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ON THE SPOT

Castro Threat Not So Empty

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Until recently, Johnson administration officials tended to shrug off Cuban Premier Fidel Castro's boasts of turning Latin American wars of liberation into Viet Nam-type conflicts.

And in its preoccupation with Viet Nam, the American public has failed to notice very significant and troubling developments south of the border.

But events are not only proving that Castro's threats are not so empty, but are also calling into question many of the smug assumptions about developments in such places as Venezuela.

Any comparisons to Viet Nam area, are of course to the earliest stages of that war when victims of terror and ambush were listed by the dozens rather than by the thousands.

Assumption in Venezuela

With regard to Venezuela, it has been assumed in Washington that the success two years ago in holding free elections in spite of opposition from Communist terrorists had more or less settled the guerrilla problem.

After all, it was reasoned, the Venezuelan government was freely chosen, left of center, and very progressive in social good works. More than most people on this earth, Americans cling to the myth that good government is of itself a defense against Communist guerrillas.

Very handily for the Communists, we have been brainwashed into assuming that

Communist terrorists can thrive only if most of the people are against a government. It is a very unhistoric assumption.

In Europe, the destruction of Czechoslovakia's popular and progressive government by a Communist minority is just one of many examples of the fact that the Communists usually take over in spite of the will of the majority.

Venezuela Lesson

In Venezuela, the lesson is that terrorist guerrillas, if supported from the outside (Cuba) can dangerously increase their trouble-making capacity in spite of good government — a government that has among other things effectively worked at matters of land reform and helping the peasantry.

As in Viet Nam, the peasants of Venezuela may hate the guerrillas, but they will not expose them for fear of torture and death.

The discovery of five tons of armaments hidden in the San Antonio Del Gauche region of Venezuela this week follows a gun battle in the same area between military forces and guerrillas. A secret guerrilla headquarters of the FALN (National Liberation Armed Forces) was even uncovered in the petroleum center of Anzoateguil state.

Training For Guerrillas

But if Castro and company have their way, this is but a foretaste of far worse to come.

According to reliable reports reaching Washington,

guerrilla training — once confined to Cuba itself — is going on in the Venezuelan states of Lara and Falcon. The guerrilla chieftain is a former Venezuelan newspaper man, Fabricio Ojeda.

The Venezuelan National Liberation Front believes in the formalities. It is officially represented in Cuba by German Layret, who recently went through the formality of signing a "mutual aid pact" with the Viet Cong representative in Havana.

Castro's press and radio made much of this and openly boasted that the pact heralded the start of Viet Nam-type wars, not just in Venezuela but in other parts of Latin America. Clearly, the Communist guerrillas, like their counterparts in Asia, are planning carefully and diabolically for the years ahead. Weapons and central direction are coming from Cuba and will continue to do so — as long as the United States permits this to go on.

The question is whether the United States can afford to look the other way while Cuba provides the transmission belt for weapons with which the Communists plan to subvert the hemisphere.

In Viet Nam, we waited until almost the eleventh hour before attempting seriously to interrupt outside sources of supply of men and material. Isn't there a lesson to be learned from that tragedy? Or are we to be paralyzed into inaction by failing to take seriously Castro's threats of turning Latin America into a series of Viet Nam's?

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