ONE Memorandum

The Changing Revolutionary Process in Latin America

23 February 1971

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MEMORANDUM

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 February 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Changing Revolutionary Process in Latin America *

Introduction

1. The concept of revolution in Latin America, though analyzed and refined in recent years, still leaves something to be said. The aim of this paper is to offer some new thoughts on the subject. In it we examine the underlying forces at work in the revolutionary process, suggest a set of basic propositions about its changing nature in Latin America, and, finally, reassess the impact of the process upon US interests.

* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated within the Central Intelligence Agency.

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Background

2. In the various estimates and memoranda produced in this office in the past couple of years,* the position has been taken that the endless succession of coups, assassinations, and public disorders within Latin American political systems have seldom produced basic social change. Similarly, except for Cuba, insurgent movements did not appear to have played significant roles in the revolutionary process. The established order seemed likely, in the short term at least, to remain stronger than any revolutionary forces arising from popular discontent. Over the longer term, it was thought, mounting social and economic pressures, exacerbated by continuing high birth rates and growing urbanization, would lead to revolutionary situations in some countries. In such cases communist and other extreme leftist insurgent groups might make common cause with stronger revolutionary elements. But it did not appear likely that these extremist groups would play central roles in the process.

* See ONE Staff Memorandum No. 5-68, "The Shape of Revolutions to Come in Latin America," 2 February 1968; NIE 80/90-68, "The Potential for Revolution in Latin America," 28 March 1968; NIE 80/90-1-69, "The Potential for Revolution in Latin America," 20 March 1969; and CIA Memorandum on "Radicalism and Nationalism in Latin America: Political Prospects for the Early 1970s," 29 July 1970.

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3. When and if revolutions did occur, it seemed likely that they would develop first in the overcrowded cities. The pattern would vary widely. Class origins would be largely irrelevant; the personal charismatic qualities of the leaders would be the important criteria. Reform elements in the Church and military would probably become more active as engines of change. But regardless of the motivating force, anti-US nationalism seemed destined to become an increasingly important part of the process.

4. Recent developments in Latin America have generally borne out these conclusions. At the same time, they have raised new questions about the nature, strength, and direction of the revolutionary process in Latin America. These questions are examined in the following paragraphs.

What We Mean by the Revolutionary Process

5. In all but a few countries, the process of change naturally occurs more or less continuously. The rate and nature of change vary greatly from time to time and from country to country. The process covers a wide spectrum from revolution to evolution. For the purposes of this paper we think it useful to define revolution as a development which

within a relatively short time brings about fundamental and lasting change in the political and social structure of a country. Thereby we exclude the familiar kind of superficial Latin American coup on the one hand and long-term evolutionary changes on the other. A revolution, in the sense we use it here, may be brought about by forces using either violent or non-violent means. But in either case it is sure to be a drastic process.

6. The revolutionary process begins when new social groups appear on the scene and demand a share of political power. In the Western tradition these demands were strongly influenced by a desire for political liberty. In the Russian case they were impelled in the first instance by social and economic deprivation (peace, land, and bread). In recent Latin America history they appear to spring primarily from social pressures stemming from technological and demographic factors and abetted by growing nationalistic urges. As new, politically conscious groups in traditional Latin American societies become exposed through modern communications to the growing affluence of more advanced countries, their expectations of a better life rise. But the ability to emulate the industrialized nations is frustrated by cultural habits,

difficult to reconcile with modernization; by primary-product economies, not complementary to one another, but geared to international markets largely beyond their control; and by an established order whose legitimacy and resistance to change is deeply rooted in the Iberian tradition.

7. The result is social frustration. On the one hand, a growing awareness of what might be; on the other, a growing realization that efforts to reach the goal have failed. When this cultural-technological impasse is, in turn, subjected to mounting demographic pressures stemming from unchecked population growth and crushing urbanization, the revolutionary impulse is born.

8. As the combination of revolutionary forces becomes strong enough to challenge the established order, ruling elites may either resist or adjust to the pressure for change. In either case, their response will largely determine the depth and duration of the process. Political structures may be toppled, as in the Mexican and Cuban revolutions, or they may merely be altered to serve new purposes, as in Perón's Argentina and Betancourt's Venezuela. The change may be bloody, as in Mexico and Bolivia, or peaceful, as in Vargas' Brazil.

It may be rapid, as in Castro's takeover, or it may develop in stages over a considerable period of time, as in Mexico. The revolutionary process might stagnate, as during Paz Estenssoro's second administration in Bolivia; or it might be braked, as in Brazil (in the mid-1940s) and Guatemala (in the mid-1950s). But it is unlikely to be completely reversed. Indeed, the momentum of widening participation by new mass social groups in the political process is likely to make it easier, not harder, to continue the revolutionary process in later stages.

The Conditions for Revolution: A Theoretical Framework

9. Whether and how the revolutionary process occurs will, of course, vary widely, depending on the political and social institutions peculiar to each country. But certain basic conditions appear to be necessary to get the process underway in any country. These basic conditions might be said to be a function of social pressures generated by social-technological change and of the ability of established governments to either accommodate or resist such pressures. In this equation of forces the chances for revolution in any country will depend on several interdependent factors:

a. The degree of public awareness of and frustration over the failure of the established order to meet growing social needs;

b. The availability of the technological and institutional techniques -- i.e., the materiel, communications, and organizational skills -- needed to produce basic changes in the social order;

c. The ability of the government in power to maintain public order and its claim to legitimacy in the face of the social-technological pressures stemming from the above factors;

d. And, finally, the willingness of the government to risk its hold on power by instituting reforms quickly enough and of sufficient scope to meet growing demands for change.

10. With these factors in mind, one might speculate that the revolutionary process will occur first in those countries in which social frustration is high and in which the technological and organizational tools needed to produce basic changes are becoming available. If in such countries the government refuses to use its power to meet rising social

demands, the revolutionary process might end in a violent overthrow of the system. If the resisting government's hold on power is precarious, the upheaval could come within a short period of time. This could happen, for example in Guatemala, if the Arana government fails to consolidate its rule and neutralize the extremist tendencies in that country. If, on the other hand, the government is a strong one, it might be able to stave off a violent challenge for a long time. If in such cases, the impasse between revolutionary forces and established institutions persisted, however, the chances of a violent solution would probably grow. This is the situation which could develop in the Dominican Republic, and possibly Brazil and Argentina, if the present, relatively secure governments in those countries fail to satisfy demands for political and social change.

11. Alternatively, the revolutionary process might be expected to be non-violent -- but in the end just as thoroughgoing -- in countries where social frustration is high, where the means necessary to produce change are available, but where the government shows itself to be responsive to revolutionary pressures before they reach destructive proportions. The present regimes in Peru and Chile might be said to fit this category.

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12. Finally, at the other end of the revolutionary continuum, there are those countries which, in terms of our criteria, appear to have little potential for revolution -- violent or otherwise -- in the foreseeable future. These are the countries in which there is relatively little public awareness of the possibilities for change and in which, in any case, the tools to produce change are still scarce. In such countries, social pressures are not yet strong enough either to topple the existing government or to compel it to produce changes in the status quo. Paraguay and Nicaragua and perhaps Haiti seem to fall into this category.

13. What we have been talking about thus far are the basic conditions for revolution. To catalyze these conditions into actual revolution -- whether violent or non-violent -- a "triggering" element is needed. In earlier decades, when revolutions were created largely from below by forces outside the established order, the "trigger" was usually some charismatic leader who was able to mobilize mass support around an emotionally explosive event or situation -- e.g., the massive street actions in Buenos Aires which brought Perón to power in October 1945, the wide-scale rebellion of Bolivian labor and campesino groups which launched Paz Estenssoro's first

administration in April 1952, and the cancellation of the 1958 elections by Perez Jimenez and the ensuing popular uprising which ousted him from power and ushered in Betancourt's democratic administration in Venezuela.

14. In the sixties, however, this pattern began to change. Instead of a Castro descending from the mountains with an armed band to overthrow a bankrupt regime in the capital, we find technically more competent, though perhaps less colorful, military "organization men" like Velasco in Peru and hard-headed politicians like Allende in Chile emerging to direct the revolutionary process from within established governmental institutions of the central city itself. As Latin America moves into the seventies, the ingredients of revolution -- i.e., the social pressures generated by social-technological change and the ability and willingness of governments to cope with those pressures -- are likely to remain. But as Latin Americans become more adept and eager to "get on top" of the process, the launching of revolutions is likely to depend more on the deliberate plans of determined men within established institutions than on the actions of individual leaders outside the system seeking to contrive or exploit a "triggering" event.

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Some Propositions about the Revolutionary Process

15. In the first two-thirds of the century -- roughly to the mid-sixties -- the following periods and regimes are regarded by virtually all observers as full-scale revolutions:

a. The Mexican Revolution, from its destructive beginning in 1910 through its consolidation under Cardenas in the 1930s.

b. Paz Estenssoro's National Revolutionary Movement in Bolivia after 1952.

c. Castro's takeover and consolidation of his revolution in Cuba from 1959 through the early sixties.

16. As we define the term, the following also appear to qualify as revolutions:*

a. The radical political changes made by Jose Batalle in Uruguay in the period 1903-1919.

b. Vargas' rule in Brazil from 1937 to 1945.

* This list is based largely on a classification of revolutionary regimes in NIE 80/90 published in March of 1968.

c. Perón's regime in Argentina in the mid-1940s.

d. The Arevalo and Arbenz regimes in Guatemala in the decade 1944-1954.

e. Betancourt's consolidation of a democratic system in Venezuela in 1945-1948 and after 1958.

17. Two additional cases have now become eligible for inclusion in this expanded list:

a. The pattern of change begun by Frei's "revolution in liberty" in Chile in 1964 and now being accelerated by Allende's more ambitious "people's revolution."

b. The military populist reforms of the Velasco regime in Peru since October 1968.

18. In light of reports on recent developments in Latin America, however, one or more of the following candidates might also qualify over the next several years:

a. Forbes Burnham's "cooperative" state in Guyana. In the past year Burnham has established a system of workers' cooperatives and has moved toward a more authoritarian, one-party system, a more independent stance on

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international issues, and nationalization of US and Canadian bauxite companies. The mix could lead to basic changes in Guyana's social and political outlook over the next few years.

b. Juan Jose Torres' military government in Bolivia. Caught between military pressure from the right and its commitment to its original student and labor supporters on the left, President Torres' "people's revolutionary" regime has produced much revolutionary noise but little action. How long Torres can keep up the balancing act is uncertain. It is possible, however, that at some point new splits in the military and renewed pressures from the left could prompt him, or a successor, to back his regime's revolutionary rhetoric with new radical policies.

c. Omar Torrijos' "revolutionary" regime in Panama. Since taking power in a National Guard coup in October 1968, Guard Commandant Torrijos has neutralized the political power of the traditional oligarchy and tightened his grip on the country. Though still without any clear blueprint for revolution -- and still unsure about how far he can go in asserting Panamanian claims to sovereignty over

the Canal Zone -- he now appears anxious to push ahead with social and economic programs which could lead to basic changes in the country's political and social structure.

d. Colombia after the end of the National Front system. Though, unlike the three cases above, forces advocating revolutionary change are not in power in Colombia, there are signs that they are gaining ground and will continue to do so. The country's National Front framework for the established political order is scheduled to be dismantled over the next two to four years. At the same time, mounting social problems are threatening economic progress and creating new pressures on the Pastrana government. The near victory of Rojas Pinilla's radical populist movement in the April 1970 national elections is already prompting politicians across the spectrum to move toward more radical positions to maintain popular support. Out of the growing ferment could come far-reaching social and economic changes in Colombia over the next several years.

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19. If, in light of our theoretical assumption about the revolutionary process, we now turn to an examination of common elements among these past, ongoing, and possible future revolutionary situations in Latin America, the following general propositions seem to emerge:

a. The impulse for revolutionary change is gaining momentum. In the three decades between 1930 and 1960, though the scope and intensity of the process varied widely from country to country, the rate at which revolutionary change was initiated remained fairly steady: Mexico (the consolidation period) and Brazil in the thirties; Argentina, Guatemala, and Venezuela in the forties; and Bolivia and Cuba in the fifties. In the decade since 1960, however, and particularly since 1968, the pace seems to have quickened. A growing awareness of the widening economic and technological gap between the have and have-not nations, and the failure of efforts -- e.g., through the Alianza -- to narrow that gap, have left Latin America with unresolved -- and growing -- economic and social problems. These, in turn, have produced mounting pressures for political and social change from groups within and outside the established order. In the early sixties, as Castro's

revolution gained momentum in Cuba it provided stimulus to the revolutionary impulse throughout the hemisphere. By the end of the decade Peru and Chile seemed well along on their own revolutionary roads. Guyana, Bolivia, Panama, and Colombia may follow. Local circumstances will dictate the timing and nature of the revolutionary process -- or the unlikelihood of its occurrence -- in individual countries. But, overall, the chances of its coming to fruition appear significantly greater in the seventies than they were in the sixties.

b. The main impetus in the revolutionary process is being generated within institutions of the established power structure. In this respect, the Latin American pattern differs in significant ways from the theoretical revolutionary pattern often associated with Third World countries -- a pattern in which a coalition of middle class elements and an aroused peasantry, fired by unsatisfied social demands and strong nationalist feelings, rises to overthrow a weakened ruling elite.* In the Latin American

* See, for example, the revolutionary scenario developed by Samuel P. Huntington, in Political Order in Changing Societies, Yale University Press, 1968.

process the peasantry is almost completely on the sidelines; to the degree that the masses become involved at all, they will be urban masses. Of primary importance is what is happening among elite groups and (especially their younger members) and within institutions which have traditionally been the strongest defenders of the existing order: the Church, the military establishments, the professional bureaucracies. As such elite elements, responding to growing general frustrations in their countries, become involved as engineers of change, they become increasingly willing and able to assume and use political power to further their objectives. And this tendency is producing within the existing political systems a variety of new revolutionary forces and views.

c. Political violence is more than ever a fact of life in Latin America, but it is becoming less important as a factor in the revolutionary process. Rural insurgents in Latin America have proven to be remarkably inept in their efforts to ferment revolution. For the most part they have been contained and subdued by increasingly efficient security forces over the past five years.

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Urban terrorists are causing serious problems in some cities and putting new stresses on governments, particularly in Guatemala, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. Indeed, in Guatemala terrorist and counter-terrorist groups are severely straining the fabric of society. In no case, however, do such groups appear to be able by themselves to topple the government or to overthrow the established order. Students continue to challenge government authority, through demonstrations and violent activities and, indeed, are major participants in urban terrorist activities, but they will not be able to bring about revolutionary change unless they ally themselves with elite groups within established institutions. In most countries, pressures on government by organized labor groups appear, for now at least, to be aimed more at gaining a larger slice of the economic pie and participation in the political process than at a revolutionary change in the economic and social order. None of the countries on our list of candidates for revolution seems to be moving toward the goal by violent means. Indeed, if anything, as governments and established institutions have themselves become more involved in the

revolutionary process, they have, not surprisingly, tended to dampen, rather than to encourage or exploit, political violence, e.g., in Peru, Chile, Panama, and Guyana. In short, though public disorders by extremist elements will probably continue to erupt at the surface of political life in most Latin American countries, the likelihood of any group creating a revolutionary climate by violent means seems to be receding.

d. Communist groups in general have failed to influence the revolutionary process by insurgent or terrorist methods. In early 1967 it was suggested that the potential for communist influence and subversion might be enhanced by conditions developing in, at most, six Latin American countries over the coming year or two. The six countries were Guatemala, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Bolivia, and Haiti (the latter, as usual, was viewed as a "special case").* At this writing, communist groups have yet to make significant gains in any of these countries. This includes Guatemala, where the issue is unresolved but where the

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* ONE Staff Memorandum Number 4-67 on "How to Worry about Latin American Communists," 13 January 1967.

government still seems to have the strong upper hand. Beyond these six countries, communist efforts to focus popular discontent and to gain power by violent means have fared no better. This does not mean that the lucha armada will be abandoned; it does suggest that greater emphasis will now be placed on non-violent efforts. The victory in Chile of Allende's Popular Unity Front government with communist participation has, greatly encouraged those advocating the via pacifica. But whether other communist groups will be able to apply this alternate strategy successfully elsewhere on the continent is still an open question.

e. The revolutionary process is not directly related to the stage of economic development. Classical theories, derived mostly from Marx, equated revolution with poverty; the downtrodden would rise and throw off their chains, and the old order would be swept away. Later the process was said to depend upon "rising expectations;" as the masses became aware of the possibilities of a better life, their revolutionary fervor would rise proportionately. More recently, theorists have refined this explanation to suggest that it is neither the absence

nor the beginning upturn of economic development which stimulates revolutions. Rather it is the social frustrations attending a leveling off or downturn of economic progress at any level, combined with the government's inability to alleviate these frustrations, which sow the seeds of revolution. The widely differing economic levels represented in our list of revolutionary periods seem to bear out the view that the stage of economic development is not the key factor: Colombia and Guyana appear equally vulnerable to the revolutionary virus.

US Interests and the Revolutionary Process

20. The changing style of revolution has been accompanied by a strong upsurge of nationalistic feeling among almost all Latin American countries in recent years. Since Latin American nationalism historically has been turned against the US, the revolutionary process continues to find a strong common denominator in words and actions directed against US interests. The intensity of the anti-US stance will vary considerably from one country to another. Its vehemence will often be unpredictable but will depend partly on the degree to which US reactions or the local US presence offers a target. Where

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US private investment is extensive but not overwhelming as, for example, in Brazil, and Argentina, and the US maintains a relatively low profile, the anti-US reaction is likely to be manifested primarily in increasing restrictions on US-owned properties. This might well lead in some cases to nationalization through more or less orderly, though perhaps arbitrary, processes. In other countries where the US presence, official or otherwise, is more prominently displayed, as in Panama, or where the US finds itself compelled to confront nationalistic actions directly, the chances for a direct and possibly violent expression of hostility toward the US would be much greater.

21. In general, our propositions about the revolutionary process suggest a certain pattern of anti-US activity in Latin American countries over the coming decade. As we have noted, though communist elements may encourage anti-US violence, they are likely to find it increasingly difficult to turn such action into revolutionary channels. A corollary of this is that, regardless of their political makeup, Latin American governments which seek to "keep on top" of the revolutionary process will probably feel a growing need to dampen uncontrollable anti-US violence and to use official governmental action to reduce public and

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private US interests which appear to represent unacceptable restraints on nationalistic aspirations. In such a process long-term economic advantage -- e.g., the desirability of maintaining a favorable rate of foreign investment for economic development -- is likely to be subordinated to the satisfaction of more immediate social and nationalist demands. This, incidentally, might well produce new economic problems to feed social frustration and thus further accelerate the revolutionary process.

22. Given the growing momentum of the revolutionary process, US efforts to advance such goals as the promotion of democratic systems, the protection of political liberties, and the maintenance of stability and a favorable climate for US business will become increasingly difficlt and likely to spark nationalistic reactions. In the longer run renewed interest by Latin Americans in these concepts will be more likely if the US associates itself with the positive aspects of the revolutionary changes which are now taking place in the area. While a general decline in US influence in the area is probably inevitable, the new revolutionary forces themselves are not such as to threaten the basic power or security interests of the US. The situation in Panama could prove to be the exceptional

case if attempts to settle differences over the Canal fail and nationalistic reactions in that country lead to a violent confrontation with the US.

23. Though nationalist pressures will cause growing problems for US companies in Latin America, it seems likely that, as the revolutionary process develops within the established power structure, actions against US investments in many countries will become less arbitrary and more subject to orderly processes of "Latinization." Over the short term, though US businesses will continue to find opportunities for investment, such actions will surely worsen the climate for US investment in the area as a whole. They can be expected to be particularly disruptive where US capital is involved in enterprises directly related to the country's national wealth or infrastructure, e.g., the extractive industries, banking and communications. As our experience with post-revolutionary Mexico has shown, however, out of this period of dislocation might well emerge over the longer term a stable and thus newly attractive investment climate for US business, despite the tighter restrictions on US ownership and profit margins. In short, though a reduction and change in the pattern in US private investment in Latin America may be a frustrating and

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at times an extremely painful experience, US business can probably adjust to it over the long run.*

24. In the years immediately ahead the US can expect a continuation, and perhaps an increase, of violent acts against US personnel and installations -- governmental and private. This will be extremely hard to cope with or control precisely because it will usually be tangential to, rather than part of, the revolutionary process. Most of it will be perpetrated (as similar terrorist acts are being perpetrated in the US) by way-outs -- by fringe and splinter groups not strong enough for successful revolutionary efforts on their own, and often counter-productive in their effect when aligned with stronger, more reasonable elements. Over the longer term, as elites in existing institutions in Latin America become more involved in the revolutionary process and attempt to bring it under control, their efforts could actually lead to a reduction of indiscriminate anti-US violence.

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* In 1969 direct private US investments in Latin America totaled $13.8 billion, or roughly 20 percent of total direct private US investment abroad ($70.7 billion).

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25. Because anti-US tendencies will be so strong and persistent, however, there will be opportunities for the Soviets to extend their influence in the hemisphere over the coming years. In taking advantage of these situations, Moscow is likely to depend less on disruptive tactics and more on official and private approaches at the diplomatic, cultural, and technical levels. Clandestine support to individuals and groups which appear susceptible to Soviet influence will also be an important factor. Present circumstances in Chile clearly provide the Soviets with promising opportunities. The revolutionary process there is gaining momentum and indigenous Chilean institutions are already being sorely tested. To the extent that the Chilean Communist Party is able to improve its strong position and dominate the scene the Soviets will be beneficiaries.

26. But, generally speaking, the Soviets are likely to run into serious problems in Latin America in trying to fill "vacuums" left by the US. As Latin American governments become more adept at riding the revolutionary tiger within their own countries, they are likely to become more capable of excluding outsiders <u>of any kind</u> who might want to come in either to ride or to tame the tiger for them. In any contest over

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who will finally come out on top of the accelerating revolutionary trend in the hemisphere, time would seem to be on the side of the Latin Americans. In the end, they are likely to align themselves more closely with the Third World then with either the US or the Soviets.

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