

~~SECRET~~

6/

14 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT & CUBAN-INSPIRED GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN BOLIVIA

CUBAN SPONSORSHIP OF BOLIVIAN GUERRILLAS

1. In the first six months of 1967, reports have been received indicating the presence of seven distinct guerrilla groups in Bolivia, located in widely separated parts of the country, as shown on the attached map. To date, only one of these, located north of Camiri in the Department of Santa Cruz, has gone into action. Presumably the others are in various stages of training. Their presence poses a grave threat to Bolivian stability.

2. It has been evident from the outset that Cuba has played a key role in the initiation, implementation and execution of guerrilla activity in Bolivia. As early as January 1966, when Rene Roberto Olivares Garcia, a leader of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Bolivia (PCB/S) was in Cuba for guerrilla training, Cuban leaders told him that they were convinced that guerrilla warfare will expand throughout Latin America and eventually will succeed in overthrowing unpopular governments. Subsequent reports have proved that the Cubans trained scores of Bolivians both in Cuba and in Bolivia, supplied the guerrillas with large sums of money, modern automatic weapons, munitions, radio equipment, medical supplies. These facts combine to attest to a carefully prepared plan for widespread guerrilla activity.

3. Ernesto "Che" Guevara according to several reports from different sources, is personally directing Bolivian guerrilla activities and has been physically present with the guerrillas in Bolivia. A number of other Cuban military officers have been positively identified as members of the guerrilla band north of Camiri. These include: Lt. Leonardo Tamayo Nunez, Comandante Antonio Sanchez Diaz, Captain Gustavo Ricardo Machin Hoed de Beche, Comandante Jose Nivaldo Cauce Perez and Captain Roberto Sanchez Barthelomey.

INABILITY OF THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT TO COPE WITH THE GUERRILLAS

4. In the 10 weeks since the outbreak of guerrilla activity, the government of Rene Barrientos Ortuno has repeatedly demonstrated its total inability to cope with the guerrillas. Despite persistent rumors, the Government, blinded by its phobia

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.5

NLJ / PAC 12-419

By LUC NARA, Date 10-23-2013

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

-2-

regarding the political threat of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), refused to admit the possibility of guerrilla warfare in Bolivia until early March 1967. After considerable prodding, Army patrols began to follow up reports of groups of bearded strangers in southeast Bolivia. On 23 March, an Army patrol stumbled into a guerrilla hideout. The guerrillas reacted immediately, killing one officer, five men and one civilian guide. In addition, they wounded five men and took 21 prisoners. The prisoners were released after the guerrillas had treated the wounded, interrogated the officers and men, and stripped them of their weapons, equipment and clothes. In subsequent clashes, the Army fared no better. The guerrillas repeatedly escaped virtually unscathed, enriched by the spoils of battle, while the Army suffered mounting losses in dead and wounded, even when MAP-trained troops were engaged.

5. The Army is handicapped by the fact that most officers have been trained in traditional warfare and have no comprehension of guerrilla tactics. The majority of the men are raw recruits with little or no training. All are unfamiliar with the terrain. Officers are arbitrarily assigned to squads, and frequently issue orders to soldiers not even under their command, causing endless confusion. Soldiers are demoralized by the lack of food, medical facilities, faulty weapons, and the terrifying ferocity of guerrilla attacks from the dense jungle. Communications between field headquarters and the Army Command in La Paz are extremely unreliable. This means that literally no one in the Army Command has an accurate understanding of events in the guerrilla area. This is aggravated by the fact that officers reporting on skirmishes do not hesitate to distort the facts to cover their own ineptitude. At the high command level, the President and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces differ sharply on tactics to be used to combat the guerrillas. Barrientos, who is an Air Force general, favors bombing; a thesis Army General Alfredo Ovando Candia rejects on the grounds that it is impossible for the pilots to spot targets through the thick undergrowth. Each tends to blame the other for failure to deal effectively with the situation. These differences have served to widen the already existing breach between Barrientos and Ovando.

INSTABILITY OF THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT

6. The Government's failure to eliminate the guerrillas has encouraged opposition political parties, student groups and labor agitators to become restive. MNR signs of reunification, unruly student demonstrations, agitation in the larger mines and continued costly clashes with the guerrillas have collectively

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

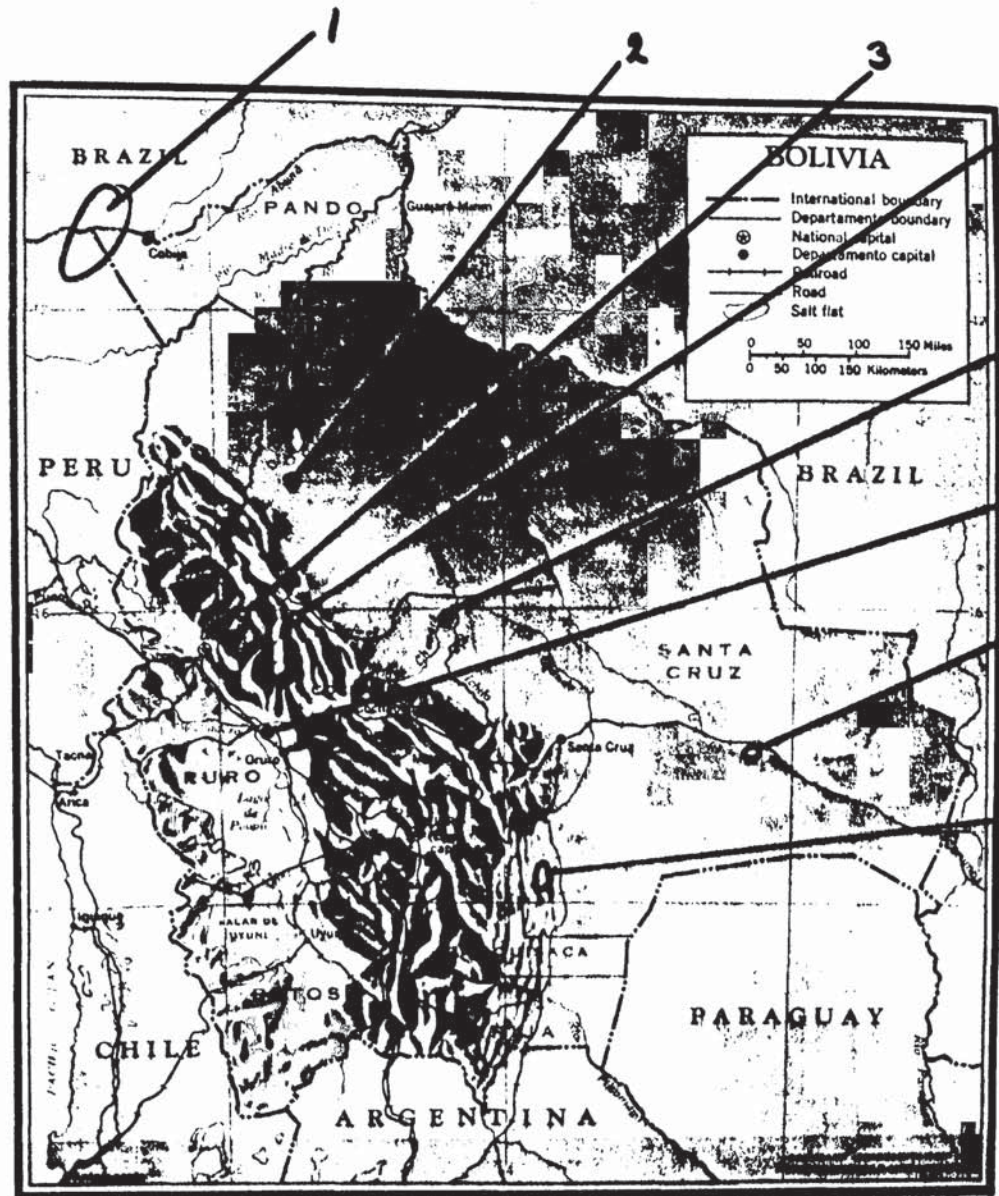
-3-

caused Barrientos to declare a state of siege effective 8 June 1967. There is no reason to assume, however, that the emergency powers now available to Barrientos would enable him to cope with the situation if additional outbreaks of guerrilla activity occur in various parts of Bolivia simultaneously. Should this happen, it is probable that drastic changes would take place in the already weakened Bolivian governmental structure to the point where significant advances could be made by the extreme left. This could lead to a government composed of a loose coalition of leftist parties. Both President Juan Carlos Ongania, of Argentina and President Eduardo Frei, of Chile agreed at the Summit Conference in Uruguay in April 1967, that if Barrientos is overthrown and replaced with a left-wing leader like Juan Lechin Oquendo, they will intervene with their armed forces.

7. It is possible that the Soviet Union will recognize the possibilities of aggravating the situation in Bolivia as a means of drawing world attention away from their humiliating defeat in the Middle East. By supporting the Bolivian guerrillas through Cuba, they could help bring down the Bolivian Government; spread guerrilla activities into the five countries bordering Bolivia; reinforce their relations with Cuba; attempt to provoke the United States into unpopular action in Latin America--while concealing their own direct participation.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET



1. Area where Fidel Castro reportedly is ready to launch guerrilla warfare.
2. Camp composed of Bolivians, Peruvians, Brazilians and Colombians on Maniqui River.
3. 30-40 man group located around Mururata, 45 miles NE of La Paz.
4. FCB/S band in the Alto Beni region (approximate location).
5. FCB/S band in Chapare region (approximate location).
6. Guerrilla groups in the Huanuni mines. (??)
7. Guerrilla group led by Alcebiades Velardi (approximate location).
8. 60-100 man guerrilla band north of Camiri, the only group to have clashed with the Bolivian Army to date.

14 June 1967

SECRET

Source: Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, National Security Files, Intelligence Files, Box 2, Folder "Guerrilla Problems in Latin America"



This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

[Read related article:](#)

Che Guevara and the CIA in the Mountains of Bolivia

2020-10-09