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Top Secret

BOLIVIA: Military Setback

*The government's strong rebuff of the military's latest maneuvers against the election process may interrupt chronic coup plotting at least until after the presidential election scheduled for 29 June.*

The military chiefs have repeatedly underestimated President Gueiler's determination to reinstate elected government and have overestimated the public's tolerance for military intrusion into the transition plans. Their record leaves open the possibility for further efforts to derail the election.

Military hardliners, fearing that the election could jeopardize their power base, had demanded it be postponed for one year. Gueiler's rejection on Thursday of the demand and her attempts to thwart an earlier effort by the military to declare the US Ambassador *persona non grata* have forced the military to reevaluate plans for a coup.

Coup plotters in the high command grossly miscalculated the reaction of the public and government. The attack on the Ambassador has produced only limited civilian support, while the outcry over a possible delay in the election suggests that most Bolivians would resist an interruption of the constitutional process at this late date.

Gueiler's actions have added to the differences among key military leaders. Commanders reportedly are questioning the ability of General Garcia Meza--the principal plotter--to carry out a coup, and midlevel officers are reported to be disenchanted with the high command. Lack of unity proved fatal to the coup attempt last November.

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