy lines" or using exterior lines. The two aspects allowed a conventionally weak force to

extend its operations into an attack in depth. It inhibited an occupying force from governing the territory it had acquired by conquest and challenged the enemy in the political arena.

The second requirement that the guerrilla campaign should only supplement the conventional forces followed directly from Mao's assertion that guerrilla warfare alone could not achieve the necessary political-military victory. The third requirement followed from two different needs. Bases fulfilled many military needs of troops in general, hence guerrilla troops also. Nevertheless, they also fulfilled a vital political role in that the establishment of bases either secured local governmental control or at least challenged such control by the enemy. The fourth requirement about understanding the precise relationship between the attack and the defense most likely referred to the need to comprehend what the two different modes of operations could accomplish and how they usually were markedly different in conventional and guerrilla operations. The fifth requirement—that guerrillas develop mobile warfare—followed from their need to be as free as possible from fixed lines of communication and supply, fixed defensive positions, and from an easily predictable threat pattern. Following Sun Tzu closely, Mao advocated threatening from the east and attacking from the west as well as many of his other admonitions. The last requirement was that the guerrillas have correct command, an injunction considered imperative by later commentators such as Moyer. Mao believed that correct command arose as the stresses of combat forged improvement in some leaders while it caused others to fall by the wayside.

Mao had a strong commitment to the concept that military and political leadership manifested itself in the crucible of struggle. Background and class were much less important than ability, dedication, and political understanding. Such a belief led to a Chinese policy that revolutionaries must engage in armed hostilities over any other revolutionary path as the only

guarantee of adequate political and military leadership. Guerrilla leadership was particularly challenging in Mao's account because both military and political facets must flow from such a person in a context where the primary avenue to success was leadership by example. Mao posited that guerrillas must be volunteers and thus, they were much less susceptible to the coercion often employed with regular troops. The lack of discipline in many irregular military formations was well known. American militia in the Revolutionary War had a mixed record, including a disastrous rout that included abandoning their weapons at the Battle of Camden. Confederate Guerrilla units were so notoriously undisciplined, with the primary exception of Colonel Mosby's Rangers, that the Confederacy ordered them disbanded. Lawrence's Bedouin allies would often return home once they had been able to loot after a raid. The informality of the Bedouins' service stood against the rigorous discipline practiced in such traditional forces as the British Army and Navy. Bedouin leadership avoided the mindless policies of the Allied command of regular forces in the First World War, perhaps up to and including reviving the ancient Roman practice of decimation.¹⁰¹ Thus, Guerrilla leaders had to command with far less of a disciplinary system to aid them in addition to the already immense obstacle of carrying out offensive operations against stronger, usually more numerous foes.

Harold Isaacs gave an account in his 1961 second revised edition of *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, the first edition appearing in 1938, with a very different explanation of the failure of the Chinese nationalists to defeat the Communists from that of those who credit Mao's Prolonged People's War approach. Isaacs mainly focused the original book on the events of the revolution of 1925 to 1927, but in the revision examined herein, he attributes the nationalist

¹⁰¹ MilitaryHistoryNow.com, "'Removal of a Tenth' – A Brief and Bloody History of Decimation | Militaryhistorynow.com," accessed April 22, 2017. <http://militaryhistorynow.com/2014/02/26/no-safety-in-numbers-a-brief-history-of-decimation/>.

failure to mostly a long history of corruption and mismanagement by Chiang Kai-shek. Key to that assessment was Isaacs' portrayal of Chiang Kai-shek's delay in confronting the Japanese invasion choosing appeasement to buy time to continue his campaign against the Communists. Once he had to engage the Japanese, his forces exhausted themselves in that part of the conflict. The mistakes of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua follow a similar path.

Mao underestimated Japanese military capacity as he argued that Japan had already overextended itself in its war with China as of 1937 as Japan undertook far larger operations after 1937. He also overestimated the possibility that a peace faction in Japan might come into power domestically. Japan eventually weathered much more military adversity than even a united China could have dreamed of applying while showing no signs of cracking politically, although broken militarily, until sustaining atomic bomb attacks. His argument about the inability of a monarchy to sustain military operations under the pressure of a revolutionary war carried out against it lacked historical validity, but also, more importantly, showed a lack of a grasp of Japanese political realities. The lack of understanding concerning the Japanese situation was a damning weakness when one so prominently features political indoctrination. The fact that eventually the Chinese Communists triumphed over both the Japanese and later the Nationalists does not necessarily vindicate Mao's theory of insurgency. The discussion of Che Guevara's *foco* theory below makes clear that it was possible for either an insurgency or counterinsurgency to have achieved success and explains that such success might occur even when its theoretical base was fundamentally flawed.

Che Guevara joined Fidel Castro in 1955 during the Cuban Revolution and went on to lead several failed insurgencies until his execution during such a campaign in Bolivia in 1967.

Guevara, a medical doctor, was more of an intellectual than Castro was and had read many Communist works, including treatises by Marx, Lenin, and Mao.¹⁰² He also had been a rapt student of Alberto Bayo's training in both conventional and asymmetric warfare, especially the latter. Bayo, a Cuban with long experience in the Spanish Civil War and eleven years in the Spanish counterinsurgency operations against the Rifis in Morocco, was an advocate of Sandino's brand of insurgency. Sandino, who inspired the Sandinistas, had employed the approach in Nicaragua from 1927 to 1933. Bayo believed that Guerrilla tactics could succeed and enable insurgents to take power in Cuba. Castro wanted to fight a conventional warfare revolution against the government of Fulgencio Batista and asked Bayo to stop teaching Guerrilla warfare tactics to his men, a request Bayo honored. Castro did agree to pursue a Guerrilla approach if his planned expedition on the yacht *Granma* failed as had his previous effort at taking over the Moncada Barracks in Santiago. The expedition did fail and the switch to Guerrilla warfare led to an eventual victory that Guevara attributed to a new kind of insurgent warfare, *foco* theory.

The three basic tenets of the *foco* theory were:

- (1) Popular forces can win a war against the army.
- (2) It is not necessary to wait for until all the conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them.
- (3) In underdeveloped Latin America, the countryside is the basic area for armed fighting.¹⁰³

These appear against a Marxist-Leninist set that might take the form of:

- (1) The Party is primary.
- (2) Revolutionary worker forces can win a war against the army.
- (3) It is necessary to wait until history and economics create all the conditions for making revolution; anything else is adventurism.
- (4) Throughout the world, the city is the essential area for armed fighting.

¹⁰² Dosal, *Comandante Che*, 37-38.

¹⁰³ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 3.

Thus, Guevara presented *foco* theory as an alternative to standard Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory that replaced its fundamental tenets with their opposites except for the belief that an irregular force can defeat the regular army. Just as Lenin had adjusted Marxist theory to the realities of Czarist Russia, Guevara adjusted *foco* theory to the reality of Latin America. That reality was composed of a nascent labor movement, underdeveloped economic class-consciousness, lack of significant industrialization, colonial past, large peasant population, and imperial victimhood. The Guerrillas replaced the Party in a process that had to move away from the cities in Latin America with their inadequate worker base to the countryside full of its peasant alternative. Violence would create the myriad of revolutionary tendencies that Marx had so carefully tried to prove would slowly develop inexorably over time in a capitalist society. Guevara rejected Marx's culminating prediction of an overwhelming worker class-consciousness that would place itself under the disciplined control of the Party. Guevara replaced it with his notion of committed ideologues awakening nonpolitical peasants who took up the crusade of the Guerrillas and formed a mass movement to unseat the government.

On the surface then, Guevara keeps little of Marxist-Leninist theory, at least on revolution. The broader context of his approach is much closer to that theory than it appears, however, as a reference to more modern research provides insight into the particular nature of communist insurgencies (a characteristic shared by ethnic and, especially, religious insurgencies.) Research indicates the importance of insurgent leaders as identity entrepreneurs making use of a narrative to recruit, maintain, and provide differentiation from the opponents for insurgent groups.¹⁰⁴ Marxist-Leninism provides a sophisticated, ready-made narrative to use that is particularly powerful against capitalist excesses evident in the colonial and imperialistic

¹⁰⁴ Thomas et al., *Warlords Rising*, 79.

practices that form the history of Latin America. Interestingly, Fidel Castro chose not to use such a narrative in the Cuban Revolution. He substituted instead a nationalistic, pro-democratic, anti-dictator, and anti-imperialistic narrative postponing embracing Communism until after taking power. Thus, *foco* rhetoric that became Marxist in subsequent iterations was not Communist in its sole apparent success in practice.

Guevara was careful to note that while he disputed the Marxist-Leninist requirement that all the conditions necessary for revolution be in place before the insurgency occurs, he did stipulate that there must already exist a sufficient set of conditions such that the rest were within the power of the Guerrilla forces to produce. The primary condition was that such pre-existing conditions would allow for the establishment and consolidation of the “first center,” very much along the lines of Mao’s People’s War approach.¹⁰⁵ Guevara’s 1960 work implied that such pre-existing conditions were minimal and that the Guerrillas could create most of the conditions necessary for revolution. In actual practice, the conditions for revolution all existed before the Cuban Revolution, with the exception of the belief that insurgent forces could defeat the Cuban Army. Until the defeat of that army in the summer of 1958 during Operation Verano, that condition did not exist, and the mass uprising Castro had been predicting since before the failure at the Moncada Barracks in 1953 did not appear. Guevara’s subsequent efforts to launch insurgencies outside Cuba all fell prey to the lack of such “minimal conditions” culminating in the disastrous Bolivian adventure wherein government forces captured and executed Guevara as he was unable to establish the “first center,” or indeed, develop any support from the local population.

¹⁰⁵ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 4.

Guevara improved on most major authors on insurgency/counterinsurgency when he started with the observation that there are two kinds of Guerrilla warfare. One that merely complements armies in the field and one that serves as the sole military force of the insurgency until it can grow into a conventional army.¹⁰⁶ He specified that his work would only consider the latter. Guevara, like Mao, postulated that Guerrilla warfare could not itself bring victory; instead, it was a prelude to conventional warfare. The last stage of a successful insurgency occurred when insurgents could field an adequate conventional force. In the earlier stages of Guerrilla conflict, the fundamental principle was that combat was advisable only under conditions where victory was most probable. He then presented an analysis of Guerrilla warfare that was often erroneous when touching on conventional warfare principles but tactically sound concerning Guerrilla operations. The latter circumstance reflected his often-excellent leadership in combat planning and execution during the Cuban Revolution.

Guevara rejected the odious reputation of Guerrilla operations as cowardly by first just denying the claim and then by asserting that conventional forces, when considered on the platoon level in a war of positions, will act just like Guerrillas in "... secretiveness, treachery, and surprise"¹⁰⁷ The latter was an exaggeration at best, particularly concerning "treachery," but purely false in the broader context of platoon operations within a regular army. Regular army operations, even on the platoon level, usually had a different character primarily because their operations occurred in the broader conventional context as to strategy and tactics. It should come as no surprise that Guevara took up the question so early in his analysis as Castro himself rejected Guerrilla warfare, even Guerrilla training, until embracing the strategy under protest following the two resounding failures of the Moncada Barracks assault and the *Granma*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 9.

expedition. Castro believed the use of Guerrillas to be cowardly, and that his forces could triumph despite their quantitative limitations because of their superior leadership and courage. While there can be little doubt that they indeed displayed the latter, very little of the former was evident until the summer of 1958

Ultimately, Guevara believed that, despite the use of “disparaged” tactics, the Guerrillas “... achieve a true nobility, the nobility of the end at which they aim; it becomes clear that we are not speaking of distorted means of reaching an end.” The end he envisions is of establishing “... a new society.”¹⁰⁸ Of course, this is just a variation on “the end justifies the means.” Guevara, having dispensed with the moral problem of Guerrilla warfare, at least in his own opinion, moved on to prescribe the proper Guerrilla strategy.

Guevara began his discussion of Guerrilla strategy by insisting that the first step in ascertaining the proper strategy was to analyze in detail the enemy’s resources that supported the goal of eliminating the insurgents. Those included “... the means in men, in mobility, in popular support, in armaments, in the capacity of leadership on which he can count.”¹⁰⁹ Next, the Guerrillas must identify how the government planned to use its assets. Such identification was important not only in understanding the tactics that they should anticipate, but because he believed the counterinsurgents would be the chief source of supply of Guerrilla armaments, particularly ammunition. (Something accurate in the Cuban Revolution that became far less often the case as Cold War and subsequent insurgencies often found outside sources of guns and ammunition, Cuba itself providing many such supplies in Latin America).

After the analysis of the enemy was complete, the Guerrillas’ next task was to survive while they developed strength. The Guerrillas needed to establish a secure base, either because

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 11.

of its inaccessibility or by assembling sufficient forces there to deter attack. Once they established the haven, efforts to weaken the enemy gradually commenced. Initial operations focused on the areas closest to the base and then extended ever deeper into enemy territory. Primary enemy targets were communications at first, followed by outlying bases, with central bases reserved for the last phase. Attacks were continuous, with day and night attacks where terrain permitted, and night-only attacks in open areas with expected consistent enemy patrol activity. Guerrillas maintained pressure on the counterinsurgents as much as possible. The pressure required extensive intelligence concerning the local population and terrain. Such intelligence required the support of the population within areas of insurgent operations.

Guevara described the need to obtain and maintain popular support by way of what would today theorists call a “narrative.” The leadership would use it “... to explain the motives of the revolution, its ends, and to spread the incontrovertible truth that victory of the enemy against the people is finally impossible.”¹¹⁰ He pointed out that the latter belief was mandatory to be a Guerrilla. Later accounts posit that the narrative also applied in its entirety to the Guerrillas, as it was essential in recruiting and maintaining their allegiance. Guevara saw an escalating use for this narrative as the revolution progressed, beginning with securing secrecy among the local population in areas of operations. The next step was to move from the passive stage of keeping quiet to a more active role of rendering aid. Such aid scaled up over time as loyalty and commitment grew to include contact missions, supply transport including arms, and local guides. Eventually, mass efforts took place in the workplace with the culmination in the general strike.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

The guerrillas worked to expand their areas of operations while being careful not to overextend. Once sufficient strength developed, various columns broke off and repeated the cycle of establishing a haven and then expanding operations from there. The main leader remained in the original zone of operation, as it was the safest. (David Galula also recommended a cyclic approach of establishing a secure area and then using it to move to adjacent new areas, only for counterinsurgents).¹¹² Eventually, the columns would outgrow their areas of operation and would not be able to move to any new areas of enemy occupation weak enough to allow for such operations. At this point, the columns must come together and form a conventional unit to confront the remaining enemy forces. He identified this stage of conventional war as a war of position. Even at this stage, though, Guevara advocated the formation of new guerrilla bands in the enemy's rear in line with Mao. Guevara then moved to a discussion of guerrilla tactics.

Guevara began by noting that tactics remained flexible, a la Mao, as the guerrillas adjusted to the changing conditions of the conflict. The principal factor in determining the changes needed were the actions of the enemy. He argued that the fundamental quality of a guerrilla band was mobility. The paramount importance of flexibility became apparent in noting how the guerrilla band used mobility to react to enemy action. Mobility was used to move from a zone of operation quickly and, if desired, even into a different region in a matter of hours, making possible an attack-in-depth. Mobility also allowed the Guerrilla band to avoid encirclement or other maneuvers that could force combat under unfavorable conditions. Like Lawrence, Guevara emphasized the disparity between the cost of casualties to the insurgents and counterinsurgents as the insurgents were much less able to bear them in the unconventional stage of the conflict.

¹¹² Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 56.

Guevara drew a sharp line between acts of sabotage, of which he was in favor, and acts of terrorism, which he rejected except in a single case. His chief complaint against the use of terrorism was its ineffective and indiscriminate results, often killing large numbers of innocent people that would have been valuable to the revolution. The only example of its proper use was the elimination of a particularly successful counterinsurgent leader. He briefly considered the connection between terrorism and government oppression, although it would seem to apply equally well to sabotage. He only considered whether such actions would impede contact with the masses. He dismissed the problem by saying that most of the time such contact has already diminished considerably due to the overall conditions of the revolution. Guevara's claim completely ignored the common strategy advocated by several groups to invite retaliation as a means to rally support to their cause. For example, al-Qaeda expected American reaction to the 9/11 attacks to bring them recruits and more robust support in the Muslim world.

Guevara concluded his section on tactics by discussing the treatment of the people, including enemy combatants. He specified that conduct towards the local population should respect and reflect local customs. While it was acceptable to punish severely, or even assassinate civilians and enemy soldiers caught passing information to the government, in general, it was usually better to show clemency, especially to enemy soldiers who were trying to do what they saw as their duty. The goal was to illustrate the moral superiority of the Guerrilla over his counterinsurgent counterpart.

After considering Guerrilla strategy and tactics, Guevara shifted to an incredibly detailed discussion of almost every aspect of being a guerrilla even down to the level of specifying what equipment was necessary. He ranked ammunition and shoes as the two most essential items, and then followed with such mundane items as toothbrush and paste, matches, lighter, and tobacco

products with a decided preference for pipes as they are more efficient in using tobacco supplies. While the section was immanently practical in its discussion of supplies, it was more than a little reminiscent of lists of items for children to take to summer camp. It was also hopelessly romantic in its depiction of the noble peasant and especially the revolutionary Guerrilla. Guevara described both as being politically conscious almost-supermen who could triumph over oppressors in almost any conditions as they educated the local populace in revolutionary Marxism.

Fidel Castro shared the romanticism of the revolutionary warrior, eschewing Guerrilla tactics until after the twin failures of the attack on the Moncada Barracks and the *Granma* expedition. He thought the rebels could offset the grave quantitative disadvantages they would fight under in a conventional conflict by their courage and the brilliance of their leadership. Castro moved away from the romance of revolutionary war in practice in early 1956, although he retained the rhetoric for decades. The clash of the romantic and the practical explained why naïve adherents initially greeted the work as a recipe book for revolution only to have the illusion broken in the ill-conceived and bungled attempt in Bolivia in 1967 that resulted in Guevara's death. Those familiar with both Guevara's book on Guerrilla warfare and the effort in Bolivia cannot help but notice how the latter almost wholly ignored the population support prescriptions in the former.¹¹³

Guevara finished with two more chapters, appendices, and epilogue in which he discussed the ideal makeup and use of a Guerrilla band and the organization of the Guerrilla front, and then moved on to discuss the probable future of Cuba. He began the remainder of the work by presenting the ideal Guerrilla band as a reasonable facsimile of Castro's actual guerrilla

¹¹³ Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters, trans. Michael Taber (1994).

movement. From there, he strayed to a complete reconstruction of actual events with a substituted version of reality that erroneously portrayed the Cuban Revolution as solely the work of that movement and then devolved into complete propaganda in its predictive model. The romantic notion that the July 26 movement was entirely responsible for the success of the Cuban Revolution, and Guevara's explanation of how that occurred, make clear the twin failures of *foco* theory. It failed to explain the historical event correctly and, for the same reasons, failed as a template for further revolutions, eventually bringing about Guevara's death. Even Castro moved away from supporting isolated Guerrilla movements as he came to demand by the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution that all the disparate groups must band together against the government. Castro insisted on such cooperation even though Guevara's book ignored the existence of other groups, and Castro steadfastly refused to subordinate his plans to any group's needs of the others active in the Cuban Revolution.

Guevara made several pronouncements in his account that show he morphed the historical record to fit his theory. He discussed propaganda in detail with two primary injunctions, tell the truth, and concentrate on a singular message of leftist revolutionary rhetoric. Guevara said that even though the actual rhetoric Castro employed was that of returning to a constitutional democratic regime based on the 1940 Cuban constitution rather than the leftist manifesto apparent implicitly in Guevara's work. He also diverged from the historical record in attributing the success of the revolution to the almost superhuman qualities the insurgent leader ascribed to properly indoctrinated guerrillas whose strength derived from his leftist program. Such a program did not appear during the event.

Indeed, despite intense effort on the part of American officials throughout the revolution to determine if Castro was a Communist, they were never able to find any evidence thereof.

Therefore, Castro's romantic vision of the supreme capability of his military leadership found a match in an equally outsized Guevara vision of the capabilities of the Cuban Guerrillas. No mention appears of the many other organizations that contributed to the success of the revolution such as the student organization, the Revolutionary Directorate, or the various groups funded by ex-president Carlos Prío Socarrás. While it was true that most of the organizations eventually accepted Castro's leadership before the end of the revolution, most of them had made significant contributions often outweighing Castro's before that. Little mention was made of the missteps of Batista that are referenced in the following chapters of this work that often better explain Castro's ultimate success than the *foco* theory or even any other insurgency theory. The failure of later insurgencies to match the Cuban success by following Guevara's theory follows from this failure of his account to explain even the success of the Cuban Revolution adequately. Still, as will be seen in the detailed examination of the Cuban insurgency in Chapter V, Guevara does provide an essential part of the explanation in correctly ascertaining that the traditional Marxist-Leninist theory was at least in need of revision.

The three participant theories that appear in this chapter show marked similarities, not just in approach but also in the shared characteristics of their authors. Each had an important, if not critical role, in leading victorious insurgencies. All three stress the importance of the narrative, although without using that term. For Lawrence, it was a return to past Arab glory hidden within a British campaign that masked a plan to control large parts of the Middle East. For Mao, it morphed from Communism to anti-imperialistic, anti-Japanese nationalism and ultimately back to Communism. For Guevara, it was Communism (despite Castro's actual use of an anti-imperialistic nationalist message during the actual revolution). Mao and Guevara repeatedly stressed the importance of political indoctrination while Lawrence counted on a

delicate mix of a carefully chosen leader, religious identification, and the pragmatic, profit-seeking raiding culture of the Bedouin. All three reference the importance of excellent leadership, although only Lawrence ties the necessary leadership qualities directly to the narrative, something that contemporary research indicates is a crucial factor in the success or failure of insurgencies. All three leaders faced problems in maintaining a unified approach during the insurgency as various groups fought a common enemy often as separate entities. All three of the men fought enemies depicted as imperialists, although in Lawrence's case, the anti-imperialist campaign against the Ottomans served the imperialistic interests of the British and French. Ultimately, the Arab Revolt led to independence, it just took another world war to reduce the British and French to the point where they could no longer maintain their empires.

The assumption of local government functions by the insurgency also plays a role in all three approaches, explicitly in Mao and Guevara's, but mostly implicitly in Lawrence's. The idea is that in pursuing a narrative that presents the existing government as illegitimate, the insurgents provide government services, including dispute resolution allowing the local people to see the benefit of supporting the insurgents. Mao and Guevara intended to introduce new governmental institutions and thus explicitly discuss their formation. Lawrence could reference the already existing tribal institutions and then conjure up an image of the old caliphate by putting Prince Feisal forward as the necessary unifying religious-political leader. Thus, when disputes threatened the temporary tribal alliances Lawrence had constructed, he usually just had the matter brought before a small set of acknowledged leaders for resolution. The one marked example of a "higher" authority beyond the tribe acting in a governing capacity was the provision of gold from the British or Feisal that covered the expenses of the different fighting

forces at least until, in some cases, booty became available. Nevertheless, essential distinctions do separate the three accounts.

Only Lawrence incorporated a significant analysis of the specific characteristics of his opponent into his campaign. Mao's discussion of the Japanese opponent lacks in its specificity about its military and is in error about its political status. Guevara refers only by implication to the opponent, mainly concerning the likelihood of retribution and other harsh responses to terrorist acts that he countenances only in circumstances of the assassination of particularly heinous/successful counterinsurgents. Interestingly, given the political nature of insurgency, of the three, Lawrence's efforts led most directly to the success of the insurgency militarily with the least political success relative to the insurgents (although entirely successful in the eyes of his imperialist master, Britain, and its ally France). Mao's military success began on the low end as the nationalists forced the Communists on the Long March in 1934-35 that saw only 10% of the original forces reach their destination.¹¹⁴ Building on the increased reputation the famous retreat had garnered him; Mao emerged from World War II as the primary Communist leader opposite the Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek. The military victory over the Nationalist forces, set up by their losses fighting the Japanese, cemented Mao's leadership of a Communist China in 1949-50, and thus was a complete political victory along the narrative lines he had pursued.

Much of Mao's subsequent political leadership involved several missteps, and today's combination of a capitalist economy and one-party rule is a rejection of most of his dedication to revolutionary principles. Castro's, and Guevara's, efforts militarily found little success until the last six months of the revolution. The catalyst for the change was a botched army offensive in the summer of 1958 that allowed Castro to have his most significant military achievement

¹¹⁴ Chang and Halliday, 120-167.

despite narrowly escaping encirclement at the end of the campaign. Nevertheless, Castro's political success has been the longest-lasting (despite his dramatic switch from a nationalist "return to constitutional democracy" narrative to a Soviet client Communist regime).

Notwithstanding the failed economic system in Cuba, Castro's governmental institutions are still functioning today.

Still, for the purposes herein, the main questions for consideration are how these various theories explain the success of the insurgencies that spawned them and what value they hold as templates for other insurgencies. While all three have elements that have both explanatory and prescriptive validity, only Lawrence's account taken in total both explains the military success of the Arab Revolt and provides something of a template for other insurgencies. To a certain extent, the successful Mujahedeen insurgency against Soviet invaders culminating in the Russian withdrawal in 1989 supplies a vivid example. The strength of the *Takfiri* Jihadi narrative, a bastardized child of the more *Salafi*-like appeal that Lawrence encouraged, is evident in the strength of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) to establish a worldwide presence. The paucity of immediate political gain from the Arab Revolt clearly shows that while insurgencies may be inherently political, a victorious insurgency may only achieve the objective of overthrowing the existing government without leading to successful replacement governance.

Mao's pamphlet provides many useful concepts about guerrilla warfare, but other allied efforts provide a superior explanation of the Japanese defeat. Those concepts do help explain the Nationalist defeat, but they constitute only a partial explanation as enemy mistakes also played a significant role. The Vietnamese utilization of Prolonged People's War to reunify and control Vietnam illustrates a textbook application of Mao's concepts. Guevara's account fails as both explanatory theory and template. The omission of the many other insurgent efforts in Cuba, as

well as the grave mistakes made by the Batista government, led Guevara to conclude erroneously that the efforts of the *focos*, small groups of guerrillas, can always bring about a successful revolution. Cuba (and Nicaragua) proved that *focos* could not create the proper conditions, but that such groups were dependent on the conditions already existing or that the government would create them. Despite Guevara's lack of patience with traditional Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought, the many subsequent efforts to carry out *foco* insurgencies did amount to little more than "adventurism." The following chapter examines the insurgency-counterinsurgency matrix from the other side.

CHAPTER IV

COUNTERINSURGENCY THEORY

The two major approaches to formulating a theory of counterinsurgency arise from either (1) historical analysis or a more inclusive general social sciences approach or (2) on participant experience. Of course, someone that participated in a counterinsurgency and had a supplementary historical/social science analysis to broaden their data set can combine the two approaches. The selections discussed here all include at least some historical/social science analysis, whether the authors had participant experience or not. Accounts based solely on participant experience are not general enough for this work. This discussion of five major counterinsurgency theories includes reference to the insurgency theories of the previous chapter. The analysis reveals a surprising spectrum of level of engagement with them from significant overlap to gulfs so vast that it can be hard to tell they refer to the same phenomenon, a particular category of asymmetric warfare. Some general comments about the field of counterinsurgency follow in advance of the discussion of the specific theories.

The primary division in the field, especially in more traditional accounts, between population-centric and enemy-centric approaches to counterinsurgency is problematic. There are several counterinsurgencies, including many in Latin America such as that in Bolivia in 1967 and at least two in Stalinist Russia, where enemy-centric approaches were successful contrary to what most population-centric theories would seem to predict. The better theory is to suggest that enemy-centric strategies that succeed are a unique subset of the population-centric approach, at least implicitly. An enemy-centric approach can become viable when adequate population-control/support already exists. Some examples would be cases where the insurgents are unable

to obtain popular support, e.g., in Bolivia, those where a democratic government enjoys stable support, such as in Israel, or those where a government cows most of the population into quiescence, such as in Stalinist Russia. Counterinsurgents just must make sure that the high level of government support, or at least cooperation, continues.

Several accounts, in both counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, emphasize that it is essential to ascertain the goals and strategies of the insurgents. However, most of the theories surveyed do not examine the differences between insurgencies where asymmetric forces operate as the primary military power and ones where such forces are merely adjuncts for armies in the field. Thus, with the Viet Cong in Vietnam operating along with the North Vietnamese Army and the French resistance operating in support of Allied armies and other such partnerships, insurgent goals and strategies were subservient to conventional warfare needs. Such a crucial difference in the overall strategy and goals of the insurgents argues for a similar modification of counterinsurgent strategy and goals.

Other accounts emphasize some facet of the counterinsurgency-insurgency matrix as being of supreme importance such as leadership, Moyar, or being the better “learning institution,” Nagl, without fleshing out sufficiently how those terms unpack in actual conflicts other than their case studies. The following analysis examines several of the contributions in the field of counterinsurgency and begins the construction of a new account that better addresses the issues mentioned above.

David Galula, a French counterinsurgency expert who had participated, studied, and observed insurgencies in China, Indochina, Greece, and especially the Algerian War, published a seminal work on counterinsurgency in 1964, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. He undertook the project after observing that while several works were detailing how to

undertake an insurgency, there were few, if any, works carefully examining how to conduct the fight against one, i.e., a counterinsurgency. Galula begins by discussing the nature of insurgency and its execution before presenting his template for how to carry out the counterinsurgency. His central theme is that insurgencies seek to replace an existing government either in total or in securing independent rule in a part of a country. This political goal not only serves as the end of the entire insurgent campaign, but it also dictates that the means employed be inherently political with only a minimum of military action. He thus identifies the essence of insurgency/counterinsurgency as a contest for the support of the population. Galula draws out the implications of this crucial insight and combines it with his experience and observations to describe a particular program of counterinsurgency.

Galula begins presenting his theory by undertaking an examination of revolutionary war in his first chapter. A revolution differs from a conventional war in that it is fundamentally an internal war, albeit potentially one conducted with external allies. It differs from an ordinary civil war in that it does not rapidly evolve, after an initial period of confusion, into two territories controlled by the warring parties that split institutions and military resources somewhat evenly between them and fight a more or less conventional conflict. It differs from an ordinary revolution in that rather than an explosive mass movement of the people that spontaneously erupts; it is a protracted struggle instigated by a small group that slowly coalesces into a disruption of a nation's peace. Galula proceeds to discuss what it is after indicating what it is not.¹¹⁵

Galula contends that insurgency is a type of civil war in which there is a fundamental asymmetry between the insurgents and counterinsurgents initially. This difference in strength

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

dictates the form the insurgency takes if, and until, it develops the ability to confront government forces in a conventional campaign. The disparate power of the two sides ensures only insurgents begin a conflict, although either side may introduce the use of violence. The insurgents at the beginning have few or no assets other than their most potent, a cause (or narrative in contemporary terminology), while the counterinsurgents have almost all the assets balanced against the most significant liability, the responsibility to provide orderly governance. One way to view an insurgency then is to envision the insurgents trying to turn their one great intangible asset, their narrative, into sufficient tangible assets, while the counterinsurgents struggle to meet their intangible liability without exhausting their tangible assets.

Galula contends that the overwhelming disadvantage on the tangible battlefield forces the insurgents to move the conflict, at least initially, to the intangible battlefield, the support of the population. Several important characteristics of revolutionary war follow from the choice of such an arena of conflict. Since the control/support of the population is a political goal, the revolutionary war is fundamentally a political endeavor. The political struggle begins slowly and builds as the conflict continues. Thus, unlike conventional war, there is no sharp or rapid transition from peace to war. The gradual transition places additional strain on the government as it must choose not only what actions to take, but also when to take them.

Furthermore, the government may suffer from a lack of political cohesion with its armed forces, a deficiency the insurgents will not experience. The absence of significant military action on the tangible battlefield usually negates the possibility of obtaining early decisive results, thus creating the likelihood the war will be a protracted one. Financial expenditures will mirror the discrepancy of tangible assets between the two sides. The discrepancy means the insurgency will be very inexpensive at least until its final stages, and the counterinsurgency will require

copious amounts. The disparity in finances includes the discrepancy in expenses between the two sides concerning their primary missions; insurgents seek to promote disorder, a very inexpensive campaign, while the government must maintain order, a costly program during a revolutionary war.

The insurgent strategy inherently contains fluidity because it need not concern itself for most of the war with the defense of assets or the dictates of responsibility, something that leads to rigidity on the part of the counterinsurgency since it is subject to both. Galula claims the tool that is essential for the insurgents to develop a political victory is a sufficiently robust cause, something that would play a central role in the narrative in contemporary literature. Successful insurgencies eventually convert their intangible assets into tangible assets more on par with the counterinsurgents through the mechanism of their narrative and tactical actions. This new parity, or even superiority, allows the insurgents to make the final push using conventional warfare, as they are now strong enough to field conventional forces. Galula moves on to the main topic of his work, counterinsurgency, after finishing his review of insurgent strategy.

Galula splits his account of counterinsurgency into three sections with two chapters on strategy, one on tactics, and one on operations. The section on strategy requires two chapters because one addresses the countermeasures to use against the insurgency before it evolves into flagrant illegality and the use of violence, the “cold” phase, and another chapter to cover the “hot” phase when it does. He is less optimistic about stopping the insurgency in the cold phase as the insurgents have many viable options, and the counterinsurgents few if the latter even realize they have a problem.

Galula posits there are four possible courses of counterinsurgency action: against the leaders, against the conditions giving the insurgency its “cause,” infiltrate the group and render it

ineffective, and improve the government's political machine. Action against the leaders is attractive in totalitarian societies where there is little personal freedom allowed, including political activity. Democracies, however, where there are traditions of significant personal liberty especially in political action, often are unable to deal with insurgent behavior during the cold phase because it is legal. Such action can also have the adverse effect of bringing publicity to the insurgent's cause or build support for the insurgents that far outweigh the benefit of whatever legal punishments the government can use.¹¹⁶

Galula is pessimistic about the term "indirect" action against the insurgents that purports to correct the conditions that give rise to the cause they espouse. He argues for this view because he claims that insurgents should seek a cause that the government cannot adopt without losing its power. However, many victorious insurgencies have utilized causes with components such as attacks on rampant government corruption. For example, the governments in Cuba and Nicaragua might have been able to stay in power if they had addressed their corruption successfully. A central feature of many insurgent narratives is that the government is illegitimate. Where that illegitimacy arises from a failure to govern adequately, a viable strategy for a government would be to improve its governing. Galula omits this possibility of governmental improvement without losing power, instead of mentioning as a favorable possibility making changes in the judicial system to handle the insurgency better and strengthening the bureaucracy, law enforcement, or armed forces.¹¹⁷ He finds the possibility of infiltrating the group early on and disrupting it or at least garnering good intelligence much more promising.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 65-66.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

Galula points out that most insurgencies start with a select group of "... generals with no privates to command."¹¹⁸ They are usually inexperienced in acting with secrecy and thus subject to infiltration. The fact that many political movements suffer splits, flounder, and die raises the possibility that government agents might infiltrate and accelerate such an end. The premium placed on intelligence in a counterinsurgency argues that even if such an effort should fail to splinter a group, the presence of an agent on the inside to report its activities can be invaluable.¹¹⁹ He believes a better alternative to any of the first three is the last choice, strengthening the political machine.

Galula prefers the approach of strengthening the political machine for four reasons. One, it directly addresses the primary goal of the insurgency, control/support of the population. Two, it can serve as a sort of inoculation against insurgent influence. Three, it matches what will be the focus in the hot phase should the need arise. Four, it relies the least on chance and makes the best use of the advantage the government has in assets. He concludes the section on possible actions for the government during the cold phase and moves on to the discussion of the hot phase, where the government has considerably more options.¹²⁰

Galula discusses counterinsurgent strategy in the hot phase of a revolutionary war as a combination of limitations, general laws to observe, and specific guidelines to follow. The primary limitations he presents are the inability of the counterinsurgents to employ conventional warfare or use the same type of warfare as the insurgents unless, and until, the insurgency has progressed to the point of fielding conventional forces. The first three laws of counterinsurgency involve the support of the population. They postulate that the support is equally necessary for

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 68.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 68-69.

both sides, gained through an active minority, and conditional based on the relative strength of the two sides. The fourth law follows from the first three in that securing the support of the population will require an essential intensity of efforts and vastness of means.¹²¹

Galula states that the third law's identification of the support of the population as being conditional on relative strength leads directly to four deductions. First, military and police operations to ensure the security of the population must precede effective political action. Second, reforms can only be useful tools when the government is in control. Otherwise, the insurgents may disrupt the reforms or even be able to claim credit and prestige by taking the position they forced the needed reforms on an unwilling government that refused to govern appropriately except under duress. Third, in the war for the support of the population, the counterinsurgency must strive for a convincing early victory to set the expectation that it can and will win. Fourth, the government can only negotiate from a position of strength. Otherwise, the insurgency will have proven its strength and make it more attractive for the support of the population.¹²² In addition to the four deductions he claims follow directly from the Third Law, he goes on to derive an operational plan of eight steps that represent the actual counterinsurgent campaign.

The operational plan Galula derives is, along with his general observations about insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, his foremost contribution to counterinsurgency theory. The last chapter in his book discussed below after the summary of his chapter on tactics covers it in detail. He ascribes six crucial attributes to the operational plan: economy of forces, irreversibility, complete utilization of resources, simplicity, population control, and initiative. The economy of force is essential because of the significant disparity in the number of troops

¹²¹ Ibid., 74-79.

¹²² Ibid., 78-79.

needed to be effectual between the two sides. Irreversibility counters the greatest fear of counterinsurgents once they establish control of a sector; that it falls back under insurgent control. A significant problem for the counterinsurgents is how skillful insurgents can severely diminish the value of the preponderance of government assets by asymmetric warfare techniques. There is also the problem that the government's broad set of assets and responsibilities leads to rigidity in action. Both these problems diminish when the population becomes the primary target of action rather than the insurgents, as the operational plan under discussion makes possible. Such an approach introduces fluidity and restores full value to the wide-ranging government assets.

A chief disparity between conventional warfare and revolutionary warfare is the complexity of counterinsurgent operations as compared to conventional operations. This is not to say that conventional warfare does not involve considerable complexity in execution, just that military practitioners have understood, taught, and implemented the basic principles for conducting conventional warfare for centuries. Thus, it is a significant advantage of the operational plan in question that it is simple. The operational plan assigns actions based on the degree of population control and support. The close tracking of the control and support of the population means that counterinsurgents can always track progress on the primary objective of the campaign relative to the step of the plan in action. The close connection of action and goal prevents the campaign from devolving into a patchwork mosaic where the insurgents can slip at will from one area to another as suits their needs. The plan also has advantages for the all-important attribute of initiative.

The need to gain the initiative is a prominent traditional military advantage that is also of great consequence in a revolutionary war. Normally the insurgents start with the initiative since

they both begin the insurgency and decide when to push it into the hot phase. The fact that the counterinsurgents cannot use the conventional warfare tactic for regaining the initiative of attacking key vulnerable locations or facilities that demand defense, since often the insurgents do not have any, compounds the problem. The pressure the counterinsurgency can place on the insurgency by threatening to control the population in an area of insurgent activity can substitute for such a vulnerable point, both regaining the initiative and perhaps encouraging the insurgents to try to fight in a time and place of the counterinsurgents' choosing rather than their own. Having set out a counterinsurgent strategy, Galula turns his attention to tactics in a section divided into two parts, command problems and the selection of the area of operations.

Galula identifies a long list of principle command problems that include the need to maintain a single direction of political and military actions, to give primacy to the political over the military power, to provide for the coordination of efforts, and to give primacy to the territorial command. The need to maintain a single direction of political and military actions leads to the inevitable conclusion that the easiest, although not the only, way to achieve such a command structure is to have one individual endowed with both the political and military command. The single direction mandate also implies that both soldiers and civilians must be aware that their actions have both military and political consequences. That situation differs from conventional warfare where there is a bifurcation of actions and consequences such that there is much less spillover between the two realms.

The fact that insurgency is fundamentally a political contest dictates that the political must be given primacy over the military in a counterinsurgency. It also explains why purely military "successes" may nevertheless be associated with a counterinsurgency failure, as, for example, in Vietnam. The Western democratic tradition of civilian primacy over the military

indicates overall command will reside in a civilian leader or council. The varied tasks of the politico-military counterinsurgency campaign with expertise spread between civilian and military personnel, although usually the military has superior human resources, dictate that the top command coordinates the many diverse individuals and groups involved. Galula posits that doctrine is the most practical tool for aligning such disparate efforts. The best counterinsurgent strategy requires that there be both static and mobile forces employed. Since the static forces have the best connection with the population, they are in a superior position to carry out the politico-military mission and thus require primacy in the campaign. Adaptation joins the above to round out his list of command problems.

Galula completes his list of principal command problems by discussing the need to adapt force composition and capabilities to counterinsurgent warfare and to adapt the minds of civilian and military personnel to the campaign's needs. The counterinsurgents must reconfigure away from heavy, sophisticated formations to lightly armed, highly mobile infantry groups with excellent communication capabilities unless the insurgents are also putting an army into the field. The need for the use of force changes from maximum firepower brought to bear on the enemy to a law enforcement-like need to use the minimum amount of firepower to accomplish the mission. Civilian officials, used to a tolerance of often-contentious disputes over approaches to issues, must narrow their acceptance of suggestions to only those consistent with the political program of the counterinsurgency.

Galula considers the strategic considerations of the selection of the area of operations as ranging from starting with the easiest and moving to the most difficult, to starting with the most difficult and moving to the easiest, to some combination of approaches. Starting with the easiest should provide the initial success that he believes is necessary, but not starting with the hardest

runs the risk of allowing the insurgents bases from which to build their power. He correctly points out that the determining factor in balancing the dilemma of how to ensure an initial success without risking the insurgency's building its strength in safe havens follows from the relative strengths of the counterinsurgency and insurgency. When the counterinsurgency has a decided advantage in power, it can attack the hardest area and still obtain the necessary initial success.¹²³

The tactical factors in selecting the area of operations include those considered in conventional warfare combined with others more distinctive of the political nature of the insurgency/counterinsurgency matrix. Such conventional factors include "... terrain, transportation facilities, [and] climate..."¹²⁴ The political factors are considerably more complex. There are objective factors such as the size of the population, the degree to which the population is concentrated in urban areas or spread over the countryside, its dependence on external suppliers, and the degree of reliance on the existing government. The subjective factors are often even more important. One such factor is the attitudes towards the two sides held by those uncommitted to either side. Another is the question of what proportions of the population actively support each side or remain neutral. Still another is whether there are natural divisions of the population (such as ethnic or religious diversity, or economic status) that may indicate tendencies as to loyalty, susceptibility to changing sides, or sources of manipulation to the advantage of either side. The assessment of the political situation is the primary key to the selection of the areas of operations.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 71-72.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Galula, having discussed the strategic and tactical aspects of counterinsurgency, ends his book with a chapter detailing an eight-step plan of operations. After the selection of an area for initial operations, the counterinsurgents carry out the first six steps. Once they have achieved success, they use the area as a base for expanding operations to the next area. The counterinsurgents repeat the process area by area until they can undertake the seventh and eighth steps to complete the defeat of the insurgency.

The first step is the expulsion or destruction of the insurgents' fighting forces in the area using highly capable mobile forces. The second step is to deploy a static unit that will focus on providing security to the population and switch the focus from offense to defense and political operations. The third step is to establish contact with and control over the population. This step has three main objectives: the reestablishment of authority over the population, the physical isolation of as much as possible of the population from the insurgents, and the collection of sufficient intelligence to enable the elimination of the insurgent political cells. The fourth step is the destruction of the political organization of the insurgents. Once the counterinsurgents finish these first four, the initial destructive phase of operations is over, and efforts turn to the constructive phase of operations.¹²⁶

The first constructive step, fifth overall, is to hold elections. The counterinsurgent leadership then tests the new local leaders so created as the sixth step. Once a sufficient number of areas have been pacified, the seventh step is for the counterinsurgent leaders to construct a national counterinsurgent political party. The core of the new party is composed of those elected leaders that have proven to be successful in their local administrative tasks. The creation of such a party is necessary to counter the national political influence of the insurgents, as an insurgency

¹²⁶ Ibid., 78-92.

is primarily a political struggle. The eighth and last step is dealing with the remaining Guerrillas by coopting, killing, or otherwise suppressing them.¹²⁷ Galula's strategic, tactical, and operational guide to counterinsurgency continues to inform most of the work on counterinsurgency as can be seen below, as well as suggesting strategy in the field, for example, as in the "spreading oil-spot" strategy advocated by the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam and utilized in Iraq.¹²⁸

John A. Nagl in his book *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, compares a successful counterinsurgency with a failed counterinsurgency as a means to identify the crucial factor separating success and failure.¹²⁹ The success he analyzes is that of the British counterinsurgency during the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960. The failure he compares it to is the American counterinsurgency during the Vietnam War. Nagl believes the crucial factor that best explains the difference between the two results is the different degrees to which each army carried out the functions of a learning institution. He considers the British army as being an excellent example of an institution that promoted learning and implementation of new tactics, while the U.S. Army provides an equally appropriate example of one that failed to promote learning and change in light of new information.

Nagl recounts that both counterinsurgent armies began with efforts along the conventional lines dominant in the military doctrine of the time, doctrine aimed at fighting a heavy force conventional conflict in Europe against the Soviets. Nagl identifies a crucial difference Nagl that led to the different outcomes between Malaysia and Vietnam. That

¹²⁷ Ibid., 92-97.

¹²⁸ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise Of American Power* (2002), 295; and Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 87-104.

¹²⁹ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*.

difference was the change in approach the British undertook because of their early experiences in the counterinsurgency as opposed to the reticence of the Americans to diverge from their initial approach. Thus, the British moved away from treating the conflict as primarily a conventional military one, to prosecuting a mainly political conflict utilizing the “hearts and mind” approach concentrating on controlling the population as now dominates counterinsurgency literature. The latter approach focused on small unit action, accepted the prolonged nature of Protracted People’s War as attempted by the communist insurgents (indeed, the communists revived the insurgency in the Communist Insurgency War from 1968-1989 after the British left Malaysia), and focused on political and economic security. He contrasts the British approach to the American approach that focused overmuch on military success. He also points out that the United States failed to adequately deal with the unsatisfactory state of the South Vietnamese government’s relationship to governing its people. The American approach devolved in a schizophrenic effort divided between the majority of leaders attempting to fight a conventional conflict and a minority carrying out a counterinsurgency.

The work, taken as an examination of how the two organizations behaved as learning institutions, is thorough and convincing. The British began with a top-down approach with the upper command determining mission priorities and overall strategy. The high command made decisions based on information determined at the highest levels, or where local unit information was processed and acted on only at those high levels. When this approach ran counter to achieving the desired results in actual operations at the local level, information to that effect went up the chain of command where, within a reasonably short amount of time, the leaders made changes. They moved mission selection and prioritizing down to much lower levels, eventually residing at the local unit level. Furthermore, upper-level leadership accorded considerable

flexibility to local commanders to carry out operations in light of this new model. Even though U.S. military operations had followed a model similar to the latter on numerous previous occasions, including most notably the Philippine Insurrection 1899 to 1902, operations in Vietnam usually followed the first, much more conventional, approach.

The primary U.S. leadership response to contrary information from below was to reinterpret it to fit leadership priorities better. Thus, contrary information came to be data generally supporting the overall conventional approach, or became subject to downplay or rejection, or the leadership changed the metrics employed for the gathering of information to funnel it to conventional models, e.g., body counts. Nagl makes a convincing case that the U.S. military, predominantly the Army, was not a learning institution but rather one that resisted change. Nagl does acknowledge that in many individual cases people were aware of actual circumstances, and several implemented appropriate changes based on an appreciation of local conditions. His point is that in the broader general context, there was an overall institutional failure.

Nagl molds a very sophisticated and convincing narrative that distinguishes between the British and American approaches that makes clear how the evolution of British strategy and tactics coincided with more and more effective results until the British victory in 1960 as opposed to far less improvement in the American effort in Vietnam. The analysis is compelling in detailing the amount of change the British made in their efforts based on ongoing collection and dissemination of information. It is also convincing in painting the picture of overall resistance to change on behalf of the Americans. The effort is far less persuasive in making the case that this one difference is the best explanation of why the British succeeded and the Americans failed.

The central differences between the two insurgencies outweigh their similarities and suggest the full explanation of success or failure is far more complicated than mainly different learning institutions. Primarily, the Vietnamese insurgents in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, were a part of the Vietnamese People's Army that had a conventional army in the field in the form of the North Vietnamese Army. The insurgents in Malaya, the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), did not have an associated army in the field. The Vietnamese had powerful external allies in the USSR, China, and Soviet Bloc countries committing significant resources to the conflict while the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was isolated from outside help. Vietnamese insurgents had safe havens for troops and supply movement in bordering countries like Laos and Cambodia, while those in Malaya did not. Most Malayan insurgents were primarily an ethnic minority, Chinese, while those in Vietnam were not, making it much easier to separate the insurgents from the general population. Politically, the essential element of insurgency, the British were preparing Malaysia for independence while the Americans were executing a confused mixture of containment of world Communism while "helping" a non-representative South Vietnamese government hold on to power.

Nagl's account bears a strong resemblance to the theories of several other practitioners in this field. It suggests the flexibility espoused by Mao, although he was referring to the insurgent side of the equation, leadership a la Moyar, Galula on unit-level activity, and Kilcullen in the constant fluidity of the situation and necessary adaptation to current circumstances. Indeed, when one reads Kilcullen's masterwork on counterinsurgency, it is easy to see that a well-established learning institution would have the advantage in dealing with the complexity of counterinsurgency. While Nagl demonstrates the contribution of a military effort organized as a competent learning institution can make and the hazard of not having one, the effort fails to be

satisfactory. It does not adequately explain the different results between the two counterinsurgencies he examines and has limited application to other counterinsurgencies.

The limitations of Nagl's approach in providing the best explanation of the success or failure of the two counterinsurgencies that he considers, and by extrapolation other counterinsurgencies, beyond the crucial differences in the counterinsurgencies outlined above, are substantial when viewed against the historical record. The fate of the Che Guevara-led insurgency in Bolivia in 1966-67 provides one example. The Bolivian government easily defeated the insurgency by using techniques that varied little throughout its efforts. While the need for incorporating new information during an evolutionary conflict, especially when one begins with an inadequate strategy, puts a premium on the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency as a learning institution, it is difficult to understand why a counterinsurgency that starts by using the correct strategy would need to be a competent learning institution. Counterinsurgencies that face weak, poorly led, or otherwise severely disadvantaged opponents would also require far less in the way of effectiveness as a learning institution. Finally, one should view Nagl's observations as identifying one factor, although not the preeminent one, in participating in the insurgency/counterinsurgency matrix. A fuller analysis occurs in the U.S. counterinsurgency field manual for which he wrote the foreword to the 2007 public edition.¹³⁰

The *U.S. Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* takes the position that the best approach to use in counterinsurgency is a population-centric approach rooted in the theories of Galula and General Sir Gerald Templar, who coined the phrase "hearts and minds" while putting into place the winning strategy in Malaya, as well as many others.¹³¹ The presentation of this contention is not in the form of an argument but consists instead of a

¹³⁰ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

¹³¹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 878.

sophisticated analysis that supports the claim without proving it. Unfortunately, several of the statements made in this analysis have historical counterexamples as appear in the following. As a manual, this does not count as a fatal flaw, but for those seeking the best theory to both explain past counterinsurgencies and to discern the best guide as to how to carry out a successful counterinsurgency campaign such limitations merit mention. While the first chapter has a section on insurgent theories, as presented in the previous chapter herein, the bulk of the chapter concerns itself with laying a foundation for the theory of counterinsurgency the manual espouses. The account includes a discussion of fundamentals, historical principles, and contemporary imperatives of U.S. counterinsurgency.

The chapter begins with a discussion of fundamentals that includes a pair of definitions, an identification, a declaration as to the central character, and a declaration about the importance of insurgents' cause(s). The manual refers to the joint doctrine that "... defines an *insurgency* as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict..."¹³² In essence, counterinsurgency becomes the sum of those actions taken to defeat the insurgency. These definitions make clear that while both sides are involved in the complex subset of warfare known as internal or revolutionary war, part of the larger subset of irregular warfare, they are distinct kinds of operations. The manual, in agreement with the vast majority of insurgency/counterinsurgency literature, specifies that the essential characteristic of insurgency is the struggle for political power taking priority over military action. It also follows Galula, and others, in emphasizing the insurgent cause(s). A cause presents two opportunities and a potential problem. The government can counter the effectiveness of a cause for an insurgency by either successfully addressing its underlying basis

¹³² "Joint Publication 1-02, 'Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,'" Joint Chiefs of Staff (February 15, 2013), 113. https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf.

or by appropriation. The possibility of an insurgency using multiple causes complicates such an approach. The manual claims, "... any successful COIN operation must address the legitimate grievances insurgents use to generate popular support."¹³³ Such a claim, however, has numerous counterexamples of successful enemy-centric counterinsurgencies such as those of the Bolivians in 1966-67 and various Soviet counterinsurgencies under Stalin. The chapter moves on after laying the framework outlined above to provide an analysis of theories of insurgency before moving on to considerations of counterinsurgency, beginning with detailing possible insurgent vulnerabilities.

The manual highlights eight possible insurgent vulnerabilities out of a broader set as potential targets for counterinsurgent action with the first four being the need for secrecy, inconsistencies in the narrative, need for a secure base(s), and reliance on outside support. The need for secrecy can prove to impede insurgent action. The manual mentions the frictional effect of the need for secrecy without mentioning how counterinsurgents might actively take advantage. Still, an obvious tack to take would be to implement controls on mobility or communications to place increased pressure on insurgent efforts to maintain secrecy. Counterinsurgents can exploit inconsistencies in the insurgents' message to limit their ability to recruit or gain popular support. The manual references internal inconsistencies in the message, but a counterinsurgency can also utilize inconsistencies between an insurgent message and beliefs of the general populace. Counterinsurgents can take advantage of the insurgents' need to establish a secure base of operations by periodically patrolling possible locations or other similar low-intensity actions. Many insurgencies rely on external support that counterinsurgents can often degrade or even eliminate in many different ways.¹³⁴

¹³³ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 18, I-51.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33, I-96 to I-99.

The remaining four areas of insurgent vulnerability are the need to obtain financing, internal divisions, the need to retain momentum, and informants within the insurgency. The insurgents' need to obtain financial resources often provides a significant area for effective counterinsurgent action. While the manual does not mention it, sophisticated financial analysis and interdiction is a particular American strength. The existence of internal divisions raises the possibility of counterinsurgent action to divide and conquer, co-opt one or more factions, or play one group against the other. The existence of internal divisions can occur in naturally occurring divisions or ones caused by counterinsurgent actions such as making compromise proposals designed to split radical and more moderate factions within an insurgency. Insurgencies have the advantage of having the initiative at the beginning of a conflict combined with a need to control tempo and scheduling of operations. Counterinsurgents can disrupt such control by seizing the initiative. Since insurgent organizations are most vulnerable when counterinsurgencies obtain substantial amounts of actionable intelligence, informants are a vital asset in such a conflict. Informant activity, or even the suspicion of it, can also have a deleterious effect on insurgent morale.¹³⁵ A discussion of historical principles for counterinsurgency follows that of insurgent vulnerabilities.

Since, by definition, the goal of an insurgency is to overthrow a government, at least in a part of a nation if not the whole of it, most of the strategy revolves around the question of political legitimacy in governance. The manual is careful to note that said legitimacy is dependent on the local population's perception of legitimacy, not on American norms. It goes on to assert that military force in a counterinsurgency is limited to addressing the symptoms of a loss of legitimacy, something that has several historical counterexamples involving many

¹³⁵ Ibid., 33-34, I-100 to I-104.

totalitarian governments, including the Romans and Soviets. The section contains a list of six possible indicators of legitimacy as guidance for American commanders for this difficult to measure metric. The six indicators are maintenance of security, frequency, and manner of electing leaders, popular participation or support for political processes, a locally acceptable level of corruption, a locally acceptable level of development, and sufficient regime acceptance by social institutions. The insurgency's overall goal of claiming the legitimacy to govern for itself leads to the primacy of the political over the military.¹³⁶

The fact that insurgency is more a political movement than a military movement becomes evident when one observes that insurgencies can succeed without ever achieving a straightforward military success in battle. The insurgency need only convince the population to abandon the government and put it in power or convince the government to give up. Thus, the insurgents in Algeria were politically successful in their struggle against French rule even though they were unable to defeat the French forces militarily. Augusto Sandino accomplished a similar result when the United States withdrew from Nicaragua in 1933, although in their view, U.S. forces had accomplished their mission, even though he never militarily defeated them in the conventional sense of the term. The subordination of the military aspects of insurgency/counterinsurgency to the political explains more of the difficulty of the larger military side in such asymmetric warfare to defeat the weaker than any other factor. The single most apparent military asymmetry concerns the number of troops needed on the two sides.

The manual notes that a historical principle developed in the form of the need for a significant advantage in numbers necessary to carry out counterinsurgent operations successfully, often quoted as being at least a ten-to-one ratio. More recent works, including the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 37-39, I-113, I-116, I-118, I-120.

manual, have generally shied away from specific numbers and have only acknowledged that counterinsurgents must have sufficiently more numbers to meet the challenges of the specific circumstances. The need for population-centric counterinsurgents to provide security everywhere, while insurgents need only maintain sufficient forces to strike somewhere, clearly support such a contention, but only for such an approach. An enemy-centric approach, as envisioned by Neill Macaulay, an American who fought as one of Castro's lieutenants in the Cuban Revolution and wrote such works as *The Sandino Affair*, need only provide enough counterinsurgents to defeat or eliminate the insurgent force. Macaulay imagines a column or columns of counterinsurgents that take to the field in direct pursuit of insurgents and stay in pursuit until they defeat them or are relieved by forces that continue the pursuit. The raid that killed Osama bin Laden can serve as an example of such a mission. True, in certain circumstances, an enemy-centric counterinsurgency might also require a significant advantage in numbers, most likely to locate hard-to-find insurgents; it is not necessarily always a characteristic of enemy-centric approaches as it is with population-centric ones. While the "asymmetry" in asymmetric warfare appears most importantly concerning military strength, it also includes political strength and behavioral expectations when applied to an insurgency.

The manual claims that American counterinsurgents need to prepare for warfare that is not "fair."¹³⁷ The main point is that insurgents believe they can derive an advantage by not adhering to the "norms" of conventional warfare. While the warning is meaningful in correctly describing the tendency of insurgents to be willing to use tactics frowned upon by professional American military figures, it glosses over two historical facts about conventional warfare. One, different cultures have displayed markedly different sets of "norms" by which they have fought,

¹³⁷ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 4, I-9.

consider, for example, the different attitudes about surrender and prisoner treatment evinced by the Japanese in World War II as against American attitudes. Two, one might undoubtedly question the implied superiority of conventional warfare norms that deemed, at least according to Americans in World War II, atomic weapons, firebombing, and the conventional bombing of civilians as acceptable. Many of the other historical principles the manual discusses derive from either the political nature of insurgency or the military peculiarities of fighting this particular type of asymmetric warfare.

The political nature of insurgency leads to several of the chapter's historical principles. The fundamental essence of insurgency as political dictates that the unity of effort among all aspects of the counterinsurgency is primary. Any isolation of the military effort from the overall political strategy could render military "successes" not only ineffective but also counterproductive.

The focus on the citizenry in a population-centric counterinsurgency places a premium on its security as the central element that builds and maintains political support, a security that the manual claims must exist under the rule of law.¹³⁸ Recent studies suggest the support for a side does not arise from an intrinsic belief in a side's ideology or beliefs shared with that side but instead accrues to the side citizens perceive as most capable of providing security.¹³⁹ The common assumption of most of the literature until recently was that support was somewhat independent of security rather than arising from it. Thus, new research in the social sciences supports the manual's assertion of the importance of security, at least in carrying out the population-centric counterinsurgency it espouses, although the emphasis is on security rather

¹³⁸ Ibid., 42-43, I-131 to 132.

¹³⁹ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 151-152. Kilcullen presents this as a central point of Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (2006).

than the rule of law featured in the section. The over-emphasis on the rule of law, other than being in keeping with American political values, does capture the importance of a government not undercutting its legitimacy by undertaking extralegal or even illegal acts in pursuit of self-preservation.

The characteristic that most reveals the difference between fighting a conventional conflict and a population-centric counterinsurgency is the breakdown of environmental factors considered essential for carrying out operations. Conventional warfare concerns itself with a great many quantitative factors including overall enemy strength, disposition, equipment, logistics, lines of communication, lines of supply, and qualitative factors such as leadership, training, and operational philosophy. The officers in charge then analyze that information within a prism of terrain, weather, fortifications, and technological capabilities. A population-centric counterinsurgency may examine some of the factors above, but the inherently political nature of the conflict places even more emphasis on the civilian environment. The manual specifies six main aspects of the counterinsurgent environment. It begins by calling for an analysis of the organization in a society as regards the key groups. Officers must identify relationships and intergroup tensions. They should decide what ideologies and narratives would resonate with said groups. They should develop an understanding of group values, interests, and motivations. They should examine the means of group communication. The last aspect is the determination of the society's leadership structure.¹⁴⁰ The entire set of aspects exhibits the political nature of the conflict as opposed to a military one. However, there may also be military peculiarities of a population-centric counterinsurgency as can be seen in the following.

¹⁴⁰ Sewall, et.al, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 38, I-124 to 125

The manual claims that the nature of insurgencies leads them usually to be lengthy. Such conflicts require substantial counterinsurgent time and resources. Intelligence plays a much more central role in driving operations. Under optimum conditions, a cycle may develop wherein intelligence leads to a mission that includes the acquisition of intelligence that then leads to additional missions. Insurgent conflict exacerbates the impact of the information environment. This fact helps explain the tactical attractiveness of something like suicide bombing where typically there is little militarily significant damage, yet there is an outsized media footprint. A primary postulate of the population-centric approach is the claim that isolation of the insurgents from their resources and cause(s) is more effective in defeating an insurgency than killing its adherents. The best support for this statement is the fact that many insurgencies replace losses quickly even to the point that numbers may increase significantly within days of casualties.¹⁴¹ The existence of clear-cut counterexamples historically, for example, Bolivia 1966-67, makes this more acceptable as a “rule of thumb” than as an absolute principle. Indeed, insurgencies that do not generate increases in participants after losses, and especially those that have difficulty even managing straightforward replacement, would seem more amenable to enemy-centric strategies than population-centric contrary to the central position of the manual. The manual claims such an approach cannot work despite the existence of many counterexamples.¹⁴² A section on contemporary principles follows the discussion of historical principles.

The six contemporary imperatives of counterinsurgency the manual presents are support at home, management of information and expectations, the appropriate level of force, adaptation,

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 5, I-12, 41-43, I-126 to 129, I-134.

¹⁴² Ibid., 5-6, I-14.

empowerment at the lowest levels, and support of the host nation.¹⁴³ Although the manual lists support at home just before the section detailing the contemporary principles, the French experience in Indo-China and Algeria, and the American experience in Vietnam would seem to call for its inclusion herein. The manual glosses over much of the higher-level political aspects of COIN after focusing a tremendous amount of effort on establishing the primacy of the political over the military in People's War (COIN/insurgency). It contains a vast amount of lower-level detail that reflects such a primacy, but such detail becomes completely moot in the case of a withdrawal of American popular support. True, from a military perspective, only a few officers take part in the political-military discussions at the top, so political considerations are outside the purview of the manual. Still, as a theory of best practices in counterinsurgency, this principle is pre-eminent among them.

The other five imperatives of counterinsurgency vary in emphasis on the political and in their scope. The political nature of insurgencies, as well as their tendency to be protracted, makes counterinsurgencies challenging. That pressure results in an imperative to manage information and expectations. Counterinsurgents must manage information to impede the insurgent narrative, keep a truthful account of events available to the public, and highlight progress toward government goals. They must manage expectations so that the population can see reasonable progress towards defeating the insurgency, an often very long-term project. Counterinsurgents must limit themselves to the appropriate level of force so that they will not provide insurgents with enhanced recruitment or undermine the legitimacy of the government. The complexity of the counterinsurgency/insurgency requires that counterinsurgents must continuously learn and adapt to the ever-changing circumstances of the conflict a la Nagl. The

¹⁴³ Ibid., 44, I-136 to I-137.

need for flexible action based on local solutions to counterinsurgent problems means that the lowest levels of military personnel must be empowered. Lastly, since the issue under challenge is the continuation of the existing government, U.S. forces must support the host nation.¹⁴⁴ The chapter concludes with a section analyzing what it describes as the paradoxes of counterinsurgency operations, although they are only paradoxical from a conventional military point of view.

Most of the paradoxes of fighting an insurgency involve the difference in the utility of using force as opposed to its use in conventional warfare. The most straightforward difference is that in counterinsurgency, the more force that is employed, the less effective it may be. A related characteristic is that the more successful a counterinsurgency is, the less force can be effectively employed, and the more risk arises from its use. Indeed, sometimes the best response is not solely to avoid force, but also sometimes to do nothing at all. The counterintuitive idea that doing nothing is often the best course of action occurs because often insurgents undertake actions specifically designed to provoke a counterinsurgent overreaction. Another crucial difference in counterinsurgency as regards the use of force or threat of force is that other actions are more effective in such operations. Conventional operations depend almost solely on the use of force or threat of force. The preceding correlates with the next paradox – tactical success guarantees nothing. An insurgency can succeed without the insurgents ever defeating the counterinsurgents by force.¹⁴⁵ The other paradoxes covered in the chapter are not so directly concerned with the use of force.

The non-force examples that appear in the chapter also derive from the political nature of insurgency. The paradox that begins the section is the fact that the more a leader tries to protect

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 44-47, I-138 to I-147.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 48-50, I-150 to I-153, I-156.

a force, the less secure it may be. The tendency is to place the force in heavily fortified central locations from which they foray out in strength. Gathering in central locations negates the ability, however, to provide the security for the population that a population-centric approach dictates. It also makes a close connection with the population difficult, if not impossible. One result of such separation is the inadequacy of intelligence provided by an estranged populace, intelligence central to guiding effective counterinsurgent operations and a key to protecting a force. The next paradox revolves around a discrepancy in effectiveness based on whether the United States or the host nation undertakes an action. Straightforwardly stated, the effect is more significant when the host nation accomplishes something tolerably well, even if the Americans can do it better.¹⁴⁶ Another conundrum is that tactics that work in one time and place may not work in another time or place. Another paradox that arises from the need of the counterinsurgents to have a close connection with the population and to be intimately familiar with local conditions is the fact that in a counterinsurgency, many vital decisions do not reside at the top of the chain of command. Instead, they reside all along its length, including a substantial set at the very bottom.

The overall presentation in the manual is robust on operational guidance, provides an excellent framework of a theory for carrying out population-centric counterinsurgency, and confidently states that enemy-centric counterinsurgency cannot succeed despite the existence of a significant body of historical counterexamples. The final judgment has to be that as a manual to guide American military forces in fighting an insurgency, it is subject to only two serious weaknesses, both of which are mostly out of its scope. One, its summary dismissal of enemy-centric counterinsurgency over hastily rejects a strategy that might be superior in specific cases

¹⁴⁶ T. E. Lawrence, "Twenty-Seven Articles," *The Arab Bulletin* no. 60 (August 20, 1917): Article 15.

to the one it espouses. Two, the manual makes too little of the fact that a withdrawal of American support at home can undo any positive results acquired through the efforts outlined therein. The loss of the Vietnam War provides a stark example of this truth with the possibility looming that the twenty-first-century conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will ultimately be failures because of a diminishment of American political will to continue the conflicts there.

David Kilcullen, an Australian army officer and Ph.D., brings a T.E. Lawrence-like blend of an academic and theorist-practitioner to counterinsurgency theory. He initially commanded a unit of Australian troops sent to assist in a counterinsurgency in Indonesia but went on to receive a doctoral degree based on the study of an insurgency in the area. He became not only a leading expert in the field but an adviser to American commanders, including General David Petraeus during “the Surge” in Iraq, in the ongoing fight against the takfiri jihadist global insurgency. Kilcullen comes down forcefully on the side of population-centric counterinsurgency as being the only correct approach. He disdains those “... armchair chicken hawks (none with experience of actual warfare in any form, let alone against real guerrillas) [who] have argued that, contrary to recent evidence, you can indeed kill your way out of an insurgency...”¹⁴⁷ Kilcullen builds a sophisticated framework for analyzing a counterinsurgency with metrics for measuring progress, a monumentally challenging task, while including excellent guidance for how unit-level commanders should carry out operations. The number of military officers in the lower ranks utilizing his work would justify a close examination even if his overall theoretical work did not

¹⁴⁷ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 5. Kilcullen briefly mentions enemy-centric theorists put forward the Nazis and Romans as examples in support of their claims. He tries to show by counterexample that the Nazis had, on occasion, used a population-centric approach (see Ben Shepherd, “Hawks, Doves and Tote Zonen: A Wehrmacht Security Division in Central Russia, 1943,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 3 [July 1, 2002]: 349–369). While partially conceding the point in the case of the Romans, he also argues that in the overall context Roman practices could be seen as population-centric (p. 7). The problem for Kilcullen is that a single Nazi counterexample cannot suffice and the discussion of the Romans is insufficient to prove his point, since a large number of Roman cases fall clearly under the heading of being enemy-centric, often without any real merit to a claim of a broader political approach indicative of population-centric strategies.

merit the serious attention that it does. The following investigates his main theoretical presentation while occasionally relating it to the everyday practices it dictates for counterinsurgent officers at the level of carrying out tactical operations.

Kilcullen's presentation of his theory begins with a quote of the definition of "insurgency" as it appears in the U.S. COIN field manual, wherein an insurgency is fundamentally an attempt to overthrow a constituted government.¹⁴⁸ That definition leads to his reduction of the manual's definition of counterinsurgency as merely being the total of those measures the government takes to defeat the insurgency. From this basis, he builds on well-known previous contributions in the fields of insurgency/counterinsurgency along with his prescriptions as to guiding principles based on his experience and study. Thus, in addition to focusing what he sees as the essential feature of the insurgency/counterinsurgency matrix, the need for adaptation (closely related to Nagl's central tenet of victory goes to the better learning organization), he claims that counterinsurgency has only two fundamentals, local solutions and respect for non-combatants (a la Mao). He also asserts that a counterinsurgency will mirror the state that carries it out.¹⁴⁹

The critical insight that makes his theory an improvement over many previous attempts is to view an insurgency by way of systems analysis using complexity theory that treats the insurgency as an organic system. While the use of systems analysis goes back to at least Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's efforts of the sixties, the introduction of complexity theory makes the approach far more sophisticated and powerful. The branch of complexity theory that best captures Kilcullen's insights concerns Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). CAS allows him, along with others who share some or all of this approach, to bring to bear

¹⁴⁸ Sewall et al., *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 10.

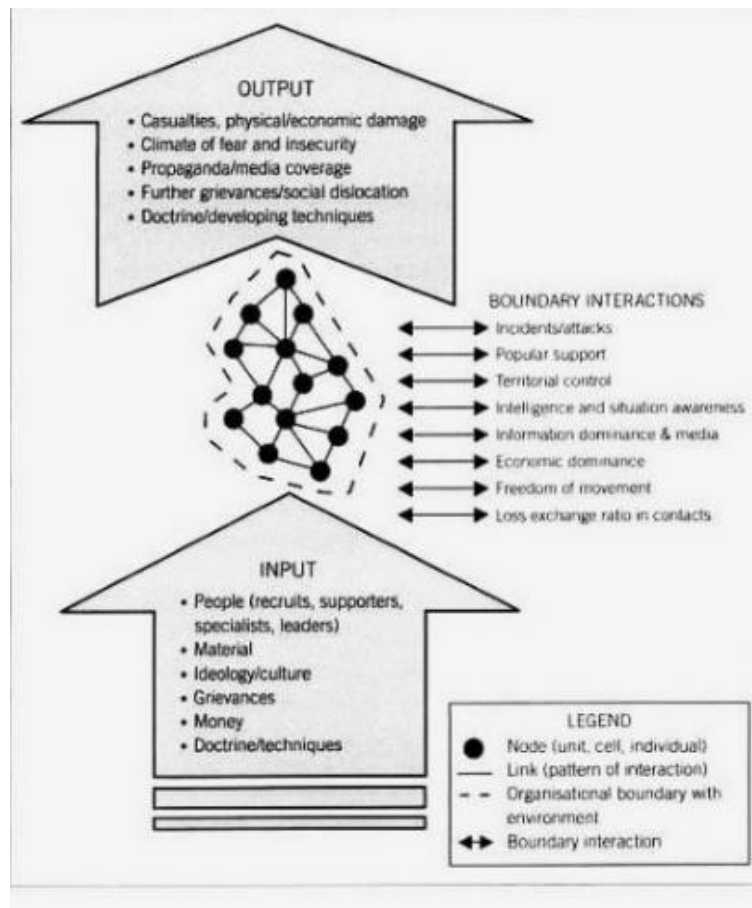
considerable insights from biology and the social sciences, including organizational science and management theory. The framework thus examines an organic system that tries to reorder its political environment from the existing governmental structure to a new structure that the insurgency controls. It does this by way of producing outputs that affect the population or ruling structure. The existence of the system for producing those outputs leads to the main two choices for a counterinsurgency, destroy or disrupt the organic system, enemy-centric, or constrain inputs or outputs of the organism such that it fails to achieve its goals, population-centric. It also suggests a new approach by Thomas-Kiser-Casebeer designed to change the insurgency's nature such that it takes up different goals than overthrowing the government.

Kilcullen thus treats insurgent groups as essentially, not just metaphorically, organic systems centered on five characteristics of the insurgency and two of its environment. First, insurgent groups are social systems that form when members organize pre-existing elements into new interactions aimed at overturning an existing government's control over all or part of its domain. Second, such groups are open to the environment concerning energy flows but are not open organizationally. Third, they are self-organizing. Fourth, they are nonequilibrium, dissipative structures that must have a throughput of energy from and back into the environment to continue to exist. Fifth, he claims that insurgencies are more than the sum of their parts mainly because they exhibit *emergence*, qualities that appear at a level of analysis not predictable by examining only parts. The two characteristics of insurgent theaters are that they are ecosystems and display adaptational, evolutionary forces. The description outlined above provides the context for Kilcullen's identification of the seven elements of an insurgency.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 194-196.

The elements of an insurgency are nodes, links, boundary, subsystems, boundary interactions, inputs, and outputs. Nodes are the physical components and structures of the insurgency, including the insurgents themselves. Links are the interactions within both the insurgency and its connections to external support. The boundary serves as the line of demarcation between the insurgency and its environment, which, while sometimes permeable, is distinct. An insurgency often reaches an organizational level of enough sophistication to have identifiable subsystems like propaganda, intelligence, recruitment, and logistics. The day-to-day events of an insurgency such as attacks, intelligence collection, and media dominance, form its boundary interactions. Kilcullen claims many counterinsurgencies often make the mistake of focusing on denying or disrupting such interactions he characterizes as similar to symptoms of a disease rather than the disease itself. The inputs are the energy, matter, and belief structures taken from the environment, for example, in the form of people, materiel, ideologies, and tactics. The outputs are the waste products and the sum of the intentional and unintentional results of insurgent actions. The elements listed above appear in Kilcullen's graphic model of an insurgency as a biological system graphic included below.

Figure 1. Insurgency as a Biological System (Reprinted from Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* p. 198)¹⁵¹



There are, of course, many other counterinsurgency theories. Most, if not all, can be placed somewhere within the spectrum presented herein, often they differ only in the emphasis on one or more of the characteristics appearing above. One such account is that of Mark Moyar in which he claims that neither population-centric nor enemy-centric accounts capture the primary factor in success in an insurgency-counterinsurgency, leadership. He identifies twelve traits as distinguishing the leadership qualities that are determinative of success: initiative, flexibility, creativity, judgment, empathy, charisma, sociability, dedication, integrity, and

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 198.

organization. Many of the qualities reflect the previous discussion of both insurgent and counterinsurgent thinkers like Mao, Guevara, and Nagl. His work, based on nine case studies beginning with the American Civil War, does not establish that a leadership-centric approach can completely supplant either population-centric or enemy-centric accounts for at least two reasons. One, there is too little argument that the definition of leadership presented is the correct one, and more importantly, two, that even with the case studies he considers, and even more clearly with many other insurgencies, he fails to make the case that leadership is the ultimate reason for success or failure. There are too many cases where the superior leadership was on the losing side, but with readily available explanations of why the losers suffered their fate for other reasons. Also, how does Moyar explain, in terms of leadership alone, how Guevara and Castro had success in Cuba but not in Bolivia? Unfortunately, too often in his arguments, good leadership becomes making the decisions that led to victory, seen only in hindsight, and bad leadership as making those decisions that the leaders on the losing side made. An overall review of the literature probably better explains the importance, though not the primacy of good leadership, by revealing the enormous complexity and difficulty that often, though not always, accompanies an insurgency-counterinsurgency.

Often the best course of action when considering a complex phenomenon is to break it down into its most fundamental components and examine those in the search for a simplifying clarity. Given the goal of an insurgency is to use revolutionary means to replace a government in all or part of an existing area, it is an inherently political endeavor. Governments can respond by focusing on the capture/elimination of the insurgents, enemy-centric, or by maintaining their control of the population, population-centric. The counterinsurgency literature breaks down along this fault line. However, a government that finds itself in sufficient control of its

population due to either widespread conviction or fear, for example, 1960's Venezuela or the USSR under Stalin respectively, needs to concern itself only with the capture/elimination of the insurgents. Such a government can pursue the enemy with only pro forma concern over its general support among the population. Thus, the view of this work is that the first step in a counterinsurgency should be a determination of the government's status with its population. Should the status be secure, an enemy-centric approach within a context of sufficient monitoring of overall population attitudes, suggests itself as the most logical course of action. Absent such security, a population-centric approach is necessary to win the political struggle for legitimacy and avoid the severe problem of fighting insurgents where such combat increases insurgent numbers and acceptance rather than diminishing them. It is possible, and indeed the best population-centric accounts mention that with sufficient control of the population, it will become necessary to kill/capture insurgents that remain incorrigible. The central principle then of the counterinsurgent theory accepted within this work has a single corollary as appears below.

While the most crucial decision in carrying out a counterinsurgency is to decide whether a population-centric or enemy-centric approach is best, it is not the first question that arises. The first question concerns the oft-neglected element of analysis in the traditional literature about theories of counterinsurgency, although not in actual counterinsurgent practice, as to whether an insurgency is associated with a conventional army in the field. A recent emphasis has taken shape that addresses the omission above in new works on what is now known as "hybrid" warfare.¹⁵² An example of an insurgency associated with an army in the field would be the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army, and for one not so associated would be the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

¹⁵² E.g., See Williamson Murray and Peter R Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (2012).

The most important reason for considering such a question is that the goals of an insurgent force are most often subservient to those of an army in the field, for example, the forces of John Mosby in the American Civil War operated in support of the Army of Northern Virginia. A counterinsurgent approach that aims at addressing insurgent aims as its essential foundation for strategy would be inferior to one examining the bigger picture of the operations of the army in the field and the relationship to them of the insurgent operations. A related question in cases where an insurgency has outside support arises when there is a threat from the possibility that an army from the outside supporter may become involved. Many Cold War insurgencies carried at least the implied threat of significant super-power involvement; actually, many insurgencies appeared to be “proxy”-wars between the superpowers. Indeed, Max Boot claims that the most critical predictor of insurgent success has been whether there is access to adequate outside support.¹⁵³

An insurgency threatens to replace a government dictating that the government under threat can best protect itself by ensuring the population will not support the insurgents or by eliminating/capturing/co-opting a sufficient number of the insurgents to dissipate their threat. Population-centric approaches attempt the former while enemy-centric approaches attempt the latter. In cases where the population is sufficiently unlikely to abandon the government, an enemy-centric approach is the most direct and at least theoretically capable of meeting the challenge. In cases where sufficient government support is not evident in the citizenry, population-centric approaches are far preferable because enemy-centric approaches run the risk of feeding more recruits to the insurgency than government action eliminates. Thus, successful enemy-centric approaches present themselves as a special subset of population approaches, ones

¹⁵³ Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (2012), xxvi. See also p. 78 for a description of the crucial role he claims for “hybrid” warfare in most insurgent successes.

where control of the population is not in practical terms actually at issue. Counterinsurgents, or anyone else interested in analyzing an insurgency, must determine first, the degree to which the government has the support of the people; and second, whether the insurgents are associated with an army in the field, as the needs of such an army dominate overall strategy of the insurgents.

CHAPTER V

THE FAILURE OF THE BATISTA-AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCY AGAINST THE CUBAN REVOLUTION 1953-1959

The roots of the Cuban Revolution that eventually came to be closely associated with Fidel Castro date to at least the nineteenth century as did American involvement in Cuban affairs. The assessment/analysis of the revolution that follows details a multi-pronged insurgency, dominated by two branches, arising from this long history. Insurgents operated from 1953 to 1959 to overthrow Fulgencio Batista and to eliminate American hegemony in Cuba. Castro saw the dual goals of the revolution in this way, and eventually, the United States came to the same conclusion.¹⁵⁴ The counterinsurgency had two components that reflected the insurgency's dual nature. The first was the effort to keep Batista in power. The second was the associated American effort to retain hegemony in Cuba. The objective herein is to explain why the counterinsurgency failed despite America's position as a superpower, rather than to give a complete account of the revolution itself.

This case study includes an alternative to the two major trends in the historiography as to the degree the U.S. government was surprised by the overthrow of Batista and America's subsequent loss of hegemonic influence. One school of thought depicts the outcome as mainly a surprise to the American government. The opposing view identifies a division between Americans in which some middle and lower-level officials recognized the warning signs but were unable to convince their superiors who did not. The upper levels included the two political appointee Ambassadors to Cuba, Arthur Gardner (October 16, 1953, to June 16, 1957) and Earl

¹⁵⁴ Ramon L. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdes, eds., *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947-1958* (1972), 379.

E. T. Smith (July 23, 1957, to January 19, 1959), along with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and President Dwight Eisenhower. The latter account mainly attributes the surprise to inattention by the president and miscalculation by the others.

The analysis herein revises the position put forward by the second group that indicates, with a tone of disapprobation, surprise at the upper levels with some participants at the lower levels correctly predicting the failure of the Batista counterinsurgency. The modified interpretation presented in this study agrees that the revolt against Batista surprised senior officials, but without disapprobation, and explains why officials, particularly those with direct experience in Cuba, could predict the outcome of events successfully. Moreover, Castro's subsequent adoption of Communism and the longevity of his government surprised most Americans at all levels (some, such as Ambassador Earl E. T. Smith, felt Castro had been a Communist all along).

American support for Batista and counterinsurgency activities fell into three distinct areas: military, diplomatic, and economic. While the efforts in the three spheres were logically interrelated, they received little, if any, coordination for most of the period. The lack of coordination was partially a product of an absence of a sense of urgency in Washington about Cuba until late in the revolution. Another factor was the different views of various stakeholders. The military, along with the two political appointee ambassadors, generally supported Batista the most of any of the official groups. The most obvious example of such a preference being the willingness to overlook Batista's improper use of units the United States trained and armed under an agreement specifically limiting such assets to hemispheric defense only.¹⁵⁵ Batista mainly

¹⁵⁵ *Mutual Defense Assistance, Agreement between the United States of America and Cuba Signed at Habana March 7, 1952, Entered into Force March 7, 1952, TIAS 2467, (1952).*

used such units broken up and interspersed with regular units fighting the insurgents allowing him to say it would be too complicated to try to reassemble and pull them from the action.

Diplomatic efforts vacillated between Washington's overriding concern about whether the Communists inspired or controlled the insurgency and the U.S. ambassadors' unwavering support for Batista and their belief that Castro was a Communist. This conflict led to an all-encompassing Washington fixation on finding evidence that Castro was a Communist. The concern in Congress, led by Adam Clayton Powell among others, over Batista's human rights abuses, media attention, and American popular opinion, severely limited options available to the State Department.¹⁵⁶ Economic efforts fluctuated between a desire to protect and maximize American economic interests on the island and the desire of some representatives in Congress from sugar-producing states to lower Cuba's sugar quota. Sugar, the basis of Cuba's monocrop-dependent economy, had dominated U.S.-Cuban economic relations for decades.¹⁵⁷ U.S. domestic economic constraints strongly influenced the roles played by military missions throughout Latin America. The region's status as the lowest priority in military spending pushed efforts to the minimal end of the spectrum.¹⁵⁸

This study rejects the view of theorists who insist that every counterinsurgency-insurgency is unique and thus that generalizations that attempt to explain the success or failure of more than one must fail. It argues that such generalizations are possible. There were aspects of the U.S.-Cuban relationship that were unique. However, general Cold War goals drove American foreign policy relative to all of Latin America and motivated most of its actions in support of Batista's counterinsurgency. Additionally, domestic concerns tempered such global

¹⁵⁶ Cong. Rec., 85th Cong., 2d sess., 1958, Vol. 104, pt. 4:4948-49 (Powell).

¹⁵⁷ See Gregory Weeks, *U.S. and Latin American Relations* (2007), 56, for an explanation of the Teller Amendment in terms of sugar production concerns.

¹⁵⁸ Bedell Smith, "Memorandum of the Under Secretary of State," 22.

concerns. The consensus that insurgency is the most political of military conflicts, as Mao's success in China amply demonstrated, stands in stark counterpoint to the American effort in Cuba. American insistence throughout the Cuban Revolution to override almost all indications of an untenable Cuban political situation reflects a failure to employ a politically viable counterinsurgency program. Instead, the United States primarily pursued a dual program of blind anti-Communism and efforts to maintain U.S. economic hegemony. The splintered approach to Latin American policy in general, and to Cuba specifically, occurred despite President Eisenhower's considerably more consistent advice he was receiving from his most trusted advisor on Latin America, his brother Milton Eisenhower.¹⁵⁹

The case study begins with a presentation of the role the Cuban Sugar Industry played during the revolution. The case study then breaks the revolution into three chronological divisions. These divisions consist of sections detailing the actions of significant insurgent groups and associated counterinsurgent responses along with a section in the first and last periods that analyze Washington's approach.

The Cuban Sugar Industry

The United States had immense control over Cuba's economy, primarily, although not exclusively, through its role as both Cuba's primary customer and competitor in sugar. Cuba had ideal conditions for growing sugar and so could concentrate more on finding markets and favorable pricing than struggling to have adequate production. The United States limited the profit available to Cubans in two ways. First, U.S. limits on sugar production caused American market prices to be above world market prices, meaning sugar exports to the United States were necessary to maximize profit. Second, Americans owned a significant amount of sugar

¹⁵⁹ See Milton Stover Eisenhower, *The Wine Is Bitter: The United States and Latin America*, (1963).

production in Cuba, thus denying Cubans much of the benefit of their country's most significant economic resource, a situation replicated in other Latin American countries with other products, e.g., bananas in Honduras and oil in Venezuela.

The primary vehicle for the control was the sugar quota reinstated after World War II. The controlling legislation was the Sugar Act of 1948 and the subsequent revision of it in the Sugar Act of 1951.¹⁶⁰ The latter decreased Cuba's share by 240,000 tons. Cuba objected to the cutback and only acquiesced to the decrease on the understanding that any future increases in the four years covered by the legislation would go to foreign producers. The quota was so central to Cuba's economic and political well-being that Secretary of State Dulles warned the president that bills pending in 1954 seeking to raise American domestic production limits by 300,000 tons, contradicting the earlier assurances any increases would go to foreign sources rather than domestic, could lead the ongoing government resistance in Cuba to grow to revolution.¹⁶¹ Those bills culminated in the Sugar Act of 1956 that assigned increased production to domestic sources in direct violation of the 1951 promise.¹⁶² While the quota changes were set not to take effect for several years as far as production, there was, contrary to the traditional interpretation, an immediate negative economic effect. The immediate effect was a decrease in Cuban sugar stock-valuations once the contents of the legislation became public.¹⁶³ The legislation also had

¹⁶⁰ The Sugar Act of 1948, Public Law 388, 80th Cong., 1st sess., (August 8, 1947); and An Act to amend and extend the Sugar Act of 1948, and for other purposes, Public Law 82-140, 82d Cong., 1st sess., (September 1, 1951).

¹⁶¹ John Foster Dulles, "Document 343, Memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President: Proposed Modification of the Sugar Act Unwise and Unfair," Washington, June 7, 1954, FRUS Vol IV: The American Republics, 902, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS195254v04>.

¹⁶² An Act to amend and extend the Sugar Act of 1948, as amended, and for other purposes, Public Law 545, 84th Cong., 2d sess., (May 29, 1956).

¹⁶³ Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, "The U.S. Sugar Program and the Cuban Revolution," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 3 (2004): 675.

immediate political/diplomatic effect in undercutting U.S. credibility and lending veracity to Castro's anti-American claims.

Two critical disputes in the historiography are relevant for consideration here. One, there is a controversy as to the overall state of the Cuban sugar industry in the 1950s. Two, to what extent, if any, did problems with the Cuban sugar industry contribute to the outbreak and continuation of the revolution. One problem in the first controversy is the lack of appropriate analysis as to what measure is best for determining the health of the sugar industry: actual production vs. production capacity, prices, actual profit vs. potential profit, the overall valuation of the industry, or some combination of factors. Some accounts focus on Cuban sugar sales during the 1950s, for example, that of Steven F. Grover, pointing out that the Sugar Act of 1956 would not reduce the amount of total sales and could have resulted in increased sales, although reducing market share in the lucrative American market.¹⁶⁴ The view that maintaining previous volumes of sales would be acceptable to Cuban producers cut out of a booming growth market ignores Grover's presentation of the American industry's dissatisfaction that led domestic producers to agitate for the changes in the quota that led to the Sugar Act of 1956 in the first place. Grover referred in a footnote to a statement from Frank A. Kemp, president of the Great Western Sugar Company, to the effect that American producers felt the Sugar Act of 1951 completely stifled their participation in the growth of the domestic market.¹⁶⁵ Of course, one's measurement of pricing may vary, depending on the period selected or whether one concerns oneself with American or world prices. For example, there had been a price spike during the Korean War, but after a two-year bubble, prices were actually slightly lower, beginning the first quarter 1950 at 4.5 cents per pound for free market sugar and ending at 4.3 cents per pound in

¹⁶⁴ Grover, "U.S.-Cuban Relations 1953-1958," 228-229.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 225 and "Beet Producers Seek to Amend Sugar Act," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1955.

March 1952.¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it is reasonable to take the position that some combination of market share, profitability, and valuation is more indicative of producer sentiment than just pricing.

Another problem with the Cuban sugar industry was the extent to which it was mainly at the mercy of external controls. The principle essential external control for the Cuban industry was the sugar quota in the United States that controlled the amount that entered the American market. The American Sugar Act of 1948, as amended by the Sugar Act of 1951, decreased the Cuban quota. Cuban objections resulted in an American promise that any future increase in total quota would go to Cuba rather than domestic producers. The 1953 London Sugar Agreement constrained Cuba in the world market where, despite Cuba's status as the leading producer, the conference was mostly to the benefit of buyers.¹⁶⁷ The next year, when the U.S. Congress/government began to discuss implementing the London Agreement, Cuban leaders became alarmed—and rightly so. What became the Sugar Act of 1956 granted an increase to domestic producers in violation of the 1951 agreement that led to the aforementioned decreased valuations of the Cuban sugar industry.

Assessment of the Cuban sugar industry's effect on the Cuban Revolution is mainly a question of perception rather than hard economic numbers. Of course, good or bad economic factors can help shape perceptions. The factors of profitability, market share, and valuation all had negative aspects during the Cuban revolution, with the latter two undergoing substantial

¹⁶⁶ Maurice F. Perkins and A. Kruithof, "Recent Developments in Agricultural Commodities : Short Notes on Production, Trade and Prices" (1952), accessed 3/34/17, 5, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/801311468336026134/Recent-developments-in-agricultural-commodities-short-notes-on-production-trade-and-prices>.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Cushion, "Cuban Popular Resistance to the 1953 London Sugar Agreement," *Commodities of Empire Working Papers*, no. 15 (March 2010), accessed 4/11/2017, 14. <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/commodities-of-empire/working-papers/index.shtml>.

declines and the former showing constrained growth during a booming market in the United States. Several historians argue unconvincingly that American actions relative to sugar led directly to support for Castro's revolutionary program.¹⁶⁸

Economically, Cuba had many reasons to be dissatisfied with American constraints on the Cuban sugar industry. The problem with that as an explanation of substantial support, at least directly, for Castro was the irrationality of thinking that a Castro victory would improve Cuba's sugar industry. The artificially high prices of the American market due to the sugar quota system meant that the profitability of the Cuban sugar industry depended heavily on access to the American market. Cubans knew that the U.S. Congress could reduce or eliminate that access with the stroke of a pen, something likely to happen if Castro took control. Analysis by Cuban sugar producers predicted that finding new, non-American buyers for sugar would reduce prices on the world residual market by 106%, pushing the price below the cost of production.¹⁶⁹ Thus, any move to replace the American market lost to an embargo would be untenable. Moreover, even if Cuba were able to sell the displaced sugar once partially or fully denied the American market, it would have entailed a very significant drop in, if not the elimination of, profits.

Accounts that present the sugar industry circumstances as directly contributing to Castro's success reflect the outmoded view in the counterinsurgency literature that at least implicitly assumes that the alignment of a people with an insurgent group is mainly a function of agreement in views with them. More accurately, contemporary research shows that perceptions of who provides the most security drive public support. While the narrative, composed of a

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 14-15; Dye and Sicotte, "U.S. Sugar Program," 700-702; and See Justin McCollum, "A Brief Historiography of U.S. Hegemony in the Cuban Sugar Industry," *The Forum: Journal of History* 3, no. 1 (2011), accessed 4/14/17, DOI: 10.15368/forum.2011v3n1.8 for a discussion of such accounts.

¹⁶⁹ Dye and Sicotte, "U.S. Sugar Program," 696, 702

leader's presentation of a group's principles and goals, does play an essential role in recruitment and the maintenance of the cohesion of an insurgent group, this role does not extend to general public support as would be necessary to support the accounts in question.

The evidence shows that the traditional view that the circumstances of the Cuban sugar industry had little to no effect on the political situation in Cuba during the revolution because profits during the period were as good as or better than the previous period was incorrect. The revisionists showed that other negative factors such as loss of market share, a drop in valuation, and the lack of substantial growth during a booming market all contributed to a politically significant effect. However, that effect was not the direct one of encouraging a mass movement in support of Castro, but rather the indirect one of strengthening Castro's anti-American narrative. That strengthened narrative contributed to improved recruitment and maintenance of group cohesion, but not a mass movement in support of Castro. The traditionalists were correct that the seminal event that generated the mass movement was the strategic defeat of the Cuban Army in the summer campaign of 1958. That event shifted the expectation of which side would provide the most security from the government to the insurgents.

March 1952 to November 1956

The period from March 10, 1952, to November 25, 1956, ended democratic institutions envisioned in the Cuban Constitution of 1940, and the country returned to its traditional system of strongman rule. Earlier, after a coalition of opponents overthrew the strongman government of President Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), Fulgencio Batista took control of the Cuban military and, with it, controlled a succession of weak executives. In 1940, Batista won the presidential election in Cuba and willingly stepped down in 1944 under the provision in Cuba's Constitution of 1940 that banned presidents from succeeding themselves. In the election of

1944, Ramon Grau San Martin defeated Batista's handpicked candidate. Grau's election began eight years of democratic rule marred by ever-increasing corruption beginning with the creation of many government jobs filled by political appointees. The appointees used their bureaucratic power to extract money from citizens rather than carry out their government responsibilities. Carlos Prío Socarrás won the election of 1948, and his government expanded the previous administration's corruption. Batista ran for office again in 1952, but when it began to appear that he would lose the election, Batista seized control of the government in a coup on March 10, 1952.¹⁷⁰

The coup stirred up only a muted reaction as the rampant corruption of the previous two administrations reduced popular loyalty to the old regime to a minimum. Batista justified his seizure of power by charging that the Prío administration planned to stay in power by disregarding election results, and thus he had to safeguard the institution of the Cuban government and its people with his coup. However, this narrative, combined with the widespread corruption, eventually produced a significant backlash as Batista's dictatorial government proved as corrupt as his two predecessors did. The backlash quickly grew into armed opposition and eventually into a full-blown revolutionary insurgency.

Various groups and individuals actively set themselves against Batista not long after he usurped rule. One of the first was the displaced President Carlos Prío Socarrás, who financed various schemes from his home in exile in Miami.¹⁷¹ The schemes covered activities of his party, the Partido Auténtico, and the younger Ortodoxos party that had split off from the

¹⁷⁰ Dean Atkinson, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State (Atkinson) to the President (Truman)," March 24, 1952, *FRUS* 1952-1954 Vol. IV, Document 327, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d327>.

¹⁷¹ Julia Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground*, (2002), 6.

Auténticos in 1947.¹⁷² An activist student group, the *Federacion Estudiantil Universitaria* (Federation of University Students), was a major anti-Batista group that eventually spawned the militant *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (Student Revolutionary Directorate, DR or DRE) that announced its existence on September 30, 1955. Fidel Castro founded a group that became known as the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* (26th of July Movement, M-26-7) after the date of its first armed action.¹⁷³ From its founding in 1953 until 1958, Castro's group received little support from the Soviet Union or the Cuban Communist party, i.e., the *Partido Socialista Popular* (Popular Socialist Party or PSP). Both considered Castro's revolution as an example of mistaken adventurism.¹⁷⁴ Such a view is in keeping with Marxist-Leninist theory that dictates two preconditions for a revolution. The theory states that a Marxist revolution can only occur when the forces of history and economics have created the objective conditions for it and that it is necessary to have an urban workers' movement with a disciplined party to serve as a vanguard. Ironically, given the American preoccupation and insistence on Communist involvement, an influential group that did not participate, indeed arrayed itself against Castro and the other anti-Batista movements, was the PSP. While these groups usually pursued separate plans, most would eventually subjugate themselves to Castro's M-26-7 by the end of the revolution.

Thus, the part of the revolution carried out by Fidel Castro was but one part of an effort carried out by many divergent forces that sought to overthrow Batista. Furthermore, all the groups involved saw themselves, to one extent or another, as carrying on the revolutionary activities of previous generations. They referenced the freedom fighters of 1895 and the revolutionaries of 1933 principally. The references gave an overarching identity to the many

¹⁷² Frank Argote-Freyre, "The Political Afterlife of Eduardo Chibás Evolution of a Symbol, 1951–1991," *Cuban Studies* 32 (2001): 79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24486201>.

¹⁷³ Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

disparate groups until most eventually joined Castro's movement. The coalescence into Castro's M-26-7 movement was not inevitable, nor even likely, as events and decisions by foreign media, his revolutionary colleagues, rivals, and Batista played more of a role in Castro's eventual ascendance than did his own efforts. The following analyzes the key events that led to the insurgent success in the Cuban Revolution.

Fidel Castro and M-26-7

The canceled elections of 1952 precipitated the development of the Cuban Revolution 1953-1959. Fulgencio Batista was running a poor third in the race for president when he led a military coup that overthrew the corrupt government of President Carlos Prío Socarrás on March 10, 1952. Fidel Castro was a lawyer and Ortodoxo Party candidate for the House of Representatives in that election.¹⁷⁵ He was a candidate despite his previous involvement in violence, possibly including murder. He, and others, filed several legal challenges to the coup as a violation of the 1940 Constitution that had provisions against such an occurrence. The courts ruled against all such lawsuits saying that revolution was a valid source of constitutional change.¹⁷⁶ The United States quickly recognized the government of Batista, setting in place another Latin American dictator with American support. Such an act caused concern among Latin American supporters of democracy.

Castro determined after losing the court challenge that he would begin a violent campaign to unseat Batista and return the government to one based on the 1940 Constitution.¹⁷⁷

The resort to violence was well in line with Castro's previous participation in "action groups"

¹⁷⁵ Peter Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro: When Cuba Was a Tropical Playground* (2008), 61.

¹⁷⁶ Ramon L. Bonachea and Marta San Martin, *The Cuban Insurrection, 1952-1959* (1974), 10-14. See also accessed 7/28/2014 <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Cuba/cuba1940.html> for a Spanish copy of the 1940 constitution and accessed 7/28/2014 <http://paxety.com/Site/1940Constitution.html> for an English translation.

¹⁷⁷ Fidel Castro, "History will Absolve me." Moncada Trial Defense. 10/16/1953 <https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>. (Accessed 5/10/2020).

while a student and after that. During that period, he made clear his contempt for “ideologists” and became “thoroughly convinced that violence alone could solve everything.”¹⁷⁸ The form Castro saw for the rebellion was an insurrection against the Batista government using conventional tactics that would spark a widespread uprising of the people that Castro would arm and lead to victory. He believed that he could make up his force’s lack of training and mediocre weaponry with courage and the outstanding qualities of his leadership. His initial supporters received firearms training on Sundays at the shooting range at the *Club de Cazadores del Cerro* in Rancho Boyeros, Cuba (a gun club sometimes frequented by Ernest Hemingway) less than twelve miles from the center of Havana.¹⁷⁹

The first blow struck by Fidel Castro’s group of approximately one hundred twenty-three poorly equipped revolutionaries came on July 26, 1953. He divided his troops for an ill-conceived, three-pronged attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The rebels made their way to the barracks in a line of sixteen automobiles. The secure army outpost held some four hundred well-armed troops. Castro believed that he could counterbalance the military inferiority of his group by using the element of surprise. Only three members of the primary attack group of ninety-five revolutionaries got past the gate through a ruse involving stolen and surplus army uniforms before a two-person walking patrol opened fire on them with submachine guns. Once the alarm sounded, Castro continued the attack for just thirty minutes before the soldiers forced him to withdraw. The group suffered only eight casualties in the initial attack, but Batista’s forces killed another sixty-one in the subsequent chase.¹⁸⁰ After similar defeats at Bayamo and Moncada, Fidel led about eighteen of the assembled thirty-eight survivors toward

¹⁷⁸ Andres Suarez, *Cuba: Castroism and Communism: 1959-1966* (1967), 7.

¹⁷⁹ Bonachea and San Martin, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 16.

¹⁸⁰ Leicester Coltman, *The Real Fidel Castro* (2005), 81-82.

the mountain of La Gran Piedra. At Granjita hill on the way there, Fidel proposed to turn and fight the army, but the others dissuaded him, and the small band resumed their retreat. On August 1, the pursuing seventeen troops surrounded Castro and his men, forcing them to surrender.¹⁸¹ The capture was one of the several times that Fidel was lucky to survive his incompetence or the actions of Batista. Fidel received a sentence of fifteen years in prison for his crime, his brother Raul Castro thirteen years.

Castro had believed that the attack on the army outpost would set off a general uprising and that taking Moncada with its weapons arsenal would allow him to arm the populace. There is little reason to suspect that had he been successful in the attack, any general uprising would have ensued. His straightforward, conventional attack indicated Castro had not yet embraced a guerrilla warfare approach, as no competent guerrilla leader would assault a fixed position at such a disadvantage in men and matériel. No good conventional warfare leader would have carried out such an attack in isolation either. The lack of intelligence about the patrols coupled with no detailed planning on what to do if they did not achieve surprise were telling deficiencies in the incredibly amateurish attempt. Augusto Sandino, the spiritual mentor of the Cuban Revolution of 1953-59, had gotten off to a similarly poor start in Nicaragua in 1927. He suffered a sound defeat in his first battle against the government with an original force of fewer than one hundred insurgents before ultimately achieving his goal of helping to convince the United States to pull its troops out. Still, Sandino had fought his first battle with a numerical advantage. The use of American airpower in history's first dive-bombing attack had proven decisive in the Battle of Ocotlan on July 16, 1927.¹⁸² Sandino learned from the first loss to switch over to a guerrilla campaign. Castro did not and suffered another major defeat in his next attack of a conventional

¹⁸¹ Bonachea and San Martin, *The Cuban Insurrection*, 22.

¹⁸² Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 78-81.

nature, as he was still not convinced of the need for a guerrilla campaign. The first disaster did create a name for the revolutionary group as they became known as M-26-7 (*Movimiento 26 de Julio*, 26th of July Movement).

In 1955, Batista ordered the Castro brothers freed as part of a general release of all political prisoners (a consistent mistake he made during the counterinsurgency). Castro soon moved to Mexico to escape the attention of Batista's secret police, and there he met Alberto Bayo and Ernesto Che Guevara, two figures crucial for his revolution.^{183*} Alberto Bayo was a Cuban-born Spanish military officer. Guevara was a budding revolutionary, but more in the line of a theorist than a guerrilla. Guevara had decided that the time had come for the People to use violent methods to overthrow governments under imperialistic control. Both Castro and Guevara had considered Guerrilla warfare as a secondary function that could provide an alternative strategy available to the revolution should a conventional approach fail. Bayo, a guerrilla warfare expert, had fought against the Islamic Riff guerrillas in Morocco for eleven years before studying and teaching guerrilla tactics, particularly those employed by Augusto Sandino. Bayo firmly believed that a guerrilla campaign would eventually succeed in Cuba in one to ten years, while a conventional campaign he believed would lose in one to three weeks. Convinced that Castro was the type of leader that could lead such a revolution in Cuba, Bayo sold the furniture factory he owned in Mexico and agreed to train Castro's followers.¹⁸⁴

Bayo began the training with a program designed to turn Castro and his men into a capable guerrilla unit. He supplemented daytime practical training with nighttime sessions devoted to guerrilla theory. Castro only sporadically attended during the daytime and skipped

^{183*} While it is possible that release of political prisoners can assist in a counterinsurgency, without the proper context of significant improvement in the overall political situation it simply allows the insurgency to replenish both its leadership and manpower as it did in this case.

¹⁸⁴ Jules DuBois, *Fidel Castro: Rebel, Liberator or Dictator?* (2007), 99-100.

the nighttime sessions. Guevara was more interested and participated fully in the training, day and night. Bayo modeled his approach very consciously on Augusto Sandino, but it resembled Mao's Protracted War Theory. The resemblance was so close that in an interview later, Guevara took considerable care to deny the connection. He struggled to make clear that, all evidence to the contrary, the Cubans had independently developed the approach they used rather than imitate systems from outside the Western Hemisphere. The training began by informing the fighters that the casualty rate would probably be ninety percent. It is a mark of the dedication of the trainees that they were willing to embark on the program despite such a stark appraisal of their chances.

Castro did not like the guerrilla approach declaring it cowardly in its refusal to engage the enemy in face-to-face combat and only under conditions of advantage. The hit and run nature of guerrilla combat conflicted with Castro's very romantic vision of how he would win the military conflict. He naively believed that his leadership and the courage of his men could triumph over the much more considerable military resources of what he considered a corrupt and morally bankrupt government. Bayo argued that the viciousness of Batista's methods, combined with his overwhelming advantage in numbers and equipment, made a guerrilla response morally acceptable. Castro held firm in his desire that the members of the group receive conventional training and Bayo relented, downgrading guerrilla training to a secondary role. Castro did state that if the conventional effort failed, he would retire to the Sierra Maestra Mountains to fight a guerrilla war.

Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE)

The Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE Student Revolutionary Directorate) formed in 1955 as a separate urban movement in opposition to Batista. Led by José Antonio Echeverría, its members did not trust M-26-7 mostly because of the perceived

caudillismo (leadership of a caudillo, strongman, usually supported by an oligarchic elite) of Castro. The DRE, along with other urban insurgents, provided the lion's share of supplies, including arms and ammunition for M-26-7, once it began operations from the *Sierra Maestra*. DRE continued doing so until M-26-7 could augment its supplies by capturing government material. DRE also carried out traditional urban insurgents' operations in Havana at considerable risk given the heavy regular and secret police presence in the capital. Castro and Guevara, with the former beginning during the revolution and the latter after, minimized the contribution of all non-M-26-7 groups both operationally and demanding they give scarce supplies to Castro's group. The DRE sustained losses at a higher rate than M-26-7, but like many anti-Batista groups eventually fell under Castro's control because of the deaths of their leadership. Such deaths often resulted directly from Batista's operations, but a close examination reveals that Castro's lack of cooperation with other insurgent groups out of his insistence that he have control the entire campaign against Batista indirectly led to many of these deaths.

The United States – Washington

Several factors dominated American foreign policy relative to Cuba, while other factors influenced it to a lesser extent. The Cold War provided the main impetus for policy, while domestic economic and political pressure restricted its execution. The Eisenhower administration viewed Cuba mainly in the global context of the Cold War. Regional objectives played a secondary role in policy formation, with Cuba-specific concerns having even less influence. The latter were most susceptible to interference from Congress on economic grounds relative to safeguarding American business interests in Cuba or domestic concerns over sugar quotas, along with general Congressional wrangling over funding. Most counterinsurgency

experts place a premium on having superior intelligence, a responsive, appropriate political plan, and sufficient resources to combat an insurgency successfully. Washington had initial intelligence that accurately delineated the problematic situation in Latin America, including Cuba. However, the preoccupation with the Cold War and the dissipation of focus brought on by domestic economic and political factors led to a policy course that failed to take advantage of the valuable spot-on intelligence assessment. Indeed, administration policy often contradicted that assessment (sometimes within a single document).

Many U.S. government documents illustrate both the accuracy of the initial assessment and its devolution into the “great” surprise of the success of the Cuban Revolution. A set of central documents in this group is the top-secret NSC 144/1 and the subsequent progress reports on it. The document begins with general considerations for Latin America with the very first sentence being, “(t)here is a trend in Latin America toward nationalistic regimes maintained in large part by appeals to the masses of the population.”¹⁸⁵ It goes on to identify how the trend becomes a political program for groups wanting to change the existing governmental approach by stating that “(t)he growth of nationalism is facilitated by historic anti-U.S. prejudices....”¹⁸⁶ Thus, the correct assessment of the threat was in place as early as 1953. The document goes on to specify one of the main goals of Latin American policy was “(4)d. (t)he reduction and elimination of the menace of internal Communism or other anti-U.S. subversion.”¹⁸⁷ Still, the seven goals enunciated arose from the broader Cold War orientation of U.S. foreign policy and focused on Communist threats from the outside rather than nationalist problems internally. The

¹⁸⁵ “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Latin America,” March 18, 1953, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; and “The Under Secretary of State (Bruce) to the Secretary of Defense (Lovett),” December 23, 1952, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 137.

¹⁸⁷ “U.S. Objectives Latin America,” 7.

National Intelligence Estimate from August 24, 1954, reiterates the assessment and goes on to predict a virtually inevitable explosion if the repressive governments in the region do not “... promote social, economic, and political progress”¹⁸⁸

Standard population-based counterinsurgency theory (as currently espoused) would suggest that the government, with American backing, should put into place a political program that emphasized providing for the security of the population while addressing fundamental political and economic needs. Logic dictates the government appropriate or replace nationalistic fervor or run the risk that insurgents will harness that cause to challenge the government. For the United States, this meant, at the very least, minimizing visible signs of American military presence and showing sensitivity to Cuban needs in political and economic matters, something explicitly pointed out by Willard L. Beaulac, a career FSO who served as U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, June 20, 1951, to August 9, 1953.¹⁸⁹ American pressure on Batista to minimize or eliminate the rampant corruption endemic to his government would also be an integral component of any effective counterinsurgency support program.

A counterinsurgency campaign needs sufficient resources to be successful. The Cuban economy faced challenges relative to sugar, the product that dominated the Cuban economy, during this period from uncertainties about its share of the American market to insurgent interference. The uncertainty about the U.S. market arose primarily during the negotiations and passage of the Sugar Act of 1951 and the Sugar Act of 1956 that reduced or limited Cuban production. The United States sugar industry directly benefitted from the problems in this all-important sector of the Cuban economy. American aid, both military and economic, would be

¹⁸⁸ “National Intelligence Estimate: The Caribbean Republics,” FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 380.

¹⁸⁹ “The Ambassador in Cuba (Beaulac) to the Department of State,” July 14, 1953, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 895.

necessary to carry out a successful counterinsurgency, as the Cuban economy was too weak to sustain such an effort under insurgent assault, especially given the rampant corruption.

The three primary components necessary for a successful American effort in support of the Cuban counterinsurgency were available to the United States: a correct intelligence analysis, the potential for an effective political program, and the requisite military and economic assets. Nevertheless, the documentary evidence makes it clear that various acts of both omission and commission undermined the effective use of the three components and rendered the American part of the counterinsurgency ineffective.

The value of the correct intelligence estimate available as early as March 18, 1953, was quickly lost as the Second Progress Report on NSC 144/1 from November 16, 1953, already discounted concerns of anti-colonialism as “peripheral” relative to the “immediate central problem” of the Communist threat directed from Moscow.¹⁹⁰ Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism fueled the nationalism referred to in the intelligence assessment far more than any desire to join an international Communist world order under the direct control of Moscow. The degree of disconnect in Washington was profound. The United States viewed the threat of Communism as existential while Latin America viewed it as peripheral at most, and usually paid it little consideration other than staunchly to condemn Communism when it wanted something from the United States.

The preoccupation with the Cold War led the United States to provide uncritical support to dictators in return for strong anti-Communist pronouncements. This practice placed into stark relief the much weaker support the United States often accorded democracies, which undercut the ability of the U.S. government to carry out an effective Latin American policy. The lack of

¹⁹⁰ “Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Smith) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council, November 20, 1953, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 30.

support for democracies was especially problematic since a democracy, Venezuela, proved far more resistant to a Communist, or nationalist, takeover than the dictatorships in Cuba and Nicaragua.

The negotiations for passage of an anti-Communist resolution at the Tenth Inter-American Conference at Caracas, Venezuela, March 1-28, 1954, made clear that many democratic Latin American governments had stronger antipathies to dictators than to the threat of Communism, a fact also reported in the *National Intelligence Estimate* of August 24, 1954. The resolution also drew criticism by some who feared that it would become an excuse for American interventions (as it indeed did in Guatemala in June 1954).¹⁹¹ Memories of past occupation by U.S. forces made the Caribbean and Central American countries worry far more about U.S. military, economic, and political intervention than an indirect and long-term abstract Communist threat.¹⁹² Dictators were usually successful in garnering uncritical U.S. support in return for merely denouncing Communism, especially when seeking military equipment for “hemispheric defense” and secret police training for combatting “Communist subversion.” Most often, regimes used such tools only against the regime’s political opponents, Batista providing an excellent example of such behavior.

For Latin Americans, the existential threat was imperialism and colonialism, not Communism. While Cuba had ceased to be a Spanish colony in 1898, many Cubans felt it had traded its colonial master, Spain, for an imperial master, the United States. Washington might consider anti-colonialism as peripheral compared to the main perceived monolithic Communist threat, but most of the rest of the world was more concerned with the wave of decolonization that

¹⁹¹ S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion of the 189th Meeting of the National Security Council on Thursday, March 18, 1954,” 304-305, and “NIE: The Caribbean Republics,” 396-397.

¹⁹² “NIE: The Caribbean Republics,” 398.

followed the end of World War II.¹⁹³ This concern was valid for America's staunchest allies, Britain and France, and perhaps, ironically, its Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union. The insurgents in Cuba, especially Castro, would make far more use of anti-imperialism sentiment than Communism in their campaign to take over the government.

An essential intelligence practice—continuous monitoring of current events—once one has a proper initial assessment, was also missing during the period. New information must be processed and assessed against the existing framework to track changes that may suggest revisions are necessary. Rather than new information driving the evaluation of the continued viability of the initial framework, officials interpreted such information in accord with their expectations. Thus, an assessment that began pointing out a trend of nationalism, possibly harnessed by Communists, incorrectly became one claiming an increase of Communist activity with almost no role for non-Communist nationalistic forces. The new information should have pushed the assessment towards downplaying Communist influence and emphasizing non-Communist nationalistic anti-American forces. The failure to integrate new information played a central role in the U.S. mistaken assessment of the threat posed by Castro. That analysis led to the adoption of a policy/strategy that focused too much effort into finding out if Castro was a Communist rather than assessing whether his anti-American campaign would succeed in overturning American interests in Cuba.¹⁹⁴

American officials never recognized the need to develop and support a system of political reforms that would attract support for a counterinsurgency campaign during the mid to late

¹⁹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security* (1982), 182; and Robert J. McMahon, "Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism: A Critique of the Revisionists," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 457, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151625>.

¹⁹⁴ Vanni Pettinà, "The Shadows of Cold War over Latin America: The US Reaction to Fidel Castro's Nationalism, 1956–59," *Cold War History* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 328, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682741003686115>.

1950s. The three primary reasons for this failure resulted from assigning priority to stopping Moscow-directed Communism in Latin America, an over-emphasis on short-range goals over long-range ones, and the appointment of amateurs as ambassadors. The latter occurred for domestic political reasons despite the need for sophisticated leadership in supporting a counterinsurgency.

The priority of trying to stop the spread of Communism from Moscow led the United States to focus military aid on strengthening Latin American military forces to aid in hemispheric defense. A subsidiary goal was the standardization of those forces to enhance their ability to work alongside American forces. The U.S. military devoted substantial effort to the development of close relations with the various Latin American militaries, including that of Cuba.¹⁹⁵ The pursuit of such goals seemed quite reasonable as action in support of the containment of Communism, but politically gave a far too visible target for anti-American nationalist rhetoric from insurgents, especially when dictators were the recipients of aid.

The overall anti-Communist program also suffered dramatically from short-range thinking dominating over longer-term thinking, inhibiting the pursuit of a political program in Latin America that would have strengthened counterinsurgent efforts. The CIA overthrew governments in Guatemala and Iran in the name of stopping or avoiding Communist control of those countries, although later evidence indicates neither was under threat of a Moscow-controlled, nor even local, Communist takeover.¹⁹⁶ The long-term effects included regional distrust that continues until today. In Latin America, insurgents in several countries—including

¹⁹⁵ “Memorandum on Substance of Discussions at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting,” May 22, 1953, FRUS IV, 152.

¹⁹⁶ Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’Etat in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (August 1987): 261, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800056737>; and Kenneth Lehman, “Revolutions and Attributions: Making Sense of Eisenhower Administration Policies in Bolivia and Guatemala,” *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 186.

Cuba and Nicaragua—capitalized on such distrust when appealing for the support of the general population.

Short-range thinking also found expression as a desire to reduce the annual budget drove Congress not to fund necessary initiatives adequately. The costs of the Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the half-century-long economic embargo of Cuba dwarfed the amounts saved by limiting foreign aid to Cuba. The failure to provide adequate support severely reduced the effectiveness of virtually every military, political, and economic program designed to defeat the insurgency. Military equipment and training provided Cuba fell under a written agreement specifying it was solely for combatting external forces. Such a practice ignored Cuba's primary need during the counterinsurgency of a focus on internal threats. When Batista violated the agreement and utilized the men and equipment for internal security, it confronted the United States with the problem of deciding to ignore the abrogation or degrade Batista's counterinsurgency by some punishment (as it eventually did for other transgressions when it instituted an arms embargo). There was also the problem that much of the equipment aimed at external threats such as tanks and bombers were unmistakable signs of American support for the Cuban dictator that had thwarted democratic processes when he seized power.

Further short-range thinking occurred as the president made political appointments as ambassadors to Cuba during the revolution as patronage in return for party loyalty, fundraising activities, or contributions.¹⁹⁷ This practice fell far short of the standard counterinsurgency principle that leaders should be highly capable of coordinating the intricate political and military nuances of such challenging conflicts. Indeed, Roy Richard Rubottom, Jr., assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, June 1957-September 1960, noted later that “[It was] ‘tragic ...

¹⁹⁷ Grover, “U.S.-Cuban Relations 1953-1958,” 230, 235.

during those critical years, having two ill-prepared people' [in Cuba], 'no matter how honorable their intentions were, and how fine their loyalty to their country undoubtedly was. They were not the skilled type of diplomat that we needed in a situation of that kind.'"¹⁹⁸

Arthur Gardner, ambassador from October 16, 1953, to June 16, 1957, had fought in World War I as a captain in the tank corps. After leaving military service, he developed business interests in Detroit, where by 1953, he was a partner in the investment-banking firm of Anderson and Gardner while also being the first vice president of Bundy Tubing Company that provided ninety percent of the tubing used by the auto industry. He entered civilian government service during World War II as "... a dollar-a-year official on the war production board in the aircraft production field ..." followed by service as "... an assistant to the treasury secretary from 1946 to 1948"¹⁹⁹ Gardner did not represent the aforementioned ideal counterinsurgent leader as his post-revolution testimony before Congress made abundantly clear.²⁰⁰

Gardner, as would his successor Smith, fell short of the professionalism of career diplomats in two ways. First, the view of the career and political appointee diverged concerning how public American military assets should be in the country. Immediately after the Batista coup in 1952, Ambassador Beaulac, a career professional, warned Washington on January 9, 1953, that the very noticeable presence of American military assets made it appear that the United States supported Batista's overthrow of a democratically elected government. He specifically mentioned the close relationship between the armed forces of the two countries, as

¹⁹⁸ Roy Richard Rubottom, Jr. interview, 1966, John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, University, as quoted by Grover, "U.S.-Cuban Relations 1953-1958," 230.

¹⁹⁹ "Arthur Gardner, Banker, is named Ambassador to Cuba," *Chicago Tribune*, May 19, 1953, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1953/05/19/page/6/article/arthur-gardner-banker-is-named-ambassador-to-cuba>.

²⁰⁰ See Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, "Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean: Testimony of Arthur Gardner, Chairman of the Board of Bundy Tubing Co.," 86th Cong., 2d sess., 1960, 106, pt. 9, August 27, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/gardner-smith.htm>.

evidenced by various public ceremonies for visits by high-ranking American military officers (such ceremonies would continue throughout most of the revolution).²⁰¹ He reiterated the need to eliminate or minimize such ceremonies in a report he submitted to the State Department on July 14, 1953.²⁰² The period of the Revolution coincided with the use by the Cuban military of easily identifiable American weapon systems such as P47 fighter aircraft, B-26 bomber aircraft, and Sherman tanks. The Cuban army also employed various American small arms, communications equipment, and other items.

When Ambassador Gardner replaced Beaulac on October 16, 1954, he completely reversed the embassy policy of restraint on the visibility of American military assets in Cuba. Gardner embraced Batista's use of American military assets even when Washington's responses hinted at toning down any explicit mention of their use by Batista. He supported public programs in honor of visiting American military officials and public appearances of American-supplied major weapons systems. Also, Gardner appeared at public ceremonies highlighting American economic interests viewed very poorly by the Cuban population such as his attendance at a ceremony in 1957 where American-owned International Telephone and Telegraph (IT & T) presented Batista with a gold telephone after the dictator had raised telephone rates of its Cuban subsidiary, the Cuban Telephone Company, twenty percent.²⁰³ He also blocked embassy communications with Washington about items unfavorable to Batista.

The second area of divergence was the realization by the professional diplomats that American interests required more than a simple decision to support, or remove support for, a dictatorship. Gardner focused almost exclusively on the overly simple question of whether the

²⁰¹ William Beaulac, "The Ambassador in Cuba (Beaulac) to the Department of State," January 9, 1953-6 P.M., FRUS, Vol IV, 881-882.

²⁰² Beaulac, "Beaulac to Department of State," July 14, 1953, 895.

²⁰³ Philip W. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (1971), 46.

United States should back Batista, a question for which Gardner's answer was to embrace Batista wholeheartedly. Such support was risky because it was not clear that Batista would triumph, although to be fair, many Americans thought he would. Beyond Gardner's willingness to publicize American military presence in Cuba, he also saw Batista socially two or three times a week.²⁰⁴ Even more damaging, such a naïve, simplistic approach had a chilling effect on relations with democratic forces throughout the region. The lack of experienced, professional leadership at the embassy in Havana exacerbated the difficulty Washington had developing an accurate picture of the situation on the ground in the complex environment of Cuba in the 1950s. The low priority placed on Cuba as Cold War events outside the Western Hemisphere dominated Washington's attention also severely inhibited the formulation and execution of an effective policy.

The qualitative shortfall of administrative and Congressional leadership led to a quantitative economic shortfall. The shortfall resulted from a variety of factors. The factors included Congress' traditional reluctance to fund foreign aid, administration officials, in this case, Secretary of the Treasury George M. Humphrey, who lobbied for cheaper alternatives to aid such as encouraging American companies to invest in Cuba, and pressure from domestic sugar producers.²⁰⁵ The documentary record is extensive on these matters during the period; however, a few instances stand out. Trade relations were a particularly sore point in U.S.-Latin American relations. Domestic political pressures often resulted in trade agreements that included "... (p)eril points and escape clauses ..." that "... simply provide a built-in mechanism to open

²⁰⁴ Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution*, (1962), 20.

²⁰⁵ S. Everett Gleason, "Memorandum of Discussion of the 137th Meeting of the National Security Council on Thursday, March 18, 1953," FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 4-5.

up and nullify any trade agreement at any time.”²⁰⁶ Peril points were limitations on the negotiating authority Congress granted the president for tariff negotiations during the 1940s and 1950s. They set a floor under which the president could not reduce a tariff as the point at which the Tariff Commission determined a tariff reduction would hurt the American industry.²⁰⁷ Such nullifications had happened several times to Latin America’s chagrin. Indeed, American trade policy was so one-sided that an American official at one meeting expressed the opinion that State and Treasury insisted on a modern-day colonial policy with Latin America trying to restrict it to only bilateral trade with the U.S. as done in English and Spanish colonial history.²⁰⁸

The belief by government officials that they could convince American executives to invest significant amounts of capital in Cuba reflected their failure to understand twin realities. The first was the political instability and generally weak economic conditions in Latin America made private investors—including even investors from Latin America—reluctant to invest in the region.²⁰⁹ Second, and even more damning, the U.S. government’s insistence on the separation of political and economic factors in U.S.-Latin American relations ignored the fundamental truth that economic factors play a central role in many political considerations.²¹⁰ Also, since anti-Communism was the principal U.S. concern in the region, it made little sense to rely on private

²⁰⁶ W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., “Memorandum by the Deputy Director of the Office of South American Affairs (Bennett) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Holland), August 20, 1954, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 231-232.

²⁰⁷ “Dictionary of Trade Policy,” Washington Trade Report, accessed 3/13/17
<http://www.washingtontradereport.com/dictionarym.htm>.

²⁰⁸ Henry F. Holland, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Holland),” July 20, 1954, FRUS 52-54 Vol. IV, 228.

²⁰⁹ Francis A. Truslow, “Report on Cuba; Findings and Recommendations of an Economic and Technical Mission,” 1951, 136, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/509231468770694282/Report-on-Cuba> (accessed 3/15/17).

²¹⁰ As with most aspects of U.S. foreign policy not all stakeholders held the same views, for example, in this case, Harold Stassen, Head of FOA, felt U.S. economic policy towards Latin America had caused serious political and security problems that would continue unless the economic policy was improved. See S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion of the 224th Meeting of the National Security Council on Thursday, November 15, 1954,” November 16, 1954, FRUS 52-54 Vol., 350.

investment. While private investment might promote a political goal, it can do so only indirectly. Private investment is a poor tool to fight the danger of a Communist takeover if the threat reaches any significant level. The specter of the Communist nationalization of private industry wiping out the said investment is one factor leading to such a result. Another factor is the general distaste for private investment in any situation of political instability, and a threatened Communist takeover certainly creates such instability. The Eisenhower administration's insistence on the separation of economic and political factors in negotiating with Latin American countries was in contrast with its assessment that most of the dramatically increased trade between the Soviet bloc and Latin America was "political" rather than "natural" during the period.²¹¹ The view that the increased trade was "political" stood in stark contrast to the assessment made by the CIA in April of 1954 that "... decreasing demand for Latin American exports, especially in the US, has aroused the area's interest in the possibility of expanding its trade with the [Soviet] Bloc."²¹²

November 1956 to March 1957

The beginning of the second phase of the Cuban Revolution occurred on November 25, 1956. The first phase had seen Castro's failed attack on the Moncada Barracks with a minimally trained amateur group followed by incarceration, release, and self-imposed exile to Mexico. Here the group received professional military training and grew in numbers. Castro decided his next step would be to begin the second phase of the revolution with an invasion of Cuba.

The plan called for an amphibious landing in the Oriente province by a group under Castro's command. On landing, two groups of rebels still in Cuba would act with one group

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Central Intelligence Agency, "National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Bloc Economic Warfare Capabilities and Courses of Action NIE 10-54," (March 9, 1954):9, accessed 5/21/2020 <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP64-00014A000100200001-9.pdf>.

reinforcing Castro and the other carrying out a coordinated diversionary attack on the Moncada Barracks and other locations in Santiago. Castro's group would attack the army garrison at Niquero. Castro had foolishly announced his intention to invade Cuba earlier in the year, giving invaluable warning to Batista's army.²¹³ The plan was just a larger version of the disastrous attack on the Moncada Barracks. It was another conventional attack on a superior force in well-defended positions that relied on surprise (despite Castro's threat to invade), courage, and sparking a general uprising for any chance of success. The Guerrilla leaders gave the group the location of a farm at the base of the Sierra Maestra for a rallying point should the uprising not materialize. They would then enter the mountains to begin a guerrilla campaign. The plan was an improvement over the one for the first attack on the Moncada Barracks only in that it had a reasonable contingency component should the attack fail.

Fidel Castro

Castro had purchased a well-worn 12-passenger 58-foot yacht named the *Granma* to transport his small force to Cuba. On November 25, 1956, with 82 rebels packed onboard — another fifty had to remain behind — the grossly overcrowded vessel left Mexico. The boat set off with only one functioning engine as the other failed to operate. The malfunction reduced *Granma's* speed by twenty-five percent, thereby lengthening the time to reach Cuba from five to seven days. Castro had not prepared for such a contingency when loading provisions for the voyage. Most of the rebels became seasick immediately upon leaving port. When the ship reached calmer waters they began to recover, but their need for food to regain their strength added additional pressure on already low food supplies the extra days, essentially meaning the rebels landed without rations.²¹⁴

²¹³ Dosal, *Comandante Che* 1,3.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

Castro's men in Cuba did not know of the two-day delay — there was no way for the force at sea to communicate with those ashore — and on November 30, the two groups in Cuba launched the diversionary attacks as planned. Without the landing of Castro's men, the diversionary attacks failed, and the reinforcements waiting to meet the *Granma* melted back into the countryside when it did not appear on time.²¹⁵

The plight of the invasion force took another desperate turn when the only navigator on the yacht, Roberto Roque, fell overboard just after midnight on December 2. Searching for over an hour using a lantern, the only light available, the rebels pulled the navigator back onboard. Castro did know, by listening to the radio news, that the diversionary attacks had failed and that no general uprising had occurred. It is unclear whether he decided immediately to go to the contingency plan of retiring to the Sierra Maestra. He appears to have chosen his landing point for its proximity to Niquero, as it was nearer to that town than any of several landing points closer to the mountains, including at least one at their doorstep. *Granma's* dwindling fuel supply, exacerbated by the search for Roque, made the location of the landfall that day more a matter of necessity than choice.²¹⁶

Nevertheless, Castro had known for days of the failure of the diversionary attacks. As it was, the yacht made landfall in a mangrove swamp one mile from Coloradas Beach.²¹⁷ The rebels, after a nightmare march cutting their way through the swamp, eventually made it to a farm where they ate and secured the farmer's brother as a guide to the mountains.

Batista forewarned not just by Castro's threat to invade but also specific information from Cuban, Mexican, and American intelligence agents, had readied his forces. He had ordered

²¹⁵ Ibid., 5, 6.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 5.6.8.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

air and sea patrols along the coasts of Oriente province, the traditional jumping-off point for revolutions in Cuba.²¹⁸ He also ordered additional troops to the area, increased patrols, and put both the Army and Rural Guard in the area on alert. Patrols had specific orders to intercept a 65-foot white yacht, a very close description of the Granma. A significant number of government troops took up positions across the routes to the mountains. Castro and his rebels, oblivious to most of the peril they faced, followed along behind their guide who had already betrayed them to the Army. They marched through cane fields that, while providing cover from the aerial patrols seeking to locate them, left a clear trail for the Rural Guard unit that ambushed the group on December 4 at Alegría de Pío.²¹⁹

Castro had ordered the group to halt for the night in a clearing. He placed his guards so close to camp that they had no opportunity to warn their fellows before the opening rounds raked over both the guards and those in camp. The neophytes broke in several different directions, many of them seeking orders from officers who were out of reach now that the group had splintered so severely. Castro was isolated from most of the rebels as he was part of a small cluster separated off from the clearing in a cane field. Initial casualties were low as the slight elevation of the camp prevented accurate fire from the Guard. Castro had compounded his error in setting the guard posts too close by failing to specify an emergency rallying point in case of attack. The absence of a rendezvous prevented regrouping. The Guard captured or killed most of the rebels with fewer than twenty eventually making it to the mountains.²²⁰ The very ineptitude of the rebels probably saved those that made it to the mountains as an overconfident Batista lifted the search after only eight days believing that Castro had perished. The failure of

²¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

²¹⁹ Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (1997), 213.

²²⁰ Dosal, *Commandante Che*, 11-13.

the attack on the Moncada Barracks, followed by this second disaster, finally convinced Castro that he needed to fight a guerrilla war. Castro spent the next year, 1957, building up his forces and staging hit and run attacks on government targets, standard insurgency strategy.

March 1957 to January 1959

The third phase of the Cuban Revolution began with a failed attempt by the DRE to assassinate Batista. The government response devastated the DRE leaving Castro's M-26-7 as the leading insurgent group around which most of the different insurgent organizations finally coalesced. The period saw Castro's turn to guerrilla warfare. Batista countered with a conventional response that almost won the war. Finally, there was the long-predicted — repeatedly in error — popular uprising that unseated the government.

Castro, having failed twice in major conventional attacks, began a traditional Guerrilla campaign from his base in the Sierra Maestra using hit-and-run tactics. The results were considerably better than those achieved using conventional tactics, and, combined with Castro obtaining international press attention, motivated Batista to order a sizeable conventional attack on Castro's main base in 1958 that came very close to succeeding. The United States meanwhile made two significant mistakes in the period that helped seal the defeat of Batista's counterinsurgency. The first was to initiate an arms embargo on March 14, 1958, to try to get Batista to change his approach under the erroneous belief he could survive such an impediment.²²¹ Second, having decided that Batista would not survive until promised elections, the United States began casting about for a moderate alternative to Castro to replace Batista, essentially splitting the counterinsurgency into separate components. There remained the

²²¹ Terrence G. Leonhardy (w/ William P. Snow signing for Christian Herter), "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba," FRUS 58-60 Vol. VI, 60

original Cuban component made up of Batista's efforts to retain control, one that was incompatible with the new American attempt to replace Batista.

Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil

The DRE had carried out anti-Batista activities in an urban action campaign and endured most of the police and secret police response. DRE leaders decided to risk all and deliver a knockout blow by assassinating Batista. The plan was to attack him in his office in the Presidential Palace. Batista had some warning that an attack was coming but not the date. The fact that the attack took place in daylight was utterly unexpected. The attacking force of eighty insurgents was to attack in two waves while a separate group would seize a radio station and broadcast news of the assassination. The attack occurred on March 13, 1957, with only the first wave getting to the palace.²²² The second wave had bogged down in the streets. Some of the attackers made it to Batista's second-floor office despite massive resistance. Unfortunately for the would-be assassins, Batista had left the main office and moved upstairs to his small office on the residential third floor. Time ran out for the attackers, and members of the first wave either died or retreated. Street fighting during the attack accounted for around forty deaths and led to a mainly adverse public reaction to the event. The failure broke the group as a significant factor in operations in Havana, but the remnants did join what became the second front in *Sierra de Escambray*, eventually commanded by Guevara.

The United States

Earl E. T. Smith, the second ambassador to Cuba during the Cuban Revolution who was a political appointee, replaced Arthur Gardner on July 23, 1957. He had begun a business career in 1925, joining the New York Coffee and Sugar Exchange. Smith founded the brokerage firm

²²² Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 82.

of Paige, Smith, & Remick in 1929, as the senior partner until 1937. He served as a director of several different major corporations including the United States Sugar Corporation. The future ambassador began World War II as a member of the War Production Board before joining the U.S. Army and rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel in Eighth Air Force Intelligence. After the war, he continued to serve in various business roles and became involved in political activities (eventually winning election as mayor of Palm Beach). He served as the finance chairperson of the Florida state Republican committee and on the National Finance Committee from 1954 to 1956.²²³

After his resignation as Ambassador to Cuba on January 10, 1959, he authored a book, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution*, which placed the blame for Castro's victory on flawed State Department policy formation. He argued that the problem was inattentive leadership at the top, on the fifth floor, while lower echelon officials dealing with Latin America determined actual policy on the fourth floor.²²⁴ He also found fault with the support many State Department officials gave Castro rather than any number of politically acceptable and friendly leaders.²²⁵ American efforts to find a reasonable moderate alternative did occur, but, contrary to Smith's contention, Batista and Castro both had succeeded in eliminating or otherwise neutralizing most or all of the potential important rivals.

Smith continued Gardner's previous program of supporting Batista uncritically, although more out of antipathy to Castro and vehement anti-Communism than attraction to Batista. Smith

²²³ "Obituary: Earl E.T. Smith; Former Ambassador, Mayor," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1991, http://articles.latimes.com/1991-02-17/news/mn-1983_1_palm-beach and Marvine Howe "Obituary: Earl E.T. Smith, 87, Ambassador to Cuba in the 1950s," *The NY Times*, February 17, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/17/obituaries/earl-smith-87-ambassador-to-cuba-in-the-1950-s.html>, (accessed 3/14/17).

²²⁴ Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

also acknowledged the use of American military assets by Batista publicly. When Congress prohibited the supply of American arms to Cuba on March 14, 1958, Smith fought unsuccessfully to get shipments resumed. He correctly foresaw the detrimental effects of such an action.²²⁶ His assessment, at least according to his after-the-fact congressional testimony and book, also correctly took into account that not only the Cuban government would see the embargo as a removal of the necessary U.S. support for it to survive, but that the insurgents and Cuban population would see the embargo in that light too.²²⁷ The United States compounded the mistake by pressuring other countries not to sell arms to Batista exacerbating the negative consequences of the embargo.²²⁸ Thus, the embargo became one of the factors that finally encouraged the general uprising that Castro had predicted for years.

Ambassador Smith's approach evolved as he served in Cuba, but it never approached the close coordination of American military and political leadership that is a part of best-practices counterinsurgency theory. To be fair, his instructions from Washington reflected an even less effective approach. He began with a position of believing his job as ambassador necessitated that he must be impartial and eventually realized that the United States had intertwined itself so thoroughly in Cuba that anything, even inaction or indirect action, could present itself as an intervention.²²⁹ One might also question placing nonintervention over American national interest. Smith eventually took the position, in action if not directly in his rhetoric at the time, that it was in the national interest to pursue a course partial at first to Batista and later to anti-

²²⁶ Earl Smith, "Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," June 16, 1958-2 P.M., FRUS Vol VI., Cuba, 108-109, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS195860v06> (accessed 1/19/2017).

²²⁷ Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*, 86; and U.S. Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act, "Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean," August 30, 1960, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/gardner-smith.htm>, (accessed 3/11/17).

²²⁸ Earl, E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*, 48, 100.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 28.

Castro moderates. He adamantly opposed both Castro as a possibly legitimate leader and the concept that the United States could do business with him.²³⁰ By the time he had correctly ascertained the situation, the State Department had stopped paying even the slight heed it had been willing to extend him when he first became an ambassador.

Fidel Castro

Batista and his supporters, including the U.S. government, considered M-26-7 as just one of several different anti-Batista groups before the spring of 1958, more as a nuisance than a serious threat. Such an assessment was not without justification. Ironically, when this substantially correct assessment devolved into a faulty estimate which claimed his group of three hundred rebels had grown to between one and two thousand, Castro began receiving international press attention. In reaction, Batista ordered General Eulogio Cantillo to destroy the rebels before they garnered any further public support. Cantillo developed a plan calling for a unified command with twenty-four battalions. It specified an opening maneuver designed to cut the rebels' line of communications before attacking from the north and northeast with air and naval gun support. The goal was to push the rebels out onto the plain where waiting forces would wipe them out. Batista cut the planned attack force back to only fourteen battalions, many of which consisted of green recruits who had little stomach for tackling such a difficult mission. He also made the mistake of weakening the campaign's chances by splitting the command between the capable Cantillo and the inept, but politically reliable, General Alberto del Rio Chaviano. Both changes hamstrung the operation with predictably bad results.

Codenamed *Operación Verano* (Operation Summer), the campaign began with an ineffectual bombing of Castro's headquarters at La Plata by Batista's American-trained air force.

²³⁰ Ibid., 60.

Numerous ambushes and rebel planted minefields slowed the subsequent advance of the Cuban army into the rebel area to a snail's pace. Army commanders were particularly concerned that their green, peasant troops would break if ambushed. The rebels had developed an extensive set of defensive positions changing from guerrilla tactics on the offensive to a conventional defensive war of position. The rebels would fire on the army troops as they advanced, then, when pressed, withdraw to pre-prepared alternative trenches and repeat the tactic. As the army's intent to take the headquarters at La Plata became clear, Castro concentrated his defenders to meet the army thrusts. Batista did not enjoy sufficient backing from army officers and the population at large to maintain long-term support for a bloody campaign in the mountains against the popular rebels.

The army advance had evolved into a pincer movement from the north and south. Having only enough rebels to meet one thrust at a time, Castro shuffled reinforcements to the front feeling the most pressure using his interior lines. Simultaneous thrusts on both fronts would have achieved a breakthrough, but such a coordinated attack never materialized. Rebel troops under Guevara broke a large formation attacking from the north by tricking the government forces into advancing four miles chasing "fleeing rebels" only to run into well-prepared defensive positions. When Guevara sprung his trap, the .30 and .50 caliber machine guns firing at the green army troops caused them to abandon their weapons and equipment and flee the battlefield. An advance of armored vehicles sent to flank the rebels halted when it ran into a rebel minefield laid in anticipation of just such a move. Equipment captured by the Rebels included radios and, even more importantly, a copy of the communications code used by the army.

Alerted by intelligence supplied by local supporters and gleaned from monitoring the enemy's communications, Castro shifted his forces to defend against a major attack from the south.²³¹ He ordered his men to take up positions that would allow them to surround a 500-man battalion that made an amphibious landing near the village of *La Plata* and was advancing north along the *Río de La Plata* (Silver River). In the Battle of La Plata, fought from July 11 to July 21, 1958, the rebels took 240 prisoners while losing only three of their men. The rebel victory both humiliated Batista's army and resulted in another massive equipment haul for the formerly ill-equipped rebels. *Operación Verano* began to shift the balance of power slowly from the army towards the rebels.

Immediately after the defeat, Cantillo thought he could use the setback to his advantage. Believing the best course of action was to lure the rebels from their prepared defensive positions, he anticipated their high morale after the Army's *La Plata* surrender would allow him to entice Castro into a foolish counterattack. Using two understrength units as bait, Cantillo lured Castro's force down onto the plain where the army could best use its advantages. Cantillo sprung his trap at *Las Mercedes* sending in three armored battalions with five tanks and one thousand troops each against rebel forces totaling about two hundred fifty. The threat of extensive aerial bombardment led Castro to ask for an immediate cease-fire to avoid further bloodshed. Convinced he was in complete control, Cantillo agreed despite having little reason not to demand surrender rather than a cease-fire. Castro used the cease-fire and subsequent eight days of meaningless negotiations to spirit his rebels back to the mountains. The Battle of Las Mercedes fought from July 29 through August 8, 1958, while technically an army victory, broke the morale of the army and ended *Operación Verano* on a note of failure. The balance of power

²³¹ Carlos Franqui, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* (1980), 347-348.

concerning morale and the initiative had swung to the rebels. They were also far better equipped after capturing vast amounts of material from the Army. Ultimately, the most important outcome of the operation was to convince many Cubans that the Army was vulnerable to defeat, making possible the popular uprising soon to come that swept away the Batista government.

The end of *Operación Verano* convinced Castro to launch a conventional offensive of his own to overthrow Batista. The decision to switch to a final conventional campaign mirrors precisely Mao's Protracted War theory, which describes the last stage as one of conventional warfare after having established a firm base of operations and gaining the support of the people. Castro sent out columns of revolutionary troops to seize control first of the plains between the mountains and Santa Clara, and then Santa Clara itself. His tactical plan for achieving these goals contained severe flaws, once again showing his lack of knowledge of military matters.

Castro based the plan on replicating his only major battlefield success, the strategic defeat of *Operación Verano*.²³² Such an approach was utterly inappropriate. Now, his forces would be on the offensive rather than the defensive, would be scattered rather than concentrated, would be operating in open territory, and would face an enemy often enjoying interior lines. Still, the offensive succeeded. One of the four columns suffered almost complete annihilation, but the other three triumphed. They succeeded in large part because other non-Castro rebel groups and volunteers from the people, often wielding Molotov cocktails, joined them. They achieved victories at the Battle of Yaguajay and the Battle of Santa Clara, convincing Batista to leave the country. The offensive was successful not because of the tactics employed by Castro, but rather due to the almost complete collapse of the Army's will to fight after the failure of *Operación Verano* and to the overwhelming participation of the Cuban people. Castro had finally initiated a

²³² Ibid., 403-404

military action that sparked a general uprising, but it had come years later than he had predicted. The military revolution was over, but Castro believed the anti-imperialist socialist revolution was ongoing.

The Failure of U.S. Policy

The revolution of 1953-59 succeeded in grasping control of Cuba from the Batista government. Post-revolution Cuba has enjoyed much less success apart from maintaining a stable government to date, and the somewhat more impressive ability to thwart the United States despite the tremendous effort on its part to subdue Castro. The cost to Cuba has been very high for such independence. A noteworthy component of the success of the revolution that is in many ways more significant than the overthrow of the unpopular Batista government was that the revolution occurred in the face of the U.S. commitment to keep Cuba within its hegemonic control. Cubans complained as far back as the nineteenth century, particularly from 1898 on, that the United States exercised economic, if not political or military, control of Cuba. Many American historians agree with that characterization. How then did the Cuban revolutionaries so thoroughly evict the United States from their nation's affairs, despite it having a ruler, Batista, who, from 1952 to 1959, had the staunch backing of the United States?

The early nineteenth-century American view of Cuba melded the moral imperative of siding with another victim of colonialism with the belief by many that Cuba would one day be part of the United States. The belief that Cuba would one day be a part of the United States occurred despite substantial cultural differences resulting from varying colonial experiences. The cultural gap between the two widened as the United States evolved as an independent nation while Cuba remained under tight Spanish rule. Initially, a young United States saw Cuba as a

key to its survival.²³³ The justifications for this view drew from diverse areas such as geographic manifest destiny, national security, and economics. Manifest Destiny suggested itself both because of the view that Cuba was a natural extension of Florida and the general view that the United States would grow to a much larger territory than its original thirteen colonies.²³⁴ National security interests initially flowed from Cuba's location controlling access to the Gulf of Mexico and traffic to and from the mouth of the Mississippi, along with being the nearest point of contact with the Caribbean Sea.²³⁵ Economic interests included the sea-lanes associated with Cuba's location combined with Havana's excellent harbor and Cuban trade, especially sugar and the market for American goods.²³⁶ There was also a feeling that the Cubans were fellow victims of colonialism and there was a moral imperative to help them achieve freedom, albeit within the structure of the United States rather than independent sovereignty.

As the United States grew more powerful, its views of Cuba evolved. The urgency of Manifest Destiny relative to Cuba receded, other than an emphasis on its closeness, as the nation grew much more extensive in its march westward and diminished the relative contribution that acquiring Cuba would bring. The role envisaged for Cuba's contribution to national security also waned as the country's overall security position improved, especially following the massive land and sea operations of the Civil War that gave the United States considerable expertise in large-scale operations. As the disparity between the two areas' power grew, the economic utility

²³³ John Quincy Adams to Hugh Nelson, April 28, 1823, in John Quincy Adams, *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (1917) 7:372-373; and see Louis A. Jr. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (2008) for an extensive discussion of the many American views of Cuba over time, particularly as how they interacted with American views of its own Imperialism.

²³⁴ "Cuba without War," *Scribner's Monthly*, (April 1876): 877-879, accessed July 29, 2017 <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=scmo;cc=scmo;rgn=full%20text;idno=scmo0011-6;didno=scmo0011-6;view=image;seq=882;node=scmo0011-6%3A16;page=root;size=100>.

²³⁵ Alexander H. Everett to John Quincy Adams, Nov. 30, 1825 in "Cuba without War," 877, and Adams to Nelson, 372.

²³⁶ "Cuba without War," 876-877, and Adams to Nelson, 372.

increased in controlling Cuba as a lesser nation rather than embracing it as an equal. The final decade of the nineteenth century ended with the United States establishing its continental Manifest Destiny with forty-five states and three territories. The U.S. Army had won the massive conventional Civil War and the unconventional small conflicts of the Indian Wars. It was on the cusp of establishing a canal to link the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The end of the decade would see the United States pivot to become an imperial power as the world entered the first half of a twentieth century that would also witness considerable imperial activity by European powers and Japan. The turning point was the Spanish-American War in 1898 that began with public cries to aid the Cubans in their efforts to rid themselves of Spanish rule, public discourse very much along the moral imperative lines of self-determination and rescue of a victimized people. Such discourse found at least rhetorical support by some members of Congress and President McKinley.

While talk of *Cuba Libre* (Free Cuba), based on a moral imperative to support liberty for all, dominated public discussion and the press in the run-up to the war, there were many indications national interest played a significant role in the decision to go to war. Such national interest quickly came to dominate what happened despite a continued rhetoric referencing moral imperatives.²³⁷ Some government officials such as Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and Henry Cabot Lodge, the junior senator from Massachusetts, were planning as early as 1897 for territorial gains if war developed with Spain.²³⁸ Senator Lodge had called for the acquisition of Cuba as early as 1895 while also calling for a “strong naval station” in the

²³⁷ H. H. Powers, “The War as a Suggestion of Manifest Destiny,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 12 (1898): 174.

²³⁸ Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918* (1925) I:278.

West Indies.²³⁹ Senator Stephen Elkins took the floor in the Senate to argue for the acquisition of Cuba to provide an outpost from which to guard American commerce once the isthmian canal went into operation.²⁴⁰ After the United States established a military government over the island after the cessation of hostilities in 1898, it quickly established dominance in the all-important sugar industry by both direct private commercial acquisition and indirect influence.

Some in Congress appealed to the national interest as appears above with others hewing closely to a discussion of altruism and the moral imperative of helping the unfortunate Cuban people. Senator George Hoar, in a speech in the Senate on April 14, 1898, described the impending military action to free Cuba as the "... most honorable single war in all human history ..."²⁴¹ Indeed, as the war approached and for the period during and after, staunch proponents of the national interest often adopted the rhetoric of the supporters of the moral imperative to help the Cubans achieve freedom. Louis A. Pérez, Jr. states, "(a)lmost all parties to the decision for war seemed determined to subsume strategic interests and security needs into formulations of idealism and altruism."²⁴²

Initially, the advocates of strict adherence to the moral imperative to help the Cubans found agreement with those that championed the national interest. The agreement flowed from the close identification of the moral imperative and the dictates of national interest. The confluence provided at least a rhetorical agreement that at first weakened and then became tenuous under the changing conditions. Some of those who championed Cuban freedom changed their call for independence to a "White Man's Burden" effort to help the backward Cubans to prepare for self-governance in the future. The national interest gained the ascendancy

²³⁹ Henry Cabot Lodge, "Our Blundering Foreign Policy," *The Forum* 19, (March 1895): 17.

²⁴⁰ *Cong. Rec.*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1902, Vol. 35, pt. 1:7639-7640.

²⁴¹ *Cong. Rec.*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 1898, Vol. 31, pt. 4:3835.

²⁴² Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (1998), 50.

as the United States institutionalized its influence with such devices as the Platt Amendment.²⁴³ Much of the rhetoric though when discussing Cuba, especially during the critical period beginning in 1898 and ending with the repeal of the Platt Amendment in 1934,²⁴⁴ retained significant mention of moral imperatives as being paramount in justifying American policy towards Cuba. Such rhetoric had little real force in the determination of American policy as opposed to that dominant in the lead-in to the war of 1898.

Various factors in the United States and Cuba contributed to a waxing and waning of the strength of the connection between moral imperatives and perceived American national interest, sometimes the same circumstance pushing the realms of morality and interest closer together, sometimes farther apart. For example, slavery made Cuba an attractive annexation target to Southerners before the Civil War, but anathema to Northerners. Following the war and the end of slavery in the United States (slavery lasted until 1886 in Cuba), lingering racism impeded the moral imperative to aid Cubans in getting their independence by implying they could not govern themselves, while “assuming the White Man’s Burden” to help the Cubans reintroduced a moral imperative. The former attitude revealed itself in the insistence by the United States that the Cubans incorporate the Platt Amendment into their constitution as a condition for ending the U.S. military government and the withdrawal of American troops in place after the Spanish-American War. Cold War mono-vision caused the United States to eschew supporting Cuban democracy for the sake of fighting Communism while calling for the United States to aid Cuba to fight off the Communist threat (the fight against Communism itself a type of moral crusade as carried out by the United States).

²⁴³ Jeffrey L. Roberg and Alyson Kuttruff, “Cuba: Ideological Success or Ideological Failure?,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2007): 781.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 782.

The tenuous, some would say nonexistent, connection with the pursuit of a moral imperative in U.S.-Cuban relations, indeed with U.S.-Latin American relations, led FDR to announce a break with past American practice by formalizing the Good Neighbor Policy first enunciated by President-elect Herbert Hoover in 1928.²⁴⁵ The United States stated it would not intervene in the internal or external affairs of another country, especially militarily. The declaration of nonintervention reintroduced a set of moral imperatives into at least the rhetoric of U.S.-Latin American relations. At a minimum, the United States implied it would recognize the moral imperative not to intervene in Latin America even where such intervention was in America's national interest.

One of the problems the United States had in dealing with Cuba in the crucial period from 1952 through the end of the revolution was the uneven level of competence of its ambassadors to Cuba. Batista's coup, his second, occurred during the tenure of a career diplomat, William Leon Beaulac, who had a thirty-nine-year career that included ambassadorships to five Latin American countries. Arthur Gardner, the first of two political appointees who would oversee the embassy through the period of most of the revolution, replaced Beaulac in 1953. Earl E. T. Smith replaced Gardner in 1957 after Eisenhower's reelection the year before. Philip Bonsal, who had previously been Ambassador to Colombia and Bolivia, took over from Smith three weeks after the revolution and tried to establish a

²⁴⁵ "Text of Hoover's Neighborly Talks; Addresses at Amapala, Honduras and La Union, Salvador.," *The New York Times*, November 27, 1928, <https://www.nytimes.com/1928/11/27/archives/text-of-hoovers-neighborly-talks-addresses-at-amapala-honduras-and.html>, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Reading Copy of Franklin Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address," (March 4, 1933), 6 <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/1933inauguraladdress.pdf/000f0bd6-6af1-48c6-a5ce-1be343a5c007>.

working relationship with Castro. His efforts failed, and he left a little over a year later when the embassy closed with the break in formal diplomatic relations.²⁴⁶

The key to the failure of the United States, despite the existence of many other often-unrelated factors, was the schizophrenic approach the United States used in dealing with Cuba in the 1950s. American policy continued to oscillate between the poles of various dualities, usually ones that had moral imperative and national interest endpoints. Such oscillation was evident in Congress, where many members often viewed severe violations of democratic principles, including abuse of citizens, as violating moral precepts such as the U.S. commitment to democracy. Other members of Congress, usually staunch Cold Warriors that supported Allen and John Foster Dulles along with other key administration officials, argued that the U.S. national need to find firm allies in the fight against Communism overrode all other considerations, including anti-democratic practices. Unmistakably, Batista filled this need. Allen Dulles, as Director of the CIA, even went so far as to help set up a second secret police force for Batista, the dreaded BRAC (*Buró de Represión de Actividades Comunistas* or Bureau for the Repression of Communist Activities), in 1956.²⁴⁷ The United States set up the group with the understanding it would limit its activities to only external threats, Communists supposedly under the control of Moscow. U.S. military equipment provided Cuba incurred a similar condition; the Cuban Army was to use it only for hemispheric defense against foreign nations.

As might be expected, Batista used such assets against anyone he considered a political foe. The U.S. fixation on the Communist threat blinded key officials to the possibility that a non-Communist overthrow of Batista could also unhinge American interests in Cuba. Instead of

²⁴⁶ Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (2011), 54.

²⁴⁷ Hugh Thomas, "Cuba: The United States and Batista, 1952-58," *World Affairs* 149, no. 4 (1987): 175, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20672109>.

trying to ascertain the level of Communist influence in M-26-7, the real focus should have been on how much M-26-7 threatened American interests. The ensuing cutoff of American military aid to the Batista government on March 14, 1958, on moral grounds (with definite political dimensions) undercut any chance of the United States maintaining influence over the events in Cuba. Whether the cutoff of aid was the correct policy or not, the swing back to the moral imperative, in this case preventing human rights abuses, meant the short-term national interest goal of maintaining influence in Cuba became impossible.

The best evidence of the schizophrenic nature of the American effort in Cuba was the 1958 arms embargo and the repeated reference to nonintervention as the foundation of American policy in Cuba. The United States had openly intervened militarily in Latin America several times in the first half of the twentieth century and covertly in Guatemala in 1954. The standard rhetoric of the open interventions was the need “to protect American lives and property.” The protection of American lives corresponded to a moral imperative to preserve life and the protection of property corresponded to both moral and economic imperatives to safeguard property. The advent of the Good Neighbor Policy removed direct military intervention as an option for such protection, but it remained a diplomatic priority in pressuring host governments to concentrate on protecting American interests no matter the circumstances. The United States repeatedly pressured the Cuban government to provide such protection despite complaining that one of Batista’s best trained and equipped units, the American trained and equipped infantry battalion under the 1952 Military Defense Assistance Agreement (MDAA), participated by being parsed out to regular units in defense of “American interests” in violation of the agreement signed between the two. The MDAA specified that Cuba could use the unit and its equipment only in hemispheric defense unless it obtained prior permission. The restriction, when coupled

with the arms embargo instituted to protest Batista's suspension of civil liberties, flew in the face of continued American demands for protection of American lives and property.²⁴⁸

The continued American rhetoric of nonintervention throughout the Cuban Revolution was strangely at odds with the overwhelming rhetoric of anti-Communism amid vastly overblown assessments of Kremlin activity in Latin America. Since the dominant foreign policy of the time was Containment, a policy that had led to covert interventions in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, such noninterventionist rhetoric is perplexing if taken at face value. There were substantial American interests at stake economically and politically in supporting Batista, a figure whose most attractive feature to the U.S. government was his staunch anti-Communism. The government had much more conversation on whether Castro was a Communist or not than it had over what would be the ramifications to the United States if he took over the government. That is, at least until near the end of the revolution. However, there is evidence that the apparent lack of concern followed from a belief that any reversal of fortune was recoverable by a covert operation that would "turn back the clocks" as had been done in Guatemala and Iran.²⁴⁹

The Success of the Revolution of 1959

The Soviet model of revolution envisages a state wherein the appropriate social and economic conditions are already in place. Cuba lacked both the industrial proletariat and the central party organization that Soviets considered prerequisites for a successful Communist revolution. Castro proved, however, that neither of the latter elements was vital. He and his Guerrillas were able to gain ascendancy among several anti-Batista organizations and eventually to forge unity among all such groups to overthrow the government.

²⁴⁸ Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*, 108.

²⁴⁹ Grover, "U.S.-Cuban Relations 1953-1958," 244-245.

Castro, Guevara, and Regis Debray, French philosopher and author of a Marxist insurrection manual²⁵⁰ and participant in Che's failed Bolivian insurrection, believed that the *foco* approach could create the social and economic conditions for revolution even in the absence of an industrial proletariat. While they proved the Soviet insistence on the primacy of the party was mistaken, they wrongly believed that actions by their followers had created the appropriate conditions for revolution, when the evidence clearly shows those conditions already existed, including over a century-long history of uprisings. Historically, the 1959 revolution also fit in a post-World War II period where many colonies were breaking away from their imperial masters. While it is true that Cuba, with American assistance, evicted its European colonial masters in 1898, one could argue that Castro completed the anticolonial project in 1959 as part of the second wave of such struggles for independence.

While American complicity in many of Cuba's social, economic, governmental problems is apparent, the anti-imperialism strain in accounts of the Revolution of 1959 overly devalues Cuban agency in the conditions that gave rise to the revolution. Diverse groups vied for status throughout the hundred-plus years leading up to the revolution. Class conflict, racial grouping, clashing ideologies, and the ability to gain political power by either catering to or opposing American interests thwarted any permanent resolution to the problem of Cuban government stability. Jules Robert Benjamin rightly observes that the inability of the first generation of Cuban post-1898 leaders to establish an effective national government was a product of the stultifying presence of U.S. policies and the threat of American intervention in Cuban affairs.²⁵¹ The need for subsequent generations of Cuban leaders to distance themselves from the United

²⁵⁰ Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*.

²⁵¹ Jules Robert Benjamin, *The United States and Cuba: Hegemony and Dependent Development, 1880–1934* (1977), 6-7.

States by taking anti-imperialist stances became apparent when the U.S.-backed unpopular Gerardo Machado fell from office in 1933. The youngest general during the War of Independence and the authoritarian Cuban president from 1925 through 1933 eventually lost any claim to legitimacy as a variety of groups worked against his government. Batista seized power in 1933 and again in 1952 and immediately received U.S. support.

The U.S. backing of Batista met perceived U.S. needs while divorcing American policy from the Cuban reality almost totally. American satisfaction with the Cuban state of affairs during much of the 1950s represents an almost schizophrenic break with conditions on the ground in the island nation. This ignorance of Cuban affairs doomed American government officials not only to suffer the shock of Castro's success, but it would lead to a complete misrepresentation of why he succeeded and ultimately to the folly of the Bay of Pigs.

The Reverse Jigsaw Puzzle

Rather than a jigsaw made of a picture cut into separate pieces for reassembly, the Cuban Revolution began with the single piece consisting of the acquisition of the island colony by the Spanish and eventually saw the coalescing of the rest of the pieces over the long period leading up to 1953-1959. The next three significant pieces were the three wars of liberation fought by the Cubans to oust Spanish rule culminating in the final War of Independence from 1895 to 1898. The American intervention in this war in the last year left many Cubans feeling that the United States had "stolen" the fruits of Cuban victory, especially after the United States installed a military government that remained until 1902. The intervention in the third war also became the blueprint for the next three crucial "military intervention" pieces, interventions during the years 1906²⁵² to 1909, 1912, and 1917 to 1922. The legality of these interventions arose from

²⁵² Ralph Eldin Minger, "William H. Taft and the United States Intervention in Cuba in 1906," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (1961): 85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2509992>.

the passage of the Platt Amendment in 1901 demanding the Cuban constitution codify the right of the United States to intervene when it felt it was necessary as one condition for the removal of U.S. troops in 1902. The set of pieces described above linked the status of Spain as an oppressive colonial master to the United States as an oppressive imperialistic master in the eyes of many Cubans. The embarkation of the last U.S. Marines in 1922 ended the period of direct military intervention by the United States in Cuba. Once the Marines left Cuba, it quickly fell into the next phase of its political evolution, *caudillismo*. This phase spawned two new sets of pieces corresponding to the two main areas where direct American intervention morphed into indirect hegemonic influence on politics and economics and two new sets of straightforward interventions in Cuba.

The political pieces began with Gerardo Machado, one of the heroes of 1898, becoming an authoritarian president in 1925, thus creating the first “Caudillo” piece of the puzzle. The creation of an “American support of dictator” piece matched the Machado piece. A new type of piece, the “student unrest” piece, came into being in 1930 as students protested an increasingly unpopular Machado. The protests gave rise to the description of the participants as the “Generation of 1930” (matching a similar group, the “Generation of 1928” in Venezuela). The Fulgencio Batista-led *Revolt of the Sergeants* that deposed Machado in 1933 generated the second “Caudillo” and “American support” pieces.²⁵³ The passage of the Constitution of 1940, and its acceptance by Batista, who served from 1940 to 1944 as president under it, started a shift to democracy. Unfortunately, it also introduced a new piece, “government corruption,” that built up to ominous proportions by 1959. Batista’s second coup in 1952 gave rise to the third “Caudillo” and “American support” pieces. The coup also engendered a second “student unrest”

²⁵³ Philip Dur and Christopher Gilcrease, “US Diplomacy and the Downfall of a Cuban Dictator: Machado in 1933,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 255–80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3875789>.

piece creating the “Generation of 1958.” The final political piece was the American arms embargo of 1958, creating the unique piece “Removal of American Support.” The economic pieces of the puzzle endured throughout the period 1922 to 1959, with their precursors going back to earlier periods.

The diplomatic pieces were primarily “Inadequate Ambassadorial Representation” and “Inattention at the Top.” The choice of two political appointees as ambassadors to Cuba during the revolution hamstrung U.S. efforts to assess the situation and guide counterinsurgent efforts correctly. The “Inattention at the Top” resulted from the low priority given Latin America compared to that given Europe, especially Hungary in 1956, and East Asia, particularly Korea and Taiwan. Such inattention is evident in much of the documentation of meetings involving President Eisenhower or Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. For example, in an October 30, 1958, NSC meeting that included Eisenhower and Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence, it is clear that Eisenhower is entirely unaware of the pivotal military action of the entire revolution, the previous summer’s major Cuban offensive to wipe out Castro and his forces.²⁵⁴ The strategic defeat of that offensive had encouraged Castro to leave behind Guerrilla tactics and begin a conventional campaign to oust Batista. The defeat also was the turning point in encouraging a general uprising of the Cuban people in support of Castro’s campaign. The campaign would succeed in ousting Batista on January 1, 1959.²⁵⁵

The prime economic pieces were the “Mono-economy of Sugar,” “America unilaterally shifted the Sugar Quota,” and the “American Control of Utilities and other Businesses including

²⁵⁴ S. Everett Gleason, “Memorandum of Discussion of the 384th Meeting of the National Security Council on October 30, 1958,” FRUS 58-60 Vol. VI, 245. See also where Eisenhower later observed he felt major elements of the Cuban situation had not been brought to his attention in Gordon Gray, “Memorandum of Conversation with the President,” Wednesday, 24 December 1958, (December 30, 1958), Box 3, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Special Assistant Series: Presidential Subseries, Eisenhower Library, 2.

²⁵⁵ Patterson, *Contesting Castro*, 222-23.

the Nicaro Nickel Plant.” Senator John F. Kennedy summed up American economic dominance by saying, ”(a)t the beginning of 1959 United States companies owned about 40 percent of the Cuban sugar lands – almost all the cattle ranches – 90 percent of the mines and mineral concessions – 80 percent of the utilities – and practically all the oil industry – and supplied two-thirds of Cuba’s imports.”²⁵⁶ The mono-economy based on sugar developed because of the immense early profitability of sugar combined with Cuba’s ability to produce large quantities of a high-quality product. However, the dependence on sugar made the Cuban government susceptible to instability, as changes in the world market or American demand exposed the country to economic instability or hardship. Sugar production also became a prime target for insurgent attacks (or a source for “tax” income for Castro’s insurgents).²⁵⁷ The primary means of control the United States exerted over the Cuban sugar industry was the sugar quota that controlled Cuba’s market share and export cap relative to the artificially high-priced American market. Such control played into the anti-American narrative that Castro maintained throughout the revolution.

American penetration of the Cuban economy also extended to other vital industries. The two most important areas of the economy, after sugar, visibly under American control were utilities in the form of telephone and electricity companies and the Nicaro nickel mining and processing company. The former reinforced the narrative that the government operated the country with undue acquiescence to American interests rather than the welfare of its citizens. The latter contributed to the narrative that the country’s natural resources contributed more to foreign wealth than domestic interests as did sugar production. Nickel production also followed

²⁵⁶ John F. Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy Speeches: Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at Democratic Dinner, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 6, 1960,” https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Cincinnati-OH_19601006-Democratic-Dinner.aspx, (accessed 7/14/17).

²⁵⁷ Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*, 22, 53.

sugar production as a target for insurgent attacks. The monopoly Cuban Telephone Company, a sixty-six percent owned subsidiary of American-owned International Telephone & Telegraph Co., improperly transferred profits to the parent company. The slowness in providing service to new Cuban customers and its pricing structure furnished the evidence of unduly promoting American profit. There was also the fact of the non-competitive practice IT & T foisted onto the Cuban Telephone Company of not obtaining multiple bids for its equipment and supply procurement needs as orders only went to system-owned manufacturers. The overall way the company functioned led to its status as IT & T's most profitable operating subsidiary.²⁵⁸

The IT & T presentation of a gold telephone to Batista in 1957 illustrated Batista's mismanagement of the Cuban government in pursuit of the welfare of himself and the United States over that of the Cuban people. The occasion that gave rise to the ceremony was Batista's increasing phone rates over twenty percent. A government official confided to Philip Bonsal, a future Ambassador to Cuba, that a condition for government approval of the rate hike was "... a contribution to the government slush fund for mass communication media," part of Batista's propaganda efforts.²⁵⁹ The attendance at the ceremony, in essence, celebrating Batista's transfer of capital from Cuban citizens to an American company, indicated the tone-deafness of Ambassador Gardner to general Cuban unhappiness with American economic hegemony-imperialism. The symbolism of the gold telephone as a source of Cuban outrage was so strong that Castro placed it on display in the Museum of the Revolution, where it remains today.²⁶⁰

The pieces identified above fit together to complete the puzzle of how a revolution succeeded in the face of the opposition of the United States and a dictator who had long

²⁵⁸ Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States*, 46-47.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶⁰ Kennedy Remarks at Democratic Dinner.

dominated Cuban politics. Most of the pieces were already in place when Castro began his campaign to overthrow Batista. Other than killing Castro outright and defeating the other factions, Batista had few options without direct American intervention because almost all of these pieces were outside his control. His failure to execute Castro when he captured him the first time, combined with his inability to win the counterinsurgency militarily, gave Batista limited choices that could lead to success. The withdrawal of U.S. military support with the arms embargo instituted on March 14, 1958, signaled both American displeasure at Batista's harsh actions and an effort to maintain a I of American nonintervention. Combined with the embargo, the decision to negotiate at *Las Mercedes* instead of demanding an unconditional surrender doomed Batista. Despite the initial picture of a ludicrously weak insurgency, the actual situation was that once the failure of Operation Verano convinced the people of Cuba that Batista's army was vulnerable, the general uprising Castro had so long predicted was inevitable.

Conclusion

Fidel Castro led a successful Guerrilla action that was very much a traditional effort rather than a new model for revolution. Utilizing the hit and run tactics long practiced by guerrillas with a concomitant decision to fight only when in a situation of advantage, precepts taught by Bayo, the rebels had not discovered some new approach to revolution. They had, at best, adapted Mao's prescription for a Protracted War to the anti-colonialism already present in most of Latin America and first utilized successfully by Augusto Sandino. While Sandino was a superior military leader to Castro by far, the latter was much better at the political side of the equation. The different political results of the two insurgencies make Castro's advantage clear, Castro's rule lasting over fifty years and Sandino's death a year after his triumph.

The ability of various American officials to forecast the failure of the counterinsurgency to keep Batista in power varied mainly based on their point of view. Most non-military officials in Cuba, other than the Ambassadors, came by degrees to see the futility of the inept counterinsurgency, as they observed the Cuban government lose its grip on the population. The Ambassadors and military officials in Cuba and both military and non-military officials in Washington, for the most part, thought Batista's government would survive until at least there could be an orderly transition. The Ambassadors shared the isolation from the general Cuban population of their Washington counterparts although without the geographic excuse of distance. Their assessment of the situation relied far too much on their overly close relationship with the ruling elite. Most U.S. military officials at the time believed that a superior standard military force could defeat any insurgency using standard military strategy and tactics (a position that led to catastrophe in Vietnam in the following two decades). This position exacted a double penalty; American military advice to the Cuban military was mainly misleading, and the estimates of the military situation given American civilian authorities were flawed. Finally, the two top American officials, the President and Secretary of State, generally viewed events in Cuba as a sideshow against the broader challenges of the Cold War. Both leaders relied on advice received from military and State Department officials whose recommendations arose from inaccurate information. Almost no one in Cuba or Washington divined the loss of American hegemony in Cuba whatever his/her position on the likelihood of a Castro success.

For over six decades, the United States pursued a schizophrenic policy demanding political stability while insisting on Cuban flexibility to meet U.S. goals and yet claimed to follow a moral imperative of being pro-liberty and anti-imperialistic. Such goals included protection and preference for American commercial interests and political support for overall

American policy in Latin America and the rest of the world. The latter goal required alignment with the United States in World War II and the Cold War with a demand for anti-communist orthodoxy becoming dominant. The pro-liberty and anti-imperialistic moral imperative ebbed and flowed with lows such as the forced inclusion of agreement with the Platt Amendment to be part of the Cuban constitution until 1934, and the continued support for Cuban dictators. Eventually, in something like a schizophrenic break, the United States believed it had a stable Cuba leading to the shock of Castro's success and the reflexive disaster of the Bay of Pigs.

A foremost cause of the ultimate failure of U.S. policy in Cuba was the inconsistency of that policy generated from one of the chief facets of how the government determines policy. While many have noted the formation of American foreign policy involves the contention of many different stakeholders whose views develop per Miles Law that states, "Where you stand depends on where you sit." However, participants' views of the weighting assigned moral imperatives as opposed to considerations of national interest determine an even more critical factor. Positions range from holding that American foreign policy should rise from moral imperatives with little to no assessment of national interest, to those that claim that foreign policy decisions should always maximize national interest. Of course, many hold that some mix of the two types of concerns is relevant. Usually, administrations have pursued national interest although often couching their actions in moral imperative rhetoric, public opinion most often hewed to moral imperatives (if it speaks to an issue at all), and Congress has had champions of both approaches. Foreign policy with Cuba varied from one extreme to the other concerning the moral imperative-national interest scale, at least from 1898 to 1959.

The intervention based on the moral imperative to assist Cuba in obtaining liberty from their colonial masters in 1898 became a military occupation and military government based on

national interest before the end of the year. The imposition of the dictates of the Platt Amendment lasted until 1934. The economic and political hegemony of the United States over Cuba operated to the disadvantage of most of the Cuban people from 1898 to 1959. The century-long oscillation between poles of morality and national interest finally resulted in a policy of repudiating Batista and losing any influence over Cuba other than the reactionary, negative one of the embargo for over half a century. Castro's successful revolution, ironically, perpetuated the plight of the Cuban people rather than alleviated it. Long after the demise of Castro's Soviet comrades, Castro's most enduring legacy remained his anti-Americanism. It is hard to imagine a more significant failure in American foreign policy concerning Cuba in both the spheres of national interest and moral imperatives. The loss of hegemony over Cuba negated the American national interest both politically and economically. The imposition of a Communist government only ninety miles from the United States represented a complete defeat of the moral imperative taken up in 1898 to help the Cuban people achieve liberty. It also represented one of the most significant setbacks during the Cold War for the United States, a war often viewed in the starkest of terms concerning the primary moral imperatives of the American nation. The success of the Cuban Revolution and Castro's subsequent declaration of Cuba as a Communist country also emboldened several groups to begin similar insurgencies that would challenge American interests, including a group in Venezuela.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUCCESS OF THE VENEZUELA-UNITED STATES COUNTERINSURGENCY – THE EARLY YEARS 1960 – 1963

The insurgency in Venezuela began in 1960 as a conscious imitation of the success of the Cuban Revolution. On the surface, there seemed to be enough similarity to the Cuban case for the Communist revolutionary insurgents' cause to give them hope that they could replicate the Cuban example. The following analysis will show, however, that the Venezuelan effort became more of a mirror image with many of the counterinsurgency-insurgency advantages and disadvantages of the Cuban Revolution interchanged between the opponents. Indeed, most of the similarities proved to be superficial, while the dissimilarities often turned out to be crucial. The following covers the period leading up to the outbreak of hostilities. It shows how the 1958 overthrow of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship and the inspiration of the Cuban Revolution dictated the form of the early years of attempts on both the Right and the Left to overthrow the government of Venezuela.

Fear and Hope that Venezuela Would Become another “Cuba”

The similarities between Venezuela and Cuba included the principal fact that the governments of both were capitalistic and close allies of the United States. Additionally, there were substantial American holdings in Venezuela, three billion dollars in 1965, behind only Canada and the United Kingdom, which played a significant role economically. Moreover, the economy depended on a single product, petroleum, for which it was the world's largest exporter, rather than sugar as in the case of Cuba, and the insurgencies occurred when these products were suffering challenges, pricing for the former, market share for the latter. In 1965, Petroleum

accounted for thirty percent of GNP, almost seventy percent of government revenues, and over ninety percent of foreign exchange earnings. Both sugar and petroleum in the American market sold at much higher prices than the overall world market, making access to the American market crucial.²⁶¹ Most of the wealth generated in the development of the dominant resource went to outsiders or those in the country's elite.²⁶² The unbalanced distribution left most of the citizenry in widespread poverty.²⁶³ Another similarity was the lack of unity and agreement as to how to go forward among the anti-government forces, factors present in the Cuban Revolution the claims of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara notwithstanding. There were significant differences between the two countries; however, that raised the possibility that an insurgency attempted along the lines of the Cuban Revolution would fail.

The difference between the Venezuelan case as against that of the Cuban manifested itself in several ways, many of which carried more weight than most of the participants realized, especially the insurgents. Primary among these was that the government was a democracy rather than a dictatorship, the exact opposite of the Cuban situation. Indeed, the Venezuelans had just overthrown the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in 1958, a process that provided most of the leadership of the democratic government and the insurgency. Castro's narrative was that his revolution, repeatedly described by him as noncommunist, would restore the democracy of the 1940 Cuban constitution that Batista's coup had destroyed. While he had declared his government Communist after taking power, he fought the revolution without a Communist

²⁶¹ CIA, "National Intelligence Estimate 89-65: Venezuela," December 16, 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 531: 3, 6.

²⁶² CIA, "National Intelligence Estimate 89-61: The Situation in Venezuela," November 21, 1961, *FRUS*, 12:61-63, *The American Republics*, Document 217: 3, 6.

²⁶³ H. David Davis, ed., *The Economic Development of Venezuela* (1961), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/1961/01/1561285/economic-development-venezuela> (accessed 1/28/16), 11.

narrative. The Venezuelan Communist insurgents and Castro, who provided their most considerable support used a Communist narrative. A significant difference also applied to the ambassadorial representation the United States had in Venezuela as opposed to Cuba. While most of the insurgency occurred while the American ambassadors in Cuba were political appointees, three of the four ambassadors to Venezuela were FSOs during the conflict there.

Additional disparities between the two countries included the facts that corruption was not rampant in the government and law enforcement of Venezuela as it had been with Cuba, and the insurgents' narrative did not match the aspirations of the people. The Venezuelan insurgents also had significantly more support from other countries, but that support came with a price, as there was disagreement among the Communist nations supporting them on how they should carry out the effort.

The Venezuelan insurgency had its roots in the history of colonial Latin America. However, the two most important recent events that triggered it were the Cuban Revolution and the 1958 overthrow of the Pérez dictatorship (1952-58), all within the dominating, at least for the United States and its primary opponents, context of the Cold War.

A combination of people secured the overthrow of Pérez, a team of somewhat older leaders in exile with the most preeminent being Rómulo Betancourt, who provided its theoretical underpinnings and a mostly younger set in-country that carried out the more dangerous practical activities. The former provided most of the democratic leadership that would control the government and its counterinsurgency, while the latter supplied many of the insurgent leaders such as Douglas Bravo. The older group inherited the mantle of the "Generation of 28," when students had marched in the streets protesting the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez, while the younger group identified itself more as the "Generation of 58." Such a bifurcation differed

from the Cuban example where primarily all the insurgent groups saw themselves as heirs to the revolutionaries of 1895 (a revolution against Spanish colonial rule) and 1933 (a short-lived democratic overthrow of the dictator Gerardo Machado replaced by Fulgencio Batista's first Cuban coup). While the protests of 1928 had done little towards removing the Juan Vicente Gómez Chacón dictatorship, it would bear fruit in the 1958 overthrow of Pérez and the successful counterinsurgency in the 1960s.

The Run-up to the Fall of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez Dictatorship in 1958

Rómulo Betancourt was a student activist who took part in the short-lived student protests against the dictator Gómez (1908-35) in 1928. He went to jail because of his activities, gained his release after a few weeks, and renewed his participation in anti-Gómez activities. The authorities responded by exiling him. Betancourt and other student figures then began organizing a movement whose goal was the eventual taking of power and establishment of a democracy. Betancourt authored a vital declaration of intent document known as *El Plan de Barranquilla* (the Plan of Barranquilla) in Barranquilla, Colombia, in March of 1931.²⁶⁴ Cosigned by eleven other exiled leaders, the plan outlined a concise analysis of Venezuela's tendency towards a strongman government supported by an oligarchic elite subject to foreign economic exploitation. It concluded by detailing eight steps that made up a minimum program to form an alternative government that would be responsive to all Venezuelans.

The analysis section highlighted Venezuela's colonial past and its difficulty in escaping the two primary legacies it had bequeathed the people of Venezuela. Spain developed an imperial system wherein it extracted natural resources for the benefit of the home economy and a Spanish elite-controlled power to the detriment of the general population of Venezuela.

²⁶⁴ Rómulo Betancourt, "Plan de Barranquilla," March 22, 1931, <http://saber.ucab.edu.ve/handle/123456789/44956>, (accessed 02/08/18).

Eventually, a local elite developed among Creoles, who were the descendants of Spanish colonial settlers born in the New World. Ultimately, local strongman rule, *caudillismo*, replaced the control of the King. With the support of the Creole elite, a *caudillo*, ruled by balancing the distribution of wealth generated by natural resources between himself and that elite while granting exclusive access to foreign powers that replaced the former colonial master, Spain. Venezuela had replaced Spain as the international imperial economic malefactor with a few European nations and the United States and traded the King and Spanish elite for local actors. The result for the vast majority of Venezuelans was indistinguishable in a practical economic and political sense.

Betancourt's prescription to end the cycle of horrific government was to call for democracy and nationalistic economic practices along with the elimination of corruption in government and improved education for the masses. Most of Betancourt's eight-step plan for correcting Venezuela's politico-economic problems arose directly from his historical analysis and focused mainly on general items such as freedom of expression. There were specific calls for punishment of Gomez and his supporters. However, that more directly addressed the ongoing situation in Venezuela.

The plan broke down into three stages. The first called for the ouster and punishment of the existing government. The second envisioned the creation of a more democratic government to replace it that would safeguard fundamental rights and place power with the masses. The third stage consisted of a review by the new government of all existing agreements with foreign powers to ensure they were in the best interest of the Venezuelan people. The new government would combat the abuses of the past by bringing the benefits of education and political rights to the people, and then safeguard their economic welfare through industrial and agricultural training

and a nationalistic foreign policy. *El Plan de Barranquilla* laid out a precise theoretical analysis of the political problem and a proposed solution but did not address the “how” of the process to use to bring about the desired “regime change.” The Gomez government ended in 1935, but it was not until a 1945 coup d’état that a government along the lines of Betancourt’s theories took power, one with Betancourt as the provisional president.²⁶⁵

Betancourt had founded a political party, *Acción Democrática* (AD – Democratic Action), which provisionally controlled the government until its victory in the 1947 elections formalized its rule. Provisional President Betancourt implemented the various concepts he had espoused in *El Plan de Barranquilla* with the most noteworthy economic change being taxing oil profits at fifty percent, thus splitting profits with foreign companies. He believed such a move guaranteed the people of Venezuela a more equitable return on Venezuela’s natural resources without most of the problems attendant to nationalizing the oil industry. The devaluation of the Mexican peso and twenty percent inflation that accompanied that country’s nationalization of the oil industry in 1938 providing ample evidence of the pitfalls of nationalization.²⁶⁶

Such efforts ended when a triumvirate took power in another coup d’état in 1948,²⁶⁷ a triumvirate that transitioned to a dictatorship in 1952 when one of the triumvirs, Pérez, took full power. Betancourt and the Generation of 1928 continued to work toward establishing a permanent democracy mostly from exile, while a new, younger group worked to topple the latest authoritarian government from inside the country.

²⁶⁵ Winfield J. Burggraaff, “The Military Origins of Venezuela’s 1945 Revolution,” *Caribbean Studies* 11, no. 3 (1971): 35–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25612402>.

²⁶⁶ Many countries refused to buy Mexican oil and oil companies called for a boycott of all Mexican products that was partially successful. Similar international reaction greeted the 1951 Iranian nationalization of oil with an even more successful embargo against the purchase of Iranian oil with an end coming to the government that attempted the nationalization when a coup d’état backed by the U.S.A. and U.K. succeeded in 1953.

²⁶⁷ Bethany Aram, “Exporting Rhetoric, Importing Oil: United States Relations with Venezuela, 1945-1948,” *World Affairs* 154, no. 3 (1992): 94, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20672311>.

A unified effort came into being to topple the new dictatorship, but one that bore the seeds of a split that would threaten to undo the democracy that replaced the dictatorship. The Generation of '28 provided a strong theoretical and moral leadership for the people working to restore democracy to Venezuela. However, it fell mostly to the younger group in-country that acquired the label "the Generation of 1958" to undertake most of the practical, and often very dangerous, day to day struggle against the regime. The final collapse of the Pérez dictatorship occurred against a backdrop where observers thought the government was secure after deporting or arresting most opposition leaders even though there had been a prolonged period of opposition. While it was true that the most famous leaders like Betancourt were out of the country or in jail, there remained sufficient leadership, and popular will, to organize and carry out a general strike and student demonstrations. The demonstrations became riots over two days in late January 1958 that convinced Pérez to step down and leave Venezuela on January 23rd.²⁶⁸ The coalition between the two generations of revolutionary leaders of '28 and '58 provided the corresponding successful rhetorical-theoretical and practical combination to overthrow the government. The unity of the revolutionaries of 1958 in overthrowing the Pérez dictatorship broke down quickly, however, laying the groundwork for the insurgency of 1960-68.

The Return to Democratic Government and Opposition to it, 1958 to the Kennedy

Inauguration 1961

The U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela during the period beginning not long after Pérez left the country through a few months after Kennedy's inauguration was a career FSO, Edward J. Sparks. His career included several ambassadorships. These were Bolivia (June 13, 1951, to October 29, 1954), Guatemala (July 29, 1955, to February 15, 1958), Venezuela (March 19,

²⁶⁸ Tad Szulc, "Special to The New York Times, (1958, Jan 23), Caracas Revolt Ousts Dictator; Dead Exceed 100," *The New York Times* (1923-Current File).

1958, to April 15, 1961), and Uruguay (May 24, 1961, to May 15, 1962).²⁶⁹ He began government service as a clerk in the War Department in 1917. The War Department sent him to work in the office of the military attaché in Santiago, Chile in 1919. He became an embassy clerk two years later. Other than a three-year appointment as the counselor of the embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark, he spent his entire Foreign Service career in Latin America. In addition to ambassadorships, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in the latter part of 1954 through the middle of 1955. He retired in 1962 to Santiago, Chile, where he lived out the remainder of his life.²⁷⁰

Rómulo Betancourt won the general election of 1958 and thus headed the democratic government that replaced the previous dictatorship, but one that faced significant domestic and foreign policy problems. Figures from the Generation of '28 dominated this government, many of whom like Betancourt had spent significant time out of the country. The accumulation of power in the older members left many younger individuals who had been leaders and participants in the recent regime change as junior members of various parties with significant expectations of changes with little real say in what those changes would be, and how quickly the government would try to implement them. Betancourt thus had to juggle a sluggish economy in large part due to low oil prices while attacking other serious problems. The other obstacles included a restive military that already had removed him from power once before and an ever more disenchanted politically active youth movement allied with various parties that ultimately cast its lot with the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV – Venezuelan Communist Party). Indeed, even the Communist Party eventually proved unable to meet their revolutionary expectations.

²⁶⁹ “Edward John Sparks - People - Department History - Office of the Historian,” accessed 5/17/17 <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/sparks-edward-john>.

²⁷⁰ “Edward J. Sparks Diplomat, is Dead,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1976.

Betancourt had to govern within a challenging domestic environment. He had to negotiate the maze of maintaining American support with its tripartite dictates of being staunchly anti-Communist, subservient to the demands of American hegemony, and allowing the United States to retain its highly favored economic position in Venezuela. He had to accomplish the American balancing act without sacrificing too much while fighting an insurgency and confronting other extensive foreign policy problems. The Dominican Republic's dictator, Rafael Trujillo, and Cuba's recently ensconced Fidel Castro posed the two most substantial such problems. The former detested Betancourt to the point of supporting assassination attempts against him and invasions of Venezuela, while Castro supported the overall efforts to overthrow the Venezuelan government by Venezuela's Left in conjunction with his campaign to fight American "imperialism." Betancourt faced this daunting set of challenges hampered by having a coalition government.

Betancourt's AD party had two major party contenders for power. They were Rafael Caldera's COPEI (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* – Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee) party and Jóvito Villalba's *Unión Republicana Democrática* (URD – Democratic Republican Union). The three made a power-sharing agreement known as the Punto Fijo Pact before the election. The agreement among the three major parties left out the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV – Communist Party of Venezuela).²⁷¹ It specified that whichever party won the highest number of votes, the other two parties would accept the election results with the proviso that they would share in power in the executive and legislative branches. The AD won a plurality in the elections of 1958, giving Betancourt the presidency. He implemented the pact and formed a coalition government. The

²⁷¹ Hernán Castillo and Leonardo R. Ledezma, "History and Political Theory of Civilian-Military Relations in Venezuela," *Politeja*, no. 24 (2013): 38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24919576>.

complicated political situation in the coalition made for vast differences of opinion as to how to govern. The differences ultimately led to defections from the coalition and its constituent parties, leaving an ever-smaller number of ruling party members taking part in the government while formal opposition increased.

Betancourt had set out his minimal plan in 1931 to rectify Venezuela's political and economic woes, but it was far short of a complete solution for Venezuela's problems. While he had made significant progress on the economic front during his presidency from 1945 to 1948, during which he obtained a fifty percent tax on oil company profits,²⁷² economic, other domestic, and foreign policy challenges verged on being overwhelming. The essential prescription of the 1931 plan was to root out corruption, assign power to the people through democratic institutions, safeguard the benefits of Venezuela's natural resources for its people instead of for foreigners, and lift its citizens through education and economic opportunity. The domestic and foreign policy situation in Venezuela from 1958 through 1968 would call for far more government response.

The dominant foreign policy context for Venezuela during this period was the Cold War. The influence of that conflict was more complicated than merely choosing Communism or not. Allying with the United States entailed an embrace of Capitalism that had not previously benefitted most Venezuelans, and a commitment to American Cold War priorities despite their inappropriateness for the Venezuelan situation. For example, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had announced that "You must think ... of our policy in Latin America as chiefly designed to

²⁷²Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (2017), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/eastcarolina/detail.action?docID=5064394..>

play a part in the cold war against our enemies”²⁷³). It also required coming to grips with past US economic imperialism and military intervention in Latin America. Additionally, there were the complications caused by Castro’s recent overthrow of an American-backed dictator in Cuba.

The Batista debacle was just one of several difficulties arising from the US practice of valuing strong anti-Communist rhetoric and stability over democracy as indicated by American support for several dictators and interventions against elected governments in Iran and Guatemala in the fifties. Indeed, Castro’s vision for Cuba’s revolutionary leadership and vehement anti-Americanism presented a challenge for Venezuela as first relations soured between the two countries, followed by Cuban support for overthrowing Venezuela’s government. The dedication of Venezuelan insurgents to a Communist or Leftist effort to overthrow the government gained them considerable support from Communist countries, principally Cuba. Such support led to a mirror-image concern on the Right in the military about the possible need for another coup d’état to thwart a Communist takeover.

The conflict between Betancourt’s administration and several younger, politically active junior party members grew primarily from two factors. First, Betancourt had great faith in basic democratic practices to provide solutions to Venezuela’s problems, a view not shared by many Leftists.²⁷⁴ Second, Betancourt was willing to accept a slow improvement in conditions, a view not shared by many younger activists. The conflict developed rapidly into a break between the administration and many activists in part because of the difference in the experience of the two groups during the overthrow of Pérez. The older generation had focused on the need for

²⁷³ S. Everett Gleason, Deputy Secretary of the NSC, “Memorandum of at the 244th Meeting of the National Security Council, Monday, November 15th, 1954” *FRUS, 4: 52-54, The American Republics*, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=goto&id=FRUS.FRUS195254v04&isize=M&submit=Go+to+page&page=350> (accessed 2/7/17), 350.

²⁷⁴ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 72.

structural change to improve the Venezuelan government, mainly in theoretical musings. The younger group had focused on the dangerous day-to-day activity necessary to overthrow a dictator. The younger group wanted to focus on a revolutionary pace of change in line with their previous efforts, while the older group had seen their program begun in 1928 come to fruition and place them in power for the second time in 1958.

The younger group had two successes to refer to in developing such misleading expectations, the 1958 regime-change in Venezuela and the 1959 overthrow of Batista in Cuba. The rapidity of the collapse of the Pérez government once popular opposition coalesced against it gave them an unreasonable expectation of the rate of change the Betancourt government could achieve. They also overestimated the degree the general population believed in their revolutionary rhetoric. The Cuban success had provided similar chimerical expectations. The younger group shared a fundamental misconception with Castro, Guevara, and the Sandinistas as to the proper explanation of the Cuban success. They believed that *focismo* was behind that success, and thus that it provided an adequate model for revolution elsewhere. Their problematic acceptance of *foco* theory led them to believe that they could create the conditions for a successful revolution despite the government having far more popular support.

The tensions between the Generations of 28 and 58 led first to political separation and eventually to violent opposition by the younger group, but only after foreign elements began backing such action in 1960. Betancourt had been highly critical of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, dictator of the Dominican Republic. The criticism led Trujillo to become obsessed with bringing Betancourt down. Trujillo began in November 1959 by having leaflets dropped in an urban area of Venezuela calling for a revolution against the government. He escalated the following year to direct violence. Trujillo found allies within the Venezuelan military, such as former general

Castro Leon who led an uprising at the San Cristóbal garrison in Venezuela on April 20, 1960. The uprising failed, giving Betancourt hope that other discontented military officials might think twice before acting. However, Trujillo, undeterred by the failure, escalated his efforts with an assassination attempt on the Venezuelan president in June 1960.²⁷⁵

Four conspirators led by Venezuelan businessman, and self-appointed General, Juan Manuel Sanoja had flown in a C-46 from Caracas to San Isidro Military Base in the Dominican Republic on the morning of June 16. Dominican officials drove them to a house in Ciudad Trujillo, where Colonel John Abbes Garcia, Trujillo's chief intelligence agent and director of the Dominican *Servicio de Inteligencia Militar* (SIM – Military Intelligence Service), met them. He showed them a brown overnight case that housed a small radio transmitter that allowed for sending a signal to a receiver capable of detonating dynamite. Trujillo arrived shortly after that, claiming that Betancourt must die before he killed Trujillo. The next day Colonel Abbes demonstrated the use of the transmitter destroying two cars with dynamite. The conspirators flew back to Venezuela after this “training.” They carried out the assassination plot on June 24 in the morning.

Betancourt planned to attend the Venezuelan Armed Forces Day ceremony. Two of the conspirators drove a green 1954 Oldsmobile to a parking spot along the route they expected the president to take. The car contained two suitcases with sixty pounds of dynamite wired to the detonating receiver. A third conspirator transmitted the destruct signal using the button inside the overnight case from two hundred yards away as Betancourt's car drove past the explosives car. The blast killed three in the president's vehicle, but Betancourt survived with only minor burns. The assassins had not used enough dynamite to guarantee Betancourt's death nor to

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

render the Oldsmobile untraceable. Authorities promptly found the owner of the car who told them essential information about the plotters. The police also found the abandoned brown overnight case.²⁷⁶ International news coverage of Betancourt's survival and return to work with bandaged burns generated a great deal of support for the government and public disapproval of the conspirators and their supporters. Trujillo drew the heaviest, and most far-reaching, condemnation. The United States, already fatigued from its dealing with the out-of-control dictator, found its CIA accused of complicity in the successful assassination of Trujillo by underground opposition leaders on May 30, 1961.²⁷⁷

The failed efforts to unseat the Betancourt government from the Right would soon find companions from the Left.²⁷⁸ The challenge to Betancourt's government from his Leftist younger former allies arose from a fundamental difference in point of view between the Generation of '28 and the Generation of '58. Betancourt and his peers in AD saw the main problem for Venezuela as being the past governments, colonial, imperialistic, and dictatorial, that had lacked legitimacy. Since they believed that only self-determination provided a legitimate source of political power, they saw democracy as an adequate response to overthrowing the dictatorship, and then they set about ruling the country within such institutions. The Generation of '58 felt the "Revolution" against Pérez was only a first step in a Leninist-Castroite program to restructure society on class concepts in vogue at the time. Marxist-Leninist theory decreed that the time for revolution was not right, but Castro's *foco* theory offered the illusion that they could create the conditions conducive for revolution. Their independent journey began as their

²⁷⁶ "Trujillo's Murder Plot," *Time*, 7/18/1960, 30.

²⁷⁷ Executive Secretary, CIA Management Committee, "Family Jewels," (May 16, 1973), 425, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/family-jewels>.

²⁷⁸ Larry A. Nicksch, *Case Studies of Counter-Insurgencies*, Congressional Research Service (1985), 45 and CIA, "NIE 89-61," 9.

constant agitation against Betancourt's AD administration led sixteen of them to form the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR – Movement of the Revolutionary Left) on April 8, 1960. AD expelled them from the party on April 12.

Domingo Alberto Rangel and Américo Martín led MIR, initially in rhetoric and later in action. Martín had written a scathing indictment of the “anti-democratic” inadequacies of AD in a series of articles published in the daily newspaper *La Esfera* that had gotten the youth wing of the party dissolved.²⁷⁹ Rangel and Martín followed the latter's series as two of the principal signers of an April 24 *El Nacional* position paper that codified their opposition to the Betancourt administration and the AD program. MIR did not have any significant constituency, but Rangel was confident they could find one by uniting middle-class intellectuals and the urban poor. The former would not be numerous, and what narrative he thought would unite them with the urban poor was not apparent. In the actual event, many insurgent activities actively drove the urban poor closer to the government.

Betancourt also faced challenges from the Left that did not extend to violence, but instead further undercut the strength of his ruling coalition already hurt by his own party's loss of its youth wing. The Democratic Republic Union component had strong sympathies for the Castro government. The tensions between the Cuban and Venezuelan governments that grew as Castro embraced Communism and began to move his country toward the Soviet sphere, together with Betancourt's reactions to Castro's active involvement in efforts to unseat his administration, were mirrored in DRU dissatisfaction in the coalition. Matters came to a head on November 12, 1960, when the DRU withdrew from the Punto Fijo pact.²⁸⁰ Thus, Betancourt faced the

²⁷⁹ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 68.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

possibility of violence from both the Left and Right while struggling to maintain the efficacy of his eroding ruling coalition.

A significant part of Betancourt's response to challenges from the Left and the Right, violent and nonviolent, as well as holding onto as much of his party and the Punto Fijo coalition as possible, was the consistent narrative that he espoused. He presented democracy as an answer to all critics, both within and without his coalition, domestically and in his foreign policy. Thus, he placed a premium on the passage of a new constitution on January 16, 1961. Betancourt took the position that the new constitution was sufficient to safeguard fundamental political rights for all citizens. While the Venezuelan government at times suspended various civil liberties, Betancourt was careful to take such actions only after a public outcry to do so.²⁸¹ The Right challenged the narrative by claiming that the administration was inadequate to govern and meet the challenge from the Left. The Left, in a claim made by Rangel, responded that the constitution only represented a paper reality until it included a mechanism to rule out class inequality.²⁸² The conflicting narratives defined the struggle. The government answered challenges from the right by successfully governing. It answered the challenge from the Left by successfully governing and reminding the population of the strength democracy/capitalism offered, along with a close alliance with the United States, as against Marxist/Castroist rhetoric and violence. The violence would prove particularly problematic for the insurgents.

²⁸¹ Richard Weitz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Latin America, 1960-1980," *Political Science Quarterly*, (January 1986): 410; and Nicksch, *Case Studies*, 49.

²⁸² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 72-73.

The Kennedy Administration Game Plan for Latin America and the Internal Obstacles that it Faced

President Kennedy's administration took the position that countering Communist gains in developing nations required a three-pronged strategy, economic, political, and military. The principal architects of this approach in the administration were President Kennedy, McGeorge Bundy, and Walter Rostow. McGeorge Bundy was a former professor of government at Harvard despite holding only a bachelor's degree from Yale. He later became the youngest dean ever at Harvard when only thirty-four. President Kennedy made Bundy his National Security Adviser. Bundy and Kennedy concluded that the politico-military nature of insurgency elevated insurgent "wars of liberation" to be equal in danger to conventional warfare. The recognition of the danger posed by insurgencies led to the formulation of a high-ranking panel, the Special Group Counter-Insurgency (Special Group CI). The chairperson was the Military Representative of the President. The other members were the Attorney General, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Director of Central Intelligence, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development.²⁸³

Walter Rostow was a distinguished economic history professor who served as a political adviser to Kennedy in 1960, and after the election became a deputy to Bundy. Rostow provided the administration with a combined economic-political-military grand strategy. Most of the strategy arose from the book presenting his theory that economic modernization went through five stages of development.²⁸⁴ He saw America's role in the Cold War regarding developing nations as providing economic aid for them to achieve the last stage of "high mass-

²⁸³ Bundy, "Action Memorandum No. 124," 1.

²⁸⁴ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth; a Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960).

consumption.” The United States would also provide military, diplomatic, and political aid to stave off Communist subversion.

President Kennedy’s administration also attempted to implement a more nuanced military approach to insurgencies. The change was in recognition of the fact that the previous military thinking of the 1950s, as evidenced in part by the failure of the Batista counterinsurgency, was erroneous in assuming the position that sufficiently trained and equipped conventional forces were adequate to defeat any unconventional forces. While the administration recognized the politico-military nature of insurgency and tried to implement a new counterinsurgency approach that combined appropriate economic, political, and potentially severe military measures to combat it, three major internal obstacles confronted their efforts.

One internal obstacle to Kennedy’s new approach was the inertia in the high command of most of the uniformed military wedded to traditional conventional strategy and tactics based on their experience in the conventional warfare of World War II. A second internal obstacle was the inability to realize how essential it was to have adequate training, experience, and professionalism in those tasked with leading and coordinating such efforts. For example, the U.S. government consistently sought to take action through the Organization of American States (OAS), possibly even a military intervention, as a substitute from its announced intentions not to intervene in Latin American affairs.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, President Kennedy made a political appointee deLesseps Story Morrison (1946-1961), the former fifteen-year mayor of New Orleans who had had business dealings with the Pérez dictatorship, his Ambassador to OAS. Morrison was the first of three political appointee OAS ambassadors that served during the majority of the

²⁸⁵ E.g., see James S. Lay, Jr., “Annex to NSC 144, A Report to the National Security Council: United States Objectives and Courses of Action with respect to Latin America,” Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Papers, Policy Papers Subseries, (March 6, 1953), 11.

Venezuelan counterinsurgency. Both President Betancourt and Ambassador Teodoro Moscoso objected to the appointment of Morrison, which came at a time Venezuela was looking for action by the OAS. The issue was Cuba's interference in Venezuela's domestic affairs.²⁸⁶ Kennedy would repeat using a political appointee to head an organization that he counted on to aid in counterinsurgency strategy when he moved Moscoso to be the first Coordinator of the Alliance for Progress.

The third internal obstacle was the domestic pressure economically and politically to maintain America's hegemony in Latin America.²⁸⁷ That pressure had contributed to Batista's defeat by Castro's anti-American imperialism narrative. It provided the Venezuelan and Nicaraguan insurgents, as with other Latin American insurgents, with a similar narrative, especially as so many movements took their inspiration from the Cuban Revolution. The Kennedy administration was responsible for such new approaches to foreign aid as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps, and the Alliance for Progress in addition to several other initiatives. Unfortunately, all three initiatives fell victim to limitations and criticisms based on economic and political pressures often given force by Congress.²⁸⁸

The nature of the American political system is a primary cause of difficulty for any administration seeking funds for large amounts of foreign aid. The principal participants are elected officials and the Secretary of State. Senators serve six-year terms, presidents four,

²⁸⁶ Teodoro Moscoso, "Telegram 1273 Caracas to Secretary of State," June 16, 1961, 7 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/61 – 6/61.

²⁸⁷ Stephen M. Streeter, "Nation-Building in the Land of Eternal Counter-Insurgency: Guatemala and the Contradictions of the Alliance for Progress," *Third World Quarterly*, (2006): 58.

²⁸⁸ Andrew David and Michael Holm, "The Kennedy Administration and the Battle over Foreign Aid: The Untold Story of the Clay Committee," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 1 (March 2016): 67, doi:10.1080/09592296.2016.1137735.

representatives two, with Secretaries of State often serving only four years even under two-term presidents. Such limited timespans, two years for most participants, with eight years often representing the “long-term,” means that domestic political pressures often run counter to taking the long-term view necessary in solving many problems in foreign affairs. Since foreign affairs are usually the purview of the executive branch, American foreign policy often makes major shifts every four to eight years with each new presidency. The House of Representatives can affect foreign policy through its power over appropriations, and the Senate must ratify treaties (a responsibility often sidestepped in contemporary times by administrations concerned they could not secure ratification).

The presidencies of Kennedy, Nixon, Carter, and Reagan all brought new approaches during the Cold War period. One administration official summed up the problematic situation saying, “(w)e know in our hearts that we are in the world for keeps, yet we are still tackling 20-year problems with 5-year plans, staffed with 2-year personnel working with 1-year appropriations. It’s simply not good enough.”²⁸⁹ In essence, the Kennedy administration was correct in assessing that foreign aid, in the end, was both morally preferential to war and could accomplish more in the national interest. The latter fact arose in part because it might sometimes prevent far more costly military actions or other international crises. For example, had the United States been able to prevent Castro’s success in the Cuban Revolution by judicious use of aid, it would have prevented the subsequent crises of the American-supported failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A primary reason that the Kennedy administration failed to obtain adequate funding for foreign in 1963, after slight increases in 1961 and 1962, with a drastic House cut of

²⁸⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “PL 87-195 S. Rep. No. 612, 87th Cong., 1st Sess. (1961): To Accompany S. 1983,” July 24, 1961, 1719, <https://law.resource.org/pub/us/gao.gov/87-195/00005548.pdf>.

\$850,000,000 flowed in two ways from how representatives viewed such appropriations.²⁹⁰ One problem was that reasons for giving foreign aid by the administration fell into two categories, with some referencing moral duty and others national security interests. Representatives were more willing to spend money on the latter than the former. Of course, the administration's overarching contention, a key component of Rostow's theory, was that giving economic aid would ultimately promote security and other national interests. Congress did not always see the connection, and even if its members did, many were not willing to wait long for results.²⁹¹

A more serious problem arose from the fact that representatives tended to appropriate funds selfishly.²⁹² Cutting foreign aid provided a double incentive for representatives. First, they could avoid spending money from which they saw little political advantage for so doing. Second, they could gain political advantage by publicizing they had voted to cut the unpopular expenditure. There was little risk for Congress in shortchanging foreign aid because the public most often blamed foreign policy failures on the executive branch rather than on Congress. Thus, despite a total foreign aid budget representing only 0.007 of GNP, compared to 0.2 of GNP for the Marshall Plan, the Kennedy administration had minimal success in obtaining even its modest requests for funding by 1963.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Press Conference, 20 August 1963, White House Audio Recordings, 1961-63, (1963), John F. Kennedy Library, accessed 5/10/17, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHA-210.aspx>.

²⁹¹ David and Holm, "The Kennedy Administration," 67.

²⁹² See David Schoenbrod, *DC Confidential: Inside the Five Tricks of Washington* (2017) for a discussion of how Congress and the White House began in the 1960s seeking to split taking credit for good results while avoiding blame for negative consequences or responsibilities.

²⁹³ Kennedy, Press Conference.

The Left Joins the Right in Violence from January 1961 to December 1962: First Plan for Rapid Victory (Urban Component)

The two American ambassadors during the period were Teodoro Moscoso, who served May 23, 1961, to November 21, 1961, and C. Allen Stewart, who served from March 14, 1962, to November 28, 1964. Moscoso was a Puerto Rican business leader. He was born in Barcelona, Spain, and moved to Puerto Rico as a child. He graduated with a B.S. pharmacy degree from the University of Michigan in 1932. After graduation, he worked in the drugstore business until he entered government service. Moscoso played a crucial role in the transformation of Puerto Rico's economy from one based on agriculture to a modern one based on manufacturing and tourism. The average per capita income rose from \$120 to \$6500 in 1992, the highest in Latin America. He was the president and general manager of the *Compañía de Fomento Industrial de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company), which he helped create, from 1942 to 1950. He became the first administrator of the *Administración de Fomento Económico Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico Economic Development Administration), which he led from 1950 to 1960. His signature program was Operación Manos a la Obra (Operation Bootstrap). The program involved switching from a sugar-based mono-economy to a modern industrial economy with a significant tourism component mainly through a series of tax incentives and a below-market wage structure. The program started in 1947 with the codification of his ideas into legislation. The program garnered praise as an economic miracle in the 1960s, although its later inability to avoid excessive unemployment and adapt to an information age economy led the government to declare bankruptcy in 2017. Still, Moscoso's stature at the time provided the incentive for John F. Kennedy first to name him ambassador to

Venezuela in May 1961, and later the Coordinator for the Alliance for Progress in November 1961. Moscoso returned to Puerto Rico after the Kennedy administration ended.²⁹⁴

C. Allen Stewart was a career Foreign Service Officer. He graduated from the University of Arizona in 1929 and began a career in journalism. He worked as a reporter in Arizona and California until 1936 when he joined the Associated Press. In 1941-42, he worked at the Latin American desk in New York. Before the end of 1942, he became Chief of the Associated Press Bureau in Bogota, Colombia, for a year after which he gained a promotion to bureau chief in Caracas, Venezuela, for three years. He entered Foreign Service in 1947 and took up the position of Public Affairs Officer for the U.S. Embassy in Havana. In 1951, he moved to the embassy in Santiago, Chile, as First Secretary until 1953. In the mid-fifties, he served in various capacities in the embassy in Costa Rica, including First Secretary, Consul, and Counselor until November 4, 1956. Next, he was the Deputy Director of the Office of Middle American Affairs. He became the Director of the Office of Central American and Panamanian Affairs in September 1958. His next assignment was to be the Director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs in March 1960. He moved over to the Caracas embassy in Venezuela, first as Deputy Chief of Mission and then as Ambassador from March 14, 1962, to November 28, 1964.²⁹⁵

The leftist insurgency began in October 1960 with riots and a student call for a revolutionary general strike as had toppled the Pérez dictatorship.²⁹⁶ It quickly became evident

²⁹⁴ Teodoro Moscoso, "Telegram 1262, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 14, 1961, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/61 – 6/61, Eric Pace, "Teodoro Moscoso, a Former Envoy And Economic Aide, Is Dead at 81," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1992 and "Teodoro Moscoso Dies," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1992, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1992/06/17/teodoro-moscoso-dies/e1d857e1-0903-4345-bca6-312e33cf1e4b/?utm_term=.0a9ffaeb26d0.

²⁹⁵ "Biographic Sketch of C. Allen Stewart," JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 2/62 – 3/62, 1962.

²⁹⁶ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela: A Study of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Operations and Techniques in Venezuela, 1960-1964* (1964), i, <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=AD0707252>.

when the strike failed to materialize, and the protests drew little support from the general population, that overthrowing a democracy would be a very different project than overturning a hated, corrupt dictator.

The insurgents decided they would need a new strategy to accomplish their goals. The two leading suggestions made were 1). A rural guerrilla approach as espoused by Mao and Guevara, something along the lines of a mixture of *foco*-based Prolonged People's War, or 2). A mixed urban-rural approach designed to bring a much faster result with an envisaged timeline ending sometime in 1962. The leftist leadership in favor of armed action settled on the latter and created the five-stage "Plan for Rapid Victory."²⁹⁷ The first stage was to be the organization of activists in all the major cities. The second stage would be street protests up to and including riots in the urban areas. The third stage would be the formation of "shock brigades" that would carry out a range of attacks from spectacular publicity-generating ones through those involving lethal force and terroristic effect. The fourth stage would add rural guerrilla warfare. The fifth and final stage would be a revolutionary war with a more traditional armed force in the field.²⁹⁸ The Left was now committed to joining the Right in challenging the Betancourt government.

One of the leading causes of agitation for both the Left and the Right against the government, including some parts of the military, was the lackluster state of the economy. Key business leaders, one of whom had previously plotted with the military, delivered an ultimatum criticizing Betancourt's economic policies in early May 1961 demanding changes in both government policies and the members of the cabinet. The business leaders planned to circulate their signed manifesto until Betancourt warned them that signatories would be subject to arrest. They published it unsigned. The ultimatum led to many rumors of an impending rightist *golpe*.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., ii.

²⁹⁸ H. Micheal Tarver et al., *Venezuelan Insurgency, 1960-1968: A Successful Failure* (2001), 72-73.

Reports of leftist plots to carry out violent protests up to and including an attack on the newly appointed U.S. Ambassador Moscoso on his arrival reached the American embassy from multiple sources. In a speech to the Venezuelan Congress on May 4, Betancourt called for a comprehensive government austerity program despite the grumblings in the business community and all the other threatening developments.²⁹⁹ The next month would see the reports and rumors of Leftist and Rightist actions come true.

June 1961, Moscoso's first full month as ambassador, was a baptism of fire, literally, for the amateur diplomat. On June 14, Moscoso ignored concerns by some of the embassy's staff and went to see an exhibit at Central University. While he was inside the exhibit hall, hundreds of students surrounded his car, searched it, and stole his briefcase from the trunk. The students found various confidential and secret documents inside the briefcase. They released the driver unharmed and then set fire to the Cadillac. The Ambassador left after an appropriate escort became available three hours later. The fiasco had later repercussions that included President Kennedy telling Moscoso and his successor C. Allen Stewart to stay away from the university.³⁰⁰

The earlier reports of an impending *golpe* proved accurate when there was an attempted uprising in the port town of La Guaira seven miles north of Caracas at 4 A.M. on June 26, 1961, followed by an associated one in the coastal city of Barcelona at 5:30 A.M. In La Guaira, four officers in the garrison there tried to convince others to join them while another officer led a group to try to take over the power station. Forces loyal to the government quickly arrested all

²⁹⁹ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram 1023, Caracas to Secretary of State," May 5, 1961, 11 a.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/61 – 6/61.

³⁰⁰ C. Allan Stewart, C(harles) Allan Stewart Oral History Interview - JFK #1, 10/23/1967 - John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, interview by Larry J. Hackman, October 23, 1967, accessed 5/8/17, 13-14, DOI: JFKOH-CAS-01, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-CAS-01.aspx>; and Peter P. Lord, "Interview with Peter Lord," interview by Lambert Heyniger, April 13, 1998, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, accessed 5/8/17, 19, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Lord,%20Peter%20P.toc.pdf>.

the rebels. In Barcelona, two retired Army officers, Major Ruben Masso Perdomo and Captain Luis Vivas Ramirez, recruited approximately two hundred fifty members of the city's garrison and had more success. They took control of the garrison, arrested the governor, took over the radio station, and raided the headquarters of Betancourt's AD party. However, forces loyal to the regime convinced the rebels to surrender after only four and a half hours by threatening them with action by land, sea, and air. The government reported thirteen dead and eleven wounded in the fighting in Barcelona. Much like Castro's disaster at the Moncada Barracks, small groups acting in one or two locations failed miserably to start a general uprising capable of overturning the government. Ambassador Moscoso reported to Washington that he believed that the failed *golpe* strengthened the government's status.³⁰¹ June closed with organized protests of Ambassador Moscoso's arrival at the Central Maracaibo airport.³⁰²

November 1961 included several developments both in foreign affairs and domestically. Word had leaked out that Betancourt planned to order a break in diplomatic relations with Cuba sometime near the middle of the month. Various problematic incidents occurred in the run-up to the break, and afterward in protest of it. On November 7, two bombs exploded in eastern Caracas. That same day there were student protests that sought to disrupt at the Central University of Venezuela and one or more high schools.³⁰³ Venezuela broke diplomatic relations with Cuba on November 11.³⁰⁴ There were secondary student protests during the day on November 13, followed by Central University students gathering that night and burning an

³⁰¹ "Rebellion Crushed in Venezuela; Military Unit Holds City Briefly: 13 Reported Slain in Barcelona Fighting Before Rebels Surrender -- Uprising Attempt Near Caracas Fails," *The New York Times*, June 27, 1961.

³⁰² Moscoso, "Telegram 1343 Caracas to Secretary of State," June 29, 1961, 9:24 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/61 – 6/61.

³⁰³ Moscoso, "Telegram 565 Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov 7, 1961, 6 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 10/61 – 11/61.

³⁰⁴ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 77; and Niksch, *Case Studies*, 46.

American flag. Newspapers reported that six students suffered gunshot wounds, although there was no attribution as to who had shot them.³⁰⁵ There were minor incidents in Caracas on November 14, with rumors of a student buildup for activities the next day.³⁰⁶ Major rioting occurred throughout the day on November 15 in the city of Barquisimeto, with four killed and forty-six wounded. Secondary students carried out the majority of activity on November 15, including a one-day school strike. Disturbances were minor except one person died.³⁰⁷ Ambassador Moscoso turned embassy affairs over to C. Allan Stewart as President Kennedy appointed him Coordinator for the Alliance for Progress on November 21.

Student activity decreased during the second half of November, but Communist activity spiked late in the month with several terrorist attacks in Caracas. The U.S. Embassy reported to Washington on November 29 that there had been attacks on police and civilians with one police officer killed, one police officer and two civilians wounded, and seven civilians suffering lesser injuries. An attempt against power line towers failed when an individual(s) discovered two time bombs before they exploded. Betancourt responded to the attacks by ordering police occupation of all Federal District offices of the PCV and MIR as well as the arrests of any of its activists. Betancourt instructed state governors to take such steps if activity in their area warranted.³⁰⁸

An announced visit by the U.S. president and first lady scheduled for December 16-17 replaced the diplomatic break with Cuba as the focus of protest. Incidents in late November and December ranged from a plane hijacking and attacks on U.S. businesses to youths throwing ink

³⁰⁵ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram 599, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov 13, 1961, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 10/61 – 11/61.

³⁰⁶ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram 600, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov 14, 1961, 5 p. m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 10/61 – 11/61.

³⁰⁷ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram 611, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov 16, 1961, 5 p. m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 10/61 – 11/61.

³⁰⁸ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram 660, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov 29, 1961, 12 p. m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 10/61 – 11/61.

on the walls of the Dutch Embassy offices. On November 27, five students hijacked an Avensa Airlines flight from Caracas to Maracaibo with at least four Americans onboard. They demanded the pilot circle Caracas while they dropped leaflets calling for anti-government protests on the upcoming first anniversary of the declaration of partial martial law. They then ordered the pilot to fly the plane to Dutch Curaçao.³⁰⁹ The Curaçao authorities extradited the hijackers to Venezuela on December 2. Also, on December 2, an individual(s) discovered a bomb in an ice cream plant. On December 3, students vandalized the Dutch embassy offices to protest the extradition of the five hijackers to Venezuela. Several minor incidents occurred at high schools where one car fell victim to arson. Just before President Kennedy's arrival, insurgent incidents had increased with attacks at two Sears' stores, a General Electric store, and the *Caracas Daily Journal*, an English-language newspaper. The attacks matched a profile intelligence sources had recently reported the PCV had declared.³¹⁰ The two-day visit by the president went off according to schedule under a massive security presence.³¹¹

Activity on both sides picked up in January 1962, the fourth anniversary of the overthrow of the Pérez dictatorship, with frequent incidents in the streets, including insurgent log and tire barricades hampering movement for hours.³¹² More ominous was a report sent to Washington relaying a very detailed description of a large purported arms deal the previous September involving thousands of small arms, bazookas, light and heavy machine guns, grenades, and three

³⁰⁹ "Castro Supporters Hijack Plane with 43 Passengers: Students Force Pilot to Fly Leaflet Raid." [Palm Springs] *Desert Sun*. November 27, 1961, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19611127.2.13> and Office of Civil Aviation Security, "Aircraft Hijackings and Other Criminal Acts Against Civil Aviation Statistical and Narrative Reports," Federal Aviation Administration, (1983), <https://www#ncjrs#gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/91941NCJRS#pdf>.

³¹⁰ Stewart, "Caracas to Secretary of State," received December 14, 1961, 6:45 a.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 12/61 – 1/62.

³¹¹ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 79-80.

³¹² Stewart, "Telegram 863, Caracas to Secretary of State," January 22, 1962, 8 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 12/61 – 1/62.

million rounds of ammunition. The report included the city, contact names, and cover names, serving as just one of many examples of the superior intelligence available to the Venezuelan and American governments during the insurgency.³¹³ Initially, the Venezuelan problem was not a lack of resources, but rather the lack of communication among the various groups utilizing the resources. The Venezuelan government had more than twenty organizations involved in intelligence work, but the various groups, as with the Americans just before 9/11, were not sharing the information. Ironically, the American advisers working with the Venezuelans during the sixties' insurgency helped them to set up an intelligence fusion center that solved the communication problem that remained for the United States until after 9/11.³¹⁴ The reported arms deal also reflected the more substantial supplies of arms reaching the Venezuelan insurgents, primarily courtesy of Fidel Castro's support, compared to the Cuban Guerrillas during the Cuban Revolution. The heightened activity convinced the Betancourt government to focus on the PCV and MIR, searching their properties and personnel assembly points for arms caches. Authorities discovered a Guerrilla-training site and arrested many PCV and MIR party members, although the government stopped short of ruling the parties illegal.³¹⁵

The next major violence occurred on May 4, 1962, when Commander Jesus Molina Villegas, Major Pedro Vargas Castejon, and Lieutenant Luis Delgado Delgado led just under five hundred marines and military police in an uprising at the Carupano Marine garrison and radio station in eastern Venezuela. There were student disruptions including the high schools in Caracas. The government responded by closing them until further notice. Government forces

³¹³ Stewart, "Telegram 862, Caracas to Secretary of State," January 22, 1962, 7 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 12/61 – 1/62.

³¹⁴ John D. Waghelstein, "Ruminations of a Pachyderm or What I Learned in the Counter-insurgency Business," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 5, no. 3 (December 1, 1994): 361, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592319408423090>.

³¹⁵ Stewart, "Telegrams 893, 903, and 908, Caracas to Secretary of State," January 29-31, 1962, 7 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 12/61 – 1/62.

restored order with minimal loss of life by May 6.³¹⁶ Betancourt responded to the uprising by suspending the PCV and MIR Parties from political participation, although he did not outlaw the parties outright.³¹⁷

On June 1, 1962, Ambassador Stewart passed along a claim by Minister of Interior Carlos Andre Perez, informing Stewart that the government was breaking up a leftist coup planned for that night by making a series of arrests. Those arrested included Major Vargas Medina. He was to have led his former command, the Caracas Armored Battalion, against the government. Furthermore, plotters sought to use the Military Police Battalion in Caracas, the Marine Battalion in Puerto Cabello, and Military Police detachment in Merida.³¹⁸ The incident was another example of the superior intelligence available to the Venezuelan counterinsurgency.

The revolt came on June 2, but only at the Puerto Cabello Navy Base when the thousand-man 2nd Marine Battalion along with various naval personnel under the leadership of the executive officer, Commander Pedro Medina Silva, and former Navy Chief of Intelligence, Captain Ponte Rodriguez, took over the base, town and radio station. A Government of Venezuela (GoV) information release later placed the number of rebels at only four hundred, a number it probably understated to downplay the severity of the situation. Reports indicated the Leftist leanings of the rebels revealed themselves after they released and armed some twenty-five to fifty Leftist insurgents at the base. The larger contingent of rebels on a better-stocked base required considerably more resources to defeat at a much higher cost in casualties. The revolt

³¹⁶ Stewart "Caracas to Secretary of State, TDCS 3/510,031 and TDCS 3/510,041" May 4, 1962, and "Telegram 1271, Caracas to Secretary of State," May 6, 1962, Received 7:48 P.M., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 5/62.

³¹⁷ "Suspendidas las Actividades del Partido Comunista y del MIR," *El Nacional*, May 11, 1962, in Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 84.

³¹⁸ Stewart, "Telegram, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 1, 1962, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/1/62 – 6/4/62.

did not spread, although there were sporadic incidents in Caracas, including one in which individuals set fire to two buses. Individuals reported bombings at the General Electric Company, two at an apartment building, and several explosions near the Avila Hotel. There was also a report of an unexploded bomb at the Pepsi-Cola company offices. It is a mark of how often there was violence in Caracas that the American embassy gave so little note to the bombings. In just over twenty-four hours, a large force of mixed arms had retaken the base, including four destroyers, National Guard paratroopers, British-built Canberra bombers, American-made F-86 Sabre jet fighters, and forty tanks. Early reports listed casualties at one hundred to four hundred dead, with one thousand two hundred wounded. The government forces captured Commander Medina and Captain Rodriguez along with an insurgent Guerrilla leader, Teodoro Petkoff.³¹⁹

The political situation had reached another crisis point that would force Betancourt to go farther than he had before in his battle with the PCV and MIR. Authorities arrested a MIR deputy, Raul Lugo Rojas, for participation in the uprising. A CIA report contained more evidence of excellent intelligence resources when it revealed that members of the PCV in Puerto La Cruz were on alert on June 2 to support any military uprising in their area.³²⁰ The involvement of the PCV and MIR suggested to Betancourt that he would have to take sterner measures against them to satisfy growing dissatisfaction in the military with his rule, possibly even to the point that they would abandon their support of his administration. He told Ambassador Stewart that he had made up his mind to suspend the PCV and MIR members of Congress.

³¹⁹ CIA, "TDCS 3/512,822" June 5, 1962, and Stewart, "Telegrams 1381-1384, 1386, and 1391, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 2-4, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/1/62 – 6/4/62, Folder General 6/5/62-6/30/62

³²⁰ Ibid., 2.

However, when Betancourt consulted Rafael Caldera, the leader of the coalition COPEI party, he said it would be a mistake to do so. Caldera argued that under the combined threat of the Leftist insurgency and Castro's apparent decision to make Venezuela a prime target for subversion, it was vital to maintain a standard democratic government and avoid the trappings of a police state.³²¹ Betancourt ultimately decided on a compromise. Instead of taking immediate action, he would wait until after the July 6 adjournment of Congress. The delay would allow him to place the PCV and MIR members under house arrest without violating Parliamentary immunity. This move allowed the government to begin to prepare for the 1963 elections without having to further deal with immunity.³²²

The Left Joins the Right in Violence from January 1961 to December 1962: First Plan for Rapid Victory (Rural Component)

There were three main elements of the rural component of the insurgencies centered in the mountains of the state of Falcón and one hundred miles to the south in the El Charal region of the Venezuelan Andes. The first element was a long history of rural insurgency in the two regions. The second element was the many family connections of the Falcón rural insurgent leaders with those past insurgencies, connections they used to establish and carry out operations in the area. The third element was an unreasonable expectation of replicating both the Cuban success and the 1958 overthrow of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. Previous rural insurgencies had occurred in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against various dictators. They had evolved into clannish affairs where first instincts were to support any local

³²¹ Stewart, "Telegram 1400, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 4, 1962, 7 p.m., CIA, "Demands on President Romulo Betancourt by Moderate Military Personnel to Crush Leftist Conspiring," Distributed June 7, 1962, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/5/62-6/30/62; and Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 85.

³²² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 85.

group that rose in opposition to the government despite previous ties to the said government. It is important to note that those insurgencies had failed.³²³ Many of the leaders of the rural component of the insurgency had participated in the overthrow of Pérez and naively thought a democracy was as vulnerable to a revolution as a dictatorship. Domingo Urbina, Douglas Bravo, and other insurgent leaders held the belief despite Guevara's earlier warning about democracies as targets for revolution. Guevara had said that a guerrilla outbreak could not succeed against a government that was the result of a popular vote if it adhered to even an appearance of constitutional legality.³²⁴ They also did not realize that the *foco* theory did not account for Castro's victory and thus provided a fundamentally flawed strategy to follow.

Both Domingo Urbina and Douglas Bravo were relatives of leaders of past insurgencies. Urbina's uncle, Rafael Simón Urbina, had led three failed insurgencies in the 1920s and 1930s but had always escaped capture with the help of Falcón mountaineers.³²⁵ Bravo's family spread over most of the region. The most significant advantage at the beginning for the two leaders was not so much that the locals joined their ranks, but rather that the locals did not turn them into the authorities.³²⁶ Another advantage that accrued to the insurgents was the terrible reputation the Army had in the area because of the cruel and repressive measures the dictator Gómez had ordered to put down the insurgencies against his rule.³²⁷ The efforts in the state of Falcón and the El Charal region survived for years as opposed to those in nine other areas that quickly collapsed due to a failure to secure local support and develop sufficient strength to survive initial

³²³ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 173-174, 189, 219-220.

³²⁴ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 8.

³²⁵ Rafael Simón Urbina, *Victoria, dolor y tragedia* (1946 [1936]).

³²⁶ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 173-174.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

encounters with the police or military. The failure resulted in at least one hundred forty-three captured and seven killed.³²⁸

The development of the insurgent strategy was fundamentally flawed, particularly regarding the rural component. The initial approach of the overall insurgency was only to try to replicate the methods, urban riots and a general strike, that had led to the final ouster of the Pérez dictatorship; methods appropriate only when the people were already against the government. When that failed, they looked to the Cuban Revolution for their strategic inspiration combined with a heightened urban effort in their (first) “Plan for Rapid Victory.” Guevara’s *foco* approach led them astray in that it did not explain the success of the Cuban Revolution, nor did it provide a reasonable blueprint for carrying out a revolution in Venezuela.

The plan for rapid victory specified a rural component without clearly delineating what it was supposed to accomplish. A Georgetown Research Project report in 1964 argued, “... that the insurgents planned to use the guerrillas as a strategic diversion.”³²⁹ More likely, the insurgents merely were confused as to the best way to proceed and so combined their 1958 experience with a bastardization of *foco* theory since the failure of their earlier efforts proved the conditions for revolution did not yet exist. Indeed, the report mentioned an unnamed PCV member’s analysis that criticized the (first) Plan for Rapid Victory for not including an answer to the fundamental question, “[f]or what purpose do we have guerrilla fronts?”³³⁰ That same individual went on to recommend a strategy of protracted rural people’s war instead of the previous approach, a suggestion that at least hued far more closely to Guevara’s theory, albeit a seriously flawed theory on its own.

³²⁸ Ibid., ii, 167.

³²⁹ Ibid., ii.

³³⁰ Ibid.

The two areas in the mountains of the state of Falcón in northwest Venezuela and one hundred miles to the south in the El Charal region of the Venezuelan Andes saw an extended period of guerrilla efforts. The regions had both positive and negative characteristics. The positives included the fact that the areas were remote enough to usually require at least a jeep for travel, often traversable only by mule or on foot.³³¹ Another positive was the poor state of training and experience of Army troops in 1962. The first graduates of Army efforts on training for counterinsurgency did not appear until April 1962, the same year that artillery units fired their weapons for the first time in five years.³³² A negative factor was that both areas were small, making the task of locating and engaging the insurgents easier for government forces. A factor that had both positive and negative elements, especially early in the rural insurgency, was the difficult terrain and climate. Since most of the insurgents were students from the urban areas, both they and the army suffered from the harsh conditions.³³³ Bravo and Teodoro Petkoff, another guerrilla leader, had tried to help the students acclimate to the conditions by sending them ahead before starting operations, but the effort had failed.³³⁴ The first Plan for Rapid Victory had failed.

Friction between the Governments of the United States and Venezuela over the U.S. Oil Imports Program Changes in December 1962

The end of 1962 found almost the entire month of December dominated by an economic/political dispute primarily consisting of displeasure at the United States for not consulting Caracas before changing oil import restrictions. The changes would harm the

³³¹ Ibid., 193.

³³² Ibid., 219.

³³³ Ibid., 171; and Miller, *Prekarious Paths to Freedom*, 97.

³³⁴ Tarver et al., *Venezuelan Insurgency*, 75.

Venezuelan economy.³³⁵ The situation initially replicated the negative impact created by the passage of the Sugar Act of 1956 during the Cuban Revolution. The issue in both cases was that each Latin American government felt that the United States had broken promises related to the access of their dominant product to the American market on which their economies depended. The central role the two commodities played in the economies of their respective countries, combined with the close identification of the products with American markets, also made production and distribution areas prime targets for insurgent attacks. Even though both cases involved little immediate change in sugar or petroleum exports respectively, they would both grow less rapidly over time decreasing market share and profitability. Earlier, President Kennedy had invited President Betancourt to come to the United States to meet in February 1963. Part of Betancourt's reaction to the change in import policy was to place the trip in doubt. When Betancourt called Kennedy to complain about the situation, they agreed that Deputy Special Counsel to the President Meyer "Mike" Feldman would meet with the Venezuelan president to discuss the matter.³³⁶

Several Venezuelan objections included a lack of consultation and the continuation of the overland exemption only applying to Canada and Mexico, and the restriction of U.S.-Venezuelan oil market discussions to only bilateral matters. The Venezuelan government felt the United States had failed to keep a promise that it would not change the import program without prior consultation. Even though former Ambassador C. Allen Stewart would later state that Washington had made such a promise on multiple occasions, Mr. Feldman responded that there must have been a misunderstanding about the existence of a commitment for consultation before

³³⁵ C. W. Ruser, "Report of Mr. Myer Feldman on Discussions with President Betancourt on the United States Oil Import Program," December 29-30, 1962, JFK Library, President's Office Files, Subjects, Oil Imports, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-104-011.aspx> (accessed 1/4/18), 1.

³³⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

any action.³³⁷ He went on to claim that even had such an agreement been in effect; there would have been no need to consult because the Venezuelan position was already so well known. Such a response conflated “informing” with “consulting” as the latter implies at least the possibility of negotiation. The oil program had a provision to allow for an overland exemption to the overall import limitations that Canada and Mexico possessed in the name of North American security. Venezuela objected that the United States should employ the exemption in the name of hemispheric security and include Latin American suppliers. Feldman responded that the United States exemption as currently constituted had protected vital Venezuelan interests because of the exemption allowing Canada to be able to meet production targets without building a pipeline to eastern consumer markets supplanting significant importation of oil from Venezuela. Such a response ignored the Venezuelan claim that hemispheric security should be the priority and neglected to note that the voluntary limits the Canadians had agreed to were self-imposed and without any enforcement mechanism.³³⁸ The official delegation report after talks in Ottawa on December 13-14, 1962, concluded that Canadian noncompliance with such limits was possible and could reach overages that would “... raise a serious question with regard to U.S. policy.”³³⁹

Other Venezuelan objections included the practice of trading quotas, the manner of allocations to U.S. inland refiners, and how the program treated the import of residual fuel oil. Venezuelan studies of quota trading estimated that the practice led to a yearly loss by Venezuela in oil revenues of \$35 million to \$45 million. The program allocated quotas to inland refiners that disadvantaged Venezuelan imports, particularly as the changed program had cut back on

³³⁷ Stewart, “Stewart Oral History,” 3-4.

³³⁸ Ruser, “Report of Mr. Myer Feldman,” 2.

³³⁹ C. W. Ruser, “Report of the United States Delegation to the United States-Canadian Discussions of Petroleum Policies and Programs,” December-14, 1962, JFK Library, President’s Office Files, Subjects, Oil Imports, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-104-011.aspx> (accessed 1/4/18), 5-6.

allocations to so-called “historical” importers, many of whom had production interests in Venezuela. The trading of such quotas often forced Venezuelan oil prices lower. Feldman responded by claiming that the United States had adequately safeguarded Venezuelan interests by requiring that all trading of quotas be on a barrel-per-barrel basis. Furthermore, he said that acquiescing to Venezuelan requests to prevent the exchange of domestic oil for imported oil would limit inland refineries to use only Venezuelan oil possibly resulting in downward pressure on prices due to increased transportation costs.

Finally, the program treated crude and residual oil as equivalent, something that the Venezuelans vigorously denied. The ratio of domestic to residual oil had decreased from 51.5/48.5 in 1962 to 49.2/50.8 for the same period in 1963 under the Oil Import Program changes. The Venezuelan position was that relaxations on limitations on the import of residual oil could not make up for the quotas on crude oil imports designed to protect American domestic producers.³⁴⁰ In Feldman’s preparation for the meeting, the briefing document acknowledged that American producers viewed residual oil as an undesirable refining byproduct leading to prices well below that of crude. The document continued to contend that a liberal import policy on residual oil represented a major offset to controls on crude oil imports.³⁴¹

Feldman concluded the meetings on December 29 and 30 satisfied Betancourt. The reasoning followed from four assessments. Betancourt seemed impressed that he was the only head of state given notice of the proclamation about the changes. He also apparently accepted the American claims that the United States had duly considered the effect on Venezuela before making the changes. Feldman believed that his arguments in favor of the overland exemption

³⁴⁰ Ruser, “Report of Mr. Myer Feldman,” 5, Attachment 1, 1-2.

³⁴¹ Ibid., Attachment 2, 6.

convinced Betancourt and his officials that it should continue. Finally, the Venezuelans approved of American efforts to get Canada to limit exports voluntarily.³⁴²

While Feldman reported mostly positive results from the meetings that certainly met his main charge to placate the Venezuelans, the entire matter revealed how divorced from the avowed goal of countering the global Communist threat such policies were. The Venezuelans were correct in the assertion that such policies should have been more concerned with hemispheric security than simply North American policy. Indeed, with geopolitically significant resources like petroleum, security concerns of the United States arguably should have focused on global security. Instead, the program sought to balance domestic and foreign policy concerns. The administration made the changes in 1962 because it deemed the previous program structure a failure.³⁴³ Given that the general effect of the changes was to increase the market share of domestic producers by granting them privileged access to growing demand, the balance was weighted towards domestic concerns, just as it had been when Congress passed the Sugar Act of 1956 similarly privileging domestic sugar producers. The Kennedy Administration implemented the Oil Import Program changes despite the existence of a Communist insurgency in Venezuela and the creation of OPEC, of which Venezuela was a founding member in 1960. Petroleum policy would remain a point of contention between the two allies for the entire period of the insurgency.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Ibid, 6.

³⁴³ Ibid., Attachment 2, 1.

³⁴⁴ For example, see Thomas C. Mann, "Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Mann) to the President's Special Assistant (Califano)" January 6, 1966, *FRUS* 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 532, pp 1105-1108, Maurice M. Bernbaum, "Telegram From the Embassy in Venezuela to the Department of State," January 12, 1966, 2131Z, *FRUS* 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 533, pp. 1108-1111, and "Memorandum of Conversation: Subject – Petroleum Problems," April 11, 1967, 6 p.m., *FRUS* 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 540, pp. 1120-1126.

The situation was another piece of evidence indicating that the central principle of counterinsurgency theory that calls for unified political-military leadership is a practical impossibility for the United States as a third-party nation assisting in a counterinsurgency. There is no such unified leadership given the military being under civilian control and the addition of the contest between domestic and foreign policy concerns. The needs, or just desires, of the domestic petroleum industry, led to a U.S. oil import policy that played into the insurgent narrative that the United States unfairly reaped too much benefit from Venezuela's primary source of economic well-being, oil revenues, at the expense of the Venezuelan people. The policy increased the difficulty of the counterinsurgency.³⁴⁵

Despite a suggestion in the report that the United States begin taking OPEC into account, less than a decade later, OPEC would exact a devastating effect on the global economy, and hence American foreign policy when the Arab Oil Embargo quadrupled oil prices in 1973-74.³⁴⁶ The embargo was a reaction to an American foreign policy decision, the vast military aid package given Israel during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. While the counterinsurgency survived the blow to oil revenues from the changed Oil Import Program, the predominantly domestic considerations that prompted the changes showed the lack of a unified political-military approach to American support for the counterinsurgency. The lack of weight given most of the Venezuelan objections, such as their position that liberal residual oil imports could not replace lost crude imports and dismissing their concerns over the overland import exemptions as "really" in their interest, argues against the "special relationship" Miller envisioned.

³⁴⁵ Stewart, "Stewart Oral History," 3.

³⁴⁶ Ruser, "Report of Mr. Myer Feldman," Attachment 4, 4.

Conclusion

The attempts to overthrow the government from the Right made through the period from 1960 through September 1962 tried to return to a conservative nondemocratic government that would provide a reliable bulwark against the threat from the Left. The efforts made by conservative elements in the military along with Leftist elements who disagreed with the political goals of the dissidents, fell short because sufficient supporters of the democratic government in the military put the various uprisings down. Many on the Left, especially younger members, grew impatient with the democratic government's limited scope and slow pace of change and began working to overthrow the government themselves. They tried a combination of methods successfully used to oust Jiménez in 1958 blended with what they took to be the lessons of the Cuban Revolution and the *foco* theory it spawned. By September 1962, it was clear that the first iteration of their plans had failed.

CHAPTER VII

THE SUCCESS OF THE VENEZUELA-UNITED STATES COUNTERINSURGENCY – THE FINAL YEARS 1963-1968

The multi-pronged approach of trying to replicate both the Cuban Revolution and the successful ouster of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship had failed by September 1962. Participants on both sides of the conflict in Venezuela had made much of the threat of Castro's plans to export his revolution to Venezuela. However, the insurgents had initially followed a strategy more closely aligned with that used against Pérez with the addition of significant urban violence. They lacked Castro's compelling narrative of trying to return Cuba to constitutional government as well as his victorious rural guerrilla forces (at least in the latter stages from 1956 on). *Foco* theory said that the rural groups would create the conditions for revolution; there was no reason to think that what had happened before September 1962 would have done so. The insurgents decided that they would need a change of strategy.

The Second Plan for Rapid Victory: The Left Tries to Sabotage the Presidential Elections from September 1962 to December 1963 (Urban Component)

The insurgents felt their first blueprint for victory had failed when the targeted date for the fifth stage, revolutionary war, had arrived without making significant progress towards realizing it. The new Second Plan for Rapid Victory encompassed two goals, either of which the insurgent leaders believed would be sufficient to allow them ultimately to take control. The first was to undermine the ability of the government to govern to the point that there would be a military or civilian revolt. The second was to disrupt the presidential elections.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, iii.

Another significant step the insurgents took during the period was to form the twin organizations the *Frente de Liberación Nacional* (FLN – National Liberation Front) and the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (FALN – Armed Forces of National Liberation). The FLN was to be the political arm, and the FALN was to be the military arm. The FLN provided a common front for the PCV and MIR to carry out the insurgency with Cuban support. The FALN provided hitherto missing coordination of the military efforts of the PVC and the MIR as well as coordinating the rural and urban activities. While various sources put the organization of these groups at various points after the end of 1963, Miller correctly places the date in mid-1962.³⁴⁸

The core of the second plan was “Operation Caracas” with a subsidiary component called “Operation Moto.” “Operation Caracas” called for using heavy weapons that Cuba would supply, including bazookas, mortars, and recoilless rifles in a campaign against central Caracas. Operation Moto called for arson and attacks on oil industry infrastructure. It also envisioned attacks on other strategic targets like military and police installations, communications facilities, and security personnel.³⁴⁹

The insurgents began in late summer 1962, making use of their new military wing by carrying out various violent missions that eventually reached over one thousand separate acts ranging from robbery to sniping by the beginning of fall 1963.³⁵⁰ The insurgents added two subsidiary goals for the first part of 1963. The first was to mark the January 23 anniversary of

³⁴⁸ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 94, and John A. McCone, “Statement by the Honorable John A. McCone Director of Central Intelligence to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Tuesday, 19 February 1963,” Committee on Foreign Relations, 88th Cong, 1st sess., (February 19, 1963), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp65b00383r000400070001-2> (accessed 2/23/2108), 2.

³⁴⁹ Office of Current Intelligence, “Intelligence Memorandum: The Venezuelan Communist Split and Present Insurgency,” June 6, 1967, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 3, 11/66-12/68, Folder 3, Document 63:5.

³⁵⁰ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, iii.

the fall of the Pérez dictatorship. The second was to disrupt Rómulo Betancourt's visit to the United States.

The insurgents carried out a variety of attacks in the days leading up to the anniversary of the fall of the Pérez dictatorship. The embassy reported on January 13 about an attack the previous morning where individuals set fire to tire stocks at the U.S. Rubber Company in Maracaibo.³⁵¹ The next notable attack involved the theft of five French impressionist paintings on loan from the Louvre and the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art on display at the Museum of Fine Arts on January 16. The theft represented a new approach where various attacks were made mainly for publicity.³⁵² The night before the anniversary, January 22, saw demonstrations that grew violent with at least two police officers and four civilians suffering injuries during sporadic gunfire and rock-throwing.³⁵³

The violent demonstrations continued the morning of the anniversary, January 23, but the insurgents added attacks of their own. The insurgents assaulted three gas stations attempting to set them on fire, although with minimal results. The stations belonged to American-owned companies, Creole Petroleum Corporation and Shell Oil Company. The intensity of the demonstrations increased when the political police seized two issues of the left-wing newspaper, *El Clarin*.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹Stewart, "Telegram 737, Caracas to Secretary of State," January 13, 1963, 5 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63-2/63.

³⁵² Stewart, "Telegram 770, Caracas to Secretary of State," January 23, 1963, 6 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192-Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63-2/63 and "Museum Raided by Terrorists," The Bridgeport Telegram, January 17, 1963, Newspapers.com, <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/32060838/> (accessed 12/26/17).

³⁵³ Stewart, "Telegram 770."

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

February 1963 saw intense activity from almost all the participants. The impetus for the activity centered on Betancourt's upcoming trip to meet with John F. Kennedy (JFK).³⁵⁵ The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Venezuela presented its concerns to Ambassador C. Allen Stewart after its headquarters suffered a raid.³⁵⁶ The insurgents developed plans for a combination of attacks to discredit Betancourt's government before and during the trip with traditional strikes and a continuation of "publicity" incidents.³⁵⁷ The governments of Venezuela and the United States generated status reports on the insurgency in preparation for the meeting.³⁵⁸

The Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce held a meeting after its headquarters was attacked and decided to send three officials to meet with Ambassador Stewart on February 12. They had two additional concerns other than the latest principal act of violence. The first was that word had reached them that captured insurgent documents outlined a campaign against American business interests. The second was the general state of continuous lesser assaults and threats. Stewart reacted to the meeting by setting up an appointment with Interior Minister Carlos Andres Perez to discuss special protection for American businesses to reinforce the ambassador's previous requests.³⁵⁹ The requests for special protection for American

³⁵⁵ Hill, "Telegram 863, Caracas to Secretary of State," February 14, 1963, 9 A.M., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63-2/63, 1.

³⁵⁶ Stewart, "Telegram 853, Caracas to Secretary of State," February 12, 1963, 5 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63-2/63.

³⁵⁷ "CIA Information Report Telegram: Possible Attempt to Assassinate President Betancourt," Information Obtained February 13, 1963, Distributed February 18, 1963, and "CIA Information Report Telegram: Terrorist Activities Planned by the Communist Party of Venezuela," Information Obtained February 15, 1963, Distributed February 19, 1963, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63-2/63.

³⁵⁸ "Under the direction of Vice Director DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) Major General John M. Reynolds USAF for General C. V. Clifton, Military Aide to the President,: Armed Forces and Current Siutation," JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General Armed Forces and Current Situation 1/63-2/63, 4a, and Richard B. Howard, "Airgram A-581, Amembassy Caracas to Department of State," February 14, 1963, "Ministry of Interior Communiqué on Terrorism in Venezuela," JFK Library, NSF, Box 192- Country Venezuela, Folder General 1/63 – 2/63.

³⁵⁹ Stewart, "Telegram 853."

businesses replicated similar requests during the Cuban Revolution. The requests provided evidence for the insurgent narrative that the Venezuelan government served more for the welfare of Americans than the Venezuelan people. Stewart also echoed the previous American ambassadors in Cuba in seeking expedited handling of police and military equipment orders, orders constrained by reduced funding due to the American Oil Import program.³⁶⁰

The variety of terrorist plans outlined in two CIA reports at the time ran from a plot to assassinate President Betancourt during his trip out of the country to hijacking a freighter and continued attacks on American-owned businesses and other high-profile targets. The trip to the United States included stops in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. The report about an assassination attempt referred to alleged PCV participation in a Fidel Castro plot to sabotage Betancourt's plane. The report carried a notification that the information was unevaluated.³⁶¹ In the event, the trip transpired without a suspicious mechanical incident. The target list in the second report included gas and oil pipelines, radio stations and transmission towers, an American tourist ship, and a hotel. The target list also included a plan to cause power outages designed to coincide with Betancourt's arrival at the airport and to Caracas on his return. The report also noted that past FALN plans had been more ambitious than their capabilities to carry them out. However, more recent attacks suggested that they were developing the competency for more extensive operations.³⁶² The second report also carried a mark indicating the information was unevaluated, but, unlike the first, it was a natural fit for other information processed at the time rather than the outlier a Castro assassination plan was.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ CIA, "Possible Attempt."

³⁶² CIA, "Terrorist Activities Planned."

The Venezuelan Ministry of the Interior released a lengthy communiqué about the status of terrorism in the country on February 11, 1963 (translated and sent on to Washington on February 14). The document mentioned attacks such as the October 1962 sabotage of the Lake Maracaibo electric sub-stations and the February 8 destruction of the Sears' warehouse in Caracas. The document's most important section covered the involvement in the insurgency of members of Congress. Their illegal activities ran from leading an FALN command post to the publication of illegal articles in the *Tribuna Popular* and *the Pueblo de Revolución*. Efforts to punish such officials failed when Congress refused to remove immunity for them. The communiqué also listed numerous court actions in progress against the insurgency. The most notable action was the government petition before the Supreme Court to outlaw the Communist and MIR parties.³⁶³

The American document was a lengthy secret Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) intelligence assessment. General C. V. Clifton, Military Aide to the President, requested the report. Vice Director DIA Major General John M. Reynolds USAF managed its production. It included a summary in response to some of the President's questions on Venezuela in preparation for President Betancourt's impending visit. The section on terrorism mentioned insurgents using hit-and-run attacks on American targets. It also mentioned publicity attacks such as the one where a Venezuelan freighter, the *Anzoátegui*, was hijacked on February 14.³⁶⁴ The document highlighted the destruction of the Sears warehouse that was the most damage inflicted since the oil field sabotage the previous October. It stated that the latest set of attacks had heightened concerns. However, the U.S. Army Attaché in Venezuela reported that there was

³⁶³ Howard, "Airgram-581."

³⁶⁴ "Hijackers Ashore," *Time* 81, no. 9 (March 1963): 45, Master FILE Complete, EBSCOhost.

no chance the insurgents would gain the upper hand.³⁶⁵ Similar glowing assessments were the rule almost the entire time of the Cuban Revolution.

The case of the Anzoátegui had negligible impact on the DIA intelligence assessment, but it led to a flurry of post-crisis analysis at the White House, State, and Defense Departments.³⁶⁶ On February 14, a group of students that had stowed away on the freighter under the leadership of its Second Mate Wismar Medina Rojas took over control. Ultimately, they took the ship to Brazil, where the government interned it and its crew for a return to Venezuela and granted the hijackers asylum. The incident garnered considerable international publicity. However, the primary relevance to this study is what it revealed about the lack of coordination at State and Defense for the political/military requirements of good counterinsurgent practices.

The review of the American handling of the incident involved the President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of the C.I.A., and various subordinates. The President had asked for a summary of actions taken by the various American governmental participants. On February 20, he sent a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Director of the C.I.A. John McCone, wherein he identified the changes he wanted. They fell mainly into two categories. First, he wanted personnel to make recommendations as soon as possible rather than waiting for questions from superiors. Second, and most important, he wanted watch and other duty personnel to be much quicker to wake up, if necessary, and inform senior personnel of situations that required their authority. He wanted information to move up the chain of command much faster so that officers/officials could judge its political implications, a senior command function. His

³⁶⁵ DIA, “Armed Forces and Current Situation,” 4a.

³⁶⁶ CIA, “Analysis of Reports on the Venezuelan Ship Incident | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov),” <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80b01676r002400020002-4>.

immediate primary concern was that the situation could have led to the FALN successfully taking a Venezuelan ship and steaming it to Cuba. Such a result would be unacceptable, particularly in light of the United States having Cuba under close surveillance. The publicity from such a success would hurt Venezuelan and American counterinsurgent efforts, but the damage would also affect the larger Cold War goals of the United States.³⁶⁷

General Edward Lansdale, a leading American counterinsurgency expert, visited Venezuela in March 1963 and wrote a detailed report on the counterinsurgency.³⁶⁸ He had been the adviser to the Secretary of National Defense and then President Ramon Magsaysay of the Philippines. He had served in that role during the successful counterinsurgency against the Hukbalahaps that ended in 1955.³⁶⁹ Gordon Chase summarized the report in a memorandum for McGeorge Bundy on April 30. The summary consisted primarily of assessments of the Venezuelan Counterinsurgency and the American effort and contained suggestions to improve the counterinsurgency. It also included an assessment of the insurgency.³⁷⁰

Lansdale felt the American military participation in-country was in excellent hands in the form of the Special Forces Mobile Training Team (MTT). He did suggest Washington forego the excessive reporting requirements in-place since the Country Team was such a good one. He also suggested that a Special Air Warfare MTT go to Venezuela with the temporary assignment of other MTTs such as a Public Safety MTT. Lansdale passed along Ambassador Stewart's

³⁶⁷ John F. Kennedy, "Memorandum for Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director, CIA: *Anzoategui* Affair," February 20, 1963, General CIA Files, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80b01676r002400020002-4> (accessed January 26, 2018).

³⁶⁸ See Max Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (2018) for a detailed biography.

³⁶⁹ Lawrence M. Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines - 1946-1955* (2010).

³⁷⁰ Gordon Chase, "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy, Venezuela [sic] – General Lansdale's Report," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–63, American Republics; Cuba 1961–1962; Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, 10/11/12: Microfiche Supplement, Document 230, Office of the Historian, April 30, 1963, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10-12mSupp/d230> (accessed 2/1/18).

request for the expedition of the shipping of military equipment. Lansdale included a suggestion that twenty to one hundred tough American students enroll at Central University in Caracas to help counteract intense Communist activity there.³⁷¹

Lansdale was far less sanguine about the effectiveness of almost the entire Venezuelan counterinsurgency. He found significant fault with the police, the armed forces, and the overall organization of the counterinsurgency. The police were inadequate as insurgents often robbed or disarmed them. The organization of the several types of police was insufficient as there was no central command. There were municipal, traffic, technical, security, and political police all reporting to different officials. The armed forces also varied tremendously in political reliability, capability, and training. The Army consisted of mostly two-year, often illiterate, draftees with no anti-guerrilla training, yet they were doing the brunt of the fighting against the insurgents. The National Guard, a volunteer force, was more capable and had anti-guerrilla training; however, since its assignments were usually only static defense, it contributed little to the counterinsurgency. The politically unreliable Marines supported the small Navy. The smallest branch, the Air Force, was obsolete and in disrepair. The titular head of the counterinsurgency, the Unified Command, consisted of the Chief of Police, the Commanders of the Armed Forces, and the Ministers of Justice, Interior, Defense, and Agriculture. While nominally a standing group, it usually only met during emergencies. Thus, Lansdale concluded that there was no one person under Betancourt tasked with defeating the insurgency.³⁷²

Lansdale broke down the insurgent threat as appearing in two geographic areas that also varied by type. Caracas presented the focus of the political threat. The oil fields of West Venezuela presented the focus of the economic threat. He saw the hills surrounding Caracas as

³⁷¹ Ibid., 2-4.

³⁷² Ibid., 2-3.

providing the poor rabble-rousers of the movement. Lansdale saw the student population as the more dangerous insurgent participants. The college students were a particular problem because they had immunity behind the walls of Central University. Another problem group with immunity was the Communist members of the Congress who tried to block counterinsurgency measures, among other things. The primary economic threat was to the country's prime asset, oil. The vulnerability was such that a single successful attack on the central power plant at La Salina, an attack well within FALN's capability, would cost the Venezuelan government two million dollars a day in lost oil revenues.³⁷³ Lansdale concluded that the political and economic threats were significant.

The most prescient item in Lansdale's report was the overall description of the degree of threat from the insurgency, and Chase featured it prominently in his summary. Lansdale believed that, while the insurgents were increasing in their capabilities and the threat was real, the insurgency remained only a set of sparks rather than a fire. He based that assessment on the relatively small numbers he attributed to the militant arm of the PCV, the FALN. Lansdale estimated they had approximately three to five hundred armed insurgents with half of those in Caracas. He did not believe such a group, under the circumstances, was capable of winning the political struggle. Based on the makeup of the one hundred seventy-seven captured members, around twenty-five percent were students, twenty-four percent farmers, eight percent professional men, and the rest unknown. Numbers increased when schools were on vacation. Lansdale also correctly predicted that 1963 would be a critical year. He predicted the year would be critical because he thought the upcoming elections could prove vital. The elections would be

³⁷³ Ibid., 1-2.

particularly important in light of the continued Communist efforts in the Venezuelan Congress to block funding for the counterinsurgency.³⁷⁴

The rest of the year, 1963, would mark changes in the leadership of both the United States and Venezuela, the former because of an assassination, the latter because of an election. The insurgent groups focused on disrupting the elections after failing on two counts in February.³⁷⁵ They had not kept Betancourt from attending the Kennedy meeting, something the United States had come nearer to doing with the Oil Import Program changes. They had also not obtained any significant success in embarrassing or harming Betancourt while he was out of the country.

Three attacks in the spring of 1963 combined significant damage with even more extensive publicity. The first was on the night of April 4 when a terrorist group attacked a Ministry of the Interior parking garage. They disarmed the guards, a la Lansdale's report, and set fire to the building damaging or destroying some fifteen police and ministry vehicles. Just after midnight the next day, six insurgents blew up the transmitter for Radio Tropical. The attack destroyed it and kept the prominent radio station off the air for an indeterminate period.³⁷⁶ The FALN insurgents returned to an American target, the new emphasis of attack, on June 5 at 6:10 P.M., when eight men attacked the U.S. Army Mission Building.³⁷⁷ They disarmed the Venezuelan guards, took the uniforms of the Venezuelans and all the American personnel other than the mission Deputy Chief Colonel James Chenault. Next, the insurgents escorted them to a

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁷⁵ Office of Current Intelligence, CIA, "Current Intelligence Memorandum: Terrorism in Venezuela," September 16, 1963, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63, 1.

³⁷⁶ Stewart, "Telegram 1072, Caracas to Secretary of State," April 5, 1963, 5 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 3/63-5/63.

³⁷⁷ CIA, "Terrorism In Venezuela | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov)," CIA, September 16, 1963, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00429a001200030017-6>, 3, (accessed 2/9/18).

nearby gully and set fire to the building.³⁷⁸ A CIA secret telegram had predicted the attack on May 31, based on information obtained the day before. However, the date specified for the attack had been June 1.³⁷⁹ While no one was hurt, the damage to the building ran into the \$45,000 to \$75,000 range. The humiliation inflicted on the victims in losing their clothing received extensive publicity the next day.³⁸⁰

Three terrorists tried to assassinate Rómulo Betancourt on June 11, 1963. Thomas L. Hughes, Director of Intelligence and Research for the State Department, forwarded an intelligence note to Secretary of State Dean Rusk on June 14. The note detailed the reaction of the Betancourt government to the attempted assassination. The government initiated a crackdown on the members of the Partido Comunista de Venezuela (PCV) and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). Hughes related that the drastic measures the government implemented might regain the initiative and offset growing unease among the military and general population that the terrorists were gaining the upper hand.³⁸¹

Attacks on American personnel continued in June. Minister of Defense, General Antonio Briceño Linares, on June 20 informed the embassy of intelligence indicating FALN planned to kidnap high-ranking embassy personnel. General Ramón Florencio Gómez of the Defense Ministry carried the same message to the chief of the U.S. Army Mission.³⁸² The warning had come too late to stop a terrorist intrusion by four FALN members at the home of the embassy's

³⁷⁸ Stewart, "Telegram 1324-26, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 5, 1963, 7, 9, 11:11 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁷⁹ CIA, CIA Information Report, *Planned Attack on the U.S. Military Mission in Venezuela by the Armed Forces of National Liberation*, May 31, 1963, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 3/63-5/63.

³⁸⁰ Stewart, "Telegram 1329, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 6, 1963, 5 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁸¹ Thomas L. Hughes, "The Secretary from INR – Thomas L. Hughes, Intelligence Note: Venezuela: Government Acts Forcefully to Quell Terrorists," June 14, 1963, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁸² Stewart, "Telegram 1395, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 20, 1963, 5:13 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

political counselor, E.T. Long, on June 15. The attack had missed its primary target but placed his wife and a maid in harm's way. The insurgents left after painting slogans inside the house.³⁸³ A group made an amateurish attempt to replicate the feat on June 27 at the home of embassy Commercial Attaché Eldon Cassoday. The attempt failed when the maid, the only person at home at the time, thwarted their effort by a quick-thinking subterfuge and called the embassy for help.³⁸⁴

The insurgents returned to attacking Venezuelan targets over the last few days of June while a police raid netted significant results. The police carried out a raid on June 28 of an insurgent headquarters in the Caracas suburb of Los Chorros. PCV Senator Pompeyo Marquez claimed the house was his residence and should have been immune from any search. He made that claim despite the police confiscating over a ton of incriminating material there, ranging from a clandestine radio transmitter to secret plans. The next day insurgents attempted to sabotage the Mene Grande Pipeline. They mimicked previous attacks at the location using six sticks of dynamite, leading to a very short outage. A companion attempt to bomb a downtown building of the Ministry of Development failed utterly.³⁸⁵

Twin prison uprisings, one with outside support from machinegun-wielding snipers, raised concerns on July 2 that there might be a more general uprising. Prison authorities defused the political prisoners rioting at Maracaibo Prison without serious violence. The riot at the juvenile detention facility on the northeast boundary of Caracas escalated from agitation in the morning to violence by noon. Sixteen prisoners and one policeman suffered injuries by the time

³⁸³ Stewart, "Telegram 1395, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 20, 1963, 5:13 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a-Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁸⁴ Stewart, "Telegram 1425, Caracas to Secretary of State," June 27, 1963, 4 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a-Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁸⁵ Stewart, "Telegram 1435, Caracas to Secretary of State," July 1, 1963, 7 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a-Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

officers restored control. Five gunmen armed with machine guns robbed the University Director and other employees at Santa Maria University in Caracas on the same day.³⁸⁶

Betancourt improved the Venezuelan police's counterinsurgency capabilities in August by creating a unified command for Caracas. However, it was the events in September that proved the turning point in the counterinsurgency. The insurgents had concentrated on American targets in the preceding summer. In September, they both turned their attention to Venezuelan targets and increased the terrorist footprint of their attacks. The insurgents were trying to employ mass terror to create the conditions Guevara had identified as a goal for urban insurgents. The idea was that the insurgents should create conditions such that the local citizenry would welcome a change in government to relieve the fear.³⁸⁷ The insurgents carried out several operations designed to disrupt a meeting of the *Acción Democrática* Party (AD – Democratic Action) to celebrate its twenty-second anniversary on September 13. The attacks included hit-and-run shootings and bomb detonations in different parts of the city. The meeting did occur, but with an attendance figure around half the expected number.³⁸⁸ The widespread violence in Caracas directed at ordinary citizens signaled a new phase of the insurgency. This new phase had a chilling effect on the feelings of security of the general populace.

The insurgents continued the escalation on September 21 when they attempted to detonate a powerful explosive device in a building in Casa Americana, Maracaibo. The building housed the United States Information Service Information Center and offices. The bomb had enough dynamite to have destroyed the building if technicians had not disarmed it. The

³⁸⁶ Stewart, "Telegram 12, Caracas to Secretary of State," July 3, 1963, 12 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a-Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁸⁷ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 29; and Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 135.

³⁸⁸ Office of Current Intelligence, "Terrorism in Venezuela," 2.

insurgents successfully detonated a different charge ripping a hole in a Texaco pipeline in eastern Venezuela near Barcelona on September 22. The oil ignited, increasing the damage. Four extremists ran from a pursuing mob that managed, with police assistance, to capture two.³⁸⁹

The earlier September attacks served as a prelude to a terrorist attack consisting of hijacking a train and executing five National Guardsmen on September 29. They also robbed some of the approximately four hundred vacationing civilians on their way to a favorite park.³⁹⁰ The insurgents shot the troops in the middle of a tunnel and threw the wounded men off the train to die.³⁹¹ The horrific murders and other violence that women and children witnessed fueled the general public's outrage and desire for government reaction.³⁹²

The government responded forcefully on September 30. Minister of the Interior Manuel Mantilla announced at a press conference that night that PCV and MIR leaders would now be subject to arrest. The government was ready to make arrests for terrorist activities going back to November 1960, whether or not the perpetrators previously had congressional immunity. The legal device used to bypass immunity was to declare the train hijacking and murders as an "act of war." The American Embassy concluded the strong actions were designed in part to avert an independent reaction from the military, possibly even a *golpe*.³⁹³

The government crackdown included the arrests of many PCV and MIR leaders engendering a violent response from FALN. Insurgents killed five civilians and two National Guardsmen on the La Guaira-Caracas highway and carried out drive-by shootings targeting the police, soldiers,

³⁸⁹ "Telegram 340, AmEmbassy Caracas to SecState WashDC," September 23, 1963, 12 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

³⁹⁰ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 99.

³⁹¹ Tarver et al., *Venezuelan Insurgency*, 92.

³⁹² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 99.

³⁹³ Stewart, "Telegram 384, Caracas to Secretary of State," September 30, 1963, 11 p.m., JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

and AD members. The total dead reached twenty by October 7.³⁹⁴ November would prove to be the pivotal month as far as the elections occurring as scheduled.

The insurgents called a revolutionary strike on November 19 that they were determined to enforce. They telephoned business owners the day before warning them to honor the strike. The plan included several previously used tactics. The insurgents threw tacks and nails onto the streets of Caracas to severely inhibit automobile travel. They set fire to barricades and vehicles and placed snipers on high buildings, especially ones near the fires where they could shoot first responders. Many shops opened the morning of the strike, so the insurgents began trying to harass the shop personnel of the open shops to get them to close. They attacked some vehicles with homemade pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails. Sniping began during the night and increased during the day, with twelve people killed and over seventy more wounded. Almost all Western Caracas businesses completely shut down by the middle of the day. The cessation of business did not, however, encourage any general support for the insurgents. Instead, the populace waited for the government to restore order.³⁹⁵

The approximately five thousand police and military on duty in Caracas had not been able to prevent the slowdown of business. However, they were able to roll back the insurgent gains by later that night and the next day. They arrested more than seven hundred fifty suspects. The second day of the strike found business almost returned to normal, but an additional five people died, and another fifteen suffered wounds. The threat was over the next day, November 21, as all efforts at a strike receded.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 100.

³⁹⁵ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 137-138.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

There were several terrorist attacks over four days beginning on November 25. Terrorists sabotaged five oil lines and one gas line of the Mene Grande and Mobil companies on the first day.³⁹⁷ The next day a group robbed and set fire to the Employees Firestone warehouse in Barquisimeto, Lara State. Another group of six terrorists robbed offices of the Electoral Board in Villa de Cura, Aragua State, and set the records on fire.³⁹⁸ On November 27, four terrorists kidnapped Deputy Chief of the U.S. Army Mission Col. James Chenault at 0700 from his official car. He had been on the way to his office at the Venezuelan Army Headquarters.³⁹⁹ The insurgents released him unharmed after eight days in captivity.⁴⁰⁰ Government forces made little progress in developing much information about the perpetrators and capturing them. Five male and one female FALN insurgents hijacked the Venezuelan Avensa Airlines Flight No. 504 on the route from Ciudad Bolivar to Caracas on November 28. They had the pilots fly to Trinidad, where the insurgents were taken into custody and then extradited.⁴⁰¹

The FALN promised a wave of violence for election day, December 1, designed to keep voters away from the polls. They failed to muster much more than some sniping and scattered bomb explosions that had little effect on voter turnout.⁴⁰² The AD candidate, Raúl Leoni, won the elections allowing for the first peaceful turnover from one elected leader to another in Venezuelan history.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov. 27, 1963, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 2, Document 95.

³⁹⁸ C. Allen Stewart, "Telegram, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov. 27, 1963, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 2, Document 92.

³⁹⁹ Department of the Army Staff Communications Office, "Message, US Amb Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov. 27, 1961, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 2, Document 89.

⁴⁰⁰ "Telegram, Caracas to Secretary of State," Nov. 27, 1961, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 1, Document 52.

⁴⁰¹ Robert G. Miner "Telegram, AMEMBASSY PortofSpain to AMEMBASSY Caracas info RUESRS/Sec State," Nov. 28, 1963, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 2, Document 84 and Office of Civil Aviation Security, "Aircraft Hijackings and Other Criminal Acts."

⁴⁰² Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 138.

⁴⁰³ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 102.

Another crucial development in the insurgency during November had consequences going into, and long after, the elections. On November 1, a National Guard patrol in Falcón state (possibly on a tip from a farmer) discovered a three-ton arms shipment on the Paraguaná Peninsula.⁴⁰⁴ The initial investigation showed that Cuba was the proximate source of the weapons and ammunition. The weapons would have represented a significant upgrade for the insurgents as the twenty 3.5 in. bazookas, five 60mm mortars, and nine 57 mm recoilless rifles would provide them with heavy weapons. The eighty-one automatic Belgian rifles (that would today loosely fit into the classification of assault weapons) provided significantly more firepower and effective range than the typical weapons the insurgents carried. The usual source of the submachine guns, pistols, revolvers, and the few rifles the insurgents employed were the proceeds of theft or illegal purchase from Venezuelan troop or police supplies.⁴⁰⁵ The heavy weapons were the long-awaited means to carry out the centerpiece of “Operation Caracas,” the main assault on central Caracas. The discovery and confiscation of the arms shipment had nullified the heart of the operation without the heavy weapons firing a shot.⁴⁰⁶

The determination that Cuba was the source of the weapons set off a flurry of diplomatic activity that clarified the positions of the various participant nations. Venezuela reacted the most vigorously, calling for the overthrow of Castro as Betancourt declared there could be no “... peace in the hemisphere as long as Fidel Castro exists in Cuba...”⁴⁰⁷ He called on both the United States directly and the OAS to take decisive action against Cuba. The United States

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 101 and Office of Current Intelligence, “The Venezuelan Communist Split,” 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 111-112.

⁴⁰⁶ Office of Current Intelligence, “The Venezuelan Communist Split,” 5.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Eder, “Venezuela Seeks Drive on Castro: Betancourt Urges Action by Hemisphere to Erase Communist Foothold,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 1963.

counseled patience while reiterating its determination to prevent the spread of the Cuban Revolution.⁴⁰⁸

This incident, along with most of the rest of the history of U.S. policy in Latin America during the Cold War, is part of the convincing case that Miller has overestimated the importance of the U.S.-Venezuela partnership. Rather than the partnership being the center of U.S. Latin American efforts in the 1960s, the center was the American preoccupation with halting the spread of Communism there along with any other threat to its political-economic hegemony in the region. Castro denied the arms came from Cuba insisting instead they were supplied by the C.I.A.⁴⁰⁹ Eventually, the OAS voted to sever trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba on a tally of fifteen to four with Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay dissenting. While the measure stopped short of approving military action without further consultation, an earlier goal of the United States and Venezuela, the two countries viewed the diplomatic effort a success.⁴¹⁰

The Second Plan for Rapid Victory: The Left Tries to Sabotage the Presidential Elections September 1962 to December 1963 (Rural Component)

The rural component of the second plan deemphasized guerrilla action as it focused on urban areas. In light of this, there was no effort by leadership to establish any new guerrilla fronts. Continuing operations were to take place in the remaining two fronts as opportunities arose.⁴¹¹ Most engagements were small during this period and had one of two origins. Chance encounters occurred out in the countryside when insurgents and government forces stumbled onto each other in minor flare-ups. Other encounters occurred, beginning in July 1963, when insurgents temporarily occupied remote villages and held them until government forces arrived.

⁴⁰⁸ Miller, *Precairous Paths to Freedom*, 101.

⁴⁰⁹ "Castro says Cuba Ready for War: Fidel Rattles Saber," *Bristol Daily Courier*, December 7, 1963.

⁴¹⁰ Miller, *Precairous Paths to Freedom*, 121.

⁴¹¹ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, iii.

Casualties were low, with few deaths and the number of wounded limited to the dozens.⁴¹² The demanding terrain and climatic conditions hampered the Army's efforts throughout the period.⁴¹³

The government initiated a much more substantial encounter in January 1963. Twelve insurgents, believed at the time possibly to be under the leadership of Douglas Bravo, broke into a restaurant in the Falcón mountain village of Pueblo Nuevo and killed two police officers. The attack was most probably a reaction to the long sentences given one hundred and one insurgents in a mass trial in Caracas the month before. The Army mounted a massive counteroffensive that media reports estimated included as many as three thousand soldiers.⁴¹⁴

The operation involved two main thrusts corresponding to the two main guerrilla groups, those of Urbina and Bravo. The soldiers in the Sierra de Churuguara moved out of the villages and pushed into the mountains seeking Urbina's camps and insurgent group. While the column penetrated the region to the degree of locating some of the hideouts, it never found Urbina's group. The Army still achieved success in the mission when the constant pressure on Urbina's insurgents caused the majority of them, local recruits, to disband and return home.⁴¹⁵

Troops in the Sierra de Coro advanced simultaneously to the other column. They attempted a siege to starve Bravo's group for the first two months without significant enemy contact. The column moved more aggressively after the insurgents attacked a police patrol near Cabure. The Air Force dropped fragmentation bombs on suspected guerrilla hideouts in support of the Army moving forward split into several groups attempting to encircle the insurgents. The rugged terrain and unrelenting rainfall allowed the insurgents to escape contact. The Army did manage to find at least nine Guerrilla camps. Ironically, they came within a few hundred yards

⁴¹² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 97.

⁴¹³ Georgetown Research Project, *Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*, 171, 180.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

of the enemy's main camp without actually finding it. The nine camps yielded up around sixty small arms, including automatic weapons and assorted ammunition. The Army withdrew from the area in June after there was almost no guerrilla activity for several weeks. The Army thought they had eliminated the threat in both the Sierra de Churuguara and the Sierra de Coro, a view that was correct in the former case and incorrect in the latter case.⁴¹⁶

The guerrillas reorganized under the command of Bravo, concentrating operations from the Sierra de Coro with reinforcements from Caracas. Overall, the insurgents focused operations on urban attacks designed to undermine the upcoming elections. The rural guerrillas supported the campaign with a change in tactics. Beginning in July, they began using vehicles to extend their attacks out to surrounding villages. A standard raid consisted of taking over the mayor's office and the police station after disarming the police officers, declaring the village as part of "Free Venezuela." They would hold the village for a short time and then flee before government forces could arrive to engage them.⁴¹⁷

The government also changed tactics during the second half of 1963 in combating the rural guerrillas. The government kept most of its resources in the urban areas where the insurgents concentrated their main thrust. Therefore, they replaced the large formations they had previously sent into the mountains with smaller groups, platoon-size and below that formed hunter-killer groups of soldiers or police officers.⁴¹⁸

The more aggressive actions of the guerrillas and the more efficient force selection by the government brought about a series of small engagements in the latter part of the year throughout the Sierra de Coro. A small Army unit scored a significant victory in October when a peasant,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 179-180.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 180-181.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 181.

possibly a guerrilla deserter, led them to Bravo's main camp. The camp could provide permanent support for between thirty and forty guerrillas. The Army found a significant cache of supplies, including communications equipment, medicine, explosives, ammunition, and foodstuffs. They also found the personal effects of two of the guerrilla leaders, Bravo and Elias Manuitt Camero.⁴¹⁹

The loss of the base camp forced the guerrillas in November into a more vulnerable hit-and-run campaign that exposed them to more contact with government forces. They sustained several losses that month. On December 3, a guerrilla deserter led a small Army unit of fifteen men to a camp known as "Mi Cielito" (My Sweetheart), where they killed perhaps as many as ten to fifteen guerrillas. The effort to disrupt the December elections had failed utterly.

Domingo Urbina went into exile as some forty other guerrillas laid down their arms. The governor of Falcón State claimed that there were less than fifty battered, demoralized guerrillas left in the area by January 1964. The period after the elections saw little guerrilla action for several months.⁴²⁰

The Left Splits over the Question of Continued use of Violence, the Right Fades, and a New President's Government Gains the Upper Hand January 1964 to December 1968

The year of 1964 presented significant challenges for all three of the main components of the leftist insurgency: the FALN, PCV, and MIR. Cuba had suffered a significant setback in supporting the insurgents because of the OAS action after the discovery of the arms shipment the previous November. The failure to disrupt the 1963 elections had led to differing interpretations between the insurgent soft-liners and hard-liners. The soft-liners claimed that only educating the public would lead to a Communist victory. The hardliners believed that only military force

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 181, 182.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 182.

could overthrow the government.⁴²¹ In essence, the former group took a position tantamount to saying that the previous violence had been too much; the latter group was saying it had not been enough. Despite the incompatibility of the two positions, the Communist Party central committee at its meeting in April decided it would continue a combined peaceful-armed approach.⁴²² Douglas Bravo thought that the decision to continue to pursue a combined peaceful-armed approach consisted of such vague terms as to allow the disagreeing parties to read into it whatever they wanted. He claimed this allowed the party to present only the illusion of strength instead of providing the strength required for the campaign.⁴²³

The distribution in mid-May of a CIA intelligence information cable detailing the conclusions of the central committee from the previous month's fifth plenum is an example of the superb intelligence the Venezuelan and U.S. governments were collecting on the insurgency by 1964.⁴²⁴ Not only did the cable make clear the final positions taken, but it also included information about alternative proposals that failed, including the names of those that made them. One such proposal, from Teodoro Petkoff, was so violent the committee deemed it "leftist and non-Marxist" in rejecting it.⁴²⁵

The counterinsurgency partnership also faced new challenges with the two nations' new presidents, particularly the American. President Kennedy had attempted to reorient the U.S. armed forces to a much superior counterinsurgency capability and mindset. He had focused the country's attention on service, including overseas with the Peace Corps. He referenced Cold

⁴²¹ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 113.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴²³ Alfredo Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, (1978), 106-107.

⁴²⁴ CIA, "Intelligence Information Cable: Conclusions of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Venezuela," May 19, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Cables, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 1.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

War rhetoric where the country would “pay any price” and “bear any burden.” He captured America’s imagination with a commitment to landing on the moon within the decade. The first inaugural address and the “moon” speech before a joint session of Congress both included explicit references to the foreign policy of Communist containment.⁴²⁶ The set of four elements demonstrate the main thrust of the Kennedy administration along foreign policy lines. President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), who would oversee the implementation of these programs after Kennedy’s assassination, focused more on his “Great Society” domestic program until events forced a foreign policy agenda.

Johnson’s focus centered on a challenging domestic agenda. It included a civil rights movement energized by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that faced an extreme pushback in the South. LBJ oversaw the core of the space program to land on the moon. His Great Society program also included other elements that required his attention. However, international events quickly overshadowed the domestic agenda as the Vietnam War came to dominate foreign and domestic considerations. Other vital foreign events were American intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Johnson would be a very distracted partner in the Venezuelan counterinsurgency, much more than Kennedy had been. American participation also suffered when the American Ambassador to Venezuela with intimate knowledge of the conflict, Stewart, left the posting and the position stayed open for several months.

The U.S. ambassador after Stewart left in late November 1964 was Maurice M. Bernbaum. From Chicago originally, he graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College in

⁴²⁶ John F. Kennedy, Swearing-in Ceremony and Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHA-001.aspx> and John F. Kennedy, Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs, 25 May 1961, accessed 5/15/18 <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHA-032.aspx>.

1931. Bernbaum worked briefly as a social worker in Chicago before taking employment in the Treasury Department and the Tariff Commission in Washington, D.C. He entered the Foreign Service in 1936. His first assignment was as vice-consul in Vancouver, with a follow-up assignment to Singapore in 1939. He served in Nicaragua and Ecuador from 1945 to 1950. He returned to the United States in the early fifties in a range of duties, including work at the United Nations and attending the National War College. During the mid-1950s, he was the director of South American Affairs. He became Ambassador to Ecuador in 1960 and served until 1964. During this period, he witnessed two successful *golpes*. President Johnson appointed him U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela in 1964 with Bernbaum's presentation of credentials on March 4, 1965, and termination of the mission on July 9, 1969. He retired in 1969.⁴²⁷

The Venezuelan government had far fewer negative factors for the counterinsurgency from the change in presidents and many positive factors. The lone negative was that Leoni was a less charismatic leader with a lower international profile than Betancourt was, a problem analogous to one that Johnson suffered. The many positives included the increased training and experience of the Army, especially in counterinsurgent tactics. The danger of a military *golpe* had faded as the previous military uprisings had failed. The military had come to feel the government's campaign against the insurgents had stabilized and appeared to be leading to success.⁴²⁸ The insurgent failures leading up to 1964, most notably the inability to disrupt the elections, had fractured the different insurgent groups. The insurgents had managed earlier to maintain a mostly united front. The counterinsurgent intelligence gathering had improved dramatically from its already strong start. The votes Leoni received as the AD candidate had

⁴²⁷ Yvonne Shinhoster Lamb, "Longtime Diplomat Maurice M. Bernbaum, 98," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/26/AR2008032603291.html>.

⁴²⁸ CIA, "NIE 89-65: Venezuela," Document 531, 6.

dropped to thirty-three percent from the forty-nine percent Betancourt had garnered in the 1958 elections. A change in attitude among the urban population partially made up for the drop in support for the AD. The attitude towards the insurgents had gone from indifference to an active desire by 1964 to see them defeated.⁴²⁹

Another encouraging factor was the increase in oil revenues. A significant component of the insurgent narrative that had gained some traction up through the end of 1963 was the poor state of the economy that was principally dependent on oil revenues. During discussions of the changes made to the U.S. Oil Import Program in December 1962, Venezuelan officials estimated that the program caused losses in the tens of millions of dollars. The detrimental effect on the counterinsurgency of the program was significantly less starting in 1964, because of a thirty-three percent net increase in oil tax revenues. That increase accounted for most of a nine percent increase in government revenues that allowed the government to increase expenditures four percent.⁴³⁰ The increase in revenues was exceptionally impressive, given ongoing guerrilla sabotage efforts. There were twenty-four attacks of escalating sophistication on the equipment of a single company, the Mene Grande Oil Company, from December 1963 through April 18, 1964.⁴³¹ The United States was fortunate that market conditions helped make up for the losses the Oil Import Program caused. Nevertheless, the National Intelligence Estimate for the period 1965 through December 1968 noted that there would most likely continue to be resentment about U.S. restrictions on the importation of Venezuelan oil.⁴³²

⁴²⁹ Dieter Nohlen, ed., *Elections in the Americas: A Data Handbook: Volume 2: South America* (, 2005). 580; and CIA, "NIE 89-65: Venezuela," Document 531, 5, 6.

⁴³⁰ Jorge Salazar-Carrillo, *Oil and Development in Venezuela During the Twentieth Century* (1994), 193.

⁴³¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "SC3253D, Subject: Information on Guerrilla Activity," April 25, 1964, 9:02 PM, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Cables, Vol. 1, 11/63-7/64, Folder 1, 2.

⁴³² CIA, "NIE 89-65: Venezuela," Document 531, 2, 10. See also "Telegram From the Embassy in Venezuela to the Department of State," November 15, 1965, 0215Z, FRUS 64-68 Vol. 31, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 528 and "Editorial Note," nd, Document 530.

Strains in the U.S.-Venezuelan counterinsurgency appeared early in the new Johnson-Leoni period. The Kennedy-Betancourt rhetoric for the partnership, expressed principally through discussion of the Alliance for Progress, had been in support of a dual program of modernization and democratization. President Johnson gave a speech on March 16, opening a series of conferences with Latin American ambassadors and foreign ministers. The speech was about U.S.-Latin American relations with the focus on the Alliance for Progress. A meeting led by Thomas C. Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, with members of the Latin American diplomatic corps followed on March 18, 1964. Someone leaked the contents of the meeting to the press. The leak led to a Tad Szulc article the next day in *The New York Times* that declared the administration was abandoning democratization as a policy goal.

Mann had laid out a change in policy regarding Latin American dictatorships that led to considerable controversy. The controversy arose from the disputed interpretations of the policy by the administration, *The New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc and other critics of U.S. foreign policy, and various Latin American countries. The principal point of contention was Mann's announcement in the closed meeting that the United States would no longer have a policy against dictatorships. He said that the previous policy had done nothing to prevent or overthrow dictators. Thus, the new United States policy would be to base recognition decisions of new governments on a de facto basis, rather than de jure.⁴³³

The negative reception to the policy change by democratic proponents in Latin America and administration critics like Szulc echoed previous incidents. It was another case where

⁴³³ Tad Szulc, "U.S. may Abandon Effort to Deter Latin Dictators: Mann Is Said to Be Against Trying to Separate 'Good Guys and Bad Guys' Reds Would Be Fought Report That Kennedy Policy Faces Reversal Dismays 2 Democratic Senators U.S. Considers Ending Policy Of Opposing Latin Dictators," *The New York Times*, March 19, 1964, Proquest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tamu.edu/docview/115565166/D7F59F27B8C44B68PQ/16?accountid=7082>.

administration officials seemed to be signaling that the United States was moving away from supporting democratization in Latin America. On July 11, 1963, a military *golpe* overthrew the government of Ecuador's President Carlos Julio Arosemena Monroy. Three days later, an article by *New York Times*'s correspondent, Henry Ramont, included the claim that there was a split in thinking at the State Department. The split occurred among high-ranking officials as to whether the military was a stabilizing influence in Latin America.⁴³⁴ Betancourt strongly condemned the article and sent a letter to Kennedy asking for clarification.⁴³⁵ President Kennedy replied that there was no change in policy while explicitly mentioning the Ramont article.⁴³⁶

Mann's predecessor as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Edwin M. Martin, also created an incident about democratization. Martin caused a stir with an editorial in the *New York Herald Tribune* published on October 6, 1963. Martin pointed out that military coups sometimes had positive effects. He went on to say that it would be inappropriate for the United States to ever intervene in a coup d'état.⁴³⁷ Several media outlets dubbed the position as the "Martin Doctrine" and speculated as to whether it represented another step towards recognizing military governments. Once again, President Kennedy walked back the pro-military government comments. He did so in this case during an October 9 press conference wherein he restated that U.S. policy remained opposed to coups d'état.⁴³⁸ The close connection between the

⁴³⁴ Henry Ramont, "Washington Sees Gain For Ecuador: Coup Welcomed as Ending an Incompetent Regime Blow to Aid Program Leaders Attitude Hailed," *The New York Times*, July 14, 1963, Proquest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tamu.edu/docview/116656338/3A05BC68F4DB4606PQ/1?accountid=7082>.

⁴³⁵ Betancourt to Kennedy, July 22, 1963, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

⁴³⁶ Kennedy to Betancourt, August 16, 1963, JFK Library, NSF, Box 192a- Country Venezuela, Folder General 6/63-9/63.

⁴³⁷ "Editorial Note," FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XII, American Republics, Office of the Historian, 149, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10-12mSupp/d230>.

⁴³⁸ Miller, *Prekarious Paths to Freedom*, 108-109.

July and October incidents was no accident. The furor over the Ramont article in July had led to a State Department review that had directly resulted in the publication of the Martin editorial.⁴³⁹

The difference between the Mann incident and the earlier incidents quickly became apparent. In the earlier incidents, President Kennedy himself had walked back the comments that seemed to indicate a fundamental move away from democratization. While both the State Department and White House officials denied the veracity of the Szulc article, President Johnson did not. Events on April 1, 1964, provided a non-rhetorical counterpoint to the administration denials of the Mann Doctrine. On that date, the Brazilian military took over the government to prevent an alleged Communist coup that never materialized. President Johnson quickly congratulated the provisional president, Pascoal Ranieri Mazilli, and offered his support.⁴⁴⁰

The three problematic incidents above began with a right-wing military overthrow in Ecuador to thwart a left-wing “threat” and ended with a right-wing military overthrow in Brazil to thwart a left-wing “threat.” The recognition of the two military governments indicated that the United States would support military coups to thwart the “threat” of a communist takeover, even in cases where that threat was minimal or even illusory. It also provided evidence to some that the United States was more concerned with stability than democratic institutions. The message to Venezuela from the incidents was particularly troubling since the period from 1960 to 1963 had seen both right-wing attempted coups and the threat of additional attempts in reaction to the ongoing leftist insurgency. The 1965 U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic under circumstances of an illusory threat provided more indication of the actual American policy rather than the rhetorical-only policy.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ “Editorial Note,” 149.

⁴⁴⁰ Miller, *Prekarious Paths to Freedom*, 124-125.

⁴⁴¹ H. W. Brands, “Decisions on American Armed Intervention: Lebanon, Dominican Republic, and Grenada,” *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (1987): 611, 613–15, 617, 619-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151304>.

A summary of the main points from the March 18 Mann meeting formed the basis of the “Mann Doctrine.” The priorities would be the protection of U.S. business interests, de facto recognition of new governments instead of de jure, a policy of nonintervention, and resistance to communism. The new priorities represented a change from the Kennedy approach in that democratization, while still promoted rhetorically, almost ceased to be a policy goal for American action.⁴⁴² The Mann Doctrine, although denied by the administration as representing any significant change from the previous administration, did better reflect the policy pursued by the United States in Latin America during the Cold War. The base policy throughout the period concerning what actions the United States carried out, rather than just rhetoric, was the maintenance of hegemony, the pursuit of American economic interests, practicing nonintervention rhetoric while regularly intervening in nonmilitary ways, and the containment of Communism. The Mann Doctrine, although denied by the Johnson administration, did capture its policy better than its claims revealed.

The insurgent forces decided to continue the dual approach of peaceful political engagement and armed insurrection at the April meeting of the Communist Party Central Committee. The decision led to a relatively quiet period with few attacks in April and May.⁴⁴³ The lull was to allow for a strategic change. The insurgents would no longer aim the violence at causing citizens to doubt the government’s ability to keep them safe. Instead, the goal was to allow the PCV to present itself as a peacemaker that could negotiate an end to hostilities.⁴⁴⁴ The plan was for FALN to follow the lull with an intensive campaign.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 123-124.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁴⁴ CIA, “Communist Decision to Start a Guerrilla and Terrorist Offensive as Soon as Possible,” September 6, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Cables and Miscellaneous Folder.

Significant insurgent operations returned in September with actions spread across rural, urban, and oil field areas. In the countryside on September 2, a guide led a group of thirty Digepol agents into an ambush with two insurgents killed while the government forces lost three. Contact resumed the next day without further fatalities. A group of new clashes developed between insurgents and government forces in several states. In Caracas, terrorists carried out a series of attacks on government buildings and officials. In the oil fields, the insurgents continued their attacks on oil installations.⁴⁴⁵

A pattern emerged in the contacts in the state of Lara throughout September and October. Government forces would pressure the insurgents in daylight, sometimes discovering and destroying Guerrilla camps and supplies. However, they usually failed to close and kill or capture the guerrillas themselves. Instead, officers would pull out their troops at night for fear of the dangerous terrain.⁴⁴⁶ The survival of the insurgents allowed them to continue surprise attacks and temporarily holding villages. Nevertheless, the loss of their camps and supplies denied them any buildup that would allow them to tip the balance of power in their favor. The guerrillas' general failure to rouse the peasantry to their cause exacerbated the problem.

FALN terrorists kidnapped Lieutenant Colonel Michael Smolen, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Air Force Mission, on the morning of October 9 about 7:55 A.M. The chief of the mission, Colonel Henry Lee Chaote, and a Venezuelan military driver had gone to the Smolen residence to pick him up and take him to Headquarters. As Smolen was about to enter the car, another car drove up and pinned him between the two cars. Two men got out, one armed with a submachine gun and forced Smolen into the kidnap car. Choate, who had gotten out of the car as Smolen exited his house, was able to escape on foot as the insurgents shoved Smolen into the getaway

⁴⁴⁵ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 128.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

car. The kidnapping took only twenty seconds or less. The local media quickly began sensationalized coverage, including minute by minute radio bulletins.⁴⁴⁷

The kidnapping quickly took on an international quality. Several local newspapers received telephone calls from persons claiming to be the kidnappers threatening that they would execute Smolen. They said they would kill Smolen if South Vietnam proceeded with the scheduled execution of Nguyen Van Troi. The South Vietnamese government had condemned Nguyen to a public execution. His arrest the previous May followed his attempt to set a bomb under a bridge on the route Secretary McNamara was to use during a visit to Vietnam.⁴⁴⁸

While the opening facts of the Smolen case mirrored the Chenault kidnapping of the previous year, the event unfolded very differently. Venezuelan authorities developed actionable intelligence very quickly, whereas the Chenault kidnapping ended after eight days with little progress made in identifying his captors. The Venezuelan police raided an apartment at 3:00 A.M. on the third day of Smolen's captivity, October 12. They narrowly missed rescuing Smolen, who had left the apartment only an hour earlier. Interior Minister Gonzalo Barrios told the press at noon that the group that carried out the kidnapping totaled eight to ten in number. The kidnappers were continually moving Smolen from one small unit to another.⁴⁴⁹

The insurgents released Smolen around 10:00 P.M. the same day as the police raid. *The New York Times* reported that three kidnappers were captured that night with an additional three captured the next day. The captured included the kidnapping group's leader, Angel Luque, and his wife. The insurgents had not been able to stop the execution of Nguyen. Venezuelan

⁴⁴⁷ "Telegram, Fm AMEMBASSY/Caracas To RUEMCR/SecState WashDC," Noon, October 9, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Document 158.

⁴⁴⁸ "Venezuelan Terrorists Kidnap U.S. Colonel and Threaten Him," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1964.

⁴⁴⁹ "Telegram, Fm AMEMBASSY/Caracas To RUEMCR/SecState WashDC," 3:01 P.M., October 12, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Document 145.

authorities claimed that the group had been responsible for the earlier kidnappings of Col. Chenault and Alfred di Stefano, a Spanish soccer star, both publicity successes.⁴⁵⁰ The Smolen kidnapping was not, on balance, a publicity success. The failure to influence the Nguyen execution revealed the inability of the insurgents to act successfully on a global stage. More damaging to the insurgent cause was the transition of the narrative from the kidnapping of an American military officer to a story of counterinsurgent success. The Venezuelan government had not only secured the release of Smolen; it had captured most, if not all, of the kidnapping group including its leader.⁴⁵¹

The kidnapping of Smolen led to a general review in the U.S. government similar to the one after the earlier hijacking of the Venezuelan freighter, the *Anzoátegui*, albeit on a much smaller scale. The kidnapping of Chenault the year before had already made the threat explicit. Additionally, the very day of the kidnapping, a warning memorandum arrived at U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). The memorandum detailed planned FALN activities, including kidnapping U.S. Air Force Mission personnel.⁴⁵² The State Department set up a teleconference with the embassy in Caracas to find out what had gone wrong. The focus of the conversation was on how the insurgents carried out the kidnapping so effortlessly given past kidnappings and a current specific warning.⁴⁵³ The contents of the teleconference about the warning contradicted the State Department's response to earlier media inquiries about the existence of warnings before

⁴⁵⁰ "Caracas Seizes 6 in Kidnapping: U.S. Colonel, Freed, Says He Was Treated Well," *The New York Times*, October 14, 1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/14/caracas-seizes-6-in-kidnapping.html>.

⁴⁵¹ Daniel R. Margolies, "Memorandum, Fm CV (Office of Colombian-Venezuelan Affairs) (Daniel R.) Margolies To ARA (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs) Mann," November 24, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Document 122.

⁴⁵² "Memorandum, Fm JCS To USSOUTHCOM/J2," LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Document 171-d.

⁴⁵³ "Transcript Teleconference Department of State with AmEmbassy Caracas," LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Document 173.

the kidnapping. The State Department had claimed there were only rumors that lacked specifics.⁴⁵⁴

The arrests and subsequent investigation led to the discovery of the various safe houses the kidnappers used and, ultimately, the principal place of Smolen's captivity. Evidence found at the apartment made possible the additional arrests of twenty-nine FALN members. The group had accounted for twenty high-profile terrorist acts since 1962. The arrests had the immediate effect of forcing the PCV to order two entire guerrilla brigades to cease operations due to their leaders being in jail. A more critical and long-lasting effect was to cause the PCV to lose confidence in the FALN leadership. The party began to question the entire idea of armed resistance as being the best course of action under the circumstances.⁴⁵⁵

The last week of October saw the final acts of the FALN campaign to position the propaganda message of the PCV as being the best negotiator for lasting peace. On October 25, the guerrillas made one of the short-term takeovers of a town, in this case, La Hoyadita, east of Caracas. The next day they kidnapped the manager of a Caracas bus line from his home and forced him to go to the office, open the safe, and give them five thousand dollars. The insurgents bombed a Mene Grande Oil Company causing a massive fire that reduced production by ten thousand barrels a day. The guerrillas continued their hit-and-run fighting with government forces west of Caracas.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ "Washington Cites Rumors," *The New York Times*, October 10, 1964 (1923-Current File) Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/115935287/abstract/1770CF150924418FPQ/1>.

⁴⁵⁵ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 129 and CIA, "Intelligence Information Cable: Dissatisfaction within Communist party toward Party Leaders, Future Plans of the FALN to Continue Terrorism Despite Police Crackdowns," October 28, 1964, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 2, Document 91.

⁴⁵⁶ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 129-130.

The government began a crackdown in October in the remaining predominant insurgent area of operations, Lara State. The government campaign in Lara yielded noteworthy results. Government forces had discovered and destroyed the usual number of camps. The capture of wounded guerrillas suffering from malnutrition and dehydration introduced a new element into the insurgency. The government also carried out the relocation of peasants, a standard counterinsurgent practice.⁴⁵⁷ Relocation could deny insurgents haven and allow the government to provide better security for their citizenry. Relocations could also be repressive; something Douglas Bravo would claim included mass arrests, torture, and the deaths of many men and women.⁴⁵⁸ The Venezuelan media attempted to investigate Bravo's claim but could not confirm nor disprove it.⁴⁵⁹ For the Venezuelan counterinsurgency-insurgency battle of narratives, Bravo's claims never became a significant factor as they did in several other insurgencies, e.g., as in the revolutions in Cuba and Nicaragua.

FALN activity resumed in Falcón in March 1965 after it had recovered from the debacle of its fall 1964 losses. Guerrillas had attacked the town of Aracua. Army units responded, pushed them out of the town, and continued to pursue them. The troops were able to set an ambush for the insurgents on the 18th, allowing them to kill two. One of the dead was the leader. The soldiers had four wounded. The guerrillas withdrew and thought they had broken contact to the degree that they planned a party for the evening of the 20th near La Cruz de Taratara. Acting on a tip, the National Guard's elite *Cazadores* (Hunters) Battalion helicoptered into the area and surrounded the guerrillas. The *Cazadores* sprang their trap around ten o'clock, killing six insurgents.⁴⁶⁰ The government also dealt the insurgents a blow when it arrested three Italian

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁵⁸ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 109.

⁴⁵⁹ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 130.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 134.

Communist Party couriers and confiscated \$330,000 meant to fund operations of the PCV.⁴⁶¹ Operations in Falcón and Lara, netted government forces twenty guerrillas and four camps captured, with another twenty-four insurgents killed during April and May.⁴⁶²

The United States' intervention on April 28, 1965, in the Dominican Civil War (April 24, 1965, to September 3, 1965) heartened the insurgents and encouraged them to carry out attacks.⁴⁶³ The intervention also brought the issue of U.S. support for nondemocratic governments into the forefront again. The issue resurfaced because the rebels were trying to reinstate a democratically elected president, Juan Bosch, overthrown by a coup in 1963. The Venezuelan government strongly condemned the United States' intervention. At least some U.S. officials took exception to the "permissive atmosphere" such rhetoric produced in Venezuela. Vice Admiral William Raborn, Jr., USN, Ret., Director of the CIA, passed along the reasoning to White House officials that the Government of Venezuela (GoV) attitude had led to a problematic situation. He believed it was responsible for recent insurgent decisions to resume making urban terrorist attacks on U.S. targets.⁴⁶⁴ The position Raborn advocated, along with Johnson's overriding desire to see a right-wing government put into power in the Dominican Republic to avert "another Cuba," was a poor fit with the GoV. Such a position took little notice of the multi-year threat to the democratic GoV from a right-wing military coup with the same justification.

⁴⁶¹ "Caracas Seizes 3 as Plot Couriers: Aliens Accused of Carrying in \$330,000 From Italy to Finance Red Terrorism," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1965 (1923-Current File) Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/116765828/abstract/7C750B0AF33C4F02PQ/2> (accessed 4/20/18).

⁴⁶² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 136.

⁴⁶³ CIA, "Series of Intelligence Information Cables: PCV Plans to continue terrorist campaign against American interests in response to US intervention in DR," May 8, 10, and 11, 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 2, Documents 85-87 and CIA, "Intelligence Information Cables: Reason for Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) to Resume Terrorism," May 4, 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 2, Document 88.

⁴⁶⁴ William Raborn, Jr., "Office of the Director: Memorandum Fm William Raborn, Jr. To McGeorge Bundy," May 3, 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 3, Documents 114, 114a.

Venezuelan security forces had several successes in October. They captured approximately one hundred guerrillas in eastern Venezuela. The losses caused numerous FALN guerrillas to desert. The police captured a significant number of terrorists in or near the eastern oil fields. The most critical operation, however, was the discovery on October 29 of an underground munitions factory found in a web of tunnels near Caracas under a farmhouse. The government confiscated a sizable cache of arms and an estimated \$300,000 of equipment. Leoni declared it the most significant blow struck against the FALN during the insurgency to date.⁴⁶⁵

On November 2, the Minister of the Interior announced the arrests of five prominent insurgent leaders. The first two were noteworthy PCV officials, Humberto Efrain Arrieti, Acting Chief PCV Military Commission, and Dr. Luis Maria Sanabria Rebolledo, a well-known PCV activist. The third was University biology Professor Jose Vincente Scorza, a top Communist organizer on campus. The last two were guerrilla leaders. Carlos Jose “Flaco” Lopez had helped plan and carry out the killing of two National Guard members on September 30. The second leader captured was Winston Bermudez, a leading FALN terrorist unit commander in the East.⁴⁶⁶ Another vital arrest occurred on November 4 when police took a suspect carrying a Spanish passport into custody. They confiscated \$300,000 from the courier headed to the PCV.⁴⁶⁷

On December 6, the insurgents made another grave mistake, although in this case partially unintentional, that eclipsed the harm to their cause when they hijacked a train and killed five Guardsmen. The insurgents sent a booby-trapped gift to an AD congressional representative apparently with the intention he would set it off while surrounded by colleagues. Instead, he

⁴⁶⁵ Office of Current Intelligence, “Intelligence Memorandum: Review of Insurgency Problems,” November 10, 1965, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00472a001100050013-1>, 2.

⁴⁶⁶ “Telegram 439: Fm AMEMBASSY/Caracas To RUEMCR/SecState WashDC Priority 486,” 2045Z, November 3, 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 1, Document 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Office of Current Intelligence, “Review of Insurgency Problems,” 2.

took the statuette of the Virgin Mary home to his wife. Subsequently, the bomb detonated when the wife removed a tag from the statuette, and she died in the explosion. The death sparked universal condemnation aimed primarily at the PCV and MIR greater than any other single act of terrorism. President Leoni even described the attack as a definitive rejection of a proposal put forward by a group of intellectuals making overtures to the PCV for a pacification program.⁴⁶⁸

The end of 1965 saw a crucial split in the insurgency wherein dissatisfactions that leaders had papered over in the last two Communist Party plenums broke into a complete fracture.⁴⁶⁹ In essence, hardliners and soft-liners on the issue of violence agreed that the past dual approach of peaceful political engagement and armed insurrection had failed. They disagreed, however, of what lay behind the failure. Most of those who favored a peaceful political approach believed that the problem was that the violence had been excessive and premature. Most of those in favor of armed struggle believed the violence had been of an insufficient degree to create the objective conditions to support a revolution as advocated in *foco* theory. Unlike the previous disagreement along these exact lines, the two sides broke apart.

The intelligence available to the Venezuelan and United States governments about the split went all the way down to the brigade level. The very detailed information provided further evidence of how extensively the Venezuelans had developed their intelligence resources.⁴⁷⁰ The breakaway FALN leaders began by electing a substitute Central Committee. All the guerrilla leaders agreed to the new structure except for those of the Simón Bolívar Front in Lara and two leaders that walked out of the meeting in protest. The breakaway FALN leaders immediately

⁴⁶⁸ Office of Current Intelligence, "Intelligence Memorandum: Review of Insurgency Problems," December 14, 1965, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00472a001100050013-1>, 5.

⁴⁶⁹ William G. Bowdler, "Memo for Walt Rostow," December 30, 1965, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 1, Document 76.

⁴⁷⁰ E.g., see CIA "The Status of Communist Insurgency in Venezuela: Special Report Weekly Review," December 29, 1967, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 3, 11/66-12/68, Folder 2, Document 52, 7.

implemented three crucial decisions. They broadcast the changes to their allies in Cuba, China, and the USSR. Next, they came to an arrangement with elements of the MIR to form a unified command. Their third action was to give instructions to FALN brigades in Caracas to resume terrorist operations there in early 1966.⁴⁷¹

Meanwhile, President Leoni requested President Johnson meet with Dr. Gonzalo Barrios, Minister of the Interior, during the latter's weeklong visit starting January 18, 1966. President Johnson was concerned that the main point of the meeting would be further Venezuelan requests for increased access to the U.S. petroleum market. Petroleum was something he did not want to discuss.⁴⁷² A short meeting did occur for which a briefing document included a section detailing the current administration's position on military aid to Venezuela. The report began by noting that Venezuela did not receive any military grant assistance. The page concludes that there was little reason to begin supplying such aid or even extraordinarily generous credit terms. The argument in favor of such a position was that Venezuela had a balanced budget and \$800 million in gold and hard currency reserves.⁴⁷³

The recommendation that there was little reason to begin supplying such aid flies in the face of most of the rest of the contents of the briefing document. It noted that in 1965 the GoV had already fallen behind on payments on \$51 million of military credit sales purchased against a 1956 ten-year \$180 million line of credit. The Johnson administration had renegotiated the debt for payments of \$6 million a year until 1975. The document also included a section detailing the

⁴⁷¹ CIA, "Intelligence Information Cable: "Revolt of Hard-line Dissidents in the FALN against Established Leadership and Plans to Resume Terrorism in Caracas in Jan 1966," Dec. 30, 1965, , LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 1, Document 76a.

⁴⁷² "Editorial Note," FRUS 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 535, pp. 1112-1113.

⁴⁷³ Thomas C. Mann, "Attachment to Memorandum: Appointment for Dr. Gonzalo Barrios, Special Representative of the President of Venezuela," January 19, 1966, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 2, 8/64-8/66, Folder 1, Document 108a.

fact that Leoni was not in a position politically to be able to secure increases in the military budget. However, the GoV needed more counterinsurgency equipment. Additionally, Leoni needed to secure “prestige” items like high-performance jet aircraft and another submarine. The aircraft and submarine would help shore up support from the Air Force and Navy, a prominent political goal for a counterinsurgency facing challenges from the Left and the Right.⁴⁷⁴

The calculation that the GoV could financially afford in theory what it needed, even if correct, was a useless political assessment if the GoV could not afford its needs in practice. The Administration and Congress also failed to take into consideration the very high cost of the Communists coming into control of Venezuela’s oil. The high cost of failing to win a counterinsurgency had already occurred with the implementation of the United States embargo against Cuba and later realized under the Chavez administration in Venezuela. Similar high costs would accrue later to various actions of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Government forces repeated their success of the previous October when they discovered another underground arms factory on February 28.⁴⁷⁵ The factory, along with a warehouse, was near Cerro Gordo in Lara state. The materials the government confiscated included the usual arms and ammunition, but it also included anti-tank mines, booby traps, and large quantities of explosives of sufficient capacity to seriously damage or destroy large public works. Officials concluded the contraband might have been the supplies for an entire guerrilla campaign or, at minimum, sufficient numbers of booby trap devices to hamper army operations for months.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ “Red Arms Found in Venezuela,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1966.

⁴⁷⁶ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 152.

Government forces achieved a multilayered victory during a clash in Lara state in early March. They defeated a group of insurgents and killed the leader, Félix Linares (alias Sargento Vicente). A letter found on Linares' body was an intelligence treasure trove. The contents of the letter provided details of the desperate state of affairs in which the guerrillas in Lara found themselves. The letter bemoaned the lack of adequate leadership and supplies in the region. Three other leaders had recently died with a fourth having deserted. Army operations had caused severe shortages of supplies by intercepting shipments to the *focos*. The shortage of supplies and other privations had led to desertion. The losses had become so serious that Linares had implemented summary execution for anyone caught trying to desert.⁴⁷⁷

The Army suffered a reversal later that month in Lara while the Urica Anti-Guerrilla Commando unit was tracking a group of approximately fifteen guerrillas in the El Cepo region. The insurgents were able to spring a well-planned ambush on a supply column headed to the unit on March 15. The guerrillas detonated several charges as the column entered a turn in the road. The explosions destroyed a jeep and a truck. The guerrillas then assaulted the column with machine guns killing an officer, six soldiers, and two civilians, with a loss of only two insurgents. The two dead guerrillas wore new uniforms and did not show the weathering of someone who had been out in the elements for long. Venezuelan Intelligence determined the evidence pointed to the guerrillas continuing to be able to obtain fresh supplies and recruits. Further investigation revealed that at least some of the “guerrillas” were individuals sent from urban terrorist units to help set up the ambush. The operation had been the Army's most significant setback for some time.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 152-153.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 153-154.

Government forces announced on June 19 that they had captured one of the most famous guerrilla leaders, Fabricio Ojeda. He had initially gained renown as a journalist for *El Nacional* making calls for opposing the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in the last months of 1957. His fame grew as he became a leader of the *Unión Republicana Democrática* (URD – Democratic Republican Union). He publicly renounced politics and joined the FALN in July 1962. Subsequently, government forces captured him, but he managed to escape from the national prison in Trujillo on September 15, 1963, along with other insurgents. His recapture was a media event, but the news on June 22 that he had hanged himself while in custody eclipsed the coverage of the 19th. Every political party across the spectrum bemoaned the loss of such a central figure in the events of the 1958 coalition.⁴⁷⁹

Luben Petkoff returned to Venezuela from Cuba on July 24 with a group of guerrillas he had trained in Cuba. Fifteen of the guerrillas were Venezuelan with ten from other Latin American countries, including, despite Petkoff's denials, Cubans. He also had arms and funds that Cuba had provided. Petkoff, in his extended stay in Cuba, had come to accept fully Castro and Guevara's prescription of the primacy of armed struggle using *focos*. His understanding of the strategy, however, more closely resembled the Prolonged People's War theory that Guevara refused to acknowledge as the logical antecedent of *foco* theory. Petkoff and Bravo had decided that it was time to consolidate forces so that *focos* would number over one hundred rather their previous size of twelve to fifteen. The first battle involving such an enlarged *foco* occurred a few days after July 27 when eighty guerrillas under the command of Julio Chirinos combined with Petkoff's group to attack soldiers in Falcón. Douglas Bravo joined his group to those of Petkoff and Chirinos on August 6 and began operating along the border of Falcón and Yaracuy states.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 156-157.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 155-158; and Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 122-123.

The generally low amount of insurgent activity during the first two-thirds of 1966 gave way to intense activity in September that eclipsed the height of operations in the summers of 1964 and 1965. The new, larger guerrilla groups' assaults combined with the tried-and-true terrorist attacks in the cities, primarily Caracas. The plan, at least according to the Venezuelan and American governments, was still to bring about a right-wing military *golpe* that the FALN and MIR would lead a popular movement to overthrow in favor of the Leftists.⁴⁸¹

The main developments of the new campaign in September and October involved an event in Caracas and two events in the countryside. On September 15, terrorists used machine guns and pipe bombs to attack the motorcade of Digepol Chief, Gabriel José Páez, wounding him and his driver, and killing a bystander. In the countryside in late September, Pedro Medina Silva, who had led the uprising at Puerto Cabello in 1962, returned to Venezuela to lead a new *foco*. Previously, he had escaped prison in December 1963 and left the country. In October, the guerrilla forces in Yaracuy carried out a series of attacks focusing on killing public officials and the civilian guides used by counterinsurgent forces. The new campaign engendered an attempt at a *golpe* by elements of the military.⁴⁸²

The much-reduced threat of a Right-Wing military takeover during the second half of the Venezuelan insurgency was evident when the first attempted Right-Wing military revolt during Leoni's term in office occurred on October 30, 1966.⁴⁸³ Lieutenant Colonel Clemente Pacheco Ochoa tried to lead the National Guard Officer Training School in Ramo Verde in rebellion against the GoV. The National Guardsmen at the school easily defeated the uprising by nightfall. Government forces killed Ochoa during one of the gun battles. Various indications

⁴⁸¹ Miller, *Precairous Paths to Freedom*, 158.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 158-159.

⁴⁸³ CIA, "The President's Daily Brief: 1 November 1966," (1966), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0005968607> (accessed 5/18/18).

existed that there was still some discontent in the armed forces with how the government was handling the insurgency. However, the lack of support for Ochoa's uprising showed that the threat of a coup had diminished substantially.⁴⁸⁴

The heightened insurgent activity continued through the end of the year. In November, there were many clashes in Lara state between the guerrillas and government forces with casualties running in the dozens representing a significant increase over recent numbers. The government responded with prolonged aerial bombardments in Portuguesa state after the insurgents repeatedly ambushed state police. Insurgents in Caracas returned to attacks on foreign facilities for the first time in a few years, attacking such targets as Sears Roebuck warehouses, a Mercedes dealership, and supermarkets causing substantial damages. In December, terrorists assassinated a judge, Francisco Astufillo Suárez, who had presided over the trials of several insurgents.⁴⁸⁵

A second terrorist attack in December proved another significant miscalculation on the part of the insurgents. They wounded General Roberto Morean Soto, Chief of the General Staff of the Army. The government responded by suspending constitutional guarantees of due process for the first time since 1962. It also sent forces onto the campus of the Central University in Caracas, ending an extended period where the campus was a haven for insurgents and their supporters. Security forces instituted a thorough search of the campus over many days as they continued to find incendiary devices and other terrorist weapons.⁴⁸⁶ The government followed up the raid with beginning the process of the legislation stripping the university of much of its autonomy. Another change was that the authorities fenced off the university hospital, a center of

⁴⁸⁴ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 159.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁴⁸⁶ CIA, "The President's Daily Brief: 21 December 1966," (1966), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0005968694> (accessed 5/18/18).

many insurgent activities or their supporters, and made it part of the regular city proper.⁴⁸⁷ The demonstrations that had so often plagued the city with their genesis on campus would be far more difficult to organize.

The loss of the university as a base of operations forced much of the conflict in 1967 into the countryside. There were some notable exceptions like the assassination of the foreign minister's brother in March of that year. Even in rural areas, there was little contact between the opponents until August as the insurgent forces were down in numbers, including the loss of many of their leaders to death or capture. The individual guerrillas remaining had more skill on average. The fact that they were often suffering from various ailments because of their harsh living conditions somewhat offset the improvement.⁴⁸⁸

President Johnson met with President Leoni at his residence in Punta del Este, Uruguay, on April 11, 1967. President Leoni made clear from the outset that he had two main requests. One, the GoV wanted military equipment and supplies outside of any pre-existing agreements. Two, Leoni wanted the United States to expedite the delivery of any equipment or supplies, whether or not it was under a new or existing agreement. President Johnson enunciated three of his constraints on providing military equipment and supplies, while others remained unsaid. One owed its existence to Congress with the other two based in the administration. Senator J. William Fulbright (D–Arkansas) had sponsored an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1966 capping military aid and sales to Latin America at \$85 million a year. The administration had committed massive amounts of military expenditures to Vietnam, a commitment that had begun to spiral out of control. Accordingly, Johnson expressed a willingness only to sell items

⁴⁸⁷ Maurice M. Bernbaum, "Telegram From the Embassy in Venezuela to the Department of State," January 31, 1967, 2000Z, *FRUS* 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 538, pp. 1117-1119.

⁴⁸⁸ CIA, "The Status of Communist Insurgency in Venezuela, 1, 5, 6.

that were in surplus. Johnson also claimed that the administration did not want the United States to become the arms merchant to the world (despite its past status as the Arsenal for Democracy).⁴⁸⁹

President Leoni specified that all the matériel he was requesting would be for immediate use in internal security. Thus, his request was for items such as ammunition, communications gear, vehicles, and similar types of equipment. He stressed that such items preferably needed to arrive in three months rather than the eighteen to twenty-four that were the norm. The meeting eventually led to an agreement on May 18 that the United States would outfit ten new anti-guerrilla (*Cazadores*) battalions to join the three existing highly successful units. The administration agreed despite concerns from the Department of Defense about a possibility of an inability to meet the restrictions of the Fulbright amendment.⁴⁹⁰

On May 8, a Cuban sailing bark deposited two small rafts with twelve guerrillas; four of them were Cuban soldiers with the remaining eight Venezuelan insurgents, off the coast near Machurucuto. One raft capsized on the way to shore with one Cuban drowning. The remaining raft made it to the beach, and the eleven survivors moved to link up with the other insurgents in the mountains. Some fishermen found one of the abandoned rafts and reported the finding to the Army. Venezuelan troops intercepted the “invaders” before they could reach the mountains and killed nine while capturing two of the Cubans. The encounter took the name of “the Machurucuto Incident,” or, for some Venezuelans, the “Invasion of Machurucuto.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation: Subject – Venezuelan Requirements for Additional Military Equipment,” April 11, 1967, 6 p.m., *FRUS* 31:64-68, South and Central America, Mexico, Document 541, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d541>, (accessed 4/30/2018), 1126-1128.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ CIA, “The Status of Communist Insurgency in Venezuela,” 5; “Castro’s Targets,” *Time*, May 19, 1967; and Francisco Toro, “Opinions: Fidel Castro’s Venezuela Obsession,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/fidel-castros-venezuela-obsession/2016/11/26/5a3d3e9c-b405-11e6-8616-52b15787add0_story.html.

The government also improved its counterinsurgent strategy as the guerrillas fielded their more effective larger *focos*. One such change was the replacement of occasional sweeps of an area by a much more thorough approach. The new approach consisted of isolating a region, evacuating the civilian population, and setting up roadblocks on transportation arteries to control movement into or out of the area. Once they cleared the area of civilians, they instituted substantial bombardments followed by search-and-destroy missions.⁴⁹² The new approach negated the ability of the insurgents to choose the time and place of most engagements. It also denied them the opportunity to rest and refit after combat.

The Army initiated one of the new type operations on May 19, 1967, near El Rosario in El Bachiller Mountains. After the troops finished removing the civilians in the early morning hours, they opened fire with new artillery pieces at 7:00 a.m. The shelling lasted just less than five hours, after which helicopters flew at treetop level firing machine guns at ground targets before depositing a unit of *Cazadores* to conduct a sweep. The *Cazadores* settled in indefinitely supported by helicopters. The new approach quickly showed results as several skirmishes with the guerrillas occurred. The insurgents suffered another blow when the MIR leader, Américo Martín, contracted Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease caused by sandflies. Martín had to leave his command to seek medical care because of the debilitating disease. Authorities captured him aboard a ship headed overseas to obtain treatment on June 2. Guerrilla activity in the area trickled down to nothing while the Army found only some long-abandoned campsites. Intelligence reports indicated the guerrillas were avoiding contact and regrouping. Intelligence also indicated that groups were down to their fourth or fifth leaders due to losses of their more experienced officers. The peasants in the area no longer reported seeing insurgents. The

⁴⁹² Miller, *Precarious Paths*, 188.

intelligence reports and beginning of the rainy season convinced the Army to lift its blockade of the area.⁴⁹³

A Ministry of the Interior press conference on June 23, 1967, detailed the police capture of sixteen Communist terrorists. The arrests began with the capture of the terrorist leader Raul Chirinos and his Chilean girlfriend. Digepol acquired leads from the two that led to several other arrests. The police obtained further information from the new prisoners that led to further arrests for a total of sixteen (a pattern repeatedly seen during the Algerian War of Independence 1954-1962). The police operations also netted substantial quantities of weapons, FALN propaganda, and documents. The documents included some that the remaining most prominent FALN leader, Douglas Bravo, signed as recently as on June 6.⁴⁹⁴

The late June arrests amplified the effect of the June 9 arrests of MIR terrorist leaders Américo Martín and Leonet Canales. The series of arrests, coupled with the general decrease in Communist violence over the previous two months, gave rise to a feeling in the GOV that the end of the insurgency was in sight. The American embassy believed that the reduction in activity was more a sign of the severely split communist movement. Embassy personnel speculated that the factions were trying to disengage and build strength.⁴⁹⁵ In the actual event, the GoV had a better appreciation for the situation.

The new approach of using the expanded battalions of *Cazadores* to maintain a longer-term presence in a guerrilla zone and removing noncombatants also included another essential new practice. While the less capable Army units drew many of their conscripts from urban areas, the new *Cazadores* recruited peasants from the proposed areas of operations. Such troops

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 188-189.

⁴⁹⁴ Maurice M. Bernbaum, "Telegram: Fm AmEmbassy Caracas To RUEHC/SecState," 232007Z, June 23, 1967, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 2, Intelligence File, Folder Guerrilla Problem in LA (1967), Document 4a.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

were already acclimated to the local conditions, well trained, and provided a much better physical match for the experienced guerrillas they were fighting. This individual advantage, combined with the far better training *Cazadores* received as opposed to that of regular Army units, reaped immediate benefits for the counterinsurgency. The approach had at least two new essential results. One, the guerrillas could no longer expect to find even infrequent support from the local population. Two, the guerrillas could no longer trust to the incompetence of their pursuers to escape.⁴⁹⁶

The expanded counterinsurgent forces exhibited the new level of effectiveness again in the second half of June despite an initial insurgent success. On June 23, 1967, a group of fifteen guerrillas, purportedly under the command of Luben Petkoff, seized the towns of Tostós and Niquiato close to the Trujillo-Portuguesa border. They destroyed the local AD office, damaged public buildings, and then retreated to the mountains in jeeps. The guerrillas ambushed an Army patrol two days later, killing two soldiers. Contrary to past incidents, counterinsurgent forces quickly arrived in the affected area and rapidly tracked the insurgents down and engaged them successfully. On June 30, government troops attacked the guerrilla group killing four and wounding three at a loss of only two deaths of their own.⁴⁹⁷

Digepol and the judicial system struck similarly successful blows for the counterinsurgency in late summer. On August 25, Digepol killed three insurgent leaders. It claimed they controlled as many as ten *focos* and urban terrorist cells. The deaths ruined a command and control center with a budget of \$50,000 a month. On August 28, the courts handed down a sentence of thirty-seven years for Américo Martín.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Miller, *Precarious Paths*, 191.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 191-192.

In September, the police further degraded insurgent capabilities in Caracas by killing or capturing the entire eight-man Strategic Sabotage Command (*Comando Estratégico de Sabotaje* or CES). The group was Bravo's leadership team of the Caracas terrorist organization. Adolfo Meinhardt Lares, the chief of CES, was among the prisoners. The police had similar successes crushing urban units in Guarico and Maracaibo during the month. The police also prevented the bombing of the major beer plant in Caracas by intercepting and arresting three terrorists on September 6.⁴⁹⁹ Additional police operations netted four Bravo radio stations, documents, and other key personnel. Army troops also had success in the last week of September with two events in the countryside. They surrounded thirty-five guerrillas, thought to be associated with MIR, near Maturin, the capital of the state of Monagas, and killed six of them. They captured the PCV's leader of their guerrillas in the west, Tirso Pinto, an achievement diminished somewhat because the PCV had already ordered all their guerrilla units to stand down.⁵⁰⁰

The news of Che Guevara's death in Bolivia at the hands of American-trained rangers on October 9 accelerated the problems of morale for the Venezuelan insurgents except for the most fervent among them.⁵⁰¹ The autumn successes of the *Cazadores* combined with the news of Guevara's death to cause an almost complete halt to guerrilla-initiated attacks in the final two months of the year. The clashes that did occur were more often the result of counterinsurgent force actions. The battles themselves were sharper and more deadly as the *Cazadores* applied added pressure. The remaining active guerrilla groups were more dedicated to winning at all

⁴⁹⁹ William G. Bowdler, "Note to Walt Rostow," May 8, 1967, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 3, 11/66-12/68, Folder 2, Document 56 and Maurice M. Bernbaum, "Telegram: Fm AmEmbassy Caracas To SecState 2898," 072018Z, September 7, 1967, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 3, 11/66-12/68, Folder 2, Document 56a.

⁵⁰⁰ CIA, "The Status of Communist Insurgency," 5, 6.

⁵⁰¹ See Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (1998) for an account of Guevara's ill-fated insurgency in Bolivia.

costs. Many insurgent groups suspended operations, and the ones that continued the struggle found fewer and fewer replacements joining their ranks.⁵⁰²

The guerrillas wanted to disrupt the upcoming elections of December 1968, although they had far fewer resources to do so than during their failed campaign to interfere with the 1963 elections. Before the 1963 elections, the insurgency had mainly been an urban terrorist campaign combined with demonstrations/riots and a nascent rural component. In 1968, the insurgency followed a strategy of a “long struggle” more along the lines of a Prolonged People’s War with little in the way of surviving active personnel in urban areas. The decision of the PCV and some members of MIR to participate in the election also weakened insurgent prospects for disrupting the election. A CIA intelligence assessment on October 31 evaluated the risk to the elections as minimal.⁵⁰³

The several hundred guerrillas of the summer of 1967 had dwindled to perhaps only two hundred active insurgents by the beginning of 1968. There was even one claim made by Interior Minister Reinaldo Leandro Mora in late January that the number was only forty. While the estimates varied from one source to another, they all showed around a ninety percent drop from 1965 to the beginning of 1968. The insurgent leadership drain continued as the police arrested Lino Martínez, a longtime associate of Douglas Bravo and Luben Petkoff.⁵⁰⁴ The average insurgent had become more experienced and skilled over the last several years at the same time that the average insurgent leader manifested less experience, at least as a leader.

⁵⁰² Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 192-193; and Francis B. Kent, “Venezuelans Spurning Hard Guerrilla’s Life,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1967.

⁵⁰³ Office of Current Intelligence, “Intelligence Memorandum: Status of Insurgency Venezuela” (1968), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000126963.pdf, 1.

⁵⁰⁴ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 195, 197-198.

The failure of the insurgency once again led to a disagreement on how to proceed among the forces that had been fighting it. The split mirrored the 1965 insurgent crisis in that the leaders agreed the strategy they had followed had not worked, at least not yet, but they disagreed on what had led to the failure. Douglas Bravo had never wholly accepted the Regis Debray theory, derived from Castro and Guevara, which posited that the rural *focos* alone accounted for the success of the Cuban Revolution. He correctly felt that it had been the rural guerrillas and the urban efforts together that eventually cemented the support of the Cuban population. He wanted to suspend armed action until conditions were more favorable to a Socialist message, especially in light of the much-improved economy. He wanted, once conditions were better, to go back to smaller *focos* combined with urban terrorist cells and a political action plan.⁵⁰⁵ Luben Petkoff disagreed vehemently. He thought such changes would undo the evolution of larger *foco* groups that had had recent tactical success.⁵⁰⁶

Paradoxically, Petkoff's disagreement led him to take his twenty-five guerrillas and head off on his own. Other guerrilla leaders also pulled out their insurgents. The withdrawals left Bravo with about thirty guerrillas. The large *foco* that Petkoff insisted needed to be the organization retained moving forward had splintered into the small groups he thought were a mistake.⁵⁰⁷ The move from the larger unit to the smaller ones had significantly diminished the tactical capabilities. The strategic possibilities the larger group provided had disappeared for all practical purposes. These changes occurred in an environment where the much more numerous counterinsurgent units and vastly improved strategy had placed enormous pressure on the ever-shrinking numbers of guerrillas still in the field.

⁵⁰⁵ Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 129-130.

⁵⁰⁶ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 199.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Once the large Bravo *foco* split into its parts, most, if not all, of the smaller units tried to relocate to other operating areas by the end of March with Yaracuy being the target for Bravo's and Petkoff's groups. Government forces harassed the guerrillas throughout April to June, inflicting casualties that matched those of the previous eighteen months. *Cazadores* operating in western Yaracuy ambushed a group of guerrillas rumored to be under the command of Petkoff on the morning of April 20, 1968, killing six initially. The Rangers were able to reestablish contact at noon, killing an additional insurgent when the guerrillas tried to escape on a local highway. Units operating near Sabana Larga in Anzoategui state had a similar success when they received word of a guerrilla group of about twenty was in the vicinity. They hiked in for twelve hours and set up an ambush. The guerrillas walked into the trap completely unaware. The guerrillas abandoned considerable amounts of their weaponry and supplies in their attempts to escape during the engagements above, as well as other encounters during the period.⁵⁰⁸

The government ordered approximately two thousand soldiers led by a unit of rangers into Yaracuy state in early May to try to kill or capture Bravo's guerrillas. There were several unusually sharp clashes with as many as twenty guerrillas dying and several soldiers. The Rangers continued to arrange ambushes and were able to account for another twenty-five guerrillas. Local intelligence reported that Bravo was trying to escape Yaracuy for another area of operations.⁵⁰⁹

The forces in Yaracuy kept up the pressure throughout June by continuing to seal off the area and conduct almost daily operations. They encountered guerrillas every few days and were able to kill approximately another forty. The government forces decimated Bravo's forces and forced Petkoff to escape with perhaps as many as a hundred insurgents to El Bachiller Mountains

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

east of Caracas. The guerrillas had ceased to be a factor in Yaracuy by the end of June. Petkoff was the only remaining guerrilla leader willing to engage with Army forces directly.⁵¹⁰

The domination of the Army over the guerrillas during the previous three months encouraged a Leftist offshoot of the AD, *Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo* (the People's Electoral Movement), to put forward an amnesty plan in July 1968. While the opposition parties quickly announced their support for the plan and there was some initial cautious positive commentary from some members of the AD, AD eventually came out against the law killing it until after the elections.

Nevertheless, a consensus had emerged that the law or a similar substitute would pass in 1969.⁵¹¹ August had seen the last phases of an ever-increasing shift from an emphasis on the armed struggle to political participation. A late August event in Europe would call into question the entire Socialist project, especially the Soviet and Cuban varieties, and further erode support for armed action.

Soviet and Warsaw Pact divisions invaded Czechoslovakia on the night of August 20, 1968. The Soviet Union and her East European allies had moved to crush the liberalization policies of Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. The move echoed previous Soviet repressions of liberalization in Poland, East Germany, and Hungary.⁵¹² The need to force another communist country to follow Soviet dictates further tarnished the Soviet Union's leadership of the Communist world. The invasion came at a time when China, Cuba, and the non-aligned movement were challenging Soviet leadership. The

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 201-202.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 203.

⁵¹² CIA, "A Look Back ... The Prague Spring & the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia," CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2008-featured-story-archive/a-look-back-the-prague-spring-the-soviet.html> (accessed 6/7/18).

situation presented Castro with the daunting conundrum of maintaining consistency with his rhetoric in the sixties and condemning the action or supporting the Soviet Union out of a need to maintain its economic support. Castro initially tried to have it both ways, but ultimately had to opt to support the Soviet Union and protect his economic lifeline.⁵¹³

The invasion of Czechoslovakia not only called into question Soviet and Cuban leadership; it further eroded the notion of a united international communist movement. The various fronts that had come into existence to support Soviet foreign policy and help achieve Communist Party objectives broke for the first time with the Soviet leadership.⁵¹⁴ The fallout from the invasion would eventually lead to yet another split in the Leftist opposition as Teodoro Petkoff would lead a group of younger members to splinter off from the PGV in 1969.⁵¹⁵

The Venezuelan government had reduced guerrilla activity to a minimum by the fall of 1968 and then turned its attention to Cuba again. President Leoni changed Venezuelan policy in late 1968 because of past incidents where Cuban fishing boats had landed men and matériel on Venezuela's shores. One key example had been the landing on the Paraguaná Peninsula on November 1, 1963.⁵¹⁶ Another critical case had been the landing near Machurucuto on May 8, 1967.⁵¹⁷ The change he ordered was for the Venezuelan Navy to forcibly seize Cuban fishing boats appearing to be carrying out such missions.

⁵¹³ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 204.

⁵¹⁴ CIA, "A Look Back."

⁵¹⁵ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 205.

⁵¹⁶ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 101 and Office of Current Intelligence, "The Venezuelan Communist Split," 5.

⁵¹⁷ CIA, "The Status of Communist Insurgency," 5

The first seizure occurred on November 20, 1968.⁵¹⁸ The GoV claimed the boat had been in Venezuelan territorial waters when attacked. Walt Rostow sent a White House memorandum to LBJ discussing President Leoni's order to seize two more trawlers indicating U.S. sources were sure that the November 30 seizure had occurred in international waters. Rostow warned the president that such seizures could lead to an escalation with Cuba that would hurt Venezuelan and U.S. interests. Rostow considered it a possibility that Cuba would retaliate against the United States and Venezuela. Bernbaum received instructions to try to get Leoni to stop seizing Cuban boats.⁵¹⁹ Kennedy's "pay any price" commitment to liberty, backed up by actions such as the naval blockade of Cuba during the Missile Crisis, had become a faint echo in Latin America by 1968. The problem of mismatching counterinsurgent priorities of the United States and its host-nation ally had returned much as it had existed near the end of the Cuban Revolution.

Rafael Caldera, leader of the COPEI party, won the presidential election of December 1968. The third straight peaceful election in Venezuela sounded the death knell of the insurgency, although a low-intensity guerrilla effort survived into the 1970s. A telling indicator of how the insurgent efforts had backfired appeared in USIA survey results of university students and recent graduates from 1964 to late 1967. While fifty percent of the survey respondents preferred Socialism as against ten percent for Capitalism, the preference for Communism or a dictatorship had fallen from five percent in 1964 to only one percent in late 1967.⁵²⁰ Since

⁵¹⁸ "Venezuela Seizes Ship; Cuba Objects," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 21, 1968, Proquest Historical Newspapers. <https://search-proquest-com.srv-proxy2.library.tamu.edu/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/143217515/F116803F3BB7472FPO/1?accountid=7082>.

⁵¹⁹ Walt Rostow, "Memorandum, Fm Walt Rostow To The President, Subject: Venezuelan Seizure of Cuban Trawlers," 11:15 A.M., November 21, 1968, LBJ Library, NSF, Box 74, Country Venezuela, Vol. 3, 11/66-12/68, Folder 1, Document 2.

⁵²⁰ Miller, *Precarious Paths to Freedom*, 206-207.

students provided the largest pool of supporters of the insurgency, the magnitude of the failure with the general population was evident.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the Venezuelan government were more numerous and severe than those facing the Cuban government. They were also more severe than those that would face the Nicaraguan government throughout the Nicaraguan Revolution. Both the Right and the Left challenged the government internally and externally. The AD ruling coalition put together by Betancourt lost membership both in the sense of a coalition partner withdrawing and the expulsion of the AD youth wing. Members of various other political parties also criticized government actions, although stopping short of withdrawing. Another principal challenge existed in the weak economy of the first part of the period. The weak economy was partly due to low oil prices, especially during the early sixties. U.S. restrictions from the Oil Import Program that denied Venezuela unfettered participation in the growing petroleum market in the United States also played a role, even after the economy had improved. However, the weak economy had also resulted from the mismanagement of the Pérez dictatorship.

The Leftist insurgents faced numerous obstacles of their own, the most important of which was self-inflicted. They shared numerous obstacles with the Cuban insurgents, such as lack of agreement on strategy between all participants. The Leftist insurgents' most problematic self-inflicted obstacle had to do with their narrative and subsequent strategy in light of that narrative. The lack of a compelling narrative was a problem the Cuban insurgents had not suffered. The winning narrative used by the Cubans (and later by the Sandinistas) was an anti-dictator, anti-imperialist one. In Cuba, Castro promised a return to democracy. Since Venezuela was already a democracy, that narrative was not available for the insurgents. Instead, they

decided to use a narrative of Marxist ideology. The Marxist narrative was less useful than either the Cuban “return to Constitutional rule” narrative or the later more nationalistic narrative. The Leftist insurgents could have used the anti-American, anti-imperialist component of the victorious Cuban narrative by merely replacing the reference to sugar with mention of petroleum. Castro had increased emphasis on that component of the Cuban narrative; the longer his revolution went on. Such a component might have been more potent in the Venezuelan case because the economy was doing much worse than the Cuban economy. The poor state of the economy could have provided an influential part of the narrative if the insurgents publicized how much foreign ownership there was of Venezuela’s most significant natural resource, petroleum. Instead, the Leftists insurgents tried to take on the sophisticated task of “selling” class warfare, rather than the much simpler task of continually highlighting the need for the general populace to “vote with their wallets.”

The insurgents also suffered from strategic confusion and over-optimism. While they explicitly referenced the Cuban Revolution, and *foco* theory, as their template, the better description of the strategy they followed was an amalgamation of the Cuban Revolution and the 1958 overthrow of the Pérez dictatorship. The use of *foco* theory had a severe flaw that it was utterly unproven and most likely just wrong. It did not explain the success of the Cuban Revolution and ultimately failed everywhere anyone tried it. The attempt to replicate the 1958 success using the same methods failed as the tactics used, while appropriate against an unpopular dictator in bad economic times, were not viable against a democracy, at least one as ably led as had been the case under Betancourt. The insurgents were overly optimistic, as proved the case with their mentor, Che Guevara, in thinking they could use a Marxist ideology to convert uneducated peasants and non-labor urbanites in a democracy to their cause. The approach also

suffered from a strategic confusion in thinking that they could so convert the urban population while carrying out a terrorist campaign against it.

Another unproven strategy they pursued the majority of the insurgency was to try to instigate a right-wing *golpe* in the hope that the population would then turn to them for a democratic, albeit a Communist, restoration. One might argue, on the contrary, that a right-wing military government would have been more capable, at least in the short run, of repressing the insurgency. It was a confusing strategy based in part on an overly optimistic assessment of public support for a Communist government, said support running according to a USIA survey of college students no more than five percent in 1964 near the height of its popularity. The number was most significant because the largest segment of the population supportive of such a government was college students and recent graduates.

There were three quintessential elements in the success of the Venezuelan counterinsurgency. The first was the advantage Venezuela enjoyed as a democracy, especially following an ineffective dictatorship. The second was Betancourt's leadership, with roots developed over decades. The third was the numerous mistakes made by the insurgents. The democracy gave the citizenry a feeling of ownership and buy-in, combined with the knowledge that changes for the better might have been only the next election away. Participation in a democracy can channel dissatisfaction in nonviolent paths. The benefits of democracy achieved greater efficacy under good leadership, something that Betancourt and, to a lesser extent, his successor Raúl Leoni provided. Betancourt had laid out a reform program in the 1930s and partially implemented it when he was president in the 1940s. He had significantly softened the impact of foreign ownership of Venezuelan petroleum resources by placing a high tax on oil.

Such a move considerably weakened the most visible anti-imperialist component of a nationalist narrative.

Betancourt's narrative of reform via democracy presented over decades provided an open-ended narrative. The GoV could use such a narrative to lead the counterinsurgency. It allowed for both reinforcing the government's legitimacy and providing a mechanism for nonviolent change. The mistakes the insurgents made were as vital in the success of the counterinsurgency as anything the government did, perhaps even more so, as they alienated the general population by threatening its security. Their decision to try to prove the government illegitimate because it could not safeguard the security of its people backfired as more recent research would have predicted. Insurgency being the most political form of conflict turns more on the feeling of the population as to which side provides the best security than any other factor.⁵²¹

Intelligence available to the Venezuelan and U.S. governments during the counterinsurgency was superior to that available to the Batista regime by several orders of magnitude. Repeatedly, counterinsurgent intelligence had specific knowledge of insurgent strategy and planned operations. For example, on January 22, 1962, the embassy in Caracas passed along a memorandum from the Venezuelan government detailing extensive details about a suspected arms purchase to support the insurgents. It contained the long list of items and quantities involved, the cover names of the agents involved along with their real names, the name of their contact in the United States, and the city where they would meet.⁵²² Much of the intelligence appeared to have come from sources inside the insurgency's deliberations and

⁵²¹ Georgetown Research Project, "*Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela*," 135.

⁵²² Stewart, "Telegram 862."

operations given its content and timeliness. Counterinsurgency theory places a premium on good intelligence, and the Venezuelan and U.S. governments had superior intelligence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION: 1961-1979

The Sandinistas carried out only the second successful communist insurgency in Latin America.⁵²³ That almost unprecedented success raises the central question for this chapter as to whether that success was due to the Sandinistas' creation of a new, more dangerous, type of communist insurgency, U.S. and Nicaraguan government mistakes, or some other factor or combination of factors. The Sandinistas overthrew the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who was an ally of the United States. The insurgency spanned the years 1961 to 1979, thus touching on the administrations of five American presidents. The amount of attention afforded Nicaragua by each administration varied considerably from one to the next, and at times, even within the same administration either during different years and among different factions. The Sandinista success concerned the United States in at least three ways. First, the failure of the U.S. supported counterinsurgency involved the loss of an allied government. Second, it had implications for other counterinsurgencies, primarily anti-communist ones. Third, there were the geopolitical ramifications.

A critical component of the failure to defeat the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan Revolution was the mishandling of relations between the United States and Nicaragua from the middle of the nineteenth century through at least 1979. The following includes an account showing how the United States went from being a symbol of freedom and entrepreneurial spirit in the 1840s to one of repression, antidemocratic imperialism, and corrupt capitalism by the 1970s.

⁵²³ While Fidel Castro only declared a communist government after the victory of his insurgency, and the extent that the Sandinistas were actually communists is controversial, this dissertation follows the standard U.S. policy position that they were both communist revolutions, not because of believing that it necessarily best reflects the truth, but rather that it best supports an analysis wherein U.S. Foreign Policy was so driven by the belief they were.

While most of the blame for the failure of the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency resides with Somoza for creating the conditions for a successful revolution, the United States contributed significantly to the failure. America provided the initial context of the revolution and consistently made mistakes that exacerbated those of Somoza. The United States created the context for the revolution in two phases. The first involved military and political interventions from the 1840s to 1933. The second covered the years after American troops left Nicaragua in 1933 up through the formation of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN, Sandinista National Liberation Front) in 1961. The second phase had its genesis with the creation of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua (National Guard) in 1927. Originally intended to be apolitical, it became the basis for the creation and maintenance of the dictatorial Somoza dynasty. It was American-trained and equipped, along with being American-led until the United States left in 1933. After Nicaraguans began providing its officer corps, it retained most of its American nature. It continued to use American equipment from small arms to armored vehicles and planes, American-styled training, and officers knew they needed to obtain training from U.S. military institutions to advance.⁵²⁴ Somoza was himself a graduate of West Point.⁵²⁵

Somoza made several critical mistakes in leading the counterinsurgency, many of which the United States matched with mistakes that exacerbated the adverse effects. Somoza overused the National Guard with little concern for neither the extent of the violence it employed nor the collateral, or even intentional, damage to civilians. Despite having the lesson of the Cuban Revolution to guide it on the dangers of having such a visible American military influence, the United States continued to ship arms to Nicaragua until April 1977 and maintained a military

⁵²⁴ Charles A. Gillespie, Jr., "Nicaragua Country Reader," 117, <https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Nicaragua.pdf>.

⁵²⁵ Arthur W. Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights and Development Assistance: Nicaragua," *Universal Human Rights* 1, no. 4 (1979), 98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/761788>.

group of about ten officers and NCOs throughout the revolution. The arms embargo implemented in April 1977 ostensibly to improve Human Rights caused several problems that were more extensive, including leading to an increased level of abuses, as will be seen below. Somoza overly focused on Castro and the Communism of the Sandinistas, a mistake that the United States replicated.

Somoza violated the principle of having a unified politico-military leadership by consistently showing a preference for actions that maximized his family's wealth over ones that would most have contributed to a counterinsurgency win. As a third-party participant with a separate, often uncoordinated approach, the United States had leadership that exacerbated the problem by often following internally contradictory goals. The lack of unity became total near the end of the revolution when the United States, as it had in Cuba earlier, split its efforts away from Somoza's counterinsurgent campaign to retain his power to an American plan to allow Somoza to fall without allowing the Sandinistas to take over.

The Sandinistas' willingness to try different versions and combinations of the three basic communist insurgent approaches during their eighteen-year revolution complicated the counterinsurgency task. The Sandinistas also added a layer of complexity to the insurgency by directly targeting American domestic support for the Somoza government designed to achieve a two-fold task. One, they sought to circumvent any direct American intervention. Two, they sought to undermine the United States Government (USG) support for the government of Nicaragua (GON) to the point of obtaining a total withdrawal.

The roots of both the Somoza regime and the Nicaraguan Revolution trace back to the United States' interventions in Nicaragua in the period 1849 to 1933, particularly the period from

1927 until the Americans withdrew in January 1933.⁵²⁶ The initial intervention was an economic one. Cornelius Vanderbilt's Accessory Transit Company secured a contract to provide transit across the Venezuelan isthmus connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in 1849. The impetus for the contract was the high demand for travel across the isthmus as individuals leaving the eastern United States sought to travel to the California Gold Rush fields of 1848 to 1855. Vanderbilt's company eventually reduced the travel time across from the Atlantic to the Pacific from as many as twenty days to as few as two days. The route developed a regular business of about two thousand travelers a month until closed by fighting in 1856.⁵²⁷

The Nicaraguan Civil War 1854-55

A Nicaraguan civil war started on May 5, 1854, between Conservatives (or Legitimists as they called themselves at the time) and Liberals. The civil war led to two American military interventions, one a single incident, the other the appearance of an American filibuster force under William Walker that ultimately took over the government of the country. The former was an official action undertaken under the auspices of the U.S. government, while the latter was a private action supported by much of the American public.

San Juan del Norte (Greytown for Europeans and Americans) was the eastern terminus of the transit route across Nicaragua. While the transit company benefitted some Nicaraguans, it also disadvantaged others while carrying out a high-handed approach to Nicaraguan, and, in the case of Greytown, nominal British authorities. The company refused to pay the ten percent royalty to the Nicaraguan government agreed to in the original contract. The high-handed treatment of local law enforcement officials revealed itself in a series of incidents that began with the murder of a local inhabitant along the transit route.

⁵²⁶ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 3-5.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

In May 1854, one of the transit river steamers, the *Routh*, collided with a “bungo,” a type of Latin American canoe. After the crew had disentangled the steamer from some brushwood, the American steamer captain, T. T. Smith, ordered the steamer back into the main channel. He next turned the steamer around and bore down on the bungo. He shot the local boatman in the back with a rifle, killing him as he tried to leap to shore.⁵²⁸ When the steamer reached San Juan del Norte, the outgoing U.S. minister, Solon Borland, intervened when a posse tried to arrest Smith for murder. He said that the United States did not recognize any authorities in the town. Borland grabbed a rifle from a bystander and ordered the posse to withdraw. Later, a group of armed men tried to arrest Borland while he visited at the home of Joseph W. Fabens, the U.S. commercial agent, where Borland invoked his diplomatic immunity. Sometime after the group left, the mayor presented himself to deny he had ordered Borland’s arrest. While the two men were discussing the situation, a bystander threw a broken bottle and hit Borland in the face. The minister escaped injury, and the perpetrator disappeared through the crowd. Borland, and presumably Smith, made their way to the steamer *Northern Light* and returned to the United States.⁵²⁹

When Borland returned to the United States, he made a full report to Secretary of State William L. Marcy on May 30, 1854. One of Marcy’s first actions was to instruct Fabens in a letter of June 9, 1854, to demand an apology from authorities in Greytown. Such an order was impossible to carry out as Borland’s activities while exiting Nicaragua had resulted in the entire

⁵²⁸ David I. Folkman, Jr., “Westward via Nicaragua: The United States and the Nicaragua Route 1826-1869” (diss., University of Utah, 1966), 185, <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=192766>.

⁵²⁹ Randall O. Hudson, “The Filibuster Minister: The Career of John Hill Wheeler as United States Minister to Nicaragua, 1854-1856,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 49, no. 3 (1972): 284; and Franklin Pierce and J. C. Dobbin, “Message from the President of the United States: Transmitting Reports Concerning the Bombardment of San Juan de Nicaragua,” 33rd Cong., 1st sess., July 31, 1854, Serial Set 734, Session 16, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, H. Exec. Doc. 126: 15-17, HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3984549;view=1up;seq=423>.

local government resigning without any new group yet to take its place. The next day the Navy Department ordered Commander George N. Hollins, the captain of the sloop-of-war USS *Cyane*, to proceed to Greytown, gain the facts from Mr. Fabens, and teach the residents that the United States would not stand for such outrages. While the instructions noted that the department counted on the Commander to use good sense, it gave him considerable latitude as to how to present the lesson to the townspeople. Once Hollins arrived at his destination, the lack of any governing authority to issue the requisite apology severely restricted his options as to how to carry out his orders. On July 12, he issued an ultimatum demanding the still nonexistent town government to issue a full apology by 9 AM the next day, or he would bombard the town.⁵³⁰

Hollins ordered the bombardment to commence when the impossible apology was not forthcoming after leaving some extra time for women and children to evacuate the town. The ship fired into the town in three phases over approximately an hour and a half. Marines disembarked after the bombardment setting fire to the remaining buildings completing the destruction of the town. The attack became an international incident and ended the first American military intervention in Nicaragua.⁵³¹

William Walker and the Filibuster War 1855-57

Michel Gobat, in *Confronting the American dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule*, set out an argument that the interaction of the United States and Nicaragua in the period 1845 to 1933 determined much of Nicaragua's history from 1934 through 1990. The main events presaged included the Somoza dictatorships (1936-1979), the Nicaraguan Revolution (1961-1979), and the Sandinista Revolution (1979-1990). The principal U.S. components of the earlier period were political, economic, and military intervention. The principal Nicaraguan

⁵³⁰ H. Exec. Doc. 126: 7.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

components were a desire to inculcate American entrepreneurship while retaining Nicaraguan sovereignty. The following describes at length the William Walker intervention in Nicaragua that most clearly illustrates the pattern Gobat references wherein all these components are visible. Walker used a military intervention to dominate the political institutions of Nicaragua to the extent that he took over the Presidency. Once in control, he ordered an economic program that included land redistribution. The Nicaraguan components were evident when the Liberals invited Walker in with a partial payment providing land for settlement by American colonists bringing, the Nicaraguans hoped, the American entrepreneurial spirit. The Nicaraguans later used military action to oust Walker when he threatened long-term Nicaraguan sovereignty. The Walker intervention became a template for the various American interventions that Nicaraguans came to expect up to and including the fall of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 and beyond.

The Liberals were losing the Civil War and turned to outside help. In 1854, they contacted William Walker about his bringing three hundred filibusters to Nicaragua to defeat the Conservatives and then settle there. One of the enticements offered Walker's men was two hundred fifty acres of farmland at the close of the military campaign. The Liberals made such an offer not merely to secure a military victory with the help of the Americans. The Liberals also wanted the Americans to establish an agricultural colony to promote the adoption of American values in Nicaragua. Many members of the elite thought such values were at the core of the success of the United States. The arrival of Walker with only fifty-seven followers on June 1855, far fewer than the three hundred he had contracted to bring, began the second U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua, albeit a private one.⁵³²

⁵³² Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 26-27.

Walker began by securing his lines of supply by taking control of the San Juan del Sur-La Virgen transit road in late September. His Liberal backers were disappointed he had not immediately marched on the Conservative stronghold of Granada, a considerably less militarily sound strategy. Once he had control over the route that would bring him reinforcements and supplies from the United States, he developed a plan to take Granada quickly. His plan involved commandeering a transit company steamer in La Virgen and crossing Lake Nicaragua to make a surprise attack on Granada. The attack over water avoided the superior Conservative army's main strength at Rivas. His force of three hundred native volunteers and his "American Phalanx," with around one hundred filibusters at the time, took Granada without a battle on October 13, 1855. The filibusters executed their most important prisoner taken there, Foreign Minister Mateo Mayorga, in retaliation for an attack by the Rivas forces on a lake steamer's passengers.⁵³³ Walker threatened many more executions if the Conservative Army did not surrender. The Conservative generals, afraid for the lives of their kin, agreed to lay down their arms.⁵³⁴

Walker set up a puppet government at first using the Conservative Patricio Rivas of León as the provisional president. Ministers were kept under control by Walker's implementing a policy that required them to have a U.S. filibuster for a deputy. Walker secured military superiority by disbanding any Nicaraguan forces that had not volunteered to fight under his command. While Walker had the support of the elites, most of the Liberals, and many of the Conservatives, he also had considerable support from the local populace.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ James Carson Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua: Or, Reminiscences of An Officer of the American Phalanx* (1909), 46.

⁵³⁴ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 29.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

Walker used his control to reshape the political and economic systems in Nicaragua in the hope of Americanizing the country, under American leadership, of course. The election changes he made granting more local control loosened the grip of the elites on the electoral process, and it enabled him to orchestrate a massive election fraud to have himself elected president in July 1856. His main economic program against the elites consisted of the confiscation of over one hundred rural estates. He planned to diminish the power of the over eighty elite families affected while providing land for his filibusters and the thousands of U.S. colonists he expected to arrive in Nicaragua once he was in control of the government. He also saw the confiscated estates as a possible source of income wherein he would sell some to American investors.⁵³⁶

Walker's confiscation of land and other anti-elite actions pushed the upper classes of the surrounding Central American countries to invade Nicaragua in support of their peers in Nicaragua beginning the "National War" (1856-57). Costa Rica's President Juan Mora committed troops to battle in April; over one thousand troops from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras joined them after Walker's election in June. The latter force quickly pushed Walker's forces out of the area around León in northeast Nicaragua. The allied victory, combined with the Costa Rican army marching up from the south along with renewed vigor in the Nicaraguan elites' Guerrilla warfare in north-central Nicaragua, severely restricted the geographic options for the filibusters. Walker felt he had to abandon his capital in Granada and move to Rivas to guard his all-important supply lines along the transit road. Walker ordered his men to set fire to his capital city after they withdrew. There was not much left standing after the conflagration burned for ten days.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 38.

The conflict was relatively balanced until a second American intervention occurred; this one financed by Cornelius Vanderbilt. The Allies had more men fighting in the war's three fronts. However, the higher than anticipated casualty rate from both battle and the cholera epidemic that had broken out among them considerably decreased that advantage. Another negative factor was the bickering that had broken out in all aspects of the war's leadership on the Allied side. Vanderbilt initially lobbied the USG to stop the flow of recruits and supplies to Walker. Vanderbilt wanted to retaliate for the loss of his lucrative Accessory Transmit Company to Walker's main business allies, Charles Morgan and Cornelius Garrison, in 1853. The approach worked for a short time, but the USG relented under significant public pressure and allowed the reinforcements. Vanderbilt reacted by shifting his efforts to direct support of the Allies with both funds and arms, supplies that they sorely needed.⁵³⁸

Vanderbilt took his next step of escalation in January 1857. He assigned agents to assist the Costa Rican forces in capturing important forts along the San Juan River and capturing all the transit company steamers. The agents' success brought the eastern transit from the Atlantic to Lake Nicaragua into Allied hands. They completed the capture of the entire transit route by April. Walker's starving force no longer had a viable route for supplies or escape. Its numbers diminished by desertion and cholera, they had no choice but to surrender. The Allied leadership, ignoring the wishes of their Nicaraguan counterparts, allowed Walker and his force to return to the United States ending the American filibuster's intervention in Nicaragua.⁵³⁹

U.S. Intervention in the Civil War of 1912

Another significant American intervention in Nicaragua occurred in the context of events growing out of the desire of several Central American countries and the United States, along

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 40.

with various European countries, to build a transisthmian canal to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Initially, a source of strong agreement between the United States and Nicaragua as represented by the Nicaraguan dictator, José Santos Zelaya, the location for the canal became a significant source of contention.⁵⁴⁰ The pattern of the relationship between the United States and Zelaya would become a familiar one during the twentieth century. Foreign leaders usually received support in return for safeguarding American economic and political interests, or even for just providing stability in some cases.⁵⁴¹ Such leaders received support despite being, in many cases, very autocratic. Zelaya was very generous in his offer to the United States for granting it the right to dig the canal through Nicaragua up to, and including, perpetual ownership of the canal and the right to police the six-mile-wide Canal Zone.⁵⁴²

The decision of the United States to build the canal in Panama was not the direct cause of the break with Zelaya, who remained pro-American. However, the choice indirectly led to the Americans' efforts to unseat Zelaya. The turnabout in the American attitude came about when threats to traditional economic and hegemonic goals of the United States outweighed Zelaya's contributions in three ways. After the United States picked the Panamanian canal route, Zelaya sought out other powers for an alternative canal through Nicaragua, first with Great Britain and France, then with Germany and Japan. He also took out substantial European loans to build up the Nicaraguan economy violating the spirit of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Lastly, Zelaya tried to unite the Caribbean Basin under his leadership.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁴¹ Brian D'Haeseleer, *The Salvadoran Crucible: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency in El Salvador, 1979-1992* (2017), 20.

⁵⁴² Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, "Background Documents Relating to the Panama Canal: Prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate," 95th Cong., 1st Sess. (1977), HathiTrust, 169-75 <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d008170806>.

⁵⁴³ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 69.

The United States agitated for the Nicaraguan population to overthrow Zelaya, a campaign that resulted in the 1909 revolution led by the Liberal governor of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, General Juan José Estrada. Zelaya's forces quickly pushed the rebels to the edge of defeat but suffered a diplomatic disaster that reversed their military success when they executed two Americans found fighting with the rebels.⁵⁴⁴ U.S. Secretary of State Philander Knox ordered a break in diplomatic relations on December 1, 1909.⁵⁴⁵ Knox backed up the belligerent note announcing the cessation of relations by dispatching naval vessels carrying a force of one thousand Marines to Nicaraguan waters. Zelaya, hoping to forestall an American invasion, turned his government over to a longstanding Liberal critic, José Madriz, and went into exile. The move failed a short time later as government forces surrounded the few remaining rebels; most had ceased the struggle once the popular Madriz took power, providing the pretext for American intervention. The Madriz government fell soon after that as there was no reasonable counter to the U.S. presence placing Nicaragua back under American rule, this time by a USG-backed revolutionary government instead of a private citizen group.⁵⁴⁶

The USG special envoy Thomas Dawson, backed by U.S. warships in the Atlantic waters off the coast of Nicaragua, solidified its political intervention with an agreement in October 1910 called the Dawson Pact. The agreement attempted to stabilize the Nicaraguan government. In essence, the plan was to make the country a financial protectorate aligned with American strategic interests. The agreement placed a premium on stability over democratic values by excluding from power anyone other than the four Nicaraguan leaders that pooled control with American officials. The Knox-Castillo loan treaty formalized the principal financial component

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.; and Lester D. Langley and Thomas D. Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (1995), 85-92.

⁵⁴⁵ United States Dept of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (1914), 448-457.

⁵⁴⁶ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 69-70, 75.

of the pact. The treaty specified that Nicaragua would surrender control of its customs house, its primary source of government income, and the Banco Nacional de Nicaragua (National Bank of Nicaragua). The control of the Nicaraguan institutions would serve as a guarantee for \$15 million of loans from U.S. banks to put the Nicaraguan government's finances on a sound basis.⁵⁴⁷

The treaty immediately drew opposition in both Nicaragua and the United States. In Nicaragua, most portions of the population outside the four officials at the top of the government opposed surrendering as much sovereignty to the Americans as the treaty specified. The April 4, 1911 coup by liberal artisans from Managua led by President Estrada, a carpenter himself, had attempted to force Conservatives from the government. The coup failed miserably, American diplomats forced Estrada to step down and enter exile. Ignoring the unpopularity of its contents, the Nicaraguan Constituent Assembly ratified the Dawson Pact on June 6, 1911. In the United States, the Senate refused to ratify the treaty. The Knox-Castrillo Convention based on the Dawson Pact went to the U.S. Foreign Relations Committee, where it sat for almost a year before failing to receive a favorable report to the Senate during May 1912. The principal obstacle was the feeling on the part of many Senators that the William Howard Taft administration was too close to large corporations.⁵⁴⁸ Taft worked around the Senate's rejection by arranging private short-term loans from two private banks. The horrible terms of the treaty, surrender of the control over Nicaragua's financial institutions for only fifteen million dollars, along with the loss of sovereignty, became ten times worse under the new package. The reason for the ten-fold

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 75,81.

⁵⁴⁸ Bureau of Public Affairs Department of State. The Office of Electronic Information, "U.S. Intervention in Nicaragua, 1911/1912," August 19, 2008, accessed 6/20/20, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/ip/108629.htm>.

exacerbation was that the private bank deal produced only \$1.5 million in loans, a tenth as much as in the treaty, as payment for the aforementioned Nicaraguan sacrifices.

The State Department's plan to rely on the top officials of the Nicaraguan government to maintain stable control along very pro-American lines proved itself an overly simplistic approach that quickly unraveled. Significant political agitation occurred from almost all the groups excluded from regular political participation. The diplomats used the opportunity to bring about the ascendance to the presidency of Conservative Alfredo Díaz, restoring government control to the Conservatives. Much of the focus of political discontent had previously settled into support for the Minister of War, General Luis Mena, as its champion. The failed coup solidified Mena as a symbol of opposition to the leadership of the American-backed small group of Conservatives led by Díaz. A drought in March through July of 1912 that brought hunger to the rural and city poor eventually pushed the political discontent into an attempted revolution.⁵⁴⁹

The problems the drought produced went beyond food shortages and led to immediate and severe political ramifications. The drought highlighted the risk undertaken during the late nineteenth-century agro-export boom when many producers switched from grain production to cash crops/commodities such as coffee, sugar, and dairy products, reducing the overall production of foodstuffs. The expansion of upper-class haciendas placed additional strain on limited water resources even before the drought as the wealthy landowners fenced off their land, blocking access to water. They exacerbated problematic water access by drilling new wells dropping the water table to the extent that lands that had been well-irrigated outside the haciendas now grew dangerously dryer. The changes increased the national trend toward class tensions. Ultimately, peasants resorted to violence to gain access to better-irrigated fields.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 80, 94.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 96.

As production plummeted due to the drought, prices quickly rose in urban areas to heights that outpaced the resources of anyone not among the rich. Calls for municipalities to import grains despite the necessity of going outside of Central America, since the drought affected the entire region, met negative responses from national officials and the American official in charge of the customs duties. National officials pointed out it was against existing customs laws (presumably passed to protect the domestic production that had now failed) and might encourage speculation. The U.S. official worried that importing the food would run up the public debt in a Swiftian proposal to counter debt by not providing food for citizens. Many municipal officials moved ahead with the imports, some of whom engaged in the speculation national officials had feared.⁵⁵¹

Most of the opposition's aspirations focused on General Luis Mena, the Minister of War. President Díaz attempted to reduce Mena's portfolio on July 29, 1912, over concern that he might lead a revolt against the government. He developed that concern after hearing that Mena was bringing one hundred fifty recruits to Managua for a coup. Mena reacted by sending sixty soldiers to take a fortified hill, La Loma, south of the Campo de Marte. The troops demanded the government forces at La Loma relinquish control. They responded by firing on the interlopers. Mena and his force took refuge in one of the facility's other buildings. President Díaz requested George T. Weitzel, U.S. Minister to Nicaragua, to negotiate a peaceful end to the hostilities. The terms would be Mena's resignation as Minister of War with replacement by a civilian and amnesty for Mena's force. Weitzel considered arranging the safety of Mena as a high priority since he had concluded that if Mena died, his "irresponsible negroid son," Daniel,

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 94-95.

would use the military equipment and troops at his disposal to carry out reprisals in Granada.⁵⁵² Such racist preconceptions vitiated not only much of the USG's policy towards Nicaragua but in Latin America in general.

General Mena did not abide by the deal he made with Weitzel. Just after midnight, Mena, together with the Chief of Police who was his brother, along with the entire police force and other followers, cut the electric light wires in Managua and made their way fifteen miles south to Masaya.⁵⁵³ Mena's son captured Granada as his father set up operations in Masaya.⁵⁵⁴ The rebels had a rare advantage over the regular army in being better equipped. Mena had secured most of the military assets of the country by using his position as Minister of War to store them in areas that he would have control over once he openly broke with the government.⁵⁵⁵

In a pattern that repeatedly occurred in American interventions in Latin America, Weitzel contacted the Nicaraguan government about guarantees of safety for American property.⁵⁵⁶ He made the inquiry despite the knowledge that during the military conflict at hand, such guarantees might require the host nation to place the security of American property at a higher priority than the security of its own citizens' lives, let alone their property. He related in his reports to Washington that he had heard from the American owners of the Bank of Nicaragua and the country's railroad and steamships with property concerns. The Díaz government responded that

⁵⁵² George T. Weitzel, "The American Minister to the Secretary of State (Knox), No.68]," July 31, 1912, FRUS 1912, 1027, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1912>.

⁵⁵³ P. C. Knox, "The Secretary of State to the President (Taft)," August 5, 1912, FRUS 1912, 1032, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1912>.

⁵⁵⁴ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 101.

⁵⁵⁵ George T. Weitzel, "The American Minister to the Secretary of State (Knox), No.70]," August 9, 1912, FRUS 1912, 1035, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1912>.

⁵⁵⁶ For a discussion of over a dozen interventions in Latin American in just over two decades beginning in Cuba in 1906 see Paul W. Drake, "From Good Men to Good Neighbors: 1912-1932," in *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal, (1991), 1-40.

they could not provide such guarantees under the circumstances. Indeed, the response included a request that the United States provide forces not only to safeguard American property but also the property of all the people in Nicaragua. Weitzel, on his authority, wrote the commander of the USS *Annapolis* and requested a force to protect the railroad and provide security for American citizens and their property. He then asked the USG to send the three hundred fifty marines he had discovered were in Panama to the Pacific port of Corinto to bolster the one hundred bluejackets the *Annapolis* had provided.⁵⁵⁷

Mena was able to recruit quickly to fill out his army to a total of thirty-five hundred. The well-equipped rebel army supported by various insurgent groups was able to bring under its control all of Nicaragua aside from Corinto and Managua by late August. The rebels carried out a campaign of humiliation against Conservative elites, especially in the Conservative stronghold of Granada. Both men and women suffered serious degradations. The atrocities became so severe that the rebel leadership realized it had lost control of the movement in that regard. While the four hundred fifty bluejackets and marines were not enough to stem the tide, the U.S. troops became the most potent force between August 28 and September 4 when an additional twenty-three hundred sailors and marines landed at Corinto. While the commander, Admiral William Southerland, began with a strict policy of neutrality much against State Department wishes, he eventually took an anti-rebel position after running into significant resistance from the rebels in Masaya.⁵⁵⁸

Once Southerland went on the attack, an ill General Mena, convinced erroneously that the liberal forces under General Zeledón had abandoned the fight, surrendered. The surrender

⁵⁵⁷ Knox, "The Secretary of State to the President (Taft)," August 5, 1912, 1032, and Weitzel, "The American Minister to the Secretary of State (Knox), No.69]," 1034 and "The American Minister to the Secretary of State (Knox), No.70]," 1035.

⁵⁵⁸ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 101, 103, 111-115.

shocked Mena's forces and motivated Zeledón to suicidal heroism. Southerland, with Mena's forces out of the way, concentrated a force of one thousand American troops joined by four thousand government soldiers who surrounded Zeledón's eight hundred rebels. Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton, as the U.S. commander in the field, issued an ultimatum that Zeledón rejected. The resulting Battle of Coyotepe Hill was a lop-sided victory for the government. Zeledón and a small remnant of his force managed to escape south, but they marched into an ambush about ten miles south of Masaya. While there are different accounts of Zeledón's death, the most likely to be true was that the government troops executed him. The victors then paraded his corpse through the surrounding hamlets. Zeledón's sacrificial stand, particularly in contrast to how often other rebel leaders in the civil war and before had meekly surrendered to the Americans, occupied a unique place in Nicaraguan memory.⁵⁵⁹ American forces would remain in Nicaragua until 1933.

1912 to 1934 Dollar Diplomacy, Civil War, Sandino's Rebellion, and the Foundation of the Somozas' Dictatorships

The period from 1912 to 1926 found the United States relying on an economic intervention, dollar diplomacy, to carry out most of its policy goals for Nicaragua. The main policy goal early on was to prevent Nicaragua from reaching an agreement with a foreign power to build another interoceanic canal. The method in Nicaragua took the form of taking over the national bank, the railway, the customs receivership, and, most importantly, the commissions assigned to regulate state expenses. The commissions, appearing under the guise of several names over time, always had two U.S. members along with a single Nicaraguan. Ironically, dollar diplomacy did not funnel massive amounts of money into Nicaragua as it did in most of

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 117-118.

the rest of Latin America, but instead, led to austerity measures that restrained the growth of the economy. The primary goal of the effort was to keep a stable Conservative government in power. The United States denied the Liberal Party equal participation throughout most of the period.⁵⁶⁰

A civil war broke out in 1926 when there was a coup d'état led by a Conservative who had been a primary beneficiary of past dollar diplomacy, Emiliano Chamorro, against a coalition government elected in 1925. The United States intervened and forced the ruling Conservatives and insurgent Liberals to accept a peace treaty. The peace treaty gave the United States not only the right to run Nicaraguan elections but also to establish and command the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua. This new army would be the guarantor of the democratization process. Thus, the United States had moved from dollar diplomacy to a policy of destroying the caudillismo that American officials saw as leading to Nicaragua's political instability. The American officials feared political instability above all, a fear that would only increase during the Cold War. Such steps were necessary to ensure the continuation of American hegemony.⁵⁶¹

The period from 1927 through 1933 encompassed a guerrilla war led by Augusto César Sandino, a Liberal general from whom the Sandinista movement would later take its name. Sandino refused to quit fighting when the landing of U.S. Marines forced almost every other participant of the Nicaraguan civil war of 1926 to 1927 to withdraw from the conflict. The National Guard that was to be a permanent, non-partisan constabulary came to represent a very different force.⁵⁶² The leader of the National Guard when the United States pulled out was Anastasio Somoza Garcia, a position he used to seize power in 1937 (a result historian Walter

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 125, 127-128, 208

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 205, 210.

⁵⁶² Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 73.

LeFeber claimed was inevitable for “nonpartisan” constabulary forces in Latin America).⁵⁶³ His eldest son, Luis Anastasio Somoza, took over the dictatorship in 1956. His second son Anastasio Somoza Debayle took over in 1967 and was the dictator until the Sandinistas overthrew him in 1979. The National Guard had provided political stability rather than democracy, but still, it had managed to preserve the American hegemony.

Sandinino stated unequivocally to Carleton Beals, the only U.S. reporter to interview the rebel leader, that he saw the current American invasion as merely another act in a long line of unjustified American interventions in Nicaragua. He also discounted any suggestion that Nicaraguans should patiently wait for the Americans to leave, pointing to the as-yet unfulfilled promise for the United States to leave the Philippines.⁵⁶⁴ Sandino’s approach incorporating a longer-term view of the relationship with the United States, emblematic of most elite or at least educated Latin Americans, stood in stark contrast to the announced policy of the United States. The U.S. government based that policy on a much shorter-term view of American involvement in Latin America. The unannounced policy of the maintenance of hegemony in the region did represent a longer-term outlook, but one in conflict with the values trumpeted in the announced policy of democratization.

Sandinino tried to counteract the American claim that troops had been sent into Nicaragua to protect “American lives and property,” by claiming in 1928 that he had not targeted either (other than American troops). His 1927 raid on the American-owned San Albino gold mine

⁵⁶³ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, (1993), 67.

⁵⁶⁴ Carleton Beals, “With Sandino in Nicaragua: Sandino – Bandit or Patriot?,” *The Nation*, March 28, 1928, 340-341, <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3-euw1-ap-pe-ws4-cws-documents.ri-prod/9781138824287/ch5/11. Carleton Beals, With Sandino in Nicaragua, 1928.pdf>,

revealed the nature of the claim as propaganda. Indeed, by April of 1928, he had switched targets almost exclusively to American ones.⁵⁶⁵

Sandino began his campaign against the American intervention by conducting two raids to gather supplies. The first raid occurred during June 1927 in Telpaneca. Major Herald Pierce, commander of the fifty-Marine detachment sent to secure the Nueva Segovia, left a ten-man garrison at Ocotal to protect the governor and left to investigate news of the raid on June 13. Arriving two days later, Pierce discovered the guerrillas had taken significant amounts of cash and merchandise from a store in the village. Having escorted the new governor to Ocotal and investigated the “robbery” at Telpaneca, Pierce considered his mission accomplished. Marine Intelligence reported, massaged into content expected to please the commanding general, Sandino’s inconsequential, “poorly led” group posed little threat and predicted that the group would quickly dissipate.⁵⁶⁶

Managua received intelligence on June 30 that Sandino had taken the American-owned San Albino gold mine. Brigadier General Logan Feland, in overall command of the Marines, decided to send a large force after Sandino composed of one hundred fifty volunteer Nicaraguans bolstered by a Marine force of seventy-five mainly assigned to protect the expedition’s Marine officers.⁵⁶⁷ He put Marine Major Oliver Floyd in command. Major Floyd felt the Marines would have to carry the bulk of the mission leading to his only recruiting seventy-four volunteers. Sandino obtained five hundred pounds of dynamite and associated fuses and caps

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.; Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898–1934*, 2nd ed. (2001), 202; and Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 73.

⁵⁶⁶ Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 66-70.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 29 and Charles C. Eberhardt, “The American Minister to the Secretary of State (Knox), [No.68],” July 31, 1912, FRUS 1912, 439-440 <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1912>.

from the mine. He, his force now almost fully outfitted from the two raids, decided to fight the Marines at Ocotal before Floyd's more numerous allied force could intercept him.⁵⁶⁸

The insurgent leader used a letter to tell the governor he would not recognize any authority in Nueva Segovia outside of Ocotal since Sandino controlled the rest of the towns therein. He also took part in a series of telegrams sent between the telegraph offices at San Fernando and Ocotal for the commander of the Marines stationed there, Captain G. D. Hatfield. The communication took the form of several threats and insults with both sides seeking combat and promising a decisive victory. During the period of the interchange of threats, General Feland decided to bolster his forces in the North in the hope of running Sandino to ground. The project was supposed to be mainly a Guardia Nacional undertaking. However, for at least the first half of what became a multi-year fight, the Marines often bore the brunt of operations. Feland ordered the Marine detachment at Ocotal reinforced to forty-one and added a Guardia Nacional unit of forty-eight Nicaraguans with two American officers.⁵⁶⁹

Sandino decided to carry out his threat to attack Ocotal on July 15. The attack presaged two mistakes that Fidel Castro would make over twenty-five years in the future. The attack was conventional (like Castro's first two), and he announced it was coming (Castro's Granma "invasion"). He did at least surpass Castro in having the advantage of a more numerous force, an advantage more than nullified by the appearance of American airpower. Sandino attacked with a force of up to as many as eight hundred local peasants supplementing his Guerrilla band of approximately sixty. Sandino's main force controlled about one hundred twenty rifles, at

⁵⁶⁸ Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 73-75.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-76.

minimum two machine guns, and many dynamite bombs. Most of the rest of the group had machetes or short swords.⁵⁷⁰

During the battle, many of the peasants took advantage of Sandino's promise to allow them to take revenge on Conservatives by attacking and looting their homes and businesses. Such activity was the most successful part of the raid as the attack on the soldiers in Ocotal suffered a high casualty rate while inflicting few on the Marines and Guardia Nacional, one dead and one wounded and three wounded with four captured respectively. The insurgent losses stretched into the hundreds, mainly due to the strafing and dive-bombing by Marine aircraft. The dive-bombing attack was the first recorded use of the tactic rather than some erroneous references to the later attacks of the Luftwaffe in Poland as having been first.⁵⁷¹

Sandino's decision to make a conventional attack had allowed the allied forces to utilize their strengths of better-equipped, disciplined troops for effective fire control, small unit tactics, and airpower, while defending prepared positions in a static battle. The lop-sided casualty figures bore out those advantages. Sandino's "army," the "Defending Army of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua," tried conventional tactics in the next two, albeit smaller, encounters with the Marines and their allies. Those encounters were ambushes, both of which the Marines discovered before Sandino's force could spring them, at San Fernando and Santa Clara, respectively. Sandino decided after starting with three failures to switch from conventional tactics to Guerrilla tactics. He would follow the classic insurgent strategy of only fighting, as much as possible, when conditions favored the Guerrillas and avoiding all other contacts.⁵⁷²

Later Castro would make the same decision learning only through the hard way after not taking

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 76-82 and Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 195-197.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 85-86.

advantage of Sandino's experience. Sandino had learned that the Marines and the American-trained Guardia Nacional were much more difficult opponents than the Conservative forces he had faced previously.

A pattern was now in place that would become a familiar one for Latin American insurgencies with U.S. involvement, if not insurgencies outside the region. Some American officials in the government and the military underestimated the insurgent forces, often dismissing them as "bandits," while others had a better understanding.⁵⁷³ Officials and other interested individuals in Washington and the country developed a significant split over whether the intervention was a good idea, including some Americans that supported Sandino.⁵⁷⁴ The announced U.S. policy was "to protect American lives and property" and to support good governance in the host nation. In reality, the driving force of the policy was the maintenance of economic and political hegemony with a growing preference for "stability." Another factor seen in the conflict was the impact of other areas of American interests causing adverse effects on the American effort in the host nation. The competing area, in this case, was China, where the anti-imperialist Kuomintang had "... split into left and right wings, thus threatening a civil war within a civil war"⁵⁷⁵ The development had convinced the Marine Corps Commandant, General John A. Lejeune, to draw down the Marine force in Nicaragua to bolster the Marine brigade in China.⁵⁷⁶

The most significant discrepancy in the U.S. approach was the description of Sandino's campaign. Most officials continued describing his forces as simply being bandits, even long after the most ardent military leaders had to admit the campaign went far beyond banditry. The

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 83, 85-86, 89.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 102, 104-105.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

insurgent campaign had broad Latin American support and beyond as even a Kuomintang unit had the name “Sandino Division.”⁵⁷⁷ Sandino had drawn participants from every Latin American country other than Peru, showing the widespread anti-American imperialist sentiment in the region.⁵⁷⁸ He even had Marines join his group after they deserted.⁵⁷⁹ There were also several instances of Guardia Nacional turning on the Marines and attacking them (as would become a common occurrence during the 21st-century war in Afghanistan).⁵⁸⁰ Sandino’s campaign also presaged the Vietnam War in that the ability of the insurgents to cross the border when under pressure, in this case, into Honduras as compared to Cambodia, allowed them to survive in many cases.

The conflict changed when Sandino abandoned his conventional approach and switched to asymmetric tactics. The change partially nullified two of the allied advantages, superior training and fire discipline in small unit tactics, and air power. The new approach reduced the American advantage from aircraft both in gathering intelligence and bombing and strafing attacks. The forest shielded the Guerrillas from observation and the destructive power of the small bombs the planes carried. The peasants provided Sandino much better intelligence of allied movements.⁵⁸¹ The disparity in the quality of the intelligence available to the two sides allowed Sandino to choose when and where to strike significantly diminishing the allied advantage in small unit tactical training.

Militarily, the conflict settled into a stalemate with both sides unable to achieve their primary objective of eliminating their opponent, the allies striving to kill or capture Sandino and

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 112-114

⁵⁷⁸ Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 198.

⁵⁷⁹ Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, 75.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 102, 154-155, 173, 223.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 88.

the Sandino “army” trying to drive the Americans from Nicaragua. Politically, the United States was more successful as it kept the government it wished, progressed towards its goals of free elections, and trained the Guardia Nacional to become the guarantor of a stable government. It did fail, however, in its goal of creating a nonpartisan military force that could guarantee stable democratic rule.

Sandino enforced discipline over his insurgents, especially in their treatment of peasants. However, his methods in dealing with “transgressors” both within and outside his forces reinforced his image as not worthy of serious consideration because of its brutality and lack of recognition of Western norms. The most common types of punishments against various types of perpetrators involved the use of machetes in cruel executions, some of which involved the mutilation of the victims. Sandino also had at least one captured Marine pilot hung along with executing other POWs. His official seal showed a Sandinista standing over a prostrate Marine about to behead him. He even executed someone who came to meet with him about negotiating an end to the conflict.⁵⁸²

Once Sandino switched to an asymmetric insurgent strategy, the conflict settled into a long, drawn-out stalemate of sorts. The Allies could never eliminate Sandino or his forces’ ability to carry out attacks. When pressed, Sandino’s forces usually would escape across the border to Honduras. On the other hand, the Allies were able to extend their control throughout Nicaragua other than minor incidents during some of Sandino’s raids. Ironically, both sides would claim victory as the United States supervised free elections in 1933, completing its main stated goal and then left the country in early 1934, fulfilling Sandino’s goal of “expelling” the Marines. Ultimately, Sandino failed to help establish the kind of government in Nicaragua free

⁵⁸² Ibid.93, 97, 147, 212-213.

of American domination he wanted. Instead, General Anastasio Somoza, the first Nicaraguan Chief Director of the National Guard, ordered Sandino executed soon after the Americans left. The United States had failed to establish a stable democratic government in Nicaragua, but it did get a stable dictatorship that was extremely friendly to American interests. Thus, it retained its hegemonic status unabated, the unspoken goal of the United States' foreign policy in the region.

The Nicaraguan Revolution Begins in 1961

A group of ex-student activists, José Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomás Borge Martínez, founded the FSLN. Their goal was to start a Nicaraguan Revolution as a direct descendant of the Cuban Revolution that had come to power only two years before.⁵⁸³ That revolution, as characterized by Colonel D. Waghelstein, was "...a major departure from the traditional and ineffective approach long advocated by Moscow. Castro's Rebel Army was the vanguard, not any political party or political organization."⁵⁸⁴ They would pursue the Somoza regime through guerrilla *focos* (foci) organized to operate in accord with three central principles as espoused by Ché Guevara. "(1) Popular forces can win a war against the army. (2) It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them. (3) In undeveloped America, the countryside is the basic area for armed fighting."⁵⁸⁵

One of the problems with *foco* theory was that while it disputed the Marxist theory's claim that one must wait for history and economics to create the conditions for revolution, it does not correctly establish what those conditions are. An insurgency is a struggle for the control/support of the population. In an armed conflict that control/support will accrue to the side providing the best-perceived path to security. Thus, the conditions that insurgents need to

⁵⁸³ Tim L. Merrill, Library of Congress, Nicaragua: A Country Study, 3rd ed., Area handbook series 550-88, (1994) Chapter I, Subheading "The Rise of the FSLN."

⁵⁸⁴ Waghelstein, "Insurgency Status Report," 43.

⁵⁸⁵ Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 7.

establish are those in which they become the perceived path to the best security for the population. The Sandinistas never realized that none of their approaches were the best way to achieve that. However, as can be seen below, Somoza pursued a course, with American help, that unintentionally created that perception for the Sandinistas and ultimately led to their victory.

The *focos* approach did not survive the first attempt the FSLN made at an armed campaign. Colonel Santos Lopez, a veteran of Sandino's earlier insurgency, shared command with Tomás Borge of a force of sixty poorly trained ex-students in a strike from Honduras into Nicaragua to take the village of Raití in June 1963. They had not attempted to secure a supply line or familiarize the guerrillas with the terrain in the area and had failed in attempts to garner support from the local Miskito Indians. The group managed a few unsuccessful attacks on National Guard elements before retreating into Honduras in October. Authorities arrested most of the force not long after its return. Despite continued references to *foquismo* rhetoric, the FSLN would next take the field of combat under a different communist insurgent strategy.⁵⁸⁶ The failure of *foquismo* to provide success was hardly surprising since the theory had not been responsible for the success of the Cuban Revolution despite Guevara and Castro's claims to the contrary.

Nicaragua deported Carlos Fonseca to Guatemala in January 1965. There he encountered a member of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) named Luís Turcios Lima. Similarly, FAR and Turcios Lima had experienced only defeat with *foquismo*. The FAR had traded in a *focos*-based approach for the Protracted People's War model employed successfully by Mao Zedong and Vo Nguyen Giap in China and Vietnam, respectively. The meeting between Fonseca and Turcios Lima, combined with a year's experience of fighting alongside the FAR of an FSLN group under

⁵⁸⁶ Nolan, "From FOCO to Insurrection," 74.

Oscar Turcios, led to a return to the mountains by the FSLN around the end of the year in 1966. The return accompanied claims from the FSLN spokesperson in Cuba of a continuation of a *foquista* strategy to obtain peasant support by armed action. In actuality, the three Sandinista contingents headed by Fonseca, Mayorga, and Borge avoided firefights and concentrated instead on building a peasant support network in the tradition of Protracted People's War.⁵⁸⁷ Despite avoiding combat, a peasant informer revealed the location of the Mayorga column leading to its destruction by the helicopter-mobile National Guard in May 1967.⁵⁸⁸

The second major military debacle in as many tries led to a substantial reorganization of the movement, both as to its personnel structure and its ideology. Fonseca ascended to a weakened secretary-general position as the group diffused power among the National Directorate membership. The changes brought about a more flexible leadership mechanism to deal with the genuine possibility of capture and death. The changes did exact the cost of increased factionalism during the next ten-year period. That the threat of capture or death was genuine follows from the fifty-seven percent fatality rate of the Directorate during the period.⁵⁸⁹

A change in overall strategy matched the change in the leadership structure, gone completely were the *focos*, replaced by a "Prolonged Popular War" (GPP- *Guerra Popular Prolongada*). The military action side of the equation was to be small unit action over widely dispersed areas and the creation of liberated zones in line with Mao's campaign in China. In practice, ideological fervor was far more in evidence than military action. The new strategy introduced two crucial changes in the FSLN agenda. First, the peasants were to take part in the guerrilla struggle to overthrow the government rather than postpone active involvement until the

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (2000), 98.

⁵⁸⁹ Nolan, "From FOCO to Insurrection," 74.

FSLN had taken control of the government. Second, and more telling, the primary goal switched to the destruction of U.S. imperialism, a move that takfiri jihadists such as Al Qaeda would replicate later, as the immediate adversary and they committed to deposing any nonsocialist regime that came to power.⁵⁹⁰

The U.S. reputation at the time in much of Latin America "... as the champion of authoritarianism in the Americas" made for a compelling anti-American narrative.⁵⁹¹ The change in the targeted adversary was notable for two reasons. Politically the move distanced the FSLN from the many anti-Somoza groups that hoped to form a U.S.-backed reform government, a government unlikely to have a significant role for the Sandinistas. Strategically, targeting the U.S. support of any government in Nicaragua was more in keeping with the reality on the ground.

The FSLN organized a comprehensive program to influence American public opinion and shape it to pressure Congress to work against any support for the Somoza regime. The first step was to monitor the level of U.S. attention closely. The approach the insurgents decided to follow was to pursue the revolution at a pace designed to lull American complacency until it was too late to intervene militarily. They also developed a media plan to influence public opinion in the United States and the world with measures such as having FSLN leaders write editorials for *The New York Times*. Fidel Castro contributed by suggesting (ordering) that the insurgents establish front organizations outside Nicaragua in the guise of public affairs/information offices to generate support for the revolution and build resistance to U.S. involvement. Finally, the FSLN would finance guest speakers for U.S. academic, civic, and church groups who would

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Learning from History," in *Exporting Democracy*, ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal, 389.

present propaganda attached to requests that the groups write letters to U.S. Congressmen who held key committee positions concerning security assistance.⁵⁹²

Reorganized and redirected, the FSLN began another return to the mountains in 1969. While there was a firefight between an FSLN-led peasant guerrilla group and a National Guard unit in February 1970, one that the Sandinistas uncharacteristically managed to escape successfully, the period saw little other military action. Protracted War theory called for such a “period of silence” wherein the guerrillas were to build forces and a supporting peasant network.⁵⁹³

Recruitment spiked in 1972 because of the mishandling of the Managua earthquake of 1972. Mauricio Solaún, U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua during the crucial period from 1977 to 1979, characterized Somoza’s response as giving rise to a

... broad consensus among my contacts -a few members of the Somoza family inclusive- that the devastating Managua earthquake of 1972 was a critical turning point ushering in a ludicrous period of exacerbated kleptocracy, wanton National Guard repression, debauchery of the ruler, corrupt expansion of his business empire and mismanagement scandals in it, and a syndrome of normlessness further delegitimizing the Somocista state.⁵⁹⁴

The knowledge both within and without Nicaragua that Somoza had diverted much of the international earthquake relief aid to himself and his closest supporters, including his family, began creating a gulf between the previously supportive business community and the regime in addition to enhancing FSLN recruitment.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² Waghelstein, “Insurgency Status Report,” 45-46.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Mauricio Solaún, *U.S. Intervention*, 79.

⁵⁹⁵ Richard R. Fagen, “Dateline Nicaragua: The End of the Affair,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 36 (Autumn 1979): 181; and Alan Riding, “Nicaraguans Accused of Profiteering on Help the U. S. Sent After Quake.” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1977, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/03/23/archives/nicaraguans-accused-of-profiteering-on-help-the-us-sent-after-quake.html>.

Matilda Zimmermann, in her book *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, has persuasively argued that Solaún's judgment that the earthquake was the critical turning point in the Nicaraguan Revolution was incorrect. While the corruption evident after the earthquake was a decisive factor on the part of the business community that had supported Somoza joining the opposition, it had its most significant effect only on that section of the elite and middle class. Since the revolution was a massive popular insurrection that initially eschewed capitalism, it just did not have the character an aggrieved business class upheaval would have had.⁵⁹⁶ Solaún probably had the same problem that Arthur Gardner had suffered in misapprehending the Cuban Revolution. American Ambassadors usually are in contact far more with a host country's elite rather than the ordinary people in discussions of the significant trends in a society. While the earthquake's aftermath was of primary importance to some members of the elite, it served the lesser role of being a reminder to non-elites about the way the Somoza government devalued their welfare.

Somoza and the National Guard diverted many relief goods, including food, clothing, medicine, and cash to themselves. The theft was so egregious that the Spanish Ambassador had the materials returned when a shipment arrived from Spain earmarked for the International Red Cross. He did this rather than hand it over to the dictator's namesake son, Anastasio Somoza, who was in charge at the airport. Despite the significant amount of such supplies the Somoza administration stole, the much more significant theft occurred during the reconstruction phase. The Somozas had allowed other wealthy families to control some business sectors such as banking and construction before the earthquake, helping to retain elite support even as the Somoza family controlled much of the rest of the economy. The elder Anastasio Somoza could

⁵⁹⁶ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 210.

not refrain from moving into both sectors as the vast amounts of relief funds flooded into the country. His bank, the Banco de Centroamérica, handled most of the funds with the majority going to his new construction companies. Somoza used a variety of schemes to bilk millions from relief efforts and reconstruction. One method he used was to rebuild highways using expensive concrete blocks made by one of the factories he owned, rather than traditional materials like poured concrete or asphalt.⁵⁹⁷

Somoza and his cronies also used real estate transactions to cover the theft of millions of dollars of reconstruction funds. Most of the damage occurred in the downtown area, where ownership did not center on Somoza and his associates. Somoza decided to concentrate on new construction in the outlying regions of the city where he and his associates already owned land or quickly bought it up. They enhanced the value of their land indirectly by using reconstruction funds to develop the areas with new roads and utilities. They also profited directly by buying parcels of land at market prices and then selling them to the government for almost five hundred times as much after only a few months.⁵⁹⁸ The Somoza eviscerated the reconstruction effort to the degree that downtown Managua was still in ruins over twenty years later.⁵⁹⁹

The corruption evident after the earthquake would have specific ramifications for the counterinsurgency when its full effects filtered into the business community. The principal cause of complaints from the business community was that the Somoza interests used the diverted funds to place non-Somoza firms at a competitive disadvantage.⁶⁰⁰ However, it was, more

⁵⁹⁷ Alan Riding, "National Mutiny in Nicaragua," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1978, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/07/30/archives/national-mutiny-in-nicaragua-nicaragua.html>, and David Jickling, "Nicaragua Country Reader," 128, <https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Nicaragua.pdf>.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ "20 Years After Quake, Poor Still Live in Managua's Ruins," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1992, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-12-27-mn-5120-story.html>.

⁶⁰⁰ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy toward Nicaragua," RAC Project Number NLC-15-35-4-8-5, p. 1.

importantly, a turning point in the deterioration of the legitimacy of the Somoza rule. A legitimacy the dictator's father and older brother had carefully safeguarded.⁶⁰¹ While the mishandling of the earthquake certainly contributed ample evidence of the widespread corruption of the dictatorship, the critical turning point did not occur until January of 1978 when the main moderate leader, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, fell victim to an assassination widely thought to be under Somoza's orders.

While professional FSO ambassadors oversaw the first nine years of the Sandinista's efforts in Nicaragua, three political appointees with marked deficiencies oversaw the heart of the revolution up until one month before its completion.⁶⁰² The political appointees were Turner B. Shelton (11/20/70 – 8/11/75), whom one embassy staff official termed the “worst of the worst,” James D. Theberge (8/11/75 – 6/8/77), and Mauricio Solaún (9/30/77 – 2/26/79).⁶⁰³ Solaún also received low marks from a prominent embassy staffer.⁶⁰⁴ The next ambassador, Lawrence A. Pezzulo, did not present his credentials until July 31, 1979. Shelton repeated Gardner's mistake relative to a country's dictator of becoming “... joined at the hip with Somoza.” Shelton's transgressions extended to forcing embassy personnel to rewrite reports until they falsely reflected well on Somoza, or they would not go out. The staff took to sending un-doctored reports as airgrams that went in the diplomatic bag by courier. The inappropriate relationship

⁶⁰¹ Joseph Tulchin and Knut Walter, “Nicaragua: The Limits of Intervention,” in *Exporting Democracy*, ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal, 252.

⁶⁰² Gillespie, “Nicaragua Country Reader,” 85.

⁶⁰³ James Cheek, “In Ambassador We Don't Trust: Working Under the Leadership of the Infamous Turner Shelton,” Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, December 13, 2013, accessed 4/27/2019, <https://adst.org/2013/12/in-ambassador-we-dont-trust/>; and “James D. Theberge; Former Ambassador, 56.” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1988, sec. Obituaries. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/24/obituaries/james-d-theberge-former-ambassador-56.html>.

⁶⁰⁴ Gillespie, Jr., “Nicaragua Country Reader,” 111, 123.

was so close with Somoza that Nicaragua issued a twenty-peso note with the ambassador's likeness on it.⁶⁰⁵

The Reign of Terror and its Aftermath from January 1975 to September 1977

The five-year quiet phase ended in December 1974 when a small group of thirteen masked FSLN commandos seized the home of Jose Maria Castillo Quanta, a prominent supporter and personal friend of Somoza who died in the course of the attack, during a Christmas party in Managua in honor of the U.S. Ambassador, Turner B. Shelton. The ambassador had just left, but the commandos still netted several valuable hostages, including at least two relatives of Somoza. His brother-in-law, Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, the Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, and a cousin who was the director of the National Development Institute were among the victims. Others among the twenty or so prominent people taken, thirty-five hostages in total, were the Nicaraguan chief delegate to the United Nations, Guillermo Lang, Gen. Alfonso Deneken Díaz, the Chilean Ambassador to Nicaragua, and Luis Valle Olivares, the Nicaraguan Minister of the National District. The balance of the hostages included the Mayor of Managua and many of the officials' wives.⁶⁰⁶

The commandos demanded the release of some forty of their comrades from prison, a five-million-dollar ransom, and safe passage out of the country. Negotiations carried out under the mediation of Archbishop of Managua, Msgr. Miguel Ovando y Bravo, reduced the ransom to between one and one and a half million dollars, the release of prisoners to twenty-six, and

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Alan Riding, "Guerrillas Kill 3 at Party, Seize Key Nicaraguans," *The New York Times*, December 29, 1974, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/12/29/archives/guerrillas-kill-3-at-partyseize-key-nicaraguans-guerrillas-seize.html>, Alan Riding, "Nicaragua Will Free 26 To Win Hostages' Release," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1974, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/12/30/archives/nicaragua-will-free-26-to-win-hostages-release-special-to-the-new.html>, and Stephen Kinzer, "Sandinistas Mark Raid That Presaged Victory," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1985, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/01/07/world/sandinistas-mark-raid-that-presaged-victory.html>.

transportation of the freed prisoners and the commandos to Cuba.⁶⁰⁷ Somoza met the reduced Sandinista demands, but it proved to be only a Pyrrhic victory for the rebels.⁶⁰⁸

Somoza used the occasion of the December 27 Christmas raid, combined with ongoing FSLN assassinations of local officials in the home area of the Sandinistas, to declare martial law. Somoza had his forces start with radical workers, Catholic activists, and students in the cities, but quickly changed the focus to the northern rural areas. The National Guard pursued a reign of terror in the mountain haunts of the guerrillas.⁶⁰⁹ Somoza began the campaign by declaring a state of siege. He ordered the creation of an elite counterinsurgency unit within the National Guard. He requested, and received, an eighty percent increase in U.S. military assistance. The Guardia Nacional concentrated its activities in the northern departments of Matagalpa, Segovia, and Zelaya, where the FSLN presence was most visible.

The counterinsurgents applied indiscriminate torture, rape, and mass executions principally against peasants with little or no provocation, especially since the FSLN had relatively few peasants as members at this time. The campaign was more about sheering away peasant support for the FSLN. A significant component of that effort occurred when the Guardia rounded up eighty percent of the peasants and placed them in relocation camps. The move allowed them to make the areas free-fire zones.⁶¹⁰ The Air Force bombed settlements, including the use of napalm. They burned peasant homes and fields. The campaign accounted for up to

⁶⁰⁷ Riding, "Nicaragua Will Free 26."

⁶⁰⁸ Humberto Ortega, "Nicaragua—The Strategy of Victory: Interview with Humberto Ortega," interviewed by Marta Harneker, in Carlos Fonseca et al., *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution*, ed. Bruce Marcus (1982), 68.

⁶⁰⁹ "Nicaragua: Somoza's Reign of Terror," *Time* March 14, 1977.

⁶¹⁰ William M. LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua: Another Cuba?," *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 1 (Fall 1979):31 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20040337>.

three thousand dead.⁶¹¹ The actions resulted in Nicaragua joining several of its Latin American neighbors in having many women seeking information about their “disappeared” loved ones.⁶¹²

The FSLN fought back with limited success, but the group’s small peasant base could not survive the campaign’s executions and resettlement, the latter being an oft-repeated, oft-successful counterinsurgent technique. The National Guard had succeeded in cutting off the main guerrilla force, the *Pablo Ubeda* column led by Henry Ruíz, from both its peasant supporters and its urban contacts. Forced into the isolated jungles of eastern Nicaragua, the loss among the FSLN leadership was particularly devastating as three others died, including Carlos Fonseca, and Tomás Borge entered captivity. The government clampdown that led to the third major military defeat of the FSLN also brought about a significant faction split for the first time.⁶¹³

Two groups, one led by Jaime Wheelock and the other by Humberto Ortega, concluded that a peasant-based Protracted War approach would not work. Wheelock’s Proletarian Tendency (TP) agreed with the GPP’s belief that the correct approach was a cautious long-term approach, but they wanted to base it on the buildup of a Leninist working-class party. While they accepted a commitment to violence, in theory, they foresaw effective military action so far into the future that the GPP purged them in October 1975. While the TP eventually formed some urban cells, their numbers always remained small and were militarily insignificant. Ortega’s Insurrection Tendency (*Terceristas*) rejected the belief that the crucial time was far into the future, believing instead that it was at hand, so much so that they thought the FSLN risked total failure by not being there to guide the coming people’s revolt. The failure of the TP to gain

⁶¹¹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 210.

⁶¹² Margaret Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (1981), 4.

⁶¹³ Nolan, “From FOCO to Insurrection,” 77.

traction, combined with the severe losses that rendered the GPP guerrilla movement impotent, left the *Terceristas* the last viable force to lead the insurgency, estimated by the CIA to be down to as few as fifty fighters, going into 1977.⁶¹⁴

The lack of military success of the FSLN through the beginning of 1977 did not mean that the Somoza regime had not suffered reverses on the broader political front. The brutal National Guard campaign under martial law ostensibly aimed only at the insurgents had included a far more extensive set of victims. The violence sanctioned by Somoza brought condemnation from the Church within Nicaragua and human rights advocates from the international community. The general disgust with the Somoza regime's corruption, with Managua's continued, earthquake-ravaged appearance as a constant reminder, and the contemptible human rights record gave substance to an ever-growing opposition movement that became a potent political force during 1977.⁶¹⁵

The year 1977 began poorly for Somoza when, in January, priests used their pulpits to read a pastoral letter from Nicaragua's Roman Catholic bishops. The letter accused his National Guard of egregious human rights violations against the people over the two years of martial law. The charges included the claim made by rural missionaries that hundreds of Campesinos (peasant farmers) had died or disappeared.⁶¹⁶ The significance of the letter went beyond just demarcating human rights charges. It was also a statement consistent with the tenets of liberation theology. The movement had grown out of the Latin American Episcopal Council,

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.: National Foreign Assessment Center, "Intelligence Memorandum: Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation front," CIA, August 25, 1978, NLC-15-35-4-3-0, p. 3-4; and for discussion of the CIA estimate see Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan, 1964-1980: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order*, (2001): 561. For additional CIA estimates on the Sandinistas for 1976-1979 see Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (1996): chap. 12.

⁶¹⁵ Alan Riding, "Nicaragua Groups Looking to Carter for Help on Rights." *The New York Times*, March 3, 1977, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/03/03/archives/nicaragua-groups-looking-to-carter-for-help-on-rights.html>.

⁶¹⁶ "Nicaragua: Somoza's Reign of Terror," *Time*.

including the conference in Medellin Colombia, in 1968. The central notion of participation in liberation theology led to the idea that oppressive governments could be subject to overthrow from the oppressed. This radicalization of the clergy led many of them to support insurgencies against right-wing governments, even if those insurgencies were Marxist. Many within the movement sought to amalgamate Marxism and Christianity for such purposes. The Church's move away from supporting existing authoritarian governments represented a significant shift in Latin American politics.

Several different groups opposed Somoza by political means, including the Conservative party, but they had not come together under one umbrella before 1977. A member of that party, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, was the editor and publisher of the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*. He was also the founder of the Union for Democratic Liberation (UDEL), which was an inclusive group dedicated to removing Somoza by political means.⁶¹⁷ A new entity, the "Group of Twelve," a group composed of twelve Nicaraguan businessmen, academics, and priests, some of whom were already secretly in the FSLN, joined the union and announced their support for the Sandinistas. The announcement was the first such show of support by prominent Nicaraguans.⁶¹⁸

The Group of Twelve represented one part of a two-pronged approach the FSLN took to the changing climate in Nicaragua. The new conditions resulted from the insertion of the Church into the reform movement, the possible impending success of reformers like Chamorro, and the changes emanating from the new Jimmy Carter administration. One of the latter was the demand that Somoza should lift the state of siege, which he did in September 1977. Chamorro's followers welcomed the move, but it was a cause of concern for the Sandinistas. They feared

⁶¹⁷ Fagen, "Dateline Nicaragua," 183.

⁶¹⁸ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 39-40.

genuine reform might render their revolutionary ideology moot. They responded by creating the Group of Twelve as a front to establish their “democratic” credentials and give them a role in the broader political movement. The plan was to position them to influence the political process by way of their secret control of the Group of Twelve, and ultimately to cast aside the other elements of the reform movement once Somoza fell. The second line of effort was military action. The Sandinistas carried it out by launching attacks in September and October as soon as Somoza lifted the state of siege to obviate, hopefully, any chance a political solution could work.

The Sandinistas had begun by embracing the *focos* approach that eschewed waiting for history and economics to create the objective conditions for revolution. They had changed the overall strategy three times, mostly to avoid continued failure. The final insurrection of 1979 represented the broad front they had said in 1961 was not needed. Thus, while they had begun with a theory that eschewed traditional Marxist theory that one had to wait on history and economics to create the conditions for revolution, on the contrary, it was the history and economics of Somoza that they had to wait for to have their revolution.

Nicaragua had long been a site of intervention by the United States, either directly or indirectly. The amount of intervention had undergone an ebb and flow throughout not only Nicaragua’s existence as a nation, but particularly during the period of the Sandinista insurgency. The insurgency occurred not only during the Cold War but had begun in a time when the recent success of the communist revolution in Cuba had jolted the United States to look south. At least as late as 1979, U.S. officials were talking about the possibility of “... one, two, or more Cubas emerging in Central America.”⁶¹⁹ The Nicaraguan insurgency spanned the administration of five

⁶¹⁹ Robert Pastor, “Memorandum From Robert Pastor of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs ([Zbigniew] Brzezinski), the Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs ([David] Aaron), and the President’s Special Representative for Economic Summits ([Henry] Owen), FRUS 1977-1980; Volume XV, Central America, Document 467, p. 2.

presidents beginning with John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy had a conflicted approach to foreign policy in Latin America. He instituted the Alliance for Progress, a broad aid program for the region, but also pushed counterinsurgency programs to deal with left-wing radicals.⁶²⁰ Johnson, however, was more willing to support the right and extreme right governments if they supported U.S. policies.

The direction of U.S. foreign policy changed under Richard Nixon with his rapprochement with Communist China, but the involvement of his administration in toppling Salvador Allende's government in Chile harkened back to the many previous interventions in Latin America.⁶²¹ The Ford administration continued the same tenor of Foreign Policy without anything like the drama of Nixon's China trip. Carter came to office with a commitment to human rights and the desire to disengage from the support of authoritarian governments as opposed to the past practice of supporting such regimes if they were staunchly anti-communist.⁶²² Unfortunately, the Carter administration sent mixed signals that hampered its attempt to secure better human rights treatment from its Latin American allies while still achieving its security goals in the region.⁶²³

The U.S. foreign policy apparatus had many more components than just the overarching approach dictated by the president, however. Various constituencies in the State Department, Defense Department, Congress, lobbyists, business interests, special interest groups including human rights groups, and individual officials and military officers all played a role in the formation and execution of foreign policy. A country involved in bilateral relations with the

⁶²⁰ Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 5.

⁶²¹ Jonathon Haslam, *The Nixon Administration and the Death of Allende's Chile: A Case of Assisted Suicide* (2005).

⁶²² Thomas M. Leonard, "Central America: A Microcosm of U.S. Cold War Policy," *Air University Review* 37 (July-August 1986): 39-55.

⁶²³ Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (2004), 121-147.

United States could also significantly influence those relations, even where that state was in a dependent relationship with the United States.

Dr. Gabriel Marcella, retired Director of the Americas Studies in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College drawing substantially from a book review written by Caesar Sereseres, identified six factors that facilitated the Somozas' manipulation of American support to maintain power in Nicaragua. [#1] The first involved the fact that Somoza Debayle had significant military contacts in the United States in part because of his graduation from West Point in 1946. [#2] The Somozas were behind an influential lobby in the U.S. Congress. [#3] A family member, Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, dean of the diplomatic corps and an astute lobbyist for thirty-six years, had represented the Somozas as Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States. [#4] The Somoza family's fluency in English allowed for direct and comfortable communications with the entire spectrum of their U.S. contacts. [#5] They were also able to take advantage of individual career concerns of diplomats and military officers assigned to Nicaragua. [#6] Lastly, they were able to take advantage of U.S. service rivalries, domestic political shifts, and inconsistent U.S. foreign policy objectives.⁶²⁴ All six factors above could be even more productive for the Somozas during periods of American presidential inattention and low interest in intervention. All six factors faded in significance during a period of presidential attention with an avowed well-publicized commitment to nonintervention.

⁶²⁴ Dr. Gabriel Marcella, "Security Assistance Revisited: How to Win Friends and Not Lose Influence," *Parameters*, 12, (December 1982): 46-47. See the book review by Caesar D. Sereseres, "U.S. Military Aid, Authoritarian Rule and Military Politics," *Armed Forces and Society*, 5 (Winter 1979): 329-33. For an extended discussion how another Latin American dictator with American military training and ties manipulated American support to stay in power see Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*, (1998).

Jimmy Carter campaigned in 1976 in part on a promise to make human rights a central issue of American foreign policy for dealing not only with the Soviet Union and other communist states but also with nations deemed friendly to the United States. His election as president in 1976 coincided with the release of a State Department human rights report that was highly critical of Somoza. The election also, in conjunction with the previous one, brought eighty to ninety young liberal Democrats to Congress as part of the anti-war, anti-Nixon backlash who were anxious to revise American foreign policy completely.⁶²⁵ They especially wanted to cut ties to repressive right-wing regimes. Congressman Edward Koch of New York, a member of this group, initiated the first effort to cut off all U.S. military aid to Nicaragua.⁶²⁶

The Carter administration had early on created a new human rights office in the State Department at the assistant secretary level. The administration also created the Interagency Group on Human Rights and Foreign Assistance under Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher (hereafter referred to as the Christopher Group). The group was composed of high-level officials from the Defense, State, Treasury, and Agriculture departments, the National Security Council, and the Agency for International Development (A.I.D.).⁶²⁷ These two entities would now present an additional pair of stakeholders that increased the distance from the unity of politico-military command desirable during a counterinsurgency. Indeed, both would usually represent impediments to the success of the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency.

The two new entities considered Nicaragua an excellent showcase for the new human rights policy. The small Central American country did not have any military bases, nor did it represent any significant U.S. interests. The reign of terror in 1975 and 1976 provided clear

⁶²⁵ See Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, which traces the growth of human rights concern among congressional liberals back to the 1960s.

⁶²⁶ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 29.

⁶²⁷ Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights," 94.

evidence of substantial human rights abuses.⁶²⁸ The analysis that led to their conclusion that Nicaragua should see early action for the new human rights approach had three fatal flaws. One, the abuses associated with the reign of terror had already ceased, as it had been so successful there were few targets left. The human rights groups were behind the curve on the situation because the news of the atrocities had just begun reaching the American news media in the first part of 1977. Two, while Nicaragua may not have had the U.S. interests of Cuba, or to a lesser extent Venezuela, the loss of Nicaragua to Communism would have replicated the Cuban situation in that a counterinsurgency failure would have far more impact than a success. Three, while the Human Rights Office in the State Department had no national security portfolio, the Christopher Group did have representatives from entities that did. Those representatives erroneously thought that cutting off aid in the name of human rights did not have any essential ramifications for the counterinsurgency; instead expecting that Somoza would survive what they anticipated would be a temporary measure.

The administration had an internal dispute over how to handle Somoza's horrible record on human rights. One camp wanted to give teeth to the commitment to human rights and withhold aid. The other camp wanted to continue the tradition of supporting governments who supported American policy aims. The State Department put forward a compromise by sending Congress a request for \$3.1 million in military aid for Nicaragua. Congress passed the package. The State Department's human rights bureau was not satisfied, however, and suggested State hold the aid pending additional improvements on human rights. Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher agreed and took the further measure of also putting a hold on two development loans approved by Congress totaling \$10 million in April 1977. The hold on the aid approved by

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 94-95, and LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 31.

Congress and the additional action on the loans by Christopher amounted to a complete cutoff of aid to Nicaragua. The action to hold up the loan money went beyond anything requested by Koch's liberal Democrats or the human rights lobby. Washington turned its attention from the brief sideshow and moved on to other, "more important," matters.⁶²⁹

The concept of providing aid to assist a counterinsurgency requires a different calculus than just supplying foreign aid. Since a counterinsurgency is a conflict about the support/control of the population, aid can only play a role in winning a counterinsurgency directly if it bolsters such support/control when that support/control would otherwise be insufficient. It may play a much smaller role in maintaining such support/control if it is already sufficient at the time. Therefore, it follows that concerning the Nicaraguan Revolution, where the control/support of the population was most likely sufficient for continued success in the period 1961 through the end of 1977, it could play only a small role. Developments in 1977 and 1978 would see that support/control steadily decline until it became insufficient for victory, thus making aid at least a possible component of reestablishing the requisite support/control. In the event, the United States failed to carry out such a program. Instead, it actively contributed through its actions regarding aid to help bring about the reduction in the support/control of the population that made aid necessary in the first place. The hold thus represents a U.S. mistake exacerbating the negative results of a Somoza mistake, in this case, the overzealousness of the Reign of Terror.

Most of the Human Rights abuses that led to the Christopher Group decision in 1977 had occurred in 1975-76 and were not occurring on any significant scale during 1977. Instead of reducing abuses, the main result of the cutoff was its contribution to funding shortages and concern about the ability of the National Guard to obtain adequate stocks of small-arms

⁶²⁹ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 30-31; and LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 34.

ammunition and field supplies, including rations.⁶³⁰ Even after the Christopher group partially lifted the hold five months later, it refused to authorize any new United States Agency for International Development projects for Nicaragua for two years.⁶³¹ Therefore, the cutoff reduced the ability of the Guardia to carry out its counterinsurgent mission.

The hold seemed little more than striking a match in Washington; after all, the United States continued to believe Somoza would survive at least through 1979.⁶³² However, the hold came across as lighting a fuse to a massive bomb in Nicaragua. The year-in and year-out arrival of aid from the United States played a role in Nicaragua almost as influential as direct intervention. The feeling of certainty that the aid would continue to come was, in a certain sense, already “priced in” by the contending parties there. Just as the stock market reaction can be quite significant to relatively small changes when an expected profit turns out to be a completely unexpected loss, the political reaction to the news of a temporary hold on the U.S. aid was tremendous indeed.⁶³³ Even though the Christopher Group saw the hold as temporary, most of the parties in Nicaragua saw it as a permanent withdrawal of U.S. support, removing one of the two primary pillars of the Somoza regime, U.S. backing, and diminishing the capabilities of the other, the Guardia.

The U.S. reaction to the stories of Somoza’s human rights abuses appearing in the American media undid the benefit of the censorship of the Nicaraguan media to minimize the damage. Indeed, the announcement of the hold sent the message to the Nicaraguan people that their government was one of the worst abusers of human rights in the world, and as such, would

⁶³⁰ Office of Regional and Political Analysis, “Situation in Nicaragua: Interagency Intelligence Memorandum,” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, RAC Project Number NLC-6-56-7-31-3, p. 13-14.

⁶³¹ Jickling, “Nicaraguan Country Reader,” 128.

⁶³² Robert Pastor, Document 467, Attachment and Special Coordination Committee Meeting Minutes, September 12, 1978, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, RAC Project Number NLC-24-78-2-8-0, p. 2, 4 .

⁶³³ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, “Review of US Policy,” 10-11.

cease receiving American support. The result was to weaken the support/control over the people to the extent that aid became necessary to help build that control/support back up. In other words, the United States had brought about the Catch 22 situation of creating a primary role for aid to perform in the Nicaraguan Revolution by cutting it off. The decision to embargo arms shipments also had the negative effect of reminding Nicaraguans that the problematic National Guard atrocities involved American arms and often under an officer contingent that was American trained and educated.

The above shows how harmful the cutoff of aid was to the counterinsurgency. The aid cutoff also suffered in being very inefficient even if there had not already been a significant reduction in human rights abuses. The abuses had substantially diminished since their utility once the reign of terror had accomplished its mission at the end of the previous year was much less. The inefficiency made itself apparent in two other areas. First, the funds held up were much smaller than funds still flowing due to past commitments connected with the 1972 earthquake, funds still disproportionately benefitting Somoza. Second, there were considerable investments already associated with the projects held up or under consideration that dissipated because of the Christopher Group action.⁶³⁴ The result was that considerable costs financially, militarily, and politically accrued to a policy implemented at a time that its objective had already independently occurred.

Finally, Christopher's main concern was that Somoza not be able to divert any of the aid to his coffers.⁶³⁵ Since most of the new projects would have been through local partnerships with private volunteer groups and two cooperative development organizations, there was only a

⁶³⁴ Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights," 96-99.

⁶³⁵ Jickling, "Nicaraguan Country Reader," 128.

tiny chance that projects existed with less chance of Somoza siphoning off funds from them.⁶³⁶ However, the standard Christopher's Group set at proving Somoza could not gain access to the money was beyond what A.I.D. officials had the resources to do. Ironically, one of the groups best placed to make such a determination was that of Christopher adding another failure to their list.

The idea that the United States might be severing its ties to Somoza gave all the anti-Somoza groups real hope they could succeed. The most obvious beneficiary of this hope was Chamorro. He pointed to Somoza's lifting of the state of siege and press censorship as proof that Washington's new policy was to support a peaceful transfer of power away from the regime. While Nicaragua teetered on edge, in the United States, principal policy figures' attention was elsewhere as those in support of Somoza saw no real chance the almost wiped-out Sandinistas could topple his regime. Those trying to force him to improve human rights had succeeded in their primary goal of holding up his aid. That there was a price to pay for the human rights approach was at least partially evident in a government report that admitted Somoza's counterinsurgency abilities had suffered.⁶³⁷

While Somoza's two-year reign of terror had successfully reduced the FSLN to a nuisance force and completely cleared its northern operating area, it had involved a level of human rights abuses that threatened his government's control of the population. The base of that control, as had been the case in Cuba, was the "invincibility" of the army and the steadfast support of the United States. One should remember that the United States had dramatically intervened in the sovereignty of both countries in the past. It is common in counterinsurgencies for government forces to use overly harsh treatment against insurgents and ordinary citizens that

⁶³⁶ Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights," 96.

⁶³⁷ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy," 1.

can shift the population's support to the insurgents. While Somoza's reign of terror and subsequent abuses eventually had that effect, Somoza's censorship of the Nicaraguan media delayed the effect. The problem for the counterinsurgency was that by the first part of 1977, news of the abuses began to appear in the U.S. media, causing the U.S. government to react in a way that harmed the counterinsurgency. The Christopher Group, in line with the position of the new Human Rights Office, decided to put a hold on all new aid to Nicaragua.

A top-secret memorandum to Carter's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Zbigniew Brzezinski, containing the Nicaraguan assessment of the costs of the U.S. human rights policy, was alarming. The Nicaragua Minister of Government José Antonio Mora had speculated the American policy had three possible outcomes, civil war, increased repression by the National Guard resulting in further distance between the two allies, or a coup d'état. The CIA thought there was a plausible alternative wherein Somoza and the opposition agreed to neutralize the Sandinistas before they became too influential.⁶³⁸ In the event, Mora was correct about the second possibility, and a case exists, he was right about the first. The CIA's "assessment" never had a chance of coming true. The Sandinistas had already infiltrated the opposition and were carefully working to ensure no such happenstance could occur. William M. LeoGrande, a professor of Government at American University, described the American idea to replace Somoza with an alternative government without Sandinista participation as "(t)he unreality of this convoluted scheme is truly astonishing."⁶³⁹ Somoza's negative attitudes towards the opposition and its distrust of him also argued against any such cooperation.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁸ The Situation Room, "Memorandum to Dr. Brzezinski: Additional Information Items," March 2, 1978, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, RAC Project Number NLC-1-5-5-8-2, p. 2-3 and for American discussion of the possibility of a coup d'état see Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy," 16.

⁶³⁹ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 36.

⁶⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy," 7-8.

The controversy continued in the American lower echelons where people like the new U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Mauricio Solaún, were already asking Washington to up the pressure on Somoza to allow a peaceful transition to another government. These efforts met with no success because Assistant Secretary Terence Todman preferred to continue quiet diplomacy, as he was more concerned with his battle with the human rights bureau for control of the policy than Solaún's read of the situation. The fuse was burning, and no one in Washington would listen to Solaún's warnings.⁶⁴¹

When Somoza lifted the "state of siege" in September 1977, and the U.S. press finally reported the reduced level of abuses occurring in the first half of the year, the Christopher Group relaxed sanctions and approved a new military aid package.⁶⁴² While the group decided to continue to hold up loans and project funds to "test" recent Human Rights improvements, there were critical financial incentives for going ahead with military aid over other types. Funds had already been allocated for the fiscal year 1977 and would be lost if the aid was not approved. New project and loan funds were subject to reallocation and could then find funding in the fiscal year 1978 if the group decided to lift those sanctions.⁶⁴³

The withholding of nonmilitary aid was something of a double-edged sword. While it provided a blunt cudgel to try to force Somoza to act against what he perceived as his self-interest in prosecuting the counterinsurgency, it very sharply created political and even military significance the aid lacked before. It directly gave political significance to the aid in that any decision to resume the aid would become an announcement, at least to most Nicaraguans, that the United States was then satisfied with Somoza's Human Rights current practices and was once

⁶⁴¹ Ibid. 32, 41-42.

⁶⁴² Martha L. Cottam, "The Carter Administration's Policy toward Nicaragua: Images, Goals, and Tactics," *Political Science Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (1992): 123, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2152137>.

⁶⁴³ Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights," 96

again wholeheartedly supporting the regime. It indirectly had military significance as long as it continued since it was a sign the United States had at least partially withdrawn its support. It also served in both the political and military spheres to delegitimize the regime in line with the Sandinista's narrative. However, by the beginning of 1978, the group was on the edge of releasing the rest of the funds when an apparent political assassination raised a new level of Human Rights concern.⁶⁴⁴

The Turning Point

The explosion came on January 10, 1978, when a green Toyota pickup truck ran Chamorro's Saab off the road. Two men got out of the pickup and fired three shotgun blasts into the Saab's driver seat area, killing Chamorro.⁶⁴⁵ The FSLN eventually claimed that Somoza had Chamorro killed because of his paper's publication of the story exposing the business practices of the Somoza-connected blood-export business, Plasmaféresis. The FSLN claimed the company's operations had led to the death of three thousand peasants.⁶⁴⁶

Chamorro's *La Prensa* had published front-page stories in a series known as the "Vampire Chronicles" as to how peasants donated plasma in a private clinic known as *La Casa de Vampiros* (The House of Vampires) for minimal remuneration. Plasmaféresis then sold it to countries such as the United States for very high profits. At first, no one took credit for the assassination with Somoza as the logical suspect. Eventually, five men were brought to trial and claimed Pedro Ramos, a right-wing doctor who had fled Castro's Cuba and was the principal owner of Plasmaféresis, along with various Somoza associates, ordered the killing. While Somoza insisted Ramos was alone responsible, no one in the opposition would call for anything

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Lake, *Somoza Falling*, xiii.

⁶⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Nicaragua: Somoza's Fortunes Sink Deeper," RAC Project Number NLC-31-37-5-2-0, p. 2; and Gillespie, Jr., "Nicaragua Country Reader," 105.

less than the end of the current government.⁶⁴⁷ It served as a rallying point for all factions of the opposition for the rest of the life of the regime. It proved the last straw for any remaining support Somoza could count on from members of the elite. The breadth of the anti-Somoza response was both its strength and its weakness. Somoza's opponents united in their belief that he must leave office, but the many disparate elements could not agree on when and how to force the change.⁶⁴⁸

The assassination moved the United States to reimpose sanctions. The decision was challenging in that it represented a choice between supporting the counterinsurgency fully at a time when Somoza's prospects were the worst of the insurgency and avoiding domestic political embarrassment. The lack of a consensus among Nicaraguan moderates how to proceed favored both Somoza and the Sandinistas. The business community led a general strike starting on January 23 that initially had some success. It had dissipated by February 5; the day Somoza had called for municipal elections. The strike leaders had hoped to encourage defections from the government and National Guard, but none were forthcoming. Somoza belittled the strike leaders and played up the antagonisms between the unions and the elite businessmen. The National Guard quickly brushed aside small attacks carried out by the Sandinistas. While the Sandinistas were having little success militarily, their dreams remained alive because of the failure of the moderate anti-Somoza groups to replace Somoza with a reform government that would obviate the Sandinista's radical agenda.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ "Company of US-Backed Somoza Sucked Nicaraguan Blood – Literally," <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Company-of-US-backed-Somoza-Sucked-Nicaraguan-Blood--Literally-20160719-0022.html>; and Riding, "National Mutiny in Nicaragua."

⁶⁴⁸ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 43-45.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-46.

Zimmermann argues that matters were coming to a head in 1978. The diversion of relief funds from the earthquake of 1972 to Somoza and his supporters mainly by way of direct theft or the funneling of contracts to businesses they owned had eroded support in the business community. The brutal repression following the 1974 hostage-taking "... involved dropping bombs and napalm on settlements, burning peasant homes and fields, and disappearances, rapes, and incarceration in concentration camps," had demolished support among the non-elites.⁶⁵⁰ Such behavior united the lower and middle classes in opposition to Somoza and placed the Church's support ever more firmly on the insurgents' side. Thus, the increased pace of the revolution in 1978 resulted "... partly because of repressive actions by Somoza, partly because of FSLN initiatives, and because of semi-spontaneous mass actions."⁶⁵¹

One such mass action was the February 1978 Indian uprising in Monimbó, located in the city of Masaya, brutally put down by the National Guard. Such actions enhanced the insurgents' political position even though the Sandinistas had no relationship whatsoever to the protest.⁶⁵² While Zimmermann had the general outlines of the contributing factors correct, Somoza's repression and the people's mass actions played a far more significant role than any of the Sandinistas' actions. The Sandinista Christmas raid of 1974 and the raid on Congress in August 1978, for example, played only a subsidiary role by convincing the masses that Somoza and his Guardia Nacional were vulnerable rather than creating the conditions of revolution.

The Carter administration released its international human rights report in February of 1978 that claimed a significant improvement in Nicaragua's human rights record. However, the report barely mentioned the Chamorro assassination despite his status as the preeminent

⁶⁵⁰ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 210.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 212.

opposition leader. The inaccuracy of the report gave it the appearance of being more a document to support the U.S. approach to Nicaragua than to give a reasonable account of what was going on there. The disconnect between the Carter administration's diplomatic hopes and the reality on the ground in Nicaragua continued as long as the regime remained in power. For example, the National Guard put down the outsized riot of Indians in Masaya by using machine gunfire from armored cars and helicopters, killing as many as one hundred of the Indians. An administration official later testified before Congress that the Guard had used "considerable restraint." The State Department, evidently in light of what it saw as a successful human rights policy approach, maintained a suspension of all aid save for a perplexing \$150,000 for the training of the National Guard.⁶⁵³

The next "nonintervention" came in May of 1978. Congressman Charles Wilson (D – Texas) threatened that he would begin holding hearings on the human rights record of Panama that he claimed was worse than that of Nicaragua. Such hearings could have jeopardized the new Canal Treaty. Wilson told the Carter administration he would not do so if they released the Somoza funds. The administration changed course and announced it was releasing the loan funds after all. The change, of course, set off another bomb in Nicaragua as it dismayed the reformers and gave Somoza a chance to declare victory. This setback allowed the FSLN to continue radicalizing the broader anti-Somoza movement. The critical period of spring and summer 1978 passed without an Assistant Secretary for Latin America as the constant struggles with the human rights bureau had led Todman to resign in frustration. The decision to release the loans was not the only action that Somoza read as indicating continued U.S. support.

President Carter sent a personal letter to Somoza praising his improvement on human rights and

⁶⁵³ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 48-50.

urging him to continue. Carter sent it despite strong State Department objections. When the letter became public in early August 1978, it created a firestorm in both the United States and Nicaragua.⁶⁵⁴

Carter had intended the U.S. reconciliation with Somoza to lead to a liberalization of the Nicaraguan government. Instead, it demoralized most of the moderate elements and persuaded them that their only avenue of progress was to join forces with the radicals. They took the first step in that direction by forming the Broad Opposition Front, a new umbrella organization.⁶⁵⁵ The Carter administration continued to send mixed signals, both on its end and by the misunderstanding of its intent on the Nicaraguan end, throughout the Nicaraguan Revolution.

The Sandinistas did launch a successful attack when, on August 22, 1978, twenty-two guerrillas captured the National Palace in Managua, taking some 3500 politicians and businesspeople hostage. They demanded the release of all fifty-nine FSLN members in prison.⁶⁵⁶ The raid brought international attention to the Sandinistas and gave them their first hero in the minds of the Nicaraguan people in the person of Edén Pastora, the operation's leader often described as movie-star handsome, whose *nom de guerre* was "Commander Zero."⁶⁵⁷ It also made "Commander Two," Dora María Tellez, an instant legend.⁶⁵⁸

The media frenzy over coverage of the raid on the National Palace gave Pastora and Tellez a small taste of the type of coverage that had developed in the Cuban Revolution for Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. While many of the previous Sandinista leaders had participated in newsworthy activities, a combination of press censorship and high failure rate diminished both

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 48-50, 54.

⁶⁵⁵ Seyom Brown, *Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Obama* (2015), 316-317, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/eastcarolina/detail.action?docID=1912258>.

⁶⁵⁶ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 212.

⁶⁵⁷ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 56.

⁶⁵⁸ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 212.

the coverage and romantic air about them. The raid had occurred in a period of much less censorship and presented a much more romantic picture because of its bold action and wild success. Both Pastora and Tellez called up images of Che in the outfits they wore. Tellez, whose oversized uniform hung on her slight frame, especially resembled Guevara's who often pushed his asthmatic body to extremes of endurance. The two had a prominent role in the virtual parade they formed, escorting the freed rebels to the airport as thousands of citizens of Managua lined the streets along the route to the airport and a flight to Panama.⁶⁵⁹

Flush with the success of their raid on the National Palace, the FSLN released a communiqué entitled "The Maneuvers of the New Somocismo." The contents castigated almost all the moderate anti-Somoza groups for "being opportunistic latecomers to the anti-Somoza struggle."⁶⁶⁰ The *Terceeristas* clearly stated their opposition to letting Somoza resign peacefully. The group had made a tactical error by prematurely revealing their differences with most of the rest of the anti-Somoza movement. Various groups, including conservatives and businesspeople, made calls to bring down Somoza, but without the Sandinistas, foreshadowing the "counterrevolution" to come.⁶⁶¹

The end of August saw a spontaneous outbreak of violence in Matagalpa, where boys in the poor barrios clashed with the National Guard. The riots were a sympathetic reaction to the raid on the Nicaraguan Congress that had exponentially increased anti-Somoza morale. The street battles were very bloody and spread to four other cities in September. The situation caught the FSLN off guard, but it hurried to send guerrillas to give the appearance of being the leaders of the outbreak. On September 9, the FSLN announced the start of a "final offensive" against

⁶⁵⁹ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 34.

⁶⁶⁰ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 57.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

Somoza and began a series of attacks on police stations and National Guard posts in several cities. The National Guard response easily defeated the guerrillas who withdrew, avoiding total elimination, leaving the boys to fight on alone for several days suffering heavy losses.⁶⁶²

The Sandinistas appropriated the bravery of the overmatched boys who had become martyrs of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Interviews with peasants around Matagalpa indicated they identified with the Sandinistas because they were the only ones with any victories against the government, a telling rejoinder as to why more-moderate groups were ineffective. The military defeat became a huge political victory for the Sandinistas. Somoza, who had appeared weak in handling the palace raid, had overreacted to the outbreaks of violence. He allowed the National Guard to fight unrestricted warfare against the poor citizens of the barrios. Tanks and trucks shelled and overran the youths. The Air Force bombed and strafed barricaded blocks killing civilians and causing widespread damage. National Guard troops executed boys at point-blank range with submachine guns.⁶⁶³

Similar uprisings occurred in Granada, León, Estelí, and Chinandega. The National Guard used similar methods to put them down, primarily relying on airpower. Such excessive violence, a common mistake made in many counterinsurgencies, cured the Sandinistas' biggest weakness, lack of human resources. Hundreds, if not thousands, of recruits hungry for revenge, were now available, many marching off with the Sandinistas when they withdrew from the cities.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Ibid., 58-59.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 34.

The United States' Split

The carnage spurred the Carter administration to reassess its position.⁶⁶⁵ The administration decided it wanted Somoza to step down and have a moderate democratic government to replace him.⁶⁶⁶ The attempt to replace Somoza replicated the failed strategy taken in the Cuban Revolution of formally splitting the counterinsurgency into two different counterinsurgencies. While both sought to prevent a Sandinista takeover, only the Somoza-led effort sought to preserve the existing government. In early October 1978, the United States formed an Organization of American States mediation committee to try to defuse the situation in Nicaragua. The commission met with representatives of the most crucial moderate group, Chamorro's Frente Amplio de Oposición (FAO), and reached an agreement. They passed "... a proposal that Somoza should relinquish the presidency to a successor he would name, with the National Guard to be kept intact and legislative power shared between the bourgeois opposition parties and Somoza's PLN. The plan included no role at all for the FSLN."⁶⁶⁷ The Group of Twelve walked out and joined a new coalition named the National Patriotic Front (*Frente Patriótico Nacional*, FPN). Rather than shut the Sandinistas out of a new government, the U.S. plan had backfired, reducing the creditability of the moderate opposition while strengthening the Sandinistas position in the new broad front organization.⁶⁶⁸

The U.S. move to try to find a moderate alternative suffered not only the same fate as it had in Cuba; it mostly had a negative result for the same reasons. The biggest problem was the late start the United States tried to find a moderate alternative.⁶⁶⁹ By the time the United States

⁶⁶⁵ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 60.

⁶⁶⁶ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy," 5.

⁶⁶⁷ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 214.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 34.

got around to starting the search, the dictators and the insurgents had long been working to ensure there were few, if any, moderate alternatives.⁶⁷⁰ The Sandinistas, in particular, worked very hard to keep any moderate options from being available. The assassination of Chamorro assumed to be a Somoza act removed the most prominent moderate leader and helped push any remaining moderates to the left.

The pro-revolution sentiment was deep and widespread by the beginning of 1979, although the Prolonged Peoples' War and urban-based splinter groups of the Sandinistas thought the revolution was still years from taking power. The *Terceristas* saw the victory as being closer but saw only a bourgeois opposition-party-dominated post-Somoza government in the near term.⁶⁷¹ Once again, as happened in the Matagalpa uprising, and those it spawned, the Sandinistas would have to scramble to catch up with actual developments in the anti-Somoza movement. Richard R. Fagan describes the movement in 1979 as being "... [s]o massive, so popular, that the thousands of *milicianos* with their Red and black kerchiefs and assorted pistols, shotguns, rifles, Molotov Cocktails, and contact bombs were never fully organized by Frente cadres or always led by known Sandinistas."⁶⁷²

The intense dislike of Somoza's government was driving the masses to identify with the Sandinistas despite that organization's unpreparedness, and without regard for its strategy commitment. More importantly, the general population had decided that the Sandinistas provided the best path to security. The status concerning security the people assigned the Sandinistas occurred not because the insurgents had proved themselves particularly adept at

⁶⁷⁰ Pastor, Document 647, p. 2.

⁶⁷¹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 214.

⁶⁷² Richard R. Fagan, *The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Personal Report* (1981), 8.

protecting the population at large, but rather that it was clear how little protection, if not actual government threat, they had under Somoza's dictatorship.

The influx of tens of thousands of radicalized ordinary people into the movement showed immediate results. First, the disinterest of the masses in the different approaches of the three factions made the different theories of organization moot, so all three factions coalesced back into one group. The goal of the masses was to fight Somoza, not debate strategy. Next, the Sandinista movement had progressed to the stage of a traditional insurgency strategy that the guerrillas from the countryside would march to liberate the cities. Once again, the rapidity of change in Nicaragua in 1979 had outrun the Sandinistas' plans.

The Sandinistas organized five guerrilla groups of varying sizes to move towards liberating the cities. The FSLN completed the reunification and launched what was to be the final assault. In early April, a harassing attack on the National Guard in Estelí quickly morphed into a general uprising, once again catching the Sandinistas unprepared for action by the masses. The campaign launched by the guerrillas never made it to the cities before urban uprisings there liberated themselves. The National Guard tried to stem the tide by using bomb and rocket attacks against the urban centers of resistance, succeeding only in solidifying Somoza's reputation as a "beast." The repression became the motivation for the majority of those participating in the uprisings rather than any political agenda.⁶⁷³

The Sandinistas finally caught up with developments at the end of the spring of 1979. Subsequent military efforts would have experienced cadres, although, for some, the experience was only a couple of months deep, at their head. The viciousness of the Somoza response polarized the situation between the Sandinistas and the masses on the one side, and the Somoza

⁶⁷³ Zimmermann, *Sandinista*, 216, 218.

government on the other. Moderates reacted to the pull of political gravity by siding with the FSLN and agreeing to its having a role in a new government.⁶⁷⁴ Somoza had pushed the population into the arms of the Sandinistas by the heavy-handed tactics and disregard for their safety. Somoza's government was now wholly dependent on the United States for any chance to survive.

The next Assistant Secretary for Latin America, Viron Vaky, believed that the United States faced a stark choice in Nicaragua. One, they could intervene directly, or via offering to mediate among the disputing factions and thereby ensure the new regime was pro-American. Two, they could continue their current policy and face a new regime that was pro-Cuban. He recommended the former. Higher-level officials refused that course of action because that would mean the President would have to reverse course from what he saw as a historic new approach in Latin American relations. That approach was to emphasize Human Rights without regard for a country's Cold War alignment and nonintervention. The Carter administration had repeated a long-standing practice of various administrations to shuffle priorities among dominant foreign policies like containment, economic factors, domestic politics, and campaign promises.⁶⁷⁵ The result was a pro-Cuban Sandinista government.

The Paradox

The broad front insurrection the Sandinistas carried out ending in 1979 represented for many American leaders a new, more dangerous type of Communist insurgency. That was true. The paradox, though, was that identifying that new type of insurgency does not give the best explanation of the Sandinista success. No plan of the Sandinistas, not even one of the four significant variants they tried, envisioned the actual insurrection that succeeded in 1979. They

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁶⁷⁵ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy," 14.

backed into success, more because of Somoza's mistakes exacerbated by the mishandling of the situation by the United States. Charles Maechling, in his analysis of the part strategic theory plays in an insurgency, captured this facet of the Nicaraguan Revolution in his general examination of victorious insurgencies when he observed, "(o)ne has to ask whether guerrilla doctrine is a blueprint for victory or ex post facto rationalization."⁶⁷⁶

The most serious mistake that Somoza made during the counterinsurgency was not to take steps to reform his dictatorship on Human Rights and corruption practices to counteract the fact that he had ruled his dictatorship in such a way as to create the conditions for a revolution. The Sandinistas originally started their revolution with the idea they would try to replicate Castro's victory over the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Their original strategy was to use *foco* theory because they thought, incorrectly, that it had led to the Cuban victory. There was no need to use *foco* theory to create the conditions for revolution, a fatally flawed theory as appears in Chapter Three, as the dictator Somoza, as had Batista before him, was creating those conditions on his own. Instead of diminishing or nullifying those conditions by reforming his government, Somoza increased the likelihood the insurgents would win by increasing corruption and Human Rights abuses, a major mistake.

Anastasio Somoza's father and brother, especially the latter, had always worked to maintain at least a façade of legitimacy for their governments. Anastasio eventually dropped almost any pretense of legitimacy. The corruption he practiced built his family fortune to close to an estimated one billion dollars.⁶⁷⁷ Somoza, for a time, had allowed business elites not within his inner circle to carry out operations without direct competition from Somoza-involved

⁶⁷⁶ Charles Maechling, Jr., "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: the Role of Strategic Theory," *Parameters* 14 (Autumn 1984): 38, at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/1984/1984%20maechling.pdf>.

⁶⁷⁷ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 29.

companies, particularly banking and construction. However, with the massive influx of supplies and funds after the 1972 Managua earthquake, he moved into both banking and construction, which, combined with various corrupt real estate practices, added millions to his coffers. Somoza's move into business areas he had previously stayed out of pushed a significant portion of the business community that had supported, or at least tolerated, his dictatorship to become part of the opposition. The general population of Managua, particularly the poor, also suffered from the flawed reconstruction effort, as the city had still not recovered even twenty years later.

Somoza's harsh counterinsurgency made the common mistake of being too heavy-handed, in its treatment of insurgents, their supporters, and even innocents, to drive support away from the government to the opposition. The corruption and abuse ultimately convinced the population that their security was higher with the insurgents than with the government. While Human Rights problems occurred throughout the insurgency, two periods of abuse had the most significant impact on bringing about Somoza's downfall. The two-year reign of terror during 1975 and 1976 in response to the FSLN Christmas raid of the year before led to the arms and aid embargo of April 1977. In September 1978, the Guardia used airpower to quash uprisings in five towns killing many citizens indiscriminately.

The act of a national army making war on its population finally convinced the U.S. government to make two decisions. One, they no longer believed that Somoza could restore political stability. Two, as it had during the last part of the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. government exacerbated the problems the host nation was suffering by splitting the counterinsurgency into different host-nation and American counterinsurgencies. The Nicaraguan government kept fighting its counterinsurgency aimed at retaining power. However, the

American effort changed to be a counterinsurgency to ensure that any new government would exclude the Sandinistas, a change that guaranteed the failure of both counterinsurgencies.⁶⁷⁸

Somoza had little claim to legitimacy due to his government's corruption and disregard of Human Rights, but another factor contributing to his lack of legitimacy was the institutionalized disregard the government evinced, particularly for the poor. An example of this was the widespread practice of allowing the poor to sell their blood without safeguards. The system of unrestricted sale of blood by the poor reflected on the illegitimacy of the government in at least three ways. One, it failed to provide for the security of all citizens. Two, it allowed the elite to profit from the outright abuse of the poor. Three, it had failed to provide citizens with better economic options than selling their blood at the risk of their life. The thousands that died participating in this practice strengthened the Sandinista claims about the Somoza government's lack of legitimacy. Chamorro's publication about the business closely followed by his assassination further illuminated the institutionalized disregard for the poor.

The mistakes made by the United States in their support of the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency were many, but the majority concerned the failure to have a unity of politico-military command and its corollary to have the best leadership possible. While an essential part of the problem was the fact that being a third-party participant in a counterinsurgency makes a unified politico-military leadership almost impossible, the United States fell far short of achieving what was possible. The main problems were changes in leadership and inadequate leadership. The American election cycle brought about the fact that five presidents, Kennedy through Carter, several Secretaries of State, innumerable lesser officials, and several Ambassadors to Nicaragua, had positions during the Nicaraguan Revolution. While such

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 34.

changes are the inevitable results of being a democracy, the often-poor performance of some of the officials and the systemic problems associated with how such officials make and execute American Foreign Policy are avoidable.

The constant change of personnel, particularly at the top in the United States and the embassy in Nicaragua, exacerbated the tendency for inconsistency in American Foreign Policy. That inconsistency caused havoc in American efforts to support the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency. The American support for the three Somozas' dictatorships began as a function of American interest in maintaining the political stability of the Nicaraguan government mainly for hegemonic reasons, but that interest increased geometrically with the advent of the Cold War. The trend, however, was for the priority given to "containment policy" to diminish, particularly after the ill-conceived intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and the failed intervention in Vietnam, as maintenance of hegemony and Human Rights agendas drained away early Cold War intensity.

Changes at much lower levels also hurt American efforts in Nicaragua. A key component in assisting Nicaragua, especially its non-elites, was A.I.D. projects. Since the agency utilized the practice of two-year "tours," the completion of projects often fell to new personnel who did not originate the plans and therefore had little or no "buy-in" on seeing the projects through to successful completion. The holdup of assistance in 1977-78 exacerbated this problem.⁶⁷⁹

Domestic political concerns often interfered with foreign policy objectives and played a role in several critical problems in the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency. A counterinsurgency needs professional leadership as it involves a complex matrix of considerations that require

⁶⁷⁹ Gillespie, Jr., "Nicaragua Country Reader," 121.

careful handling to promote success. However, the United States repeated its mistake during the Cuban Revolution of having political appointees as ambassadors during the heart of the revolutions. Such amateur leadership weakened the ability for the United States to assist in the Nicaraguan Revolution and, at times, made things worse, such as when Ambassador Shelton allowed his image to appear on Nicaraguan currency.

The drift away from containment policy as the core of the interaction between Somoza and the United States handicapped the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency. The de-emphasis involved a changing of the rules without any agreement or even productive discussion between the allies as to what such a transformation meant for the counterinsurgency and how to incorporate it in a way that did not damage the chances of success. The key to U.S. support for the Somozas had long been political stability and strong anticommunist rhetoric, if not action. Indeed, unlike Cuba and Venezuela, domestic economic concerns did not distort American policy nearly as much because American investment in Nicaragua was far smaller. In essence, American policy towards Nicaragua was more a mixture of Containment, maintenance of political hegemony, and domestic political concerns.

During the Nicaraguan Revolution up through 1977, Somoza had used harsh methods that, although they involved significant Human Rights abuses, had successfully reduced the FSLN to perhaps fifty active Guerrillas. Thus, Somoza was following the old pattern of providing political stability and carrying out anti-communist rhetoric and actions. In return, he received American support and reaped an outsized share of the economy's benefits. The economic arrangement was different from that in Cuba and Venezuela, where the United States retained most of the benefits, especially Cuba.

The election of Jimmy Carter with his campaign promise to make Human Rights the central component of his Foreign Policy had dire ramifications for the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency. Often, in a counterinsurgency, Human Rights can have an essential role in cases where the support/control of the population is weak. The manner that the Carter administration pursued it, however, in combination with Somoza's over-use of harsh abuses had the opposite effect of being a crucial part in causing the failure of the counterinsurgency. By the end of 1976, the Guardia had ceased most of its harsh repressive measures in its reign of terror because it had achieved its goals of breaking the FSLN and its peasant support. However, news of the abuses was only then beginning to get significant coverage in the American media in the first quarter of 1977. The newly created Christopher Group, acting on what was old news that did not reflect the current facts on the ground in Nicaragua, decided to withhold all new aid, including military.

The American embargo hurt the counterinsurgency in at least three ways. Militarily, it reduced the resources available to the Guardia. Politically, the Nicaraguans on all sides took it to mean the United States was removing its support for the regime permanently. Politico-militarily, the embargo was a double blow. The first was the official announcement that the United States was withholding support for the Somoza government. The second was that it was verifying the insurgent narrative that Somoza's government was illegitimate in part because of its human rights abuses. The two reduced the control/support of the population below the threshold necessary for the counterinsurgency to be victorious. Under such circumstances, the projects would have been able to contribute more to the counterinsurgency than when American officials initially planned them, since they could help restore the requisite level of control/support of the population. The projects put on hold could have been particularly useful because most of them targeted the non-

elites that had most suffered from the human rights abuses and were not supportive of the government.⁶⁸⁰

The United States might have prevented a Sandinista success by following either of two mutually exclusive paths. One, they could have straightforwardly followed a human rights policy. Thus, the administration could have discontinued the approach of shoring up the Somoza government by covering up many of the abuses of civilians and sending a variety of other mixed signals. Instead, the United States could have made it clear that not only would Somoza experience a cutoff of funds, weapons, and military equipment should abuses not stop, but that the administration would throw its support to helping moderates displace his government.

The other route was to tell Somoza the United States would support his government as long as he did not allow it to take actions that would undercut popular support. The massive corruption and human rights violations would result in the same threat to replace him with a moderate government. Ironically, both paths involved better human rights results. The first would do so because of a moral commitment. The second would do so because of the practical truth that counterinsurgencies that produce massive insurgent recruitment are usually, if not always, doomed to failure. The U.S. government waffled back and forth between these alternatives, thus contributing significantly to the Sandinista's success.

Initially, considerations of Containment and maintenance of hegemony drove American concern in Nicaragua. Both factors played a role in the U.S. determination not to allow "another Cuba." Castro, for his part, lent support to the Sandinistas throughout the Nicaraguan Revolution in varying degrees as mainly determined by two factors. Those factors were his view of his own needs, combined with his determination that the probability of a Sandinista success

⁶⁸⁰ Mudge, "A Case Study in Human Rights," 96.

for most of the revolution was very low. Cuba provided training, a haven, a propaganda hub, and, for the first part of the revolution, arms and other supplies. Castro's mediation late in the revolution allowing the fractured FSLN factions to reunite was the best advice he had provided any of the foreign insurgencies.⁶⁸¹

The support Castro provided the Sandinistas, while significant as a percentage of the Sandinista efforts, never made any appreciable contribution to their eventual success. The most productive areas of support were the provision of a haven for the Sandinistas and a hub for both Cuban and Sandinista propaganda. The arms and training were less of a factor because of the small numbers of Sandinistas for almost the entire revolution.⁶⁸²

The support Castro provided was far more successful for Cuba than the Sandinistas. The propaganda and haven provided on behalf of the Sandinistas fit nicely with the Tricontinental phase of Cuban assistance to Latin American insurgencies up through the end of 1967. Castro preached revolution and anti-Americanism, both of which fit well with the multi-faceted Cuban effort. Cuba switched its focus in 1968 to focus on diplomatic efforts in Latin America to normalize relations with countries willing to ignore the Organization of American States (OAS) sanctions. The change moved Cuba away from trying to end its isolation through revolutions. However, anti-American propaganda and the provision of a haven continued to provide benefits for Castro. The reduction of training and arms delivery reflected the new foreign policy as well as incorporating the negative lessons of most of Cuba's earlier efforts to support foreign insurgencies, especially Bolivia's. The post-1967 approach implicitly acknowledged the failure of the *foco* theory. Most Cuban military aid to the Sandinistas ceased until late in the insurgency

⁶⁸¹ William M. LeoGrande, "Cuba and Nicaragua: From the Somozas to the Sandinistas," *Caribbean Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 11–12.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

based on the belief that conditions in Nicaragua “... were not ripe for revolution...”⁶⁸³ Such a determination violated a central tenet of *foco* theory that stated the *focos* could create the conditions for revolution rather than wait for them to come into being as postulated in traditional Marxist theory.

There were two ironic twists to Cuba’s support of the Sandinistas. First, the Sandinistas helped show that the *foco* theory was not a viable theory for an insurgency, even in the Cuban case. The dictators had been the primary creators of the conditions for revolution with the assistance of the United States’ struggle for maintaining its political and economic hegemony in the two countries, not rural guerrilla *focos*. Second, Castro, despite being utterly unwilling during the Cuban Revolution to form an integrated structure with all the different anti-Batista groups, had, by 1979, begun insisting that all the revolutionary groups in a country form a unified organization.⁶⁸⁴

Conclusion

The struggle for the support/control of the population had swung to the insurgents in Nicaragua, just as it had in Cuba, once the population decided its best chance for security was to overthrow the dictator. There were political, economic, and military components that contributed to the change. The mistakes made occurred in all three categories with the United States and its ally each participating.

Politically Nicaragua, as had been the case in Cuba, inhibited its support/control of the population in three key ways. One, Somoza had convinced the population that the government ran, in descending order, more for the benefit of the dictator, his cronies, and the United States than for the citizenry. Batista had convinced the population that the government ran, in

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Pastor, Document 467, p. 1.

descending order, more for the benefit of the United States, the dictator, and his cronies than for the citizenry. Two, the widespread corruption evident in both administrations undercut government support since the citizenry could not count on even essential government services, particularly law enforcement. The heavy presence of American-educated government and military personnel in corrupt activities lent them an American flavor. Finally, the Guardia's use of heavy-handed tactics, including torture, extrajudicial executions, and "disappearances" against the insurgents and possible peasant supporters, had negative consequences later. The regularity of significant civilian collateral damage eventually convinced the population the government posed a more significant threat to their security than did the insurgents.

In Cuba, the outsized economic investment, second in total book value in Latin America and more than three times the rest of Latin America on a per capita basis, colored much of the American foreign policy. The total value was \$956 million in 1959.⁶⁸⁵ The influence was most evident in the Sugar Act of 1956; an act Congress passed over an express American promise not to do so. The total value of the direct investment in Nicaragua in 1978 was less at \$103 million, but that did not include commercial bank loans totaling \$385 million. Those figures joined an additional \$302 million in disbursed U.S. credits. In 1977, U.S. exports to Nicaragua totaled \$233 million, with imports at \$181 million.⁶⁸⁶ In Cuba, American holdings were a threat to the economic security of the citizenry. In Nicaragua, it was Somoza's holdings, especially after the growth experienced when the earthquake relief funds found their way into them, which were a threat to the economic security of the citizenry. The abandonment of Somoza by the previously loyal business community was one sign of the problem.

⁶⁸⁵ Leland L. Johnson, "U.S. Business Interests in Cuba and the Rise of Castro," *World Politics* 17, no. 3 (1965): 440–59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009288>

⁶⁸⁶ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, "Review of US Policy" 3-4.

Finally, the American equipped and trained military forces that had long kept the population from feeling they could side with the insurgents eventually revealed themselves vulnerable. The event that revealed the vulnerability of the Cuban Army was the strategic defeat of *Operación Verano* in 1958. It occurred in Nicaragua when years of the killing of innocent citizens, with the catalyst of the assassination of Chamorro, convinced a large number of the people to take to the streets until their numbers overwhelmed the National Guard. The population had decided security prospects were better through chancing open rebellion than have matters continue as they had been. The close identification of the two nations' militaries with the United States placed it in an unfortunate light. Furthermore, the April 1977 cutoff of military aid triggered much of the population's feeling that the time to rise was at hand.

The American military consistently overestimated the effectiveness of the host nations' militaries in defeating the insurgents. The new situation of the post-World War II era of military operations might excuse somewhat the mistaken assessments made in the 1950s in Cuba. The mistaken assessments made in Nicaragua after ample insurgent examples, including Cuba and Vietnam, were more starkly misbegotten.⁶⁸⁷ The changes President Kennedy had tried to implement after the disaster of the Cuban Revolution had brought mixed results and failed to save the situation in Nicaragua. Somoza also over-relied on the National Guard. To be fair to Somoza and the United States military, the National Guard had successfully kept the Somozas in power since 1936.

In essence, the United States had allowed its inconsistent application of conflicting priorities to undercut its counterinsurgency support for both Cuba and Nicaragua. The United States should have forced Batista and Somoza to pursue a course of action that would shore up

⁶⁸⁷ LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua," 35.

their support/control of the population. They could have secured cooperation under the threat that the United States from the very outset of hostilities would find moderate alternatives to the insurgents to take over the government. The U.S. attempt to find alternative moderate groups occurred too near the end when it was doomed to failure. An earlier attempt might have been successful.

In Cuba, an American willingness to forego its mercantilistic commercialism would have undercut the insurgent narrative that the government of Cuba was illegitimate in its slavish adherence to American investment. In Nicaragua, the United States could have threatened early on to withdraw support for Somoza both because of his plundering of the Nicaraguan economy for personal benefit and his ever-worsening record on human rights. Such policies would have been strictly in line with the Cold War Anti-Communist Containment Policy. The result was that for all four main policy goals, containment of Communism, economic primacy, political primacy, and Human Rights, the first three were total failures with arguably a slight improvement in Human Rights at the cost of an allied government during the Cold War.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The first half of the Cold War period after World War II had militaries and their governments around the world struggling to come to terms with the new world order. Two superpowers had emerged that fielded armed forces of great sophistication over vast areas beyond their borders. The United States had tremendous naval and air forces, along with a substantial army. The Soviets fielded a massive army with an enormous advantage in tanks that had proved the dominant force in land battles and an air force that soon featured excellent jet fighters. The specter of nuclear warfare hung over all military planning with the possibility that it might render the naval advantage of the United States and the armored advantage of the Soviets moot. The monopoly on nuclear weapons was at least two years shorter than the best predictions in the West as Soviet espionage had significantly shortened Russian discoveries. Both sides prepared for the two most commonly expected conflicts if war should break out. One possibility was a nuclear war, a possibility that generated a massive arms race to develop large quantities of nuclear weapons of increasing yield along with delivery systems of increasing range and accuracy. The other possibility considered perhaps even more likely, a World War III patterned after World War II fought in Europe and the North Atlantic. That region represented the focus of most of the conventional forces of the two competing sides.

Although there were many crises including the Berlin Blockade (1948-49), the Korean War (1950-53) the Hungarian Revolution (1956), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), several wars involving Israel in the Middle East, and many other potential flashpoints, neither one of the two expected conflicts materialized. Instead, the Cold War featured mostly proxy wars and

insurgencies. Many of the latter occurred in Latin America. Most military leaders in the United States and the Soviet Union, veterans of the traditional warfare of World War II, focused on conventional warfare. Many military leaders in Third World countries developed theories of insurgency, and in several cases carried them out, drawing on a limited number of published accounts of pre-World War II insurgencies or recreating them in practice if unaware of the publications. The primary accounts available were that of T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt, Mao Zedong and the Chinese Civil War, and Augusto Sandino (reported by others) in Nicaragua against the United States (1927-33). Insurgencies were by far the most common, and a case can be made for them being the most critical type of armed conflict during the post-World War II period. The exceptions were primarily the set of conventional wars involving Israel and the mixed conventional-insurgency conflict of the Vietnam War up to the return of more traditional operations in the First Gulf War.

Latin America became a locus of insurgency efforts when insurgents won the Cuban Revolution against a close ally of the United States who fielded an American trained and supplied army. The insurgents had won a conflict against the expectations of most traditional military thinkers of the time. Contemporary, traditional military thinkers had believed insurgents on their own could not defeat a regular army. The success of the Cuban Revolution had led most observers, erroneously, to be willing to credit the *foco* theory as providing a new model for success. The Cuban victory had three main results. One, many groups, especially those in Latin America, began insurgencies of their own. Two, it made clear that a substantial Cold War military threat existed separate from World War III, whether as a conventional war in Europe or a nuclear one. Three, newly elected John F. Kennedy reacted to his appreciation of that threat by

trying to press the American military to embrace counterinsurgency as part of a restructuring of America's entire foreign policy apparatus.

The examination in the preceding pages supports a substantial number of new, and provides further evidence for several previously made, observations about counterinsurgencies in general, and Cold War Latin American counterinsurgencies in particular. A unified interpretive framework appeared herein as to the Cold War Latin American counterinsurgencies above. A dominating dichotomy in the literature, enemy-centered versus population-centered counterinsurgencies, revealed itself under analysis to be merely two aspects of a single population-centered approach. In addition to new interpretations of the case study counterinsurgencies, a close examination of the U.S. participation in them revealed an updated interpretation of the fractured nature of U.S. policy formulation and execution in the period. That it occurred in a time of almost universal agreement of what the dominant foreign policy should be because of the Cold War lends added significance to this result of the analysis. The following details these conclusions divided into three broad categories, the Historiography, the Case Studies, and the broader field of Counterinsurgency accounts.

The Historiography

Most Counterinsurgency/Insurgency studies share one or more weaknesses. Academic studies often suffer from having data "cherry-picked" to fit a pre-conceived theory while illegitimately downplaying contrary information to maintain an unjustified level of confidence in the theory. Many COIN participants from the military community decry these practices of "armchair" theoreticians as producing accounts that clash with their "on the ground" experiences. Participant accounts, however, often suffer from overemphasizing the part of the conflict the author directly experienced without sufficient academic-type depth and breadth of

inquiry to allow for the proper perspective to see the conflict within its entire scope. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that some of the most compelling accounts come from the small minority of COIN experts that combine the experience of participation with rigorous academic preparation like David Kilcullen or T. E. Lawrence.

Another problem in the literature is that most COIN accounts examine conflicts principally only from the vantage point of either the counterinsurgents or the insurgents, but not both. Since success in the conflict revolves around the interaction of the two opposing forces, a proper analysis of such a phenomenon ideally addresses a full treatment of both. It is possible, however, that in some conflicts, the disparity of power between the two sides may make the result such a foregone conclusion as to ameliorate the harm of underemphasizing the weaker side. The results of the limitations of one-sided analysis are serious. Many accounts that seem to give a somewhat reasonable account of the conflict under investigation, or a select group of case studies that suggest themselves by supporting the central thesis in question, fail dramatically to be extensible to other conflicts. The lack of extensibility is a fatal flaw since almost all such accounts in this group promise, explicitly or implicitly, to be subject to such generalization.

Most accounts that analyze COIN conflicts overemphasize positive factors in assessing what occurred if approached as a “lessons learned” or prescriptive advocacy of how to carry out a counterinsurgency or insurgency. The analysis should instead follow the data from the conflict in discovering what combination of positive and negative factors, including correct decisions and mistakes made, determined the outcome. Thus, COIN conflicts run a wide range of combinations of factors. There are cases at one end such as Bolivia, where the counterinsurgents had most of the advantages and made most of the correct decisions while the insurgents were woefully inadequate. Then there are cases at the other end such as Cuba where the advantages

split more evenly, and the government made enough serious mistakes to provide the insurgents with a victory.

A claim often made in analyzing counterinsurgencies is that each conflict is so particular in characteristics that no overarching generalities exist as to what leads to success.

Counterinsurgencies do vary considerably, and even ones that initially appear similar can develop in markedly different ways. However, this dissertation provides a framework that not only accounted for the three case studies at hand but is extensible to the other Cold War Latin American cases and the broader field. It is particularly compelling that the same framework could explain not only the insurgent successes in Cuba and Nicaragua but also explains the insurgent failure in Venezuela.

This dissertation has shown that the prominent division of COIN theories and accounts between enemy-centric and population-centric approaches is a false dichotomy. The false dichotomy follows from the definition of an insurgency as a struggle over the control of the population; hence that control must be the ultimate goal of a counterinsurgency. The fact that even “enemy-centric” operations are only a subcase of a population-centric strategy is apparent when one considers the extreme case where every single enemy has been killed, captured, or coopted. It is still possible that the goal of the counterinsurgency to maintain a particular government in power would fail. One plausible scenario for such a result would be a case where a very heavy-handed approach to rooting out the enemy turned the population-at-large against the government, a common occurrence in COIN conflicts. Using enemy-centric or population-centric can indeed be a meaningful operational description of current priorities, but it fails as the best description of the strategic nature of a counterinsurgency.

While some of the literature focuses on the complications introduced in a counterinsurgency by third-party participation, e.g., *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, most accounts do not adequately deal with such issues if at all. Some of the complications are true for all third-party participation, while some are particularly problematic for democracies, especially the United States. The most acute complication introduced by third-party participation is the deleterious effect it usually has on the unity of command over the entire military and political campaign. Almost all best-practices COIN theories specify the need for such a unified command. While most counterinsurgencies do not achieve such unified commands, third-party COIN participation almost completely negates even the possibility of achieving that priority. The problem is that to achieve such unity of command, either the host nation or the third-party nation would have to subordinate the command over its military and political resources completely. If there are multiple third-party participants, the problem increases accordingly.

The severity of the problem of third-party participation and the lack of a unified command includes a very challenging structural component. A counterinsurgency is almost always pursued by the host nation government as a struggle to maintain its power rather than merely to defeat a particular group from replacing it. A third-party nation may be more interested in defeating the particular insurgents involved rather than preserving the existing government. The possibility that a third-party may have a different view as to what would be an acceptable outcome of the conflict from the host-nation government can lead to the result that the counterinsurgency can best be viewed from the start, or develop at any point later on, more like being different counterinsurgencies for the host nation and third-party nations. One would focus on maintaining the existing government in power while the other would focus on securing a

government that meets the desires of the third-party nation. The split into different counterinsurgencies occurred in both the Cuban and Nicaraguan insurgencies as the third-party participant, the United States, had determined that the existing government was no longer viable. The USG sought to bring about a moderate alternative government rather than see the countries' control fall to the anti-American insurgents even though such an approach included abandoning long-term allies leading the existing governments.

This dissertation has illustrated that the contribution of the other social sciences to the field of counterinsurgency has been significant. In particular, the new analytical tools available to evaluate the structure and behavior of groups have shed new light on their operations. Those same tools can be used by historians to give better interpretations of past conflicts than heretofore available. The conclusion that, contrary to past expectations, the support for a side in a counterinsurgency accrues to the more powerful local side rather than the one most similar in outlook calls for a reexamination of many historical accounts. The treatment of an insurgent group as behaving like a biological entity in an ecological environment provides the ability to make powerful insights into almost all aspects of such organizations. The approach helps explain why some thrive, some fail, and others morph into using nonviolent means to pursue their goals.

The Case Studies

This dissertation focused on three case studies wherein many new observations appeared in support of an innovative interpretation of all three conflicts examined. The most significant advance was the provision of a single explanatory interpretation that spanned all three conflicts even though two were failures and one a success. Another advance was the presentation of an answer to the central question as to how the only superpower in the hemisphere performed so

poorly in the three counterinsurgencies. Other improvements occurred that were more specific to the individual case studies.

While there were significant differences in the three case studies, e.g., dictatorships in Cuba and Nicaragua, and democracy in Venezuela, the similarities between the three are more striking. All three involved “Communist” insurgency, avowed in the cases of Venezuela and Nicaragua, and suspected in Cuba (although Castro only explicitly declared the Revolution Communist after taking over the government). All three had governments whose rhetoric was staunchly anti-Communist and were close allies of the United States, especially the two dictatorships. They all fell under the three primary foreign policy priorities of the United States relative to Latin America, solidarity with U.S. Cold War goals, the maintenance of regional hegemony, and the maintenance of the U.S. political and economic imperialism in the region.

The most critical factor in explaining the success of the winning side in the case study conflicts was the way(s) in which the losing side drove the general population into supporting their opponents. In the case of Cuba and Nicaragua, the dictators mistreated the population often by torture, mass corruption, and by placing the welfare of the dictator and the United States over that of the nation. In the case of Venezuela, the insurgents directly attacked the civil population. In all three cases, the population concluded that their security was best protected by the side that eventually won the conflict. Primarily the lone successful counterinsurgency represents a mirror image of the two failures in that the Venezuelan government provided the best security and narrative, while in the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases, it was the insurgents that had those advantages.

The question of how the only superpower in the hemisphere lost two of the three counterinsurgencies has a related puzzle. The analysis of the three case studies provides a

convincing argument that in the only success, Venezuela, it was the host nation government that should receive most of the credit for the victory. While the United States did provide valuable arms and other equipment along with important training, it also replicated many of the same mistakes in its counterinsurgency with Venezuela that it made with the two losing cases. The most straightforward example being the treatment of sugar in the case of Cuba and oil with Venezuela.

The United States repeatedly made mistakes in the execution of its third-party assistance to all three counterinsurgencies. The mistakes the USG made often replicated particular ones as almost exact copies. The USG was either unaware of previous instances or merely oblivious to the past incarnations. One such mistake was the use of political appointees rather than career foreign service officers as ambassadors. Another was the overreliance on the effectiveness of the three governments' conventional forces. Often, a more severe strategic mistake the USG made was to subordinate the priority Cold War goal of containment. Containment was a counterinsurgency-consistent goal of thwarting the loss of friendly governments to Communism or other anti-American forces. Instead, the USG regularly pursued the often counterinsurgency-inconsistent goal of maintaining economic and political imperialism. Finally, as the largest arms supplier to the three governments, the imposition of arms embargoes against Cuba and Nicaragua in the final stages of their defeats was a significant contributor to their failures.

Counterinsurgency theories posit leadership as a critical factor in success, even reaching the status of being the determinative factor for some. They also specify that a unified politico-military command is highly preferable. The complications of the United States being a third-party participant already increased the required sophistication of coordinating effective counterinsurgency political and military action. This fact made finding suitable leadership very

difficult. The USG selecting amateurs, political appointees, to try to fill such roles fell far short of an adequate approach. There was even a blatant case of conflict of interest that exacerbated the problem in the case of Cuba when Earl E. T. Smith was selected Ambassador to Cuba despite being on the board of directors of the United States Sugar Corporation, a company heavily involved in Cuba's dominant industry. The counterinsurgency in Venezuela, the only successful one analyzed, did have the benefit of three of the four U.S. ambassadors being professional Foreign Service Officers during the period.

Often, the United States consistently took actions that undercut all three counterinsurgencies it was supporting for the reason of maintaining economic advantages in the host nations. It did this despite such activity reducing the resources available to its allies. Additionally, even more damage occurred because such efforts provided evidence bolstering the insurgents' anti-American narrative that the government secured American economic interests at the sacrifice of the host nation's people. The two most prominent cases discussed in the previous pages amply illustrate both of these results. The Sugar Act of 1956 in the case of Cuba and the Oil Import Program changes of 1962 in the case of Venezuela forced Cuba and Venezuela into highly disadvantaged positions so that American domestic producers could continue to enjoy high profits despite the deleterious effects on the allied governments.

The United States was the most significant arms supplier overall to all three of the case study countries. The arms provided fulfilled a three-fold mission. One goal was to ensure standardization in case of the need for allied action against an external, presumably Communist, threat. Another goal was to assist a friendly government in defending itself. The third was to make profits for an essential, and lucrative, American industry. Despite playing this pivotal role in the armed conflicts of the three friendly governments, the United States only provided arms

the entire length of the counterinsurgency in the case of Venezuela. Indeed, the Venezuelans viewed a major arms deal they made with President Johnson in the last two years of their counterinsurgency as a key in their victory. In the other two conflicts, the United States not only ceased selling arms to the allies; it positively blocked them from receiving American arms by placing them under embargoes.

As was the case with disadvantageous economic decisions, the embargoes extracted a two-fold impediment to the success of the counterinsurgencies. Besides the loss of access to good weapons for the conflict, the embargoes convinced, incorrectly, most groups in the host nations that the United States was permanently withdrawing its support for the regimes in question. That the United States intended the embargoes as only temporary halts of weapon shipments to encourage better human rights behavior by the allied governments did not change the fact that most everyone in the host nations viewed the embargoes as withdrawals. The arms embargoes not only represented a miscalculation that there would be temporary interruptions rather than permanent withdrawals of support, but in both cases, the USG miscalculated that the host governments could survive them. The fact that the United States felt the need to impose arms embargoes to change the prosecution of the counterinsurgencies also shows another way in which the desired unity of politico-military command did not exist.

The Overall Conclusions

A thorough examination of the literature on counterinsurgency or insurgency reveals that almost all of it focuses on various positive characteristics of either how to carry out a successful campaign, for works mostly concerned with theory, or how to explain a victory in historical accounts. While laying out a theory of how to pursue a counterinsurgency or insurgency in a set of positive prescriptions makes sense, the practice works far less well in historical analysis.

Actual conflicts turn on the interplay of the two competing sides. Thus, various theoretical guidelines such as the side with the best leadership will win, Moyer, may ultimately fail to obtain in an actual conflict where the better leadership loses because of severe disadvantages in logistics and other assets. Most of the accounts suffer from examining a conflict or set of conflicts from only one side or the other. Such a limited scope dramatically increases the chance that the best explanation of the conflict will escape discovery since that outcome is dependent in almost all cases on the interplay between the two sides rather than the actions of just one side.

This dissertation made clear the danger of analyzing primarily only one side of a conflict as a unified explanation of all three case studies required examining the interplay of both sides of the conflicts. That result is particularly evident because the insurgents patterned their efforts to a greater or lesser degree on *foco* theory in all three conflicts. *Foco* theory does not account for the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions, although its inadequacy contributes to the account herein of why the Venezuelan insurgency failed. Che Guevara claimed that, contrary to traditional Marxist theory, one did not have to wait for the conditions of revolution to exist. Instead, he argued that a small vanguard of Guerrillas fighting from remote rural bases could create the conditions for revolution. Guevara claimed *foco* theory as the basis for the Cuban success completely ignoring the role of other relevant groups such as the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (DRE) and various groups funded by deposed president Carlos Prío Socarrás. He also ignored the fact that the Cuban dictator, Batista, did far more to create the conditions for revolution than did the *focos* of the M267. The fact that the *foco* theory failed to explain the success of the Cuban Revolution is also evident in the failure to successfully export the approach to other revolutions. While the Sandinistas in Nicaragua did embrace it at the beginning of the revolution, they did not succeed until years after they dropped using it.

The Lessons Learned

Since an insurgency is a struggle for the control of the population, i.e., a conflict over the ability to govern, such control is the goal of any insurgency. Counterinsurgency is the effort of the existing government, possibly with third-party nation support, to maintain its control of the population. Such efforts can morph into a campaign to deny the insurgents the opportunity to take over the government even to the extent that the existing government is taken over by some third group. The social science literature has established that the side in such conflicts that provides the best security for a population, whether or not the path to that security is onerous, will garner the support of the population. Thus, the conflict turns on the struggle over gaining or maintaining the belief of the population as to which side provides the best course to security. This dissertation establishes that the dominating goal for counterinsurgency, or insurgency, is to win that struggle.

Having identified the central goal of such conflicts does not, however, mean that there is a single strategy that will achieve that goal. This truth has led to confusion in the literature. The major split of counterinsurgency theories into population-centric and enemy-centric is one such confusion. The previous paragraph makes clear that all such conflicts are population-centric. However, in cases where the existing control of the population is very high, then a strategy of concentrating on the enemy can be primary as long as the campaign does not throw that control into question. Another confusion is that each insurgency is so unique that the development of general principles is impossible. The development of such principles is possible. They need to flow from the fundamental goal of gaining/maintaining the belief of the population as to which side provides the best path to security. Beyond the primacy of providing security, there are any number of best practices.

Many accounts provide guidelines that allow a combatant to pursue the overarching goal of maintaining control of the population. Good leadership (Moyar), being flexible and being the better learning institution (Nagl), and expanding zones of population control (Galula) can all provide useful rules of thumb for a campaign. Work drawn from organizational theory (Thomas et al.) can illuminate how narrative and other factors play a role in the origin, maintenance, and evolution or dissolution of insurgent groups. The advisability of focusing on obtaining good intelligence, keeping violence against enemies and especially collateral damage to the population below levels that degrade civilian feelings of security, and having a superior narrative to the enemy are additional positive goals to pursue. The advisability of having a unified political-military command is another such goal. However, all these accounts are subsidiary to the overarching understanding of the role of the maintenance of the population's feelings of security plays in the final result in an insurgency.

The abuse of the population in the Cuban and Nicaraguan counterinsurgencies through corruption, torture, and placing U.S. interests ahead of the general population all contributed to pushing the population to believe their security was better with the insurgents than the government. The decisions of the USG to implement arms embargoes convinced the population that the United States was abandoning the allied governments. The withdrawal seemed to remove the possibility that U.S. intervention would stabilize the ability of the government to provide better security. The arms embargoes also convinced the populations that the insurgents would win, enhancing their prospects as continuing to provide better security.

The Venezuelan counterinsurgency was a victory in large part for the same reason that the Cuban and Nicaraguan counterinsurgencies failed, except the side that drove the population to the opposition was the insurgents. The insurgents adopted a strategy of trying to show the

government was inadequate to guarantee the populations' security by carrying out terroristic attacks on the citizenry. The decision arose in large part from the fact that the insurgents were unable to use the anti-dictator narrative of the other two case study insurgencies. The status of the Venezuelan government as a democracy made it vastly more difficult for the insurgents to try to establish the government's illegitimacy. While all three counterinsurgencies involved a complex web of factors, the single most critical factor was the tendency of the losers to push the population into supporting the winners.

The ultimate picture that emerges from the analysis in this dissertation is that strategically there is an inverse proportion between the degree of confidence of the population has in the government's ability to provide security and the government's need to focus on population control/support over operations against the enemy. The best practices identified in the literature provide tactical guidance. The analysis, used in historical interpretation, makes clear that in both the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases, the governments failed to adequately concern themselves with making the primary goal providing population control/support. They needed to do so because that control was too low for them to focus on enemy-centric operations in the way that they did. The Venezuelan case, including as it did high population control/support flowing mainly from its status as a democracy, showed the effectiveness of its enemy-centric strategy under said high levels of support. Indeed, in both failed government counterinsurgencies, the government degraded the populations' feelings of security from an already too low of a point. Conversely, the Venezuelan insurgents strengthened the public perception that the Venezuelan government was the superior guarantor of security, hence enhancing the success of the counterinsurgency.

The side with the better narrative won all three of the case study conflicts. Nevertheless, the narrative advantage should not be considered decisive. Narrative plays more of a role in

recruitment and maintenance of morale for participants in the active struggle similar to the role security plays for the general population. The narrative can be essential for getting the population of third-party nations to continue to support their nation's involvement in the host-nation conflict. The insurgents in both Cuba and Nicaragua used a two-pronged narrative of anti-dictator and anti-American components. Both prongs highlighted the governments and the United States as not being concerned with the populations' welfare, including security. The initiation of arms embargoes in both countries in support of U.S. recognition of Human Rights violations of the two dictators indicate how dominant such narratives were. The narrative advantage of the Venezuelan government revolved around its rhetoric and actions designed to show its dedication to fulfilling its democratically elected role of providing its citizens' security against the depredations of Communist extremists.

While the Cold War played a crucial role in all three counterinsurgencies, it was not in the way one might have expected. The American view that the Cold War was an existential threat should have made preventing the loss of the three allied governments a clear overriding goal. Such a goal should have provided sufficient impetus to engender the appropriate amount of unity of command on the politico-military front, at least as far as the United States was concerned. In the event, however, it had more of an inhibiting effect on U.S. policy in Latin America.

The deleterious effect the flawed implementation of Cold War priorities engendered was two-fold. It led to the United States supporting dictatorships in the name of defending the very values that dictatorships ignored. The victor in the conflict between Human Rights and fighting Communism was the latter. The support of dictators, in Latin America and elsewhere, was particularly debilitating since they quickly learned that anti-Communist rhetoric could net them

substantial American rewards at little cost. When the conflict was between winning the counterinsurgencies to fight Communism and sacrificing commercial advantage, the United States chose to decide in favor of commercial advantage despite the contradiction with the avowed dominant foreign policy goal. The Sugar Act of 1956 and the Oil Import Program changes of 1962 are only the most prominent examples of a long list of such decisions.

The schizophrenic nature of American actions did not stop at the examples above, as in both the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua, the USG changed course again near the end of the two conflicts. The USG decided that Human Rights had priority to the extent of employing devastating arms embargoes against the two allies. So rather than providing a real framework for understanding how to carry out the counterinsurgencies supported, Cold War priorities became part of a list of competing demands. That list pulled American decision-making in divergent directions leading to an inconsistent approach that contributed significantly to failure in two out of the three case studies. While the Cold War has ended, the fractured nature of American support for counterinsurgencies has continued.

The main problem was that the United States was operating under three main foreign policy imperatives, one announced, and two unannounced. The policy of containment was explicit throughout the Cold War. The maintenance of hegemony and political/commercial ascendance did not appear explicitly in open forums. Instead, they can be functionally identified by looking at American foreign policy decisions, various Congressional actions affecting commerce, and appear explicitly in the records of meetings not for general public consumption. The mishandling of the imperatives resulted in a loss relative to all three priorities. Cuba and Nicaragua became Communist countries in violation of containment. U.S. hegemony in Latin America decreased accordingly. The United States lost access to Cuba's sugar, and American

investors lost vast amounts of money as Castro nationalized American holdings there. The United States lost privileged access to the Nicaraguan economy. Even in the case of the lone victory, Venezuela, the United States suffered when that country turned to membership in OPEC to try to boost the profitability of its oil industry after U.S. actions under the Oil Import Program.

The utility of having a unified politico-military command is unchallenged in the literature as befits the inherently politico-military nature of insurgencies. The focus of the Army-Marine Corps COIN manual on the United States military being used as a third-party participant in host nation counterinsurgency operations is logical given the nature of most post-World War II military operations. While the manual provides an acceptable, if somewhat flawed, set of guidelines for third-party military guidelines, it falls far short of an adequate overall guide to COIN operations. It, of necessity, leaves out most of the political side of the equation. When combined with the essential politico-military nature of counterinsurgency, the deficiency is a significant part of a much larger whole wherein being a third-party participant poses significant problems for the United States. The difficulties appeared in all three case studies and several other post-World War II conflicts where there was U.S. involvement. The systemic reasons the United States is particularly ill-suited to third-party COIN operations appear below.

There are several systemic reasons the United States is ill-suited to aiding in a host-nation counterinsurgency, especially a long-lived one, e.g., a Prolonged People's War, the War in Afghanistan, or the War on Terror. The Nicaraguan Revolution in Nicaragua lasted from 1961 through 1979, spanning the administrations of five US presidents. A significant reason long-term operations are challenging for the United States is the shortness of the political cycles that determine the makeup of the government. Foreign policy is usually the prerogative of the executive branch where a president runs for office every four years. In cases where a new

president is elected, the change in foreign policy can be substantial. Even cases where the same president achieves reelection can represent significant change as his/her attention shifts from reelection to establishing a legacy. The House of Representatives is on an election schedule twice as brief at two years. While the Senate has the most extended cycle at six years its primary foreign policy role is the ratification of treaties that usually represent the last stage of a conflict or other action. Such a relatively rapid change in the principals of the political side of the command structure makes a consistent approach to the support of a counterinsurgency problematic.

The American electorate exacerbates the disruption of the political cycle in two ways. One, it often prefers split government with the Congress and White House not under the control of just one party. Two, it often elects a president significantly different from a predecessor, especially after two-term presidents. Such large swings can play an important role in changes in foreign policy that can affect a counterinsurgency. For example, the election of Jimmy Carter shifted the approach to foreign policy from a focus on national interest implemented by Henry Kissinger to Human Rights flowing from Carter's election campaign. That shift led to the arms embargo that crippled the Nicaraguan counterinsurgency.

Domestic politics often overshadow foreign policy in the American political system. Foreign aid, often the central part of assistance to a host-nation counterinsurgency, is unpopular with much of Congress and even more of the voting electorate. Short and long-term economic interests usually hold far more sway with members of Congress. Reelection campaigns usually skew the thinking of elected policy-makers even more towards domestic priorities as special interests and party activists can play outsized roles in getting officials elected. One of the principal sources of political appointee ambassadors, including both that served in Cuba during

the revolution, are individuals being “thanked” for their roles in elections. Members of Congress often place their reelection, promotion of getting/maintaining Congressional majorities, or assisting their party’s second-term president in securing his/her legacy as more critical than aiding a host-nation counterinsurgency. Calls to bring American troops home almost always appeal to considerations of domestic political success more than calls to put “boots on the ground.”

Another structural problem for American participation in host-nation counterinsurgencies is the difference in appreciations of what is occurring in-country in the U.S. embassy there and the officials in Washington, D.C. Sometimes the understanding at one end of the chain of command is superior, sometimes the other. Disagreements between the two locations can be profound as happened with both of the political appointee ambassadors during the Cuban Revolution. At times embassy staff that develops a genuinely better feel for the host nation’s circumstances is viewed as having “gone native,” resulting in his/her/their informed opinions receiving little or no consideration.

Changes in the leadership of the State Department can also disrupt the political command used to support a counterinsurgency. For example, Condoleezza Rice reorganized the relationship of the department to the embassies around the world. She orchestrated the pushing out of responsibility for much of the operational determination and implementation of foreign policy to the embassies while retaining strategic control in Washington. The very next secretary, Hilary Clinton, basically undid those changes and recentralized operations to D.C.

The disconnect between the rhetoric and functional priorities of American foreign policy caused havoc during all three case study counterinsurgencies and remains a problem today. Disputes such as national interest versus national values, commercial interests, best foreign

policy as against best domestic politics, and disagreements among the many American stakeholders dominated the case study counterinsurgencies, and there is little reason to expect that to change soon. All of which suggests caution should be employed in decisions to get involved in new counterinsurgencies. One should not take from this, however, that the United States should reject all such opportunities. Even victories such as the support of the Mujahedeen against the Russians in the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the Venezuelan counterinsurgency in the 1960s drifted in very problematic directions later as the attention of the United States moved on to other trouble spots. The more important lesson for the United States is to realize that host-nation victory will often require a genuine sacrifice on the part of the United States in hegemonic status, commercial interests, national treasure, diplomatic complications, or world opinion. Such a sacrifice(s) is far superior to the price paid by the United States in the two failed case study counterinsurgencies and perhaps even in the lone success. Cuba remains a problem for the United States' foreign policy even over sixty years later. Venezuela is even more of a problem today.

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