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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 October 1965

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 24-65

SUBJECT: Some Perspectives on the Dominican Problem

SUMMARY

The Dominican Republic is in a state of suspended revolution, and the provisional government headed by Garcia Godoy has the task, in effect, of reconciling irreconcilables. If he seems to be favoring the rebel cause, he risks intervention by the armed forces; if he leans to the other side, he risks new outbursts of rebel violence. The underlying political trend in the D.R. is to the left, which enhances the prospects of a left-of-center candidate, if elections are held as planned. If such a candidate won, his government would probably be anti-US and Communist-influenced. The military would likely seize power to keep out this kind of regime, but a military take-over would cause sizeable elements of the left to turn to systematic terrorism and guerrilla activity.

1.5(c); 3.4(b)(1)

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SUBJECT: Some Perspectives on the Dominican Problem

Background

1. Since the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1800, the Dominican people have passed about one-third of their history under occupation by foreign military forces (French, Haitian, Spanish, US). Even when the country has been independent, it has known only turmoil and civil war or military dictatorship. The latest dictatorial rule -- the thirty years of Trujillo which ended with his assassination in 1961 -- left new scars on the old scars of the body politic. The Trujillo reign not only prevented the development of political leaders and normal political life, [REDACTED]

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1.5(c); 3.4(b)(1)

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2. The social-economic structure is equally unhealthy. In these spheres, the D.R. has had no revolution and very little reform. The Bosch government in 1963 kindled popular expectations of dramatic economic and social change. But it actually accomplished little during its seven months in office. Per capita GNP in the D.R. is not much below the average for Latin American countries. But the distribution of wealth and income is starkly unbalanced. The upper and middle classes -- less than 10 percent of the population -- have almost all of what there is to have. The other 90 percent of the people are have-nots, the great majority of them living in grinding poverty. Some two-thirds of the total population lives outside the money economy, scraping by on subsistence farming. Roughly one-third of the Dominican labor force is completely unemployed, and under-employment is also prevalent. In short, the basic economic and social conditions which determine the lot of the mass of Dominicans is a potential source of great political pressure -- a source so far tapped to only a limited extent.

3. The Dominican Republic's very high birth rate (3.5 percent) not only complicates the economic problems but also has direct political impact. At present nearly half the population is

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under age 15. Many Dominican young people, especially in urban areas, have already been attracted to the various parties which call for radical change. Teenage kids played an active role on the rebel side in the recent fighting. Moreover, the size and composition of the electorate is rapidly changing. The D.R. has universal, obligatory suffrage for all citizens over 18 and all married citizens of whatever age. This means that if elections are held as planned in the late spring of next year there will be about 350,000 qualified to vote who were not old enough to do so in the December 1962 elections -- the only free elections in Dominican history. (The total vote cast in 1962 was 1,054,944.)

4. Under the Trujillo dictatorship the armed forces became a praetorian guard ensuring the dictator's absolute control over virtually every aspect of life. In return they received certain perquisites, including a share in Trujillo's institutionalized system of graft. During the last several years, however, there has been increasing evidence that the younger, US-trained officers are developing a sense of professionalism and reacting against the corrupt and reactionary tendencies of their seniors, many of whom were personally associated with the Trujillo dictatorship. Nevertheless, the military establishment as a whole still considers

- 3 -

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itself an elite group not answerable to civilian authority when its basic prerogatives are threatened.

Political Tendencies

5. Dominican political attitudes and institutions are remarkably primitive; the parties are young and highly personalistic. A large proportion of the rural peasantry is not yet politically conscious; a considerable number, despite their own sparse lot, continue to yearn for the good old days of stability under Trujillo, "the Benefactor." Even so, in December 1962 Juan Bosch drew strong support from the countryside in piling up some 58 percent of the total vote and in obtaining nearly twice as many votes as his closest opponent.

6. But there were special circumstances in that election, and Bosch's image was then much brighter than it is now. It is worth noting that in September of 1963, when the Dominican military threw Bosch out, there were no significant public demonstrations of protest. A political poll taken early this year (before the rebellion began in April) indicated that former president Joaquin Balaguer (who was not a candidate in 1962) would be a more popular presidential candidate than Bosch. Balaguer has the

political advantage of popular identification with both the stability of the Trujillo era and the expulsion of the Trujillo family.

7. The rebellion gave new impetus to the political awakening that was already underway. The basic trend is a movement of political strength to the left. In terms of elections this would give the advantage to a left-of-center combination (Bosch's Dominican Revolutionary Party [PRD] and the extreme leftist parties). Balaguer's Reformist Party (PR), as a center-conservative party, would have considerable attraction, but the rightist parties probably would not command many votes. Thus the rightists are coming to rely more and more heavily on the armed forces as a counter to the political challenge posed to them by the left.

Tribulations of the Provisional Government

8. Hector Garcia Godoy, an experienced diplomat and a man of decent, liberal instincts, if not great strength of purpose, has now held office as president of the provisional government for nearly two months. Given the inherent instability of the situation, this in itself is no mean accomplishment.

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Garcia Godoy was selected because he was acceptable to all sides. There was not much competition for the job. He has the task, in effect, of reconciling irreconcilables. There is no broad political base at the center on which he can rely.

9. Moreover, the Dominican adversaries have little common ground; many on each side are clearly more interested in renewing the battle than in reaching compromise. The struggle for dominant influence in the university, in the labor unions, and in various government-run enterprises is still going on. Shooting affrays are being perpetrated by both rebel extremists and rightist vigilante groups. Garcia Godoy's every action and appointment is carefully scrutinized: if he seems consistently to be favoring the rebel cause, he risks intervention by the armed forces; if he leans to the other side, he risks new outbursts of leftist violence. Many in the military are deeply concerned, not only about the provisional president's appointment of a number of leftists to government positions, but about his failure to use forceful measures to collect the rebels' arms. Some military units may defy the government's authority and set out on collecting expeditions of their own.

- 6 -

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10. The one important stabilizing factor is the Inter-American Peace Force (IAPF), currently about 9,200 strong and the OAS mission headed by Ambassador Bunker. Twice during the eight weeks the provisional government has been in office the intervention of Ambassador Bunker and the commanders of the IAPF has been required to prevent the Dominican military chiefs from unseating Garcia Godoy. The senior Brazilian officers in the IAPF are, however, now becoming restive because of their sympathy for the Dominican military's opposition to Garcia Godoy's policies. This attitude may make it increasingly difficult to maintain the international character of the IAPF.

11. The Institutional Act, upon which the authority of the provisional government rests, specifies that presidential elections are to be held at some time between 4 March and 4 June, 1966. Thus Garcia Godoy could have seven months more of trying to keep his feet on the tightrope. The last three months might be especially taxing because that would be the period of formal campaigning for the presidency. (Garcia Godoy himself is not permitted to run.)

- 7 -

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What Might Come Out of Elections

12. It is, of course, too early to make any very specific election predictions. Indeed, the elections may not be held on schedule at all. If they are held, it is not yet clear who the candidates would be or what party combinations may be worked out. Although there may be a candidate or two of the extreme right (for instance, the exiled General Wessin y Wessin has been talking about throwing his hat in the ring), most rightist backing will probably be for Balaguer, running on the ticket of his Reformist Party as a center-conservative candidate. Similarly, although one of the Communist parties may produce a nominee of its own, most leftist backing will probably go to the candidate of Bosch's PRD party. It might be Bosch himself, Caamaño, leader of the revolution, or perhaps a party figure not so well known.

13. Some observers believe that Balaguer would win such a contest over any man the PRD could put up. They argue that much of Bosch's old magic is gone -- particularly because of his failure to return to the D.R. while the fighting was going on. They dismiss Caamaño as not politically shrewd enough. They note that Balaguer still has much prestige and is widely respected, and

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predict that many Dominicans will vote for him as the man who might bring back order and tranquillity.

14. These are all points of some merit. But there are some broader considerations certain to have impact. We think, for example, that the expansion in size of the electorate -- those who have politically awakened during the past few years and the large additional number of young people now qualified to vote -- will strongly favor the left. We believe that many will vote for the "candidate of the revolution" because they see this movement as their only hope for rapid improvement in their depressed living conditions. The insistence by the PRD party and the leaders of the revolution of their determination to reinstate the Bosch constitution of 1963, with its provisions for agricultural reform and various other measures to improve the lot of the masses, provides a powerful initial issue for the campaign. Nationalistic resentment against the US intervention is also likely to favor the parties of the left. On balance, we think the candidate of the left will be in the stronger vote-getting position.

15. If such a candidate won the election, his government would probably be anti-US and Communist-influenced. The Dominican

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military leaders would be likely to seize power to prevent the installation of such a government. Indeed, if the election of a leftist candidate seemed likely, the military would probably intervene before the voting took place.

16. In the event of a military takeover, or even if Balaguer or someone like him won the presidency, sizeable elements of the left (and not only the Communists) would probably turn to systematic terrorism and guerrilla activity. Although the military might be able to cope with this development initially, their repressive actions would tend to antagonize the people and to lead eventually to another round of revolution.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

Sherman Kent

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

- 10 -

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