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Friday - June 23, 1967

Mr. President:

This is what is going on with guerrillas in Bolivia:

Last March 24 Bolivian security forces were ambushed in a remote area of southeastern Bolivia as they were investigating reports of a guerrilla training camp. Since then 6 other skirmishes have been fought. The Bolivian forces have come off poorly in these engagements, losing 28 of their men to 2 or 3 known rebels killed.

Interrogation of several deserters and prisoners, including a young French communist -- Jules Debray -- closely associated with Fidel Castro and suspected of serving as a Cuban courier, strongly suggests that the guerrillas are Cuban-sponsored, although this is hard to document. There is some evidence that "Che" Guevara may have been with the group. Debray reports seeing him.

[redacted] a recent statement by Brezhnev that Guevara is in Latin America "making his revolutions".

Estimates of the strength of the guerrillas range from 50 to 60 men. It appears that they were flushed out while still in a preliminary training phase and before they intended to open operations. Despite this, they have so far clearly out-classed the Bolivian security forces. The performance of the government units has revealed a serious lack of command coordination, officer leadership and troop training and discipline.

Soon after the presence of guerrillas had been established, we sent a special team and some equipment to help organize another Ranger-type Battalion. On the military side, we are helping about as fast as the Bolivians are able to absorb our assistance. The diversion of scarce resources to the Armed Forces could lead to budgetary problems, and our financial assistance may be needed later this year.

The outlook is not clear. The guerrillas were discovered early before they were able to consolidate and take the offensive. The pursuit by the government forces, while not very effective, does keep them on the run. These are two pluses.

At their present strength the guerrillas do not appear to pose an immediate threat to Barrientos. If their forces were to be quickly

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augmented and they were able to open new fronts in the near future, as now rumored, the thin Bolivian armed forces would be hard-pressed and the fragile political situation would be threatened. The hope is that with our help Bolivian security capabilities will out-distance guerrilla capabilities and eventually clear them out.

State, DOD, and CIA are following developments closely. As I mentioned, Defense is training and equipping additional forces. CIA has increased its operations.

The Argentines and Brazilians are also watching this one. Argentina is the only other country with a military mission in La Paz. Close military ties between Argentina and Bolivia are traditional. The Argentines have also furnished military supplies to the Bolivians.

W. W. Rostow

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