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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Bolivian Guerrilla Movement:
An Interim Assessment*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
8 August 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Bolivian Guerrilla Movement:
An Interim Assessment

Summary

A guerrilla movement discovered in Bolivia in March 1967 appears through its genesis, nature, and tactics to be a concentrated Castro-style revolutionary effort that appears more sophisticated and more professional than similar efforts elsewhere in Latin America. The insurgents' success to date,

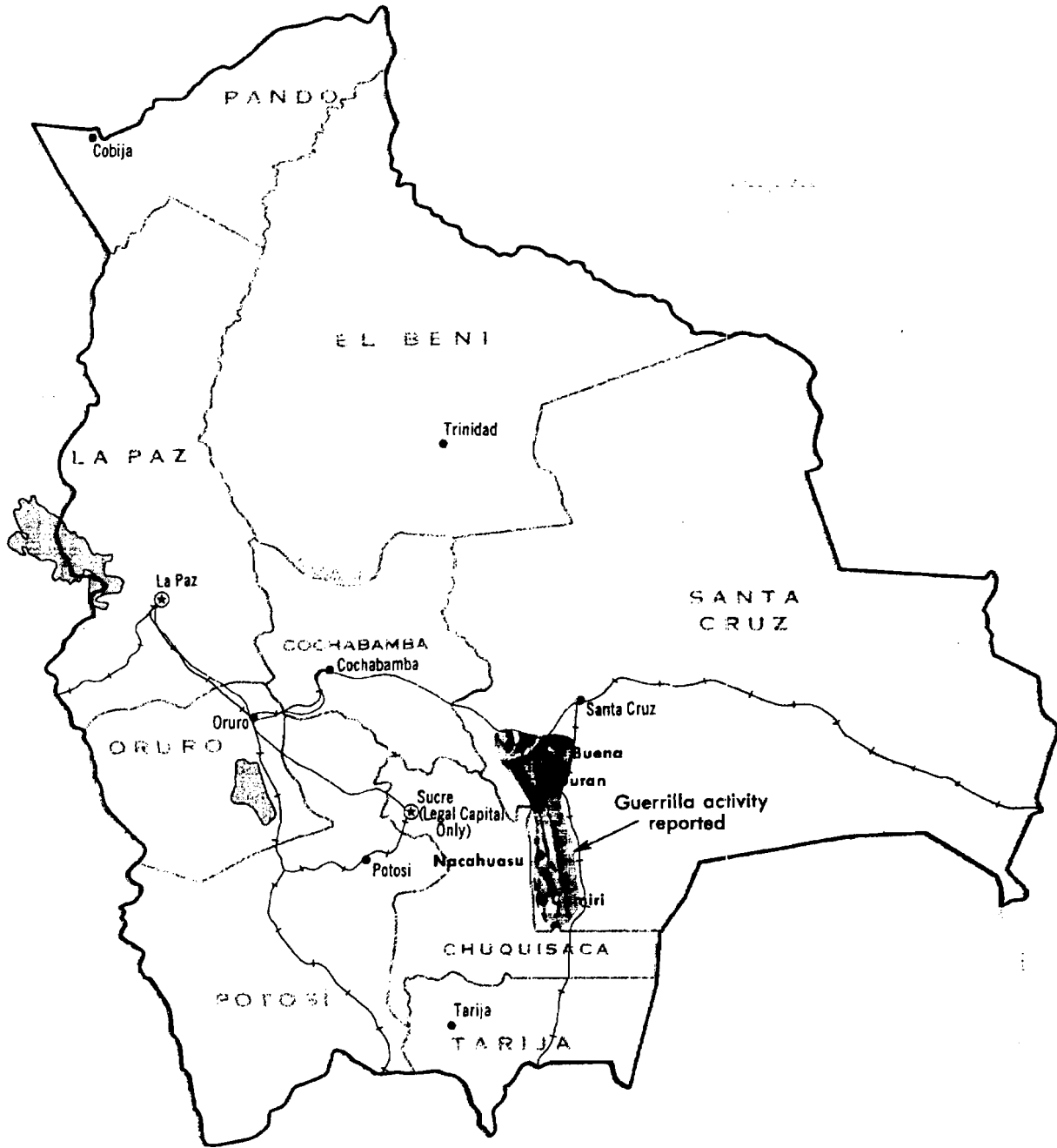
is spurring Bolivia's neighbors into developing contingency plans for military intervention should the situation deteriorate drastically.

The guerrillas adhere closely to the revolutionary theories espoused at various times by Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and French Marxist theoretician Jules Regis Debray. The insurgents have received training, propaganda support, and some arms and equipment from Cuba.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Services.

Additional propaganda assistance is now being provided by the Havana-based Latin American Solidarity Organization (LASO), which is championing armed revolutionary activity throughout the hemisphere. Furthermore, because worldwide publicity has been given both to the alleged presence of Che Guevara with the guerrillas and to the capture of Debray, this insurgency movement will be kept in the public eye. It could become a focus for the continuing polemical debate in the Communist world over the wisdom of political versus militant revolutionary action.

BOLIVIA: Area of Guerrilla Activity



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1. Bolivia is a relative newcomer to the list of Latin American nations where Communist-inspired insurgency has become an acute problem. Preparations to begin guerrilla operations there first began to be reported in late 1966. Such reports were initially received with skepticism by foreign and domestic observers, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the prevalence of bandits in the traditionally wild and lawless frontier area where the guerrillas were reported to be located, and the government's propensity for trying to distract public attention from its more pressing internal problems.

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2. After considerable prodding, army patrols in early March began to follow up reports of groups of bearded strangers in southeast Bolivia. On 23 March a patrol stumbled into a guerrilla camp, and in the resulting battle seven army personnel were killed and five wounded. In addition, the guerrillas took 21 prisoners who were released after they were treated for wounds and interrogated. In subsequent clashes, the army fared little better.

Effectiveness and Orientation of the Guerrilla Movement

3. Although much has been written and reported about the Bolivian guerrillas since their discovery, much more remains to be learned about them. Few reliable accounts of their activities have been obtained from the guerrillas themselves, and the extreme isolation of the areas where the guerrillas have been active prohibits coverage by ordinary news media. Even the number and nationality of the guerrillas remain uncertain. The last estimate indicates that there are about 100 of them, mostly Bolivians and Cubans, with a few Peruvians. More than one group may exist. They are apparently supplied with arms that have been smuggled into the country through Chile, Peru, and Brazil.

4. One major point is clear. The Bolivian guerrillas are a well trained and disciplined group. The insurgents are better led and better equipped [REDACTED]

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forces. Moreover, it is evident that Cuban-style training techniques have been used to prepare the guerrillas for action. Many of them have been trained in Cuba, and there is good evidence that a small cadre of Cuban guerrilla warfare experts is actively fighting with the insurgents. In contrast to the pro-Castro insurgents active in Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia, the Bolivians stand out because they usually have been able to seize the initiative in encounters with the military.

5. Another important consideration has been Havana's willingness to become more directly involved in providing tangible support to Latin American guerrilla groups. The Cuban involvement in the landing of Venezuela on 8 May demonstrates that this recent Cuban "escalation" has not been confined to Bolivia. The Bolivian group, however, probably received a more professional start because of a more direct Cuban role from the beginning.

6. As a result of Cuban involvement, this professionalism, along with careful preparation and imaginative leadership, is readily apparent. Considerable emphasis has obviously been given to training exercises, ideology, and tactics. All of this is reflected in indications that the guerrillas are highly motivated and that their morale is good. Moreover, this professionalism has been attained even though the guerrillas were discovered by accident well before they felt themselves ready to begin actual operations.

Leadership and Doctrinal Guidelines of the Movement

7. A few known Bolivian Communists have been identified as leaders of the insurgents. Other reports from within Bolivia and elsewhere allege that one of the leaders is Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentine-born revolutionary who was a key figure in the Castro government in Cuba until he dropped out of sight in March 1965. These reports, which come from sources of varying credibility, are in essential agreement on the details of where and when Guevara is supposed to have been with the guerrillas, but conclusive

evidence of Che's direct participation has not been obtained. Whether Guevara is a participant, or indeed whether he is even alive, it is plain in any case that the guerrilla leaders are well-schooled in the insurgency techniques and doctrines previously espoused by Guevara.

8. These techniques and doctrines are basically common to both Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Recently they have been given fresh emphasis with their publication in handbook form by Jules Regis Debray, a young French Marxist protege of Castro. Debray's book, Revolution Within the Revolution, was written after conversations with Castro and was published last January with Cuban Government backing. The book's preface points out that Debray has shared the life of the guerrillas in various Latin American countries. This assertion was underlined in late April 1967 when Debray and two other foreigners were captured by the Bolivian Army shortly after leaving the guerrilla camp. Debray is still awaiting military trial.

9. The Castro-Guevara-Debray theories which challenge the role of national Communist parties can be briefly stated as four main revolutionary tenets: (a) Latin America needs a dynamic, offensive, rural-oriented guerrilla action; (b) there should be only one major guerrilla movement, directed by a united leadership and guided by one clear strategy; (c) guerrilla operations should be initiated, developed, directed, and controlled from rural areas; and (d) the guerrilla unit precedes the urban-based party and, in fact, ultimately evolves into the "authentic" party. Castro, Guevara, and Debray all have contended that given the unique political, social, economic, geographic, and cultural conditions prevailing in Latin America, Cuba's revolutionary struggle is much more relevant to the situation than the experience of the Soviet Union and Communist China.

10. The recent interrogation of Ciro Roberto Bustos, an Argentine free-lance journalist who was with the Bolivian guerrillas from 6 March until his

capture along with Debray by the Bolivian Army on 20 April, directly supports other indications that these Castroite revolutionary theories are being implemented in Bolivia. Both Bustos and Debray have claimed that Che Guevara was personally directing this implementation. Indeed, Bustos has given a rather full account of an alleged conversation with Guevara on this subject in late March.

11. According to Bustos, Guevara defined his strategic objective as the capture of political power in one or more South American countries after insurrectional armed struggle had developed. Paraphrasing the Castro-Debray thesis, Guevara is said to have explained that the guerrilla band must be the nucleus of revolutionary impetus. It must be developed, consolidated, and expanded by its own activity in order to proliferate. Amplifying the current attacks of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (LASO) on imperialism as the real enemy of the people and the organization's international revolutionary flavor, Bustos claims Guevara told him that external political support is necessary for any successful Latin American revolution, although initially the struggle should appear to be strictly internal. As the revolution progresses, the theory goes, its "proletarian-revolutionary-international character will become a simple fact," or, in other words, outside assistance to the revolutionaries need not and cannot be hidden or obscured for long.

12. LASO delegates who are now meeting in Havana, ostensibly to coordinate hemisphere revolutionary activity, have apparently adopted the Cuban tenet that "reactionary oppression" must be met with "patriotic revolutionary violence." Following this reasoning, the Bolivian delegate, Aldo Flores, a member of the central committee of the pro-Moscow Communist Party, implied that the Bolivian guerrillas were merely exerting their patriotic duty in opposing US advisers and materiel that had been sent to "oppressive forces" in Bolivia.

13. The conference itself is basically serving as a forum for Castro to appeal to Latin Americans to band together in "Red Beret" groups in order to begin



Typical terrain where guerrilla activity is reported.

Oven found at original guerrilla campsite at Nacahuasu.



Dense undergrowth in area of guerrilla activity.

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a true revolutionary struggle. The spectre of "Che" Guevara, who was elected honorary chairman of the conference "in absentia," personifies the militant approach Castro wants the meeting to take and creates worldwide sensational publicity. No particular emphasis has been placed on the success of the Bolivian guerrillas during the proceedings; their continuing progress, however, has certainly raised the morale and affected the outlook of the delegates. The worldwide play being given to the Guevara theme and the Debray capture, moreover, will help to maintain the Bolivian guerrillas in the public eye long after the LASO Conference ends. The Bolivian experience may well become an important element in the continuing debate in the Communist world over the wisdom of armed action versus peaceful methods as the best means of achieving power.

The Military's Role Against the Guerrillas



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16. In spite of the potentially volatile situation prevailing in the major urban and mining regions, President Barrientos has sent several MAP-supported units serving in those regions into the guerrilla area. Bolivian Army efforts to reinforce the counter-guerrilla units, however, have been hampered by ad hoc organization of units without regard to unit integrity and state of combat efficiency; assignment to the guerrilla zone of a few officers and NCOs trained in counterinsurgency tactics; and employment

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type of army reinforcements to date supplied to the guerrilla zone has not materially enhanced combat effectiveness. At best, therefore, these troops locally committed to the area are able only to harass and make sporadic contact with the guerrilla forces.

17. Pressed by the public and by his advisers to obtain immediate favorable results in the guerrilla area, President Barrientos is at present mainly concerned with seeking an immediate spectacular victory over the guerrillas. All his plans rest mainly on the hope of obtaining modern firepower from the US without regard to the need for concurrent training and other logistical requirements.

Domestic Impact of the Insurgency

18. Thus far the guerrilla movement has elicited only minor support within Bolivia, with most tangible assistance having come from the far left. Leaders and individuals within the pro-Moscow Bolivian Communist Party (PCB/S) are directly involved in the insurgency, and some individual members of the party are working in liaison with the guerrillas. The rank and file of PCB/S as well as other Communist and radical leftist groups seem to have been taken by surprise by the insurgency. Except for the Communist Youth sector of the Pro-Chinese Communist

Party of Bolivia (JCB/C) which reportedly offered active support to the guerrilla movement two months ago, the others have only recently begun to make tentative gestures of material support. Some extreme leftist leaders of Bolivia's chronically discontented tin miners have tried hard to establish ties between the miners and the guerrillas. They have had little success, although a few unemployed miners have reportedly been recruited to join the guerrillas. Many university and high school students undoubtedly sympathize with the insurgents but so far have not demonstrated this support to any significant degree. There are no indications that the Bolivian non-Communist parties of the left are greatly interested in the movement other than as the source of possible opportunities to improve their own position. The extent of peasant support for the guerrillas is unknown. It is known, however, that the guerrillas have been circumspect in their treatment of the indigenous population. In those instances where they have found it necessary to go into town for food and supplies, they have been scrupulous in their dealing with the townspeople, often paying more than the going rate for supplies. Doctors attached to the bands often have treated local villagers, at the same time propagandizing for the insurgents.

19. Guerrilla representatives are reportedly in contact with one of the larger political opposition parties in Bolivia, the opportunistic Bolivian Socialist Falange (FSB), which received 12 percent of the vote in 1966. The guerrillas have reportedly offered to collaborate with the FSB if the latter would begin guerrilla activities in the cities. FSB chieftain Mario Gutierrez Gutierrez has ordered that three party members be sent to talk with the guerrillas and find out the exact terms of cooperation and what assurance the FSB would have of coming to power if the guerrillas were successful. At the same time, however, the power-hungry FSB has held informal talks with government leaders with a view toward joining the government.

Impact of Insurgency on Bolivia's Neighbors

20. There is considerable doubt among Bolivia's neighbors, especially Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, and Peru that the Barrientos government can cope with the insurgency problem. Presidents Ongania of Argentina and Stroessner of Paraguay are reportedly agreed that if Barrientos is overthrown they may have to intervene militarily. The Argentine Government has provided Barrientos with food, clothing, and small arms. There is no confirmation of recent press reports that Bolivia has requested the assistance of Argentine military troops. Argentina has sent military and police reinforcements to the Bolivian border, however, and a speedup in antiguerrilla training has been ordered.

Outlook

21. The sponsors and prime movers of the Bolivian guerrilla movement--including Bolivians and Cubans--have had a measure of success that will encourage them to keep the movement on an active footing. Nothing on the horizon would indicate that the guerrilla problem will ease soon or that the Bolivian armed forces can quickly improve their capabilities. This seems bound to lead to increasing tension and instability within the country and more concern on the part of Bolivia's neighbors lest the contagion spread across their own borders.

22. The longer-run outlook may be a little brighter if the Barrientos government manages to survive. Although this government, like its predecessors, has had its political ups and downs, there is no significant threat to the government at present. The guerrilla activity has encouraged dissident political groups somewhat, but the firm measures taken by Barrientos late in June to quell the violence that broke out at the tin mines may have served to show such elements that the government will crack down on them just as firmly if need be. At present these opposition groups are even less united and less effective than the government is, and as long as this situation prevails, Barrientos will retain the upper hand.

23. Bolivia's military capabilities may gradually improve. Forces in the operational zone are undergoing intensive retraining in anti-guerrilla tactics, and a 600-man ranger battalion now training in Santa Cruz is expected to be added to the forces in the field in late September or October. Guerrilla successes thus far have come against ill-trained, raw troops, and it remains to be seen if they are as effective against a well-disciplined and organized force. Although the lessons the guerrillas are teaching the Bolivians are painful ones, they could be beneficial if they help the Bolivians and other Latin Americans understand the need to devise new defenses against an elusive enemy in a difficult terrain testing revolutionary doctrine and tactics. On the other hand, should the guerrillas continue succeeding in Bolivia, their experiences and methods are certain to be emulated in other Latin American countries.